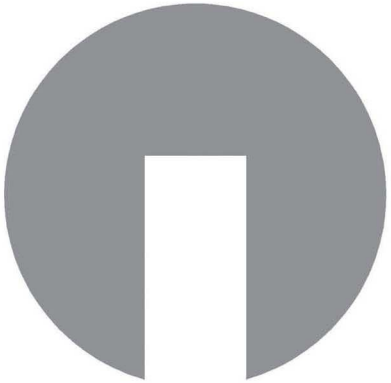
# *Melancholy and Politics*



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## Contents

Adam Czirak: Melancholy and Politics. An Introduction p. 3

Vassilis Noulas: Melancholy and Polemics p. 7

Erin Manning: In the Act: The Shape of Precarity p. 10

Gerko Egert: *The Fault Lines*: The Future (Im-)Perfect of Melancholia and Movement p. 16

Philip Hager: Sites of History: Debris, Ruins and Memory p. 21

Adam Szymanski: Toward a Melancholy Aesthetics of the Cinema p. 25

Hypatia Vourloumis: Minima Melancholia: Performances of Affective Refusals and Rem(a)inders p. 29

George Sampatakakis: Mourning over Heritage, Weeping over Performance. The Melancholy of the Critic p. 37

# Melancholy and Politics. An Introduction

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Isolation, narcissistic regression and pain are some of the effects associated with the melancholic experience. These signs of a distancing from social and communicative structures refer to a retreat into a contemplative disposition, the arrival into a continuum of doubt and despair, where one is affectively and intelligibly shocked by the fact that it is not possible to start over again, to find a solution and to cope with the apparently unchangeable surfaces of the world. If we are to define melancholy as a 'search and think' process moving in immobility, hesitant and unmediated, then it seems to imply and communicate a peculiar loneliness and setback.

Melancholy – and its clinical equivalent, depression – refers, as it is widely understood, to a disruption or an end to a social existence. But is it really so? Is the melancholic characterized by a suspension of its interest for the world? The contributors to this journal do not seem to agree. On the contrary, they suggest that the melancholic experience of loss, distanciation and exclusion is an ambivalent situation. This is because melancholy performs *an avoidance, which is not a disappearance*; it marks an encapsulation of the subject, which at the same time leaves behind voids and traces, which destabilizes social contracts and which undermines social functionality and efficiency. The examples discussed here agree that the melancholic existence implies a political dimension, in that the melancholic is perceived as an agent who is productive and communicative in a specific manner. Disagreeing with Marx[1] and Lukács[2] and picking up a controversial philosophical debate, I want, in what follows, to argue for a political definition of melancholic withdrawal that bears within it a potential for resistance and restart.

The notion of melancholy has experienced probably the most turbulent history of discursive shifts and has persistently eluded systematization. A closer look at the discursive history shows that melancholy is characterized by a 'phenomenology of the ghastly' always haunted by ambiguity and implied meanings. The notion 'melancholia' appeared around 400 B.C. and it referred to a biological substance – the black bile – that did not exist as such but was said to elicit physical and mental effects. The causes of melancholy were thus looked for in anatomy or 'nature', later also in astrological and meteorological explanations. Its plausibility was obtained by transcendental causes denying a phenomenological access until modern times. The late modern understanding of melancholy that was coined by psychoanalytical and political theories presumed that the gloom of the melancholic draws upon the loss of a non-concrete and forever vanished object. Not only did the reasons behind the melancholic disposition resist human perception; its victims were also pushed to a social semi-existence and remained excluded.[3]Although melancholy was idealized during the Renaissance and Romantic periods as expression of ingeniousness, the lugubrious was generally marked negatively: he was accused of sinfulness, stigmatised pathologically or – during early modernism – branded as a threat to the enlightened utopia or capitalistic economisation. As long as the melancholic personalized the shady

[1] Cf. Karl Marx: "Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte", in: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels (eds.): *Werke*, Bd. 8, Berlin 1956, pp. 135-136.

[2] Cf. Georg Lukács: "Grand Hotel Abgrund", in: Frank Benseler (ed.): *Revolutionares Denken – Georg Lukács. Eine Einführung in Leben und Werk*, Darmstadt; Neuwied 1984, pp. 179-196, here: p. 179-182.

[3] Baroque is an exception here, in that the melancholic condition constitutes a signum of the whole era. Cf. Walter Benjamin: *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Frankfurt am Main 1990.

sides and negative effects of industrialization and economization, he was seen as a harasser of the utopic founding idea of rational community-building.[4]

The modernist project understood melancholy as a dark side of its utopic imperative. Until today, the melancholic is excluded from hegemonic narratives like the romanticised conceptions of nation, religion or the mandates of perception, planning and regulating. These narratives are until today penetrated by various modernist economic and discursive demands excluding depression or melancholy as unsettling and irritating concomitants of a social utopia. Considering Adorno's and Heidegger's thoughts,[5]the melancholic outsider position *is not an external one*. Every social phantasma functioning as a concealment of contradictions proves to be an unstable construct, powerless to extinguish doubts and figures of melancholy. Adorno argues, in this sense, that melancholic thinking should be comprised into the field of the social in order to be consolidated as an immanent political position of resistance and critique; this thought is highlighted when he says: "The unshown speaks together with the apparent."[6] Melancholic behaviour, however, does not articulate a teleological aim that can be projected into the future, but rather underlines the fact that there is not *one* politically calculated aim that can be announced. In this sense, melancholic politics is an oblique politics manifested in unfinished processes of reflection, making the boundaries between understanding and not-understanding transparent. I would suggest that this politics operates within an enigmatic rhetoric that oscillates between legibility and illegibility and communicates an eloquence comprised in circular moves.

How can a melancholic politics, however, be considered effective within art? How can it be identified in the field of the aesthetics? Vourloumis' and Hager's texts for instance, which problematize ways of implicit protest and performing strategies, consider melancholy, pain and precarity explicitly as a dramaturgical subject, suggesting that melancholy in art serves as a means of articulating resistance. There are many artists acting politically in the wider field of aesthetics. I would like to give an example concerning melancholic attitudes that serve as resisting strategies by referring to totalitarian regimes of the so-called Eastern European Bloc during the second half of the 20th century. Whilst socialist realism was established as the dominant ideology, a 'second public sphere', unofficial and illegal, also emerged. In this context, visual and performance artists tried to defend the 'autonomy' of their works and to continue working despite the unprecedented censorship and the threat of sanctions, which affected their private life. In this sense, the status of the artist was connected to an uncanny figure of the 'antagonist' who is constantly excluded from the official system of representation and who haunts with his or her precarious presence the official public sphere. This happened not primarily because of a subversive aesthetic vocabulary but mainly because of an existence that went along with his/hers allegedly alternative way of life.

The neo-avant-garde in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia chose a silent way of resistance: Without aggressively challenging the boundaries of censorship, the artists followed a logic of expression which combined in a melancholic tension practices of withdrawal together with moments of self-manifestation. They exposed themselves in a process of self-retreat: they often let their performances circulate in the form of textual instructions; they certified their subversive actions, which were only meant to happen in front of a camera, by photographing them; last but not least, they often presented themselves powerless in front of the public and hurt themselves

[4] Cf. Hartmut Böhme: "Kritik der Melancholie und Melancholie der Kritik", in: Margrit Frölich, Klaus Gronenborn, Karsten Visarius (eds.): *Kunst der Schatten. Zur melancholischen Grundstimmung des Kinos*, Marburg 2006, pp. 11-27.

[5] Cf. Ludger Heidbrink: *Melancholie und Moderne. Zur Kritik der historischen Verzweiflung*, München 1994, pp. 180-210.

[6] Theodor W. Adorno: *Negative Dialektik*, Frankfurt am Main 1975, p. 397.

physically in order to transfer the melancholic moment of 'self-objectification'[7] from the psychic onto the bodily-physical coordinates of their *Dasein*. The melancholic resistance, which was characteristic for many underground artists, manifested itself in a balancing act between self-retreat and self-articulation, withdrawal and self-representation, silence and voice.

György Galántai in front of 'Summer' from the four-part 'Négy évszak (The Four Seasons) (1971)' (*Packed Exhibition* 24.04.–08.05.1973, Technical University Budapest). Photo and Copyright: György Galántai; Courtesy: Artpool Art Research Center.

I am going to use as an example the *Packed Exhibition (Unfinished Work)* [Becsomagolt kiállítás (hiánymű)] (1973) by Hungarian visual artist György Galántai (fig. 1).[8] Galántai's aesthetic principal aimed, on the one hand, in following the rules of official prohibition and on the other, in incorporating them into the exhibition itself. Éva Barta, head of the censor committee for visual arts, decided the day before the opening to forbid the exhibiting of two-thirds of the material formally approved. Galántai, in the remaining 24 hours before the opening night of the exhibition, packed the forbidden objects and exhibited them anyway as planned. This elaborate strategy points to a theatricality which derives from a performative action conditioned by the productive power of a prohibiting law that comes into being in the process of the execution of censorship itself. The importance of the *Packed Exhibition* culminates in Galántai's gesture to disclose the voids of censorship, manifesting them materially and staging a 'presence in the absence' as a double rhetoric figure: on the one hand, the presentation of the disavowed existence of censored repression and on the other, the spectral character of an anti-systemic artistic practice. If one wishes to sharpen the problem posed in Galántai's exhibition, one has to ask how it is possible to present and communicate a melancholic artistic attitude marked by its powerlessness and with what tools. The *Packed Exhibition* concretizes exemplarily a tactics, which articulates critique not as a frontal attack to the system, but insists instead on the paradoxical 'freedom' of the artist, which grants the 'sovereignty' of artistic expression and which is almost nothing, but only almost. It decides to meet the censorship by executing the prohibition and at the same time by insisting on a remnant of conformance that is to be shown and perceived.

The melancholic 'moodedness' of anti-systemic art resists museumification, nor is it to be found exclusively in totalitarian regimes. On the one hand, counter public spheres form themselves today in Russia, Hungary and Greece, emancipating themselves from repressive powers, antidemocratic laws and nationalistic ideologies. On the other, the last century has also revealed melancholic tendencies in Western art. If we can assume that the historical avant-garde was an artistic system that progressively prohibited melancholy, then we are able to understand the comeback of the fragmented, melancholic subject in the performing arts of the second half of the 20th century: The end of political utopias, the difficulty in articulating artistic attitudes, the proliferation of diverging biographies and the presence of absences and voids in processes of sense-making are increasingly manifested in theatre, dance and performance art. Melancholy becomes plastic, not so much in established bodily signs, like the gaze

[7] Cf. Sigmund Freud: "Trauer und Melancholie", in: ibid.: *Studienausgabe*, vol. III, Frankfurt am Main 2000, pp. 193-212.

[8] Documentation by György Galántai, Júlia Klaniczay (eds.): *Galántai. Lifeworks 1968-1993*, Budapest: Artpool - Enciklopédia 1996, pp. 74-75. Let me here thank the staff of the Artpool Art Research Center (György Galántai, Dóra Halasi and Júlia Klaniczay) for helping me in my research.

towards the ground, the head leaning on the hand or the emphatic silence. New qualities of melancholy include rather precarity and diversity manifested by paradoxical forms of self-presentation that combine gestures of self-exhibition and withdrawal. In such performances, singularity and divergence are not staged as interpersonal conflicts – such as for example in classical dramaturgy – but at the moment of falling back to the 'I' itself – made evident in the increased number of solo performances from 2000 onwards. A politics, shimmering in melancholic figures, articulates itself ostensibly in the loss of a conventional reference to the world and to the other.

There is a specific ambiguity in the fact the melancholic becomes 'conspicuous' while he/she withdraws and refrains from action. These moments of the – as Paul de Man would say – 'illegibility of melancholy' are particularly focused on in the texts that follow in order to articulate the political from the perspectives of the other, the doubtful, the resigned, the excluded.

Translated from the German by Natascha Siouzouli and Hypatia Vourloumis

# Melancholy and Polemics

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Oh, appointive Prince, how much I feel you
I cannot stand the cracked smile towards astounded crowds
you sign proclamations which you have not read, you recite
the poems you have not wanted, you allege remorse
the dead ones now dictate to you their own voice

Nikos Alexis Aslanoglou[1]

There are moments when you experience time as a uniform continuum without the ability to suspend it, escape it or even just alternate it… You feel trapped inside an unceasing isochronous rhythm from which you would like to get away through a dilatation, a pause, even sometimes wishing for a more drastic respite… You were promised palaces and time at your disposal and in your imagination. But now you feel like an appointive prince having to run while panting behind a flattening reality, which increasingly demands more of you while not granting a thing. A reality - which remains deep down indifferent to you. Your melancholy, Prince, is your disillusioned carelessness of your childhood; this is the essence of your aristocratic nature. I find you once again, Prince, with the form of the scrivener Bartleby, amidst the busy Wall Street of New York, denying any action, any activity while calmly pronouncing "I would prefer not to".[2] However, there you are, standing at the center of the incessant activity of a blind, isochronous and merciless capitalism, there you are with all your embarrassing physicality, there you are silently performing a negation.

