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**MELANCHOLIA AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN MUSIC, ART AND LITERATURE**

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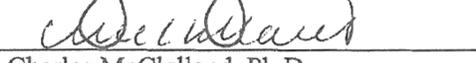
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**MELANCHOLIA AND CONSCIOUSNESS  
IN MUSIC, ART AND LITERATURE**

**by**

**Kenneth Martin Alewine, BA, MS, MA**

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## **Dedication**

For my mother Kathryn Rhea McElwaine, whose middle name means “bubbling spring,”  
and for my father, Murry Lee Alewine, who immersed me since I was a toddler in his  
electronic music studios at school.

## Acknowledgements

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early expressionist works, which eventually led me to the composer's interest in the unconscious as a source of artistic inspiration. I also owe my thanks to the British Museum for releasing its images freely for use in this work, most of all Dürer's *Melencolia I*, and I owe a special gratitude to Laura at the Courtauld Gallery in London, for approving my original photo of Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* for inclusion in this work. I also express my thanks to Scala Firenze for licensing *The Starry Night* and to the National Gallery for the use of its images, including Goya's *The Sleep of Reason*. Most of all I would like to thank my beloved mother for helping me get through the very rough times at the IMH, including one heart attack, two bouts of vertigo, and one minor depression, for which to God I am very thankful never grew back into the full-blown melancholia that nearly killed me in my mid-twenties. Thus, unwittingly following Leonardo's method of observation, it is with *experience* that I began building this difficult work years ago.

# **Melancholia and Consciousness in Music, Art and Literature**

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*Abstract: Melancholia and Consciousness in Music, Art and Literature* is an interdisciplinary exploration of artists' melancholia as a state of consciousness across the visual arts, music, and literature, from the times of the Hippocratic writers to the emergence of the unconscious as a source of artistic inspiration. The three major sections of the dissertation, Ancient Melancholies, Modern Melancholies, and Future Melancholies, are structured throughout by the interplay among three threads (or perspectives) in the history of artists' melancholia: religious-philosophical, artistic, and medical. Each of the five chapters are based on a certain theme, what I call a figure, which represents various conceptions of melancholia across the arts at different time periods. For example, Chapter 1 is titled "The Melancholics," which is the figure the ancients used to understand melancholia and its relationship to the arts and creativity. The flow of the dissertation ultimately tracks the development of the artistic personality first as a melancholic figure emerging in ancient times, next as a visual polymath at the beginning of the Renaissance, then as a musical Faust during the Romantic period, next as a *flâneur* rising from the detritus of modernity, and finally as the melancholic *automaton* of the future. These figures are shaped by melancholic processes that are both constructive and destructive, and by the early twentieth century they follow the submersion of melancholia into the dark Freudian unconscious, where the symbolic life of dreams arose alongside an associative logic. Even though melancholia no longer held magisterial respect among physicians in the twentieth century, it did not leave the culture which it had shaped for over 2500 years. Psychiatric medicine nonetheless recast the artistic personality once again when it renamed melancholia as a disorder of mood called depression, a diagnosis that remains controversial in the twenty-first century.

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## Introduction

Melancholia has resurged in the debates among researchers, physicians, historians, philosophers, artists, musicians, and writers over its nature, its drug-resistant incurability, and its poorly defined status in medicine after 2500 years of serving as a mainframe for medical and philosophical investigation of both disease and emergent human consciousness. Even after being re-classed as depression and almost forgotten, after the many electro-convulsive interventions to jumpstart the mind when talk therapies were ineffective, and after the countless medications have brought so little relief to so many who suffer from its lethal effects, the ancient problem of melancholia, even after its upgrade to depression, remains unconquered. Because the long history of melancholia and melancholy is over 2500 years, the two terms have been used interchangeably by researchers, philosophers, artists, poets, musicians and physicians, thus creating significant ambiguity. Unlike some melanchologists, I do not attempt to tease out separate definitions for the two terms. Some scholars have done so to suit their own preferences, usually to support attempts to make a connection between creativity and melancholy, primarily to filter out those creatives who suffer from serious mental disorder like melancholic psychosis. The attempt to define terms in this way is complicated by the fact that many eminent painters, poets, composers and musicians throughout Western history have been diagnosed with psychotic melancholia, severe mania, depression, manic depression, and schizophrenia, all harmful conditions with long psychiatric histories. Thus I use the two terms contextually throughout this work because that is how history has treated them. It was not until the nineteenth century that psychiatrists began to use the term *depression* to separate it from its undeniable humoral

precursor, thus robbing melancholia, as William Styron has noted, from its “magisterial” status.

After its emergence in Greece, it would not be until the beginning of the Early Modern period that Aristotle’s question about the relationship between melancholia and artistic excellence would be taken up in earnest again and with great intensity in the work of Florentine Platonist and physician-musician Marsilio Ficino in his famous medical treatise *La Vita Triplici*. Melancholia surged as a fashionable illness and sublime poetic mainstay during the Romantic period, until its abrupt breakdown with Freud at the turn of the twentieth century. Melancholia has morphed into many things in the twenty-first century. It has also retained its protean nature from its ancient medical past as a recurring health problem with many remedies but no cure.

This multilinear work is animated by a figural conception of melancholia. Broader than mere personae, these figures have represented melancholia throughout history as abstractions that have illuminated and refolded back into Western culture across its art forms and sense modes since Aristotelian times. Each chapter of this work features the same three threads that represent three principle discourses on melancholia: 1. religion-philosophy, 2. the arts, 3. medicine. These threads thus track the development of the artistic personality first as a melancholic figure emerging in ancient times, next as a visual polymath at the beginning of the Renaissance, then as a musical Faust during the Romantic period, next as a Flâneur during the age of modernity, and finally as the melancholic *automata* of the future. These melancholic figures serve as chapter titles and form the armature of the dissertation. Chapter 1 begins with the melancholies of Antiquity and introduces the melancholic as a personality type. Chapter 2 explores the

revival of melancholia and the rise of the multitalented visual artist in the Early Modern period. Chapter 3 introduces the musical Faust, turning to music and melancholic madness and the role they play in the development of the artistic personality. The mad composer is a phenomenon in music literature that peaked during the German Romantic movement, when music was considered both cure and cause of mental illness. This idea culminated in an iconic Faustian critique of music in the twentieth century, involving the composer Arnold Schoenberg and his rival Thomas Mann. Chapter 4 introduces the literary *flâneur* as a late modern instance of the melancholic personality, including its place in the new world of psychiatric medicine and the emergent term *depression* that eventually replaced melancholia. The final section is entitled *Future Melancholies*, which opens with Chapter 5, “The Automaton.” This chapter explores the oracular [predictive] nature of melancholic consciousness as a musical instrument that reveals a tension between organic and mechanical processes of artistic creativity. These processes follow the submersion of melancholia into the dark Freudian unconscious, where the symbolic life of dreams arises alongside an associative logic. Finally, the artistic personality is upgraded once again, as medicine renames melancholia, recast as a disorder of mood called depression.

The technologies that became associated with melancholia in its ancient past literally surrounded artists, scholars, and musicians as depicted in engravings and paintings by artists who used creative tools to cope with melancholia’s strong effects when other methods of coping were of little benefit. Music and consciousness also become inextricably linked in Romantic era philosophy of mind, revealing the intense anxiety between the contemplative and the automated that was later depersonalized in

Kraepelin's medical taxonomy and dissociated in T. S. Eliot's poetics. At the turn of the century the unconscious was the source of artistic inspiration for major figures of the expressionist movement like Kandinsky and Schoenberg. Even though melancholia was eventually replaced with the term depression, it persisted in the Western culture that it had defined for over 2500 years, dropping into the unconscious as an inexplicable fear and sadness, moving into the deepest regions of the mind, where the strong forces of medicine, art, and religion reconfigure the ancient malaise once again.

Why is life given to those with no future,  
those God has surrounded with difficulties?

I cannot eat for sighing;  
my groans pour out like water.  
What I always feared has happened to me.  
What I dreaded has come true.  
I have no peace, no quietness.  
I have no rest; only trouble comes.

Job 3:23–26

Remember my affliction and my homelessness,  
the wormwood and the poison.  
I continually remember them  
and have become depressed.  
Yet I call this to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD's faithful love  
we do not perish,  
for His mercies never end.  
They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness!

Lamentations 3:19–3:23

## ANCIENT MELANCHOLIES

### Chapter 1 The Melancholics

#### *“hoi melancholikoi”*

Melancholia began in the chaos of the ancient heavens. In Genesis 1:2, the Holy Spirit *broods* over the deep waters of the *tohu wa-bohu*, a formless void of non-being in the immeasurable moment imagined by gap theorists, before the light was made or any creature walked by its illumination. It is sound that breaks the thick barrier of darkness in the following verse, when Elohim speaks the command “Let there be light.”<sup>1</sup> The ancient sages believed the voice of Elohim was like a musical instrument that played the universe into existence with the notes of “divine speech,”<sup>2</sup> pitting light against formless darkness. The most iconic image of sound affecting oppressive darkness comes much later in the Biblical narratives, in the Book of I Samuel, when David plays his lyre to drive away the evil spirit from Saul and soothe his anguish. Like the Hebrews, the ancient Greeks discovered that deep anguish could be diminished by the powerful influences of sound and music, which emanated silently from concentric spheres in the Greek cosmos, ordered by mathematical elegance and musical fortitude. Ancient psychiatrists prescribed music as an antidote to soothe disconsolate moods, a practice that was revived

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<sup>1</sup> As this narrative opens the Genesis account, sound precedes light, suggesting that before a thing can be seen it must be heard. The rabbinical and kabalistic traditions hold that music was voiced in the *Lashon HaKodesh* or “holy tongue” of Elohim, who created the universe through musical speech. The Greeks thought the universe was made of harmonic spheres. It is easy to see that in the ancient world the universe had a musical beginning for Semitic and western cultures in the Mediterranean.

<sup>2</sup> Avraham Arie Trugman, *The Mystical Power of Music* (Southfield, MI: Targum Press, 2005). In his chapter “Torah and the Song of the Creator” the rabbi writes, “The normative tradition as brought in *Pirkei Avot* is that the instrument through which God created the world was Divine speech.”

in the Medieval and Renaissance periods and continues today in various forms of clinical music therapy. Plato was ambivalent about the healing powers of music and believed certain musical modes agitated the mind, similar to the way the sibyls entered states of manic *enthusiasmos* or what Plato called “divine frenzy.” As an invisible *thing* voiced by instruments, music produced outbreaks of inspiration among the poets and prophets, stirring up the passions Plato feared, calming the dark terrors David understood with his lyre.

Melancholia emerged in the Greek world like a musical chord, a triad, one mystical, creative, medical. The ancient Hebrews did not use the term melancholia to define states of psychotic anguish, divine inspiration or interminable lassitude. It was the Hippocratic writers who invented *melancholia* as a medical term to describe a disease that afflicted both mind and body. Thus melancholia began as a medical discussion over 2500 years ago, generating a body of literature that philosophers and physicians and laypersons contributed to with equal authority. Melancholia was named after the mysterious substance called black bile (*melaina cholē*). The dark substance was a perplexing fluid that was filtered by the systems of the body, moving in the veins until finally settling in the spleen, the organ associated with melancholia. When overheated the black bile generated imbalances that classical physicians treated with herbs and diets. Outside Greece in much of the ancient world of Mesopotamia, Egypt and India, where Ayurveda traditions flourished, physicians also believed bodily substances were in a state of imbalance when they indicated disease and could be stabilized by herbal remedies and bloodletting, common practices that continued in medicine across cultures for millennia. But the Hippocrateans outlined the prevailing fundamental symptoms of melancholia as a

medical illness featuring long-term “fright or despondency,”<sup>3</sup> a sickness they believed was caused by a surplus of overheated black bile in the melancholic humor.

The physicians cultivated the term melancholia in various medical treatises and set its boundaries as a rationalistic explanation of disease, but it was the philosophers who developed the understanding of melancholia as a temperament, as a state of mind that inspired poets, artists, scholars, and statesmen as much as it afflicted them.

Melancholia was the most substantial part of the ancient medical theory of the four humors (blood, phlegm, yellow and black bile), which featured certain volatile qualities (cold, hot, dry, moist) that were influenced by the four elements (earth, fire, air, water), which generated the four temperaments (melancholic, choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic).

The structure of humoral theory is polyphonic, a quartet for certain. It was thus the fluids that moved on the body to excite the four qualities, which inspired the mind from within and that were subject to the four elements that influenced the mind from without. The theory in this way may be seen as a cycle that was thought to generate certain temperaments or personality types. The doctrine of the humors was a system that explained mind as a condition of body, as a balance of dynamic fluids when the system worked properly and an imbalance when the processes were out of order.<sup>4</sup> To restore health and bring balance back to the body, the physicians prescribed therapies with qualities opposite to those of the affliction, so that, for instance, the dry and cold

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<sup>3</sup> Hippocrates, "The Internet Classics Archive: Aphorisms by Hippocrates," *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*, 2014, accessed September 24, 2014, <http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/aphorisms.6.vi.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps vestiges of this theory remain in the idea of mental illness as a medical condition caused by chemical imbalances in the brain.

condition thought to be the state of melancholia would be treated with moist and hot remedies.

Ancient medicine specified a way of describing consciousness and the complex relationship between mind and body. Thus, the parameters of early consciousness developed partly around those of disease, so that melancholia defined not just an illness but also an ontology, a way of being. Those who were afflicted with melancholia were treated for a physiological condition, though remedies were difficult and unreliable. Yet melancholia did not end there. There was the more ancient connection between the body and the stars and planets, the macrocosmic influences that affected character and shaped the intellect from afar. These astrological influences were thought to control all aspects of daily life. Melancholia was associated with the planet Saturn, a cold power and distant world on the very edges of the ancient solar system with seven planets, including the sun and the moon, as orbiters of the earth in a geocentric universe. Elementalism and the four principle qualities, though the Chinese sages recognized more, also preceded the doctrine of the humors and helped to organize its parameters by the time of Hippocrates.

The ancients believed that melancholia was a deep and lasting sorrow without cause. Pseudo-Aristotle, or likely Theophrastus,<sup>5</sup> a student follower of Aristotle who may also have been a physician, wondered why the great poets and the very imaginative seemed always to be melancholics. The poets and dramatists also wondered why creative people were prone to melancholia and mania. Plato believed melancholia manifested as a poetic frenzy or divine madness, but that it did not take the pathological form. Physicians described the mysterious condition as a bodily fluid that influenced the temperaments,

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<sup>5</sup> Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humors* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2007), 116.

sanguine or melancholy, phlegmatic or choleric. Yet it is the melancholic temperament more than any other that has been explored across the wide body of literature, music, and visual art throughout the ages. These technologies, music, writing, and art, have literally surrounded creative people who have expressed for centuries the dual nature of melancholia, a nature that is paradoxically generative and destructive, the unstable stability that one can read in pseudo-Aristotle.

In the fourth century BC, after Aristotle had been teaching in the Lyceum, Theophrastus began to write medical treatises on medicinal plants and about the hot and the cold. For Aristotelians the melancholic humor vacillated between the hot and cold, hot when over-stimulated by the passions and cold when the melancholic experienced states of immobilizing fear and incomprehensible sadness. Susceptible to whichever temperature, whether hot or cold, the melancholic was for the Aristotelians also prone to poetic inspiration, as pseudo-Aristotle argued in his short but very famous medical treatise in the *Problemata*.<sup>6</sup> It is his medical treatise that has engendered many others much longer for over 2500 years. Some scholars and psychiatrists view the text through modern lenses, filtering pseudo-Aristotle's arguments through contemporary conceptions of bipolarity, rebuilding the *manike* he describes as overheated bile into a retro conception of mania as the essential characteristic for generating creative work, which is of course reductive. The divine madness pseudo-Aristotle refers to is not limited to manic episodes as such might be described today by DSM culture in its ever-expanding

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle does not mean when the melancholic is in the throes of an illness that *perittos*, gifted inspiration, occurs. By the *perritos*, or as Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl define the term, the "abnormality," he means a disposition. Thus inspiration does not come from disease but from nature. *Perritos* is also physiologically defined and thus the paradox between health and melancholia remains.

taxonomies of mental illness. Creative work of the caliber Aristotle refers to in his treatise is not produced in states of mania or melancholia or in the vacillations between the two; it arises from the instability of the black bile, in a state of balanced imbalance, where the divine madness itself is a contradiction as much as it is a condition for excellence. For pseudo-Aristotle, excellent artistic work arises from divine madness, and this may be so via a state of intense inspiration that cannot be approached without serious focus and discipline as a poet or artist. His question as posed does not explore why melancholia leads to outstanding creative works. It asks why creative people tend also to be melancholics. The mechanics of the question are not difficult. It is the mechanics of melancholia, or the lack of them, that have driven the inquiry for over two and a half millennia.

This is an ancient question that is still without a definitive answer. Most likely this is the case because the problem originated in medical science as a philosophical question about mind and body, creative being, and artistic practice, not just medicine. Over this perplexing issue from antiquity, the three forces (medicine, philosophy, and art) have resisted each other for millennia. The philosophers argued the nature of consciousness and melancholic being. The poets explored the creative possibilities of melancholic experience. The physicians focused on the four humors thought to be present in the body, coursing through it systems as binaries, either in balanced or imbalanced states. Thus melancholia moved and immobilized the ancient world through the simultaneous effects of these three enigmatic forces: daunting celestial influences, artistic inspiration, and mysterious humors. These forces recast in more iconic terms as stars, voices, and fluids—which title the sections in this chapter and serve thematically as

sections in all chapters—were arranged within a much larger worldview that was highly musical and explained the formations of a harmonic cosmos.

## STARS

Ancient cosmology, whether Hebraic or Greek, possessed a mathematical elegance and a prophetic structure, an *episteme* and a *tekhnè*, a theoretical domain and a practical, hands-on wisdom, two modes of knowledge production in Greek culture that continued as new forms in the revival of melancholia at the opening of the Renaissance and later on as a foil to Greek rationalism in the Enlightenment. The musical construction of the cosmos, a paragon for the lowly earth and its mutable outcomes, was intensely understood by the poets, philosophers, and musicians of antiquity. The doctrine of the humors animated the universe in the ancient world and set a medical standard for explaining mental illness and melancholia throughout the ages, a tradition that resisted modernization until the emergence of the new medical technologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>7</sup>

As an origin narrative, the heavens as a musical cosmos connected the mind and the body in powerful ways. The condition of the body and its fluctuating humors affected the mind, and many ancient intellectuals believed consciousness was moved by inexplicable phenomena among the stars, wonders which could be witnessed in the heavens as portents and expressed through the creative technologies of writing, music, and the visual arts. The conception of melancholia as a consciousness that could be moved by luminous celestial influences, powerful creative inspirations, and strong bodily

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<sup>7</sup> The progression of melancholia has enabled it to retain its enigmatic status despite being replaced in recent times by the terms depression and anxiety.

flows compelled the Aristotelian writers to associate the artistic temperament with melancholia's luminous qualities. It would not be so again until the times of the great Persian physicians in the ninth century, and again in the early Renaissance among astrologer physicians like Marsilio Ficino, the famous Florentine Platonist who wrote a medical treatise on melancholia that was very influential.

Before the artificial separation of the disciplines, when knowledge production was more unified and eclectic, the celestial influences, creative inspiration, and the doctrine of the humors worked polyphonically as simultaneous voices vying for prominence among the works of ancient poets, philosophers, and physicians. In their unique ways these three powers influenced each other and originated the classical conceptions of melancholia that dominated medicine and its relationship to the arts for over 2500 years, generating a vast body of literature about melancholia and its effects on consciousness, birthing an ancient self that emerged as something more modern than we might think.

These ancient conceptions of melancholia arose from a musical universe. The musical cosmos was the highest expression of the Platonic forms, evidence of the *episteme* and its theoretical abstractions that complimented the *technai*, or the applied knowledge of the artists and craftsmen. The Greeks did not differentiate theoretical knowledge from practical application as is done today. Medicine was a form of wisdom that required a way of knowing things and with an order of doing them that was prescribed by methods and procedure, qualities which have continued in modern medicine. In the *Timaeus*, Plato likened good health to being musical, the body in harmony with itself, and bad health he likened to the amusical, the body out of tune, its fluids operating in imbalanced states. Yet over time, the focus of melancholic suffering

dropped from the firmament of stars to the earth, becoming like a heavy element, an immobilizing *thing*, restraining energies tied to objects and time, nostalgia and bitterness, love, madness, and anger. Early in ancient Levant and later in Greek texts, melancholia became associated with writing as a craft, a *tekhnè*, an awareness of the bitter and the sweet, key sensibilities that over time enabled a literary formation of attachments and deep nostalgic awareness. Melancholia also gradually became connected with Saturn and its sluggish influences that weighed down the spirit with physical heaviness, a density that could be felt in the body, the new melancholic universe, one just as mysterious but much more portable than the macrocosms from which it emerged. Deep melancholia became a lowness that delayed productive plans and stifled the energy to do anything, fragmenting works, leaving others unfinished. Yet the philosophers and artists, alongside the medical investigation that had been underway for some time, eagerly explored the relationship between melancholia and madness. In the ancient world, melancholia was the frontier for understanding mind and body and its strange interactions. It formed the foundations for the theory of the humors and gave medicine a framework from which to build its theories of the body and its effects on the mind. The microcosm of human consciousness and the mutable earth, the realm of uncertainty and instability, were through the body joined to the musical spheres beyond the lower circles of the moon, the macrocosm of the stars and planets, the dominion of the eternal forms. The origins of melancholia as a manifestation that could be read in the heavens was a tradition revived and amplified by the ninth century Persian astrologer Abû Ma'shar, who first associated the stars with colors and humors, and specifically the cold and dry black bile with the planet Saturn. To be Saturnine was to be in the grip of a mood, subject to fear and

despondency without cause, a lowness of spirits, dark energies and creative frenzies that worked against each other owing to an imbalance in the complex flow of the humors, dynamic conditions of the bodily fluids that physicians thought generated certain states of mind, representing the first instance of the mind-body problem long before Descartes had re-imagined it in his philosophy during the early Enlightenment.

Melancholia was ultimately about sorrow, though as a term it encompassed almost any number of descriptors of mental illness. Sorrow was also the oldest language of the musical cosmos, and the philosophers believed that musical modes were strongly connected to emotions. The literary forms of sorrow originated in the Near East in ancient texts like the Book of Enoch and the Book of Job. Literary sorrow does not appear here as a metaphorical statement entirely. The Book of Enoch connected the technology of writing as an art, as an application, with sorrowful qualities that have defined melancholia for centuries. Long before the books of the Torah existed, Job read the stars as stories spread out in the sky, as did many of the wise in the ancient world. Widely considered the oldest Biblical text, the Book of Job mentions the constellations and the Hebrew zodiac as a practice of watching the cosmos, looking for signs in the heavens during times of great suffering and uncertainty. Scholars believe the Book of Job was written during the times of the patriarchs, around the beginning of the second millennium BC. This was the time of Abraham and moon worship in the great city-state of Ur, where Sumerian scribes and mathematicians worked under celestial influences, the planets and the stars, recording knowledge of the constellations in cuneiform to track complex omens in the night sky and to still their uncertainty. Even in the earthbound throes of immobilizing pain, Job was awed by the mysteries of the heavens above.

Looking to the lights of the zodiac (in Hebrew the *mazzaroth*), he contemplated astronomical signs from God that rendered stories from distant futures and ancient paradises.<sup>8</sup> At the end of his melancholia, Job heard the voice of God responding to his sorrows in the whirlwind, presented in the complexities of the stars as inexplicable riddles he could not answer any more than he could understand the severity of his suffering. In this way melancholia was a riddle, emerging in the literature of the ancient world as an unexplainable thing that is nonetheless deeply experienced. The Book of Job begins as an exploration of this sorrow, with the imagining of a thing to be greatly feared moving in on a man who was upright and without blemish. Loss and physical suffering overwhelm Job's speeches to his critic-friends as he challenges God to explain his misery and endless wrestling with misfortune wrought against him by the adversary. Job's art is the work of spoken words, his appeals to a critical audience that at first regards him from a distance, unable to approach the severity of his incomprehensible afflictions. Job is mangled, unrecognizable, somehow a foreigner deported to a distant land unreachable and unknowable. This is the vast, cold, silent melancholia of the deepest space imagined in Hebrew cosmology, at the very edge of the canopy and the stars sited in it.

Written in Aramaic and surviving in Ethiopian fragments from the second century BC and in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Book of Enoch emerged from the pseudepigraphon as a revered text among the early Jewish writings and was also quoted by Jude, lending the text great authenticity as an influential outsider from the Biblical canon.<sup>9</sup> The Book of

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<sup>8</sup> (Job 9:7-10) It is God "... who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south; who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number." (Isaiah 46:10) "I make known the end from the beginning, and from ancient times what is still to come . . . ."

<sup>9</sup> Some researchers believe that the text is much older than the second century BC and that it greatly precedes the early traditions of humanistic practice that were being formed by Aristotelian

Enoch is a kind of mystical travelogue detailing the adventures of a great prophet who was translated into the heavens because of his righteousness, the very righteousness Job appeals to in his complaints against melancholia, against the inexplicable calm of the stars and the judgments of his so-called friends.<sup>10</sup> In the Book of Enoch there is a relationship between the technologies of expression, from writing, to metallurgy and cosmetics, which the author connects to melancholic suffering during a time before these technologies were practiced as arts.<sup>11</sup> Developed in the medium of words, melancholia finds its central contradiction here, as the bitter and the sweet, since in its literary form of words it must be inspiring and prone to expression but by the very tools that aid its generation it is also as terrifying, unimaginable and lethal. This is the paradox that Enoch brings to view, the corrupting influence imposed on humankind by the Watchers who possess the knowledge of the ancient dark arts. Specifically, Enoch attributes the art of writing to Penemue, one of the fallen watchers, who taught humankind the use of ink and paper and a sense of “the bitter and the sweet,”<sup>12</sup> a fundamental binary that vibrates throughout the centuries in melancholia’s cosmic literature. Hippocrates believed that melancholia could be explained as sadness without cause, a phrase that has circulated

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and Platonic forces. It is often speculated that Enoch may have been the very first book, even predating the Book of Job.

<sup>10</sup> To gaze up into the heavens for signs of hope in the constellations was a privilege for learned men like Job. Salvation was also directional and the Psalms refer to Elohim as “the lifter of heads.” Finding salvation for the ancient Hebrews meant going through tribulation, or narrow straits; it was a configuration like the stars, vast but very personal. Worship meant hearing God but not seeing him, as there was a prohibition given to Moses for the Israelites against worshiping Elohim’s visual form, which could not be revealed, and against physical presences and statues in general in the high places, idols that were silent and dumb, and had no real voice.

<sup>11</sup> It is only implied by Enoch that writers might be destroyed by the voices they heard and the strange influences native to writing as an expressive technology. As a prophet he would have expected to hear from Elohim and perhaps assume that others with similar techniques might hear from other voices.

<sup>12</sup> Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels: Including the Fallen Angels* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1994; repr., 1967), 222.

among the generations of medical treatises since antiquity. Yet this was not Job's sorrow. Job experienced the loss of his children, the curses of his wife, the loss of his health, his sanity, and the loss of all his wealth, which was sizeable. He endured the pain of physical afflictions, diseases and boils that attacked his body and afflicted his mind. He begins his account, before his long speeches to his friends, with a famous lamentation, that what he had feared had come upon him, imagining dark things before they happened, like a giant continuous, insurmountable wave. But this is sorrow due to many causes, to severe losses and great mourning. Job's entry into the core of extreme suffering, as if to probe its dimensions and know its shapes and colors, is a literary pathway to an inexplicable state. It cannot be known or felt through words unless it has been known or felt.

