



Melaina Kole

How to explore the essence of melancholy with an artistic interdisciplinary approach through the lens of societal addiction.

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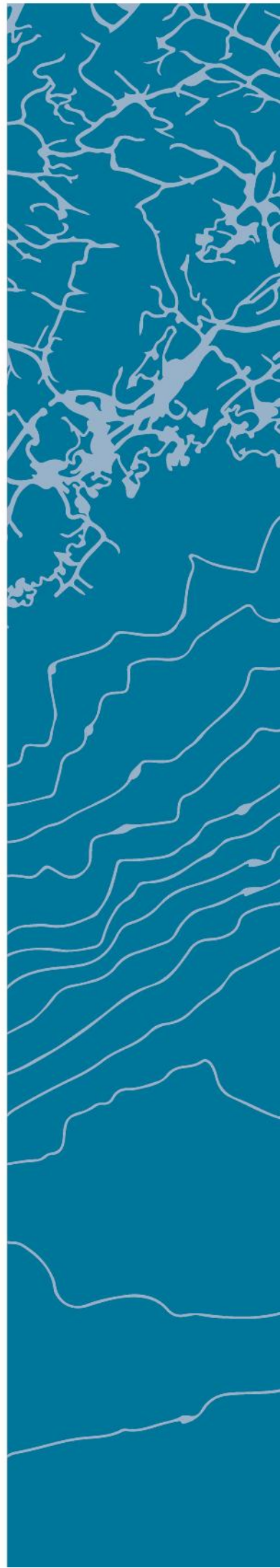
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Abstract

This thesis is artistic research of melancholy and societal addiction through autoethnography and phenomenology, analysed up against selected theories and empiricism. Systematically listed by theoretical perspectives, methods and melancholy, I have aimed to acquire as much data as possible, to further the chances of success in defining melancholia, and exploring its use and value through empiricism, historical perspectives and scientific theories. In the artistic exploration societal addiction will be the main theme, but the link between melancholy and societal addiction is the goal for the creative experiment that is the performative media production.

Sammendrag

Denne mastergradsavhandlingen er et kunstnerisk utviklingsarbeid om melankoli og avhengighetssamfunnet gjennom autetnografi og fenomenologi, analysert opp i mot utvalgte teorier og empiri. Ved systematisk oppføring av teoretiske perspektiver, metoder og melankoli har jeg siktet mot å tilegne meg så mye data som mulig, for å øke sjansene for suksess ved definering av melankoli, og å utforske begrepets bruk og verdi gjennom empiri, historiske perspektiver og vitenskapsteorier. I den kunstneriske utforskningen vil avhengighetssamfunnet være hoved-temaet, men forbindelsen mellom melankoli og avhengighetssamfunnet er målet for det kreative eksperimentet som er den performative medieproduksjonen.

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0. About the author

My background lie in music and visual arts, however I have great interest in several artistic fields. The musical journey started in my childhood when I enlisted in the local corps to play the flute, which I played for 10 years before I put it away for other, more pressing, interests. Being self-taught in piano, vocals and song-writing/composing, I went to Media and Communication for a year, then three years in General Studies with Fine Arts. For higher education I spent one year at Noroff for Sound and Musicproduction before I eventually landed on a bachelor's degree in Visual Arts with a year-study of Music included as the last year of my bachelor (2011-2013/15). The last ten years has been spent doing digital illustrations, and producing music in Cubase¹ in my spare time.

0.1 Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Marius Igland Lønskog for his excellent patience and wisdom guiding me through this thesis.

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¹ "Cubase is a digital audio workstation developed by Steinberg for music and MIDI recording, arranging and editing. The first version, which was originally only a MIDI sequencer and ran on the Atari ST computer, was released in 1989." (Routledge, 2015).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Theme

The overall theme for this thesis is melancholy. By collecting data through books and movies, and conversing with fellow artists of different backgrounds, the intention is to define the term melancholy and uncover how it is viewed and/or portrayed in today's society. As a fluid term, the definition is changing through the centuries, and speaks to the state of society at each time period.

To be able to define this term, it is therefore important to understand it. Through the lenses of value theory, structuralism, psychodynamic theory and bourgeois aesthetics, there is a diverse spectrum of definitions and opinions to be explored through the methods used. Whether or not there will be a final definition at the end of the thesis is not the aim, mostly due to its varying understanding by the individual, and its fluidity throughout history. As such a vacant term, it waits to be described and used however and wherever it may be needed.

There is however an underlying theme of the thesis as well, something that has been becoming more apparently important in the search for this definition of melancholy, and that is the theory of societal addiction. There is mention of the addiction society in documentaries such as "The Social Dilemma", and although this has a small part in it, however in a broader sense, it is for the most part not used in the context of social media. Human beings lived in societal addiction long before social media was introduced. There is an addiction to perfection, first and foremost, and whether it is real life or on the internet, human beings will always attempt to obtain acceptance via perfection in various ways. This yearning for acceptance through perfection makes way for rising above others, and therefore the want to excel and surpass others for the acceptance and admiration of many.

This is true for all parts of society, especially in relation to something Theodor Adorno referred to as mass culture. In *Minima Moralia* Adorno expresses his distaste for mass culture in the culture industry. He claims that by downgrading tragedy into fate, this industry promoted inertia. By exposing human suffering, tragedy expressed a negative movement of protest in traditional art. Exposed to the illusion of any

harmony between form and content, individual and society, tragedy revealed the “necessary failure” of any striving for fulfillment in class society. (T. Andrea, 2005)

“Tragedy is reduced to the threat to destroy who does not cooperate... tragic fate becomes just punishment which is what bourgeois aesthetics always tried to turn it into.” (DE, p. 152)

1.1.1 Choice of Theme

The reason for choosing this theme has root in my childhood. Through the various stages in my life, I have always tried to understand what I am and where I come from (by way of personality). I have attributed my personality to many things, some examples being depression, social anxiety, autism, naivety, daydreaming, adhd, emotionality, introversion etc, the list keeps on going. However this doesnt mean I am always sad, nor does it mean I’m always happy. Some things that make others sad, can make me happy. I find satisfaction in things that others might find depressing, but I am but of course not alone in this opposition. It is simply a divergence from the norm, and who decides what the norm is? The majority of society, and simply put society is a group of human beings co-existing. To quote Osamu Dazai from his book “No Longer Human”: “What is society but an individual?”

1.2 Thesis Question

How to explore the essence of melancholy with an artistic interdisciplinary approach through the lens of societal addiction?

The theme of melancholy was born through my own interest and criticism of societal addiction. Melancholy is only a state of mind, but this term has many meanings to different people. In addition to this, the term is used to pathologize people who are considered psychologically abnormal. For example, “most of the older theories pathologize same-sex attraction,” and this is how society is in a constant evolutionary state. Just like how same-sex attraction is now becoming a more

accepted part of human society, melancholy has become a more used term in relation to the human psyche.

In the theory chapter you will find all theories decided to be relevant to the thesis question presented, and in the method chapter you will find all the research methods I found to be able to shed light on the thesis question both theoretically and practically. The sub-chapter on melancholy alone includes its history, but also the most prudent views relating to the term, and the ways it is presented in visual arts. Other ways of communicating the melancholy mood is music, and the artist chosen to be focused on is Sigur Rós, which will be found in the chapter on empiricism (including empiricism collected from movies/tv shows and books). Lastly there will be a qualitative study in three subjects with no philosophical background explaining their views on these questions (myself included), and how melancholy can relate to their life and mood.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In this chapter I will review the range of theoretical perspectives chosen to be used in the understanding of the thematics of this thesis. Together they will shed light on many aspects of the topic of melancholy and the definition of terms over the course of history, however mainly in today's society. Furthermore they serve to examine how those terms are created and for what benefit. The hope is to create a piece of art, or pieces, to reflect and cause reflection in spectators about how the constant strive for perfection is hurting society more than its helping.

2.1 Value Theory & Hedonism

Hedonism is a theory within value theory, and therefore it is prudent to briefly go into what value theory is about. The term value theory is used in at least three ways in philosophy. In one way it can be used as a catch-all label for all branches of moral philosophy, social and political philosophy, aesthetics, and sometimes even feminist philosophy and philosophy of religion; "all areas of philosophy comprised of some 'evaluative' aspect" (Schroeder, 2021). Value theory can also be understood in the sense roughly synonymous with 'axiology'.

"Axiology can be thought of as primarily concerned with classifying what things are good, and how good they are. For instance, a traditional question of axiology concerns whether the objects of value are subjective psychological states, or objective states of the world" (Shroeder, 2021).

This theory is however more useful in the ways of moral philosophy that revolves around theoretical questions about value and goodness of all types; this is the theory of value. Axiology does exist within it, but there is more to the theory than that, i.e. "other questions of value and its relation to other moral categories" (Schroeder, 2021).

Where value theory intends to find the value in f.ex. actions or words, hedonism diverges with its one proclamation: Pleasure is the only good, and pain is the only evil (Sagdahl, 2021). Based on this approach anyone or anything is only good or evil

based on whether or not they cause pleasure or pain. Melancholy must then according to hedonism be either good or evil.

Hedonists are often seen as individuals whom are only interested in immediate sensory pleasures, as is shown evident in the well known saying ‘sex, drugs & rock’n’roll’. Pleasure is on the other hand understood differently within philosophical theory. There is no longer talk about the immediate sensory pleasures, but rather the feeling of reading a good book, getting in a great work out session or overcoming our fears, to mention a few examples (Sagdahl, 2019).

2.1.1 Paradise Engineering & the Hedonistic Imperative

This brings us to the term Paradise Engineering, a term which exists within hedonism. This is an umbrella term for the creation and use of technology to build a world which satisfies the hedonistic imperative, created by philosopher David Pearce. The hedonistic imperative wants only two things: To seek joy in all its forms, and to avoid pain in all its forms. It is motivated by technology, and the use of technology to eliminate suffering and induce happiness. (Reason, 2018).

David Pearce (1959 -), being a british Oxford philosopher and transhumanist, is one of the world’s most distinguished patrons of utilitarianism. He has become well recognized on the basis of his works and writings on transhumanism, as well as his collaboration with organizations like the IEET (The Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies), which has possibly made him the staple “on the attainment of utilitarian ideals through emerging technologies.” (Dan Faggella, 2013). Along with fellow Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom, he co-founded the World Transhumanist Association in 1998, later to become “Humanity+”.

Happiness can be based on more then just a good feeling, it can be induced by something more physically advanced as biomechatronics. Biomechatronics is a merge of man and machine, an example being cyborgs in Science Fiction (Tech, 2021). Some examples of cyborgs can be seen in “The Terminator” by James Cameron, “Blade Runner” by Ridley Scott or the character Adam Jensen from the game “Deus Ex: Human Revolution”.

Biomechatronics is an interdisciplinary field wanting to combine units with human beings to “assist or improve control of limbs or joints which can be lost or weakened

[...]” (Tech, 2021), but also the opportunity to control our emotional spectrum and possibly turn happiness permanently on.

According to hedonism the term melancholy must then land within one of two categories; good or evil. However, within philosophical theory there is a different way entirely of viewing the term pleasure.

As they are synonymous with each other (joy, pleasure and happiness), it is up for discussion whether or not such manipulation evident in paradise engineering where one would be in constant happiness can be defined as happiness. To be able to view this in the context of the theme of melancholy, it is important to define what happiness is, in order to understand to a certain degree whether or not melancholy can be happiness.

“Not all pleasures are good in the moral sense, or perhaps it is better to say that given our deeper origins in an animal world that runs red in tooth and claw, many of the chemical incentives inherent to our biology are triggered only through selfish and damaging acts.”
(Reason, 2018).

There are, as mentioned previously, other ways of pleasure than the immediate sensory pleasures, pleasures that need not resort to advanced technological improvements. There are physically grounded pleasures like beautiful scenery, physical human interactions and wind in the hair, as well as psychologically grounded pleasures like surprise, humor, basically all mentally grounded human interactions.

The idea to simplify how we induce pleasure within our own brain chemistry, removing any work required to experience said pleasure, was an early innovation within the technological environment. Every piece of technology created is made to “achieve better results with less effort” (Reason, 2018), hence creating a society where the reward system shifts from requiring hard work and manual labor to something else. This is where augmentations and wireheading through biomechanics are presented as part of the human condition, the ultimate outcome being to push a button and experience the exact type of pleasure you want whenever you want, potentially continuously.

According to Reason, the writer of the article *The Hedonistic Imperative - Followed to the ends of paradise engineering*, this neverending endeavor for constant

pleasure is the “less consequential of the two sides of the hedonistic imperative”. It is rather by the elimination of suffering that will have a greater impact on the world we live in today, possibly due to the amount of pleasure we already experience in most of the world’s industrialized countries. There is a greater fight against suffering than for pleasure.

2.1.2 Wirehead Hedonism VS Paradise Engineering

Wireheading is a term referencing the “artificial stimulation of the brain” in order to experience pleasure, among other things, for the most part “through the direct stimulation of an individual's brain's reward or pleasure center with electrical current.” (Multicore et al., 2020). The interest in wireheading is the way it also can be utilized to “refer to any kind of method that produces a form of *counterfeit utility* by directly maximizing a good feeling, but that fails to realize what we value.” (Multicore et al., 2020).

"If it was possible to become free of negative emotions by a riskless implementation of an electrode - without impairing intelligence and the critical mind - I would be the first patient."

Dalai Lama (Society for Neuroscience Congress, Nov. 2005)

Technically and ideologically the idea to abolish suffering of any kind may be closer than we think. Given that both of these coincide and we as a species decide to act on this wish to “banish unpleasant modes of consciousness from the living world” (David Pearce), genetic engineering and nanotechnology (i.e. Biomekatronics) could make this a reality. In the wake of this reality the human species might, as genetically improved individuals, create a society of pre-programmed communities where the last bit of pain and negative emotion has long been eradicated.

Here Pearce would argue that the obstacle to the premise of a happy world based on these ‘improvements’ is our rationalization of the need for mental pain, even though in his opinion it soon will become optional. The reason for our reluctance to accept biotechnology as a way to eradicate suffering is due to the fabrication of two negative stereotypes:

- a) “Soma - Aldous Huxley’s brilliantly-conceived but spurious evocation of the ‘ideal pleasure-drug’” (David Pearce)²from his book *Brave New World*. This drug dulls the senses and suppresses the intellect, which might serve to repel any interest in this pharmaceutical solution to suffering.
- b) An “[...] intra-cranially self-stimulating rat. The little creature's enraptured frenzy of lever-pressing is eventually followed by death from inanition, self-neglect and immunological collapse.” (David Pearce). In addition to rats, there have been a large amount of species, even “humans have all been found to exhibit electrical self-stimulatory behaviour when given the opportunity to do so.” (David Pearce).

“In the case of humans, our reward-pathways are (slightly) more anatomically diffuse than the average rodent. At least with present-day electrode-placement techniques, intra-cranial self-stimulation (ICSS) as practised by laboratory humans doesn't lead to uncontrolled hedonistic excess and death. Only depressed or deeply malaise-ridden human subjects *compulsively* self-stimulate when wired. Ill-defined "ethical constraints", however, are commonly held to forbid the human use of ICSS rather than to mandate its widespread adoption and refinement for "treatment-resistant" depression - even by avowed utilitarians. So instead of using depressed fellow humans, experimenters use rats. Pleasure-crazed rodents have become the symbolic expression of wirehead hedonism - and of all the pitfalls that "unnatural" pleasure entails.” (David Pearce)

2.2 Structuralism

Structuralism was developed in the mid-20th Century “to study the underlying patterns of social life” (Smith, 2020). Its a philosophy and method focusing on relationships rather than individual objects “or, alternatively, where objects are defined by the set of relationships of which they are part and not by the qualities possessed by them taken in isolation,” (Almeida, 2015) meaning that objects would need to have a human (or potentially an animalistic) relation.

² “...Two thousand pharmacologists and bio-chemists were subsidized. Six years later it was being produced commercially. The perfect drug. Euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinant. All the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects. Take a holiday from reality whenever you like, and come back without so much as a headache or a mythology. Stability was practically assured...” (Aldous Huxley).