Art is the field par-excellence where other possibilities are being opened, other contingencies beyond the norm. Art is capable of imagining and proposing other modes of being, where the real seems to be enclosed, fixed. This ability art possesses could be understood as highly political since it entails: a contestation of the dominant model, a shaking of certainties, an opening of cracks on the seemingly unbroken status quo, a creation of ephemeral utopias of any sort which all point out towards autonomy and self-determination. However the market knows how to incorporate everything within its large grinding mill and to normalize what could be presented as a negation of the dominant model. It is about a game –like the one of the cat and the mouse– that we saw being eagerly played during the 20th century and the various avant-gardes and their unappeased modernism! The avant-gardes have been defeated, historicized and canonized perhaps faster than expected. The request for constant renewal and non-stop artistic production always triumphs; while in actuality flattens everything in defining the imperative rules of the market inside the art world. Caught in those fishing nets, the artist is an appointive prince, exiled inside his own kingdom, with his time being confiscated by the market; always stressed, always "present". The artist is the emblematic prototype of today's neoliberal model of precarious work, the fluidity of work, where free time is not anymore distinguished from work time, where work can be also executed at home, in a café, via phone or internet, for free, without a fee or with occasional payment. The modern artist is the one who says "yes" to all opportunities, who takes part in exhibitions not only without being paid but even contributing his own money for the production of his work, who makes performances without a budget, who participates in public debates, in festivals, etc., without a fee, who becomes the producer and the agent of himself.[3]

Is it possible to exit from this vicious circle? Melancholy, writes Panayotis Kondilis, is characterized –in the same way as consciousness– by intentionality: it is always a melancholy about

[1] Nikos Alexis Aslanoglou: *Odes to the Prince*, Athens 1991.

[2] Herman Melville: *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, translated by A. Dimitriadou, Athens 2011.

[3] These observations mirror the state of affairs in the art scene of Greece.

something.[4] This is a view seemingly opposed to the Freudian model of melancholy as "the loss of Ego" or even as the collapse of meaning· Kondilis ascribes to melancholy the fighting spirit which psychoanalysis tended to negate. Inside the melancholic view of things there is scorning and critique, there is nostalgia (desire) for another version of things. Kondilis connects melancholy to polemics:

> The founding feature of the pessimistic regard is the flight from society and the people with the synchronous maintenance of the subject's reference to them, exactly inside and through the flight, which simultaneously functions also as a resignation from every action and as an action· for the flight is not silent, even when the one who flees remains silent. The action itself signals a factual rejectful judgment for the cause which provoked the spiritual and/or social detachment and at the same time it is an invitation to it [the cause] to change its trajectory in a way so that a potential return in its embrace would be worth it.[5]

Through such an ambiguous reading of melancholy as a more or less literal "flight from something" we could see scrivener Bartleby's inaction as action· the melancholic' s silence as word· the withdrawal as an invitation! What are the artist's margins of resisting the norm? Could melancholy –or better: diverse and different melancholies– become a strategy for the destabilization of dominant meaning? Melancholy's seemingly "lack of meaning" that empties the world is at the same time a means of disturbing power. For wherever a "meaning" appears, there lies power. The impossibility of a meaning within melancholy undermines power. And it opens up space for the emergence of another world, another meaning.

The already settled in the museum avant-gardes can be re-activated. Their defeat is not final but imposed by the dominant model of the market. Through the negation, the withdrawal, the differentiation of melancholy's time, the "dead ones" can "now dictate their own voice to you"! Time is not linear and isochronous but open, filled with possibilities, condensations and dilutions. Walter Benjamin says that "History is the object of a construction whose site is not the homogeneous and empty space, but time filled with the presence of now."[6] It is considered that the non-stop time of the market which is permanently directed towards an indifferent future of a generic ideology of "progress" is the filled time and that the time of the melancholic one who negates this one-way prospect of the future is the empty, the devoid time. Nevertheless, on the contrary, it is the melancholic one who truly lives in the "here and now" and not inside a constantly postponed future, it is he who lets himself go by abdicating power, the meaning and the anxiety of the continuous "present" inside the potentiality of the present time. He can hear the voices that negate the historical avant-gardes and extract them from the dominant mechanism of turning everything into a museum.

Scrivener Bartleby's inactive body at the center of a frenzied activity comes from the literary universe of the 19th century, from the "heyday of capitalism" as Benjamin would say, and is projected in our era as an emblematic melancholic performance that attempts an exit and also articulates eloquent (however silent) polemics. Adopting melancholic strategies often includes high risk. Scrivener Bartleby's melancholic body is dangerous for those around him: it creates unease, nuisance, it raises questions, it disturbs order, constitutes a scandal· but it is dangerous also for his own self: Bartleby dies in the end because he refuses to move away, because he even refuses to eat.

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[4] Panayotis Kondilis: "Melancholy and polemics", in: Id., *Melancholy and polemics*, Athens 2002, p. 174.

[5] Ibid., page 181.

[6] Walter Benjamin: *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, translated into Greek by Natascha Siouzouli for Nova Melancholia's production, winter 2010.

The current issue's texts of the Institute for Live Arts Research |Π|'s periodical attempt to shed light on the connection of melancholy with the art of polemics. Perhaps this connection is a way to channel melancholy's "perilousness" from the suffering subject towards the appeased surround.

Translated by Manolis Tsipos, Gigi Argyropoulou and Hypatia Vourloumis

# In the Act: The Shape of Precarity

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> In a text on Guattari, Deleuze speaks of two Guattaris, a Pierre and a Felix (he was called Pierre-Felix). According to Deleuze, one was "like a catatonic head, a blind and hardened body perfused by death, when he takes off his glasses," the other "a dazzling spark, full of multiple lives as soon as he acts, laughs, thinks, attacks." These are the two schizophrenic powers of an anti-I. The petrification and the spark.[1]

Shortly after Felix Guattari's death, Peter Pal Palbart – schizoanalyst, philosopher – wrote a text that he ended with an anecdote about Guattari's inherent doubleness, wanting to get at the complex overlapping, in Guattari, of what Deleuze calls "petrification and spark". The anecdote recalls a trip taken to La Borde, the clinic where Guattari worked and lived. The anecdote goes like this:

> In 1990, passing through France, I went to visit the La Borde clinic with Guattari. We left Paris by car. He asked me to drive, and while I was driving, he slept, like that, without his glasses, petrified, as Deleuze describes it. It is well known that sleep can confer on the sleeper the guise of a rock, but the next morning, awake, Guattari hadn't changed... I had never seen him this way, even during his many trips to Brazil. To escape from a situation that made me a bit uneasy, I decided to go out and walk with my partner. Guattari wanted to accompany us. We walked in silence. It was late afternoon. We listened to the noise of our steps and far-away sounds. Evening was coming. A neighbour greeted us. Everything was bucolic. And then we found ourselves in front of a pigsty, in silence. So I tried to converse with the pigs, using my limited knowledge of oinking. Slowly, the dialogue became more animated, and Guattari began to participate in the conversation. He laughed a lot, and he oinked a lot. I think that in this day and a half spent at La Borde, this was the only conversation we had – oinked. In front of the pigsty. With a collective of pigs, in a veritable becoming-animal. I left the next morning, troubled. I told myself that a thinker has the right to remain catatonic, to become dead, to oink from time to time, if it pleases him or her. To tell the truth, since that day, I never stopped envying this catatonic state. Sometimes, of my own accord, I find myself this way, to the distress of those around me...
>
> [Later, in] re-reading some of his texts, I understood that his silence at La Borde was not only a petrification, but also an immersion in a kind of chaosmosis, the mix of chaos and complexity, of dissolution, where what is to come must be engendered.[2]

*Depression*

In his several texts on the alignment of depression and capital in neoliberal times, Bifo (Franco Berardi) uses the figure of Guattari as a means of delineating the way "the winter years" affected Guattari's capacity to act. Using Guattari both as a beacon for a thought in the act, and as a troubling signpost of the impossibility of the act, Bifo suggests that Guattari's depression not only left him paralyzed in the face of life, but put him in a

[1] Peter Pal Palbart: "Un droit au silence", in: *Chimères*, no 23, 1994, p. 9 (my transl.).

[2] Ibid., p. 10.

situation wherein he gave himself to causes that he didn't believe in.

For Bifo, it seems to be important to play depression against *Anti-Oedipus* and its construction of desire. He writes: "Felix did not pay attention to depression, neither as a philosopher, nor as a psychoanalyst. [...] The *Anti-Oedipus* does not know depression; it continuously over-comes, leaping with psychedelic energy over any slowing down and any darkness".[3] Personalizing Guattari, Bifo becomes the (psycho)analyst: "Felix knew this, I am sure, but he never said as much, not even to himself, and this is why he went to all these meetings with people who didn't appeal to him, talking about things that distracted him and making lists of deadlines and appointments. [...] And here again is the root of depression, in this impotence of political will that we haven't had the courage to admit".[4]

Using his friendship with Guattari as a guarantor, Bifo undertakes a specious project, specious because based on a proposition, it seems to me, that both discredits Guattari's and Deleuze and Guattari's life-long investment in the prepersonal and the group subject, and misinterprets the machinations of desire as outlined so clearly in *Anti-Oedipus* as not belonging to the individual. Bifo's is an approach that instead returns to identity to place Guattari in the figure of the patient and, even worse, to suggest that Guattari's personal struggle with depression kept him from doing his work.

Bifo needs Guattari as the exemplary figure to be able to argue as he does that we've fallen on depressive times that divest us of our investment in the act. His argument, over the last decade, is that this current neo-liberal period has left the body disempowered, our collective nervous system besieged by the forces of a capitalist take-over, which has stopped us in our tracks. We can, and indeed, we must no longer act for "activism is the narcissistic response of the subject to the infinite and invasive power of capital, a response that can only leave the activist frustrated, humiliated and depressed".[5]

In these pages, I hope to challenge Bifo's account of depression, and particularly his account of the relationship between depression and activism, by paying close attention to the story told by Peter Pal Palbert of the chaosmosis at the heart of the "not-me" which is inhabited at once by petrification and spark. Taking the act not as that which is in the service of the neo-liberal economy, and placing depression out of the context of an individual sadness, I want to explore the operative passage between petrification and spark.

In doing so, I do not want to discredit the fact that there is extensive turmoil in the face of neo-liberalism's excessive take-over of what a body can do. There is no question that these are troubled times. Nor do I want to suggest that depression isn't terrible. It is. What I want to do is propose another account of the time of experience, and against Bifo's proposition, propose that these are not, and should not be, passive times. Depression, I want to argue, does not necessarily entail a loss of the capacity to act.

In my own struggle with depression, it has become clear to me that what we call depression is nothing if not plural: it expresses itself in an infinity of ways from sadness to hunger, from loss to anguish and anxiety, from a quiet panic to a full-fledged panic attack, from the stillness of a body incapable of moving to a frenetic body. Indeed, as many of us have experienced, depression as a treated phenomenon (particularly for those of us who take SSRIs) is most often less about sadness than it is about an uncontainable sense of self. Depression in this guise is closer to anxiety, though it does not necessarily express itself as an outward anguish. In my case, it comes closer to a sense of disalignment with time. The world moves too

[3] Franco 'Bifo' Berardi: *Felix Guattari: Thought, Friendship, and Visionary Cartography*, London 2008, p. 11.

[4] Ibid., p. 13 (mod. transl.)

[5] Id.: *After the Future*, Gary Genosko, Nicholas Thoburn (eds.), Oakland 2011, p. 7.

quickly or too slowly in ways that are difficult to connect to. It is as though there were multiple speeds and slownesses in continuous unalignable disjunction. Medicated, the sense I have is that it becomes easier to align and the field of relation stabilizes enough to allow a co-composition across worldings. I can participate. But this is not a personalizing "I". It is a schizo-I, as Deleuze notes in his account of "Pierre" and "Felix", a schizo anti-I in the sense that there is no absolute integration, but an emergent potential for co-composition across experiential time both quick and slow, a belief in the world as a mobile site to which alignments are possible.

These alignments are not given, however. They must be crafted. And so an anti-depressant is only the first step. Opening the way for a co-composition that potentially aligns itself to times in the making, requires, I believe, a rethinking of the act of alignment itself. It requires what Guattari would call a group subjectivity, an account of a collective that exceeds the personal. And, to connect with this collectivity in the making, it requires techniques for inventing modes of encounter not simply with the human but with the wider ecology of worlds in their unfolding. For the collective as a mode of existence in its own right is not the multiplication of individuals. It is, rather, the way the force of a becoming attunes to a trans-individuation that is more-than human. To become-collective is to align to a chaosmosis in a way that prolongs the capacity of one body to act.

This is not to underestimate the pain, difficulty, even horror of depression, nor to underplay how complex misalignments make us feel our silence on the one hand, or our anxiety on the other as signs of our misalignment in the world. Nor is it to argue that drugs against "depression" in its widest definition should be handed out as liberally as they are. It is simply to speak, across my own experience, and the moving reading of Peter Palbart's account of Guattari's pretrification, about how to think time in its complex realignments with experience in the making.