If melancholia could be a heroic condition for the poets and Aristotelian writers, it also could lead to agitations of mind in the ancient prophets, relayed in visions, odes and oracular pronouncements. Some physicians thought the sibyls were mad, not divine. Plato wanted to ban the poets from his utopian state. Melancholia for the ancients, including pseudo-Aristotle, also led to pathology. As pseudo-Aristotle observes in his treatise, melancholia killed those who suffered from extreme imbalances of the black bile and the continued effects of sadness and fear. He states that those afflicted by the severe pathological form do not live for very long and usually commit suicide, often by hanging themselves. Melancholia was not exclusively an elevated condition, not a thing to be cultivated in the ancient world. It had a pathological index. It was stupefyingly painful, maddening, and lethal. The poets did not have to go wandering about looking for it. Greek melancholia though divine was not a fashionable illness. The poets spoke prophecies and some of them killed themselves. Melancholia came to them and grabbed

the mind like a powerful inspiration, so that the philosophers were convinced that the poets had a divine madness, one very close to a pathological expression but somehow not completely without logic and beauty. It came to the poets along with madness in a full-blown form that completely destroyed the mind. This was the contradiction that remained in the melancholic personality. This had always been the contradiction regardless of the age, the pulse of the disease that has survived its various interpretations and cognates for millennia.<sup>13</sup> Melancholia and mania, as Jackson observes, have always been interconnected.

Melancholia was an uninvited guest, something that seemed to come from the outside, so that voice hearers, the poets and the prophets, reported a sense of having been visited. The inner world that melancholia disrupted seemed to come from without, not within. For the ancient philosophers, melancholia was an influence, a mind state and a mood transported and agitated by certain musical modes, an omen drawn in the stippled constellations, or something merely flirted with in the nostalgias of lost times and sacred objects. But much more than any of these, whether viewed as a dark celestial influence, a divine inspiration, a hot-cold fluid, or a fixation with what once was, melancholia was a serious illness that often resulted in madness and suicide. The ancient physicians from the Hippocratic writers and the Aristotelians to Galen and Rufus of Ephesus were intrigued by it, wrote treatises about it, applied their techniques and treatments to it, not because melancholia was obscure but because it was ubiquitous, iconic, magisterial,

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<sup>13</sup> Melancholia is linked with mania, as Stanley Jackson details in his iconic work *Melancholia and Depression*. See Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996). Though the idea of *bipolarity* defines the connection as a cyclical phenomenon of mind for much of modernity, as a historical condition melancholia is an elliptical illness, much more broadly defined.

horrific and seemed to have no permanent remedy. It was more than the condition of an individual. It was *the* condition: the humor, the mainframe upon which all else hinged in the inscrutable gaps between mind and body in the emerging science of medicine.

The revelations of the heavens, the constellations, and of the moon spoke directly to the severity of extreme suffering recorded in the writings of Job and in the Torah. Writing about deeply personalized suffering was not the office of the prophets, who spoke to national melancholies that they foretold and for which they were hunted down by evil kings from warring tribes. The Hebrew prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah recorded two mass extinction events of the Israelites, one in 722 BC, after which the Assyrians deported the Israelite survivors to Nineveh with hooks in their noses; the other, in 586 BC, the survivors of which, including the astronomer-prophet Daniel, were carried off by the Babylonians, who later destroyed the temple after a long siege. The world of voice hearing and prophecy were not just professions for those who lived in them daily. They were modes of being and a way of producing wisdom for the future of entire kingdoms, not just individuals. The authority afforded to the prophets was sealed in the texts bearing their names and their principal prophecies. Plague, famine, and wars were thus national melancholies the prophets could predict as warnings and as omens of distant futures. The sky was a scroll that held these warnings encoded in the stars. The ancients calculated the patterns in the night sky that were simply not available anywhere else as they were learning how to write things down in longer, alphabetic, less visual forms. If the physicians and anatomists were focusing on the body, the poets and astronomers were

reading the sky, leaving the philosophers to work skillfully in both worlds, in the *episteme* of the cosmos and in the *tekhnè* of the dense earth.

In the Book of Enoch the Watchers refer to Enoch as “the scribe” since he is very wise and records many fantastic events as a prophet. The Watchers are angels from the heavens who have special powers that they use to teach humankind many arts and technologies, including the reading of the stars and planets. Enoch preserves a dark view of these fallen angels, principally because the Watchers violate Elohim’s prohibitions by having sex with women, spawning a race of supernatural giants called the Nephilim.<sup>14</sup> Many times the Watchers appeal to Enoch’s high status as a prophet, and the Nephilim ask Enoch to pray for their survival against the curses of Elohim, who has shown them in their dreams that He will destroy them for their transgressions. Enoch prays on their behalf but this does not change the fate of the giants. In his prayers he is a mobile prophet and takes a long journey in space, which serves as a unique and central device of the narrative, allowing him to narrate his adventures and his survey of the earth from an all-knowing view. He travels to heaven with an angel; he moves in dream visions and through the sky in a kind of spacecraft, commenting on the status of the earth and its various geographical configurations. He describes the technologies the Watchers have invented in the arts and metallurgy, in weapons and tools, and in herbs and cosmetics. One of these inventions is writing, again, the technology the watcher Penemue introduces

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<sup>14</sup> The Nephilim are mentioned in Genesis 6 as “the mighty men of old” who were on the earth before the Great Flood. They are also the giants mentioned in Numbers 13, from whom the Anakim were descended. The Anakim lived in Canaan and were the giants the twelve spies encountered, ten of which reported to Moses they felt as mere grasshoppers in comparison and were so esteemed by them.

to humankind. By Enoch's description writing is a hazardous occupation though it brings wisdom, the kind mentioned closely in the text with bittersweet subjects. He records:

The name of the fourth is Penemue: he discovered to the children of men bitterness and sweetness; and pointed out to them every secret of their wisdom. He taught men to understand writing and the use of ink and paper. Therefore numerous have been those who have gone astray from every period of the world, even to this day. For men were not born for this, thus with pen and with ink to confirm their faith; since they were not created, except that, like the angels, they might remain righteous and pure. Nor would death, which destroys everything, have effected them; but by this their knowledge they perish, and by this also its power consumes them.<sup>15</sup>

One may wonder if Enoch is warning against a specific form of writing. In the long history of melancholia, physicians and philosophers believed scholars and geometers were predisposed to suffering from the illness owing to uninterrupted hours of study and to the effects of interminable isolation that are a natural part of the work of intellectuals. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* Burton's long-titled subsection "Love of Learning, or overmuch study. With a Digression on the misery of Scholars, and why the Muses are Melancholy" rolls along prosaically in complete sentences, exaggerating the figure of the melancholic scholar. Some academics believe the much older treatise *On Melancholia*, by Rufus of Ephesus, reflects the geometer's melancholy more than the artist's.<sup>16</sup> Many engravings and paintings during the Renaissance, most fatefully Dürer's *Melencolia I*, depict the geometer surrounded by tools of measurement, fixed in the classic melancholy

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Laurence, *The Book of Enoch the Prophet* (Kempton, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1883; repr., 2000), 85-86.

<sup>16</sup> Rufus of Ephesus, *On Melancholy*, eds. Peter E Pormann, et al. (Darmstadt, Germany: Mohr Sidebeck, 2008). Rufus' treatise defines the melancholic figure as a scholar or technician (geometer) who is brought low by melancholia owing to excessive writing, isolation, and intense reflection. Aristotle's text defines the melancholic more as an artistic virtuoso or creative hero. In either case, around 2500 BC, the Hippocratic writers began to define the parameters of mental illness for artistic people active in ancient Greece, the traditions of which continued with Galen much later in Rome.

pose with head resting in hand. Connecting the technology of writing with melancholia and thus with extreme suffering is doubtless an ancient practice, but it is also mentioned more recently in Sanja Bahun's *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Countermourning* (2013). Physicians and philosophers have also connected writing and books with melancholia's creative and destructive effects. The origins of humanism are founded on the same revolutionary technologies. When melancholia flourishes so too does humanism.

If writing and scholarship were thought to promote melancholic states, music was mostly considered healthy for melancholics by both Semitic peoples and Greeks, as long as it did not excite the passions, at least for philosophers like Plato, who believed certain modes could cause harm, even if he believed the status of health depended on its degree of musicality, mirroring the relationship between the body and the musical spheres. The *Timaeus* is Plato's work designed to merge the body with the soul. Plato uses the "myth of music to overcome the distance between inner and outer, soul and world."<sup>17</sup> The music of the spheres thus joined the cosmos with the soul, the macrocosm linked by musical ratios to the microcosm. In his treatise *Diseases of the Black Bile*, Galen wrote, "All of the best physicians and philosophers agree that the humors and actually the whole constitution of the body change the activity of the soul."<sup>18</sup> Galen believed the faculties of the soul corresponded to the body, the microcosm, thus joining the soul with the body through the holistic system that humoral theory provided and that he preserved in his

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Kalkavage, introduction to *Plato's Timaeus* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2001), 24.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 68.

voluminous texts and in his personal library.<sup>19</sup> Plato wrote about health as a musical element, one that reflected the certainty and balance of the outer concentric spheres of the Greek cosmogony. The body out of tune reflected its fractured, mutable environment on earth. In the *Timaeus*, to be ill meant to be unmusical (*plēmmelôs*) and out of tune: “Disease is the absence of musicality.”<sup>20</sup> For the Aristotelian writers, retreating into dark fantasies of release, which often ended in suicide by strangulation, was the principle danger of melancholia. Pseudo-Aristotle discerns in the *Problem 30.1*: “Now those who become despondent as the heat in them dies down are inclined to hang themselves.”<sup>21</sup> Physical release from extreme suffering is also a significant theme in the Book of Job. There is the theme of doing violence to the body through suicidal thoughts. Strangulation is Job’s petitioned form of release from the horrific visions of his tormented mind, though Elohim does not permit Job to kill himself, or rather to be killed, as he expressly prohibits Job’s adversary from murdering him, though he is free to harm him in any number of ways, including the destruction of his family, the affliction of sores, and imposing the loss of many possessions.<sup>22</sup>

Job’s intense suffering is strongly connected to his losses: the deaths of his children, the curses of his wife, and the theft of his vast properties. He also loses his

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<sup>19</sup> A doctoral student discovered a new letter by Galen, “On the Avoidance of Grief,” in 2005. The letter is a meditation on loss and on how to overcome the grief associated with losing many books to a fire. Vivian Nutton is rumored to be writing an English translation of the letter.

<sup>20</sup> Kalkavage, *Plato's Timaeus*, 121.

<sup>21</sup> Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (New York, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1979), PDF, 27. Aristotle continues in the following sentence: “Hence the young and the old are more likely to hang themselves; for in one case old age itself makes the heat die down, in the other, passion, which is something physical too.”

<sup>22</sup> (Job 7:13-15) “When I say, My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint, then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I would choose strangling and death rather than my bones. I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are a breath.”

health, mysteriously contracting very painful boils. Job is ill also in his mind, tormented by horrific visions, and his sleep is burdened with horrific dreams. He pleads his innocence before Elohim and demands an audience with his creator. Job argues with his critic-friends but he appeals to the heavens, to hear the voice of God in response to his inexplicable suffering, as he turns to the sky and to the constellations by some attempt to find recognition of his unimaginable pain—pain that cannot be described by losses and illness, pain beyond earthly things and forsaking all attachments. This is the realm of melancholia. This is the sadness without cause, expressed much later as another form of religious melancholy, or *acedia*, which emerged during the times of the church fathers in late antiquity and continued into the Medieval period. In the eleventh century, composer-abbess Hildegard von Bingen believed that melancholia began with Adam and Eve and their eviction from paradise into a world of difficult labor, fatigue, waning, and death.<sup>23</sup> In some accounts *acedia* could bring on bouts of madness but it was mostly aligned with *ennui* and the sin of sloth.

Melancholia emerged as a transhistorical worldview explored by many writers and thinkers across several cultures in the Mediterranean and ancient Near East. Ancient Semitic writers, influenced by the Book of Enoch, connected sorrow as an action to be expressed in writing, a technology that could encode experience and was brought down to humankind by the Watchers. Thus in ancient texts the injunction to watch the heavens in a prophetic sense was also a technique for healing sorrows as was writing. Both systems encoded experience in very powerful ways that must have seemed strangely connected to the ancients in a time when math was thought by the Pythagoreans to be magical with its

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<sup>23</sup> Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, 81.

golden ratios distributed eloquently throughout nature. In Hebraic cosmology, the heavenly expanse, or *raqiya* (רקיע), was like a translucent sapphire,<sup>24</sup> a star-filled canopy that divided the waters above from those below.<sup>25</sup> The upper waters were thought to be a heavenly ocean that filled the dimension above the stars. The heavens below, *tehowm* (תוהם) from the root *huwm* (תוה), were noisy, perplexing, and full of voices. These were the first waters that the Holy Spirit brooded over, the waters in which “wave calleth unto wave.”<sup>26</sup> This Hebraic cosmic structure at least parallels if it does not inform the perfect world of the heavenly spheres and the noisy uncertainty of the sublunary in Greek cosmology. For the Greeks the heavens were a harmonic center for philosophers and poets, holding the planets and the stars in concentric circles, but the constellations for the Hebrews told stories and for the Chaldeans regulated being, just as the state of the humors was either musical or lacked musicality in the *Timaeus* and determined bodily states either in balance or imbalance.

## VOICES

Grounded in bodily explanations of disease, many physicians understood melancholia as an earthly, heavy, mutable force. Yet some of the symptoms of melancholia, like hearing voices, they believed were hallucinations. It was one thing to attach a disease to mood, but another thing to attach illness to the mind, to logical thought. Even so, at the same time, philosophers, playwrights and poets wrote about hearing the voices of the gods with great conviction. Plato believed the poets were susceptible to possession by strange

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<sup>24</sup> Exodus 24:10

<sup>25</sup> Genesis 1:6

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 42:7

influences, so it is not surprising that physicians believed the melancholics were hallucinating if they reported hearing the voices of the gods. This opinion does not vouch for the entire culture, as many consulted the sibyls and believed in the gods. Socrates heard the voice of his *daimonion* and acted on its advice.<sup>27</sup> As a symbol of logic and rationality for secular intellectual circles in Europe and the West for centuries, and though a philosopher who inspired Plato as a figure to practice his dialectical method of reasoning, Socrates also heard voices regularly, voices often issuing simple commands and speaking in shortened sentences. If voice hearing is perceived as an illness, or at least as an irrationality or hallucination, then Socrates inspires the ancient tension between secular and religious explanations of illness. Many people in ancient times were hearing things. Hearing voices was not an immediate indication of disease or mental illness for all Greek physicians. Very often people appealed to those who heard them (to the Pythia and the sibyls and the priestesses of Dodona) for direction and assurance. Voices illuminated the premonitions of the Pythia and inspired the philosophers to write about divine madness as if it were a daily reality, and very likely it was. One can recognize this easy acceptance of religious voice-hearing in the dialectics on madness in the *Phaedrus* and in *Ion*. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates speaks about the almost identical formation of the words for prophecy *mantike* and madness *manike*, words that he says were designated by the “ancient inventors of names” to describe noble arts of the highest order.<sup>28</sup> Plato thus appeals to word stocks to authenticate madness as a divine function.

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel B. Smith, *Muses, Madmen, And Prophets: Hearing Voices and the Borders of Sanity* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2007), 141.

<sup>28</sup> Plato, "Phaedrus," *The Internet Classics Archive*, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html>.

He also distinguishes divine madness from its pathological form,<sup>29</sup> “And of madness there were two kinds; one produced by human infirmity, the other was a divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention.”<sup>30</sup> The divine madness also visited the visionary women who heard voices at the temples of Zeus and Apollo. Socrates illuminates:

For prophecy is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when out of their senses have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and private life, but when in their senses few or none. And I might also tell you how the Sibyl and other inspired persons have given to many and one many an intimation of the future which has saved them from falling.

But the Pythia at Delphi were not sitting on tripods reciting poetry for their audiences. Their method of prophecy was hazardous and sometimes led to death because of the ingestion of what the Greek historians called laurel. We know this because of the writings of Plutarch, who was a priest at Delphi.<sup>31</sup> Inducing the symptoms of the illness state was a priestly technique for entering the oracular phase. Ingesting laurel leaves or inhaling fumes created the symptoms. This illness state was *enthousiasmos*, specifically featuring the symptoms of what Hippocrates called “the sacred disease.” Seizure, frothing mouth, and agitated mind were common at the oracle of Delphi. One researcher and professor of surgery from the School of Medicine at the University of Ioannina theorizes that the laurel of Delphi was actually oleander. Homeric hymns and the travelogues of Pausanias revered the plant as the one the Pythia and sibyls ingested or

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<sup>29</sup> P. J. Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>30</sup> Plato, "Phaedrus."

<sup>31</sup> Harissis V. Haralampos, "A Bittersweet Story: The Discovery of the True Nature of the Intoxicating "laurel" and the "chasm" of the Oracle of Delphi," accessed October 22, 2014, [https://www.academia.edu/7004301/A\\_bittersweet\\_story\\_the\\_discovery\\_of\\_the\\_true\\_nature\\_of\\_the\\_intoxicating\\_laurel\\_and\\_the\\_chasm\\_of\\_the\\_oracle\\_of\\_Delphi\\_Pre-print\\_version](https://www.academia.edu/7004301/A_bittersweet_story_the_discovery_of_the_true_nature_of_the_intoxicating_laurel_and_the_chasm_of_the_oracle_of_Delphi_Pre-print_version).

inhaled as incense or drank as a tea from tainted water bowls to go into frenzy.<sup>32</sup>

According to Heraclitus, the sibyls spoke indirectly in powerful riddles, so that what they said might not be easily interpreted or forgotten. One of Heraclitus' fragments is translated, "And the Sibyl, with raving lips uttering things mirthless, unbedizened, and unperfumed, reaches over a thousand years with her voice, thanks to the god in her."<sup>33</sup> Theophrastus believed Heraclitus was afflicted by melancholia because he never finished anything and because what he did write was intentionally obscure, in the oracular style, though all that survives from his hugely influential works are fragments that others like Plutarch quoted.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps that is why pseudo-Aristotle compares the effects of wine to the melancholic state of mind. In his treatise on melancholia, pseudo-Aristotle likens melancholia to being intoxicated with wine but on a perpetual basis. He writes:

For as one man is momentarily, while drunk, another is by nature: one man is loquacious, another emotional, another easily moved to tears; for this effect, too, wine has on some people. Hence Homer said in the poem:  
"He says that I swim in tears  
like a man that is heavy  
with drinking."<sup>35</sup>

Melancholia is like a wine that not only alters behavior but also reflects a certain character or temperament, one that is expressed as madness in the case of the melancholic

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Oleander is a highly toxic plant that may produce seizures and potentially psychotropic symptoms when ingested.

<sup>33</sup> Heraclitus, "The Word," in *The Portable Greek Reader*, ed. W. H. Auden (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1948; reprint, 1978), 70.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Hussey, "Heraclitus," ed. A. A. Long, *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 88.

<sup>35</sup> This is from the translation by Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, 20.

who is ill with the disease but as an artistic ability of high quality if the melancholia is not too extreme. Pseudo-Aristotle continues:

Sometimes they all become compassionate or savage or taciturn—for some relapse into complete silence especially those melancholics who are out of their minds.<sup>36</sup>

It is not as important that wine is an influence on the melancholic but that melancholia is an influence like wine. It disables the senses, but in a way that may open the melancholic to states of creative inspiration. But this form of artistic inspiration is associated with madness, and pseudo-Aristotle is clear that there is a link between madness and poetry but is less clear about how exactly this madness may be defined when compared to the divine forms Plato imagined the poets were afflicted by, or to the voices of Socrates, commanding and telegraphic, suggested in the *Phaedrus* as divine inspiration and prophecy, the output of poets. The inspiration may be divine and prophetic, coming from without, “and this is how the sibyls and soothsayers arise and all that are divinely inspired, when they become such not by illness but by natural temperament.”<sup>37</sup> This is what pseudo-Aristotle tells his audience. Even in a scientific treatise intended to associate temperament with the black bile, pseudo-Aristotle affirms that the melancholic poet is capable of prophetic utterance. As he claims, “Maracus, the Syracusan, was actually a better poet when he was out of his mind.”<sup>38</sup> Such suggests a form of artistic inspiration generated by temperament, not an influence governed by distant stars. It is not astronomical but contained in the mind that is expressed in the body as a physiological process regulated by the heating or cooling of the black bile. Even divine

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

madness begins to fail as mere frenzy, succeeded instead by the new stubborn and mysterious fluid.

Early in the ancient world, melancholia was associated with artistic temperament. In his writings Aristotle mentions the “melancholics” (*hoi melancholikoi*) though never aligns the personality type with Greek humoral theory or black bile.<sup>39</sup> The idea of linking melancholia and artistic temperament originates from the Aristotelian *Problem 30.1*. Likely a philosopher-physician and follower of Aristotle, the author of the *Problem* wrote about melancholia as a natural phenomenon, as a thing that could be observed in the body but was also revealed in by the poets and via popular heroic characters like Ajax and Bellerophon. Ancient physicians connected melancholia with autumn and the earth, with cold and dry qualities, but also with madness, fear, and dejection. Even outside medical discourses in the fifth and fourth centuries BC the term *melancholikos* is likened to the word *manikos* (mad).<sup>40</sup> Humoralism was a theory that grounded physiological processes in the etiology of melancholia while it simultaneously connected the temperament to artistic venture. It was through the Hippocrateans and later the Aristotelians that melancholia became located in the physiological processes that for them were not mapped in the stars but in the black bile and its unstable status in the body. To reiterate, Plato’s understanding of mental illness was a musical balance between the body and the universe, so that the melancholic experienced visions as a form of divine madness that was oracular. When Socrates heard voices from his personal *daimonion* he interpreted them as “divine signs.” Aristotle also believed inspired poets had a divine voice.

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<sup>39</sup> Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, 139.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-141.

The tropes of melancholia appear in many historical images, sometimes as posturing female figures, listless and dejected, the most famous of which is Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I*. The iconicity of melancholia has for centuries featured the downcast face and the *gestus melancholicus*, the leaning head propped up by a hand, the subject gazing vacantly off into the distance, lost in deep reflection or maybe obsessive thought loops that challenge daily productivity. This kind of creative listlessness is transnational. The Japanese term *boketto* means to gaze vacantly into the distance, to be thoughtless as if adrift on a sea of consciousness, similar to the Portuguese term *nefilibata*, or "cloud-walkers," who dream and invent as outliers living beyond the nominal and the mainstream. Japanese artists have visualized similar melancholic states in woodblock prints depicting the "floating sorrowful world"<sup>41</sup> or *Ukiyo-e*, a dream space of blurred vision and forgetfulness that mimes the effects of opiate-inspired trips. For many cultures the melancholic mind is divergent, protean, creative, and it was so for the ancient Greeks. Aristotle understood melancholia as a dream state full of unimaginable connectivity. But there is also the melancholic mind on pause, as if in the trench depths of an aquatic abyss, one afflicted by limited vision, darkened and narrowed down. Perhaps this mind is hallucinatory, colonized by bioluminescent creatures or abstract electrical figures blinking beyond description. This is the mind that has most intrigued physicians. This is the one that may long for death and too often achieves it.

Melancholia emerges historically from the artists as a form of *tekhnè*, an application that since ancient times has expressed mood and consciousness through the technologies of music, drama, art, and writing. There is thus in the ancient world (as

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<sup>41</sup> Library of Congress, "The Floating World of Ukiyo-e | Exhibitions," *Library of Congress*, 2014, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/ukiyo-e/intro.html>.

now) a strong link between creative agency and madness, between the artistic temperament and melancholic action, which may as readily lead to suicide as to the ancient sublime. To be sure, the physicians viewed melancholia as a lethal illness, and the poets and playwrights, among other ancient imaginative people who worked in the creative and scholarly occupations, seemed to suffer most from its effects and demonstrated the condition with voice hearing and powerful, ecstatic behaviors, a problem that intrigued Theophrastus as much as it vexed Plato.

In the late twentieth century, a well-known psychologist put forth an unusual theory about ancient consciousness, which he augmented with features he believed were supported in the writings of the Greek playwrights, the Hebrew prophets and the sibylline oracles. The theory concerned the bicameral mind, an ancient form of consciousness that could be theorized as the gradual breakdown of religious voice-hearing at a time many scholars believe the emergence of alphabetic language occurred. Psychologist Julian Jaynes developed this philosophy of mind in his controversial book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Break Down of the Bicameral Mind*, which held that the ancients did not differentiate between internal and external voices. Such was the case because the bicameral mind interpreted its thoughts and imaginations as voices from the outside, not as the thought streams of a unique and modern subjectivity that held inner dialogues with itself. Whatever voices the Hebrew prophet Amos heard, for instance, he believed came from God, voices Jaynes believed the prophet hallucinated, similarly to the way schizophrenics experience voice hearing and auditory hallucinations in modern times.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2000), 311.

Jaynes believed the internal conversations the modern mind engages, essentially internal dialogues, were not experienced before the advent of the alphabet in the minds of the ancients, whom he believed lacked self-consciousness. He determined that bicameral minds slowly lost the ability to hear voices as the acquisition of alphabetic language emerged around 1200 BC. The influences of voices that inspired the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and philosophers like Socrates came from the outside, and according to Jaynes they lessened as the centuries progressed, and humankind became more self-conscious, and as language continued and became more sophisticated and versatile.

Jaynes wrote that the Greek playwrights and poets wrote about characters who heard voices because they really believed that the gods spoke to them. But gradually the voices became silent, and the oracles could no longer be heard. Referring to the Old Testament prophets, he writes, “It is essentially the story of the loss of the bicameral mind, the slow retreat into silence of the remaining *elohim* . . . But the mind is still haunted with its old unconscious ways; it broods on lost authorities; and the yearning, the deep and hollowing yearning for divine volition and service is with us still.”<sup>43</sup>

Assuming a strong neo-Darwinist stance, Jaynes believed that the religious mind still heard voices in modernity because it hallucinated them, as it always had, from Delphi to Jerusalem. The temple priests of ancient Greece and the prophets of Israel heard voices and prophesied both prosperity and apocalyptic trouble for Athens and Judea respectively. Jaynes writes about the powers of the young rural women who were often trained as priestesses of the Greek oracles at the temples like the one in Delphi and in Dodona. The women would go into states of ecstasy (*enthousiasmos*) to render their

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 313.

divinations for those seeking answers to various uncertainties. Whether by strong gases emanating from cracks in the earth or by the rustling of the wind through the chimes in oak trees, the Pythia and the sibyls rendered their oracles from inspirations that were not written down as inward obsessions or as preoccupying fantasies. It was believed these priestly women heard voices from the outside and that they had somehow been transported outside their bodies for unknown periods of time via religious trance or ecstasy. If we agree with Jaynes here, then it is likely that many of the sibyls really believed that they had heard from the gods.

Jaynes was not alone in his belief that voice hearers were merely hallucinating their enchanted utterances. In their classic text *Saturn and Melancholy*, Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl write about ancient physicians who began to view the phenomenon of prophecy and voice hearing with disbelief. They discern, “. . . the melancholic’s gift of prophecy, which was observed by Aristotle and which Rufus still considered a reality despite its pathological origin, now began to be regarded merely as a sick man’s illusion.”<sup>44</sup> It seems divine inspiration along with the generative powers of the melancholic began to slide more into notions of illness early on among physicians in the ancient world. Thus this rationalistic explanation of religious experience is not merely some late development during the Enlightenment but was founded on a system that supported divine inspiration and the influences of the stars just as well as the dynamic states of the fluids. Jaynes finally observes in his text that the end of bicameralism and the close of the age of the prophets represent “The birth pangs of our subjective

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<sup>44</sup> Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, 54.

consciousness.”<sup>45</sup> The modern self was thus emergent in antiquity, however controversial and contested such a claim may be among scholars today. Others working in melancholy studies like Peter Toohey support the idea of a much older subjective self than the one that was thought to have surfaced during the late Medieval and early modern periods. In his text *Melancholy Love and Time: Boundaries of the Self in Ancient Literature*, Toohey makes the claim that the ancient self was much more similar to the modern self than is generally accepted by most humanists, even though he admits that his evidence is not irrefutable and that the literary exemplars of the ancient world that he draws from do not provide hard proof that a modern sense of self surfaced during this time.