“In the social sciences the structuralist mode of inquiry sought not simply to identify structures or relationships per se, but rather to look behind or beneath the visible and conscious designs (beliefs, ideas, behaviors) of active human subjects (surface manifestations) to expose or unearth how those designs are in fact outputs, effects, consequences, products generated by underlying causes, hidden mechanisms, or a limited number of “deep” structures that are universal to the human mind.” (Smith, 2020).

Structuralism is mainly a method, yet the sub-category of binary opposition is a theoretical perspective, which is the main interest for this thesis within structuralism. This theory indicates that all elements within human culture only can be understood in relation to each other, like for example ‘on’ and ‘off’, or ‘good’ or ‘evil’ (Marinero, 2021).

The question this theory poses is whether or not we can feel happiness without also having felt the opposite of happiness, i.e can we feel melancholy without first having felt the opposite, however the opposition of melancholy is possibly harder to define than melancholy itself. There are many variations of oppositions within psychological theory and especially value theory, and this only exposes how important those opposing definitions and experiences are in exploring the human condition.

2.3 Psychodynamic theory

The terms psychodynamic and psychoanalytic are understandably often confused with each other. Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) theories are included in both, however his theories as the original were psychoanalytic, yet psychodynamics include his theories as well as his followers who built their theories on his, some of which include Carl Jung (1912), Melanie Klein (1921), Alfred Adler (1927), Anna Freud (1936) and Erik Erikson (1950).

The psychodynamic theory is a psychological theory used in the attempt to explain the origins of human behaviour, whereas Freud’s psychoanalysis functions as both theory and therapy. (McLeod, 2020).

“The psychodynamic approach includes all the theories in psychology that see human functioning based upon the interaction of drives and forces within the person, particularly unconscious, and between the different structures of the personality.” (McLeod, 2020).

2.3.1 Id, Ego and Super-Ego

Freud had a psychoanalytic theory explaining that the human personality is a tripartite consisting of Id, Ego and Super-Ego, and an excellent filmatic example of this theory is the movie *Fight Club*³. The Id is described as the primitive and instinctual part of the personality, including the sexual drive, also referred to as Eros (containing the libido), and the aggressive instinct, sometimes referred to as Thanatos (death), as well as hidden memories, both known as Greek Gods.

The Ego is the realistic and decision making persona, developed to mediate between Id and the Super-Ego; the desires between the unrealistic Id and the physical world.

The Super-Ego then functions as the moral conscience, including the “values and morals of society which are learned from one’s parents and others.” (McLeod, 2021).

The Ego is the only component of this tripartite that pertains to the conscious part of the mind, which is in constant conflict with the unconscious parts, being Id and the Super-Ego. The Ego controls the defense mechanisms, which is how the mind deals with the anxiety created by this conflict between the two unconscious areas of the brain. (McLeod, 2021). Even though these three components of the personality seems to have a will of their own, they all interact with each other as a whole, contributing to an individual’s behaviour. (McLeod, 2020).

2.4 Societal addiction

Social addictions, aka social traps, are patterns of behaviour that societies i.e. individuals may get trapped in. These traps involve a short-term reward-system (See 3.5.1) that are “detrimental and unsustainable in the long run”. (Constanza et. Al., 2016). Excellent examples of societal addiction, in contrast to social addiction⁴, include “addiction to inequitable over-consumption fueled by fossil energy and a ‘growth at all costs’ economic model” (Constanza et.al., 2016), capitalism being a big part of the addictive motivation.

³ *Fight Club* is a drama thriller released in 1999. “An insomniac office worker and a devil-may-care soap maker form an underground fight club that evolves into much more.” (IMDb).

⁴ “Social media addiction is a behavioral addiction that is defined by being overly concerned about social media, driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on to or use social media, and devoting so much time and effort to social media that it impairs other important life areas.” <https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/social-media-addiction/>

2.4.1 Nihilism

“Nihilism is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence.” (Alan Pratt). There is no belief system, no loyalties, and no purpose of life, other than to perhaps destroy. Few philosophers would openly agree to be nihilists, and who could blame them as it is a theory which constitutes a certain type of personality. Again, *Fight Club* and the main character is a good example of a nihilist attitude, not to mention consumerism, capitalism, instrumentalism and Freud’s Psychodynamic Theory. These attitudes fade away as the events of the storyline changes the main characters’ perspective on not only his own life, but also the life of others.

The philosopher most associated with nihilism is Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)⁵. He “argued that its corrosive effects would eventually destroy all moral, religious, and metaphysical convictions and precipitate the greatest crisis in human history.”⁶ (Alan Pratt). There are different branches of nihilism, including epistemological nihilism - “denies the possibility of truth and knowledge”, political nihilism - “associated with the belief that the destruction of all existing political, social, and religious order is a prerequisite for any future improvement”, ethical nihilism - “rejects the possibility of absolute moral or ethical values” and existential nihilism - “the notion that life has no intrinsic meaning or value, and it is, no doubt, the most commonly used and understood sense of the word today”. (Alan Pratt).

⁵ “Max Stirner’s (1806-1856) attacks on systematic philosophy, his denial of absolutes, and his rejection of abstract concepts of any kind often places him among the first philosophical nihilists. For Stirner, achieving individual freedom is the only law; and the state, which necessarily imperils freedom, must be destroyed. Even beyond the oppression of the state, though, are the constraints imposed by others because their very existence is an obstacle compromising individual freedom. Thus Stirner argues that existence is an endless “war of each against all” (*The Ego and its Own*, trans. 1907).” (Alan Pratt).

⁶ “It has been over a century now since Nietzsche explored nihilism and its implications for civilization. As he predicted, nihilism’s impact on the culture and values of the 20th century has been pervasive, its apocalyptic tenor spawning a mood of gloom and a good deal of anxiety, anger, and terror. Interestingly, Nietzsche himself, a radical skeptic preoccupied with language, knowledge, and truth, anticipated many of the themes of postmodernity. It’s helpful to note, then, that he believed we could—at a terrible price—eventually work through nihilism. If we survived the process of destroying all interpretations of the world, we could then perhaps discover the correct course for humankind.” (Alan Pratt).

2.5 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Dialectic of Enlightenment (i.e D.E.) was written by Max Horkheimer (1895 - 1973) and Theodor Adorno (1903 - 1969) in 1947. It mainly speaks of the culture industry and mass culture, which was a big pet peeve of Adorno. The constant regression of society was due to pride: “Our increased ability to control and manipulate the external world.” (Johnathan Bi).

The book sustains no sense of structure, and this is due to “the shared belief that society, as it was, was too dysfunctional, inconsistent, and chaotic for any consistent and structured truth to be presented” (Johnathan Bi). Trying to systemize the foundations of D.E. is a task in itself due to the lack of organization.

Adorno explains that “what we had set out to do was nothing less than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism”. (Adorno, 1947).

In addition their opinion on pleasure was that it meant not to think about anything. To forget suffering even when it was evident. They compared pleasure to helplessness, and flight. “It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance.” (Adorno, Horkheimer).

2.5.1 *Negative dialectics*

Rather than being a specific concept, *Negative Dialectics* (published in 1966 and translated to english in 1973), is a critique of philosophy. Developed by Theodor Adorno, often viewed as his greatest work, it served to venture into in some way resolve two different problems: First, “if concepts are not identical with their objects then in a certain sense they are inadequate to the task of defining objects”, and second, “if we are aware of this, but accept that philosophy has no other resource for understanding and defining objects except the concept, then we have to figure out how to create an adequate form of philosophy using means we know to be inadequate.” (Adorno, 1966).

“Concepts cannot be identical with objects by definition. So this isn't simply a problem of a poorly conceived concept that could be remedied by creating a better concept. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that both concepts and objects change over time. Thus, every concept has a history and is embedded within history.” (Adorno, 1966).

2.6 Bourgeois Aesthetics

Bourgeois stands for middle class⁷, and is used in conjunction with many different expressions, like f.ex. bourgeois aesthetics, bourgeois society⁸ and bourgeois gestures⁹. Bourgeois aesthesis attempted to define beauty.

“What is beauty? Is it a subject for discussion at all? Can it be defined in such a way as to provide a foundation for aesthetics? Is it a product of art? Or of nature?”

To define: to limit the boundaries, to give an outline to the defined thing. Beauty, then, is defined by all that is not beauty. This not-beauty circumscribes, limits, and defines beauty. But beauty is not opposed by not-beauty; it is opposed by ugliness. Yet the recognition of ugliness itself involves an aesthetic ‘faculty’, and sensibilities responding both to beauty and ugliness; and it is not possible to say where one begins and the other ends. Ugliness itself is an aesthetic value: the villain, the gargoyle, the grotesque, the Caliban, the snake-headed Furies, the triumph of Time’s decaying hand, all these qualities interpenetrate with beauty, and help to generate and feed it. All live in the same world. Nowhere can we draw a distinct line and say, on this side lives the beautiful, and on that the ugly. All man’s experience, all the rich complexity of his sculpted, painted, written art forms, all the elaborate multiform crowd of living animals and varied scenery, deny such a simple dichotomy¹⁰. All form one world even if it contains opposites, and therefore, the generating forces must lie at a lower level. Beauty and ugliness, the noble and the petty, the sublime and the ridiculous, all these opposite terms, *when used in an aesthetic way*, involve each other, and must be determined by other, different qualities, from which they spring.” (Caudwell, 1949).

So if we replace beauty with melancholy, bourgeois aesthetics would instruct this term to be defined by what it is not; not-melancholy. However the opposite of melancholy is not not-melancholy, as that term doesn’t exist. It is something else with its own faculty, as it is recognized as itself and not not-melancholy. It has its own aesthetic value that differs from melancholia, but it is difficult still to know where one stops and the other begins. This is possibly the most prudent way to define melancholy, because what it is not will determine what it is.

⁷ Bourgeois: “The term *bourgeoisie* refers to the social order that is dominated by the so-called middle class. In social and political theory, the notion of the bourgeoisie was largely a construct of Karl Marx and of those influenced by him.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/bourgeoisie>

⁸ The Bourgeois Society was prosperous, but through capitalism and materialism lead to the society we have today due to monopolizing.

⁹ “[...] bourgeois gestures: Sequences of glances and half-speech [...]” (Steinberg, 2014, p.298).

¹⁰ Dichotomy: “A division into two contrasting parts or categories; *the dichotomy between rural and urban communities; regards the division between nature and nurture as a false dichotomy.*” <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=dichotomy>

On this basis, the definition of beauty starts with the relation between a subject and an object. “The man looks at an object and calls it beautiful. This is a relationship repeatable by this one man with perhaps thousands of objects.” (Caudwell, 1949). It must be the relation between all beautiful objects and all men that is the common factor. Perhaps the man is common to all objects, meaning that the beauty is ‘in’ the man. “To the bourgeois aesthete this very simple solution of the problem seems so obvious that he has no patience with anyone who can think anything else.” (Caudwell, 1949).

The definition is found through coenaesthesia. Coenaesthesia is the common term where all these similar relations where the man says ‘This is beautiful’ coincide, becoming his ‘coenaesthesia’ through this link. “Here is a common term of the kind we sought for when we sought for something similar in all relations of men finding objects beautiful. Here then is a definition for beauty. Beauty is coenæsthesia.” (Caudwell, 1949).

“Coenæsthesia is a wide term, and really includes the totality of proprioceptive impressions as far as they give rise to affects. Most neurologists picture the process as one in which interoceptive stimuli – particularly visceral stimuli – give rise, via thalamic activity, to colorations of the conscious field known as feelings. Now it is quite plain that although the æsthetic emotions are coenæsthesia in this sense simply because they are affective, all coenæsthesia sensations are not sensations of the beautiful. That would be to say that all feelings of pleasure or unpleasure are feelings of the beautiful. Consequently the definition of Richards and Ogden is inadequate. A pork chop, well done, may arouse strong feelings of coenæsthesia, but it is not beautiful – or hideous. As an æsthetic object, it is neutral.” (Caudwell, 1949).

There is further exploration into coenaesthesia and this beautiful relation, and how much there is to this particular side of bourgeois aesthetics. The relationship between the subject and the object is tainted by the object and its affect on the subject. For it is the object that infers such feelings like happiness, pleasure, fear, pain etc. They are all felt in the man, but expressed in association with his environmental relation. However some of these may appear from the man’s subconscious, yet some are clearly affect from the object itself, even though all these terms may be regarded as affective on their own.

In regards to melancholia, we may define the term via the relationship between subject and object. Nonetheless, what a melancholy object could be is subject to personal opinion. Therefore, the melancholy object must be discovered and decided upon, for this type of definition by relation could potentially be of interest.

2.7 Melancholy

Melancholy (or melancholia¹¹) is a term rarely used in every day speech. The word melancholia comes from the word Melaina Kole; the word for black bile. (See 2.7.4.) From all the research online, in books and of select people, it appears to be somewhat ambiguous how it shows, how it ensues in the human mind and how it is viewed individually and socially.

“Sadness is part of the human experience, but for centuries there has been a vast disagreement over exactly what it is and what, if anything, to do about it. In it’s simplest terms, sadness is often thought of as the natural reaction to a difficult situation. You feel sad when a friend moves away or when a pet dies. When a friend says “I’m sad”, you often respond by asking “What happened?”, but your assumption that sadness has an external cause outside the self is a relatively new idea.” (TED-Ed, 2014, 0:06).

The general view on melancholy in today’s society is that it is depression, especially within the medical sciences. A form of deep depression i.e. a sickness that could lead to suicide, bipolar disorder, dysthymic disorder and both short and long term depression, as well as bursts of depression. It falls under something called mood disorders, these are mental disorders characterized mostly by changes in mood, like depression or extreme excitement. Previously called affective disorders, which is a term sometimes still used today, this new term of mood disorders is more appropriate due to the fact that some affective conditions like extreme anger or anxiety does not edge into this type of mental disorder. (Malt, 2019).

¹¹ “The word ‘melancholia’ is a Greek word to describe the feeling of intense sadness and hopelessness. Melancholic depression makes people lose interest in almost all activities.”
https://www.medicinenet.com/is_melancholy_the_same_as_depression/article.htm

Affective disorders were mental disorders where changes in mood like despair, excitement or exhilaration were prominent. (Malt, 2020). This term encompassed mental disorders such as deep depression and hypomania, but not mentally disturbances dominated by anger (aggression disorders) or anxiety (anxiety disorders). Hence affective disorders were simply a lower subcategory of mental affective disturbances, and this is why this term is slowly being faded out by the new term of mood disorders.

There is a lot to be said about melancholy, and seeing as this dark and disturbing definition is out there in such an evolved manner, it is important to also emphasize the opposite viewpoints. “Melancholy is a species of sadness that arises when we are open to the fact that life is inherently difficult and that suffering disappointment are core parts of universal experience. It’s not a disorder that needs to be cured.” (School of Life, 2015, 0:18). It sounds harsh and gruesome that way it is explained in this sentence, however the truth lies in the fact that sadness is part of what makes us human, and perhaps melancholy is that part of us where sadness lingers as acceptance that reality can be beautiful in its own way.

“Modern society tends to emphasize buoyancy and cheerfulness, but we have to admit that reality is, for the most part, about grief and loss. The good life is not one immune to sadness, but one in which suffering contributes to our development. Melancholy is an underused word. It doesn’t mean grim and miserable. It means grasping without rage the fact that the world is full of folly and greed, that it is rare to find inner peace, that it is hard to live comfortably with those we love, that it’s very unusual to have a career that’s both financially rewarding and morally uplifting, that many decent people have a very hard time. Often sadness simply makes a lot of sense. We learn so late about stuff. You’ve wasted years, everyone has. You can only avoid regret by switching off your imagination. The wisdom of the melancholy attitude as opposed to the bitter, angry one, lies in the understanding that the sorrow isn’t just about you, that you have not been singled out, that your suffering belongs to humanity in general. To take that fully to heart is to become more compassionate and less vengeful. The melancholy facts shouldn’t make us desperate, rather more forgiving, kinder, and better able to focus on what really matters while there is still time.” (School of Life, 2015, 0:35).

The ancient Greek belief that melancholia was a black bile inside the body is a notion that is not that different today, evident in what we today call clinical depression, due to what is known as brain chemistry.

“Doctors believe that certain kinds of long-term, unexplained emotional states are at least partially related to brain chemistry, the balance of various chemicals present inside the brain. Like the Greek system, changing the balance of these chemicals can deeply alter how we respond to even extremely difficult circumstances.” (TED-Ed, 2014, 1:23).