*Neurodiversity*

Via the concept of neurodiversity, I want to begin this exploration with an emphasis on what I have called "autistic perception", defined in brief as the perceptual tendency in autistics to directly perceive the world in its edging into experience. It is very common for autistics to suffer from the disabling anxiety that is on the spectrum of what is treated as "depression". It is also very often asserted by autistics that they have a strange sense of time: "Time perception in autism spectrum disorder is a part of the complexity of the condition. Many people with autism experience fragmented or delayed time perception, which can present challenges to social interaction and learning"[6]. What I want to do by aligning autistic percetion of time to the perception of time in the wide array of depressive disorders is not to suggest that we are all autistic, or that all autistics are depressed. I want to explore how depression – as the experience of time's differential – is itself on the continuum of autistic perception. This, I hope, will open the way for an account of neurodiversity as a site of political potential, calling forth an alignment between autistic perception and schizoanalysis as defined by Deleuze and Guattari.

Autistic perception is the name I give to the field perception autistics describe in their accounts of experience. In opposition to what Anne Corwin calls the neurotypical tendency to "chunk" experience, there tends within classical autism to be a direct perception of experience in the making that defies immediate division of the environment into subjects and objects. Autistic perception is therefore a direct experience of worlding – a direct experience of relation, a capacity to feel the force of an event's unfolding in the time of the event. Walking into a room, Anne Corwin speaks of not at first perceiving tables, chairs, people, but seeing the edging into experience of fields of colour, tendings toward form. The ecology of experience is itself directly perceived in all its relationality. Once the environment begins to stabilize into form, the

[6] http://autism.lovetoknow.com/Time_Perception_in_Autism_Spectrum_Disorder

difference in coming to perception persists for the autistic: what tends to be selected for perception is not reduced to the human. The ray of light or the intensity of a sound or the quality of a colour often turn out to be more enticing than the face of another individual.

This processual approach to experience in the making makes felt perhaps more acutely the lingering of time. Of course autistic perception of time varies as much as there are autistics, but there are some salient characteristics. For instance, those on the spectrum "experience a delay in how they process certain stimuli, including time. It can sometimes be hard for them to comprehend that hours have passed"[7]. Within depression, a similar set of symptoms express themselves: "When I am depressed I feel like time goes slowly, yet at the same time I feel like I – or anyone else – has hardly any time to live at all. It feels as if time is running out".[8]

If autistic perception is the direct perception of experience in-forming, it is also a direct perception of time, but not metric or measured time. It is the direct experience of the time of the event. Event-time is experiential time, time felt rather than abstracted. It is the time of the oinking, in Peter Palbart's story. This is the moment in its alignment to itself, to its enfolding. But it is not time in the sense of a pastness that can be recorded on the present. It is the now felt in its entirety, in its interminable infinity. And so it passes too slowly, eating up all the future time in its wake. Oscillation: too slow, too fast.

[7] http://sfari.org/news-and-opinion/news/2010/time-perception-problems-may-explain-autism-symptoms (visited June 10 2012)

[8] Matthiew Ratcliffe, http://www.academia.edu/895934/Varieties_of_Temporal_Experience_in_Depression

*Schizoanalysis*

Autistic perception emphasizes a modality of perception shared by all, but felt directly by so-called neurotypicals only under certain conditions. Depression is one of those conditions. Exuberance is another. In these conditions, what is felt is the precarious edge of existence where experience is under transformation, where the field of expression resonates with its own becoming. The deep silence of depression, where the world seems to be infolding, or the inner anguish of anxiety, where speeds and slownesses seem to be out of resonance with the world at large, these are also events where the relational field vibrates and the sense of a pre-constituted self falls away. But for the autistic, this is the norm, and it is from this event-time that ecologies of experience are composed.

This state of vibratory composition, where self and other are not yet, and where the categorical does not take precedence, is very much the state Deleuze and Guattari describe as the eventful field of potential of schizoanalysis. This field of potential is not embodied by the personalized schizophrenic but active at what they call the "schizoid pole".[9]

Schizoanalysis, as Guattari emphasizes in an interview after the publication of *Anti-Oedipus*, does not seek to "discover" the unconscious, but asks it instead to "produce its own lines of singularity, its own cartography, in fact, its own existence"[10]. And it does so not through the individual, but through the prepersonal force of the group-subject, a collectivity through which experience becomes multiple. To bring to it the language of autistic perception is to emphasize how the schizoanalytic process foregrounds the becoming-multiple, in an emergent ecology. Experience makes itself felt as multiple, and it is out of this multiplicity that an account of its effects can be expressed. Like the conversation with the pigs, where the force of the oinking exceeds one

[9] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari: *Anti-Oedipus*, Robert Hurley, Mark Seem (transl.), Minneapolis 1983, p. 380.

[10] In: Palbert, op.cit., p. 137.

person's voice, or even one person's idea of what constitutes a conversation, the becoming-multiple of experience through the group-subject allows a fractured, complex and expressive field of enunciation to emerge. This field resists interpretation: it cannot be explained away.

Schizoanalysis is always in movement: it is a process, and always on the side of production. What can a body do is its mantra. "We cannot, we must not attempt to describe the schizophrenic object without relating it to the process of production"[11]. Always linked to desire (also in the mode of production) schizoanalysis taps into the force of a bodying that shapes experience into its exuberant potential, exuberant not in its attachment to a subject, but exuberant in its chaosmosis, in the force of its expression across the precarious chasm of petrification and spark.

Composing with autistic perception, schizoanalysis's task is not to decipher experience, but to find modalities of expression that honour its precarity. To push experience to its schizoid pole is to take seriously the way in which modes of existence are multiple, not only double, but uncountable in their potential diversity and their complex ways of being in the act.

*Activism*

In the act – the force of activism – is not about one individual. At its best, it is about how the collective operates as a group subject in its own complex alignments with time in the making. Desire is revolutionary not when it is individualized (or turned against itself, as in Bifo's account of depression), but when it creates differential effects. "And if we put forward desire as a revolutionary agency, it is because we believe that capitalist society can endure many manifestations of interest, but no manifestation of desire, which would be enough to make its fundamental structures explode"[12]. What is revolutionary is not the act in itself, but the opening of the act to its ineffability, to its more-than.

When the more-than is explored in its effects, a schizoanalytic process has begun. This process, as Deleuze and Guattari are at pains to show, is not a method, and it is not a therapy in any conventional sense. It is an activity, an urgent tending in the direction of a decentering that is interested in the strange range between petrification and spark. There is no order here – just a set of productive effects from the disarray of a field in motion. But something does emerge, and sometimes it can be heard or read – a collective oinking – in the realignments the act invents. And from here, new value for the expressible begins to take form that composes across difference.

Neurodiverse modes of existence must be created, and they must compose across difference in ways that remain mobile, in the act. Pathology is not the answer. Co-composition across the spectrum is necessary, across the range of its precarity. For we all have access to autistic perception, and we are all susceptible to falling into depression. For those of us for whom autistic perception comes less quickly, less easily, perhaps it's time to learn to chunk less, to refrain from quick categorization. This will likely not end neo-liberalism, but it will continue the engaging process of inventing what life can do when it composes across collective resonances that listen to dissonance.

Bifo writes: "we have today a new cultural task: to live the inevitable with a relaxed soul. To call forth a big wave of withdrawal, of massive dissociation, of desertion from the scene of the economy, of nonparticipation in the fake show of politics"[13]. Wouldn't such a task be the very recipe for the kind of pathology of depression Bifo forecasts? To act must not be overlaid with capitalism's call to do, to make. In the act is something different altogether: precarious, but creative. Not creative of capitalism's "newest new", but creative of new forms of value, of new ways of valuing modes of existence in their emergence and dissolution, of

[11] Deleuze, Guattati, op.cit., p. 6.

[12] Ibid., p. 455 (mod. transl.)

[13] Bifo 2011, op.cit., p. 148.

new alignments to the time of the event. For the act is a necessity, it seems to me, but not a guarantee. Systems are quickly formed, as are our habits of existence. And if these systems, these habits, reorient toward the individual in the mode of the pre-constituted subject we can be sure that there will be a deadening of the operations of the movement for neurodiversity. No: the act must every time reinvent itself anew, recognizing itself as bare activity, activity not yet dedicated to a cause, or to an effect, but open for the taking, and for the desiring.

# *The Fault Lines*: The Future (Im-)Perfect of Melancholia and Movement

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On the provisional stage illuminated by flickering neon lights, the dancers and choreographers Meg Stuart and Philipp Gehmacher as well as the video artist Vladimir Miller are standing and sitting almost motionless at the greatest possible distance from the others. Sluggish, almost bored, Stuart and Gehmacher approach one another, pause, hesitate and then, in a storm of movements, let their bodies clash against one another. They throw their arms into the air and violently embrace each other; shortly after, they collapse and drop to the ground, where they stay, without stirring. From these abrupt changes between inertia and hesitation, on the one hand, and explosive storms of movement, on the other, emerges the halting rhythm of their performance, "The Fault Lines" (2010).

THE FAULT LINES © NINA GUNDLACH

Even later on, when the stage has been set in motion by Miller's experimental media apparatuses, his slides and curtains, cameras and projectors, no dynamism is created, and none of the movements automatically develops from the preceding one. What takes place, on the contrary, is a search, restless and insecure, for possible relations.

Miller, like an experimental scientist, brings Gehmacher and Stuart together in the camera image, and even touches them with camera and pen, creating an assemblage of movements and relations. With his pen, he makes tender and always hesitant strokes on their bodies, and draws lines and relations not only between them but also between the wall, the filmed and the projected image as well as his own hand. These experiments, however, do not lead to clear results, they do not yield propositions with clear structures of meaning, nor do they express unambiguous emotions. What is disclosed by them, rather, is a space of motions and relations which in the following shall be described as potentially melancholic.

In the first chapter of his early book *Stanzas*[1], Giorgio Agamben traces the historical convergences, comparisons and interpenetrations established, from the middle ages onwards, between the melancholic temperament and the sin of acedia, to which mainly monks were prey. Acedia, the noonday demon or the 'inertia of the heart' (*Trägheit des Herzens*[2]), according to Agamben, is not only determined by inertia but also accompanied by sadness: a "vertiginous and frightened withdrawal (*recessus*) when faced with the task implied by the place of man before God" and a "horrified flight before that which cannot be evaded in any way [...], a mortal evil; [...] indeed, the mortal malady par excellence".[3]

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[1] Giorgio Agamben: *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, transl. Ronald L. Martinez, Minneapolis 1993, pp. 3-28.

[2] Cf. Walter Benjamin: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, transl. John Osborne, London 1998, p. 155 (Osborne translates *Trägheit des Herzens* with "dullness of the heart").

[3] Agamben op. cit., p. 6. Also in modern times, acedia is associated with melancholia (see, for instance, Benjamin, op. cit., p. 155).

THE FAULT LINES © NINA GUNDLACH

The words Agamben employs in his description of inertia and melancholia –"persistence," "exhausted," "restless hastening," "withdrawal (*recessus*)"[4] – describe states of mind, but they can also be used for the characterisation of movements. The pauses and deflections, and the slowing down in Stuart's and Gehmacher's movements could be referred to as aspects of hesitation, inertia and melancholia. These movements do not express inner feelings, nor are they the result of the individual dancers' melancholic mood. Rather, the relation mapped out by their sluggish movements is configured as melancholic. And in this relation, the division between mourning subject and mourned object is abolished. That is to say, the relation itself becomes the scene of melancholia, where the mourner and the object mourned are folded into one another; it cannot take place directly and immediately (any more), and at the same time, it is precisely this impossibility that produces the distancing bond.[5] It is in the specific dynamics of the movements as well as the interferences of touch inherent to them that the affective intensities here described as melancholic actualise as emotional textures. The melancholia of movement is not directed at an object of mourning; for it is not a past form of movement that is mourned here. Rather, the possibility of movement itself, its natural givenness, seems to have been lost. Gehmacher's movements, in particular, can be described as states of melancholia and as ways of overcoming them, and less as a form of emphatic lust for movement. According to Krassimira Kruschkova, they are gestures of "melancholic self-forgetfulness".[6] This melancholia of movement, however, does not result in a halt or standstill. On the contrary, it is precisely its being carried away (*Entrückt-Sein*), its inconsistency with itself and with the other movements that spurs the need for ever-new movements. Or, to put it differently, the affective dynamics of movement, when actualised, are not petrified but pushed on to new and different constellation of movement.