In any case, ancient medicine changed the way the body could be understood, but this also changed the way consciousness could be experienced and the self perceived. If medicine revolutionized mind-bodies through its assumptions about melancholia, then such must have had an effect on the self and its place in the ancient musical universe. The poetics of the age in which the Homeric epics flourished also influenced the way medicine was written about and exchanged among physicians. Greek physicians claimed the authority to name the maladies of the poets and philosophers in part because medicine had borrowed from the prestige of the poets to validate its claims to mainstream audiences with a legitimacy that could be brought to it only by poetry, given its high status. Many ancient medical treatises were written in poetic forms. Thus the body as a locus of interpretation and place for medical descriptors of illness brought melancholia down to the mutable earth, to the realm of *tekhnè* and its practical methods that could be

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<sup>45</sup> Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 312.

used to treat illness with specific medical procedures that did not require the interpretations of the poets or the stars, at least directly. But the applications of the hands-on arts were not limited to medicine and humoral theory. The nimbus of melancholia also linked psychosis with creativity as a collaborative influence on applied arts like poetry and drama. Medicine was being made for the body and was ready to critique its creative expression. The body had long been made into art in Greek sculpture. Medicine as an applied art set the terms for melancholia, defined its causes, symptoms, and cures, but the philosophers imported these settings as a disease to the mysteries of temperament and to the early artistic personality, expressed in the melancholia or divine madness of the poets. Creative madness authenticated poetry and it made the poets of ancient Greece into icons. As a philosophical problem the idea of connecting madness with creativity (which built the early artistic personality) originated in the Aristotelian *Problem 30.1*, a short yet iconic medical treatise that even with a questionable authorship still manages to enchant scholars and solicit their strict critiques.

In his treatise *On Divination in Sleep (De divinatione per somnum)*, indisputably the work of Aristotle, “melancholics are presented as an example of a people with clear and prophetic dreams.”<sup>46</sup> In another treatise by Aristotle, *On Dreams (De insomniis)*, he likens the dream state to a medium that generates fuzzy images. The medium is regulated by the *pneuma*, the movements of the air to the heart. In unstable people, in those lacking self-control, the “*hoi ekstatikoi*,” as Aristotle calls them, the melancholic dream state is an imaginal realm of grotesque images (*phantasmata*) from which new ideas may be discerned and developed into artistic works. These dreamers have strong imagination, or,

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<sup>46</sup> Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, 143.

lacking reason, an “inclination to follow imagination.”<sup>47</sup> For Aristotle, dreams do not come from the gods as a divine inspiration set upon the powerful, but visit common people who have special abilities. Van der Eijk writes, “The ability to foresee the future in sleep is particularly strong in people whose abilities to apply reason and rational thought are for some reason weak or impaired.”<sup>48</sup> For Aristotle, the melancholic is a prophetic dreamer who pulls creative visions of the future from the chaotic murk of his dreams. In the treatise *On Dreams*, Aristotle reduces the prophetic potential of clear dreams (*euthuoneiriai*) to distorted images, even though he believes that the poets achieve states of divine madness and discern the future clearly from dreams in the treatise *On Divination in Sleep*. Sleep divination is an unreasonable practice that nonetheless produces a clear prophetic rendering, thus contradicting the monstrous distortions and intoxications that Aristotle believed were caused by the *pneuma* in his treatise *On Dreams*. Maybe melancholia resolves these apparent contradictions between Aristotle’s writings on dreams, so that in the melancholic the irrational and the prophetic may coexist. Maybe the structure of these two works is melancholic; that is, they are paradoxical and contradictory by intention, since in one work Aristotle says the power of dreams is a distortion and irrational, and in the other work, dreams have the potential for prophetic clarity. Aristotle and his follower Theophrastus, or pseudo-Aristotle, similarly approach the dual nature of melancholia. In clear dreams Aristotle says that the *pneuma* travels directly to the heart, without the obstructions of turbulent motions and confusions that lead to the distorted images (*phantasmata*). For pseudo-Aristotle, the heated bile produces the agitated state. Thus there may be a link between the black bile and the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 144.

*pneuma*, the powerful effects of the special dark fluid working similarly to generate the motions of the air (*pneumatōdēs*) contained in the body. It is from the interactions between a fluid (bile) and a quality (air) that creative work may emerge. Working together, the state of the fluids may generate the condition of mind, but the motion of the air still controls its inspiration. Plato believed dreams could be divine inspirations given to the individual by the deity. In the *Timaeus*, “Plato never abandons the notion that dreams are God-given and essentially serve divinatory purposes. Dreams fulfill a role that Plato denies to poetic fictions: they are a means of attaining to Truth.”<sup>49</sup> Melancholics as a special group have a propensity for prophetic dreams and thus divine madness.

In the *Iliad* Homer uses the term *phrenes* to represent an energy associated with the lungs, the organ of inspiration, the site in the body Jaynes associates with the emergence of subjectivity and self-awareness, separate from the outside sources of the voices.<sup>50</sup> In *The Hymns of Orpheus*, “Hymn #9” is a panegyric to *Phusis*, that “much-mechanic mother” of nature and artistic inspiration, which is a term rooted to *phrenes*.<sup>51</sup> The poet begins the hymn with an address to impassioning Nature as “the fumigation from Aromatics,”<sup>52</sup> an idea which may have been connected to the pneumatic gases at Delphi as a source of prophetic inspiration for the Pythia. The melancholic was especially prone to the influence of *phusis*, and Aristotle believed it was “the nature (*phusis*) of garrulous and melancholic people to see all kinds of images (in their dreams) . . . .”

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<sup>49</sup> Jan R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France: Text and Context of Laurens Pignon's Contre Les Devineurs, 1411* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1998), 177.

<sup>50</sup> Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 267.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Taylor, *Orphic Hymns* (Philadelphia, PN: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 126.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Aristotle also wrote about the associative abilities of melancholics in his treatises on dreams. For him “A determining factor for the divination of melancholics is said to be not only the number of images that they are confronted with, but also a certain ability for making connections by association between objects that are far apart.”<sup>53</sup> For Aristotle *phusis* is “an important principle for poetry and philosophy,” and the strength of the imagination of melancholics is “based on the ability to ‘perceive similarities’” across disparate images.<sup>54</sup>

Inspiration and the art of breathing were inseparable in ancient times and among numerous religious and creative traditions that defined a general source for artistic creation where the rousing voice was thought to originate. The lungs, or *phrenes*,<sup>55</sup> were once a unique space that for the ancients held certain moods. The word inspiration as it is used today has lost his original meaning. Once a compelling mind-altering experience, inspiration is nowadays a flippant term that may describe any thought or whim that comes easily to mind. Long ago inspiration and madness were a shared experience for the poets thought to be in a trance or possessed by the Muses when speaking new utterance. Controlled breathing is a core feature of the ancient practices of meditation followed by eminent religious figures from wisdom traditions in the East. Operating as early as the eighth century BC as the temple to Apollo, the god of both medicine and poetry,<sup>56</sup> and mentioned by numerous ancient writers and historians, the oracle at Delphi

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<sup>53</sup> Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, 144.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>55</sup> Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 263.

<sup>56</sup> Corinne Saunders, ed. *'The thoughtful maladie': Madness and Vision in Medieval Writing, Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 67. Saunders writes, “The link between madness and creativity is as old as western literature.”

was the center for prophetic consultation in Greek culture.<sup>57</sup> Cicero, Diodorus, and Plutarch each thought that the Pythia inhaled the *pneuma* (hallucinogenic vapors) that arose from the chasm at Mount Parnassus<sup>58</sup> where the temple stood, as she sat in the adytum on a tripod and moaned utterances for her audience while in deep trance. Like Aristotle's wine, the Pythia's inhalants brought about states of mind similar to those experienced by individuals suffering from melancholia and the unstable conditions of the black bile and *pneuma*. The idea that special vapors were responsible for the Pythia's frenzy is a rational explanation for her powers, but the renown and accuracy of her prophecies brought both the bold and the weak to seek her guidance for hundreds of years. Even Cicero concludes that one cannot negate that her predictions were accurate.<sup>59</sup> Whatever the source of her inspiration, the Pythia spoke her prophecies using poetic language and the temple poets recorded her words in hexameter for the suppliants. Just as early medicine borrowed from the legitimacy of poetry, so too did the priestesses of the oracles. One scholar notes the Pythia may have prophesied from behind a curtain in a cell adjacent to her clients in the temple, creating a remove and intensifying the effect of her powerful words through invisibility.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> As Heraclitus observes, the oracles never speak directly but are intentionally obscure, offering prophecy in riddles. The language of the oracles was likely very metaphorical and poetic.

<sup>58</sup> Near the Gulf of Corinth, Mount Parnassus is 8,064 feet in elevation and was a great symbol of inspiration in Greek and Roman cultures.

<sup>59</sup> Cicero, "De Divinatione," *Loeb Classical Library*, 1923, accessed October 29, 2014, [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de\\_Divinatione/1\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de_Divinatione/1*.html), 269.

<sup>60</sup> Phillip Vandenberg, *Mysteries of the Oracles: The Last Secrets of Antiquity* (London, UK: Tauris Parke, 2007), 125-126. This curtain is similar to the acousmatic arrangement Pythagoras may have used, sitting behind a curtain and out of view when teaching, so that his students could focus their attention on what he said. The lack of visual representation of the speaker meant that only the voice could be heard, giving it additional power to those within earshot. Without a direct view of the source of sound, the voice issued forth like music or an utterance heard in the mind. Voice-hearers often report that the source of their voices is not always locatable.

The idea of mysterious fluids controlling the mind through the body was a relatively new medical understanding that emerged late in the career of the Delphic oracle as it slowly began to go silent, an event Cicero mentions in *De Divinatione*.<sup>61</sup> The fluids were emergent from organs in the body like the lungs and the liver, and took on the new responsibility, as the black bile for instance, of causing illness. Yet long before the time of Hippocrates the kidneys had been the seat of conscience in the Hebraic tradition,<sup>62</sup> as the *phrenes* of the Homeric writings had been the source of new inspiration, and the *kardia*, for the passions of the heroic warriors in the epics. These source points in the body were not outside influences like the voices from the gods, or the *daimonion* of Socrates, or the hallucinogenic gasses that seeped from the escarpment in Parnassus, or even the Aristotelian wine that drowned the mind in the *Problemata*. For the physicians the effects of these powers were located *inside* the body, moving from organ to organ by way of the fluids, generating illness and health, death and birth.

The word *inspire* has lost much of its original meaning that it had for the poets in ancient Greece. The Latin term *inspīrāre* (to breath into) is related to the older Greek *pneó*, (to blow, breathe as the wind). *Theopneustos* (God-breathed) is the term used in the New Testament to describe how the words of the writer come from the breath of God. Divine inspiration, *enthousiazein* (to be inspired by a god), is to be a little more coolly inspired, even majestically so, than the wild *manike* (mania) that Plato worried about, and that

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<sup>61</sup> Cicero, "De Divinatione." He writes, "Possibly, too, those subterraneous exhalations which used to kindle the soul of the Pythian priestess with divine inspiration have gradually vanished in the long lapse of time; just as within our own knowledge some rivers have dried up and disappeared . . .".

<sup>62</sup> Samuel S. Kottek, "'My Reins Admonish Me at Night' (Psalm 16:7); the Kidneys in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Sources," *Medicina ne Secoli* 22, no. 1-3 (2010).

Democritus required of the poets, that they be in a state of *fury* to be good at their art.<sup>63</sup> Not a Greek equivalent to the inspiration of the ancient poets, who were not thought to be mad until the fifth century BC,<sup>64</sup> the modern usage of *enthusiasm* is so watered down that it does not begin to approximate the meanings of the old words for inspiration, enthusiasm or *ekstasis* (ecstasy, which meant literally to be outside of the body), especially as these words would have been used and understood by the ancients. Inspiration continued to be a much more fertile term for the pneumatic mind even up to the time of William Blake, who experienced it as a powerful force for his own poems and drawings, a creativeness the loss of which Nietzsche lamented much later in his own writings. Since the poets up to the fifth century BC would not have been considered insane, or prone to fits of divine frenzy, they formerly operated rather out of their natural born gifts that suited them, and that required no higher learning, even though Hesiod believed the poets were “wretched things of shame, mere bellies,” but also very humble, with lowly occupations like the shepherds.<sup>65</sup>

If the poets were not so highly esteemed until the fifth century BC, neither were the artists venerated in classical Greece, especially the painters and sculptors, who were considered workers and artisans, and thought incapable of divine inspiration. Poets and musicians were elevated during the times of Socrates and Plato, as their works were thought capable of being inspired to greatness and thus were associated early on with what I call the *pneumatic mind*. Inspiration and breathing were closely linked with each other, emerging from the *phrenes* and the *pneuma*, ever since the first poets began to

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<sup>63</sup> Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 373.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

make creative works using their natural gifts. But being inspired and breathing were also especially linked in music. Learning to breath in music was from the beginning an art form developed by breathing exercises for trained singers, and it must have also been the case for the Greek chorus in theatrical works. The chorus members as performers also had the benefit of acoustics built-in to the ancient theater, which naturally amplified their voices.<sup>66</sup> The visual works of artists, works that were neither spoken or performed, were not so esteemed in ancient Greek culture, perhaps because they could not be so directly connected to the breathing function and thus to the lode of inspiration and all its cognates. The works of painters and especially sculptors were much more associated with manual labor, as they were messy and ever present, like buildings, not fleeting like music or the impassioned and improvisational poem. Thus their works being visual were not thought to be inspired as much as they were viewed for their utility, adornment and manual banality. In *Born under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists*, Margot and Rudolf Wittkower refer to the lowly status of visual artists in antiquity: “Both Plato and Aristotle assigned to the visual arts a place much below music and poetry. To the Greeks from Homer and Hesiod onward, inspiration was reserved for poets and musicians.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Even in modern times singers have had to learn to project their voices in large spaces without amplification and to conserve air and distribute it over difficult phrases, especially for expressive arias and long fermatas. In *Caruso and Tetrzzini on the Art of Singing*, there is the apocryphal-sounding story from the coloratura Tetrzzini about a young soloist who could move a piano with her diaphragm. Tetrzzini remembers one exchange with her student: “‘You see, madam,’ she exclaimed, ‘I have studied breathing. Why, I have such a strong diaphragm I can move the piano with it!’ And she did go right up to my piano and, pushing on this strong diaphragm of hers, she moved the piano a fraction of an inch from its place.” Enrico Caruso and Luiza Tetrzzini, “Caruso and Tetrzzini on the Art of Singing,” *Internet Archive*, accessed October 8, <http://archive.org/stream/carusoandtetrzz20069gut/pg20069.txt>.

<sup>67</sup> Margot and Rudolf Wittkower, *Born under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists* (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2007), 4.

In *The Iliad*, the poet-musician Thamyris provoked the Muses, claiming he would be greater than they in a competition on the harp and song. The Muses became enraged at his hubris and struck him down, blinding Thamyris and removing his abilities of poetry and music, thus cutting off his avenues of expression. As a result of his challenge, Thamyris lost his gifts for singing poems and playing the harp, and thus he crashed into a long and deep despondency. Homer records:

. . . the Muses encountering Thamyris the Thracian stopped him from singing as he came from Oichalia and Oichalian Eurytos; for he boasted that he would prevail, if the very Muses, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis, were singing against him, and these in their anger struck him *maimed* [italics mine], and the voice of wonder they took away, and made him a singer without memory;<sup>68</sup>

Thamyris loses his rivalry with the Muses and is crippled with a broken voice, a failing memory, and blinded eyes. The significantly dated Thomas Clark interlinear translation of the *Iliad* uses the word “dumb,”<sup>69</sup> instead of “maimed” as above, to describe the afflicted condition laid upon Thamyris by the Muses. His mythic status as a poet-musician who attempts to ascend to the heavens with his gifts, like Bellerophon, pulls him back down to the heavy ground, crashing Icarus-hard to the heavy Earth, the planet associated with melancholia in humoral theory. Slamming figuratively, though no less destructively, back down to the hard mutable earth is a theme in the literature of the melancholic hero whose vigorous creative forces the gods immobilize and disable with the throes of an affliction.

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<sup>68</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951; repr., 2011), 108.

<sup>69</sup> Homer and Thomas Clark, "The Iliad of Homer: With an Interlinear Translation, for the Use of Schools and Private Learners," *Internet Archive*, accessed October 11, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/iliadhomerwitha01clargoog>.

Much later than the events depicted in the *Iliad*, and much later than the times of Homer, the visionary credibility of the poets began to be challenged by the physicians, oddly enough at the time melancholia began to emerge as a diagnosis in the Hippocratic writings, around 2500 years ago. According to Jaynes, this is also about the time that the new subjective consciousness began to emerge in Greece.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps by applying the Jaynesian filter it is possible to conclude that in ancient Greece the bicameral poets who heard voices in states of divine melancholia began to lose their prophetic authority as they began to gain a subjective consciousness. Such is ironic because the poets became increasingly more self-conscious and melancholic much later as they explored the inner being in the early modern period. Yet the more self-aware they were the less prophetic they became. By the time of Rufus of Ephesus, as Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl observe, the poets in general in late antiquity had lost their former status; there was an overwhelming loss of the “heroic,” the prophetic authority that poets once held as inspired creatives. The more the poetic moved to the prosaic the more the West began to slip into the beginning stages of its Medieval silence, the darker ages, when the inspired voices had gone quiet, not to be revived again until the time of the great Arabic writers of the tenth century, also a time of rebirth and discovery. As melancholia flourished, so did the arts and letters. Thus for many physicians the prophetic voices the poets heard may not have been so divinely inspired as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle had written about so famously, and Aristotle only because he thought that nature was divine. To reiterate Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl: “and it is also very significant that the melancholic’s gift of prophecy, which was observed by Aristotle and which Rufus still considered a reality

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<sup>70</sup> Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 467.

despite its pathological origin, now began to be regarded merely as the sick man's illusion."<sup>71</sup> As for the visual world, though the artists were generally held in low regard, nonetheless some ancient scholars did write favorably of them. In 340 BC, Duris of Samos wrote *The Lives of Painters and Sculptors*, fragments of which are extant today.<sup>72</sup> In late antiquity, around the third century AD, this hierarchy and competition among the artistic professions began to change, as an interest in visual artists arose and painters and sculptors were thought to possess the ability to be inspired and to create visual works of great merit.

## FLUIDS

Melancholia designated a disease for the physicians of ancient Greece. The idea of melancholia as a disease classification had developed an increasing momentum among the philosophers as well. The physicians believed the unstable vacillations of the humors made the body prone to the conditions that caused melancholia. If the temperatures and passions threw the humors into imbalanced states so that they began to fluctuate, then the body reacted with disease, and in the case of melancholia, the reaction was due to an excess of black bile. Melancholia exhibited a multitude of variously defined symptoms for which physicians invented many unsuccessful cures. As a disease with symptoms melancholia could at least be detected and diagnosed. The afflicted also became patients who sought recurrent treatment (from herbs to bleeding), hoping for cures alongside their prayers. Such brings to mind Chekov's quote from *The Cherry Orchard*, "If many

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<sup>71</sup> Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, 54.

<sup>72</sup> Wittkower, *Born under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists*, 3.

remedies are prescribed for an illness, you may be certain that the illness has no cure.”<sup>73</sup>

In his iconic treatise *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton lists enumerable remedies for as many variants of the illness. For severe cases, one imagines what physicians might have done being in the presence of full-blown melancholia, the extreme type that manifests as madness, catatonia, and suicide. Pseudo-Aristotle had wondered if poets and artists were prone to this form of melancholia as well, the form at its deadliest and psychotic. Were they instead predisposed to the *good* melancholia and not the bad? And if melancholia could be defined as variable states beyond the binaries of hot and cold, mania and lassitude, then which of these states were attached to the artist? It is these questions that permeate this present work as it examines melancholia and the arts in different periods.

There were no sharp lines cut between the disciplines of medicine and philosophy and the status of laypersons, who contributed to the literature of madness and melancholia in antiquity.<sup>74</sup> Greek conceptions of melancholia were thus developed by classical medicine and ancient philosophy as a unified knowledge production system. Melancholia’s resistance to medical remedies challenged physicians and helped them develop a dynamic system of understanding and treating disease and the imbalances of the body that persisted for almost 2500 years. As a status of being, melancholia connected the earthbound body and its deeply unstable fluids with the perfect harmonies of the universe that worked as an early form of the mind-body dichotomy. Yet conceptions of melancholy as a disease and as a mysterious source of creative energy in

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<sup>73</sup> Jane Kenyon, "Having It Out with Melancholy," *Academy of American Poets*, 1993, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/having-it-out-melancholy>.

<sup>74</sup> William Harris, ed. *Mental Disorders in the Classical World* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 7.

antiquity should not be understood only via the heavenly music of the spheres. To be sure melancholia was also embedded deeply in the earth, catacombed in the chaos of the underworld, the chthonic erosion of hard matter, the organic decay of rotting fruits, which appeared in paintings, and in the body's digestive systems. Melancholia was also a lowly disease, one very unfashionable. Long after his death, Rufus of Ephesus influenced many physicians who believed melancholia worked in the physiological processes of the body, following the medical theory of the Hippocrateans and the Galenic physicians. Such a tradition in the ancient world Maimonides helped to maintain in the Medieval period, just as the great Persian writers of the ninth century sheltered the connections between the heavens and being. As a rabbi and physician, Maimonides was a follower of Rufus of Ephesus and had read closely his fragmented treatise *On Melancholia*. Maimonides thus coupled melancholia, as a lowly humor, with poor digestion and disrupted bowels, symptoms he believed could be remedied by syrups and medicinal substances mixed with honey. He was also one of many physicians who believed melancholia could be helped by listening to music.<sup>75</sup>

Physicians looked to the body to discern the conditions of the mind and to the influences of all the humors on various modes of being, but they studied, diagnosed, and treated melancholic states more than any of the others. Melancholia was also complicated by madness and mania, and as an ancient classification it served as a catchall for the array of mental illnesses. Melancholia was more than fear and despondency, more than sadness without cause. It was a madness; it explained psychotic states. It was also a thing working in the body. The search for its mechanism and its causes was a

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<sup>75</sup> Ephesus, *On Melancholy*, 187.

preoccupation also among the philosophers. It is thus interesting to imagine Democritus writing in his garden about madness, as the melancholy anatomist who dissected animal carcasses, reading through them as divine texts to explain his own sorrows.<sup>76</sup> Hippocrates left enlightened after his visit with Democritus,<sup>77</sup> who was thought to be insane, pale and emaciated, trapped in his books and dissections, searching for the elusive black bile.

In the second century the Roman anatomist Galen also thought the body flowed with unstable substances that expressed various elemental states—with melancholia, the cold and dry. By late antiquity melancholia's hot biles had cooled some, its bleak colors darkened more by gloom and fear than the divine, the humors now traveling in the body as vital spirits. Galenic melancholia did not reflect musical harmonies or the vibrations of artistic brilliance. It focused on the dynamic states of the mind-body interaction, on the elemental qualities, and on the vital spirits of the blood, which directly affected the body and its sense of well-being. In Galenic melancholia the vital spirits could become drained and bring on the cold and dry.<sup>78</sup> By the time of Galen, humoral medicine had still not made any grand new discoveries; it was not known for drama or tempers of its own, as it was recycled from one medical era to the next. Humoralism was a form of applied medicine that was based on traditions that reflected observed knowledge of the material world. Melancholia was observable, detected by its symptoms, but no physician had discovered its mechanism and thus revealed its direct link between mind and body.

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<sup>76</sup> Democritus was not the only anatomist who dissected melancholia; the tradition continued with Leonardo da Vinci who connected the art of anatomy—often performed when he was alone with the corpses in the late hours of the night, as was his custom at the medical university in Padua—with melancholic experience.

<sup>77</sup> Marke Ahonen, *Mental Disorders in Ancient Philosophy* (Heidelberg, Germany: Springer, 2014), 226-227.

<sup>78</sup> Clark Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 48.

Conceptualizations of melancholia evolved, moving from the heated bile, for instance, to the vital spirits of the blood, then much later on, moving to the nerves. The humors travelled to new places in the body once those places were known to exist during any period in medicine. The spleen eventually became a crucial organ for melancholic action and a metaphorical location for the poets, where fits could be discharged.

The interminable sadness and fear that intrigued the Hippocratic physicians happened for them in very physical ways. The mechanism for melancholia was the black bile; it generated conditions in the body that responded to the cold and the dry. Finding the black bile was impossible, but the determination that it was the material cause of melancholia was a breakthrough in medicine in the fifth century BC. This was an instance of *tekhnè*, where theory and application worked together to describe a highly interpreted reality, one that explained for those who could accept it the relationship between body and mind. By the time of pseudo-Aristotle, the black bile was pneumatic, like a wine, a fluid substance that jammed the mind when it was cold and stoked it when it was hot. This was not the melancholia of the astrologers, which was subject to the influences of the constellations and the planets, to Saturn and its powerful immobilizations during the rebirth of *Melancholia* in the Renaissance.

The body was not only the domain of the anatomists and physicians but was also a focus among those ancient technologists working in classical robotics, engineers and artisans who sought to mime the body as a mechanical invention that could, however minimally, interact with human beings. Greek culture worshiped physical beauty and the material elegance of the body. There was a fascination among the Greek technologists with automata, an enchantment for the machine that ranged from mechanical birds to

humanoid servants, built with the intention to make sounds and to speak with voices as an instance of early ventriloquism. But the intention was not merely to create mechanical servants or curiosities for pleasure and special events. It was important to animate the robotic figures with speech capability, to enliven them with the powers of the voice, as statues that could speak, since the gods and the oracles many people began to believe were increasingly becoming more silent. Robots that could make sound or provide some mechanism of speech generated a new kind of voice hearing in the ancient world. The conception of the body as a machine thus did not emerge in the Enlightenment but was a preoccupation even among the ancients.

For the Hippocratic doctors, melancholia did not afflict the body as a mere space; it afflicted it also as a body experiencing time. Melancholia was thus a disease of time, of long durations, as much as intense fear and despondency. The Hippocratic author writes in *Aphorisms*, “If a fright or despondency lasts for a long time, it is a melancholic affection.”<sup>79</sup> Hippocratic physicians believed that fear and sadness dominated the melancholic mind for inordinate periods of time; these were the primary symptoms. As melancholia was thought to be a disease, physicians could closely observe and diagnose its symptoms.<sup>80</sup> Physicians practicing humoral medicine had defined melancholia as a disease, marked its symptoms, and developed the required treatments. The remedies ranged from “downward purges,” as Hippocrates prescribes, to diet, leeching, and much later with Galen, bathing and herbs. Writing about other afflictions Hippocrates observes, “In melancholic affections, determinations of the humor which occasions them

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<sup>79</sup> Hippocrates, "The Internet Classics Archive: Aphorisms by Hippocrates."

<sup>80</sup> Matthew Bell, *Melancholia: The Western Malady* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 132.

produce the following diseases; either apoplexy of the whole body, or convulsion, or madness, or blindness.”<sup>81</sup> It was a versatile disease and its symptoms were enlarged by all the problems it caused for the body. Melancholia was the super humor, an epicenter for the development of most illnesses. It was the cancer of its day, a wasting disease and madness. Melancholia eventually caused almost everything terrible one could have and for those who believed in the black bile, its incurable work was plainly visible in the bodies it ravaged.