The value of sadness has always been questioned, and whether or not melancholy is sadness, there are aspects of it within melancholia and this sadness is perhaps an inevitable part of life, perhaps an essential one. Without it, we miss out on what it means to be human, as many great thinkers thought “melancholy to be necessary in gaining wisdom”. (TED-Ed, 2014, 2:01).

2.7.1 *Music & Melancholy*

Music & Melancholy is an article written by Michael P. Steinberg¹² released in *Critical Inquiry* Volume 40, Number 2 (Winter 2014).

“What cannot be declared by the melancholic is nevertheless what governs melancholic speech - an unspeakability that organizes the field of the speakable.” (Judith Butler, 1997).

Steinberg proclaims that ‘melancholy music’ in itself doesn’t exound much. “Every style or period of musical composition and reception would seem able to describe, simulate, or embody a mood of melancholy or for that matter mood in general.” (Steinberg, 2014). With the extending of words, music’s affect and effect may expand or, in fact, produce them as they reveal the mood that the music is attempting to convey. Hearing music alone as melancholy music, without words, might present a challenge when it comes to discerning or interpreting moods and intention, whereas words create a descriptive expectation.

To start, melancholy must first be understood as a mood, “usually associated with loss, memory, and nostalgia”. (Steinberg, 2014). Secondly, words partnered with the music have the propensity and the power to render through text, plot and character development when it comes to determining the mood and meaning of the music. With these sentiments, mood and loss are unavoidably juxtaposed with melancholy, and

¹² Michael P. Steinberg, Ph.D. (1956) studied History, European Cultural Studies, and Russian Studies at Princeton University and History at the University of Chicago. <https://www.wiko-berlin.de/fellows/akademisches-jahr/2015/steinberg-michael-p>

Steinberg is aware of the complications he meets via this point of view. However his assertion starts at a much wider spectrum. “The hypothesis is that melancholy *is* the condition of music - *all* music. The excitement and the danger of the assertion reside in the totalization¹³”. (Steinberg, 2014). His awareness that it is risky to propose melancholy as the condition of *all* music, instead of *some* music which might be more accountable, does not escape him, however he is content with this risk.

This is where Steinberg invokes Sigmund Freud’s heuristic¹⁴ precedent of “foundational assertion that all dreams, and not just some dreams, function as wish fulfillments.” (Steinberg, 2014). Referencing *The Interpretation of Dreams*¹⁵, music is the wish fulfillment of it’s subject - the subject being the dreamer - herefore the subject in Steinberg’s argument about music is not the composer nor the listener.

“Music is melancholic in relation to its own desire. [...] ...what does music want? Music wants to speak and speak importantly, and that unfulfillable wish is the source of its melancholia. Such historizations are complicated and continually revised by the historical hermeneutics of listening.” (Steinberg, 2014). See 3.2.2.

Steinberg is in the sense that defining melancholy is difficult, and dives into the intellectual history of the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

The twentieth century, in his opinion, may be “framed, at the beginning and at the end, by two arguments concerning the nature of melancholia and its relation to culture and society.” The beginning being Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia*¹⁶, while the end was Judith Butler and her study on *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*¹⁷.

Freud’s essay emerged as a response to trauma and posttraumatic stress syndrome. In his eyes melancholy made sense as “a failure of mourning, as the failure of the porcess by which a lost object is let go and the self, the ego¹⁸, is allowed to survive, rebuild, and flourish”, the most immediate example of a lost object being a deceased person. Freud’s diagnosis of melancholy was in turn a pathologization of mourning,

¹³ Totalization: *All* music and not *some* music.

¹⁴ Heuristic: Enabling someone to learn or discover something for themselves.

¹⁵ See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)*, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London, 1953-74), 4:121 - 60.

¹⁶ “(Sigmund) Freud’s foundational essay of 1917.” (Steinberg, 2014).

¹⁷ “...in partiuclar its final chapter, *Psychic Inceptions: Melancholy, Ambivalence, Rage.*” (Steinberg, 2014).

¹⁸ See 2.3.1

or potentially as a result of the continentwide wish to get past the war, resulting in self-destructive rage.

Friedrich J. Schelling (1775–1854) saw melancholy as a type of mourning, “a sustained awareness of the world”¹⁹. In Freud’s argument mourning was a ‘normal’ state of mind, whilst melancholia was not, as it was pathological. By referring to it as pathological, he returned to the theory of the four humors (see 2.7.4) and its philology²⁰. The melancholic condition that Freud describes is an attack of the ego, self-deprecation and self-loathing. Mourning is processive work where the end result is a liberation of the ego, i.e. “the lost object is known and the loss is conscious” (Steinberg, 2014), however in melancholia the act of loss is unknown, and as a result the lost object in turn elude the conscious mind.

“Melancholy thus stands in relation to mourning as anxiety does in relation to dear; there is no discernable, empirical object that can be attached to the condition of the afflicted subject. Because of ‘an identification of the ego with the abandoned object,’ ‘object-loss is transformed into an ego-loss’.” (Steinberg, 2014).

So Freud distances himself from the romanticizing of melancholy, not because melancholia cannot be enjoyable, but as the self turning on the self can reminisce of a form of sadism. “... unlike the mourner, the melancholiac cannot historicize his condition; he says he has always been this way.” (Steinberg, 2014).

Judith Butler’s melancholia suggested a change in the views on the term. It was no longer a pathologization. Butler firstly discussed the fact that there was a sort of harmonious relation between mourning and melancholia, and secondly saying that melancholy was depathologized. “Melancholy is precisely the effect of unavowable loss,” Butler exclaims in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*²¹, taking inspiration from “Freud’s observation that in melancholy the lost object is ‘withdrawn from consciousness’”. (Steinberg, 2014).

“A loss prior to speech and declaration, it is the limiting condition of its possibility: a withdrawal or retraction from speech that makes speech possible. In this sense, melancholia

¹⁹ Reinhold Brinkman, *Late Idyll: The Second Symphony of Johannes Brahms*, trans. Peter Palmer (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), pp. 133-34.

²⁰ Philology: The study of language, especially its history and development.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/philology>

²¹ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, Calif., 1997), p. 186.

makes mourning possible, a view that Freud came to accept in *The Ego and the Id*'. (Butler, 1997).

Firstly, According to Freud and Butler, melancholy precedes and enables mourning, “which involves the beginning of articulation - of consciousness and of speech”. (Steinberg, 2014). Melancholia is hence released from Freud’s static placement of the term. In that respect melancholy becomes “premourning rather than the dysfunction of mourning”. (Steinberg, 2014). Secondly, there is the possibility of the Archimedean paradox²² i.e. the “condition whereby the moment prior to speech and declaration [...] is permanent”. (Steinberg, 2014). Being enabled to speak becomes an inhibition.

Butler is set on the first of these two view-points. In its essentiality, this view becomes surprisingly close to performative actions since speech and the act of speech has such a big role, as her total belief in “melancholy as an enabler of speech, psychic health, and political possibility”.²³

2.7.2 Melancholy in visual arts

Melancholy has always been a fluid term, and for artists specifically a source of mystery and artistic freedom aligned with its ever-changing definition and origin. Due to the medical system of the Four Humors, humorism has also found its way to the scientific, philosophical and literary works. As mentioned earlier, melancholy often is thought of as a negative emotion, especially within the medical field where it is diagnosed as ‘deep depression’, and as it may be true that it may derive from the depressive parts of our minds, there are arguably positive implications. As artists we may find this universal human emotion to be inspirational, not because it is nuanced by sadness, but on the basis of the nostalgic introspection and longing for the past, which in turn may “awaken our deepest creative instincts”. (Maria Isabel Carrasco, 31 Januar 2022).

Many visual artists have attempted to envision what melancholy is for us as humans, more so in the gestural way perhaps than in any real sense. To capture melancholy on a canvas is not an easy feat, as there are mostly two ways to

²² Archimedean paradox: The condition whereby the moment prior to speech is permanent.

²³ For more on melancholy music in the nineteenth century, see *Music & Melancholy* (Steinberg, 2014).

accomplish this; by gesture, or by abstract. Included you will find a few of the most famous visual artists who dabbled in the visualization of melancholy.

- Aertgen Van Leyden - *St. Jerome in his study by Candlelight* (1520) See fig. 1
- Domenico Fetti - *The Repentant St. Mary Madgalene* (1617-1621) See fig. 2
- Artemisia Gentileschi - *Mary Magdalene as Melancholy* (1625-1626) See fig. 3
- Louis-Jean-Francois Lagranèe - *La Mèlancholie* (18th century) See fig. 4
- John Hayter - *Melancholy Face of Ophelia* (1846) See fig. 5
- Edvard Munch - *Melancholy* (1894) See fig. 6
- Frederic Lord Leighton - *Lachrymea* (1894-1895) See fig. 7
- Vincent Van Gogh - *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* (1896) See fig. 8
- Paul Gauguin - *Never,more* (1897) See fig. 9
- Pablo Picasso - *Melancholy Woman* (1902)
- Salvador Dalì - *Uranium and Atomica Melancholica Idyll* (1945)

Included below you will find some quotes from visual artists describing their view on melancholy in various poetic ways.

“There's little of the melancholy element in her, my lord: she is never sad but when she sleeps; and not ever sad then; for I have heard my daughter say, she hath often dreamt of unhappiness, and waked herself with laughing.”
- William Shakespeare

“I began to understand that suffering and disappointments and melancholy are there not to vex us or cheapen us or deprive us of our dignity, but to mature and transfigure us.”
- Hermann Hesse

“Melancholy is sadness that has taken on lightness.”
- Italo Calvino

“All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another.”
- Anatole France

“These paintings show that melancholy is an emotion that can cause misery and sadness, but it's also the feeling that pushes us to move forward. Melancholy has always been attached to the creative process of artists and writers because it conveys self-introspection and analysis.”
- Maria Isabel Carrasco

Notice how they all portray a subject, in this case a person of either gender, gently slouching to one side, more often than not with their heads in their hand. In lack of a better word it conveys more of a pouty feeling than anything, and this is the only way the most famous visual artists decided to convey the feeling of melancholy. Some decided to pull a veil of blues on top of the image²⁴, and this might refer to the proverb “feeling blue”, generally known for signifying a gloomy mood.

This begs the question whether or not it is possible to significantly convey the emotion of melancholy through visual media such as visual arts only. I attempted to manage such a task by playing the music created for this thesis on repeat while I let the music and brush take me wherever it wanted it to without any concept in mind. (See fig.11). The process however was uninspiring and led me nowhere, and the painting was abandoned, but it was important for me to explore in order to discern whether or not to include visual art into the interdisciplinary project.

Visual arts and theatre in *Music & Melancholy*

Hamlet²⁵ is one of Freud and Benjamin’s prime examples when it comes to melancholia. Benjamin says that Hamlet functions as “the paradigm of the melancholy man”. (Steinberg, 2014).

Albrecht Dürer created in 1514 three large engravings that are not a series, but all have a common flow. The first one called *Melencolia I* was the one related to melancholia, and one that Steinberg included in his essay *Music & Melancholy*, mostly due to its iconography and importance in the Warburg school’s “pioneering discourse of what we today call visual culture. [...] For these scholars melancholy is a condition of actual exile as well as modernity as a form of exile.”(Steinberg, 2014).

“Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience.” (Edward Said, 1984).

Yet there is a “consideration of music - playing, listening, remembering - as a form of melancholic pleasure grounded in the unrecoverability of the personal and political past.” (Steinberg, 2014).

²⁴ Pablo Picasso - *Melancholy Woman* (1902), Salvador Dali - *Uranium and Atomica Melancholica Idyll* (1945)

²⁵ See fig. 5.

2.7.3 *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

Anatomy of Melancholy is a collection of literature devoted to melancholy written by Robert Burton (1577 - 1640) in the 17th Century. It was a sort of survey on melancholy in various forms, and it has caused a great fuss ever since its publication. Over the centuries many has claimed it to be their own work, and Burton was for a long time not credited for this compendium. It is a great insight into the 17th Century mind about malencholy, and prudent to realizing how melamcholy always has puzzled philosophers from ancient Greece up until today.

It might be outdated as of now, but there is still valuable insight present in this piece of historic literature, and it could be viewed as a very important stepping stone in the perception of melancholia.

“They are apt to loathe, dislike, disdain, to be weary of every object, each thing almost is odious to them, they pine away, void of counsel, apt to weep and tremble, timorous, fearful, sad, and out of all hopes of better fortunes.” (Burton, 1632).

2.7.4 The Four Humors

The four humors originated as medical knowledge, created in the interim of Aristoteles’ (384 - 322 BC)²⁶ works, however Hippocrates (460 - 375 BC)²⁷ is the one credited with the development of the theory. The greeks believed for two thousand years that the body was composed of four main components named The Four Humors, components that all needed to be in balance of each other for the body to remain healthy. (Dan Moorhouse).

These humors were utilized as an explanation for age difference, gender, feelings and disposition of all living beings, but the seasons, time of day and the (human) life cycle altered how the humors affected the subject.

“The mind’s inclination follows the body’s temperature” (Galen).

²⁶ “Aristotle, Greek Aristoteles, (born 384 BCE, Stagira, Chalcidice, Greece—died 322, Chalcis, Euboea), ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, one of the greatest intellectual figures of Western history.”

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aristotle>

²⁷ “Hippocrates, (born c. 460 BCE, island of Cos, Greece—died c. 375 BCE, Larissa, Thessaly), ancient Greek physician who lived during Greece’s Classical period and is traditionally regarded as the father of medicine.”

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hippocrates>

The four humors consisted of Melancholic, Phlegmatic, Choleric and Sanguine. They were based on the four liquids in the body black bile, phlegm, yellow bile and blood, and they each followed their own season, planet, element etc as can be seen below. The humors were used as diagnostic tools in order for a doctor to diagnose a patient by looking for these symptoms.

Humor	Liquid	Element	Season	Age	Temperature	Organ	Planet
Melancholic	Black Bile	Earth	Winter	High age	Cold & Dry	Spleen	Saturn
Phlegmatic	Phlegm	Water	Autumn	Maturity	Cold & Moist	Brain	Moon
Choleric	Yellow Bile	Fire	Summer	Childhood	Warm & Dry	Gallbladder	Mars
Sanguine	Blood	Air	Spring	Youth	Warm & Moist	Heart	Jupiter

William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616)²⁸ is known for utilizing these humors, since they were an extensive part of the medical world in his time, and often his play *Hamlet* and the character of Ophelia²⁹ is brought up in relation to Melancholic. It was to him one of the most complicated emotions, as it had been for the previous generations. “The cold, dry temperament was considered the least desirable of the four, yet melancholy was also traditionally associated with genius and the life of scholarship.” (Theodore M. Brown).

²⁸ “William Shakespeare was a renowned English poet, playwright, and actor born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon.” <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespepedia/william-shakespeare/william-shakespeare-biography/>

²⁹ “In *Hamlet*, Ophelia becomes a classic case of the melancholy virgin because of her isolation at court, her overbearing father's commands, and Hamlet's withdrawal of attention from her.” (Theodore M. Brown). <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/shakespeare-and-the-four-humors/index.html>

3. METHODS

The principal method used from the very beginning was Autoethnography, however as the thesis progressed there were valuable additions made to the roster of methods that appeared to be relevant, or at the very least of interest to explore in connection with melancholy. Phenomenology in particular, with its theories on essence, seemed especially applicable as the word ‘essence’ already had been integrated into the thesis question/statement.

3.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is qualitative analysis of phenomenon, and the goal is to research “essences - the being of phenomenology - by not describing singular phenomenon, but search for their general being.” (Sander, 2019). There is no obligation to have a point of view since phenomenology is primarily a method and its primary purpose is to find out what things can be, and what things aren’t (Sander, 2019).

Husserl’s phenomenologic method describes essences as some special form of reflexive acknowledgement. “By reflecting over how different types of objects makes themselves known to us in our experience, we should be able to clarify these objects’ essential characteristics.” (Hovd, 2021). Similarly with bourgeois aesthetics, the relationship between subject and object is crucial, the difference being the emphasis. Phenomenology emphasizes the essence, while bourgeois aesthetics focus more on what the common denominator is.