These movements must, therefore, not be considered in isolation. For the emotions described by Susanne K. Langer as *balletic* (in contra-distinction to *personal*)[7] only emerge from the manifold interconnections of space, movement,

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[4] Agamben, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

[5] The detachment of mourning from its object in melancholia can also be found, albeit in a slightly different way, in Freud's central distinction between mourning and melancholia. While mourning is tied to a conscious and clearly identifiable object, such an object is missing or unconscious in melancholia. This contradistinction becomes particularly clear in the following quote from Freud: "In mourning it is the world that has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself." (Sigmund Freud: "Mourning and Melancholia," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIV (1914-1916). On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, transl. James Strachey, London 1974, pp. 237-258, here: p. 246).

[6] See Krassimira Kruschkova: "Die eigene Leerstelle festhalten," in: *Herbst* 2010, pp. 120-123, here: p. 121.

[7] In her investigations of emotional expression in dance, Langer introduces the concept of "balletic emotion", which is characterised by force and tension: "The almost universal confusion of self-expression, personal emotion with balletic emotion, is easy enough to understand if one considers the involved relations that dance really has to feeling and its bodily symptoms. […] Now obviously the group personality is not an actual creature suffering attacks of anything; neither are dancers of the chorus actually a subhuman organic mass. All these entities are *dance elements* that emerge from the interplay of virtual forces of 'Space tension' and 'body tensions' and even less specific 'dance tensions' created by music, lights, décor, poetic suggestion, and what not." (Susanne K. Langer: *Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art Developed From Philosophy in a New Key*, London 1953, p. 183 et seqq.)

projections, light etc. These affective settings cannot be assigned to any individual theatrical element – whether it be a dancer, a certain touch or movement, a musical performance, or a part of the stage setting. Neither can they be described by categories such as those used time and again, after Charles Darwin, to classify the emotions and their expressions.[8] The affective plane of movement is best described with Stuart's concept of *emotional states*: "In states you work with oblique relations. The body is a field in which certain mental streams, emotions, energies and movements interact, betraying the fact that interactions and states are separate."[9] Affectively and physically, however, these "states" are far from unequivocal; in Stuart's works, they are produced and modified by way of exercises and techniques.[10]

The above notwithstanding, the construction of emotions on stage does not contravene their physical dimension. The reason for this is that there is no opposition here between an authentic and subjective emotion of a theatrical performance, on the one hand, and a representational "as if", on the other. On the contrary, emotional states, which are expressed in the commingling and interrelation of different levels and elements of performance, tend to invalidate categories such as "authenticity" and "representation". None of the emotions presented by the dancers is emphatically mirrored by the audience here. What emerges, on the contrary, is an assemblage of affects woven across stage and audience, which they connect in a variety of ways. Hence, melancholia – understood as a configuration or state – cannot be explained in terms of a linear narration. In it, processes, lines and interconnections are developed from a whole variety of movements, variations and transformations. Emotions, in the movement of melancholia, never completely exhaust themselves; they are out for something else, for a transformation that never ends. Thus, the affective configurations of melancholia must not be seen as one-off events finished and done with, but as potentialities: "The scenic emotion however stays in the trembling, the oscillation of potentialities – never actual, never present, but potential, in marked absence."[11]

THE FAULT LINES © EVA WÜRDINGER

Melancholia lacks a distinct form of its own, it defies classification into the clear-cut patterns of basic emotions. Rather, it can be described as a commingling of of different emotional states: fear of loss, anger towards "those guilty" and, of

[8] A number of theoretical approaches to emotion after Darwin are taking for granted a variety of human emotions and their decipherability via the human body, namely from distinct facial expressions. Paul Ekman, for instance, describes emotions such as fear, anger, joy, disgust and others as distinct basic emotions (cf. Paul Ekman: "Basic Emotions," in: Tim Dalgleish, Mick Power (eds.): *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, Chichester 1999, pp. 45-60; Charles Darwin: *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, Chicago 1969).

[9] Meg Stuart: Damaged Goods, *Are we here yet?*, ed. by Jeroen Peeters Dijon 2010, p. 21.

[10] Gehmacher, who learned about the concept of "states" during a workshop with Stuart in 1996, explicitly distinguishes it from concepts of representing inner emotions such as can be found in modern dance: "Today I would say that states are a different way of trying to understand feelings; that is, the feelings you have and how you embody them. The modern dance tradition aimed to evoke and represent emotions, whereas states seen more related to feelings or rather the concept of the 'felt sense'. Feelings come and go, you cannot always name them; sometimes many feelings are present at the same time. Feelings dwell in the realm of uneasiness, anxiety or desire – perhaps these terms are too big, but they tie states to a 'felt sense', to sensorial issues physical existence, to sensation without addressing them immediately in a theatrical or psychological sense." (Philipp Gehmacher, in ibid., p. 22.)

[11] Kruschkova, op. cit., p. 102.

course, a never-ending love for what is lost. Benjamin, Freud, Agamben and others[12] have noted that melancholia is the paradoxical relation without an object, a relation without relata, characterised by the simultaneity of bonding and separation, a relation of undirected movements.[13] In the words of Benjamin, it is a "motorial attitude".[14]

Thus, "The Fault Lines" could be described as as an assemblage of relations referring to a moment of unavailability in time: in a complex setting including not only the dancers' movements and gestures but also technological and media apparatuses, a radicalised concept of melancholia is presented which, instead of referring back to an object from the past, questions the linear chronology of intentionality itself. Taking the title of the performance as point of departure, Kruschkova investigates the possibilities of a-chronic loss.

> Fault lines: something will have happened, and reconstruct, remember the tectonic fissures between the bodies, between the media – just because of their paradoxical emptiness. From the outset, a dispositive of the past shimmers through which could have been, will have been totally different. A scene under the sign of farewell, which will pass into the strangely melancholy restlessness of technical challenges – choreographical and medial ones.[15]

Something will have been broken: it is the futurity of a past in the present where the potentiality of a melancholia that eludes any form of linear narratability occurs. The act of touching is a specific configuration of the movements and their relation within the performance: "The Fault Lines of Touch", a touch will have taken place, it has not yet occurred, there was no immediate relation, no emphatic movement; and yet it is, potentially, part of the relations. The assemblages of the performance and its rhizomatic links are configured by these movements as melancholic: a being-in-relation full of tension that cannot be dissolved into a symbiosis nor into an absolute entropy. And yet, it is not the individual elements – the glittering curtain that finally drops on the projected image of the two dancers, the accompanying music, the searching spotlight-beamer or the struggling movements of the dancers – that constitute the forms or even signs of melancholia here. The performance of "The Fault Lines" forfeits unity and coherence due to its displaced relations, (im)possible contacts and its manifold movements of attachment and detachment. Melancholia, here, is rather the specific "balletic emotion" (Langer) that only becomes actual in relation and, particularly, in the relation initiated by the movement of touching. "The Fault Lines" – a potentially melancholic assemblage of movement.

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[12] The paradoxical structure of melancholia, its tension and ambivalence, is addressed by a number of texts on melancholia. Benjamin, for example, describes mourning as "a state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask, and drives an *enigmatic satisfaction* in contemplating it" (Benjamin, op. cit., p. 139). Freud describes the lack of a conscious object in melancholia as the source of a potential conflict of ambivalence, in which melancholia turns into self-hatred: "This conflict due to ambivalence, which sometimes arises more from real experiences, sometimes more from constitutional factors, must not be overlooked among the preconditions of melancholia. If the love for the object – a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up – takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering." (Freud, op. cit., p. 251) Agamben traces a "fundamental ambiguity" of the "noonday demon" in medieval texts: "Since its desire remains fixed in that which has rendered itself inaccessible, acedia is not only a flight from but also a flight towards, which communicates with its object in the form of negation and lack. As in those illusory figures that can be interpreted now in one way, now in another, all of its features thus describe in its concavity the fullness of that from which it is turned away, and every gesture that it completes in its flight is a testimonial to the endurance of the link that binds it to its object." (Agamben, op. cit., p. 7)

[13] For the concept of touch as (affective) movement, see my article "Movements of Touch in *MAYBE FOREVER*," in: Gabriele Brandstetter, Gerko Egert and Sabine Zubarik (eds.): *Touching and Being Touched. Kinesthesia and Empathy in Dance and Movement,* Berlin 2013, pp. 63-82.

[14] Benjamin, op. cit., p.139.

[15] Kruschkova, op. cit., p. 99.

Melancholia dissolves the unity of performance, the linearity of its time and of its compositions of movement. "The Fault Lines" resists the intentional and linear concept of movements. Movement is not directed at an object, nor does it proceed from a subject. Subject and object are themselves turned into movements here, into temporary paths within the melancholic assemblage of a stumbling without direction.[16]

Time and again, the movements of the performance are interrupted, now by moments of hesitation, now by the onset of a "storm of movements"[17], where direction and sequence have been abolished. In either case, the movement forward is dissolved and multiplies its direction. The storm of movements is engendered, above all, by a vortex of directions, a multiplicity of forces, which can neither be dissolved into *one* movement nor into an absolute standstill. And this multiplicity of directions also changes the relations of the movements themselves. Movement, here, is neither the emphatic movement-towards-an-object nor the turning away from it, but rather the relation itself, a stumbling that makes it impossible to relate the movement to an object, a being-in-relation without direction, the variety of indeterminate tendencies.

The potentially melancholic states in "The Fault Lines" cannot be restricted to the dancers and their subjective feelings, nor do they make for a unique mood of the performance. Melancholia, as a relational structure of hesitation, breaks the linearity and intentionality of movements. At the same time, the im/possibility of backward-looking relations is not simply counter-balanced by the promise of multiple future opportunities. In "The Fault Lines", past and future are instead folded into one another such that the possibility of a different past originates.

"The Fault Lines" – the achievement of the goal will have become impossible. The directions will have multiplied. It is still unclear what direction the movement will take, and stumbling and hesitation are all that is left. *Move without direction. Move in every direction at once.*

Translated from the German by Christoph Nöthlings

[16] Judith Butler describes one of these paths as the turning back of the self on itself. Butler, too, considers melancholia as a motion prior to, and at the same time transcending, the ego: The ego turns away from the object, and to itself. "[...] only by turning back on itself does the ego acquire the status of a perceptual object. [...] The turn from the object to the ego produces the ego, which substitutes for the object lost. This production is a tropological generation and follows from the psychic compulsion to substitute for objects lost. Thus, in melancholia not only does the ego substitute for the object, but this act of substitution institutes the ego as a necessary response to or 'defense' against loss." (Judith Butler: *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*, Stanford 1997, pp. 168-69).

[17] Freud uses the concept of *Bewegungssturm* – translated "stormy movements" by Strachey – to describe the movements of "beard, hand and tilted Tables" in Michelangelo's Moses (Sigmund Freud: "The Moses of Michelangelo," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XIV*, *(1914-1916). On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, transl. James Strachey, London 1981, pp. 209-236, here: p. 228). Joseph Vogl takes up this concept in his study *On Tarrying*, where he describes the image of the tarrying Moses as a "diagram of forces" and a "constellation that is determined by the effect of opposing forces and their collision." (Joseph Vogl: *On Tarrying*, transl. Helmut Müller-Sievers, London 2011, p. 5).

# Sites of History: Debris, Ruins and Memory

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> Every photograph is the trace of a previous state of the world, a vestige of how things were. The sum of all photographs is the ruin of the world.[1]

Starting from the Freudian notion of melancholia as the pathological state "related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness"[2], in the following pages, I explore the loss of history and historicity in the era of neoliberal rationality: melancholia, I wish to suggest, is a by-product of the neoliberalisation of the everyday and the amnesia of the 'end of history'. Here, in a melancholic leap into the debris of a past (not yet inscribed as history), I depart from Freud's conception of melancholia and (via Walter Benjamin and Marc Augé) trace *other* histories of the political 'scratching' the contemporary urban fabric.

*1.*

During the G20 summit in East London's ExCeL conference and exhibition centre in April 2009 a number of protests were staged in London, the G20 meltdown that mainly took place in the City and outside ExCeL. On 1 April protesters broke into the offices of the Royal Bank of Scotland in the City and went up to the roof; the police responded by containing of the area and 'kettling' the protesters standing outside the Royal Exchange – those outside of the police perimeter were kept at a distance from the contained zone. There was a whole range of almost theatrical performances, make-up, costumes and props: protesters put on shirts with messages or waved flags; there was a group of 'dead bankers' carrying almost life-sized dummies dressed as bankers, two men dressed as 'Barclay's Knights' offering tax-free havens, groups dressed in black with their faces covered and countless other performative acts. Police helicopters were flying above, while groups of protesters chanted 'Whose Streets? Our Streets!'

The choice of streets claimed by the protesters – the streets of the City of London, the financial district of the English capital – mark the historical moment: in the wake of the 2008 bailout of the American financial sector, triggered by the collapse of Lehmann Brothers, and amid fears that the crisis would spread, protesters staged a symbolic occupation of one of capitalism's headquarters. Meanwhile in ExCeL and hardly aggravated by the protesters, the world's leaders were discussing their response to the galloping economic crisis, in what was hailed by mainstream media as a successful summit.[3] Back to the City, in Bishopsgate another group of protesters had set up the Climate Camp. The atmosphere there was celebratory: there was music and dancing; there were tents on the street and colourful little flags hanging above them; there was a banner at the one end reading 'Nature doesn't do Bail-outs'; a pacifist and eco-conscious carnival was claiming the streets of the City, turning them into playful places, whose "alive disorder" bears the promise of another order.[4] This carnival was, however, short - lived: that same night the police raided and removed the climate camp.