The knowledge produced in the Hippocratic texts is fragmentary, especially so in the *Aphorisms*, where a single entry of a few lines about melancholia may be preceded by one on gout in the autumn or followed almost immediately by another referencing “chronic disease of the hip joint.”<sup>82</sup> There is no long treatise from Hippocrates on melancholia per se, but he does write an influential treatise on mental illness, *On The Sacred Disease*. Like many ancient texts, the few lines by Hippocrates specifically about melancholia that do survive were iconic referents that shaped generations of physicians and strongly influenced the professions of medicine and philosophy and the perceptions of the afflicted. Cures that might have been available for such a mysterious disease, one in the minds of some philosophers that was unmistakably linked to creative professions, were systematized in humoral medicine. For the physicians the theory of the black bile, and humoral medicine as a whole, seemed to offer an explanation of the illness and wide ranging cures. Humoral medicine was a theoretical system and an applied art practiced by the Hippocratic doctors for maintaining the interactions between mind and body. It was a whole-body system of analysis based on the proper mix of fluids, or *insonomia*, against a

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<sup>81</sup> Hippocrates, "The Internet Classics Archive: Aphorisms by Hippocrates."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

diagnosis of disease based on the instability of these fluids, or *dyskrasia*.<sup>83</sup> This was true especially concerning the status of the black bile, the most unfathomable of all the fluids. Of the four humors, three were associated with physical substances: blood, phlegm and pus (yellow bile).<sup>84</sup> The most analyzed humor, melancholia, may have been connected to vomit or clotted blood, but there is no single substance representing it as with the others.<sup>85</sup> Humoral medicine had emerged from ancient philosophy and astronomy, from the understanding of opposite forces interacting with each other as four qualities (cold, hot, moist, and dry) and four elements (earth, fire, water, and air) and the association of the four humors with the four seasons: melancholia with autumn, phlegm with winter, sanguine with spring, and choleric with summer.<sup>86</sup> The doctrine of the humors had roots into much older forms of medicine that preceded the Greeks. Thus the treatments for melancholia were still based on traditional associations with the earth, the autumn, and the cold and dry elements. The invention here was the black bile, the fluid substance, invisible though it was, but one that could nonetheless be compared to wine, a fluid all could see and understand its effects on the body. Wine was the closest thing to a physical mechanism that medicine had for melancholia. It was pseudo-Aristotle's brilliance to make the comparison in the context of the black bile. It was a way to make black-bile theory tangible, because the *effects* on the mind and the body were obvious for almost anyone for cases of the pathological sort. Few needed to know that melancholia was extremely painful and deadly in its pathological mode, enthusiastic and driven in its divine mode. Melancholia had always radiated a mystique, its allusive qualities that like

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<sup>83</sup> Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humors*, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

music embraced vagaries. In the world of the fluids medicine struggled to isolate melancholia and bring it back into balance. It remained a stubborn abstraction; it had eluded the searches for its mechanisms. Nonetheless, for Greek physicians the nimbus of melancholia enabled it to encompass many more illnesses, from epilepsy to blindness, and to be understood “as one of the cardinal forms of madness in earlier times.”<sup>87</sup>

### **The Aristotelean *Problem 30.1***

Both Aristotle and pseudo-Aristotle imagined multiple melancholies. The author of the *Problem 30.1*, if it was not Aristotle himself, writes definitively from the Aristotelian tradition of illness by observing oppositional forces, elemental qualities, and the black bile as a dynamic substance that was cold and hot, and a temperate balance between the fevers that he believed promoted exceptional creativity. The disposition of melancholia pseudo-Aristotle believed was generated by nature when inspired and a lethal illness when afflictive, the mind moved by a permanent wine and the darkest bile, the optimum of both artistic health and suicidal malaise. One may wonder from a contemporary perspective about the nature of distant scholarship and the distributed contributions of ancient writers of iconic texts in the past, whether about melancholia or any other vast subject that has sustained various imaginations across long stretches of time. Iconic writings are often much later determined by scholars to be the output of cultic followers or other contemporaries that form a group surrounding whatever significant figure, like the Hippocratic writers or the followers of Aristotle, pseudo-Plutarch and pseudo-Galen,

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<sup>87</sup> Francis Zimmerman, "The History of Melancholy," *Journal of the International Institute* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1995), accessed March 28, 2014, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0002.205?view=text;rgn=main>.

et cetera. The most iconic text on melancholia of the ancient world was the Aristotelean *Problem 30.1*. It has a pseudonymous authorship, though for centuries it was believed to be a part of Aristotle's general corpus. Cicero and Plutarch both referred to the treatise as an original work by Aristotle, as have other scholars much more recently.<sup>88</sup>

The *Problem 30.1* is a famous medico-philosophical treatise because it establishes a link between melancholia and artistic virtuosity. Put another way, it is iconic because pseudo-Aristotle positions melancholia as a curious riddle between Greek rationality and the apparent madness of creative achievement. The attempt works to resolve the paradox between madness, the worst of mind, and brilliance, the very best of mind, using the formal logic of humoral theory. Melancholia is the persistent mind-body problem, evasive, lapidary, its effects working as if generated by a system yet leaving no trace of its mechanism. Melancholia is a mirror of ancient medicine; it is the mime of logic and the conundrum of madness rolled into the dilemma of disease. The *Problem* is not however a treatise on bipolarity, as some have argued, and neither is it precisely traceable to any other modern taxonomy of mental *disorder*, which has its place in the DSM.<sup>89</sup> The *Problem's* description of melancholia is broadly philosophical yet thoroughly physiological. In the text melancholia afflicts mythic heroes like Ajax and Bellerophon with madness and inspires the poets and intellectuals to greatness. Pseudo-Aristotle considers the physiological features of melancholia, its connection to the body with the black bile in cold and hot states. When he writes about Bellerophon, he imagines a

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<sup>88</sup> Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, 33.

<sup>89</sup> As a condition more than 2500 years old, ancient melancholia falls outside the overwrought taxonomies of modern psychiatry, so it does not fit so neatly into the unambiguous categories that have barely lasted more than 100 years.

strong man not in terms of overheated bile but as a tragic figure who does not have mood swings or manic highs but is instead a brooding figure, “shunning the path of man,”<sup>90</sup> to use Homer’s phrase from the *Iliad*. This is a phrase that Robert Burton quotes in his mammoth treatise on melancholia, referring to a reclusiveness, which by his times had become a well-known characteristic attributed to melancholics. Having lost favor with the gods, Bellerophon lives his latter days as a solitary “eating out his heart”<sup>91</sup> at the loss of his children and rejection by the gods. Though Bellerophon won many victories in battle, and was famed for killing the chimera, his name according to some scholars may have had Semitic origins taking the form *Be’el-rāphôn*, meaning “Baal of healing, salvation” as he was also considered virtuous and wise.<sup>92</sup>

In *Problem 30.1* pseudo-Aristotle writes about melancholia using the language of humoral theory, referring to the dynamic states of the black bile as either hot or cold, and this with an understanding grounded in the theory of the elemental oppositions and not circular bipolarities, which are modern and not Aristotelian. He writes in general terms, not those that *specify* mental illness as in the modern diagnostic manuals.<sup>93</sup> The dynamic condition of the black bile pseudo-Aristotle defines as having opposed temperatures like cold metals and hot waters. To be fair, such suggests a polar structure if one thinks in

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<sup>90</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse (New York, NY: Signet Classic, 1950; repr., 1999), 78.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Michael C. Astour, *Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece* (The Netherlands: Brill, 1967), 226.

<sup>93</sup> In his text *Melancholia, Love and Time*, Peter Toohey recasts the *Problemata* as an ancient text that supports the modern conception of bipolarity. He believes that mania and depression define the range of states for the artist and that pseudo-Aristotle characterizes these states with allusions to heroic figures and within his descriptions of the overheated bile in opposition to the cold bile of depressive stupor. Toohey believes the author is also in some way legitimizing the lesser-established *mania* by attributing to it the traditionally elevated qualities of melancholia. In my view mania and melancholia need no introduction nor to leverage qualities from each other. They are inseparable terms that describe the long term “fear and despondency” without cause as diagnosed by the Hippocratic writers.

polar terms, but this structure is more in alignment with classical oppositional understandings of disease that come from elementalism itself (for instance hot and cold, dry and moist) than it does some early form of bipolar disorder that may be read into the ancient text. The difference is not that two mental states, mania and depression, are mentioned here as contemporary psychiatry defines them. The Aristotelian author writes that all creative melancholics experience elevated states of artistic inspiration, when the black bile is not excessive or out of balance with reference to normal health status; that is, inspiration occurs at an optimum mean or perfect balance during a creative (not pathological) melancholic state. The hot bile does not represent a state of mind that is inspired. It is the optimal status of melancholia when tempered as a mixture of hot and cold that inspires exceptional works and statecraft. The writer states in the *Problem*, “For if their melancholy habitus is quite undiluted they are too melancholy, but if it is somewhat tempered they are outstanding.” Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl conclude:

The final answer to the question put at the beginning reads that the amount of melancholy humour must be great enough to raise the character above the average, but not so great as to generate a melancholy ‘all too deep,’ and that it must maintain an average temperature, between ‘too hot’ and ‘too cold.’ Then and only then is the melancholic not a freak but a genius; for then and only then, as the admirable conclusion runs, is it ‘possible that this anomalous admixture is well *attempered* and in a certain sense well adjusted.’<sup>94</sup>

If everyone has some of the black bile, and though it may become heated or cooled and thus out of balance in all, the melancholic nature or disposition is more of an ethos, a state of mind. The balanced condition of the black bile and its influence on mind and body may thus for the Greeks indicate melancholic *health* not disease. Pseudo-Aristotle draws the difficult line between mental illness and great achievement as a product of a

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<sup>94</sup> Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, 32.

divine melancholia, the ideal state of mind that is not too unstable. What seems important is to maintain the balance in the black bile, the physiological substance, connected to the status of the mind, which is melancholic. If there is no excess of black bile, then there is no melancholic reaction, even in melancholics, who have the propensity for the condition in its generative and pathological forms. The black bile is the dynamic mechanism that somehow performs the mystery of melancholia. It is an unseen substance, a thing working systematically in the body. It is a pneumatic fluid, the invisible material of inspiration and oblivion. But inspiration does not come from disease; it comes from instability that arises from nature, a melancholic nature. Pseudo-Aristotle observes, “therefore all melancholic persons are out of the ordinary, not owing to illness, but from their natural constitution.”<sup>95</sup>

Melancholia had become a medical way to think about the difficult paradox, the ancient mind-body riddle that engaged numerous medical, aesthetic, and lay commentators. Melancholia has continued the controversies about mental illness and its physiological effects to this day. Some scholars view the overheated black bile as evidence of mania and that it is in those melancholics with hot-running bile that the tendency to generate inspired artworks and good statecraft exists. This view, influenced by contemporary divisions of the depressions, misses the real intention of pseudo-Aristotle, which is to find a balance between the cold and the hot, a physiological zone that is a proper mix of the fluids. To reiterate, for pseudo-Aristotle, the *creative* form of melancholia is based on nature not illness. Poetic inspiration *occurs* and ability and talent forge potential works. Thus when melancholia is most symptomatic it is least

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 29.

effective, least inspired. It is not in states of mania or melancholy or in the abnormal dispositions but it is in the *flow* of inspiration that creative achievement is founded. A polar reading of the *Problem* encourages fable notions that artistic inspiration somehow mysteriously occurs in states of manic exaltation. Aristotle does not take anything away from the poets, as perhaps Plato does, suggesting only talent or some pure source of divine madness generates unique works. For the Aristotelian writers the poets worked from nature, which is divine, not by the stars or the gods. The conditions of the fluids thus controlled ultimate expressions of divine madness.

Whether pathological or divine, whether Hippocratic disease or Platonic frenzy, melancholia had been reduced to a substance. It took more time to further reduce it to a pathology that was no longer divine. Melancholia had itself always been the substance (*melaina cholē*), the heroic black bile, the vector of sadness and fear. Later on as the physicians continued to refine Hippocratic theory, they relied less on the importance of the black bile in the permanent form of melancholia. Gradually, “The mythical notion of frenzy was replaced by the scientific notion of melancholy.”<sup>96</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle had re-defined the parameters of artistic creativity and the illness he believed so often attended it. Melancholia could now be understood as a pathological disorder *and* a source for artistic inspiration without being associated with mystical frenzy. As there were no hard lines separating the potential for natural melancholics to follow on easily into pathological states of dejection and fear, even full-blown melancholia, the search for the generative mechanisms of the illness continued in the body, in the stars and in the words of the poets and musicians. The musical spheres steadfastly influenced the mind and soul

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 40.

of the philosophers, the poets were still hearing voices to make their divinely inspired works, and the physicians continued to track the physical mysteries of melancholia in the fluids.

## MODERN MELANCHOLIES

### Chapter 2 The Polymaths

After nearly a millennium of possessing hermits in the desert and terrifying religious scholars in the church from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, melancholia resurfaced from its magical roots in the early Italian Renaissance, this time as a visual phenomenon that afflicted the painters. The “golden age of melancholia,”<sup>97</sup> which Starobinski commissioned as a phrase to sum the Renaissance, pointed to a new era of visual melancholia, which was in sync with the rise of the artistic temperament, the so-called visual turn in knowledge production, and with Leonardo’s *Paragone*, the elevation of painting to a high art, which some artists like Leonardo and Vasari believed had eclipsed poetry and music. Melancholia had finally revitalized its ancient connection to the artists, shedding its former status as the immobilizing sin of monks to become the personal subject of iconic engravings and paintings, in the form of novel self-portraits, most symbolically represented in Albrecht Dürer’s highly critiqued *Melencolia I*. The self-portrait of the artist, a genre Dürer invented, became an object that used material symbols to represent the melancholic status as an ambiguous state of mind, associating genius with creative tools, turning the gaze of the visual artist inward to a newly developing sense of self-awareness and cosmic inspiration. Albrecht Dürer was a polymath. Like Leonardo and Michelangelo, he was an artist who produced knowledge across disciplines, writing texts about proportion and geometry in addition to making

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<sup>97</sup> Jeremy Schmidt, introduction to *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 1.

engravings and paintings using these technical theories that employed one-point perspective on a two-dimensional surface. Dürer predictively mirrored the Faustian intellectual-artist in his multi-disciplinary works to the culture from which the legend of the demonic polymath would eventually originate. Like Leonardo he sought a creativity that unified knowledge across masteries, in a time when specialization had not yet embedded itself in the universities as a system. Creative melancholics were thus *viewed* as Renaissance men, a composite character that would help generate the Faust legend, which held mythic status in the development of artistic temperament later in the early modern period, epitomized among the multitalented, like Dürer.<sup>98</sup>

The early visualization of melancholia thus had a cosmic foundation. It is one that imaged creativity as an influence that visited the multitalented artist surrounded by tools of creativity and measurement in the studio, from musical instruments and paintbrushes to the instruments of descriptive geometry, calculation, and astronomy. While many melancholic artists innovated new works thought to be visited upon them mysteriously by way of divine inspiration (bypassing the dangerous states of mind), medical treatises continued to endorse a physical description of melancholia as a disease generated by the black bile and exacerbated by other humors in its adust (or combusive) forms. These were manifestations of illness that could prove terribly destructive rather than beneficial to the artist. Thus visual melancholies migrated from cosmic forms of expression to those located in the material worlds of the studio and the emerging mental hospital, where medicine, philosophy, and creative aesthetics informed a complex state of

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<sup>98</sup> Michael Palencia-Roth has written significantly on the Faust legend and its connection to Dürer. See Michael Palencia-Roth, "Albrecht Dürer's 'Melencolia I' and Thomas Mann's 'Doktor Faustus'," *German Studies Review* 3, no. 3 (October 1980), accessed March 28, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1429161>.

consciousness that was at times a hindrance as much as an stimulant to the creative process. This translation of melancholic sensibility in visual art as an angelic and celestial inspiration, which Dürer visualized as a wounded spirit in his iconic engraving *Melencolia I*, was much later expressed in Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night* as a turbulent illness, an affliction of the wounded artist that had material links as well in Van Gogh's late-style hospital paintings, just as Durer's angelic form of melancholia was surrounded and shaped by various tools of creativity and measurement from the material world. These two iconic works of art, along with others in their league, like Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, William Blake's illustrations of the Book of Job, and Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, have always coexisted with their respective *medical* traditions of imaging melancholia. Medical melancholia is often imaged as one of four physiognomies in treatises about the humors, but elsewhere melancholia is depicted via a more complex visual taxonomy as a physical disease that can be treated, the most iconic representation of which is the frontispiece of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The aspect of insanity is emblematic in Goya's *The Sleep of Reason*, thus melancholia is not merely an artistic influence but also is an affliction visualized as dream monsters tormenting the soul of the artist in his sleep. In contemporary media, melancholia is portrayed both as an illness and a celestial influence in Lars von Trier's 2011 film *Melancholia*.

## **COSMOS**

Astral melancholy, mysterious black rays, starry nights, omen comets, the rays of a mystery planet on a collision path with the earth. These are the scenes of celestial

melancholy in iconic art works that display the influential heavens through the windows of studios, ambiguous gardens, and hospital rooms. In the Tornabuoni Chapel of the Santa Maria Novella in Florence is Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco *Apparition of the Angel to Zachariah*. As was the custom of artists working in Florence during the fifteenth century, Ghirlandaio painted Florentine nobles wearing contemporary attire into the Biblical scene. At the bottom of the fresco he painted in physician-astrologer Marsilio Ficino, standing with other Florentine intellectuals of the Laurentian period, most notably, Cristoforo Landino. Cosimo de Medici employed Ficino to manage the Platonic Academy<sup>99</sup> in the Careggi Villa, and to translate the works of Plato into Latin. Ficino was thus a key figure of the Medici art and culture machine, as he revived Plato's works for Florentine intellectuals that would disseminate them to other city-states, eventually reaching artistic centers to the north in the Netherlands and Germany. Ficino was also a physician who placed validity in the doctrine of the four humors and the black bile theory, while also being a practitioner of astrology and alchemy. His medical treatise on melancholia may thus be understood as a synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy<sup>100</sup> that fuses natural melancholy (*furor melancholicus*) and moderately heated bile with the idea of divine madness (*furor divinus*) as an explanation for artistic inspiration and intellectual virtuosity. Ficino's principle work on melancholia, *De Vita Triplici*, is also a health manual about managing the hazards of the scholarly life and the

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<sup>99</sup> James Hankins, "The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 1991). Renaissance scholars have written disputations about the existence of this school and the degree to which it played a part in the formation of the Platonic revival in Florence.

<sup>100</sup> Noel L. Brann, *The Debate over the Origin of Genius during the Italian Renaissance: The Theories of Supernatural Frenzy and Natural Melancholy in Accord and in Conflict on the Threshold of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. A. J. Vanderjagt vol. 107, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2002), 83-84. Ficino of course subordinates the natural material causes of the Peripatetics to Platonic idealism and the theory of transcendent forms.

difficulties of melancholic imbalance. He believed there was a mystery connection between melancholia and those who devoted their lives to literary studies. He introduced the concept of scholarly melancholy to Florentine intellectual circles following in the tradition of Rufus of Ephesus, who also believed that too much study and isolation caused melancholia. Giorgio Vasari also shared this view and may have been influenced by Ficino. In his iconic series of discrete biographies, *The Lives of the Artists*, Vasari rendered as mad the Bolognese painter Amico Aspertini and believed that the late style frescoes of Pontormo expressed abysmal melancholia and grotesque madness. Vasari critiqued the tortured style of Pontormo's writhing figures in his fresco *Last Judgment* (now destroyed), which was painted in the choir of the San Lorenzo Basilica.<sup>101</sup> He warned of the perils of seclusion for painters and was critical of their lifestyle and taxing work habits that he believed were the trademark signs of eccentricity that led to melancholia and madness. The sixteenth century Italian artists had also lamented the serious affliction, in the vernacular *malinconico*, and they wrote about the condition as their own special hazard. Artists like Romano Alberti, Jacopo Pontormo, Francesco Parmigianino, and the Paduan painter Paolo Pino reported melancholia's destructive effects on both mind and body.<sup>102</sup> If some of the painters in Italy were going mad, especially in their late careers, the idea that melancholia among artists was not a display or a fancy but something far more sinister became very real, something that of course was not news to the physicians and civic-minded humanists. Melancholia nonetheless remained entangled with its genial characteristics as well and the perception that

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<sup>101</sup> Piers Britton, "'Mio malinconico, o vero . . . mio pazzo': Michelangelo, Vasari, and the Problem of Artists' Melancholy in Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 663.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

melancholic artists were more diligent and longsuffering with the complications of technique and production and other formidable demands their work put upon them. Pino noted in his treatise *Dialogo di Pittura* that the painters were susceptible to melancholia “by virtue of their sedentary life,”<sup>103</sup> which is in agreement with Ficino’s estimation of the affliction and its effects on both scholars and artists. As art historian Piers Britton concludes, channeling Vasari, who was likely familiar with Ficino’s treatise, “artists and men of letters shared their tendency to melancholia because both professions demanded enhanced intellectual effort.”<sup>104</sup>

During the Renaissance, painting and engraving became the media through which melancholia was explored, praised, and abhorred as a condition that both inspired and afflicted the artist. These visual genera began to directly approach the idea of the melancholic via objects that represented the ambiguities of a stationary yet enigmatic self, like the paralyzed visionary figure in Durer’s *Melencolia I*. This famous engraving introduced the melancholy self-portrait to a culture of creatives, intellectuals, chemical philosophers, and physicians, who looked to the magnitude of celestial influences in the heavens that they believed had significant control over melancholic states. In the images examined in this essay, the most important element of visual melancholia is composition. The arrangement of objects in the paintings, engravings, and the etchings reveals broadly a greater meaning than do the objects themselves, without resolving the ambiguities of such vast, abstract topics, which in the representation of melancholia may become endlessly interpreted, like loops of thought that tire the brain and slump the body. Thus the location of objects as a figure of consciousness immersed in a particular space

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 664.

(among the stars, in the studio, recovering in a hospital) set a momentum in the melancholic image that helped cultivate the character of the artistic temperament. Several art historians and social scientists have examined recently the representation of fashionable melancholia and the elevation of its genial forms to extravagant detail. This is not the same as the fashionable melancholia of those individuals in the past who have attempted to affect the mood as if it could be posed or expressed primarily in dark clothing with self-conscious designs. The suffering depicted in the following images is much more indirect, sometimes exceptionally subtle, but ultimately inexplicable, which is the condition of deep sorrow. All of the images considered in this essay were made by artists who suffered mental illness, some severely so. Many artists believed they were powerfully afflicted by melancholia *and* some by madness, suggesting that the two conditions share a strong link. These artists are the so-called “practitioner[s] of melancholia,”<sup>105</sup> several of whom became patients or were inmates in hospitals and prisons like the Italian verse-maker Tasso. But it was Dürer who was the first of the painters to explore melancholia as a type of consciousness, as a philosophy of mind with its own weightiness and as a construction built on approximations of uncertainty, instability, and madness. If there had been an algorithm of melancholia during the Renaissance, Dürer would have labored earnestly to measure it, only later to understand it was impossible to calculate melancholia or to write its sum. Nonetheless, the medical treatises even of his day (and afterward) continued to create categories and remedies for the hieratic illness. Dürer’s image functions similarly as a visualization of consciousness and a symbolic calculator, an analog computer driven by a visual program, a device

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<sup>105</sup> Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 20.

loaded with codes and ciphers that may be optionally configured and endlessly approximated.

### **Albrecht Dürer: Calculating *Melencolia***

Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* depicts the scattered technical world of the melancholic artist. Melencolia is visualized in the image as an angelic female with wings and a large build. She possesses both natural and supernatural features, her body connecting the realm above with the realm below. She is positioned as a dejected star, surrounded by a multitude of craftsman tools and instruments of calculation, a couple geometric solids, two animals that have a common association with melancholia, a magic square, and some celestial drama in the sky, all lit by a radial comet and moon ray arching above the polyphony of symbolic clutter below. As a supernatural figure, both angel and human, she holds the classic melancholic pose, chin resting on the hand, her face locked in a disconsolate gesture that is also contemplative. She is immobile and seems at least temporarily unable to make any use of the tools that encircle her, perhaps too preoccupied with unhappy reveries to make any creative work even if she could. She sits as an icon in aloof silence, an embodiment of the creative and calculative sage, a multitalented artist, geometer, mathematician, and astronomer. Dürer was the German Leonardo of his times. He has been cast in many roles as a polymath of the Northern European Renaissance: painter and engraver, printmaker and cartographer, geometer and mathematician, natural philosopher, scientist, and theorist. He was also the prototypical melancholic artist, the Faust of his times who had survived a major splenetic illness. Much has been speculated since Erwin Panofsky's iconological work about the objects

within *Melencolia I*. But it is not just the objects that are important to the task of decoding some of the meaning of this generally indecipherable engraving. The placement of the objects in the image suggests a hierarchy of their importance, especially concerning their relationship to the stars. Scanning from the bottom to the top of the image, the tools of the craftsman: a saw, block plane, hammer, nails, ruler, pliers, are located on the floor or near the angel's feet. Midway in the image are the items of the working but in this case thwarted artist: a shriveled purse, a set of keys, objects normally symbolizing money, access, and ownership, powers the melancholic figure seems to lack. Above these are instruments of the learned geometer, the latched book and compass, which rest in the angel's lap just below other tools of measurement. Moving upward, the utility of the instruments becomes more abstract, an empty scale appearing above the putto, suggesting the deeds of the soul, and an hourglass, instrument of time tracking, set beside a magic square, symbol of pure mathematics, planetary influence, and an ordered universe. Positioned slightly above these is the only musical instrument, a bell, which hangs from the wall attached to a pull cord. Appearing top left of frame, above the horizon, is a bat whose wings are a banner with the words *Melencolia I* and a streaking comet below a moon bow. Thus the picture below of material things gradually dissolves into the picture above of the heavens, a busy celestial window of atmospheric events and an omenized bat, signifying incalculable time and the inscrutable, melancholic universe.

Listed under a heading for comets in Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century in *A Popular Treatise on Comets*, a comet was reportedly visible in Europe during late December 1513 thru middle February 1514,<sup>106</sup> the same months since ancient

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<sup>106</sup> François Arago, *A Popular Treatise on Comets: Reprinted from 'Popular Astronomy'*, trans. W. H. Smyth and Robert Grant (London, UK: Longman, 1861), 48-49.

times traditionally associated with the rule of Saturn. While Saturn historically ruled Capricorn, from middle December through middle January, in ancient times Saturn also ruled Aquarius, the influence of which concludes in middle February. Saturn thus is the only planet to rule two months in the astrological calendar. Dürer's comet may in this way be a symbol of Saturn because of the time of its occurrence, the melancholic events it omenizes. Some tragic events were very real ones in Dürer's personal life, as the artist lost his mother in 1514. Not just a celestial event germinating from Dürer's visual imagination, it is likely a Saturnine comet streaking in the melancholic sky of the engraving, an event he may have witnessed in the night skies over Europe sometime during late 1513 or early in 1514. Visible to the naked eye for such a long period, Dürer most likely would have seen the comet, maybe several times, and others would have brought it to his attention, maybe in great detail, as he knew cartographers and astronomers, having illustrated his own star chart before his master engravings series that includes *Melencolia I* and *St. Jerome in His Study*. Dürer was fascinated with comets and also depicted one on a double-sided painting in oils of *St. Jerome in the Wilderness*, which he completed in 1496. The instance of a comet is central to the moonlit sky above his coolly dramatic outdoor space, littered with tools and mathematical curiosities, unfinished and distant from the marina behind the figure.