Intersubjectivity is a form of dialectics which was used by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) to “describe how the world is changed by the others’ appearance, by how the world appears to be oriented towards the other person, and not towards the Self. The other emerges as a psychological phenomenon over the course of a persons life, and not as a radical threat against the existence of the Self”. (WBlog Wiki).

Through objective scientific procedure one can potentially discover what happiness is by “laying out hypotheses about happiness. It’s possible to for example decide that if we laugh three times a day, we can be defined as happy.” On the other hand, we can analyse the physical characteristics of a laughter, being what is physically required to

achieve a laughter. Alternatively we can examine what triggers particular reactions, like laughter, smiles etc. Contrary to this scientific procedure, where humans are comprised of their behaviour, objective criteria and laws, we have phenomenology. “Simply put phenomenologists would describe happiness by the human’s world of experience and by trying to understand humans from within.” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015).

According to Husserl we can find the being of phenomenology by varying the phenomenon freely in all its possible forms, “whatever is constant under the different beings, is the being of phenomenology.” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015). “By reflecting over how different types of objects make themselves known to us in our experience, we should be able to clarify these objects’ essential characteristics.” (Hovd, 2021). Our perceptions are based on our existing framework of understanding, and these can quickly slide into other terms where they don’t belong. (Hovd, 2021). This thesis will explore what kind of frameworks of understanding exists around the term of melancholy, and what kind of frameworks that perhaps could have slipped into other terms.

3.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the doctrine of interpretation of texts and denotes the humanistic sciences method, or can also be a theory about all ways of comprehension. (Alnes, 2020).

The method began as a set of rules for interpretation of documents within law, classic philology and especially theology. As an interpretive art form it was distinctly used on the Bible, in the belief that the literature in the Bible had a truth that had to be discovered.³⁰

This traditional way of interpreting texts on (by finding the real truth of the text) disappeared when Friedrich Schleimacher (1768 - 1834) expanded the way hermeneutics were used. It now included all kinds of “spiritual products”, and as a result became a form of “interpretive art which considered the authors psychology, life, present and more, and the comprehension of a text became the resurrection of

³⁰ “For Martin Luther King (1483 - 1546), among others, this meant that the message of the Bible would be clarified by the “writings alone”, independent of the historic context it had been created in.” (Alnes, 2020).

this. To Schleimacher this resurrection is made possible by the fact that both author and reader are expressions for the same ” (Alnes, 2020).

Martin Heidegger (1889 - 1976), Hans - Georg Gadamer (1900 - 2002) and Paul Ricoeur (1913 - 2005) all decided on hermeneutics being a philosophical theory encompassing different forms of cognizance. Heidegger’s theory is that human existence is hermeneutic (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927). Everything from our perception of texts to all of our knowledge “built on an understanding articulated as an interpretation of what we already know something about.” (Alnes, 2020). By expanding hermeneutic understanding with all of our knowledge, the conception of truth returns to hermeneutics.

“The philosophy becomes a teaching of mankind’s historicity, meaning that humans as a “being-in-the-world” (In-der-Welt-Sein) “always already” exist in situations of perception which human beings must construe and correct through historical perception in order to find the truth.” (Alnes, 2020).

There are many types of hermeneutics branching off of its original intention, and there are four main philosophers who made these substantial subdivisions. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 - 1911) was the advocate for the classic form of hermeneutics as a humanistic sciences method, here encompassing that the humanistic sciences, nicknamed the “spiritual sciences”, were the main difference from pure science. “Science and spiritual science both situate phenomena into contexts; however science seeks to *explain* them by dissecting the totality into individual components to measure them, while the humanistic sciences method is to find ‘meaning’ by *understanding*.”

Gadamer developed a more general philosophical hermeneutic focusing on dissemination of tradition with the intention of clarifying the humanistic sciences methodic issues. He claimed that the hermeneutic method was the only method where empirical and scientific methods was unsuited. “A condition for acknowledgement of truth in areas like these is a preconditioned apprehension of the delivery or the tradition. Our individual, national and cultural inheritance and background becomes the deciding factor for our intellectual point of view, our ‘horizon’. The ‘horizon’ and the situation is continuously changing through our interactions with each other in situations that themselves are the results of previous interactions.” (Alnes, 2020).

Riceour embarked on a different route, through the linguistic aspect of ‘wordly-being’. “In order to understand its own exclamations, humans has to take the detour around the outer connection of the abundance of cultural symbols we (precariously) live through.” (Alnes, 2020).

The final philosopher, german Jürgen Habermas (1929), the only philosopher on this list still living today, developed a “critical hermeneutic in partial contrast to Gadamer where the aim is that hermeneutics has a liberating aspect through an ideological potential.” (Alnes, 2020).

3.2.1 Hermeneutics of Listening

The nineteenth century was conquered by Ludwig van Beethoven in a way that pushed all other music into an ornamental genre, focusing mainly on ways to beautify, much like in visual arts. Steinberg proceeds to explain that to his own ears there was a distinctive change in music of and after Mozart. In his own words this change was “the fiction of musical subjectivity, arguing that the new proclivity, conceived thoroughly musically, constitutes a powerful aesthetic and political critique of ideology of representation.”

“By reversing the hierarchy of seeing and hearing, music became a critical and indeed subversive cultural intervention. This new musical subjectivity is in turn able to embody melancholy, not as description or correlative of human mood, but as a function of its own inner life. All music is melancholy, but modern music knows its own melancholy.”
(Steinberg, 2014).

This gives way to the parallel of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau felt that music supremely conveyed the expression of the natural and the longing for this state of nature, something that could never be reinstated once society and language had tainted its origins. As Rousseau did not have the ability to compose music to support this claim, Mozart gracefully continued this line of thought through his music, which was “the fiction of subjectivity.” He could personify the music in the human character.

“... the fiction that the music itself a listening, acting, and reacting subject, with a past and a future, a desire for origins and for reconciliation with the world in both space and time.” (Steinberg, 2014).

To Steinberg, voice has always triumphed over the presedence of sound, however it has now risen above exclaiming that it now has something to say on its own, but even so - “Music alone cannot [...] take the final step to articulation”. (Steinberg, 2014).

3.3 Hermeneutics & Phenomenology

It is a common agreement among many that hermeneutics and phenomenology are incompatible, however combining these two sentral scientific perspectives are becoming more common, especially within music therapy. Music therapy is something that I had thought to include in this thesis, but as the thesis was growing, it became evident that there would be no room left for another subject, hence it will have to be sidelined for further exploration in the future.

In this essay on the topic (Johansson, 2016) the conclusion is that they are impossible to combine due to their different views on comprehension, yet there are others who often use them combined nonetheless. To put a scientific analysis of words to discover the ‘truth’ together with an analysis to discover the essence seems very much congruous. Agreeably, the hermeneutic interpretations and the essence of phenomenology may have to be conducted in separation, however combining them post-analysis is nothing if not an attempt to expand the horizon of what these methods alone could ever hope for.

3.4 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a method which, based on own experiences, is to create a representation of cultural experiences, social expectations, beliefs, values and so forth. Ethnografy in itself uses “fieldwork”, in the sense that we “observe, spend time on, converse with others, and examine ‘objects’ (like for example books, films, youtube videos, blogs, photographs) related to cultural experiences.” (Leavy, p. 142).

Autoethnography can be sectioned into three parts: Auto, Ethno and Graphy. The 'Auto' in Autoethnography stands for the 'Self'. Through introspection, observation and reflection of/over the writer, which in this case would be the researcher, the thoughts and feelings experienced is subject to scrutiny. It is the main difference between Ethnography and Autoethnography, Ethnography being a more out-ward method focusing on quantity over quality, and potentially less retrospective.

The 'Ethno' in Autoethnography refers to the culture the researcher lives in or grew up in, but also whatever cultural context the theme is laid out in, and the cultural practices consciously and unconsciously used.

The 'Graphy' in Autoethnography stands for the "projection of the systematic examination of stories, experiences and observations into personal insight and scientific knowledge". (Karlsson et al., 2021, p. 15).

Autoethnography is often referred to in relation to written texts, but there is an abundance of different forms of expression that this method can be applied to. In general it bases its scientific results on personal evocative descriptions of experience and spirit, from the source of one individual or a co-operation between several individuals. This results in a testimony of the lived experiences of the researcher, as well as the opportunity to explore how we are affected by a variety of different contextual situations and encounters with others. This leads to a combination of the systematic research method of 'Ethnography', as stated previously, with "expressive, creative and artistic elements and forms from the storytelling". (Karlsson et al., 2021).

The written works within autoethnography often entails experiences we don't talk about in public, and so this method is an excellent tool for sharing thoughts, feelings and experiences we usually would keep to ourselves. By fearlessly going on this journey through our own feelings, we may also awaken feelings within the reader, and achieve connection with the reader on a personal level. Successively this exploration of personal experiences will then be connected to the "broader, cultural, political and social patterns and perceptions" (Karlsson et al., 2021), because these experiences aren't 'just' our own; They are ways of expressing these cultural, social and historical contexts that we all, as a society, are involved in.

When we ask ourselves how we, through theoretical, methodical and practical approach, can write forth culture as a way of expressing experience, we use

autoethnography. Through this method we may base our arguments on self-reflection, mostly because knowledge is personal, and any examination or scrutiny starts within the researcher. This approach gives legitimacy to the subject's knowledge based on experience and offers systematic methods of endeavour which would be able to express this form of knowledge. (Karlsson et al., 2021).

3.4.1 Personal Experiences

“One day on may 17 (our national day) I was sitting with my classmate in an empty classroom working on a school assignment. We were both behind on our work load, and didn't know we would meet each other there, but hence we were stuck together. After a while we decide to put on some music, and I offer to put it on since I have a paid subscription of Spotify. I put on a playlist I made with calm piano music. After a little while my classmate asks if we can put on something less depressing. I myself didn't find the music depressing, and we were after all working on a school assignment, but she would rather listen to nostalgic upbeat 90s music. This was the first time I started wondering what depressive music really is, and what about it that makes people feel like it is depressive.” (Ida Revheim, 2021).

3.5 Empiricism

Through autoethnography empiricism has been acquired to better understand the cultural conception of melancholy and how it has been used to describe or envision the human condition, as well as examining the various ways that societal addiction has been portrayed in comparison to reality. In this thesis autoethnography applies the relationship between the experienced and observed reality, fieldnotes and ethnographical texts and media to research the personal and cultural context of these subjects of melancholy and societal addiction.

In this chapter you will find the media researched in relation to these topics: *Black Mirror - Nosedive* (Episode of a TV Show), *Black Swan* (Live Action Movie),

Equilibrium (Live Action Movie), *No Longer Human* (Fictional Book) and *Sigur Rós* (Post-Rock Band).

3.5.1 *Nosedive* - *Black Mirror*

Nosedive is episode 1 from season 3 in the dystopian tv show called *Black Mirror*. To be dystopian means to be “relating to a very bad or unfair society in which there is a lot of suffering, especially such a society”, i.e. *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Lingered between the movie genres drama, mystery and sci-fi, this well-written anthology³¹ tv series deals with serious cultural and societal issues, often times technologically grounded. There is an aspect of fantasy, but most of the episodes are based on moderately similar cultures and societies as they are today.

Each episode deals with its own separate story, and the stories usually have a moral standing. Saying that this tv show is made to uplift and inspire would be incorrect, as it raises many concerning issues with the direction of today’s technology-driven society, and feels more like a warning of maybe unwanted, but very much possible futures. There is of course the wonder of what technology might do for the human species in these futures, so the failures are usually made possible by the people managing said technology. The creator has mentioned in interviews that he very much likes technology, so the stories may not be intended as a warning sign, but may very well have become just that nonetheless.

The caption for *Nosedive* in particular on IMDb says this:

“A woman desperate to boost her social media score hits the jackpot when she’s invited to a swanky wedding, but the trip doesn’t go as planned.”

This caption alone might not seem related to this thesis much, but the interest lies less in the plot than in the portrayal of the progressed technology in the observable society and culture throughout the episode. There is of course interest in the progression of the plot, and how the main character grows beyond what they thought was their whole world, and finds out that there is more to life than likes.

Perspectively there is societal addiction here, and it’s workings lie very close to what we call social media today. It’s all about how you look, how interesting you seem,

³¹ Anthology: “A collection of selected literary pieces or passages or works of art or music.” (Merriam -Webster).

how many likes you get and general appearance, but in 3D. If you cannot keep up your popularity quota, things may be taken away from you.

Early in the episode, as the main character Lacie comes to work one day, one of her co-workers Chester engages her in conversation and says he got her and everyone a smoothie. Lacie can instantly see his ratings with her special technological lense and it's facial recognition software and notices how it's very low, which surprises her to the extent of not knowing what to say. She accepts a smoothie and rates him up, but by doing this action, she herself is marked down anonomously by others who saw her action and disapproved. Further explanation lets us know that he had a bad breakup, and he seems to be on the receiving end of everyone's hate accordingly.

In a later scene, Lacie meets him outside the workplace, and he is begging her for a high rating, because without his higher rating, he is not let into the building. The consequences are never fully revealed, but one can only assume his time at that work place is ending. This rating system could have been regarded as the currency, but we find out during the episode that there is a valid currency outside of this validation system, rendering this system to be more of a recommendation system integrated into their everyday lives.

One of the first scenes we see is the main character practicing her laughter in the mirror in her own bathroom at home. Strange enough as practicing laughter is, she is trying to laugh in an easthetically pleasing way both visually and auditory. Even one of the most basic of human reactions is stripped down to mere mechanics and function. There are few actions made by the so-called "quality people", being the high fours, that have not been meticulously planned and rehearsed beforehand to have the ultimate effect on potential stepping stones. Stepping stones meaning, in this context, the people that help boost them higher or maintain their status. Simply put, it's a popularity contest.

The plot revolves around Lacie and her want for a high end luxury apartment in a locked apartment complex. The price is simply too high for her, however if she gets to a rating of 4.5 or above, she will get a considerable discount. She is currently at the start of this episode rated at 4.2. After seeing a specialist in ratings, she is recommended to get a boost. Her interactions are great, and her popularity has been steadily increasing, however her circle is mostly official workers and working class. She needs a boost from "quality people", the high fours. After this, she is approached

by an old classmate, Naomi, who is currently a 4.8. These two talk as if they are age old friends who used to be best friends, except for the fact that she actually used to bully Lacie, something we learn from Lacie's brother at a later time. Naomi wants Lacie to be her maid of honour, and as out of the blue this is, Lacie is thrilled. Naomi's wedding will be full of high fives, and this is the boost she's been wanting. Their way of talking and laughing is a show they put on for each other, to be accepted in a way.

During the journey to get to this wedding, a number of things happens to Lacie, damaging her ratings. Close to the end of the journey, Naomi calls and tells her not to come. Lacie being insistent to the bitter end, Naomi proceeds to deny her entrance, because of Lacie's very low rating at this time. She reveals that the only reason she chose Lacie is because it would make herself look empathetic to have a slightly lower rated person to be her maid of honour, and this is how Naomi's every move is planned to the finest detail to appear as appealing to others as possible, even at her own wedding.

3.5.2 *Black Swan*

Black Swan is a Drama Thriller released in 2010, revolving around the highly competitive ballet-scene. A cautionary tale of perfectionism strongly inspired by the 1997 anime movie *Perfect Blue*. *Black Swan* director Darren Aronofsky even purchased the rights to *Perfect Blue* alongside other movies from the same director (Satoshi Kon) so that he could easily duplicate its visual style.

“*Perfect Blue*, like most of Satoshi Kon's films, deal with conflicting yet intermingling dualities. In this case, a young pop singer transitions to being an actress. The dualities presented include the opposition of a stage persona versus your personal life, obsession in the face of passion and reality versus delusion.” (Wilson, 2021)

Much like *Perfect Blue*, *Black Swan* deals with dualities in opposition, even though Aronofsky's approach is vastly different from Kon's.

The caption for *Black Swan* in IMDb says this:

“A committed dancer struggles to maintain her sanity after winning the lead role in a production of Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake".”