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[1] Victor Burgin: "Monument and Melancholia", U. Staiger, H. Steiner, A. Webber (eds.), *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City*, Basingstoke, New York 2009, pp. 17-31, p. 22.

[2] Sigmund Freud: "Mourning and Melancholia", in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, transl. James Strachey, London 1976, pp. 243-258, p. 245.

[3] "G20 leaders Seal $1tn Global Deal" *BBC News*, 2 April 2009. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7979483.stm (last accessed 22 May 2013).

[4] Henri Lefebvre: The *Urban Revolution*, transl. Robert Bonano, Minneapolis and London 2003, p.18.

After years of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "policy of depoliticization"[5], politics seemed to be restored in the streets on the days of the summit. The protests of April 2009 were the first protests in a lineage that two and a half years later produced Occupy London Stock Exchange and the first large protests since the anti-war demonstrations in 2003 (although not as large). After almost two decades of the 'end of history', by claiming the particular patch in the urban grid, protesters challenged the modes of production of public space within the neoliberal city. The city, Henri Lefebvre has demonstrated, is a book that "never ends and contains many blank or torn pages. It is nothing but a draft, more a collection of scratches than writing"[6]. The city is constantly written, unwritten, rewritten, staged and performed on the walls and in the streets, making up a volatile habitat. Yet London's regeneration (within and beyond the City) attempts to impose a fixed narrative adhering to the neoliberal project and its totalising rationality: policies of privatization of public space and resources are at the core of this urban paradigm. In their attempt to rewrite urban space outside such discourses, the Climate Camp protesters claimed the right to urban life, a "right in the making", according to Lefebvre, "to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of these moments and places"[7]. The performances implicit here incorporate the critique and disruption of the capitalist marketplace as well as the proposition of another order through the alive disorder that emerged from the reversal of the City's life rhythms and possibilities of encounters staged in the occupation. These dramaturgies, temporary scratches on the urban fabric, simulated the dynamic relationships between the individual, the collective, urban space and its use, beyond and regardless of exchange value and regimes of ownership, if only on an imagined and symbolic level and, through this political labour, temporarily created an urban common both on discursive and performative terms – a pile of debris littering the orderly and privatized spectacle of the neoliberal city.

*2.*

If you listen closely, you may hear the sound of chalk against the stonewall. Then you will hear the chalk breaking and the broken piece hitting the ground. Or is it chalk powder soundlessly flouring the paving stones outside the Bank of England? The piece of chalk was too small to last until the end of the writing. As if when it was writing the word 'chalk', the light blue substance realised the futility and meaninglessness of its existence and task, and decided to fade away, into nothing but light blue dust lying alongside the rest of the debris

[5] Pierre Bourdieu: *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market 2*, transl. Loïc Wacquant, London, New York 2003, p. 38.

[6] Lefebvre, op.cit., p. 121.

[7] Henri Lefebvre: "The Right to the City", in: *Writings on Cities*, transl. Eleonore Kofman, Elisabeth Lebas, Oxford 1996, pp. 63-181, p. 179.

of the day's clashes between protesters and the police. If you listen again, you will hear the noise of the street: horseshoes on the asphalt, broken glasses, sirens, shouts, chants, baton charges, screams of pain, screams of anger, boots of different kinds, voices of different kinds. Or, perhaps, you will hear the footsteps of the demoralised protester who marched all day walking away from the wall.

"The ruin, [Augé] says, is absent from our world of images, of simulacrums and reconstitutions, from our violent world whose debris no longer has the time to become ruins"[8]. Look at what is not there any more, delve into memory and retrieve the ruins; remake the ruins from the debris; create a mental monument to the ruins that failed to take shape. You now see the image, read the text, explore its texture. Is it a souvenir or a memento? The protest is already in the past and the 'now' ('*Jetztzeit*' in Walter Benjamin's terms) is filled with the melancholy of its aftermath. 'I marched all day and all I got was a lousy piece of chal…' The expectations were not met. The revolution which, as understood by Marx (via Benjamin), involves the dialectical "leap in the open air of history"[9], did not take place, at least not today. It is an absent ruin, a ruin that failed to become, a disposable ruin. A ruin to be remembered.

*3.*

> London, 1 April 2009: Newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson tries to head home along King William Street, near the Bank of England, at about 19:00 BST, but is caught up in a crowd of G20 protesters and turned back at a police cordon. A short time later, trying a different route, he walks along Royal Exchange. He is hit with a baton and pushed to the ground by a police officer but gets up and walks away only to collapse at about 19:25 BST in nearby Cornhill. He is attended to by police medics but dies a short time later.[10]

The circumstances of Tomlinson's death sparked a controversy in the following days as, according to the coroner's report, Tomlinson had died of a heart attack and some days later *The Guardian* revealed footage of an incident involving the deceased and a riot police officer charging him with hi baton.[11] As far as protesters at the time were concerned, police brutality was responsible for Tomlinson's death and in a makeshift shrine that was erected in front of the Royal Exchange in his memory, people put up notes of solidarity, mourning, anger and grief.

Hopkins and Orr suggest that memorials "rely on […] pedestrian performance, respond to the unspecified narratives produced by the individual subjects' visits to *lieux de memoire*"[12]. Tomlinson's memorial was created by the performative labour

[8] In: Burgin, op.cit., p. 28.

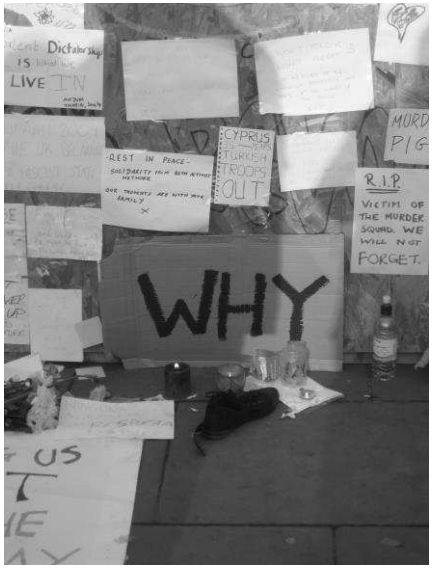
[9] Walter Benjamin: "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in: *Illuminations*, transl. Harry Zorn, London 1999, pp. 245-255, p. 252-253.

[10] "Ian Tomlinson Death: PC Cleared" *BBC News,* 17 September 2012. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10728685 (last accessed 22 May 2013).

[11] "Video of Police Attack on Ian Tomlinson" *The Guardian*, 7 April 2009. http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/video/2009/apr/07/g20-police-assault-video (last accessed 22 May 2013).

[12] D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr: "Memory/Memorial/Performance: Lower Manhattan, 1776/2001", in: *Performance and the City*, D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, Kim Solga (eds.), Basingstoke, New York 2009, pp. 33-50, p. 46.

of its visitors: this 'pedestrian production of memory' was spontaneously erected on a boarded up statue outside the Royal Exchange. Only momentarily disturbing the logic of the archive that 'provides consistency' to the narratives of monuments, the ephemeral memorial was itself a victim of the same malady that killed the commemorated man: in the same way that the statue of an important historical figure will appear as Tomlinson's death will gradually fade away, the plywood on which notes are written or pinned and the various objects around it will soon be swept away. The "'messy and eruptive' operations of performance"[13], created a temporary *lieux de memoire*, an ephemeral and disorderly memorial for absent ruins.




Tomlinson's body was initially treated as a *disposable* body: "[t]he following day, journalists were briefed by police that he was not a protester, had not been involved with police or been in a crush and had died of natural causes outside of the police cordon"[14]. Only later, when Tomlinson's body became visible (mediatised), did the police inquire into the incident. Athena Athanasiou in her discussion with Judith Butler asserts that "[a]s long as bodies are deemed disposable, found discarded, and remain uncounted, the notion of disposability will be associated with the concepts and practices of dehumanization and necropower"[15]. Echoing Athanasiou's argument, the memorial outside the Royal Exchange invited the visitor to recognise Tomlinson's body in an attempt to ward off the practices of dehumanization and necropower, and retain one's humanity. It seems doubly ironic that the memorial for a disposable body was disposable itself, since one can retain one's humanity only through an ephemeral and collective production of memory: if nothing else for memory's sake.

*Memory*

In his discussion of Proust, Benjamin ponders on the nature of memory: "[W]hile an event experienced is finally closed, at least in the one sphere of experience, an event remembered has no bounds, being simply a key to all that came before and all that came after it"[16]. For Benjamin, remembering, like writing history, is a jump into the past in a time filled by the now. Yet memory rarely resides within monuments: history within the neoliberal city becomes a fixed and predetermined narrative told in a-historical time. Against the neoliberal amnesia, we can only jump into the past to trace the absent ruins of history, staging a memorial for history itself: fragmented, inconclusive and purposeless.

[13] Ibid.

[14] "G20 fatality: How Police View of Ian Tomlinson Death Changed" *The Guardian*, 8 April 2009, *http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/apr/08/ian-tomlinson-g20-death-official-police-account* (last accessed 22 May 2013).

[15] Judith Butler, Athena Athanasiou: *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, Cambridge, Malden 2013, p. 147.

[16] Walter Benjamin: "Picturing Proust", in: *One-way Street and Other Writings*, transl. J.A. Underwood, London 2009, pp. 126-142, p. 128.

# Toward a Melancholy Aesthetics of the Cinema

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Depression: more than a source of mental pain,
it is a way of life
*Alain Ehernberg*[1]

Revolution is played out in molecular mutations of art
*Félix Guattari*[2]

There is no "melancholy aesthetics" of the cinema to be studied before the local sites of its manifestation, for the question of melancholy aesthetics – like melancholy itself – needs to be taken up again and again at the juncture of every aesthetic assemblage. Doing just that, I will probe a single behind-the-head shot that appears in the film *Oslo, August 31st* (Joachim Trier 2011). I analyze this single shot with an eye to what sort of emergent formal intelligibility and political stakes may undergird the heterogeneity of contemporary efforts to cinematically imagine the melancholic.

*Oslo* is a recent remake of Louis Malle's *Le feu follet* (1963). Much could be said about these films, themselves adapted from the novel of the same name by Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, but it will suffice to say that like the original, the contemporary is haunted – both thematically and aesthetically – by spectres of depression, addiction and suicide. In *Oslo*'s second to opening scene the protagonist Anders stands in front of a flowing river contemplating (what is shortly revealed to be) suicide (see fig. 1 & 2). A medium length shot from behind Anders begins with his out of focus head in the foreground surrounded by rippling water in the background, sharply in focus. Rack focus [3]. Foregrounded head now in focus, back grounded water now out of focus.

In a moment when Anders faces the prospects of taking his own life, he is filmed as occupying a different optical register than his surrounding environment; as extracted from the milieu he inhabits. In the first half of the rack focus shot when the water is in focus, his head and upper body mirror his affective interior state and are rendered out of focus, blurred and dulled. The second half of the shot depicting Anders' head in focus reduces the surrounding world to a blurry, weighty halo encircling him. The water and its ripples, the world and its richness, are blunted by the soft focus. Only a hazy blue mass remains; an opaque 'cut out' abstracted from the world. Ironically, tragically, the 'cut out' comes to constitute Anders' very (view of the) world. Perhaps only the melancholic's particular vision is hampered by this opacity and only he can feel its painful – often disabling – intensity, yet here, this melancholic world nevertheless exists, objectively. The world is drained of all of its budding potential, reduced to a place of limited possibility for action, where the push and pull tensor of generation is replaced by unmovable barriers of pre-determinacy. This is a shot where Anders sees the future as depotentialized, as "all used up". And it is! We are not in the realm of subjective hallucination, dream or recollection images. The melancholic vision is birthed from a melancholic reality, from the real world's relationality. Anders and his milieu are incompatible; bringing one into focus effaces the complexity and potentiality of the other.

Camera focus is used to create a stark distinction between foreground and background that gives way to an *either or* situation that leaves little space

[1] Alain Ehrenberg: *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age*, trans. Enrico Caouette, Jacob Homel, David Homel, Don Winkler, Montreal & Kingston 2010, p. 230.

[2] Félix Guattari: *Soft Subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977-1985*, trans. Chet Wiener, Emily Wittman; Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), Los Angeles 2009, p. 264.