*Melencolia I* is thus set in an abstract space that reflects a natural world in a supernatural atmosphere, a space set outdoors in an unfinished terrace, or perhaps the ruins of a palace with no roof, or an unfinished building under construction. Perhaps it is an allegory of a mind under reconstruction while enduring the effects of deep melancholia. The engraving hints at a scene that is cosmic and entangled: the comet

above, the moon beam arch, the balancing scales below, the magic square in between, each mediating a symbolic horizon that once again separates the diurnal world of material objects and measuring tools from the inexplicable immaterial world of the intellect and divine inspiration. Divine fury in the sky, melancholic madness on earth. Even though the angelic figure sits in a melancholic pose, seemingly lost between these two worlds, the inspired artist under the influence of the mood she allegorizes requires these tools to create, but they lie in disarray across an imaginary scene. Dürer's engraving displays the effects of a mysterious, celestially-driven atmosphere transmuting the mundane world into the inspired world of the artist. Mathematical commonplace, represented by the lowly carpenter's tools of the old Saturnine intellect, a compass in hand, a hammer, saw and nails at foot, is transmuted by the mysterious alchemical exchanges of *melancholia imaginativa* into mathematical super imagination, signified in the enigmatic math of magic squares and the belief in the resonance between material forms and astrological influences. Melancholia may thus be seen as a filter between the materials of what is handmade and the tools of making with the imagination. It is a pure mathematics that connects them, in the abstract unknowable dimension of the polyhedron (suggesting an unknowable melancholic state), a listless staring off that is ultimately inspired by a musical influence that operates in numbers and balances the forms across immeasurable distances in the cosmos. There is a dissonance in the angelic figure who lives with the tools of the geometer and compositionist, looking far off out of frame at an incomprehensible distance, seemingly acquainted with the unknowable features of melancholia that cannot be contained by rational boundary.

Considering the dramatic changes the role of the artist encountered during the Renaissance, Dürer's engraving is an early prototype of the transmutation of the messy world of measurement and calculation in the arena of practical science (the lower talents of the Saturnine personality),<sup>107</sup> to the elevated forms of creative expression as represented in architectural solids and mathematical equations (the higher talents of the melancholic). This parallels the upgrade of personality and profession of Renaissance artists, from the craftsman to the high status of genial artist, as a producer of both things and high knowledge. Dürer was one of the first to charge for his creative *gifts* and *expertise*, not just for the materials and tools required to do the job. This in contrast to Raphael, whose patron advised him to stay consistently within a budget, as he was still charging only for his materials and labor, not his genius.<sup>108</sup> Leonardo in Florence, Dürer in Nuremberg, two artists working in the worlds of both science and art, and at least according to Ficino and Agrippa and most of the physicians and intellectuals of the day, they were facing the dangers of the black bile, the natural melancholia of Pseudo-Aristotle, yet were also electrified by the creative furors of Platonic inspiration. Similar to Leonardo, Dürer was inventing the model of the new polymath, the melancholic artist afflicted by virtuosity, who used the vernacular language and not the silver Latin to advance both art and science, who worked and calculated in multiple media as artist and scientist, the Faust figure in control of a new knowledge production system that required eclectic talents.

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<sup>107</sup> Dame Francis Yates, "Chapman and Dürer on Inspired Melancholy," *River Campus Libraries*, 1981, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=3566>.

<sup>108</sup> David Ritz Finkelstein, "Melencolia I.1," *Cornell University Library*, February 2007, accessed January 17, 2015, <http://arxiv.org/abs/physics/0602185v2>.

The polyhedron, Dürer's solid, which dominates the engraving and sits coldly in the angelic figure's line of sight, is perhaps an enigmatic monolith, an imponderable object crafted in some otherworldly shop, as distant and unfriendly as the marina tucked far away in the background behind a small body of water. It is as if Dürer's figure sits like a stone, her thinking set far off from civilization but her body very much in view, just as the solid remains in view. The angel looks beyond to some great distance she cannot grasp. She inhabits a maze of objects, computational tools that measure and predict, and thus she is a mind inhabiting a mind, lost in a puzzle, dejected at the insolvability of her riddled existence. Dürer engraved the first European star charts and designed fantastic creatures to represent various celestial figures. These charts were published around the time he created *Melencolia I*. *Melencolia I* seems to reveal this cartographical influence, depicting a map of the melancholic consciousness, its title intentionally misspelled in the banner the bat holds above the figure. Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl assumed that Dürer borrowed the title from the taxonomy of Agrippa, but he used the traditional spelling in *De Occulta Philosophia*. Dürer may have thought he was charting the night skies of the mind, seating a melancholic star under the influence of Saturn, orbited by tools and abstract solids that resemble monoliths in miniature, the vastness of space reduced to a scene. Dürer may be visualizing Agrippa's medical taxonomy but if so he is using his own visual vocabulary represented in the objects that surround the figure. It is easy to imagine an artist illustrating an anatomical text, but it may be difficult to imagine that an artist would illustrate a medical treatise on the mind, on melancholia. Dürer does so by illustrating the melancholic mind using familiar tools designed to illustrate the cosmos, the very tools that aided his eventual engravings of the stars. His star charts are mind

charts. The image is Dürer's treatise on melancholia, a work written with scrapers and burins, suggesting that there is a great affinity between writing and engraving, between the block of text and its illustration. There is a correspondence between the art of writing with a pen and scrawling with a burnisher, thus Dürer is the poet and visual artist, as he has elevated art to the status of poetry and to geometry, one of the subjects of the *quadrivium*.

Do the tools of calculation and measurement that surround the melancholic figure in a state of disuse agitate the dejection she seems to endure without much resistance? If the artist supposedly draws some enigmatic creative potential via the filtered energies of melancholia, and if the title of the engraving truly reflects Agrippa's taxonomy of *melancholia imaginativa*, why then is the figure here so dark and pensive, and why do the tools and materials that enable artistic expression lie dormant and scattered? But it is not only the material objects, like the polyhedron and sphere, which appear immovable and lethargically rendered in the scene. The dog is emaciated, lying frozen near the angel's feet on the floor in a comatose sleep. The winged putto sitting on a grinding wheel beside the angel looks droopy and holds a slate, marking it with an engraving tool. The only creature flying in this image is the serpent-tailed bat, whose wings serve as the plate on which the banner of text *Melencolia I* is inscribed. The comet is the only radiant object as it streaks across the celestial membrane like a nocturnal idea. But it is not the only mysterious phenomenon that sets the mood of the composition. Where does the seven-rung ladder lead to behind the wall, if it is not an alchemical symbol or stairway to the heavens? The engraving is very dark, and the melancholic figure has a dusky face with a hefty but indistinct body covered by the draperies of a long expansive gown.

The computations of the engraving are represented by the magic square. The magic square is a kind of calculator, a puzzle machine, but it was not considered a toy or an amusement in Dürer's time. Magic squares are useful tools for learning number sets and making permutations. Dürer's square is of the fourth order with a magic constant of 34. Agrippa had constructed three magic squares, of orders 3 through 9, and next associated these with the then known seven planets. Dürer's square is connected mysteriously to Jupiter, not to the 3<sup>rd</sup> order square, which is connected to Saturn, the planet representing melancholia. The squares were thought to emanate special powers, and were often fashioned of the metal associated with the planet they represented and were sometimes worn as a talisman. Does Dürer's engraving reflect more Ficino's admonitions against reveling in melancholia to make creative works than it does inviting its darker, more Faustian forms in the magical world of Agrippa? Is Dürer's *Study of St. Jerome Melencolia III*, and if so, where is *Melencolia II*?

Panofsky's final interpretation of Dürer's engraving advocates a negative depiction of melancholia. For Panofsky the angelic figure is ultimately immobilized, surrounded by useless tools and a distant universe, the suffering artist beset with doubts and agitations. This is not the reading of melancholia from Dame Francis, who sees a mysterious magic working as active agent in the angelic figure, who is not immobilized with crippling thoughts but is rather absorbed in creative trance. A portrait painting by Bastien-Lepage depicts Joan of Arc at home standing near a tree in her garden, staring vacantly into the distance with wide blue eyes, angelic figures floating in the background with halos and diaphanous bodies. A similar kind of trance, a mood full of puzzling thoughts.

At least for Panofsky and Francis, the two greatest interpreters of *Melencolia I*, the work suggests a deeply self-conscious mood that for one afflicts and the other enchants the artist. Perhaps it is rather a simultaneous experience of two warring states, both affliction and enchantment. *Melencolia I* thus emanates a dual nature that defines the temperament as both a hazardous occupation to be monitored by both medicine and the stars as Ficino elucidates in his treatise, and as a divine madness purged by creative bursts. Dürer as an artist has given the temperament a shape that may take several forms to be expressed in the creative occupations represented by tools that are appropriate for the artist, the geometer, the accountant, the scholar, the mathematician, the astronomer all prone to the dual attacks of melancholia, from inspiration to dejection. Melancholia's dual nature feeds on the immaterial world of the artistic imagination struggling against the mundane realities that pull from the external world.

It is interesting that the peak image of melancholia, Dürer's *Melencolia I*, is an engraving and not an oil-based painting. Goya's most iconic image of melancholia, *Capricho* #43, is an aquatint, just as the plates from Blake's illustrations of the Book of Job and the images of melancholia by Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione are etchings. Dürer and Blake were both trained as engravers, and while Blake held a bias against working in oils, and much preferred the immediacy of watercolors and tempura, the etching is a more intimate and permanent medium, one whose marks are carved into copper plates, like the sculptor making an object.

## Vincent Van Gogh: Starry Consciousness

In the foothills of the Alpilles Mountains at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Van Gogh had begun to pour out the visions of his unstable mind into the compositions of his paintings, especially those that he did not consider finished like *Starry Night*. In the spring of 1888, a few months after the December meltdown and intense quarrel with Gauguin at the Yellow House in Arles, a fight which climaxed in a self-mutilation episode that almost killed him, Van Gogh had experienced multiple suicidal attacks, in which he compulsively began to eat his paints or indulge his absinthe habit and manic attraction to prostitutes. According to an article in *Le Forum Républicain*, published a week after the night of the December calamity, Vincent had severed his ear clean off,<sup>109</sup> wrapped it in newspaper, and delivered it to a prostitute named Rachel at *maison de tolérance no 1*, near Place Lamartine where he lived. In January, he was admitted into the Old Hospital (Hôtel-Dieu-Saint-Espirit) in Arles under the care of Dr. Felix Ray, who eventually encouraged him to paint as a therapeutic activity, the yield of which included paintings of the now iconic hospital garden surrounded by arcades. During the months in the hospital Vincent returned to the Yellow House in the daytime to paint, but his eccentric behavior and psychotic thoughts that he was being poisoned had continued to plague his mind. The townspeople, concerned that Van Gogh was a danger to them, had petitioned by at least 30 signatures the mayor of Arles, Jacques Tardieu,<sup>110</sup> to have Vincent removed from his residence at Place Lamartine and committed to an asylum. Distressed by his already

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<sup>109</sup> Rita Wildegans, "Van Gogh's Ear," *wildegans.de*, 2007, accessed January 30, 2015, <http://wildegans.de/vangogh/english/index.html>. This fact about the severed ear is among the expansive side-notes to letter 728 on the website.

<sup>110</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, 18 June 1889, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," *vangoghletters.org*, 2009, accessed August 23, 2016, <http://vangoghletters.org/>, 782.

lynched reputation in Arles, and having realized that he could not manage the sudden attacks alone, by the late spring of 1889, Vincent was ready to leave for Saint-Rémy. Theo encouraged Vincent to self-admit into Saint Paul Hospital in Saint-Rémy, which was a twelfth century Augustine monastery that had been converted into a mental hospital in the nineteenth century. It was also common for such monasteries to serve as sanctuaries for the mad and depressed before some of them became hospitals. Vincent entered the hospital at Saint-Rémy in May under the care of Dr. Théophile Peyron. Following Dr. Rey's example Dr. Peyron also allowed Van Gogh to paint as long as the activity did not agitate his mind or cause him to work for long periods without resting.

In June of 1889, shortly after he had self-admitted upon Theo's advice, Van Gogh had begun a study of the night sky that would become one of his most iconic paintings and one of the most famous images of the cosmos in all of art history. But unlike his years faithfully striving to paint nature and reality as he saw them in the light of day and in the wheat fields and orchards of Arles, Van Gogh had loosened the grip of his material vision in Saint-Rémy to paint the night as a stylized imaginary scene. One historian notes, "In this period, inspired by the unfettered approach to reality Gauguin and Bernard took in their work, Van Gogh also gave his imagination free rein."<sup>111</sup> Looking out from the window of his hospital room in the early morning hours, the stars and Venus and the moon were set before him like a cluster of models, but "Reproducing reality was not what he set out to do."<sup>112</sup> Van Gogh had instead by practice and not accident flattened multiple spaces on the canvas simultaneously, bringing together distant galaxies

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<sup>111</sup> Sjraar van Heugten et al., *Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night* (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 80.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

alongside close-up exaggerations of the moon and the starry constellation, which are set above an imaginary town. This placement of distant galaxies on the same planes as the moon and the village emphasizes the interdependence of the cosmos and the township, a cosmography he viewed through the barred window of his hospital room in which he was confined. The division between the material world and celestial infinitude rests upon the imaginary township and its surrounds, which provide a jagged but nonetheless horizontal line across the landscape with vertical bursts of cypress trees joining the two worlds, the one below with the one above.

It is not merely a point of interest that Vincent painted the turbulence of *Starry Night* from the barred window of his hospital room. The painting highlights his signature swirls and iconic brushwork that at the time had represented the development of his style. Vincent had suffered repeated attacks, episodes that ended in self-mutilation and madness, problems that could only be exacerbated by absinthe and eating poisonous lead-based paints. Such repeated exposure to toxic chemicals doubtless had an effect on his health, and it is easy to imagine that his mind had been altered by these substances enough to change the way he painted, as some writers have suggested that the swirls in his paintings like *Starry Night* are evidence of madness and addiction. These counterturning whirlpools in the night sky may not reflect a hallucinatory state, though they spin and vibrate as if they do, perhaps in a way that seems maddening as the parodied optics of creative distress and insanity. Reflected here is a much subtler turbulence than gyrating swirls.

Prior to his hospitalization at Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh had painted night paintings of cypresses alongside the road and the stars over the Rhone. In *The Poet, Portrait of*

*Eugène Boch*, Van Gogh painted a cosmic backdrop as a symbol of celestial influence and as a representation of the abstract mind of the poet, whom he had met in Arles. Van Gogh's early morning waking, his impasto strokes, and his fascination with the colors of the night converged with astronomy in a special way in this work. He did not intend to make a realistic portrait of the sky, as he had done the previous year on the Rhone just a short walk from the Yellow House. The stars may look hallucinated, riding waves of atmospheric swirl and lunar distortion, but he placed them on his canvas as they appeared in the night sky. But *Starry Night* is more than a picture of the early morning sky lit up by celestial objects over an imaginary village. The constellation Aries, Venus, and the gibbous moon<sup>113</sup> hold the same positions in the painting as they did in the sky at the hospital. Vincent wrote Theo on June 18, 1889 and mentioned the painting for the first time, providing the most likely day he would have painted the image. UCLA art historian Albert Boime used software and Van Gogh's June 18<sup>th</sup> letter to Theo to plot the coordinates of the stars, the planet Venus, and the moon from Vincent's window that night in June, when he made the painting. Others have also completed similar astronomical studies on other paintings by Van Gogh, like *Moonrise* and *The White House*. Boime discovered that *Starry Night* is an accurate picture of what the night sky looked like from Van Gogh's window that night in June of 1889. It is also speculated that Vincent likely held a fascination with or at least had been aware of the French astronomer Camille Flammarion and his drawings of the night sky published in the astronomy journals.

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<sup>113</sup> Van Gogh creates an exaggerated crescent moon instead of the more accurate gibbous for stylistic effect.

Owing to its whirlpool patterns, *Starry Night* is a kind of magical star chart mapping turbulent flows, an abstract space visualizing artistic consciousness projected onto the night sky. As an abstraction of distance and space, the painting impinges on Van Gogh's rough-hewn material safe of broken earthenware jugs, sunflowers, and worn out shoes. He does not paint this view from the sanctuary of his bedroom, or from inside the café at night surrounded by prostitutes and alcoholics whom he knew, or even from the banks of the Rhone in the evening, with only the quiet streaks of starlight shimmying across the calm waters. Van Gogh paints from his room always looking through an iron-barred window, always aware that he is in a mental hospital, interrupted by the screams of patients who are worse off than him. He paints the horizon, a wavy line of foothills separating the above from the below, the night sky from the imaginary township, the deeply mysterious from the unreal. The township looks as though it might be an idyllic place, maybe a reconstruction from some romantic past, but Van Gogh's childhood in Zundert was, he describes in a letter to Theo, "cold and austere"<sup>114</sup> and often under the "black ray"<sup>115</sup> of his father's surveilling influence.<sup>116</sup> Is this township a smaller version of Arles, an imagined village set just below the hills to counter the place that had so recently ejected him, the place where he had spent over a year furnishing a house to start a new community of artists that had lasted only nine weeks with Gauguin, a dream he

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<sup>114</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, 5 November 1883, Nieuw-Amsterdam, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let403/letter.html>. 403

<sup>115</sup> In several letters to Theo that include conversations about strife and the family, a typical topic, Van Gogh claims that his father and various other artists, by some unknown cause, possess certain white and black rays (*rayon noire*). The reference comes from Victor Hugo's last novel *Quatre-vingt-treize*, but Van Gogh uses it to suggest dual forces, one light and the other dark. The black ray is not decidedly evil, though Van Gogh believes that it can be "fatal." In the history of melancholia, and specifically in the treatise of Agrippa, there is a distinction between a "white melancholia" and a "black melancholia."

<sup>116</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, 21 September 1883, Hoogeveen, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let388/letter.html>. 388.

now knew, one severed ear and one broken mind later, he would never realize? Van Gogh believed *Starry Night* was an unfinished study, even though it has similar features to others he had painted in Arles the previous year and that he had signed, indicating approval and completion. Like the delirious rays trembling around the gas lamps above the billiard table and anemic chairs in *Le Café de Nuit*, light rings pulsate around his egg-yolk yellow stars scattered across swirling bands of atmosphere painted in brooding Prussian blues, the same blues that dominate his night paintings in Arles of the stars and the cypresses. The daubs of lemon yellow and titanium white with the impasto technique make the stars look like pan-fried eggs glowing in a sky of charged light flows and swirling nebulae, tangible forces holding Venus (fertility goddess) and the moon in suspension. The subjects of his paintings had still been grounded in the world of earthly things, but in *Starry Night* he had begun to see them in new ways and sometimes to imagine them entirely from memory to suit his new way of making.

Still, Vincent was now inside a mental asylum as a restricted patient allowed to paint from the window of his room or in the hospital halls and gardens. Vincent was also still freshly inspired by Gauguin and Bernard, who encouraged him to rely on his imagination over visible reality and the techniques of observation that had so entrained his way of seeing the world and its visual transfer to the canvas. Encouraged as he was about the potential of using his imagination to paint, and even though the realities of his mental condition and his new public role as a madman and eccentric troubled his dreams of community, the fear of his madness was nonetheless minimized by the sense of community he found in the mental hospital, one that he had never realized in the artist commune he wanted so much to emerge in the Yellow House with Gauguin and the

Studio of the South, where he would remain as other artists who visited travelled farther south to the tropics, to Tahiti and East Tonkin. In Saint Paul's Hospital in Saint-Rémy the patients helped each other during attacks. Vincent wrote about his abated fears of insanity by being around those much worse off than himself, and to his mother later about not noticing the illnesses of his comrades at all: ". . . at the moment I'm working on a portrait of one of the patients here. It's strange that when one is with them for some time and is used to them, one no longer thinks about their being mad."<sup>117</sup> This is in contrast to his experience before he was finally released from the hospital at Arles, which he laments in a letter to Mrs. Ginoux how his condition grew worse there: "But in the final days I was more catching the illness of the others than curing my own, the society of the other patients influenced me badly, and in the end I no longer understood anything about it."<sup>118</sup>

When he painted it looking through the bars of his window in the asylum, did Van Gogh have any melancholic symbolism in mind for the *Starry Night*? Certainly he was not painting in a severe melancholic state of mind or some erratic attack of manic exuberance. He was in the hospital, painting daily from the vantage of one who has suffered mental collapse, severe melancholia, self-injury, and madness. To retro-diagnose his condition with modern labels, or to say even that he had succumbed to seizures from eating lead-based paints, none of these suppositions can be precisely known. It seems best to understand his mental condition as it would have been understood by his times, from the vantage of an emerging technical era that was transitioning from a theory of humors to a theory of nerves, from a Victorian age of melancholia and neurasthenia to a

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<sup>117</sup> Van Gogh to Anna Van Gogh-Carbentus, 21 October 1889, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let811/letter.html>. 811.

<sup>118</sup> Van Gogh to Joseph and Marie Ginoux, 11 June 1890, Auvers-sur-Oise, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let883/letter.html>. 883.

Modernist domain of depression and mental disorders. As other painters did in the centuries preceding his own, Van Gogh certainly saw himself as a melancholic, wrote of himself as one experiencing that temperament, as Dürer had, as Michelangelo claimed.

In a letter to Theo in the Hague, dated 6 July 1882, Vincent wrote:

I'm often terribly and cantankerously melancholic, irritable—yearning for sympathy as if with a kind of hunger and thirst—I become indifferent, sharp, and sometimes even pour oil on the flames if I don't get sympathy. I don't enjoy company, and dealing with people, talking to them, is often painful and difficult for me. But do you know where a great deal if not all of this comes from? Simply from nervousness—I who am terribly sensitive, both physically and morally, only really acquired it in the years when I was deeply miserable . . . and whether the fact that I sometimes have disagreeable moods or periods of depression couldn't [it] be attributable to this?<sup>119</sup>

*Starry Night* is a melancholic work because it suggests the extremes of sighted vision by illustrating the farthest points the eye may reach alongside those swirling nebulae of deep space, a universe of passion modified in the medium of oil paints and the material things of the world of experience. It is the cosmic above and leaden below and the wavy unstable lines that separate the two. Melancholia has always represented the margins of known existence, the extremes of being, the edges of oblivion and the irresolute, from the farthest planet Saturn orbiting in a frozen distance to the edge of consciousness, being and madness.

Mathematics and astronomy are embedded in both Dürer's *Melencolia I* and Van Gogh's *Starry Night* in symbolic ways, Dürer's figure surrounded by her measuring devices and magic square, and Van Gogh's night sky thickened with turbulent swirls in a milky blue atmosphere and accurate star placement. They are both star maps that suggest

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<sup>119</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, 6 July 1882, The Hague, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let244/letter.html>. 244.

a melancholic consciousness. They instantiate a historical tendency for melancholic images to appeal to the mystery of the stars as a source of therapeutic advantage in visual works, similarly as Job appeals to the constellations in his complaint to God, whom the text declares has given names to all the stars. Melancholia is not mere melancholy. It is something from which to recover as episodes of psychotic depression, as madness, as mania. These images appeal to astronomy, not astrology, not a saturnine entity in the deeps of the Milky Way. Van Gogh's night sky in *Starry Night* is more than a swirling hallucinogenic atmosphere, and researchers have compared the swirls to mathematical turbulence and to the shapes of galaxies. It also appears as though the unsettled image has woken the painter from a deep dream, during the early morning hours, so that Vincent could regard the night sky from his hospital room and transform it into the same saturnine rings that vibrate around the lamps of the pool table in Arles in *Le Café de Nuit*, where vagabonds and prostitutes asleep in their anemic chairs wait out the long night, in a gastric room that seems to digest them, painted in sickly greens and sour yellows. The night sky after Vincent's meltdown is like Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, whose tormented and elongated figure clasps its ears, surrounded by a fiery sky lit up by orange apocalyptic and bonfire doom.

### **Lars Von Trier: Postmodern Melancholia**

In the twenty-first century Melancholia has been visualized in film uniquely in a way that still appeals to the heavens and the planets, nodding to melancholia's roots in astrological influence, similar to Van Gogh's "black rays." In Lars von Trier's cultic film *Melancholia* (2011), cosmic rays emanate from an approaching planet named

*Melancholia*, which will bring apocalypse for the world and moonstruck self-consciousness for the film's main character, Justine, who in one scene, suffering from some form of depression, lies naked under full moonlight, basking in its rays. The moon as a source of madness during the melancholic gaze is a trope that has appeared in poems and avant-garde music since at least from Romantic times. In a series of slow-motion sequences, Justine—a young woman who experiences major depression after an unhappy wedding—draws creative counter-energies from the material forces that surround her, like the Tesla-coil electrical fields that she reaches out to in astonishment, touching them with her hands. In another surrealistic sequence Justine is imaged like *Ophelia*, viewed from above, floating in a wedding dress downstream on a sluggish stream of water with her eyes closed, a clutch of flowers resting on her chest below crossed hands, as if she were being laid out in a coffin. Von Trier's pastiche of John Everett-Millais' post-mortem *Ophelia* is thus resurrected in this film, and is only one of several tableaux shots that depict immobility as a symptom associated with major depression. Such inertias are imaged in other brilliant forms as well: Justine entangled in boggy cords and elastic scraps of bridal fabric that hinder her and pull her down, dead birds falling behind her back, a swarm of night bugs in protracted slow-motion photography. These images suggest the heavy melancholy of humors and passions from centuries past, when the planet Saturn ruled over those with excessive bouts of black bile or whose spleens were overworked, emitting vapors that troubled the mind with sadness. The celestial object haunting Justine and her family in the film is not Saturn but the rouge planet *Melancholia*, which is on course to collide with the earth. As the interplanetary apocalypse approaches, Justine's melancholic *symptoms* increase in strength and become

both destructive and generative, suggesting the dual nature of melancholia that Ficino wrote about in his text on melancholy.<sup>120</sup>

Thus her sensitivity to melancholy works oppositely as a charge for her creative abilities as a graphic designer. Justine draws strange energies from mysterious electrical currents, her hands raised as in an ecstatic vision, her fingertips lit with low-voltage bolts that emerge from above in the middle of a golf course. This image suggests an electronic melancholy that would have been easily understood in the nineteenth century, after Millais' painting *Ophelia* had already become well known and new mental illnesses were beginning to emerge, new maladies suggesting mysterious nervous tensions, neurasthenias mostly for the well to do, or hysterias for distressed women. The closer planet Melancholia moves to the earth, the more Justine is immersed in its cosmic rays, the more transfixed or *moonstruck* she becomes, in one scene lying in the nude on a rock under its influential hue. She slips into a trance under the astral exchange when she gazes back at the sphere above her, her skin a pale mix of absinthe green and melancholy white. It was commonly thought during the Renaissance that basking in the cosmic rays of the planets and the moon at certain astrologically appointed times could create a sense of well-being and invigorate one's creative powers.<sup>121</sup> At other times in the film, Justine is immobilized, unable to bathe or eat, full of sorrows, her deep melancholia anticipated as visual inertias in the slow-motion montages at the beginning of the film. The weight of melancholy becomes almost a tangible thing, charged by a planetary-scale force that

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<sup>120</sup> The Greek term *μελαγχολία*, meaning an excess of black bile, or what Zimmerman calls the "burning out and the drastic wasting of all vital fluids," originates from the writings of Hippocrates, Pseudo-Aristotle, and Galen. See Zimmerman, "The History of Melancholy."