The story revolves around the ballet scene, which is extremely competitive, and their careers have a very short life span. The main character Nina wishes desperately to get a main role in the new setup of *Swan Lake*. As she auditions, she is told that if it was only for the white swan, the role would be hers, and in the wake of this comment she is desperate to show that she can also do the black swan. She visits the man charge, Thomas, in his office to try to convince him that she is the right dancer for the role. In this interaction he explains to her that all he sees in her is discipline, and not the raw edges that the black swan would need. The scene acts out like this:

N: "I just want to be perfect."

N: "I think I have it in me."

T: "What?"

T: (*Kisses her passionately.*)

N: "I wanna be perfect."

N: (*Pushes him away.*)

T: "Perfection is not just about control. Its also about letting go. Surprise yourself so you can surprise the audience. Transcendence. And very few have it in them."

T: "You bit me? I can't believe you bit me!"

N: "Im sorry."

T: "Man, that fucking hurt!"

N: (*Runs out of the office.*)

This interaction between them placed her in the main role, which is what she came there for.

Following the auditions for the role in *Swan Lake* she is seeing things. To start it was only a shadow, a figure in the dark, or on the street. As time progresses, the figure's face is her own. A mysterious would also starts to appear on one of her shoulderbones, and her mother seems very worried about this. It is suggested that this has been a problem before, and Nina has had mental struggles in the past, but there is never any certainty.

There is continuous pressure on Nina from Thomas, not just pressure for perfection, but also sexual pressure disguised as concern for the art. One scene in particular during practice, his actions are quite unprofessional:

T: "David, can I ask you a question? Honestly, would you fuck that girl? No. No one would.

T: "Let it go, let it go." (*He touches her butt.*)

"Feel my touch. Respond to it. Come on."

Nina, your dancing is just as rigid... fuck!"

N: (*Pushes him away, then kisses her forcefully.*)

[...] (*Everyone is told to leave except Nina, and Thomas practices with her.*)

T: "Open your mouth. Open it, open up."

(*He sticks her tongue into her mouth and touches her whole body, then suddenly stops and*

walks away.) “That was me seducing you, when it needs to be the other way around.”

In this scene the sexual undertones is part of the pressure to perform perfectly. In another scene, there is no sexual undertones, only anger that she can't be as perfect as he desires.

N: “Do you have any corrections?”

T: “No, you shouldn't be whining in the first place!”

T: “Lily told me that she saw you crying. That you were very upset and that I should go easy on you.”

N: “I didn't.”

T: “You could be brilliant, but you're a coward.”

N: “I didn't tell her that.”

N: “Sorry.”

T: “Maybe you need a little break. Like a day or two. Or maybe a month! What do you think?”

T: “No, stop saying that! That's exactly what I'm talking about! Stop being so fucking weak!

N: “She shouldn't have said anything.”

Again!”

This all triggers something in Nina, something that damages her psyche tremendously, and near the end of the movie, right before the performance starts, she thinks she fights with another ballet performer and kills her with a shard of broken mirror.

During the whole first part of the performance she thinks she has a dead body in her locker room. However as she returns for half time, someone knocks on her door, and it turns out to be the performer she thought she killed. The body is gone, and it turns out she had been fighting with herself and stabbed her own stomach with the shard.

This realization does not stop her from finishing the performance, ending it with a graceful fall onto a mattress, where her peers eventually see her bleeding stomach wound and falls into a frenzy of confusion.

Nina's desperate need for perfection could very well have cost her her life, however this is not a fact that we are privileged to in the movie, and we can only speculate whether or not she perished from this wound. This is a sort of societal addiction at works, where our image as a whole is more important than ourselves.

3.5.3 *Equilibrium*

Equilibrium is an Action Drama Sci-Fi released in 2002, being a very close cousin of the 1984 novel by George Orwell, being about an oppressive regime and control of feelings. This movie stands out from 1984 by the government's intention to remove

all feelings from its population, making it a “Utopia” where crime and ego has no place.

“No novel of the past century has had more influence than George Orwell’s *1984*. The title, the adjectival form of the author’s last name, the vocabulary of the all-powerful Party that rules the superstate Oceania with the ideology of Ingsoc—doublethink, memory hole, unperson, thoughtcrime, Newspeak, Thought Police, Room 101, Big Brother—they’ve all entered the English language as instantly recognizable signs of a nightmare future. It’s almost impossible to talk about propaganda, surveillance, authoritarian politics, or perversions of truth without dropping a reference to *1984*.” (George Pack, 2019)

The caption for *Equilibrium* on IMDb says this:

“In an oppressive future where all forms of feeling are illegal, a man in charge of enforcing the law rises to overthrow the system and state.”

This movie has many similar roots to *1984* (Orwell, 1949). The totalitarian state and what is often referred to as the “Orwellian Regime” is widely used within media, and *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1949) is also another twist on the same story, as is mentioned within *Wirehead Hedonism* (Pearce). One can only imagine, seeing as these books were published in the same year, that this was a time of crisis for society. The modern progression of society must have seemed frightening or uncertain, and certainly the fact that this was during WWII has left it no mystery. The beginning of the movie starts with a dictator pronouncing this society’s history to the people in a sort of propaganda, constantly playing for everyone to hear at all times.

“In the first years of the 21st century, a third world war broke out. Those of us who survived knew mankind would never survive a fourth, that our own volatile natures could simply no longer be risked. [...] To seek out and eradicate the true source of Man’s inhumanity to Man. His ability to feel. [...] Libria. I congratulate you. At last peace reigns in the heart of man. At last war is but a word whose meaning fades from our understanding. At last.. we.. are.. whole. [...] Librians... there is a disease in the heart of man. Its symptom is hate. Its symptom... is anger. Its symptom is rage. Its symptom is war. The disease... is human emotion. But, Libria... I congratulate you. For there is a cure for this disease. At the cost of the dizzying highs of human emotion, we have suppressed its abysmal lows. And you as a society have embraced this cure. Prozum. Now we are at peace with ourselves, and humankind is one. War is gone. Hate is memory. We are our own conscience now and it is this conscience that guides

us to rate EC-10 for emotional content all those things that might tempt us to feel again and destroy them. Librarians, you have won. Against all odds and your own natures you have survived.”

The storyline revolves around Preston, a cleric whose job is to eradicate anything that could make us feel. Art and music, as well as prosecution of humans who have stopped taking Proziium, the drug that takes away all feelings, and can feel again. Preston’s journey starts as his partner is found guilty of feeling. This sparks something in Preston that he at first does not understand, and before he knows it consciously, he finds himself treading in his partner’s footsteps.

In one scene Preston has just accidentally lost one of his vials, and he is behind on the Proziium. He is lying in bed, and feel quite strange. It’s raining outside, but he can’t see it since all the windows have been covered in a frosted film to keep the experience of the home as sterile as possible. His feelings returning has him tearing off the film, and as he stares out the window whilst the sun is rising (or setting) he feels something extremely strong. As in Freud’s and Butler’s theories on the lost object, and bourgeois aesthetics theories on the relation between subject and object (the affect of surroundings), this scene perfectly expresses these theories in practice in an artistic manner.

3.5.4 *No Longer Human*

No Longer Human was the second novel written by Japanese author Osamu Dazai (1909-1948), first published in 1948 in post-war Japan while the English version was first published 10 years later in 1958. It is a semi-autobiographical novel said to “echo the sentiments of youth from post-war Japan to the postmodern society of technology.” (Hiroshi Ando, *The Mainichi Daily News*). It has been viewed as one of the most important pieces of literature coming out of post-war Japan and is still one of the most best-selling titles in Japan today.

Both his novels were heavily inspired by real events in his life, and opted to bring about awareness around topics such as mental illness, human nature, social relationships and post-war Japan. He took his own life shortly after the publishing of this second novel, *No Longer Human*, so it is evident he had real mental struggles. It would be easy to say this novel is depressing and pessimistic, and wonder why it is worth reading. The answer would be that it is a valuable insight into the mind of

alienated youth struggling to find their place in society. Whether feeling sorry or disgusted for the main character and his beliefs and opinions, it is clear that society and family plays a huge role in the events of his life.

“I have always shook with fright before human beings. Unable as I was to feel the least particle of confidence in my ability to speak and act like a human being, I kept my solitary agonies locked in my breast. I kept my melancholy and my agitation hidden, careful lest any trace should be left exposed. I feigned an innocent optimism; I gradually perfected myself in the role of the farcical eccentric.” (*No Longer Human*, p. 28)

3.5.5 Sigur Rós

In regards to the music and videography created for my thesis, I was strongly inspired by the atmospheric icelandic post-rock band Sigur Rós. I always believed it to be one person, as the name sounds like a first name and a last name, but it has been cleared up as being named after one of the bandmembers’ sister Victory Rose. The band was formed by guitarist and vocalist Jón Þór Birgisson (nicknamed Jónsi), bassist Georg Holm and drummer Ágúst Ævar Gunnarsson. The drummer has been switched out a few times, and the vocalist has had other projects including a solo career on the side, resulting in a few pauses for Sigur Rós, however the band is still on-going to this day.

After their seventh album *Kveikur* was released in 2013, they started branching out, making appearances on the animated series *The Simpsons* as well as HBO’s *Game of Thrones*. They also appeared on an episode in season four of *Black Mirror*, collaborating with its current composer Alex Somers on two instrumental recordings.

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In 2002 Sigur Rós’ third album, (), was released. Being as internationally renowned as they are, the most unusual thing about Sigur Rós is that they are singing in a made up language, a language that has been called Hopelandic. Their intention was always to “evoke this awe-inspiring scenery in their expansive, moving music”. (Newstead, 2019).

“It presented the country as a mythical landscape, dotted with quaint fishing villages and imposing wind-blasted vistas. Arctic tundra and grayscale geography stretching to the watery

horizon. You can picture ancient Norse gods traversing the craggy mountains until they took their secret leave to the sparkling panorama behind the Northern Lights.” (Newstead, 2019).

The album was name (), but it can hardly be called a name, neither does its eight tracks. This made-up language is sometimes compared to the elvish language from the J.R.R.Tolkien books *Lord of the Rings*, but unlike that Hopelandic has no constructible grammar or system. The band itself has said that it’s “a form of gibberish vocals that fits to the music and acts as another instrument”. This blank slate it creates for the listener opens up for interpretation, and leaves the listener to fall into themselves for answers. Jónsi himself said that the album is “unfinished and people have to finish it themselves. It’s not the singer telling stories, it’s sort of a soundtrack for each person’s life”. (Jónsi, Sigur Rós).

“This exercise shows firsthand how trivial and distracting these labels are, when the focus should be on the elegantly arranged, cinematic songs, and the experience of listening to them. I don’t need to know that track seven, ‘Dauðalagið’, translates to ‘Death Song’. Its funereal pace and bleak yet beautiful tone conveys that sense of fatal permanence.” (Newstead, 2019).

The beauty of Hopelandic is that there is nothing specific it seeks to convey. Even without discernable words, it communicates the music the way a soundtrack would have to; creating feelings in us without telling us what or how to feel.

“Artists often bemoan the idea of burdening their songs with one definitive interpretation, but with (), Sigur Rós take that concept to a liberating extreme. The beauty of their concept is that there are no wrong answers, only what we feel and fill it up with.” (Newstead, 2019).

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An author named Ethan Hayden took interest in this album in particular, maybe because of its rawer sound compared to it’s predecessors and the way it scaled down on the extreme highs and lows, resulting in a more continuous baseline. This was also the album they completely removed all communicable language from their music. As

an “expression of possibility” and an invitation for the listener to “be anything they want to be” (Hayden, 2014), his high regard for this album is evident.

In his book he systematically reveals the keywords of the album, and how they fit into the concept. There is of course a great deal about Hopelandic, and about language and meaning in an almost heuristic context, but there is more to this album but only the words and voice.

Silence is an especially important, and early subject. He speaks of a concert he attended where during a break of silence in the song, the band holds this silence for an extended amount of time. Four seconds became an eternity, not because it was excruciating silence, but because it was enrapturing, and the experience stayed with him to this day. This leads me to suspect that Sigur Rós here had been inspired by John Cage’s *4’33’’*³², a piece consisting of four minutes and thirtythree seconds of silence. Silence can have power, especially in this society where we are continuously bombarded with sound. In *Lydlandskap*, Even Ruud writes about the significance of sound and silence in society, and asks the age old question: Can we hear it, if no one is there to hear? Another great piece of literature on silence is *Slow Listening* by Helena Grehan, where we are advised to slow down and listen, and if we cannot do that, then we should simply shut up. Attention spans aren’t what they used to, as it is a fast paced culture we live in, and perhaps it is time to slow down to listen.

Hayden also speaks about spaces, opposition, invisibility and nonsense. They are linked to each other, but also separated in the way that they are all important aspects of Sigur Rós’ music.

Valtari

On *Valtari*, their 2012 album, they reached out to twelve professional creatives to direct short films which would accompany the songs on the album. Some songs even received several different short films.

The song that caught me, was in fact the accompaniment with one of these short films, and I couldn’t look away. The music is beautifully melancholy on its own, but with the short films, it brought on a life of its own.

³² <https://www.theculturium.com/john-cage-silence/>

Varúð

As wondrous as the idea of a language that no one can understand is, we are still provided with translations of said language. This word stands for “warning”, and this translation was provided to the artists as they created their short films. This song received three different short films, each one as beautiful as the next.

1. Inga Birgisdóttir³³

She graduated from the Icelandic Academy of Art in 2006. She has made covers and music videos for Múm, Jónsi, Sin Fang and Sóley among others.

“For a little while now i have been experimenting with doing videos that are more like moving images or paintings. They have no beginning, middle or end so the video doesn’t expect anything from you. You don’t have to watch it all, you can glance at it or watch for an hour, it’s just your experience. I have also been doing music videos which are almost the total opposite. They have to be fast, lot of things happening in a short period of time otherwise you just turn it off. I was curious to try to combine the the two. [...] Varúð has more of a story. Varúð means caution or warning so this image instantly came to my mind. Someone making warning signs with a flashlight. I wanted the varúð video to have a slow build up like the song and leave something for the viewers to imagine for themselves. We have no idea who they are or what they are warning us about. I made the video by animating a postcard and filmed myself over and over again climbing on top of a woodenbox in front of some blue paper.” (Birgisdóttir).³⁴

2. Ryan McGinley³⁵

Ryan McGinley is known for a photographic practice that celebrates the glow of youth, and this short film was his “poem to New York”. (McGinley).

“The camera tracks a young woman—wearing nothing more than a gold wig, an oversized T-shirt, and underwear—as she skips barefoot through the metropolis. (Editor’s note: Always wear shoes when skipping in Lower Manhattan.) The footage is shot from a great distance, as if captured by an eye-in-the-sky satellite. At certain points, the woman keeps dreamily moving, even though her surroundings—pedestrians on the High Line, yellow cabs—have frozen in place. The video is something of a woozier, romantic counterpart to

³³ <https://imvdb.com/video/sigur-r%C3%B3s/varu>

³⁴ <https://18seconds.sigurros.com/valtari/videos/varud-inga/>

³⁵ <https://imvdb.com/video/sigur-r%C3%B3s/varu/2>

James Nares's short film *Street* (2011), which likewise skewed the way we see New York's everyday foot traffic."³⁶

3. Björn Flóki³⁷

Flóki (1982) was born in Iceland. Since the year 2000 he has co-created, and co-manages to this day, the Sigur Rós website sigur-ros.co.uk.