3 Rack focus is a film technique that refers to changing the focus of the camera lens, usually from foreground to background (or vice versa) so that as one plane of the image comes into focus, the other goes out of focus.

for movement in or active engagement with the milieu, since points in the visual ecology (whether human or environmental points) are segmented off from one another through distortion of composition. There is either a world of unbearable complexity that overwhelms the dulled subject who can't make any sense of (what for him is) chaos, or an alienated subject who lives in his abstracted 'cut out' world devoid of actualizable futurity, of any nascent edge to grab hold of so as to render the world intelligible again. The Situation, depotentialized, stifles Action, leaving little to no possibility for the construction of a new Situation. (It then comes as no coincidence that Deleuze opens his book on the time-image with *Umberto* D, a highly melancholic film)[4]. Either the world or the individual's place in it is left flattened of its budding complexity, reducing the world's immanent generative potential to a stale binary of individual/world whose *either or* logic crushes the vitality of individuation key to any imaginable conception of non-depressive becoming.

With the world depotentialized for the melancholic immersed and imprisoned, like Anders, in his abstracted 'cut out', nobody seems accountable for the morbid state of affairs except for oneself. To be the subject who gives birth to a depotentialized world where one is not welcome, where one's life exists as a gross incompatibility in need of weeding-out is one of melancholy's many horrors. This anti-productive power of producing one's own affliction is the impression melancholy grants the melancholic subject. From here it is easy to account for the self-loathing so often characteristic of melancholic individuals. Yet it is not the melancholic who bears the responsibility for powerlessness to escape the sadness that he or she lives. It just feels that way. Hence the self-perpetuating, cyclical nature of melancholy colloquially referred to as a downward spiral. The therapeutic question is then one of how to reinvigorate and repotentialize the world, to bust cracks into the abstracted 'cut out' of an all-is-said-and-done universe that cages the melancholic individual.

In a certain light, this question is consistent with the theorizations of melancholy as a loss of mastery. This loss of mastery (in lieu of a lost object), is a central tenet of Jean Oury's essay on melancholy and violence,[5] it reappears in Martin Seligman's learned helplessness model of depression,[6] Thomas Fuchs' account of melancholia as asynchronicity between the time of the self and the time of the world,[7] and hovers in the shadows of philosophical works such as Adorno's *Minima Moralia*[8] and Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*[9] Though the concept of mastery does afford a move away from 'the (lost) object' as melancholy's ontological ground, it nevertheless reorients melancholy around the failure of a subjective function – the failure of an individual to master a given situation, to master 'their life'. Yet the cinema offers an opportunity to think otherwise, as can be seen with the aforementioned shot from *Olso*, because the free indirect subjective functions as an aesthetic operator at the heart of the film's perception-images. Mastery need not be thought in terms of an individual's capacity to express an omnipotent agency in a given circumstance, or to control the outcome of a given situation, but can more productively be thought of as the capacity to find a plane of consistency in the face of chaos that enables the resingularization of one's self and one's world, the breaking out of depressive refrains.

The beauty and insight of *Oslo*'s rack focus image is that it doesn't suggest that melancholy resides in any stable, delineated interiority, whether that be Anders' body or mind, whereby it could then be represented through a stylized point-of-view shot

[4] Gilles Deleuze: *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Robert Galeta, Minneapolis 1989.

[5] Jean Oury: "Violence et mélancolie", in: *Actes du colloque de Milan 1977: Tome 1*, Paris 1978, pp. 21-35.

[6] Martin Seligman: *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death*, New York 1975.

[7] Thomas Fuchs: "Melancholia as a Desynchronization: Towards a Psychopathology of Interpersonal Time", in: *Psychopathology* 34 (2001), pp.179-186.

[8] Theodor W. Adorno: *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, London 1978.

[9] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari: *What is Philosophy?*, New York 1994.

that does justice to this interiority, this subjective failure to perform mastery. Nor does the shot take a more 'observational' perspective, one that imagines that depression could be visualized through recourse to externalized communicational behaviour such as facial expressions, bodily postures etc. – an attitude that lends itself both to (re-)establishing clichés and reinforcing the notion that depression can be reduced to a set of legible visible cues and hence be diagnosed and topically medicated with ease and haste. In order to visualize the depotentialization of the melancholic's world, *Oslo* offers a free indirect subjective perspective of Anders' melancholy wherein his vision of the world is not conveyed in an of itself ("through his eyes") but is instead "transformed and reflected" through a pure plane of objectivity outside of himself and through the film's own self-conscious use of style.[10] The transformation and reflection is made manifest through stylistic expressivity such as the rack focus shot where impossible perspectives – objective perspectives of subjective feeling or subjective visions of objective phenomena – are given life. Due to the melancholy being an *uncommunicable* pain and sadness,[11] we need these impossible perspectives in order to do justice to melancholy's intricacies.

Through the presence of the free indirect subjective there is an indeterminacy and ambiguity coterminous with the entirety of a given film. As a term, the free indirect originates in literary analysis and refers to an assemblage of enunciation whereby subjective (direct, personal) discourse inflects objective (indirect, narrational) discourse resulting in a mixture of subjective and objective subject-positions otherwise clearly reserved and demarcated for "character" and "narrator". In cinema, direct discourse can most rudimentarily by equated with the point of view shot and indirect discourse with the long shot detached from any particular point of view. In such instances of the cinematic free indirect subjective, the inner anguish of the melancholic stains the entire picture, and yet simultaneously, the worldly mutations that doubly reflect and give rise to the melancholic's inner sentiment 'reframe' his or her subjective vision so that it never flies of from the reality of the world into a delusional, fantastical, or supernatural plane of existence. In contra-distinction to the contingency so often attributed to accounts of subjective experience, in *Oslo* there is never any doubt as to the legitimacy of the melancholic's pain and sense of powerlessness because it is visualized as firmly situated in the world.

*Melancholy is a morbid form of belief in the world.*

For this reason, an aesthetics of melancholy must continuously revive itself by returning to the question of being in the world. Perhaps this is why the seeds of a contemporary melancholy cinema can be found in a number of the "New Realisms": New American Realism (Kelly Reichardt), the Berlin School (Christian Petzold, Ulrich Köhler and Angela Schanelec) and the New Taiwanese cinema (Tsai Ming-Liang, Hou Hsiao-Hsien), etc. The indebtedness of these filmmakers, especially the Berlin School, to Pasolini's 'certain realism' and Antonioni's *Il Deserto Rosso* is undeniable. Melancholy aesthetics, neorealist aesthetics, political aesthetics, therapeutic aesthetics. The connections between them are ripe for the making.

Since it warrants reemphasis I'd like to conclude with a return to the therapeutically political question of how to repotentialize the world. The answer is open for experimentation but one thing is for certain: "being melancholic" – as a form of belief in the world – is consequentially a therapeutically political demand to change the world. Or as Josep Rafanell i Orra writes: "Treatment, before wanting to ask, 'How can I heal?', presupposes a prior question: 'What world must be actualized?'"[12].

Hence the *political aesthetics* of melancholy cinema!

[10] Gilles Deleuze: *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Barbara Haberjam, Minneapolis 1986, p. 74.
[11] Julia Kristeva: *Soleil Noir: Dépression et mélancolie*, Paris 1987, p. 13.

[12] Josep Rafanell I Orra: *En Finir Avec Le Capitalisme Thérapeutique: Soin, Politique Et Communauté*, Paris 2011, p. 284 (my transl.)

# Minima Melancholia: Performances of Affective Refusals and Rem(a)inders

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This paper will have to start with feelings about feeling acknowledging that the following reflections, in their attempt to, in Adorno's words, "speak immediately of the immediate," emerge from a temporality and subjectivity in a constant process of dissolution.[1] The risk here is that in this act these flowing conditions become arrested through the inescapable laws of writing. Nevertheless, aware of Adorno's warning in his dedication in *Minima Moralia* of the "complicity that enfolds all those who, in face of unspeakable collective events, speak of individual matters..." I am unable, as I write this, to find another way, still in search of *how* to write on the topic of melancholia that does not begin from feelings about the subject matter *because* of collective events.[2] Some of the more pronounced ones that emerged upon receiving this call for papers on the topic of melancholia, politics and performance were anger, exasperation, irritation, frustration. The entry into the task of writing about the subject of that negative affect named melancholia, in this particular time and space, brought about a series of feelings Sianne Ngai calls "ugly".[3] What is it to begin from a condition of experiencing such ugly feelings? What is it about this immediate and particular time and space that compels such a refusal? In what ways is writing (since this paper cannot be a scream) on the subject of melancholia, or more precisely the desire for the minimizing of its accenting, complicated by the fact that the object of study can only, in this case, be tackled by sifting through subjective feelings that are in turn negative?

Extending from a sense that affective responses inexorably inform theoretical ones, this unpremeditated methodological approach in the throes of still forming itself emerges then from that historically fraught theoretical terrain where the confused boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity emanate. In attempting to tackle the above questions the essay will grapple with the persistent ways in which "the subjective dimension of feeling, in particular, in seeming to undercut its validity as an object of *materialist* inquiry, has posed a difficulty for contemporary theorists."[4] Sianne Ngai continues:

> [F]eelings are as fundamentally "social" as the institutions and collective practices that have been the more traditional objects of historicist criticism (as Raymond Williams was perhaps the earliest to argue, in his analyses of "structures of feeling"), and as "material" as the linguistic signs and significations that have been the more traditional objects of literary formalism. Although feeling is not reducible to these institutions, collective practices, or discursive significations, it is nonetheless as socially real...[5]

Feeling and sensing our way through the world, socially real feelings and sensorial multiplicities determine. Yet insofar as feelings are transitional processes, unregulated passages that do not exist in isolation from other fluctuating feelings that determine, indeterminacy is amplified. I am interested in the ways these relationalities, where irreducible feelings are necessarily singular and plural, inform subjective and collective acts, and how subjective agencies release forces, inflect affective spheres that in turn emanate from

[1] Theodor Adorno: "Dedication", in: *Minima Moralia*, New York 2005, p. 15.

[2] Ibid., p. 18.

[3] Sianne Ngai: *Ugly Feelings*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2005.

[4] Ibid., p. 24.

[5] Ibid., p. 25

multitudes of subjective acts. How feelings regarding melancholia released here through a signifying narrative, also exist as flows of amorphous intensities. How the interplay and assemblage of these jostling forces that simultaneously birth and are conditioned by affective indeterminacy may relate to political action and performance. Similarly to Ngai I use the terms affect and feeling interchangeably here whilst conceding though a "modal difference of degree, rather than a formal difference of quality or kind" between them where "ambient affects may in fact be better suited to interpreting ongoing states of affairs." This is where the politics of affect emerges more clearly, for Ngai is interested in how the minor ugly feelings she analyses, such as irritation, envy, anxiety and the "unsuitability of these weakly intentional feelings for forceful or unambiguous action" as opposed to stronger affects such as fear and anger, may in fact assist us in studying collective or individual "situations marked by blocked or thwarted action in particular."[6] These feelings regarding melancholia then are always also feelings regarding politics and performance.

We face and author many thwarted situations nowadays, encounter repeated collective impasses, conflicts, drives, interiorities, voices, desires. In organizing our thoughts and actions common feelings emerge, nebulous stages of simultaneous hope and despondency. In singular general assemblies of singularities, constant shifting feelings of, to name a few, excitement, possibility, longing, disappointment, bitterness, resignation, gather and proliferate, search for articulation and representation. Insistent practices at collectivity, at building, spew and negotiate, inhabit and are inhabited by affects that arise "in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon," as Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg write.[7] These "forces and forces of encounter" mark the body's belonging or non-belonging in the world through constant struggling, performing, doing, becoming in uncommon common.[8] Through a being together for radical change, turning blind corners together, sheltering in gassed arcades together, helping each other step over into that which is here and not yet.

Intense forces and forces of encounter and their resonances abound in the Greek public sphere. Feelings and actions both ugly and not so ugly are unleashed from the challenges we face, as we experience a perpetual series of dreadful formations through and amidst a multitude of constant unformed becomings. Just a few days ago, on June 11, 2013 Greek Prime Minister Samaras implemented, without prior negotiation or warning, the closure of the National broadcaster ERT, and all its departments, singlehandedly laying off all its workers. This unprecedented move (unapproved by parliament with signage halted by police escort), is justified as a necessary austere measure at the same time that the administration refuses to explicitly denounce racism and pass an anti-racist bill through parliament. In fact, it is coming to light that Samaras' conservative party New Democracy may be open to an alliance with parliamentary members of neo-nazi Golden Dawn (currently the third party in national polls) if it means securing power in the next elections.

At the same time, across the Aegean Sea people in Turkey steadfastly face water cannons, chemicals, beatings, rubber bullets and propelling tear gas canisters for 22 days now. What began on May 28, 2013 as an intervention by a small group of activists who saw fit to protect a park in Istanbul has escalated into a countrywide protest against an authoritarian, fundamentalist neoliberal governmentality. As fatigue sets in we look across the sea to Turkey, and across other seas, for Brazil has reared its anti-capitalist refusal and fury since I began writing this, to those other sites of struggle, and to seas of histories of struggle for inspiration, lessons, feelings of solidarity and commonality as we face the unthinkable in Greece today.

[6] Ibid., p. 27.

[7] Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg (eds.): *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham 2010, p. 1.

[8] Ibid., p. 2.