<sup>121</sup> Mary Quinlan-Mcgrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in Italian Renaissance Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 12, 28.

operates on the body and mind in an immersive way. Thus the visual inertias imaged in the film's opening scenes have an atmospheric grandeur that is both odd and beautiful. Film critic Marta Figlerowicz writes: "The opening tableaux could not be more shameless about their beauty, or about the scale of their subject matter. A great sadness is upon us—a great planet—a great cinematic event."<sup>122</sup> Both space and time are entangled within a catatonic dimension as seen through a melancholic gaze. Lars von Trier's film mediates major depression as an overwhelming destructive illness, but does not completely remove it from its historical context when the malaise was known as melancholia. The music for the film comes from Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, a work that was received as dissonant, strange, and innovative by its nineteenth century audience in ways that a modern audience can no longer, it is supposed by some musicologists, hear. The opera begins with the Tristan chord, a note cluster that forms perhaps the most famous tritone, one that opened up modern music to dissonant harmonies that were thought by many to reflect a melancholic disposition, an ambivalence left unresolved. Planet Melancholia is an apocalyptic bomb set on a collision drift with the earth, bringing with it an ultimate, colossal destruction. This is not the genial melancholy of the Renaissance or the tempered Aristotelian melancholia of the early Hippocratic writers from the emerging world of ancient Western medicine. This is an apocalyptic melancholia hinting at the long tradition of mass extinction events envisioned in the prophetic books of the Holy Scriptures by the ancient Hebrew prophets. These works suggest that the planets are mysteriously connected across vast distances that entangle celestial and human events in meaningful ways. The apocalypse is one

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<sup>122</sup> Marta Figlerowicz, "Comedy of Abandon: Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*," *Film Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 21.

instance of the melancholies of the future, one of the great disturbing anxieties that point to events that are beyond the reasoning of philosophy or the observations of science.

## THE STUDIO

Almost in spite of all the powerful influences in the heavens and the moon and the vast distances of space, the powers of self-enclosure and reclusion in melancholics were criticized by the civic-minded humanists and became attached to the studio as an ideal space where the artist met with the tools and craft of a trade that absorbed all available time. In the cinquecento the writers who critiqued the Italian painters defined the melancholic as “withdrawn and socially inept,” fitting easily into the role of the “holy hermit, or a monkish contemplative,”<sup>123</sup> who often possessed a strong imagination. One Vasari scholar quotes a disparaging poem about the melancholic temperament from the early part of the century by Dominican astronomer Giovanni Tolosani:

He lives in anguish, grief, pain and mourning,  
And for his sickness there is no remedy:  
He is solitary, and seems like a monk,  
Is without friends, and has a fantastical mind.<sup>124</sup>

While solitude was a common practice of contemplatives in the age of the church fathers, for the everyday Florentine craftsman busy in the studio or on site (working with cartoons and frescoes), the necessary requirements of being alone in order to make original art were not yet understood to be a part of the formation of the artistic personality or the habitus of the artist. The early civic humanists were suspicious of the melancholic<sup>125</sup> and

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<sup>123</sup> Britton, "'Mio malinconico, o vero . . . mio pazzo': Michelangelo, Vasari, and the Problem of Artists' Melancholy in Sixteenth-Century Italy," 656.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Brann, *The Debate over the Origin of Genius during the Italian Renaissance*, 107, 48-49.

worried about the dangers of idleness and seclusion from social activities that supplemented his habits. It was one thing to be a natural melancholic and another to be a creative anchorite at work in environments that promoted loneliness and unchecked fantastical imagination. Being intentionally embedded in the studio or study for long periods, melancholic artists and scholars sometimes unsuccessfully managed the hazards of their trade, leading the often unsociable life of the devoted intellectual or the skilled craftsman making art in seclusion. This type of immobilizing devotion was connected to the Medieval conception of *acedia*, a mental and spiritual condition with a dangerous downside and risks that sometimes led to melancholia and madness, even though they were inherent to the contemplative life. Acetic religious vows cultivated withdrawal and torpor, conditions that promoted the alienating qualities the medical writers coupled with melancholia. Thus certain tensions surfaced among the early civic humanists and their preoccupation with the community, social responsibility, and the polis. Such outwardly focused conduct and the social expectations placed upon visual artists, who were still viewed as craftsman, did not meld with the more independent attitudes of melancholic creatives like Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch, each of whom felt equally morally responsible to meet the demands placed upon them by their craft, and to the poetic vision that they believed could only be sustained from a deeply engaged inner consciousness that was not tuned to outward distractions but rather to the powers of inspiration.<sup>126</sup> Though artistic visions were thought by the poets to be inspired from deep within, sculptors like Michelangelo claimed to see the outlines of finished pieces while they were still buried in unquarried stone. This projective vision of Michelangelo on palpable

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<sup>126</sup> The contemporary idea of the intellectual on sabbatical or the artist in residence seems plausibly to have originated from this attitude.

objects, creating new forms, was a creative inspiration that also came from without. Other artists like William Blake later on during the emergence of the Romantic period heard voices, felt visited, and held conversations with the spirits of great poets or deceased relatives that, in Blake's case, provided lessons on new techniques to improve his visual handiwork. To help direct this strong imaginative and spiritual life in the early modern period, artists like Michelangelo, Pontormo, Vasari, and others in the communities of Florence—and Dürer in Nuremberg—celebrated melancholic enthusiasm in art as much as they feared its dangers. The Tuscan painters of the sixteenth century were well aware of the toxic potential of melancholia and believed it was a straight channel to madness.

There are many examples in Western art of the melancholic studio (*studiolo*), especially if the scholar's study may be added to such a category; for instance, one of Dürer's master engravings *Saint Jerome in His Study*. Paintings, etchings, and engravings of creatives in their studios surrounded by instruments are a feature of melancholic images in Western art. Dürer's *Melencolia I* is perhaps the most iconic representation of the immobilized artist surrounded by creative tools. Such images may include scholars immersed in their studies with books and armillary spheres at hand on writings desks or in *studiolos*. Many images of Saint Jerome picture the scholar in the wilderness, as a hermit immersed in an austere space, far outside the comforts of the studio and without its array of tools. Blake's engravings of Job's family surrounded by musical instruments in disuse during tribulation and in use during restoration is another iconic example of the outdoor studio with instruments as a refuge and enclosure.

## Blake's Visions and Job's Musical Trees

William Blake was trained as an engraver and etcher, like Dürer, and he made his living from the trade and used his skills to make his own books, juxtaposing poetic text as superimpositions on images, as a kind of reverse illuminated manuscript.<sup>127</sup> Blake was fascinated with the idea of melancholia and had a special admiration for Dürer. He kept a copy of Durer's engraving *Melencolia I* at his engraving table, and hung Michelangelo prints in his workshop.<sup>128</sup>

Blake is also well known for his fantastic visions that he sometimes painted. While Blake made watercolors representing visionary and melancholic religious figures to illustrate Milton's poetry, he also made a series of twenty-one engravings illustrating the Book of Job for a project commissioned by John Linnell on behalf of Thomas Butts, a trusted buyer and long-time friend who amassed the largest collection of art by Blake during his lifetime.<sup>129</sup> Linnell befriended Blake in his late life, thus the illustrations of the Book of Job are late-style prints, which Blake created in 1825, using a traditional line engraving format. Blake was magnetized to images with bold outlines and figures that emanated a strong, sculpted quality. Identifying early in his career with Michelangelo, not merely as a painter, but as a kind of sculptor, Blake also followed Dürer's preferences for draftsmanship as the foundation for expression in engraving over coloring and vague outlines. Such reveals Blake's lifelong bias against painting in oils and his own

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<sup>127</sup> William Vaughan, *William Blake*, British Artists (London, UK: Tate Publishing, 1999; repr., 2013).

<sup>128</sup> Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), 321.

<sup>129</sup> Geoffrey Keynes, ed. *The Letters of William Blake* (New York, NY: Macmillan Company, 1956), 18-19.

preferences for working fast with a vision in mind in watercolors and tempura paints, methods that he likened to working in fresco.

The illustrations for Job are considered masterworks showcasing Blake at his best and most accessible, as these plates were reasonably commercially successful, unlike most of his other works. The Job series is bookended between two images of Job and his family sitting under a great tree, initially with various musical instruments hanging from its limbs like ornaments. A harp, tambourine, a lute, and trumpets hang in the tree in Plate 1, behind which the sun is setting and the moon is rising, as the long night of Job's tribulations and mourning begins. In Blake's caption below the image in the engraving reads: "Thus did Job continually." Job does not play the musical instruments because he must be constant in prayer to Elohim for deliverance from the great evils of affliction and psychic misery that torment him in spite of his legalistic adherence to spiritual laws. The musical instruments hang in disuse from the tree, even though they are nearby for Job and his family to use. The meaning of the tree of musical instruments in Plate 1 may partially be illuminated by the first three verses of Psalm 137, in which the Judeans mourn the loss of the temple and their homeland after being deported to Babylon in captivity.

There we sat down and cried—  
by the rivers of Babylon—  
as we remembered Zion.  
On the willows there  
we hung our harps,  
for it was there that our captors  
asked us for songs  
and our torturers demanded joy from us,  
"Sing us one of the songs about Zion!"<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Psalm 137: 1-3

The Judean harp, the same species of musical instrument that David used to quiet the evil spirits that regularly tormented Saul, here hangs in silence from the willows, a species of tree that since ancient times symbolized melancholia. Since the early days of his childhood Blake saw visions, and as a young boy walking home one day he looked up into a tree and saw angels with golden wings scattered among the limbs. He later reported the vision to his father, who would have disciplined him for lying without the intervention of his mother. Blake also collaborated with astrologer and medium John Varley on a series of supernatural pictures entitled *Visionary Heads*, which included Blake's iconic tempura and gold leaf painting *The Ghost of a Flea*: a monstrous figure with a cosmic background that Blake had seen in a vision and which he had drawn for Varley during a séance as *The Head of the Ghost of a Flea*.<sup>131</sup>

Blake's visions were not limited to angels in trees or the ghosts of fleas at spiritualist outings; he also had conversations with the poet John Milton and with his deceased brother Robert. In 1786 Blake's beloved brother Robert died of consumption. Blake believed that his brother—whom he had cared for during the final days of his illness, and who, having appeared in a vision—revealed to him a new method of print making that Blake called relief etching, which unlike the inked grooves of intaglio was a process that allowed the markings raised from the surface to be inked. A design would be etched on an acid-resistant ground that coated a metal plate, then the plate dipped in a bath of acid, which would bite into the areas of the plate where the engraver's needle had removed the ground. Blake could thus write text on copper plates alongside images in

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<sup>131</sup> While spiritualist gatherings were a popular amusement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, interest in the very small arose in this time period as well with the proliferation of microscopes and perhaps in Blake's case the influence of Hooke's direct-observation drawings of fleas created in the late seventeenth century.

real time, inscribing the letters in reverse, like Leonardo's mirror writing in his notebooks. This was a process Blake called "Woodcut on Copper," because the marks on copper plates were inked in relief, or above the surface of the plate, as with woodblocks. Woodcut on copper, as an addition to a similar technique he called "Woodcut on Pewter," was the method Blake used to make the *Milton* copperplates that illustrated his very difficult long poem, which resulted in prints that looked rough-cut and primitive compared to the polished and nuanced graphics privileged by rival engravers.<sup>132</sup>

In Plate 21, Job's family plays the musical instruments with rejoicing. Job, as he prays, waits for a response, to hear the voice of God, even if he must defend his upright behavior as a protest against suffering. Of course in the end Job does hear Elohim's voice in the whirlwind, after which he is delivered and his life and family restored. In Blake's watercolor, *When the Morning Stars Sang Together*, the artist paints Job surrounded by angelic figures in his whirlwind visions with Elohim. The scene is otherworldly, as many of Blake's etchings and engravings have no customary setting and neither do they follow traditional rules of perspective and mathematics.

Blake appreciated sinewy outlines but he elevated the imagination over logical systems as dominant practices. His engravings and watercolors pull from the imaginal more than they reflect the academic properties that he so despised in the portraits of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough. To draw from nature in a realistic manner was abhorrent to Blake, a practice that he believed was more likely to image the ugliness

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<sup>132</sup> William Blake, *Milton, A Poem*, eds. Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi vol. 5, *The Illuminated Books of William Blake* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993; repr., 1998), 19. "Woodcut on Copper," in addition to a similar technique he called "Woodcut on Pewter," the method Blake used to make the *Milton* copperplates.

of death and remind the soul of its mortality than to capture youth and preserve vitality.<sup>133</sup> For Blake, to copy nature and to employ modeling and naturalistic color are to create without using the imagination, to make things after a pattern that has already been represented much better than the painter could ever hope to. Blake insisted on copying works of art not nature, on making a symbolic art, and working language into the image as a poet-painter. Blake in his method would copy a particular work of an artist, like Fuseli's portrait of Michelangelo, for instance, in order to improve upon some deficiency he had seen and to make it his own image. The imagination for Blake, and perhaps for Coleridge, too, is an irrational agent of process and image-making, where original ideas emerge from their melancholic habitation of disorder as clear visions that he could put down on paper in words and images and mix the two in complementary ways.

Reason, the enemy of imagination for Blake, was not only a visual problem. For Blake, reason was the engine within language that *mechanized* melancholy's destructive functions, working instead against its meaningful expression through the imagination and vision. Blake's visualization of melancholy is an illustration he created for a short poetic text by John Milton, *Il Penseroso*. *Il Penseroso* is the second half of Milton's poem about melancholy. Blake developed a composite system of representation that included engravings and paintings along with his poems. In this work, simply titled *Melancholy*, Blake envisions melancholy as a woman who is a religious figure, a personification Milton envisions as a nun in the poem. She is dressed in a dark veil and her gaze is visionary as she looks upward and into the distance, like the winged figure lost in a

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<sup>133</sup> Leopold Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 115. As one Blake biographer records, "He professes drawing from life always to have been hateful to him; and speaks of it as looking more like death, or smelling of mortality."

melancholic trance in Dürer's engraving. Blake's melancholic figure gazes upwards, not horizontally as with Dürer, but upwards at God, who is still at a great distance, even in her reverie, regarded as a visionary perfection. If there is a mood in the face of the figure it is inspired not dismal. Even though she may not be a saint, she is still a Muse, a melancholy inspiration that the poet cannot ignore or reject. Blake's *Melancholy* is his depiction of the imagination, and suggests that her mind is continuously susceptible to new ideas. Blake's melancholy figure is not passive. She stands on her own, enraptured, statuesque, yet her posture seems ethereal, as if she were extracted from some dream world.

In 1800 Blake and his wife Catherine moved to the thatched cottage at Felpham, a place of creative refuge and healing from what he once described as "a deep pit of melancholy."<sup>134</sup> Blake's brand of madness, one scholar remarked, "occupies an often ambiguous borderline between the divine madness of inspiration, and the demonic madness of incapacity and false or fruitless labor, a madness of irrationality, slavery, and compulsive repetition."<sup>135</sup> There is an incapacity to express or relinquish the anguish of Job and his family, to soften its deadly blows, as represented by the silent instruments hanging in the willow trees in Plate 1. Like the instruments that surround the angel in *Melencolia I*, the musical instruments in Blake's willows remain in disuse. Blake suffered from melancholia to such an extent that he thought of his anguish as an illness, and in a letter to George Cumberland, a lifelong friend and art collector, he remarked of the condition, "I begin to Emerge from a deep pit of Melancholy, Melancholy without

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<sup>134</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Awakened Ones: Phenomenology of Visionary Experience* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), 276.

<sup>135</sup> Andrew M. Cooper, "Blake and Madness: The World Turned Inside Out," *ELH* 57, no. 3 (Autumn, 1990), accessed September 15, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873235>.

any real reason for it, a Disease which God keep you from & all good men.”<sup>136</sup> But it is here at Felpham that Blake sees angels descending from a ladder to his cottage, and it is here that he writes his long poem *Jerusalem*, the lines of which he hears as voices whose words he records obediently, if not sometimes reluctantly, as if in a mystical trance that tires him. In a letter to Thomas Butts in the spring of 1803, Blake writes:

I have written this Poem from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation, and even against my will. The time it has taken in writing was thus rendered non-existent, and an immense Poem exists which seems to be the labour of a long life, all produced without labour or study.<sup>137</sup>

Blake’s visions and voices reached a peak during his three years at Felpham, but he also referred to the dark pit he found himself in, and praised the therapeutic effects of the healing ocean which he lived beside and by which he was inspired. But one should not understand the word *inspire* in a modern sense and make the error that such is the way Blake would have understood it. For Blake, inspiration was an automatic experience, something that came from his imagination in forms he had created in his mind yet were heard or envisioned as if they had come from somewhere outside his mind. This suggests a strange cooperation between mind and voice, or a paradox in which the mind creates the thing it hears outside of itself. Blake heard voices and saw visions, so that his multiple senses reported creative events in his life that he could depict and write about, as if he were a human instrument immersed and inspired and played on.

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<sup>136</sup> William Blake, "Letters to Cumberland: 2nd July, 1800," in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York, NY: Random House, 1988), 706.

<sup>137</sup> Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake*, 187.

## **Goya: Deaf Melancholies and the Home Studio**

If Blake disparaged reason and placed his faith in the powers of the imagination, his contemporary, the Spanish painter Francisco Goya y Lucientes, bemoaned the disquieting powers of the imagination and lamented the loss of reason in the unstable world of war and suffering that afflicted Spain in the late eighteenth century. In 1792 Goya experienced a mysterious illness that left him deaf and nervous. His hearing never returned and he secluded himself in his house and withdrew into painting. Goya also experienced significant anguish<sup>138</sup> during the recovery from his fit of nerves—which may have been an expression of melancholia complicated by the lingering mystery illness. He also became moved by readings on the French Revolution of 1789, and his later works serve as a visual critique of the violence and injustice that he witnessed in the madhouses, those dark experiences that had enveloped his imagination and were shaped by the social and political tumult of eighteenth century Spain. From his etchings in *Los Caprichos* to the *Black Paintings*, Goya represents his reactions to the horrors of the Napoleonic Wars, to the human cruelty and neglect imaged in grotesques as “tragic elements” of madness that reason had presumed to subdue, that proponents of empirical rationalism had cast to the shadows of the imagination. This anguished period had come upon him with a great and lasting heaviness, but it had been preceded by a completely different career. Before his mystery illness, Goya had painted cheerful, brightly toned landscapes and earned a well-paying salary painting portraits for royals and nobles in Spain as a court painter for Charles the III. In the second half of his life, after his illness, he painted more weighty

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<sup>138</sup> Hofer suggests that Goya’s illness presented symptoms beyond Meniere’s disease. Often Meniere’s disease is given as an explanation for symptoms that might also be associated with a bout of melancholia. See Philip Hofer, introduction to *Los Caprichos*, trans. Tomás Harris (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1969), 2.

themes like the country-house murals that depict witchery, madness, and the imagination that are depicted in the Black Paintings.<sup>139</sup> Following his illness and the atrocities of war and occupation he had witnessed, his painting techniques began to change in dramatic ways. The colors darkened, brush strokes lost their meticulous edge; his figures became messy and *phantasmagoric*.

After his long convalescence from the illness and nerve storm, Goya created an image of himself as the tormented artist, sleeping at a table, anguished by the dark imaginations of his dream mind. *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, Goya's most iconic aquatint, illustrates the artist sleeping at a desk with his drawing tools in a night studio filled with menacing nocturnal creatures. This work is included in Goya's series of 80 aquatint plates depicting the monstrous and disenchanted entitled *Los Caprichos*. While the title is rooted in the term "caprice," suggesting whimsy, it is actually an artistic convention in use at the time to refer to the unchecked powers of the imagination. "Caprice" is similar to "fantaisie," as both are "variants of the term imagination," having "their own visual and aesthetic history."<sup>140</sup> *Los Caprichos* may thus be viewed as a visual commentary on the imagination. *Capricho* 43, which begins the second part of the series, is a principle image originally intended to be the collection's frontispiece. It is rendered in strong contrasts between dark and light, and its imagery depicts the workings of the imagination, pre-figuring the surrealists by over a century and a quarter. Yet *Capricho* 43 is anything but whimsy. Though its compositional elements include animals like owls, bats, and enigmatic felines, creatures historically associated with melancholia, and

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<sup>139</sup> Juan Jose Junquera, *The Black Paintings of Goya* (New York, NY: Scala Publishers, 2006), 18, 28.

<sup>140</sup> Melissa Percival, *Fragonard and the Fantasy Image* (Surrey, England: Ashagte Publishing, 2012), 195.

though through contemporary eyes such imagery might be viewed as harmlessly macabre, to Goya's audience it would have evoked great fear and sadness. Even so, it is the portrait of a sleeping artist having a nightmare, visited by the inventions of the imagination, tormented by anguish. It is Goya without his reason in the Age of Reason.

Goya suffered from melancholia after the mysterious illness in 1793 that made him deaf, responding to which he became introverted, reflective, and reclusive. He began to create a new series of aquatints that parodied madness, vice, and other various forms of social ruin. In these etchings Goya explored the imagination of the melancholic as a tormented state of mind without the harmonizing properties of reason. Goya thus viewed melancholia as a form of insanity, a condition that leaves the imagination without reason to restrain its workings, so that monstrous images emerge to plague the mind of the artist. Goya's collection of etchings in *Los Caprichos* may be viewed as a series of caricatures that foil reason and showcase the absurdities of eighteenth century life. In the caption that accompanies *Capricho* 43, the aquatint entitled *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, Goya writes:

*La fantasia abandonada de la razon, produce monstruos imposibles:  
unida con ella, es madre de las artes y origen de sus maravillas..  
Imagination abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united  
with her, she is the mother of the arts and the source of their wonders.*<sup>141</sup>

The imagination balanced by reason is a source for creative works; there is almost a hint toward the humoral balance of the ancient Greeks here. On the surface, *Los Caprichos* is a moral work with a didactic structure like Brant's *The Ship of Fools*.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Francisco Goya, *Los Caprichos*, trans. Tomás Harris (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1969), 43.

<sup>142</sup> Brant's work was hugely influential, and he assembled 114 woodcuts (many from Dürer) and from various other artists to illustrate these didactic poems about social life and folly.

Goya painted the imagination, showing its effects on mood and the soul. But more than this, he masks his critiques of folly with his caricatures of social life also as a satire of the royal court and as an anti-clerical resistance piece. Goya was concerned how his audience would receive his work when the publication emerged on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February in 1799. The plates became known as critiques of social injustice and the grotesqueries of war and political violence, what is very modern in Goya, but boldly plain-sighted in their didactic structure, a form to which the Church and the nobility would be accustomed, what is very classical in Goya. Like Bosch's surreal creatures, Goya's prints feature the macabre and the ghastly as comments to the vacancies of reason as mere rhetoric. For Goya, reason is absent in the actions of his culture, present only in its discussions. His art may thus be viewed not as an attack on reason, but as a tragic lamentation on its absence in Spanish culture. His own sense of illness, his nerves freighting fear, and the loss of his hearing, are portrayed as a breakdown of reason, the imagination as an assemblage that creates monstrous illusions. Unlike Blake, Goya does not attack rationality, but neither does he elevate reason.

Like Dürer's angel in *Melencolia I*, Goya's writer in *Capricho 43* is a self-portrait of the artist as a tormented figure. In this etching melancholia fully *encompasses* the writer asleep at his desk in the forms of nocturnal creatures associated with melancholia and in flights of mayhem with electric eyes. In Goya's following series of paintings in the early 1820s, his visual focus expands his conceptions of melancholia, again in both classical and modern ways. The *Black Paintings* (late-style frescoes marking the melancholic turn in his work) were originally painted at the Quinta del Sordo, or the "Country-home of the Deaf Man, even before Goya, who was deaf from 1793 until his

death in 1828, bought it.”<sup>143</sup> The *Black Paintings*,<sup>144</sup> or *Pinturas Negras*, are large-scale frescoes depicting dark and violent themes that Goya created during his late period. As they were painted on the walls of the dining room on the ground floor of the Quinta del Sordo, they literally surround the painter at all moments day or night, as they were permanently part of the walls in his home.<sup>145</sup> In one of the paintings at one end of the dining room, *Saturno*, Goya depicts the god Saturn eating his child. Another fresco is a room-length view of witches at a black sabbath, and opposite *Saturno* across the room is *La Manola*, a full length portrait of a melancholy woman dressed in black. Goya’s home became his studio where he could realize his dark imaginations by putting them directly upon its walls, in the spaces where he ate his meals and took his afternoon rests. It is this visualization of his consciousness in a tormented state that must have created negative feedback in its most darkly romantic aspect, especially in the evenings lit only by candlelight if they were illuminated at all. In modern times many health professionals have warned against depressed people spending long amounts of time in darkened places, but to create such black images and live amongst them would have directly influenced Goya’s moods without his realizing it. Thus though I can only speculate, the dark visuals that surrounded Goya must have validated his state of mind and weakened his fragile body, making him feel worse and maybe accelerating his death.

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<sup>143</sup> Priscilla E. Muller, *Goya's 'Black' Paintings: Truth and Reason in Light of Liberty* (New York, NY: The Hispanic Society of America, 1984), 11.

<sup>144</sup> Goya used the *al secco* technique to make his frescoes, directly applying oils to the plaster. The paintings were later removed from his home to the Museo del Prado, and became famous as the Black Paintings.

<sup>145</sup> Folke Nordström, *Goya, Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the Art of Goya* (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), 187-188.

## **Van Gogh: Recovery in the Studio**

Van Gogh was a *plein air* painter who often worked outside the traditional studio and in the fields. But this does not mean he did not paint in the studio, as he often brought home his canvases he had begun in the field to finish at the studio, or sometimes to improve the visions that emerged from his perceptions of nature, or to remake his compositions into something more developed from what had begun vaguely in his visual mind. When he did paint in his studio, which in Arles was located on the first floor of the Yellow House, he sometimes left the windows open so that foot-travelers could peek in and see him at work, doing something useful and legitimate as a professional workman.<sup>146</sup> Working in the studio was a way to reform his image as the eccentric town drunk who dressed in stained work clothes, wore straw hats with colorful ribbons tied on, walked about the city in his own world talking to himself in fast and repetitive language that did not always make sense, who exhibited jerky mannerisms with odd body language, and especially with Gauguin in town, visited the brothel and the night cafés until the early morning hours. This is certainly the mediated vision we have of Van Gogh in the twenty-first century, but he was much more disciplined than his disheveled character and peculiar habits might initially reveal. This is not to ignore the reports passed down from those who knew him when he was alive, or *used* him even when he was not well, as Gauguin seemed to, even though most of the time he was at least working on many projects. Van Gogh's studio was small, spare, and messy, smelled of pigments and oils, was packed with canvases of sunflowers, the orchards, his bedroom, and portraits of the locals like the postman Roulin, the many renditions of it, and his family, all evidence of Van Gogh's

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<sup>146</sup> Martin Gayford, *The Yellow House: Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Nine Turbulent Weeks in Provence* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 12.

prolific output. He liked to make multiple iterations of his compositions,<sup>147</sup> and was very much a painter always in development, always learning, continually improving and working through the processes he believed he needed to experience to give his works an element of control and new expressive depth. Even so he was like Blake, a visionary painter who could work very fast, and often did so in the fields, painting a canvas “in one go” as he liked to say. He did not have the distractions most of the time when he painted in the fields, except when he painted with Gauguin. In Saint-Rémy, when he could not be out in the fields, Van Gogh worked in the confinement of his room, as with *Starry Night*.

In his studio in Arles there were not many visitors, and thus it was nothing like Courbet’s allegorical one, made famous in his painting *The Artist’s Studio*, which depicts a large high-ceilinged room crowded with commoners on one side and Paris intellectuals like Baudelaire on the other, each person enthralled at the work of the painter, who leans back with bearded chin to regard his work at the easel. Unlike Blake, Van Gogh painted from direct observation, much more than he painted what was in his mind, perhaps because he was uncomfortable with the workings and images of his imagination, the frequent nightmares and hallucinations he experienced when under attack. In this way he followed Pissarro, Monticello, and the Impressionists he admired, and he also emulated Courbet, Corot, and his favorite from the early days, the peasant painter Jean-François Millet.