“When i listen to Varúð i feel this overlap and struggle between sadness and beauty, between darkness and light. An overwhelming feeling of being buried in darkness but being just barely able to escape into the light, if you try hard enough. This is the feeling i've tried to bring to the video.” (Flóki).³⁸

3.5.6 Other Topical Media

In addition to the empirical data acquired from said movies, texts etc, there is a considerable amount of media relevant to the topic at hand which unfortunately could not be included due to the sheer amount of data germane to the topics in question. However in the event of continued research, these are some of the media that could be included:

Books

- I. *Brave New World* - Aldous Huxley
- II. *1984* - George Orwell
- III. *Fearless: The Making of Post-Rock* - Jeanette Leech
- IV. *Life 3.0* - Max Tegmark
- V. *Colourless Tzukuru Tazaki* - Haruki Murakami
- VI. *A General Theory of Oblivion* - José Eduardo Agualusa
- VII. *The faster I walk, the Smaller I Am* - Kjersti Annesdatter Skomsvold
- VIII. *Norwegian Wood* - Haruki Murakami
- IX. *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World* - Haruki Murakami
- X. *Kafka on the Shore* - Haruki Murakami
- XI. *Madness & Civilization* - Michel Foucault
- XII. *Slow Listening* - Helena Grehan

³⁶ <https://www.danceyrselfclean.com/music-videos/sigur-ros-varud>

³⁷ <https://imvdb.com/video/sigur-r%C3%B3s/varu/3>

³⁸ <https://18seconds.sigurros.com/valtari/videos/varud-floki/>

XIII. *Minima Moralia* - Theodor W. Adorno

Films (Animated and/or TV-Shows)

- i. *Melancholia* - Lars von Trier (Director)
- ii. *Perfect Blue* - Satoshi Kon (Director)
- iii. *Maniac* - Cary Joji Fukunaga (Director)
- iv. *Legion* - Noah Hawley (Creator)
- v. *Norwegian Wood* - Anh Hung Tran (Director)
- vi. *Black Mirror* - Charlie Brooker (Creator)
- vii. *Inside Out* - Pete Docter & Ronnie Del Carmen

Music

- I. *Loss* - Phoria (Song)
- II. *A million Roads to Nowhere* - The Living Sleep (Song)
- III. *Expectations* - Sir Sly (Song)
- IV. Killigrew (Artist)
- V. Sóley (Artist)
- VI. *Try Happiness* - Daniel Gidlund (Song)
- VII. *Breathe* - The White Birch (Song)
- VIII. *Borders* - Kalandra (Song)
- IX. *Lady in the Water* - James Newton-Howard (Soundtrack)
- X. Ludwig van Beethoven (Selective Works)
- XI. *Requiem in D Minor, K 626* - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Requiem Mass)
- XII. Jean Sibelius (Selective Works)

3.6 Qualitative study

During the research into melancholy in this thesis, I decided to perform a qualitative study on a few subjects, challenging and questioning their perceptions and prior knowledge of the term melancholy. I wanted to add myself as a way of comparing and concluding whether or not I am biased, and in what way. The questions were relayed in the way that felt most natural while questioning the subjects, and in the case of Subject three there is quite a bit of jumping around, while subject one and two both remained chronological. Subject two however needed some re-phrasing of a few of the questions in order to remain relatable to that subject.

In this line of questioning I wish to extract information, as well as challenge the subjects' mindset and understanding of the term melancholy and society's meeting with the alienation some feel in expressing their "true nature." Both subjects are close friends, but in this process I tried to stay as factual and objective as possible in this line of questioning.

Subject one is myself, Ida Marlene Roggenbiehl Revheim (1990-), a local visual artist, illustrator, musician, producer, editor, designer as well as other creative endeavours, currently writing a master in Fine Arts.

Subject two is Jordan Outlaw (1994-), an american digital and traditional visual artist and illustrator currently working as a freelance NFT creator and illustrator.

Subject three is Janne Synnøve Dyvik Sverdsten (1990-), a local visual artist, interior decorator and tattoo designer currently working as a freelancer customizing furniture and selling original visual art.

1. What is melancholy to you?

Revheim, I.: Melancholy is how I define my personality, my happy place.

Outlaw, J.: In my head I picture watching myself walking down a road on a gloomy day almost like the clouds are on the ground but they are of a fluid and I'm almost floating through them. It's my own little world of sadness, but it's more of a numb feeling that is weighing on me but also in some way ot's light. Nothing in that moment matters almost as if I'm a ghost just passing by. Idk

it's hard to describe with words for me it's like I visualize it whenever I hear the word.

Damn, that's beautiful though. You go on such a journey with just one word.

That's how that word is to me. Like it could be a movie. Just for no reason.

Sverdsten, J.: Melancholy to me is to find (the) joy in something sad.

2. Have you ever felt melancholy? If so, why?

Revheim, I.: I would say so, yes.

Outlaw, J.: Ye, but for me sadness and depression are more of short bursts even if it lasts more than a day it won't ever encompass my whole day. I can't really think of a specific time I felt melancholy. Maybe I really never truly felt melancholy, I don't know.

Sverdsten, J.: I feel melancholy periodically, it depends somewhat on what I experience in life, but when I stopped taking drugs the melancholy in me was extra strong... and beautiful. A little cheezy answer. (*Go to question 13*).

3. Do you think feeling melancholic is normal? Normal being common.

Revheim, I.: I think it's way more common than we think, since society kind of only greets the happy few.

Outlaw, J.: In a way I described it initially now I am really uncertain if I have felt it in that way at least for a sustained time. I feel like it probably isn't that common. But I feel like if someone is prone to disassociating they could probably feel that way if they were depressed. I also don't know if my "definition" is the proper one.

That is what Im here to find out, the definition is elusive. Also who said it has to be sustained?

Yea you're right. To me it just doesnt feel like something that would go away after just a few hours. Maybe it has to be that way though. In this world most

people can't just experience their feelings we have responsibilities so sometimes we have to put them on pause.

Sverdsten, J.: I think it's normal to feel melancholic throughout life, some more often than others, but I have no opinion on what is normal.

(Go to question 5).

4. Can you give me an example of something melancholic?

(Object, situation, person, colour, movie, saying, word etc.).

Revheim, I.: Since melancholy is my happy place, any time I hear a song that makes my skin tingle.

Outlaw, J.: I don't know one. *(I ask again a week later, this time specifying more examples:)* I'm stumped, I guess fog reminds me of melancholy.

Why is it hard?

I don't know, I can't think of anything at the moment.

Sverdsten, J.: Ari Behn's book, sad as fuck. *(Go to question 6).*

5. Do you have any synonyms for melancholy?

Revheim, I.: I actually struggle to find synonyms to melancholy.

Outlaw, J.: Maybe sorrow, desolation, mournful. I feel like depression is similar as well.

Sverdsten, J.: Gloomy, mournful and depressed. *(Go to question 11).*

6. What would you say to the fact that today it is classified as deep depression?

Revheim, I.: I was shocked when I found out, since this is not at all how I view it personally, and from talking to others, few people do.

Outlaw, J.: I would agree with that label. I feel that it really is a deeper level of depression, or classification I should say. At the same time I feel that melancholy could be something that doesn't last for very long. It could be a moment whereas depression I feel is chronic or lasts much longer, although I might be contradicting my initial definition of melancholy.

Sverdsten, J.: Hm, in that case I would say that yes, it can probably be viewed as a deep depression, but I also believe that it can be experienced to different degrees of potency depending on the person .. based on events, thoughts, feelings or other life situations one can go through. Some enjoy the feeling of melancholy and are delighted by melancholic songs, but that doesn't have to mean that they are deeply depressed. (*Go to question 3*).

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you know me?

Outlaw, J.: Hard to say since I don't spend a lot of time with you in person. I feel like I know a lot about you and your interests, as well as certain preferences and/or world views, so I would say maybe 6/10. I feel like I know you well, but at the same time there's a chance I really don't know you at all. Despite that, I feel like you are honest, so that's why I say 6.

Sverdsten, J.: I would say 8. (*Go to question 8*).

8. Would you say I'm melancholic?

Outlaw, J.: I knew where this was going, and honestly I could imagine that. It's kind of hard to judge since I'm not around you in person, but maybe. I feel like you are kind of stuck in a not so great stage in your life right now, and I'm sure that isn't great. Well, you have said so.

Sverdsten, J.: Yes, it appears in your art and your music.

How so?

Your music always affects my emotions in a beautiful way, you have this vulnerable yet strong and melancholic lyrics and sound. It makes me happy

and sad at the same time. *(She shows me the sticker of an angel i made)*. This is melancholic to me.

Would you say that Im maybe answering questions that people don't want answered? And in doing so, its a feeling of sadness but the feeling of beauty you get might be a sense of relief that there is honesty and not polite response?

Absolutely!

Don't we all feel guilt over asking how people are only to know full well that the response will be false?

I think most of us do. I do, but I also think people are afraid to ask because they don't know how to respond. And that also creates guilt. People fear what they don't know. *(Go to question 9)*.

9. After all that we now have talked about, would you say Im deeply depressed?

Outlaw, J.: I can't say for certain, but if you said you did, I wouldn't be surprised I suppose. [...] I hope you know that I'm always here if I can help in any way, just for your information. [...].

Sverdsten, J.: I would say that after all that we have talked about and from how I know you, that I don't experience that you are in deep depression, but that you thrive the most in a melancholic inner world. *(Last question for this subject)*.

10. Do you feel melancholy is socially accepted in society?

Revheim, I.: I feel that as a society we are trained to care about diversity, but in reality the teacher does not do as they say. Until we come a few generations furter, I don't think being melancholic, glum, angry or anything other than happy and acomodating is going to be particularly accepted. Obviously because it is a downer, and it brings others down, but melancholy in itself in my opinion is not a negative emotion to have or to show, so why is it viewed in such a negative manner? I want to be able to be less than extatic on a daily basis without my sanity or humor being questioned, and to be accepted as

something more than simply entertainment in this world of 10 second attention spans.

Outlaw, J.: I feel like most people don't recognize when others are depressed if they hide it well, and maybe even if they don't hide it at all. When I was younger, depression wasn't really spoken about, at least not by anyone in my family and certainly not at school. I feel like it's something that people are recognizing kind of recently. Mental health is something that everyone is becoming more and more aware of. As far as it being accepted, I think that people that don't have depression or haven't experienced it maybe can't understand. As a result, these people sometimes may just think or say that people can get over it, or they may just say "be happy", "people have it worse".

So in your opinion there is no notable difference between melancholy and depression?

Yea, that's hard. I'd say they are very very similar, if not the same. To be melancholic is to be depressed, but to be depressed is to be melancholic. It's really strange to think about, and I can kind of see why you may have picked this topic.

Sverdsten, J.: I feel like it has improved to a certain degree, however I also feel like melancholy is being deemed as something negative and that some people would rather have some distance between themselves and people who experience it (melancholy). (*Go to question 14*).

11. Are you melancholic?

Revheim, I.: I would very much say that I am a melancholic character. Some would say pessimistic, but no one ever said you can't be both at the same time. It all lies in the separation of the terms and the separate meanings of the words, as well as social understanding of these terms. I recognize in myself these qualities without regret.

Outlaw, J.: Definitely not.

Sverdsten, J.: Yes, these days I am a little melancholic. (*Background: Her father passed away 13th December 2021*). (Go to question 10).

12. Would you want to be without it?

Revheim, I.: I would never be without my melancholy. My melancholy is the root of this master thesis, and I feel the need to defend my inner emotional life against the likes of David Pearce.

Outlaw, J.:

Re-phrasing the question for this subject: Would you rather have a world without melancholy?

Yes and no. I think, like you said, sometimes sadness or hard times can breed success. (*I previously mentioned on a personal note that “it’s good to be down sometimes, that’s how you know it can get better.”*). I think if everything was great all of the time, there wouldn’t be a fight for improvement. I think maybe we would all be lazy.

Sverdsten, J.: No, I wouldn’t.. it is in melancholy I retrieve the most strength and inspiration to grow through the most challenging times. But that is perhaps not entirely melancholy, if I find strength in it.

13. Do you feel shame saying it?

Revheim, I.: I don’t know if its shame I feel, but I do feel some sort of way about it. Mostly because people don’t understand it or what it really is, and maybe I don’t even understand it myself. Reading about Paradise Engineering made me so mad, simply because I feel like my inner emotional life is being invalidated as something bad and worth removing and replacing. Who is David Pearce to be hammering down so hard on something I myself find to be beautiful? Albeit it isnt always beautiful, maybe thats why its so hard to pin down the true nature of melancholy. All terms are human made after all, and there is no scientific explanation that will magically explain the feelings linked to this term.

Outlaw, J.:

Re-phrasing the question for this subject: Do you think melancholic people, or people in a melancholic state, feel shame in expressing their mindset?

I think it really depends on the person and who they are expressing their mindset to, but I do think the vast majority probably feel shame regardless.

What can we do to relieve this shame?

I feel like more education on mental health is the only way, but not everyone will be willing to or care to learn. I think there will always be misunderstanding.

Sverdsten, J.: Not really. Maybe a little ashamed of the drugs., but not too much. (*Go to question 12*).

14. Do you feel abnormal because of it? (*Speaking of alienation of youth in modern society*).

Revheim, I.: Speaking of alienation of youth, it has always been the case. As Osamu Dazai talks about in his book from 1948, being young is a journey in finding your place in society rather than finding yourself. Because of this, youth are obliged to conform, but it is the ones that tear away from these conformities that change societies. In knowing that, any person deferring from conventional emotional expression will be and will feel abnormal to a certain extent, and that isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's progress. But yes, I feel like I am only half myself, because I can't be who I am without my personality being questioned.

Outlaw, J.:

Re-phrasing the question for this subject: Do you think melancholic people, or people in a melancholic mindset, are abnormal?

No, I don't think so.

Do you agree they might feel that way? Speaking of alienation of youth in modern society.

Yea, definitely. Especially when a lot of people think everyone else is okay, when really that's not the case.

Sverdsten, J.: By society's standardised norms I feel a little abnormal, but it should be normalized by talking about it and sharing it with each other.

(Go to question 15).

15. In light of this, what is normal? *(Very open question. Normal in regards to the industrialized worlds norms and rules on exposure of our own inner emotional life).*

Revheim, I.: I would say a general air of indifference, emotional entertainment and immediate gratification. I think when humans have a lot of time to think and don't have to work so hard to survive, they think too much, and that sends us into existential crisis more often than maybe we realize ourselves.

Outlaw, J.: I think that it isn't normal to talk about how you feel. We are all supposed to put on our happy faces.

Sverdsten, J.: *(She struggled with the question, so I show her the first sentence I wrote: I would say a general air of indifference, emotional entertainment and immediate gratification.)* Omg that's true. I would maybe say that if someone asks me how I am doing, my automatic response would be to say everything is fine, even if I feel sad as fuck on the inside.

16. Do you think this is because you feel obliged to be polite and not bother others, or is it because you feel like it is not suited to be emotionally honest when someone asks? (Is "how are you" a rhetorical question?)

Revheim, I.: I wrote this question as an add on after subject three answered my last question, and as I was writing this question I realized that the question was my answer.

Outlaw, J.: I feel like there is a time and place to share feelings, but maybe that shouldn't be the way it is. Also yes, "how are you" really is just a formality. I think when used in a greeting sense, it is rhetorical, most times.

Sverdsten, J.: (*I send her a tear emoji, and she replies:*) Yeah but thats because I like to deal with emotions in silence. Im that cold norwegian.

After reading her the question:

I do feel obliged to be polite, but also that some negative emotions are not suited. (*Go to question 7*).

4. THE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Music & Video

Creating the music was the first step I took. To do this I utilized a new Virtual Instrument that I had recently acquired named *Ashlight* from Native Instruments, and I had been itching to use it. As of 2022, May 12 it is not completely done, but it will be for the final viewing. It is divided into four parts intending to visualize a story. Some key terms I love to use in my music is vitality affect and dissonance.

Vitality affect is how we are affected by things, like music. If it makes you feels something, it could be referred to as vitality affect. Dissonance is a musical expression: It is also has other uses, but that is how I use it here. Dissonant tones are tones that play at the same time that are next to each other, like f.ex. H and C, semi-tones apart. This created a beautiful hysteria of sound, which used sparingly can elevate a piece.

The visual idea that first came to mind was inspired by melancholy, especially my own experience with it. (See Fig.14). The music was supposed to accompany the four stages of this visual idea, however as time went on this idea seemed less relevant, and it was eventually scrapped, hence there will be a substantial amount of footage and tests for this idea in *Prosessen*³⁹, a ca. fortyfive minute video of the process up until 2022, May 11.

In the new concept it is quite possible that two of the four musical parts will be removed, simply to align with the new idea. I wish to convey how society shapes us, and how melancholy and other moods or disorders disjoints individuals from society based on nothing but prejudice, perhaps brought on by societal addiction. Can the addict be blamed for its own actions?

The video will start with a figure in the distance. As the figure draws closer, you will see that it is walking backwards towards you, and it is getting dressed in the process. Eventually when the figure reaches the viewer, it will turn around, fully clothed and ready to meet society (the viewer), only for society to be reflected in the reflective material the figure wears on its face. To quote Dazai: “The ocean is not society; it is individuals”.

³⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxqn_APv1VM&ab_channel=ImFoxheim

As an individual with no formal training in filming, video editing and such, it was a challenge to learn everything. I've had to learn Davinci Resolve, a video editing software, from scratch, and for this I had a Youtube channel I created videos for, simply to learn the software better. This was a tremendous help, as the incentive kept the knowledge fresh in my mind throughout the year. In addition there is the equipment. To learn what lenses to use, and how to adjust the camera by the lighting was also something I was tragically bad at prior to the thesis.

Inspired by Sigur Rós and their idea to create short films for their songs, I had wanted to make two or three different videos for this one song. However there was only time for one video. In the event of further study, I wish to continue with one or two more videos to truly explore the different ways to creatively convey the music.

5. ANALYSIS

In the beginning of the thesis the goal was to define melancholy, and experiment with how I could use the potential definition artistically in an interdisciplinary way. To define melancholy I would first have to understand it, and that's where the theoretical perspectives came in to help understand where melancholy comes from and how it is viewed throughout history and the different perspectives that already exists.

Other ways to understand melancholy is to understand the feelings and terms surrounding melancholia, and the situations that shape this feeling. Paradise Engineering was one of the main theories that made me so interested in the term, and my own feelings about melancholy directly contrasted everything Paradise Engineering stands for, especially since it seems to be a mood lingering between happiness and sadness, never fully relenting to one or the other. So then by trying to understand what happiness is, i.e. pleasure within hedonistic theory, I could comprehend the position of melancholia within the Utopia discussed in Paradise Engineering. Due to my own feelings about melancholy, it is a mood I would be very reluctant to remove.

The main research method used was autoethnography, while phenomenology was a close second. There was also a qualitative study made to acquire some current empirical information from the regular artist's, who aren't philosophers, daily lives and how their views on melancholy were without being tainted by medical, historical or philosophical views or definitions.

Through the collection of empirical data I chose a few digital and traditional media, like movies and books, to shed light on societal addiction and the various ways that the full aspect of feelings is explored in both negative and positive fashion.

The result is simple. There is no way to completely define melancholy in a universal way, as it is still a fluid term where both the individual and society view it differently. However there is a way to attempt conveying the mood or feeling to an audience, in both positive and negative ways, mostly through artful expression.

I was surprised to see such diversity, even amongst my own inner circle, and I know now to not throw this term around so easily anymore. It holds great power to

some, yet very little to others, but either way it may reflect on you in ways you don't understand, realize or desire.

I've been told that the music I create holds a certain value to it, most often referred to as melancholic, and I always wondered what that meant. Not to myself, but to others. If it made someone cry, why did they cry? If it made them happy, why is that so? To myself the answer was always relatively easy: I hold my melancholic mood in extremely high regard, and I attempt to convey it through my music and visual art, because the melancholic mood makes me happy. Melancholic music and art makes my skin tingle in the most amazing ways, and I often refer to it as my own personal orgasm.

The goal was always to make people stop, listen and wonder what it is they hear. In the society that we live in, where social and societal addiction run amok, and attention spans run ever shorter, how do we sit someone down and close their eyes so that they may open their eyes to what they have lost. Much like Freud's theory on melancholy and mourning, perhaps there is a lost object within melancholy that we cannot discern because we never knew it was there in the first place, hence it was never lost in our minds.

In a society where perfection is highly valued, where does melancholy find its place? As there is no place, individuals in this state of mind may fall out of society, and therefore medical definitions like deep depression may taint an otherwise beautiful feeling, rendering the melancholiac a suffering individual with the symptoms of a rather downgrading diagnosis. It might be true that melancholy is a type of depression, but it also might be false, as human kind's greatest pet peeve is something they can't factually explain.

Exploring depression was impertinent to the thesis, because of these medical diagnoses. Hence we have explored both ends of the spectrum.

Therefore there is not just one answer to the thesis question, there are many, as seen through all the different lenses within philosophical theory and research methods. Value Theory (see 2.1) asks what the value in the word melancholy is. To say what that value is, is difficult all things considered. It certainly has had great value throughout history as a mysterious term with questionable origins i.e. the four humors, and will continue to be most likely for a very long time. In terms of interest, it certainly has a lot of value.

Axiology measures everything up against goodness; what things are good, and how good are they. In terms of melancholy, it comes down to whether or not it is a good thing. Traditionally axiology wonders whether “the objects of value are subjective psychological states, or objective states of the world”. Subjectively everyone has their own view on melancholy, and that might tear down the possibility of it being an objective state of the world. If melancholy was synonymous with for example nostalgia, it would be a good thing. If it was synonymous with depression, it would be a bad thing. Then it comes down to what the general conception of melancholy is, and that is still unclear.

Hedonism, as well as Paradise Engineering and the hedonistic imperative, bases everything on whether it brings pleasure or pain, where pleasure means it’s good, and pain means it’s bad. Again whether melancholy induces pain or pleasure depends on who asks. The medical industry would deem it depression i.e. pain, however according to TED ed or School of Life melancholy is not something to fear, but rather be joyous to experience. The question is if these positive points are enough to deem it pleasure.

Binary opposition (see 2.2) piqued my interest while I was reading *No Longer Human* (see 3.5.5.) third notebook part two. Binary oppositions are basically opposites. So if we take melancholy, what may be the opposite? Some say apathy, however this does not fit particularly well, as apathy is a lack of interest; a mild form of nihilism. Perhaps by finding the synonyms of melancholy, could we discern it’s antonym. Some possible synonyms are nostalgia, contemplation and even the sublime. According to antonym.com possible synonyms would be gloom, brooding, world-weariness, cheerlessness, depression, uncheerful and sombre, while possible antonyms may be happiness, natural elevation, psychotic depression, neurotic depression, high, euphoria, anticyclone, glad, good humour, ill humour, joyous, uncheerful, colourful, good, highland, cheerful, thoughtless, unthoughtfulness, frivolity, elation and blitheness. As seen here most of the antonyms and synonyms intertwine, as it seems the opinions varies drastically. Hence finding its binary opposition again is troublesome. Discovering whether or not we can feel melancholy without having felt the opposite first, is turning out to be challenging mostly due to the term being so hard to pin down.

In psychodynamic theory (see 2.3) the questions remains if melancholy is conscious or subconscious. Depending on the definition, it could be both, but

personally I would place melancholy in between the conscious and the subconscious, due to the fact that it is a feeling that most often escapes us. I flaunt my melancholy, even though perhaps I shouldn't, and that is a conscious choice based on self-reflection. The decision to do so makes it a conscious disposition, whilst the temper itself is a subconscious part of most of us.

In terms of societal addiction (see 2.4), where perfection and acceptance is most valued, melancholy has little space, if any. In my own experiences being of melancholic nature is viewed as puzzling and undesirable, and this all links to the possible definition of depression. No one wants to be around depressed personalities, unless they are your close friend or family. This is a preconception that stagnates the further understanding of melancholy as a state of mind, and in turn hides the individuals who align with the term whatever way it may be defined. Perhaps, as sadness was used in the caveman-days to help us get through sad states and connect with others by crying and being comforted, melancholy is that of this day and age. (See 2.7).

Nihilism (See 2.4.1) serves as the skeptical and apathic philosophical theory. It has little purpose other than to diagnose a certain type of philosopher with lack of interest and longing. If melancholy was deep depression, perhaps it would land graciously within nihilism, as nihilism and depression hold alot of the same qualities.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they refer to pleasure as helplessness and flight, that pleasure meant void of thought, essentially apathy at its finest. Comparing this idea of pleasure with f.ex. Hedonistic pleasure would be a rather interesting fight, however that is not the point of this thesis. If melancholy was pleasure, then according to Adorno it would synonymous with apathy. Apathy seems like a bad synonym, and even a bad antonym for melancholia, and therefore might melancholy be pain? What then is pain to Adorno, one might ask.

Negative Dialectics speak of concepts and their objects. If the concept is not identical to the object, its not suited to define the object. Furthermore, they say that if we are aware of this defect in the philosophy where the concept is the only thing defined and understood, then we must find a new form of philosophy to remedy the fact. Perhaps melancholy is simply a concept with no object, and the current philosophies are unable to define and understand its whole being.

Bourgeois aesthetics measure melancholy by what it is not. To define melancholy we would have to discern what not-melancholy is, and this is not as easy as finding

what not-beauty is. In the same way that binary opposition needs the opposite to define a term, in bourgeois aesthetics the definition of what it is not is what we need to discover. Furthermore, within coenaesthesia there is a way of defining terms by the relation between subject and object, and the affect received. Hence discovering what objects are melancholic would be pertinent, however that is again a difficult task to achieve. It is subject to personal opinion, in the same way that beauty is, but in a much broader scale as beauty in society has a standard to measure up to. Melancholy has no standard, apart from the medical definition (which is depression). If then, by utilizing personal opinion, I could choose an object to be melancholic based on it making me feel melancholic, then I would choose a tree with fallen leaves in the autumn. The relationship between me (the subject) and the tree (the object) is the definition of melancholy through coenaesthesia, purely based on the fact that it makes me feel melancholic. Some feelings however are from within, and the question would be if this feeling of melancholy arriving at the sight of this tree is a projection of inner reflection, or if it is created purely by the tree. The definition once again eludes us.

Empirically, the search for melancholy and societal addiction continues. Societal addiction is very evident in *Nosedive* and *Black Swan*. The continuous search for perfection and acceptance, and of course capitalistic comforts, is most often what drives us as a society, however unhealthy it may be. *Black Swan* may be a cautionary tale about perfection, but *Nosedive* is a cautionary tale about the future, where social media is taking over our real lives and becomes reality.

Equilibrium has a much darker footprint. Of course feelings is what makes humans do terrible things, and if those feelings were removed, wouldn't it in theory create a harmonious world? However that leaves us vulnerable to dictators, no society will ever be perfect. Thinking about David Pearce and his Paradise Engineering; would that also be exploited in a possible future like *Equilibrium*? It may be the cautionary tale of loss. The loss of our humanity.

No Longer Human, as a semi-autobiographical novel, speaks to a lot of truths. Mostly because it is based on true events, and who are we to dispute someone's reality. Reality is sometimes subjective, and how it is rendered to others may be tainted by perception, however it is always rooted in our common reality. Dazai's story is a sad one, and it ended with his suicide not long after this book was published. Knowing that, the contents of the book takes on a whole new meaning, at least it did

to me. The words of the author, before knowing this, in fact impressed me and made me think. His deep thoughts were mesmerizing, and I wondered how someone could be so insightful, yet so afraid of conflict and human contact at the same time. Perhaps insightfulness is melancholia disguised.

So what is the essence of melancholy? Husserl states that “by reflecting over how different types of objects makes themselves known to us in our experience, we should be able to clarify these objects’ essential characteristics”. Reminiscent of many philosophical theories, f.ex. Bourgeois aesthetics and negative dialectics, it is again about finding what melancholy is by finding melancholy’s true essence. Melancholy is not an object, but if we were to take melancholy as a metaphorical object, how does it make itself known to us? Through affect, perhaps. Is melancholy’s ‘essential characteristic’ then the affect it has on us? Maybe it is induced in us by our environment, and therefore does not exist within us, but as a synergy between us (the subject) and the outer world (the object). (See 2.6).

This leads us into intersubjectivity, which describes how the world is changed by how the world is seemingly oriented towards the other person, and towards the Self. Melancholy could be the link between the Self and the Other.

Viewed through the hermeneutic lense, melancholy could be the result of our history, national and cultural inheritance, and our continuous interactions with others, creating our ‘horizon’. The horizon contains all of us, and it is always changing, just as melancholy changes indefinitely. Hence remaining impossible to define.

5.1 The Qualitative Study

I was surprised to see the answers to the questions in the interview (See 3.6). These are people I already know, and I thought I had an inclination of how they may answer, but they both generally deviated from my expectations. Their views on melancholy was quite different from my own, sometimes I had more to say and sometimes they had more to say. The most interesting turn of events was that halfway into the inquiry, they started doubting their own definitions of melancholy, which was the first question.

This has made me curious as to what a quantitative study would assemble. With such variations between only three individuals, and after realizing melancholy has so many

pathways, it would be interesting to see what would happen if one control group received a questionnaire with freedom to answer whatever they wanted, and another control group received 5-10 options to choose from.

5.2 Conclusion

At the start of the thesis the goal certainly was to define melancholia, but here at the end I understand that it is no simple task. Exploring it has showed me how mysterious and elusive this term is, and how history has shaped it in many different ways and into many grooves.

Utilizing societal addiction to create an artistic interdisciplinary approach to exploring the essence of melancholy was in my opinion quite successful. Even though defining melancholy has failed, exploring it through all these theoretical perspectives and methods has taught me that not everything needs to end in something. Some things are open ended, and this is one of those things. That doesn't mean it was in vain, because I am still closer, and the exploration will continue.

Societal addiction is something that should be more spoken of. Social addiction is certainly a topic on many tongues, but the distinction between the two is seldomly clear. Just like the distinction between melancholy and depression. The latter distinction is something I will share, hopefully educating as many as possible, as to the fact that it's alright to feel less than perfect, it's okay to feel less than happy, and in doing so we will still be fine, only more human.

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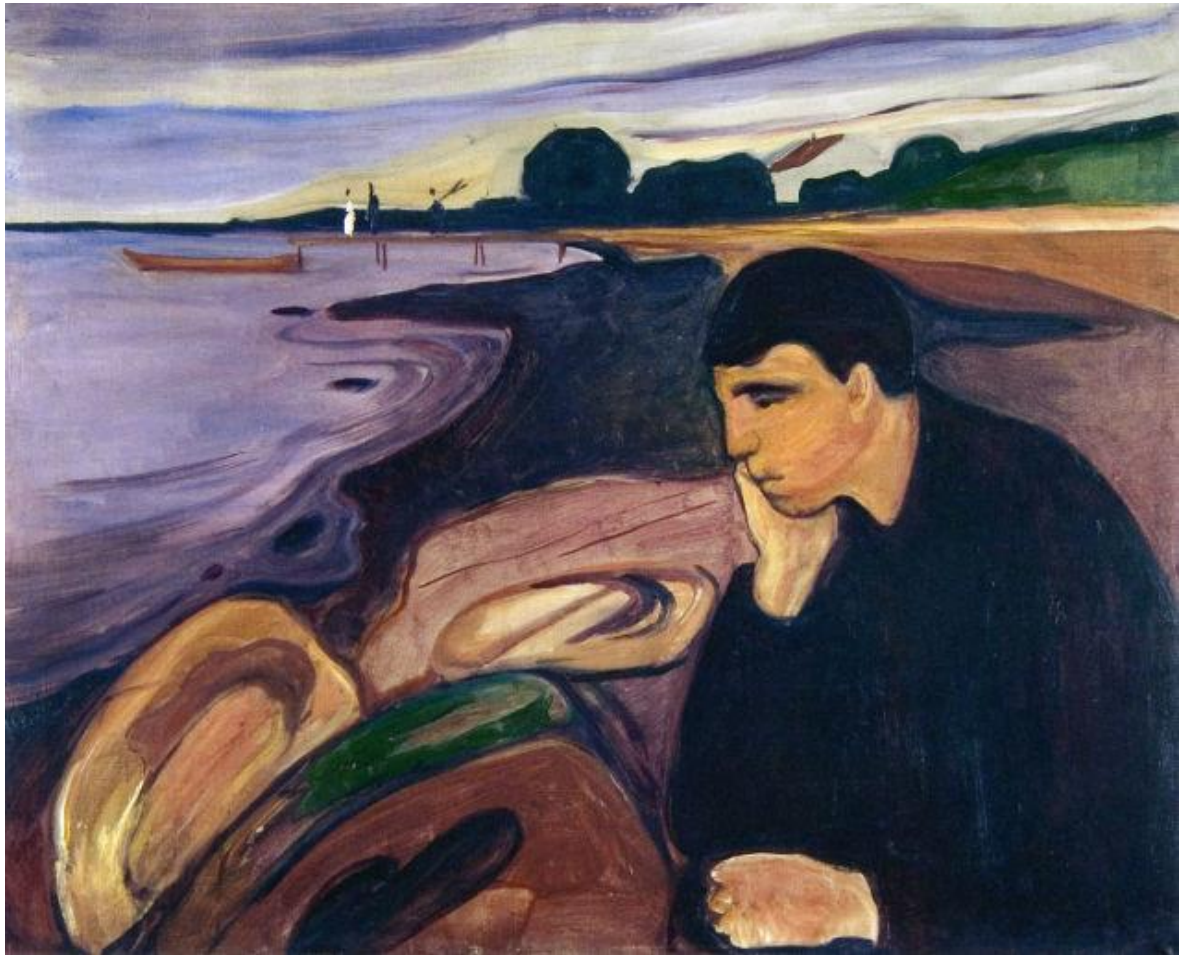