This exhaustion, I think, results from a series of persistent moves produced by and through the escalation of economic, social and political policies, crises and civic mobilizations. The riots of 2008, the occupation of Syntagma Square, protests against austerity measures and privatization, mass general strikes, the squatting of universities, hospitals, factories, theaters and schools, abandoned buildings, emerging neighborhood assemblies and support networks, alternative forms of exchange and values. Yet as Rosa Luxemburg once wrote, we are also aware of an historical series of defeats that emerges from "the contradiction in the early stages of the revolutionary process between the task being sharply posed and the absence of any preconditions to resolve it…" where a pile-up of blocks are the prerequisites and material for an on-going building.[9] Our current stalling may also be due to a whiplash effect and subsequent weariness at the strident, spectacular rise of a state-sanctioned fascist organization patrolling our streets and parliament.

In facing these developments we have little time for hesitation or melancholic contemplation. We must address and resist how an historical series of defeats, betrayals, errors, and fascist gains generates a Left that still finds time to grieve. In her book *The Communist Horizon* Jodi Dean engages with Wendy Brown's notion of resisting "left melancholia" for its opening up of possibilities regarding the rethinking of communist desire in the present. Dean nevertheless calls her out for diagnosing Walter Benjamin's "left melancholy" as merely marking the condition of being more attached to a fixed political analysis and ideal or even its failure. Through a re-reading of Benjamin's 1931 review of Erich Kästner's poetry, "Left-Wing Melancholy," Dean writes: "Benjamin's account of left-wing melancholy suggests a loss of a different sort: the betrayal of revolutionary ideals..."[10] Thinking communism as a "lost object" through Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" Dean deepens her analysis of the left's structure of feeling. For Dean, Freud's well known differentiation between mourning and melancholia, where mourning's response to loss can over time detach oneself from the lost object whereas melancholia is the persistent attachment to what is lost, sheds light on the ways the Left's melancholic attachment and identification with itself as lost object comes to internalize and feed off the melancholic attachment itself. Dean seeks to emphasize "the compromise of the left melancholic" who in Benjamin's words succumbs to "complacency and fatalism" resulting in the "metamorphosis of political struggle from a compulsory decision into an object of pleasure, from a means of production into an article of consumption."[11] These relations can be understood as "cruelly optimistic" ones, where as Lauren Berlant writes, cruel optimism is that "double-bind in which your attachment to an object sustains you in life at the same time as that object is actually a threat to your flourishing." Much like Dean's admonishing of a collective melancholic attachment to communism as a lost object, Berlant's notion of cruel optimism emphasizes that what is imperative is how we relate to objects, not the qualities of the objects themselves "but how we learn to be in relation," that our object is relation.[12] Dean points to the phenomenon of the Occupy movements as relations that performed a rupture, a break from a melancholic resignation to capitalism's inexorableness. Speaking from a US context Dean expresses her desire for an organized Left that, as she laments, the mobilizations and assemblies failed to bring about.

Yet, the attachment to a fixed ideal shaped by an acquiescence that looks back but cannot shape-shift according to the exigencies of the here and now is evidently present in contemporary Greek society. This was acutely felt while attending the improvised people's assembly held in Syntagma

[9] Rosa Luxemburg: "Order Prevails in Berlin", http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1919/01/14.htm

[10] Jodi Dean: *The Communist Horizon (Pocket Communism)*, New York 2012, p. 170.

[11] Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[12] Interview with Lauren Berlant http://societyandspace.com/2013/03/22/interview-with-lauren-berlant/

square in the summer of 2011, an occupation in turn (pre)occupied with the specificities, particularities, and historical materialities of an enduring Greek Left. Moving in a 21st century agora the visceral sensing of the new – where one recognizes because it is made visible the malleability and ephemerality of context and convention, the work itself as it unfolds, the contingency that is the absence of a finished product, the presentness of the moment – was heightened. But I was also struck at how the language that sought to spew forth from this amorphous, acephalous forum was frozen in that Butlerian notion of 'citational confinement'. Discourse and intonations that are obedient to the very institutions they seek to dismantle, deconstruct, reconstruct proliferate. Yet at the same time, among the assembly, as we all attempted to find ways to speak was the palpable ever-present tremoring of potentiality. The improvised and impromptu assembly at Syntagma and the hundreds of neighbourhood assemblies it has subsequently discharged are performances of agoraphilia as is the people's assembly currently forming in front of ERT's headquarters. Crucial and inevitable moments and spaces that offer us ways to practice communication and communion as we still search for language while speaking to history and futurity. We must refuse complacency and compromise when these ruptures and breaks present themselves to us only to demand further constitution through and by us. We must refuse wallowing in left melancholia if we are to still search for, to cite Fred Moten citing Nathaniel Mackey, "new words, new worlds."[13]

It is May 2013, exactly two years after the occupation of Syntagma square as I take an elevator up to the small fourth floor flat in an apartment building in the centre of Athens. A low row of seating pressed against a wall faces an open plan kitchen and living room and a glazed bathroom door. We crouch down and wait for the performance to begin. Dead authors stare at the back of our heads from a ghostly row of black and white images tacked to the wall. We are about to witness an intimate domestic setting marked by the presence of zombies, blood, splattered spaghetti and tomato sauce, dissonant synthesized musicalizations of poetry, queer love, erotic dancing culminating in the critical vibrations of a screaming naked woman in body paint – dripping anarchy. An hour long performance of mise en scenes which alternated from B-horror movie moments, to tender poems and naked caresses, to poignant stillness and diminutive installations, to undulating Sapphic embraces in hand me down fur coats all set to Miltos Sahtouris' collection of poetry on the subject of friendship, death and loss.

The performance *Ektoplasmata* (Ectoplasms) by the group *Nova Melancholia*, in refusing toxic normativity, ephemerally opened up through "new" ambivalent and improvisatory melancholias, the possibility for different relations between and re-arrangements of space, things and bodies. The public and private fold into each other in times of necessity and experimentation where as Berlant writes, "amidst all of the chaos, crisis, and injustice in front of us, the desire for alternative filters that produce the sense – if not the scene – of a more intimate, livable sociality is another name for the desire of the political."[14] In this case, due to the constraints of tiny budget performances that are offered for free to the public, the director Vassilis Noulas opens up his home to the public transforming it into a scene of another sociality and livability. This affective force of encounter plays out in the transformative scene of a kitchen counter, sink, living room floor as stage, the queering performance itself as well as the public entering the private sphere, producing a series of relations and becomings, in the spectators as well as the actors who play the dead and undead.

[13] Fred Moten: "Black Mo'nin", in: *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, David L. Eng, David Kazanjian (eds.), Berkeley 2003, p. 73.

[14] Lauren Berlant: *Cruel Optimism*, Durham 2010, p. 227.

EKTOPLASMATA © nova melancholia

For zombies echoingly stagger through Noulas' apartment as they haunt the streets of New York and London. Tavia Nyong'o, writing on the rehearsals and performances of zombie walks at the Wall Street and London Occupy movements observes how, framed by the architectures of finance, religion and state zombie walks show how we are "zombified" by capital at the same time as they release the potential for "de-zombification."[15] The zombie marches traipsing through protest camps and the four female performers' enactment of undead shuffles and splatters through Noulas' apartment become "an accumulation strategy for politicized, anarchic dances."[16] I would like to think through Nyong'o's notion of "accumulation strategies for politicized, anarchic dances" as they release themselves on stages, balconies, in kitchens, riots, protests, general assemblies, smoke filled streets and through new "scenes of occupation" marked by politicized, anarchic stillness. A slow feel amongst the rage, poignancies that de-regulate temporality, linearity, space. For the many stillnesses that occurred beside the frenzy in Noulas' performance such the momentary corpses (and the breathtakingly beautiful moment of the tiny revolution of a small wooden mouse placed on a melting ice cube sliding in a pan heated by a butane gas can placed on the floor), as well as for the thunderous quietude of the "standing man." Yesterday a different image from the struggles taking place in Turkey made its appearance. Almost three weeks after constant battles with the police state a man stands still, alone, in a violently emptied square. He faces in the direction of massive banners bearing nationalist images and symbols and stands still for hours, relaxed, hands in his pockets, until he is joined by more and more people who imitate his stance, standing bodies, standing completely still in the square of Taksim, in the space that was and will be again a battlefield.[17]

We are haunted by these zombies and stillnesses that mark a refusal to disappear, that mark a refusal to not feel. This is not the first or last time that the living and the dead resist by taking such stands. These performances – the improvisations, experimentation, re-arrangements, needs, desires, impulses to re-animate found objects, materialities, histories, bodies and space, to respond to thwarted action – reveal how we are

[15] Tavia Nyong'o: "The Scene of Occupation", in: TDR: The Drama Review 56:4 (T216) Winter 2012, p. 142.

[16] Ibid., p. 146.

[17] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=plaer_embedded&v=FnGfLI6scYY. For more images and interview see: http://norhetorike.com/2013/06/19/interview-4-1-2-durankadin-the-standing-woman/

haunted by new words and new worlds because they are always and already present.

http://www.rightnow.io/breaking-news/taksim-turkey_bn_1371374939596.html

The zombies, ghosts, and poetic eulogies made present in Noulas' small apartment and the images of standing singular bodies currently proliferating across the Turkish public sphere and our social media haunt, disrupt, unsettle, while sensed as known. Their specific and shared conditions of production, constraints and endurance reveal how in Avery Gordon words utopia "exists as more than a haunt":

> It exists when there is no painful split between the dream world and the real world; when revolutionary time doesn't stop the world, but is rather a daily part of it; when needs and desires and investments are already being re-engineered; when a second nature or a sixth sensory organ has already grown and taken root. It exists when the utopian is not the future as some absolute break from the past and the present, but a way of living in the here and now… It is the articulation of social movement in the general sense of the term: the ongoing building of an alternative civilization, with its own reason, its own home, and its own system of value.[18]

Gordon (and the above performances of "living in the here and now") magically show us avowals to be consciously haunted by the specter of utopia that is here, present. Utopia "exists as more than a haunt" because it is as socially real as feeling, as the material performances that summon it into existence. The stakes are high, the body is put on the line, profound risks and discomforts are endured in the daily living of the utopian. An all-encompassing melancholia, and it often is all-consuming, takes no risks, refuses to refuse its lost object, its attachment, itself. It allows for the succumbing to a solitary sadness that is pained by and turns away from the social. We must refuse a totalizing melancholia when it justifies resignation, when it is the predilection to withdraw from collective struggle and hope, admonish its indulgences as intellectual betrayals. The ugly feelings that spurred the writing of this paper seek to resist such a reading and feeling of the present and, without wanting to make light of the collective hardship and depression that abounds in the Greek public sphere these days, stems from a frustration with what feels like a current retreat from the fight.

And yet, interestingly and paradoxically, my desire for a minimal melancholia has necessarily moved through and across melancholic performances and feelings: the tears spilled when listening to poetry performed in small Athenian apartments, the melancholic tremble discerned in a zombie's cursed stumble, in images of resistance's silent stands. Our shared impossibility of immunity to melancholy necessitates a different relationship to it, necessitates its de-privileging, allowing its

[18] Avery Gordon: *Keeping Good Time: Reflections on Knowledge, Power, and People*, Boulder, London 2004, p. 129.

inevitability to bring us closer together instead of further apart. An opening up to its passing through, an opening up to feeling, an owning up to its being as intensity but not as property, to its coexistence and co-belonging with flows of affective rem(a)inders that spill over from performances of uneven divisions. Acts of resisting subjugation, whether bodily, linguistic, or affective, necessarily release forces that effuse from the collapse of the laws of the subject/object divide where in this disintegration desires flow and overflow from us at the same time the world and affects constitute us from outside ourselves. We stand in between, amongst, whilst unleashing affect, improvising, searching for a language for them and thus a world because of them, because of what haunts, because of what is possible. It is the unknown that brings us out of melancholy, the condition of not knowing, the renouncing of inevitabilities we know we have the agency to alter. Necessarily imagining, longing, envisioning and doing in the present without certitude is the vital experimentation with body, mind, space as resources whose capacities are infinite and mysterious. Knowing and not knowing is agency as initiation, instantiation, invitation to create forces, moves, performances, machines of the here and now and future, strategizing through what Douglas Crimp calls "mourning and militancy",[19] new melancholias, new militancies, new anti-fascist actions.

For as I end here more images of precarious figures standing still together, eyes locked on the same horizon, spill over from the streets of Istanbul and other cities in Turkey. One image shows a young man stand on his knees next to an empty wheelchair, behind and alongside him an elderly woman and man, statuesque. Other images show groups of still figures materializing in the passages that are streets, throughways, feelings, affects, standing together but apart, facing the same direction, reading books, studying passages. These self-conscious performances of differentiation, of singular and collective political being punctuating and thus creating spaces and times of social mobilization express feelings that refuse. And by refusing to not feel materially act as standpoints in response to thwarted action, to blockades. Near and far squares get filled, beaten and gassed into submission, emptied, filled again. We live and see huge processions, streams of protest, innovations, determinations, resilience, we live and see brutality and retaliation. We watch fascism changing faces and ways. We gather, assemble, plan, in spaces large and small, institutional, public and private, participate in desires made material, create and occupy new worlds, new words, intimacies, critically vibrating forms and sounds because of ugly and beautiful feelings**.** We hear of bodies fighting then standing deliberately still then fighting: we see bodies position themselves in excess of their opposition. Rem(a)inders flow. We hope. We are moved.