Van Gogh was known among the locals in Arles as a landscape painter who ventured out into the fields and orchards in the mornings to paint and capture what he

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<sup>147</sup> Eliza Rathbone and William H. Robinson, *Van Gogh Repetitions* (Washington, DC: The Phillips Collection, 2013), 12.

could especially find in the raw if the weather was good. But in the bad weather Vincent painted portraits, and sometimes self-portraits, as it was not easy to pay for sitters who could pose for him. In his *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*, Van Gogh painted himself in front of his easel in the studio at the Yellow House, standing in three-quarter profile, wearing a winter coat and fur cap, his bandaged left ear (painted as the right in the mirror image) prominently displayed, as if to show the medical recovery of his self-mutilation. In this painting he makes a dramatic link between painting and madness, between art and suffering as a whole. This image would resonate from the moment his severed ear and became an item of gossip among the French painters and later Gauguin's memoir, and after Vincent's tragic suicide in July of 1890, and the ebullient praise of art critics like symbolist poet and painter Albert Aurier in his famous article "The Isolated Ones: Vincent Van Gogh," from *Mercure de France* in January of 1890, shortly before Vincent's death. The artist had complained about it and was even tormented by his emergent fame. Aurier's article transformed Van Gogh's artistic moods into something volcanic and vehemently expressive as interpreted from the original use of intense colors in his paintings and the unusual brush strokes and bold forms. After Theo's wife, Johanna Van Gogh-Bonger, first published his letters in 1914, Vincent's reputation as a genial madman who had suffered sacrificially for his art became that image that thrived in the twentieth century and that still endures to this day.

When he had severed his ear that Sunday evening just before Christmas Eve in 1888, and after he had allegedly wrapped the ear in paper and given it to a prostitute named Rachel for safe-keeping, Vincent was almost unconscious by the time he was found by the inspector and admitted into the hospital in Arles. This image of the near-

lethally wounded artist now rendered in *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* was also his statement of recovery, a survivor's souvenir made in the Yellow House, the "Studio of the South." He had made his convalescent image not at the mental hospital but in the much-hoped-for artists' colony that he and Gauguin had initiated together in September of 1888, now a dismantled dream in Gauguin's absence and Van Gogh's continued relapses in the long-going recovery from his attack. As much as it suggests itself as a subject for a medical audience, a kind of self-inflicted physiognomy of subtraction and lethality, *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* is also a painting about artistic inspiration; about the hazards of hearing unbidden voices that could only have been compounded by the chemicals Van Gogh consumed, the absinthe and the poisonous paints he ingested. Now that he was under the care of physicians, he was also given foxglove, a form of *digitalis* that also is known to create hallucinations.

Though he was not a poet, Van Gogh was a literary artist like Blake, and wrote hundreds of letters, mostly to his brother Theo, detailing the development of his paintings and drawings. Van Gogh was also a tenacious reader who designed his life after characters he wanted to imitate. In *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Gauguin*, Vincent styled himself as a Japanese monk with a shaved head and contemplative expression, seated calmly in his Spartan surrounding with a jade ground. In *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* (1889), painted about three weeks after that horrific Sunday evening just before Christmas in Arles, when he severed his ear during an attack of nerves, Van Gogh depicted himself in his studio at the Yellow House in front of a blank canvas and a Japanese print, *Geishas in a Landscape*, hanging over his shoulder on the wall in the background. Japanese prints, fashions, and oddments were *chic* in France during the time

of the Impressionists, who had imported the bold regulating lines and bright colors of the Japanese woodblock printmakers into avant-garde French painting in the late nineteenth century. The peak of van Gogh's painting career emerges from the first of his major disintegrations, preceding and following the attacks at Arles and the recovery at Saint-Rémy, where he had more breakdowns. Van Gogh believed Gauguin had captured aspects of his madness on canvas. About *Painter of Sunflowers*—Gauguin's painting of Van Gogh painting in the studio at the Yellow House, just days before his departure after his disintegration—Van Gogh reportedly said to Gauguin: "It is certainly I, but it is I gone mad."<sup>148</sup>

The melancholic colors in his *Self-portrait with Bandaged Ear* are the cerulean blues and ultramarines that are subdued on the doorway and restated in his cap, and which shadow the subtle outline of the bandage at his thin jaw, and perform as flecks of pale blue light on his green coat. He is immersed in blue light. The mad colors that complement the blue light are the Indian yellow mixed on his face with lemon yellow that is repeated on the walls that are yellowed all around him, opposing the comfort of the dark green of his coat. Van Gogh's face thus reflects the same colors that ground his rehabilitated posture. Just as the sickly greens and blood clot reds on the walls seem digestive under the hallucinated light rings swarming the lamp fixtures in *Le Café de Nuit*, as if to swallow up the vagrants and prostitutes like some absinthe green stomach, so Van Gogh's studio consumed every part of his imagination. The melancholia of undernourishment and isolation, for Vincent in his letters complained of gastric problems

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<sup>148</sup> Ronald Pickvance, *Van Gogh in Arles* (New York, NY: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1984), 203.

and extreme loneliness often after his years in Paris, is countered by the vigorous impulses and imaginations of his paintings that are crafted in his studio.<sup>149</sup>

If we follow the colors as they are laid out across the canvas of *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*, the blues and lemon yellows that speckle Van Gogh's face and are repeated in the lemon yellow walls and blue trim that surround him, we have a glimpse of the place that he dreamed would become the artists settlement but had instead subsumed his unsettled imagination. Here in this painting: house and persona have become one. Not the easel or the canvas behind him, looking dull, blank, and little used, but the seamless color pathways that link the artist to his studio are what remain stable. Color binds Van Gogh to everything around him, everything that shelters and nests, in this self-portrait, or that consumes as with *Le Café de Nuit*, as he works out his recovery from madness and presents himself as the better citizen, the good patient, as one who belongs in the studio, not in an asylum.

There was now the work he had to do on himself before he could continue with his *Japonaiserie* project, the import of Japanese woodblock aesthetics from the dreamy “floating world” of *ukiyo-e* prints into the bold outlines and bright colors that transfixed his eye and that he overlaid on most of what he saw and painted in Arles. This technique fused the fantasist Van Gogh, the ascetic monk dreaming of Japan and the Studio of the South, in a merger with Van Gogh the realist, the Dutch workman in possession of a lighter palette, painting faithfully the pastoral and village life that surrounded him. Van Gogh was now aware that he had to find a way to uncouple the fantasies of the ascetic

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<sup>149</sup> Vincent painted himself into the picture as a character in olive green coat, clogs, and yellow straw hat, an avatar of the artist who sits among the burdened occupants as a companion who will endure the long night with them in the café. This was also the place where he took his evening meals.

monk with the impulse for self-harm and let his mind be mended. The Japanese concept of restoration, or *Kintsugi*, the art of repairing broken porcelain with gold and silver filler, speaks to the idea of mending a broken soul, which Vincent likened to his earthenware vessels, overlaying the Biblical principle of the potter and the malleable jars of clay, to the jugs and vases that he featured in some of his paintings. It was the mending force he understood to be in his art and in the works of great artists and composers of his hero set. In such a spirit of innovative therapy, Vincent links creativity indistinguishably with madness as a medicine in his letter to Theo about a month after the nerve storm. He writes:

... if we're a bit mad, so be it, aren't we also a little sufficiently deeply artistic to contradict anxieties in that regard by what we say with the brush? Perhaps everyone will one day have neurosis, the Horla, St Vitus's Dance or something else. But doesn't the antidote exist? In Delacroix, in Berlioz and Wagner. And really, our artistic madness which all the rest of us have, I don't say that I especially haven't been struck to the marrow by it. But I say and will maintain that our antidotes and consolations can, with a little good will, be considered as amply prevalent.<sup>150</sup>

If the French poets like Baudelaire and Rimbaud had no worries about their art as some form of madness generated during its creation from a "rational derangement of all the senses,"<sup>151</sup> as Rimbaud made the argument, Van Gogh was on the contrary very self-conscious about the seriously unstable condition of his mind and how his daily practice as a painter could affect it. The actions required to focus entirely on whatever series of images he was working on were to the neglect of his own health, the ravages of his

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<sup>150</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, 28 January 1889, Arles, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let743/letter.html>. 743.

<sup>151</sup> Jeffrey Myers, "The Savage Experiment: Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine," *The Kenyon Review* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2011), accessed January 3, 2017, <http://www.kenyonreview.org/journal/summer-2011/selections/the-savage-experiment-arthur-rimbaud-and-paul-verlaine/>.

absinthe, camphor and terpene addictions, and again with the self-conscious ideation that he was “risking” everything for his work and that he might at least with great toil and sacrifice have some small place among the painters like the Impressionists, owing much to their techniques of light and color, which he believed he and Theo had drawn a great deal from, and which he believed might one day bring himself just enough of a living to release Theo to finance his new life with his fiancé Johanna Van Gogh-Bonger and their soon-coming newborn.<sup>152</sup>

### **Edvard Munch: Melancholy Scream and the Studio**

In Edvard Munch’s *Melancholy* (1893), the figure sits resting his head in his hands, emblemizing the classic melancholic gesture. Dürer’s engraving represents the melancholia of the individual, hampered at the gateway through which the artist becomes inspired and by that word’s most ancient connotation, not the bleached definition used in the lexicons of the twenty-first century. Munch’s tempura painting, two pastels, and lithograph, manifest the four versions of *The Scream* that he created from 1893-1910. They form a collective melancholia, the melancholic scream across a vast whole, where chaos and horror emerge across the taxonomies of the species, Darwinian, catalytic, apocalyptic: mesmerized by the dark future of mass extinction in a disturbed universe. The most iconic version of *The Scream* is the 1895 oil, tempura, and pastel cardboard, and it features electric colors that agitate the atmosphere with charged swirls similar to Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*. It is also the most psychotic version, as the figure is drawn as though it could have been copied from psychiatric art, the face shocked and anxious in a

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<sup>152</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh and Jo Van Gogh-Bonger, 6 July 1889, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let787/letter.html>. 787.

visionary, nuclear way. The pastel on cardboard version of *Scream* (1893), perhaps the earliest one with its apocalyptic vermilions and fluorescent oranges, was created in the same year that Munch painted *Melancholy*, which hangs in the Munch Museum in Oslo. Munch viewed the art studio as a place of refuge, secluded and melancholic, but safe from the caustic anxiety of his apocalyptic images that torment his elongated figures.<sup>153</sup> Munch described his epiphany for the painting:

I was walking along a road one evening—on the one side lay the city and below me was the fjord. I was feeling tired and ill—I stood and looked out over the fjord. The sun went down—the clouds were stained red, as if with blood.

I felt as though the whole of nature was screaming—it seemed as though I could hear a scream. I painted that picture, painting the clouds like real blood. The colours screamed. The result was *The Scream* in the Frieze of Life.<sup>154</sup>

As one critic wrote of Munch's iconic painting, it "'Can only have been painted by a madman.'"<sup>155</sup> Doubtless influenced by the theories of degeneration from physicians like Max Nordau, another critic of the times, Andreas Aubert, summed Munch's character in a few lines: "Among our painters, Munch is the one whose entire temperament is formed by the neurasthenic. He belongs to the generation of fine, sickly sensitive people that we encounter more and more frequently in our newest art. And not seldom they find a personal satisfaction in calling themselves 'Decadents . . .'"<sup>156</sup> Munch often located his studios near fjords and other bodies of water. For Munch the studios were respites

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<sup>153</sup> Jeffery Howe, "Nocturnes: The Music of Melancholy, and the Mysteries of Love and Death," in *Edvard Munch: Psyche, Symbol, and Expression*, ed. Jeffery Howe (Boston, MA: Boston College McMullen Museum of Art, 2001), 17.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 53.

between the chaos and undefined agony of the cities and the ineffable responses of nature: the painter trapped between a dark pastoral and the civil.

## **THE HOSPITAL**

The intellectual traditions of melancholia shifted meaningfully in the Early Modern period. Humoral theory streamed in from the treatises of new physicians who were still influenced by the medical theories of Galen passed down by Avicenna but had kindled the aesthetics of melancholia as a condition of scholarly pursuit, natural magic, and visual art. Though the great Arabic writers and Medieval physicians had been aware of them, the Aristotelian *Problem* 30.1 and Plato's divine inspiration resurfaced in the Renaissance as primary sources for the melancholic philosophy of mind developed by physician astrologer and Florentine Neo-Platonist Marsilio Ficino. Ficino was a mentor to Pico della Mirandola in the Medici court, and his idea of melancholia as a hazard of the intellectual appeared in his treatise *Libri de Vita Triplici* or (*Three Books on Life*), which was very influential and shaped the theory of German alchemist and physician Cornelius Agrippa, who wrote an occult treatise, *De Occulta Philosophia*. Agrippa devised three types of melancholia: one for the artist, the philosopher, and the scholar. Though he portrayed himself as a hermetic with Christian values, he was still thought of by some as a dark practitioner of alchemy and magic, a "black conjuror of devils,"<sup>157</sup> suggesting the persona of Marlowe's Faust conjuring Mephistopheles. But Agrippa's taxonomy of melancholia was very influential and later informed the work of the chemical philosophers like Robert Fludd. Eventually these ideas about melancholia reached the

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<sup>157</sup> Dame Francis Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London, UK: Routledge, 1979; repr., 2001), 75.

mathematician and astrologer John Dee, who was one of the great intellects of the sixteenth century and an advisor and magus to Queen Elizabeth I. From this intellectual line the revived philosophy of melancholia emerged from the medical treatises and works of the alchemists and was visualized by the painters and given new meaning and prestige among artists. Agrippa's classification system may have influenced the early visualization of melancholia in the work of Albrecht Dürer,<sup>158</sup> whose engraving *Melencolia I* is an allegory of artist's melancholia and was itself a great influence on many artists following afterward like Benedetto Giovanni Castiglione.

The painters had not simply revived Aristotle's ancient concept to engineer a new art or to behold melancholia as a primary source of creative inspiration. Curiosity about melancholia and its connections with artistic creativity had spiked first in new influential treatises on astrology and mental health by Ficino, who was a physician, in *Libri de Vita Triplici* (1489), and in *De Occulta Philosophia* (1531), by physician-chemist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim. Renaissance physicians also wrote about melancholia in influential medical treatises like Timothie Bright's *Treatise on Melancholy* (1586), Thomas Walkington's *The Optick Glass of Humors* (1631), and Robert Burton's iconic *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). Artists' melancholia had surfaced as a new entity in hermetic texts on natural magic and medicine written by Italian and German scholar-physicians. This renewed interest in artists' melancholia was also accompanied by the rise of the artistic personality as a figure to be celebrated in visual culture, as the

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<sup>158</sup> In *Saturn and Melancholy*, Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl connect the title of Dürer's painting with the medical theory of Agrippa, who indicated three types of melancholia: type 1, *melancholia imaginativa*, the creative form that inspires poets and artists; type 2, *melancholia rationalis*, the logical form that inspires philosophers and prophets; and Type 3, *melancholia mentalis*, the mental form that inspires scholars, contemplatives and theologians.

ambitious painters, engravers, and intellectual sculptors in Florence gained public acclaim and competed with each other in lucrative commissions arranged by their patrons to pit them against each other in public showings and private estates. The painters had much to acquire in elevating their work from a craft to a serious discipline that was beyond practical ornamentation and religious devotion. There was also the astronomical power thought to emanate from visual works that physicians like Ficino believed were medically beneficial to viewers via the influence of powerful cosmic rays.<sup>159</sup> But harnessing these powers could now be visualized by expert technicians of art and sculpture, and thus required a degree of mastery from the great painters, those who were polymaths wielding exceptional control over their media. To have a melancholic temperament then was a genial attribute, claimed by artists like Michelangelo and Dürer, and many other painters of the Renaissance.

Many scholars have designated *genius* as a Renaissance concept but painterly genius had to come from a medium with a pedigree, something which painting had lacked for hundreds of years, perceived as merely a craft belonging to the guilds. Leonardo da Vinci had argued in his *Paragone* that painting was superior to poetry and music, mediums that had held prestige in the arts since antiquity. Albrecht Dürer, Michelangelo, and Castiglione wrestled with the rejuvenated melancholia that the ancients believed had always been a necessary condition through which to realize great works. Melancholia had become a thing to behold, fetishized in visual objects made by artists and even mentioned as a problem for the painters in Vasari's iconic text *Lives of the Artists*. Melancholia surrounded the artists as objects in their studios. They were

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<sup>159</sup> Quinlan-Mcgrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in Italian Renaissance Art*, 119-120.

immersed in the melancholy of the studio, an environment that favored the work of the solo artist when work could be done. Melancholia was symbolized in engravings and paintings as disused palettes and brushes, compasses and armillary spheres, upturned musical instruments, winged omens in the form of owls and bats, and historically *dissectible* animals, alluding to the cats and dogs Democritus used in his medical experiments to anatomize the cause of his madness and melancholia.

It is important in the history of mental illness to consider that the medical roots of melancholia persisted throughout the middle ages and into the early modern period. It was always, according to the physicians, an imbalance of the humors. The theory of the fluids was animated by its longevity and regeneration as the visualization of medical knowledge in the early modern period began to expand beyond illuminated manuscripts to media like woodcuts, copper engravings, and etchings, which emerged from the advent of printmaking. Melancholia was not only a continued issue of Hippocratic medicine and the offspring of Galenic upgrades to the theory of the fluids, but working from this ancient base was also a strong stoic tradition, which viewed Aristotelian melancholy and Platonic madness as diseases, not states of inspired consciousness. Marsilio Ficino was trained as a physician and philosopher, but with Medici backing he sought to reform the negative conception of the civic humanists who early on did not view melancholia as having any benefit to the creative and contemplative regimen. For the stoics and the civic humanists, melancholia was an affliction, a terrible disease, something to be quarantined, purged, leeches, gazed at through urine flasks. Confinement of the mentally ill and the mad was an emergent social practice early in the fifteenth century in Europe. The rise of

Bethlam Royal in 1403 as a dedicated hospital for the insane<sup>160</sup> created a new space considered by many physicians to function as a form of therapeutic treatment, as some inmates did recover from their malaises. Yet confinement was also a way to separate the mentally ill from mainstream society. This became the case in France, according to the always ambivalent Foucault, who writes in *History of Madness* that in the middle of the seventeenth century, the mad were stored in the formerly empty leper houses on the very margins of society, segregated outside the gates of old Medieval towns scattered throughout France.<sup>161</sup> The ship of fools was an imaginary space, created by literary and visual media (Brant and Dürer), designed to carry the mad outside the mainstream culture.

### **Dürer: Illness and Idleness**

Appearing just before *Melencolia I* is Durer's pen-and-ink watercolor *Self Portrait of The Sick Dürer* (1512-1513). Panofsky's translation of the inscription on the watercolor reads: "Where the yellow spot is, to which I point with my finger, there it hurts."<sup>162</sup> In this image the artist points to the left side of his belly, toward the spleen, as a gesture to map the pain of the serious illness he has recently experienced. This is in accordance with Galen's splenic theory of melancholia, which charged the spleen with filtering the blood of black bile, but when diseased, the distribution of the toxic fluid was released

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<sup>160</sup> Roy Porter, "Bethlem/Bedlam Methods of Madness?," *History Today* 47, no. 10 (October 1997): 41.

<sup>161</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2006), 7-8; and Porter, "Bethlem/Bedlam Methods of Madness?," 41-47. The Royal Bethlam Hospital (Bedlam) was first located *outside* the gates of London in the late Medieval period.

<sup>162</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943; repr., 2005), 171.

into the blood, releasing melancholic substances which later were transmuted in the spleen as vapors that affected the brain.<sup>163</sup> Dürer's watercolor is thus an early visualization of the anatomy of melancholia, long before Burton and Vesalius. With this anatomy, Dürer is the ideal melancholic, self-consciously aware of the disease that afflicts his spleen and affects his mood, resulting in a dual state of consciousness that both dejects the idle artist and inspires engagement with the tools of the studio. Burton's famous dictum some 120 years later reads: "There is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, no better cure than business."<sup>164</sup> Dürer's watercolor is also a precursor to Burton's iconic frontispiece in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, a work he constantly revised throughout his life, as if to affirm his own conclusions about its making, recorded in the voice of his persona Democritus Junior: "I write of melancholy by being busy to avoid melancholy."<sup>165</sup>

As an artist and geometer, the angelic heroine in *Melencolia I* is frozen by distant imaginations, stymied by an inertia that disengages her from the habits of work and the use of her tools. In *The Dream of the Doctor*, Dürer portrays the physician in a similar light, as a counterpart to the artist whose malady he cannot fix. Here the physician is unconscious, or rather imaged in a state of idleness, having fallen asleep on pillows at a hearth. In this engraving, a demon blows an accordion fan into the ear of the physician, who hears the voices of temptation perhaps in his dreams, symbolized by a Venus figure who points to the lethargy of the physician. As the image is a symbol of idleness and

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<sup>163</sup> Galen, *Galen On the Natural Faculties*, trans. Arthur John Brock (London, UK: William Heinemann, 1916), 206-207.

<sup>164</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2001), 7.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

temptation, it represents two of the conditions most often associated with melancholia, and in Medieval times, with the sin of acedia. The idea of idleness as a cause of melancholia continued in the eighteenth century and was often masked in the writings of William Cowper and in his preoccupation with leisure and retirement. In the nineteenth century Baudelaire revived the melancholic idler as the *flâneur*, or the sophisticated poet prowling the streets of Paris recording the impressions of a new modernity in the caricatures, fashion, and pastimes of the culture that surrounded him.

### **Robert Burton: Atomizing Melancholia**

Melancholia has a deep visual history. Along with madness, melancholia has been represented in myriad ways across a visual spectrum that corresponds to literary histories of mental illness. Some of these have been explored in Sander Gilman's *Seeing the Insane*,<sup>166</sup> a classic assemblage of mad art and physiognomies of psychiatric disturbance. The philosophy of melancholia is thus augmented by visual images, by the aesthetic traditions of melancholia's graphic tropes that link mind and body: the *gestus melancholicus*, or head resting on the hand; the splenetic physiognomies, despondent gazes, misshapen foreheads; the "*arc de cercle*"<sup>167</sup> of the epileptic, the bell-capped fool's disheveled appearance, the penitent religious hermit gesturing to the sky, and the chained madman whose metal links bind him to the earth and to the confinement of the lunatic asylum.

The frontispiece of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* features an array of psychopathological figures. The Flemish artist Christian Le Blon illustrated the

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<sup>166</sup> Sander Gilman, *Seeing the Insane* (Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books and Media, 2014).

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

engraving for the 3rd edition of *The Anatomy of Melancholia* in 1628. The image contains ten plates arranged in three columns stacked in four rows, a matrix by which Burton imagines the various types of melancholy he has explored among his many readings and citations revealed in the book. The frontispiece is thus Burton's visual taxonomy of melancholia. Its ten plates are a catalogue of visual tropes associated historically with melancholia and madness, and each of the plates is explained by its own ekphrastic poem, so that a direct relationship exists between image and text. Plates 1 and 10, at the center column of the image, portray Democritus and his satirical protégé Democritus Junior. Plates 2 and 3 in the top row represent two predominant causes of melancholia, jealousy and solitude, while at the bottom row are images of borage and hellebore, medical herbs thought to cure melancholy. Plates 4 through 7 are images of figures that represent four species of melancholia. Each figure is located within a decipherable setting or is surrounded by objects that associate its type of melancholia with its appearance. In Plate 4, *Inamorato*, or love melancholy, a fashionably dressed musician with a fine ruff and sword at his side wears a wide-brimmed hat that obscures part of his face and his eyes. A lute and music script are scattered at his feet, and a quill pen and an envelope are tucked behind a rail below a shelf of books, suggesting the musician is also writer of love letters and songs. In Plate 1, Democritus is shown seated under a tree in the classic posture of melancholy, his head resting on his palm. His medicinal herb garden appears in the background, animal cadavers strewn in the garden's walkways and the figures of animals carved into the surrounding walls like petroglyphs, what appear to be mostly dogs and cats, the totem animals of ancient melancholia. In his dissections Democritus searches for the physical topography of melancholia but laments

that he cannot discern its physical features in the bodies of dead animals and realizes that his time is short. Burton is imaged in plate 10 as Democritus Junior who has labored to complete the search of his distant mentor by producing his great anatomy of melancholy. Burton is pictured as the scholar wearing a skull cap, and like the angelic figure in *Melencolia I*, he is surrounded by objects of learning and measurement: an armillary sphere, a cross-staff, two books, one of which he holds, and a heraldry emblem. The cross-staff is a device that was used by mariners of the early modern period to navigate ships.<sup>168</sup> The plates representing jealousy and solitude, which flank the image of Democritus, are landscapes populated with animals associated historically with melancholia.

The design of Burton's book is encyclopedic and titanic, marks that show he is a polymath, a literary Faust. In this way he may also be imitating Democritus, his intellectual and spiritual hero. As an anatomist-philosopher and melancholic recluse, Democritus also wrote across a wide array of subjects. Democritus and Burton were born under the sign of Saturn, and thus suffering frequently from bouts of melancholia, they sought out its nature, its variations, and its mystery connections to the body, in search of the black bile, its pomander and its antidotes. Though seemingly a medical text with scholastic features, the work does not follow any established line of literary analysis. Even by seventeenth century standards, it is a mixture of satire, history, philosophy, religion, and medicine, each permeated by numerous theories of the ancient system of melancholia, without the author holding any *prevailing* lens on its symptoms and causes.

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<sup>168</sup> "The Mariners' Museum | EXPLORATION through the AGES," accessed February 17, 2015, <http://ageofex.marinersmuseum.org/index.php?type=navigationtool&id=14>. First recorded use of the cross-staff by mariners in the West was the same year Albrecht Dürer painted *Melencolia I* (1514).

Anything may cause melancholia; everything may be melancholic. Thus melancholia became the creative substrate of the early modern quest for simultaneous expression across multiple artistic genres and scientific disciplines.

### **Van Gogh: Pigments and Chemical Gardens**

Van Gogh generated a complex assemblage of images during his confinement in the mental hospitals at Arles and Saint-Rémy, and under the care of Dr. Gachet in the final 70 weeks of his life in Auvers-sur-Oise, where he averaged a painting per day. Vincent painted the interiors and hallways of the hospitals, *Vestibule in the Asylum* (1889) and portraits of mental patients, *Portrait of a Patient at Saint Paul Hospital* (1889) and *Old Man in Sorrow* (1890). He also painted his studio space, *Window in the Studio* (1889), which had been arranged for him in the hospital at Saint-Rémy, where he had wanted to hold an exhibition of his works in all the empty rooms—there were over 30 of them—and down the long corridors, which were spacious and arched.<sup>169</sup> In the painting, a watercolor with oils and chalk on paper, bottles appear in the studio window with bars on the outside arrayed almost indistinguishably from the wood frame and windowpanes. But it is perhaps the landscapes and the portraits that are the most enigmatic. *Garden of the Hospital in Arles* (1889) and *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* (1890) are two of the most iconic examples from the period. At Saint-Rémy, where he painted *Garden of the Asylum* (1889), Van Gogh “used the combination of red and green to evoke the madness of the psychiatric patients, which they experienced as ‘seeing red’” (Van Gogh Museum

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<sup>169</sup> Richard Cork, "Van Gogh, 'Stricken by Acute Derangement'," *Yale University Press*, 2012, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://yalebooksblog.co.uk/2012/02/17/van-gogh-stricken-by-acute-mental-derangement-author-article-by-art-critic-richard-cork/>.

exhibit). He wrote to Bernard in a letter, “You’ll understand that this combination of red ochre, of green saddened with grey, of black lines that define the outlines, this gives rise a little to the feeling of anxiety from which some of my companions in misfortune often suffer, and which is called ‘seeing red.’”<sup>170</sup> Colors were also expressive of mental states in his landscapes from this period, as they began to emerge in his portraits as a dominant technique of expressing the soul of the sitter.

Vincent’s most famous portrait of a physician, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, also emanates melancholic themes in the symbols depicted in the painting and in the classic gaunt physiognomy that Dr. Gachet self-consciously models. Adding to Vincent’s array of psychoactive chemicals. Dr. Gachet may have prescribed purple foxglove (*digitalis purpurea*) as a remedy for seizures. A sprig of the toxic herbal he grasps in both portraits Vincent made of him at the physician’s three-story house, each floor sequenced with rooms filled with curios, antiques, and Impressionist paintings from the array of other major artists Gachet knew or had treated, like Cezanne, Pissarro, Renoir, and Manet.