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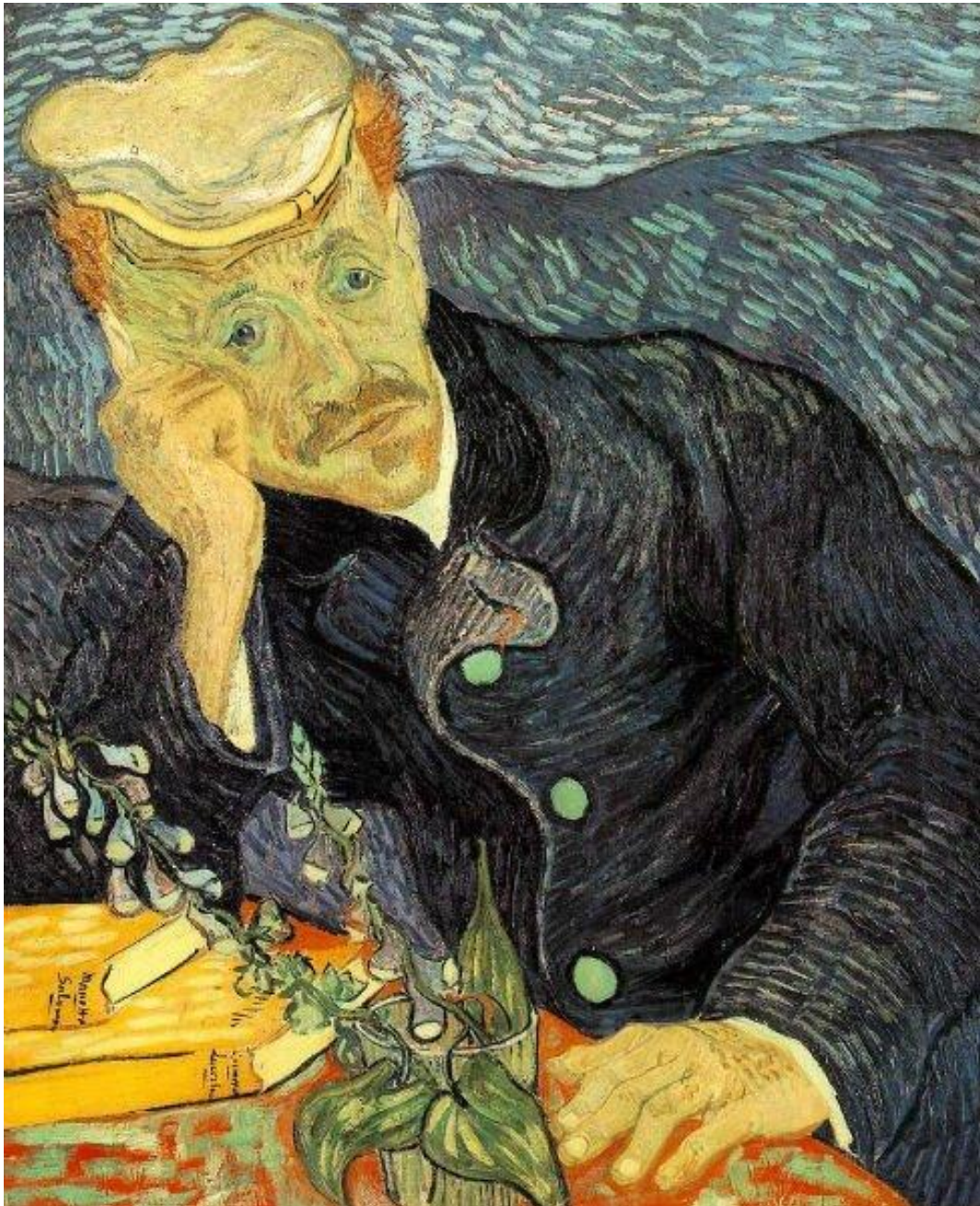


Fig. 9

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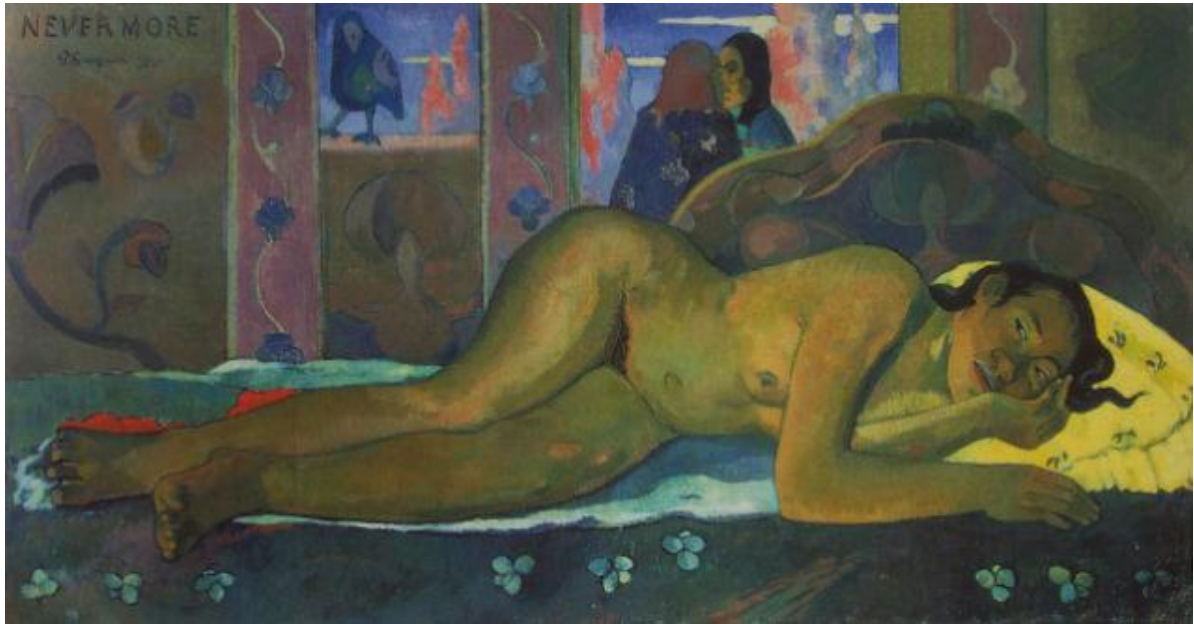


Fig. 10

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Fig. 11

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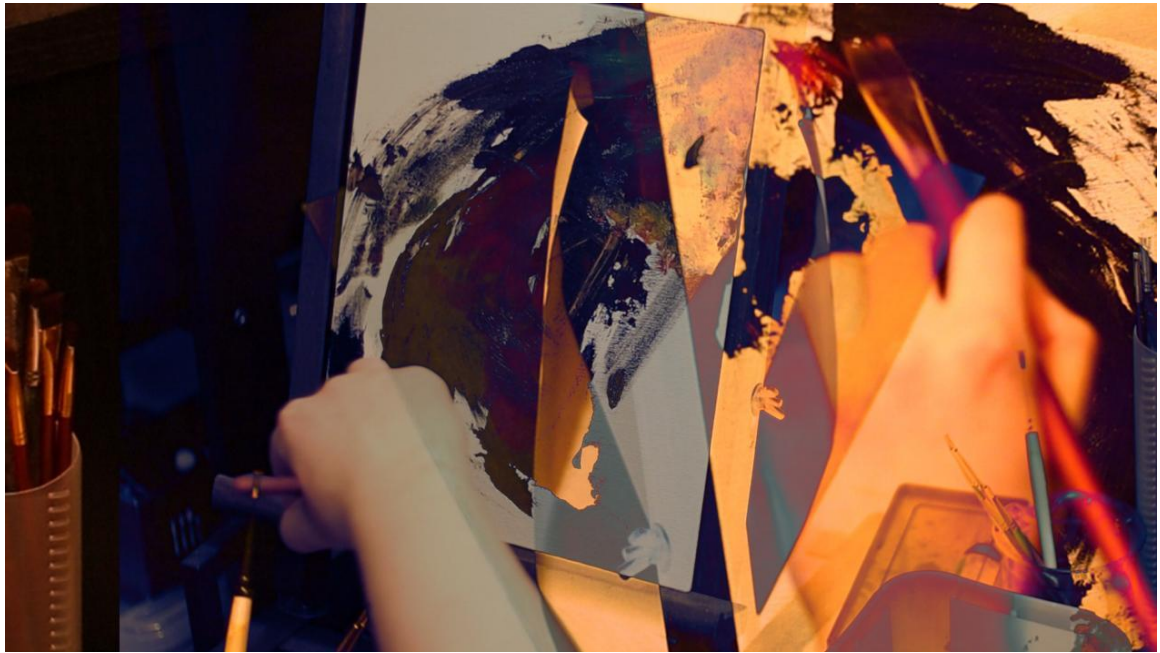


Fig. 12

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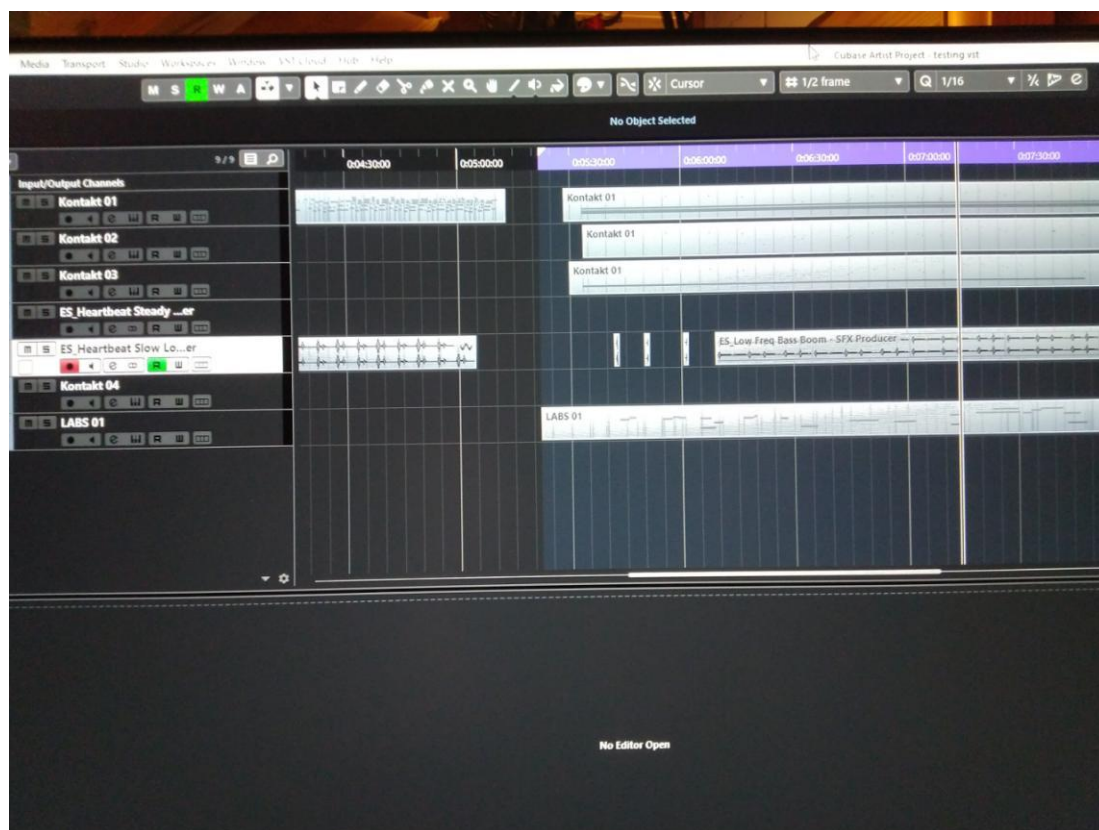


Fig. 13

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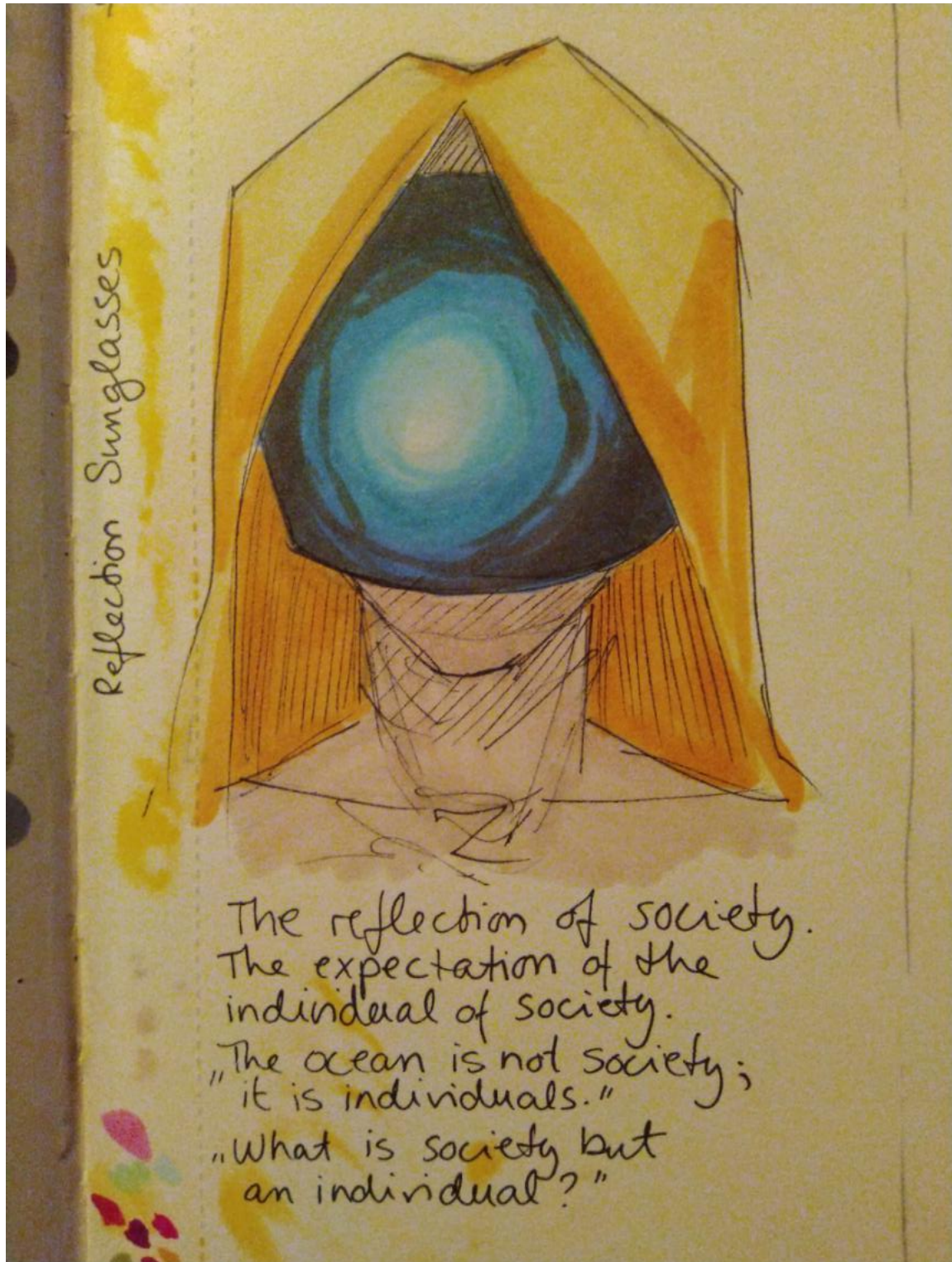


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