[19] Douglas Crimp: "Mourning and Militancy", October 51 (1989): 3-18.

# Mourning over Heritage, Weeping over Performance. The Melancholy of the Critic

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*History-Memory-Dreaming*

The present paper lies on three theoretical assessments.

1. Melancholy is an ideological mechanism of magnification and absorption: "melancholy as an inner disposition not only makes elegiac objects seem attractive but carries still another, more important implication: it favors self-estrangement, which on its part entails identification with all kinds of objects. The dejected individual is likely to lose himself in the incidental configurations of his environment, absorbing them with a disinterested intensity no longer determined by his previous preferences".[1]

2. Melancholy is a cultural phenomenon.[2]

3. The return to melancholy is historically associated with the end of utopias.[3]

A melancholy for what is lost was occasionally central to Modern Greek aesthetics. From the beginning of the previous century Greek theatre practitioners have applied to Europe (at that time to the directorial models of Max Reinhardt and André Antoine) in order to be assisted in tracing a road for modern Greek theatre. The return to Greek antiquity was already endorsed by the Greek Enlightenment, while in the 19th century historians regarded the history of Greece from the ancient years till modern times as a unity, insisting on the continuity of the Greek nation. Both ideological trends set the basis for the formation of a national identity, which during the 20th century was strengthened by means of performance following the atrocious collapse of Ecumenical Hellenism in 1922.

The ideological term "revival" of Greek drama was promoted mainly in Greece in order to fantasize the resurrection of a national heritage and establish an ancient-like stage aesthetics which allegedly validate an authentic manner of staging undisturbed from the distant past to the present day. The very starting point of the revival strategies was to construct a national identity which, on the one hand, confirms the continuity and the coherence of an undamaged Greek civilization, while, on the other hand, (due to the Western preoccupation with classical Greece from the Renaissance onwards) repositions "new" Greece from the periphery of "tourist" sight to the place of honour in the cultural West. The realization of this fixed national identity was made possible by means of performance in a selective recollection of *these* qualities of "Greekness" that would patch together a glamorous past (stylized acting, Sprechchor, archaic separation of space, ancient-like costumes, performances in archaeological sites, etc.). The main endeavour of this "strategic" plan was to materialize heritage by recreating the authentic images of Greekness in order to bring the audience to the task of its heroic and glorious past:

> […] the formal peculiarity of the Nation as a social creation may be said to reside precisely in the *nationalizing* operation

[1] Siegfried Kracauer: *Theory of Film: The Re-Demption of Physical Reality*, Oxford and New York 1960, p. 17.

[2] For example, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling and Rhonda L. Blair, with introduction and commentary by J. B. Bamborough (Oxford 1989–94) deals with melancholy not only as an illness related to single, representative individuals (such as Hamlet or even Burton himself), but the "illness" is broadened to a fundamental cultural-critical symptomatology of the age. A typical analysis of melancholy as a cultural phenomenon in J. E. Chamberlin: "An Anatomy of Cultural Melancholy", in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, v. 42, 1981, pp. 691-705.

[3] Wolf Lepenies: "Neue Einleitung. Das Ende der Utopie und die Wiederkehr der Melancholie", in: Id.: *Melancholie und Gesellschaft,* Frankfurt am Main 1998, pp. vii–xxviii.

> itself, in the process by which a society institutes its members as *national subjects*. This operation consists in fashioning a historically specific *national fantasy*: the axis around which an experience of nationality is woven.[4]

In many cases, Greek drama productions supported a national introversion (not always justifiable by harsh historic circumstances). The national imagery/fantasy was thus visualized with the wish to mirror the authentic heritage. In such an ideological context, Greek civilization is called to emit the aesthetic excellence of universal eurhythmy and harmony, recalling the Romantic ideal of *edle Einfalt und stille Größe*[5] (gentle simplicity and quiet grandeur).

*Autism – Mourning and Melancholy*

The connection of the present Greekness[6] with the glorious past was made possible by such public discourses as theatre reviews, which became the apostles and safeguards of the authentic "Greekness". Before I proceed to case analyses, it should be noted that two of most eminent features of Greek theatre criticism are: 1. Textual humanism (the idea that texts have inborn intentions – natures, ideologies, directorial requirements, stagecraft –, which the director must explanatorily develop on stage); and 2. Moral innatism (i.e., the belief that the critic is naturally superior to the "average" spectator and has the right to judge everyone and teach morals, perhaps by nature or by the Grace of God).[7]

Those critics who feel obliged to safeguard the "authentic" Greekness, also feel the obligation to protect a directorial model that uses *mimesis* as its basic functional tool (not only as in imitating the real world onstage, but also as in mirroring the real Greekness). Given that, the Greek critics' preoccupation with the Aristotelian poetics and the evaluative criteria[8] of a literary and not theatrological model, deeply antitheatrical, is in fact peculiar. I will give a mere example from mainstream press: in a review titled "PITY WITHOUT FEAR" we read that in a certain production "*mythos* was betrayed… *leksis* was disempowered… lyricism was murdered… (the authentic) *opsis* [i.e. visual aspect] was adulterated and acting overturned the *ethos* of the dramatic personae as well as their *dianoia* (reasoning)", all of which are the *κατά ποιόν* parts of a tragedy according to Aristotle[9].

The basic evaluating principle in use seems to be commencing from a generalizing (and perhaps dangerous) re-invention of the Aristotelian *Poetics*, which clearly stated that the power of tragedy exists without a public performance and without actors (6.1450$^{b}$18). In this perspective, a major critic (of the best selling Greek newspaper) gives the following definition:

> Theatre is not the ideas; theatre is the mimesis of a praxis, an important or a flagitious one, and praxis is action with character. Character is again residence,

[4] Stathis Gourgouris: *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece*, Stanford 1996, p. 28.

[5] Johann J. Winckelmann: *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, ed. by H. Uhde-Bernays, Leipzig 1925 (1755), p. 81 famous pet-phrase.

[6] For ideology of Greekness cf. Dimitris Tziovas: *Οι μεταμορφώσεις του εθνισμού και το ιδεολόγημα της ελληνικότητας στο μεσοπόλεμο*, Athens 1989, second edition 2002.

[7] Cf. my «Μίμησις – Ήθος – Διάνοια: Οι εθνοκεντρικές παράμετροι της νεοελληνικής κριτικής», in: *Επιστημονική Επιθεώρηση Τεχνών του Θεάματος*, v. 1, 2009, pp. 185-223.

[8] Kostas Georgousopoulos' review "Form against Mimesis", *TA NEA*, 27.07.2002, in which it is argued that Greeks are trapped "in the European stereotypes and are deprived from an authentic look on our ancient heritage", is characteristic and refers to the *Mania Thebaia* Projekt by the State Theatre of Düsseldorf.

[9] Kostas Georgousopoulos: *Κλειδιά και Κώδικες Θεάτρου Ι. Αρχαίο Δράμα*, Athens 1982, pp. 75, 160-64.

tenement, and respectively way of living.[10]

The adherence of many Greek critics with the maintenance of the original *tragic ethos*[11] (even if "it will be inevitably determined by aesthetic perceptions and emotional treatments and capabilities of our time") aims to the conservation of *the ideal frame of the tragic praxis*[12] through the deferential picketing of the "poetic essence"[13] of the texts. In such contexts, some critics project their expectation to theatre practitioners as indirect advice for compliance with the critic's theatrical visions. For instance, some critics in the fifties regarded the analogical recreation of the tragic character (ethos) with present-day means according to contemporary receptivity, as a condition for aesthetic pleasure. The basic tool for this recreation should be the "boosting of the imposition of the word (*logos*, the text)", that will create emotions "of the same texture and the same intensity [i.e. compared to the original ones] in the soul of the contemporary spectator". In particular, "after the morphic adaptation of the atmosphere of Greek tragedy and the appearance of constructions with plasticity according to the director's abilities, the actor will be able to express the […] 'evident pathos', in order for the contribution of the chorus to follow, who will create the 'hidden pathos', so that the prerequisites of the mental metaphor will be created"[14]. In this case, the desired effect is not illusion, but hallucination which will carry the spectator back to the sublime Greek past.

Even leftist critics, who refrain from the nationalist ideology of the abovementioned critic, seem to support the traditional textualism, declaring that "in the performance of Greek drama the text is a prerequisite"[15] and most importantly "the correct interpretation of the text" (and we are in the eighties). The most terroristic is for the critic to proclaim that "decadent times take refuge in originality and decadence is the dismantling of the continuity of the tradition", given that in some texts there is "one key, one dominant tone" according to which "the problem of the form is reduced to a general SOLUTION"[16] and does not allow any directorial "expedience from the outside", which will betray mythos "the most important aspect according to Aristotle"[17]. The suppressive interpellation of the deviant director to join the "disciplined… guild",[18] so that he will not find himself isolated in his otherness, serves the necessary compliance to the tradition, given that the critic feels its institutional safeguard. In other cases, the critics appeal to an inevitable holly nature or some teleological texture, which render the texts completed by nature and perhaps consecrated by one absolute interpretation (which of course is the critic's interpretation). For instance, there was a critic (M. Karagatsis) who considered the deferential observance of "the spirit" of the text his basic evaluating criterion, although he is the one who has already determined the meaning of the text in the introduction of his review. In doing so, the critic projects his taste and Ego to the audience in such an extorting way, that he almost drags the reader to his side: reviewing the National Theatre production of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* in 1957 he was so surprised by the director's choice to stage this Shakesperean romance, that he ironically blames himself and his savage – purely boorish – brain for "not being able to capture the Shakespearean genius in its

[10] Kostas Georgousopoulos: «Ελληνικότητα και θέατρο», in: D. G. Tsaousis (ed.): *Ελληνισμός – Ελληνικότητα: Ιδεολογικού και βιωματικοί άξονες της νεοελληνικής κοινωνίας*, 4th ed., Athens 2001, p. 208.

[11] Emilios Hourmouzios (*Ερωτήματα προς τη Σφίγγα. Από τον Γκαίτε στον Πιραντέλλο και τον Ντύρρενματ*, Athens 1986) sees the analogical recreation of the tragic character according to the receptiveness of the audience and by contemporary means (pp. 51-60, 85, 91-2, 237-8) as a basic requirement for the aesthetic pathos of tragedy (pp. 13-14, 127-33, 169).

[12] Ibid., p. 243.

[13] Ibid., p. 52.

[14] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[15] Stathis Dromazos: *Αρχαίο Δράμα: Κριτικές*, Athens 1983, p. 205.

[16] Georgousopoulos 1982, op. cit., p. 98.

[17] Ibid., p. 236.

[18] Ibid., p. 98.

totality"[19]. In other cases, the structural texture of the text is translated into an "entelecheia"[20] (actuality), from which the director is not allowed to divert. And, as the academic critic typically noted: "in case a direction overturns this generic balance –and in our days it usually does- it doesn't overturn a holiness, it overturns the nature of the text and causes teratogenesis. […] Tragedy functions through its nature. When it doesn't do so, it functions as a monster. When a choral ode is turned into an episode and the director gives the lines to the members of the chorus, we turn its nature over; we assault the nature of a specific genre. It is like performing an opera without singing"[21].

For Walter Benjamin cultural melancholy for what is lost could prevent political action and inevitably lead to "complacency and fatalism"[22]. This type of cultural fatalism may be seen as present in Modern Greece. Driven by their desire for cultural Epiphanies, many critics in Greece created critical machines of eulogy and obituary, suffering from a ethnocentric melancholy for the loss of the authentic Greekness. Today there is a clear aesthetic distinction between the *performance of a heritage* coded in a system of stereotypical citations to a supposedly unvarying Greekness, and the radical aesthetics of post-traditionalism. It follows that, in the case of "radical" performances the performative confronts those *citations* whose previous acceptance resulted from the repetition of a prevailing set of practices. And as Raymond Williams has already put it:

> Radical seemed to offer a way of avoiding dogmatic and factional association while reasserting the need for vigorous and fundamental change.[23]

[19] M. Karagatsis: *Κριτική Θεάτρου 1946-1960*, ed. by. J. Vivilakis, Athens 1999, pp. 504-6.

[20] Tasos Lignadis: *Το ζώον και το τέρας: Ποιητική και υποκριτική λειτουργία του αρχαίου ελληνικού δράματος*, Athens 1988, p. 138.

[21] Ibid., p. 27.

[22] Walter Benjamin: *Selected Writings II*, Cambridge 1999), p. 425. A good analysis on melancholy and Benjamin in Jonathan Flatley: *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, Cambridge, MA 2008, pp. 28-64.

[23] Raymond Williams: *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London 1976, p. 210.