His physicians prescribed bromide to counter his attacks in the hospital. Vincent slept on pillows tainted with camphor,<sup>171</sup> serving as a toxic inhalant that may have promoted his seizures along with his absinthe abuse. Absinthe was popular among poets and artists in the late nineteenth century, many of whom believed its dual nature, like melancholia’s, both inspired them to creative heights while simultaneously at the risk of being poisoned and intellectually dismantled by chemical inertia, so that no work at all could be done. Absinthe became a kind of chemical melancholia. Absinthe contains

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<sup>170</sup> Van Gogh to Emile Bernard, 26 November 1889, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let822/letter.html>. 822.

<sup>171</sup> Christopher P. Holstege, Michael R. Baylor, and Daniel E. Rusyniak, "Absinthe: Return of the Green Fairy," *Seminars in Neurology* 22, no. 1 (March 2002): 91.

several herbs, like sweet fennel, anise, and angelica, but its principle ingredient is wormwood, or *artemisia absinthium*. These herbs provide the chlorophyll that gives the beverage its iconic green color. Absinthe's high concentration of alcohol, 50% to 80%, and the action of thujone are thought to create the psychoactive effects that painters and poets have used to augment their work. Vincent used absinthe regularly, as did Degas and Toulouse Lautrec, and painted *Café Table with Absinthe* (1887), as a tribute to the drink with the glass distorted and leaning against the bottle, as if the perception of the viewer were to take on the intoxicated vision of the absinthe user. Van Gogh's paintings are also losing some of their color, owing to unstable pigments he used that do not retain bold hues like red and purple very well over time. His painting *Irises* (1889) features flowers that were once purple and have now completely faded to blue. Such is a similar case with Leonardo's frescoes like the *Last Supper*. There is instability in the very medium Van Gogh used to paint his swirling canvases, owing to lead paints and the chemical plumbonacrite, which degrades over time, so that Vincent's reds highlights in paintings like *Wheat Stack under a Clouded Sky* are slowly fading to white.<sup>172</sup>

In a letter to Theo in September of 1888, Vincent imagines the new soul in modern portraiture as an expression of the future. "Ah, the portrait," he writes, "the portrait with the model's thoughts, his soul—it so much seems to me that it must come."<sup>173</sup> He also thought that this new soulful color sensibility would emerge in another

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<sup>172</sup> Frederik Vanmeert, Geert Van der Snickt, and Koen Janssens, "Plumbonacrite Identified by X-ray Powder Diffraction Tomography as a Missing Link during Degradation of Red Lead in a Van Gogh Painting," *Angewandte Chemie* 127, no. 12 (February 2015): 3678.

<sup>173</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, 3 September 1888, Arles, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let673/letter.html>. 673.

generation of painters in new ways.<sup>174</sup> In a famous quote from a letter to Theo he wrote, “The painter of the future [will be] a *colourist such as there hasn't been before.*”<sup>175</sup> That Van Gogh subdued his color palette when he arrived at the hospital in Saint-Rémy, in paintings like *Garden of the Asylum*, suggests he may have believed there was a maddening effect on him when using the bold pigments and impasto strokes of his days in Arles. He also ingested his paints and turpenoids, so that color itself became a dangerous drug, an agent that induced altered states of consciousness and madness.

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<sup>174</sup> He believed his expression of the soul revealed itself in the pigments, in the colors of the portrait.

<sup>175</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, Arles, 4 May 1888, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let604/letter.html>. 604.



Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514. Engraving, 23.9 x 18.5 cm.  
British Museum, London.



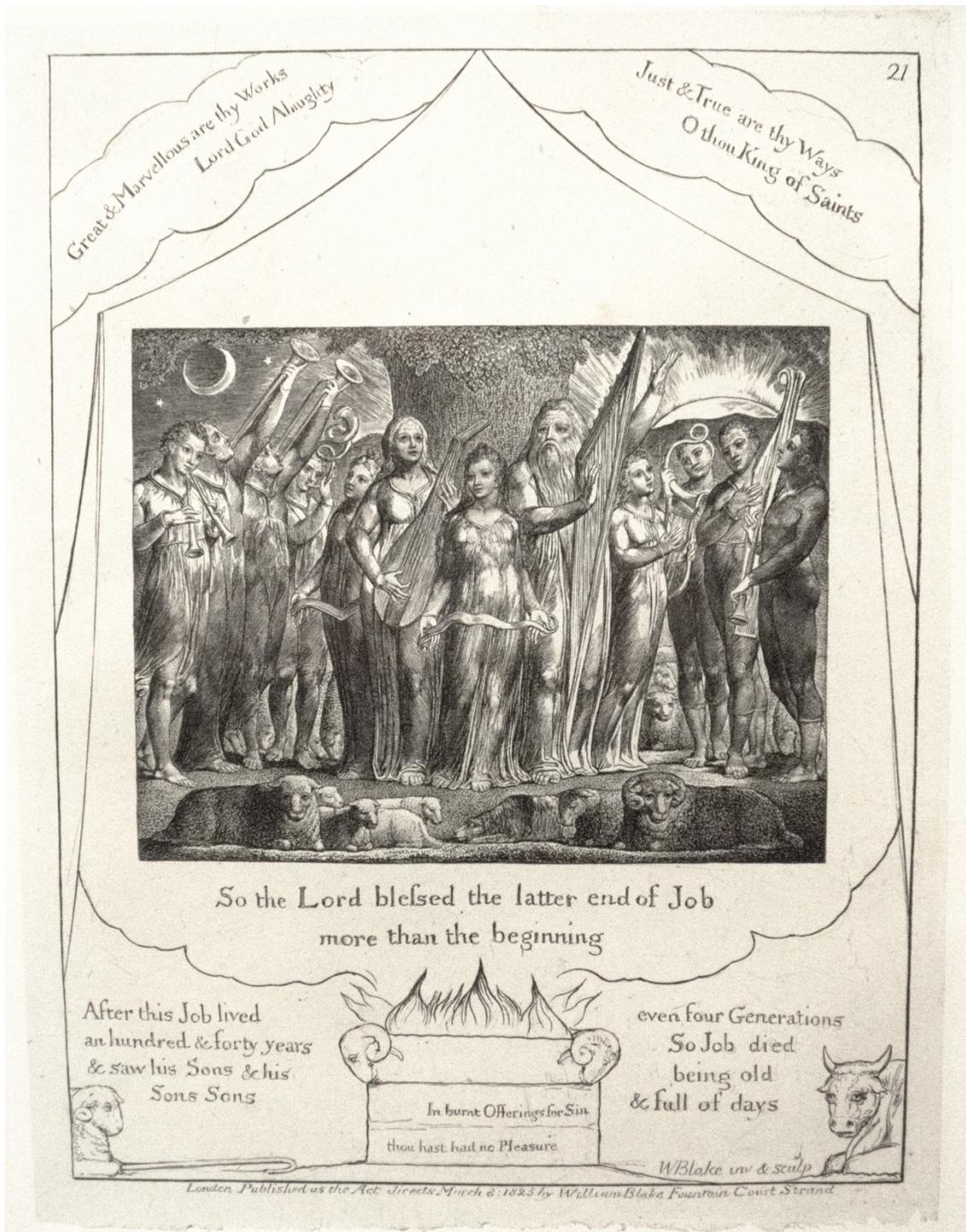
Vincent Van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 92.1 cm. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York/Scala Florence. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest. Digital Image © 2017.



Francisco de Goya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, 1799. Etching and Aquatint, 21.4 x 15.1 cm. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



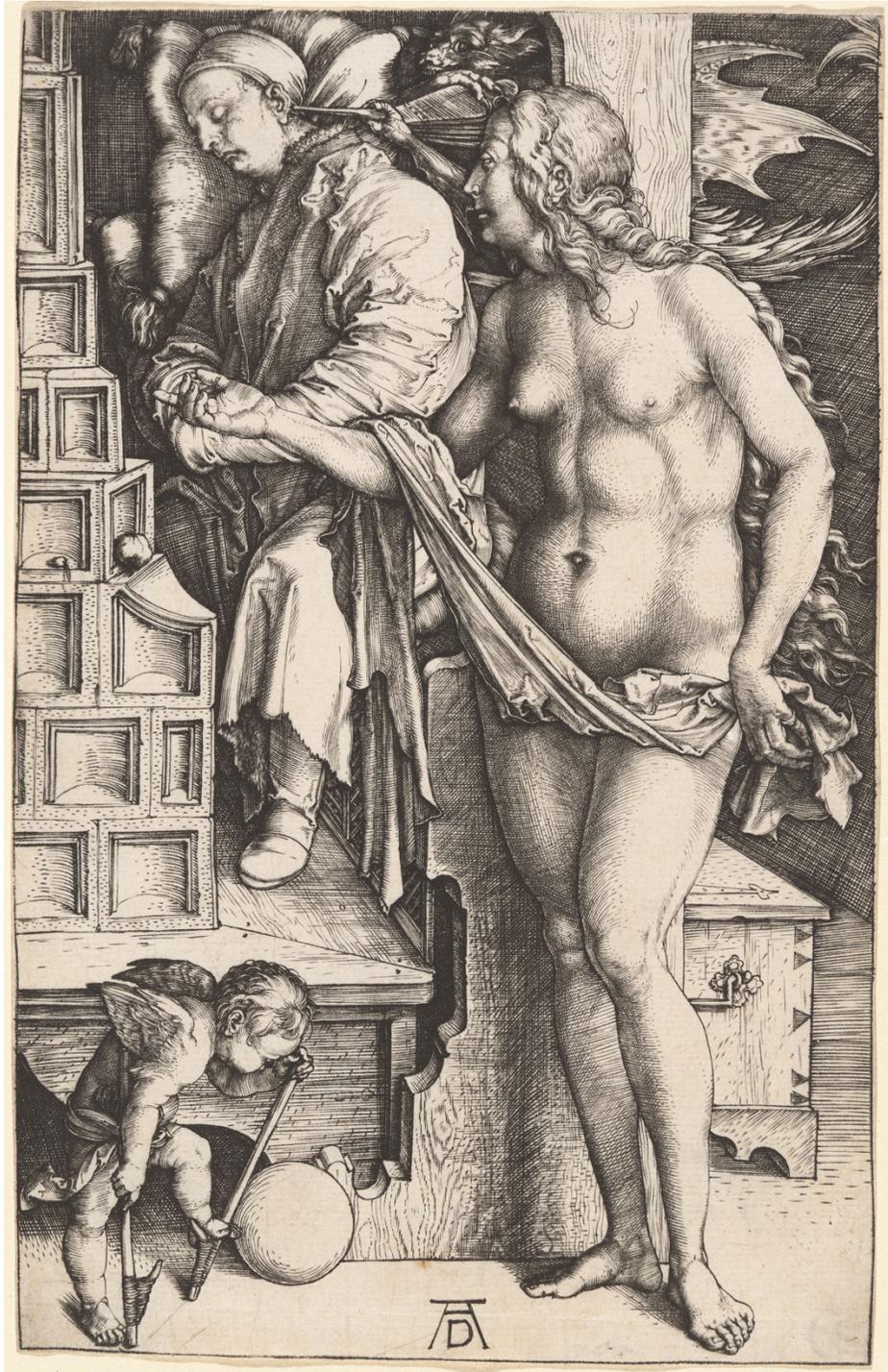
William Blake. Illustrations of the *Book of Job*: Plate 1. 'Thus did job Continually,' 1828. Engraving on Paper, 19.8 x 16.4. Tate, London.



William Blake. Illustrations of the *Book of Job: Plate 21*. 'So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning,' 1825. Engraving on Paper, 19.6 x 14.9. Tate, London. (Photo by Kenneth Alewine)



Vincent Van Gogh, *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*, 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 60 x 49 cm. The Courtauld Gallery, London.  
(Photo by Kenneth Alewine)



Albrecht Dürer, *The Dream of the Doctor* (Temptation of the Idler), 1498-1499. Engraving. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Vincent Van Gogh, *Garden of the Asylum*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 72 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

### Chapter 3 Musical Faust

If musical melancholia could be embodied as a character it would take the image of the Faust figure, Goethe's dark *homo universalis*, built on the armature of the artistic personality and the Renaissance minted melancholic polymath. During the early modern period, the artistic personality and melancholy became entangled in the formation of the creative polymath. The musical Faust provided a variation of the polymath in shaping artists' melancholy and its connection to madness and musical inspiration. The Faustian melancholic was as much a demonization of the artistic polymath as it was a dark creative hero. The musical Faust is the sad mathematician in Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I*, despising the silence of her tools from various disciplines scattered about. She is absorbed in a listless melancholic gaze as if always pointed off frame, fixed on the nothing of a distant musical abstract, where sound and silence merge indistinct from each other like a code, the way a voice might be heard or ignored as something merely in the wind. In Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus*, the musical Faust is configured by the voice of Mephistopheles from the schizoid consciousness of a voice-hearing composer Adrian Leverkühn, seriously bothered by the syphilitic hallucinations enacted by his shape-shifting nemesis, who promises him 24 years of creative genius in exchange for his soul.

During the Romantic period the artistic personality surfaced in the form of the mad composer, afflicted by madness and musical inspiration. From the musical writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann and Beethoven's mythic syphilis, to the voice-hearing of Robert Schumann that at times commanded his compositional technique, many Romantics believed musical creativity could be inspired by madness. Wagner's melancholic

chromaticism featured in his operas *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde*, and Arnold Schoenberg's experimental atonality, which was formalized in his 12-tone system of composition, resurfaced later in the form of a literary critique of the mad composer in Mann's final novel *Doctor Faustus* (1947), the same year Schoenberg wrote *Survivor from Warsaw*, his late style choral work about the horrors of the Holocaust using the 12-tone method. Thus the subject of madness is entangled in both the fiction and biography of the German Romantic composers, most of which have been retrospectively diagnosed with syphilis, melancholia, or manic-depression.

Mann researched and assimilated into his own work the Faust legend from the 1587 *Faustbuch*, which influenced Christopher Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (1604) and was later popularized during the Enlightenment by Goethe in his closet drama *Faust* (1808). Mann sought a musical form to represent his Faust and to revisit his familiar themes of illness, decline, and genial creativity. Like Nietzsche, Mann believed music was a superior art to all others and could translate the deepest configurations of the human soul. He also thought it would serve as a uniquely effective way to visualize the cultural milieu of German intellectualism in the twentieth century.<sup>176</sup> More than anything Mann believed the ruptures in German social culture that preceded the Holocaust could be depicted in the fissure that occurred between the music of the nineteenth century that he loved, and which had shaped his literary sensibility, and the complexity of the music he disdained in the twentieth century. Mann also believed music could visualize complex experiences, emotions, and abstractions that elude language, similar to the *stimmungsbild*, a German

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<sup>176</sup> Patrick Carnegy, *Faust as a Musician: A Study of Thomas Mann's Novel 'Doctor Faustus'* (New York, NY: New Directions, 1973), 19, 21-22.

compositional form that creates a musical picture of a mood or atmosphere. E. T. A. Hoffmann also wrote about music's visualizing capacity that superseded language as an art that could image the ineffable. Yet music's power to mirror the mind for good or bad, or to be a medium that merged madness with creative inspiration, did not arise with the Romantics or the Moderns. It is thus significant not to dismiss these ideas as mere Romantic constructions and rather to trace their meeting point in the Renaissance. Aristotle does not mention music specifically in his question about melancholia and genius in the arts, and neither did the musicians of the Medieval period contribute their work to prophetic madness.<sup>177</sup> Though music had lost some of its status since Antiquity as a purely mathematical form governing the music of the spheres, its power as a modal ethos revived during the Renaissance, just as the alchemists revitalized its cosmological significance to map visual conceptions of the universe. The anatomo-musician Leonardo da Vinci visualized bodies in new musical ways in his anatomical drawings as well, exploring the correspondences between the cosmos and the body through depictions of musical instruments, which he may also have built. It is important to reiterate here the self-evident connection during the Renaissance between the well-ordered musical universe above the moon, which the Jesuit music theorist Athanasius Kircher depicted as a cosmic pipe organ,<sup>178</sup> and the sublunary spheres of the well-tempered clavier in its now modulated world, the new tuning which appeared around 1700.

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<sup>177</sup> In his two treatises on dreams, Aristotle wrote about melancholics and the dream state, in which the dreamer, whom Aristotle believed was prone to *phantasmata*, could experience prophetic visions, something analogous to Plato's divine madness, but associative and metaphorical and not so ecstatic. Aristotle also believed melancholics were excellent diviners (the art of divination being one of Faust's sorceries as a magician) because they could make associations between disparate objects separated by a great distance, a talent essentially akin to metaphor and one that he thought made melancholics especially suitable for poetry and philosophy.

<sup>178</sup> Kircher was a polymath who in 1650 included his engraving of a cosmic organ in *Musurgia Universalis (Universal Book of the Muses)*, a musicological treatise in which he introduces his theory of

## ILL TEMPERED SPHERES

Hoffmann was not the first to believe in the visualizing powers of music. As Leonardo noted in his *Paragone*, it is music that gives form to the invisible, to the abstract. In Leonardo's words, music is "*figurazione delle cose invisibili*"<sup>179</sup>—the "figuring of the invisible." Music is the one art that provides the geometry for the inexpressible, that scaffolds the chaos and beauty of the inner world. It captures the unstable vibrations of the soul and its seat in the *sensus communis* Leonardo made drawings of in his notebooks. It is the mathematics of music, the proportions of intervals that kept the universe intact since Antiquity, which unites music with image making. This happened when the emerging emphasis on perspective and geometry had brought new respect for the arts of painting and drawing. The renowned twentieth century scholar of Renaissance musical instruments Emanuel Winternitz observed in his essay on musical inspiration:

While 'Musica' as a science of proportion gradually lost her cosmological importance and thereby her central position in philosophical speculation . . . it was just the doctrine of proportions which became the preoccupation of the draughtsman of the Quattrocento and their rational-mathematically correct portrayal of nature.<sup>180</sup>

Leonardo's drawings of musical instruments helped him to understand how to visualize human anatomy, and how to exaggerate with strings its features in the case of *The Anatomy of the Neck* (1512-1513), a late pen-and-ink drawing on blue paper in which the tendons of the spine are pulled taut from below the clavicles in triangular forms. Musical

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music as a medium that expresses emotions, one he termed *musica patetica*. See Marc Lachièze-Rey and Jean-Pierre Luminet, *Celestial Treasury: From the Music of the Spheres to the Conquest of Space* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 148.

<sup>179</sup> Emanuel Winternitz, *Leonardo Da Vinci as a Musician* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 218.

<sup>180</sup> Emanuel Winternitz, "The Inspired Musician: A Sixteenth-Century Musical Pastiche," *The Burlington Magazine* 100, no. 659 (February, 1958): 51.

instruments appear frequently as visual subjects during the early modern period; whether curled pipes or bowled lutes with back-slanted necks or the ancient monochord, sometimes they were used to illustrate conceptual maps of the universe, just as Medieval music theorists like Guido of Arezzo used the image of the human hand as a mnemonic device to illustrate the relationships between intervals in the hexachords. As a musical instrument builder Leonardo da Vinci ironically understood musical instrument analogies could support his theory that painting was superior to poetry and music in his *Paragone*, a part of *Trattado della Pittura*, or *Treatise on Painting*, which his pupil Francesco Melzi had compiled. It was the innovation of perspective theory that helped to elevate the visual artist from a craftsman to a serious producer of scholarly content by the sixteenth century, a movement in the arts that Leonardo directly contributed to in his *Paragone*. About this turn in the arts Winternitz continues, “Perspective became the new science-art and the vogue of the century, and consequently the painters ascended from the level of artisans to the rank of scholar.”<sup>181</sup> Musical instruments were a uniquely experimental subject Leonardo rendered in his notebooks that were reassembled in posthumous compilations like the Codex Atlanticus and the Madrid and Windsor Collections, in which some of Leonardo’s grotesque instruments are presented. From a mounted rider wearing a musical elephant costume to the fantastic dragon-like creature that he shaped into the form of a silver lyre, the proximity of bodies to music, or the envisioning of the body as a musical instrument, was powerfully represented in several of Leonardo’s anatomical drawings. In addition, five hundred years before it had been invented for the modern recording studio, Leonardo da Vinci created drawings of the first programmable

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

drum machine in anatomical form, a musical automaton that could march in a parade attached to a cart while playing a perpetual rhythm on a frame drum controlled by a notched heart that was motorized by pulleys and wheels. Because of Leonardo's innate ability to imagine distant futures, music was no longer a background force that shaped the cosmos; music and design had joined in his drawings to become a new robotics, simulating an early modern form of artificial intelligence.

As probably the greatest of polymaths and geniuses of all time to emerge from the Renaissance, Leonardo understood from his own working ethos as an artist that music could visualize automated systems. As an accomplished musician himself, having performed at the Sforza Castle for the Duke of Milan using, as Vasari records, his hand-crafted silver lyre, which the artist had himself made from his own drawing that survives in the Madrid Codex, Leonardo coupled imaginaries with musical instruments to explore strange physiologies, just as he used his drawings of acoustics to understand the structures of sound and how it filled space. Leonardo's reputation thus quickly spread north and influenced printmakers and painters like Albrecht Dürer, who was also working on his own theories of drawing and printmaking. Dürer had already a high regard for the Italian painters and like Leonardo was an artist who saw his visual works as a form of knowledge production, on par with his books about typography and perspective.<sup>182</sup>

For Leonardo music was the medium that brought the immaterial world into a strange momentary relief. In his *Treatise on Painting* Leonardo had based one of his critiques against music on its temporality, its fleetingness. Once heard in its time music

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<sup>182</sup> Son of a jeweler and engraver, Dürer was an artist who commanded a living wage and real prices for his work, which was valued as something more than the nature of the work of a craftsman on *wanderjahre*, the year-long itinerant stage of creative exploration in the complex development of artists in fifteenth and sixteenth-century Northern Europe.

could not be sustained and was rendered only in memory or as a repeat performance, which would itself be an inexact repetition when compared to the first. Music required time and did not have the immediacy of painting, which could be realized in a moment. In the refectory of the convent of the Santa Maria delle Grazie, not long after he finished painting the *The Last Supper*, it began to deteriorate. Even Vasari pronounced it ruined by the 1490s. The immediacy yet unstable condition of this famous painting had become like the music Leonardo theorized, a fleeting temporary thing. It was as if the effects of decay were accelerated, visualized in a prominent space in such a short time. While the great Italian painters were making large murals using long-lasting tempuras in semi-permanent places like the choirs of cathedrals and the vertigo ceilings of the Sistine Chapel, the Palazzo Vecchio, and the Church at the Santa Maria Novella, Leonardo had been experimenting with unstable media, bypassing the wet plaster of the genuine fresco and working with a dry wall instead.<sup>183</sup> While this technique allowed for detail and sensitivity of form, the pigments did not fix to the wall properly and began to fade and flake away. When painting seemed most like music, per Leonardo's terms, it became unstable.

Working on a much smaller scale, Dürer's woodcuts and engravings were a reliable medium made from scrawling cuts and precise carvings that enabled him to record the subtle facial expressions of serious depression in *Melencolia I* that Leonardo's blurred strokes had rendered as the softer *melancholy* in the faces of famous Milanese and Florentine noblewomen like Lisa Gherardini in the *Mona Lisa*. The only musical

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<sup>183</sup> This technique allowed him to model his figures with subtle features, using his signature *sfumato*, the complex shading that required him to work in the medium for much longer periods of time, without being hindered or rushed by the limitations of the traditional fast drying pigments of fresco.

instrument depicted in *Melencolia I* is a bell that sits above the drooping head of the angelic figure. While clearly not an instrument to be mastered by a virtuoso, it rests above her head as a symbol of melancholic consciousness, above the instruments of scientific measurement, geometry and creative expression, and well above the world-building tools of carpentry at Melencolia's feet. The bell is a part of the panoply of instruments that are scattered about, out of reach, the melancholic expanse in its usual disarray, with only moonlight for illumination. Both Dürer and Leonardo created drawings of mechanical tools and musical instruments, and in a late style work, *Man Drawing a Lute*, Dürer makes immediately visible the strong connections between mathematics and music in general, not just in the art of instrument making, suggesting that music is a mainstay, a consummate influence for the visual artist as well as the musician and composer. It is thus a mathematical music that surrounds the figure in *Melencolia I* as much as it is a self-portrait of Dürer the knowledge-producing artist. Melencolia is a mathematical figure, a theorist who remains silent, like musical notation before it is sounded by instruments or voices. In later etchings of melancholia that Dürer's had influenced, sometimes the artist placed music script in the hands of the melancholic figure who gazes upon it, while musical instruments lay scattered nearby. It is by her mathematical genius that Dürer's melancholic angel prefigures the music theorist and composer who creates via inspiration. In this way the beginnings of musical inspiration as a mathematical art emerge in *Melencolia I*. As Winternitz reveals in his essay on musical inspiration, unlike the poets, it was not acceptable for a *contemporary* musician or composer to be visualized as the inspired genius until the Romantic period.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Winternitz, "The Inspired Musician: A Sixteenth-Century Musical Pastiche," 48.

Thus in the drawings and etchings of Dürer and Leonardo, music becomes an inseparable art bound with visual art, their joint dependence being on mathematics, one based on number and relationship, the other on the calculations of perspective and geometry. This revival of a Pythagorean construction occurred across two arts, one sonic the other visual. Leonardo's wide-ranging intellect allowed him to improvise on the lira-da-braccio while reciting poetry, a typical diversion for the Milanese court, just as it allowed him to imagine and draw the musical instrument then build it for performance in polite and festive settings.

The Pythagoreans understood the universe as a musical instrument.<sup>185</sup> As I mentioned earlier, the musical instrument during the Renaissance was perceived as a kind of model or body, an armature upon which cosmological theories could be visualized. This is demonstrated by an illustration of a monochord in 1617 by the polymath physician-chemist-mathematician-cosmologist Robert Fludd, in his cosmological text *Utriusque Cosmi Majoris scilicet et Minoris, Metaphysica, Physica Atque Technica Historia*. In this image the hand of God appears above to tune the instrument, a monochord expanse of two octaves each with seven intervals beginning and ending on G, the first of which connects the bottom of the earth, or the "material octave" to the region of the sun, while the second connects the sun to the "empyrean" or "ethereal octave."<sup>186</sup> Flood was interested in perpetual motion machines, just as automata and musical robots had fascinated Leonardo. In Flood's image of the monochord, the distant divisible universe is mapped and made comprehensible and tangible on the armature of a musical

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<sup>185</sup> Lachièze-Rey and Luminet, *Celestial Treasury: From the Music of the Spheres to the Conquest of Space*, 61.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

instrument that fills the expanse and orders the firmament with proportional harmonies. The length of the string when plucked on the monochord determines its interval. The Florentine alchemist Marsilio Ficino had great influence on metaphysicians like Flood who believed that the modal ethos influenced the sublunary mind for good and bad. Mathematics as a musical system of proportions defined not only the perfect concentric circles above the moon but also the imperfect mutable world that trembled below with uncertainty. The orbital resonance produced the gravitational hum between the planets as the world above ordered the world below.

Since early Medieval times melancholia was associated with the planet Saturn in medical texts on the humor, and thus Saturn served an inert role as the outermost planet in the solar system, always on the edge of extremes, set at greatest distance among the musical spheres. In his reconstruction of Ptolemy's planetary music, German mathematician Johannes Kepler assigned the lowest musical interval to Saturn, below all other planets, since its orbit was the longest.<sup>187</sup> In his *Harmonices Mundi* (1619) Kepler, channeling Ptolemy, used astronomical proportions of the spheres to assign musical intervals to each planet,<sup>188</sup> with Jupiter and Saturn (Happiness and Sorrow) one whole tone apart, a 9:8 ratio. Kepler likened the elliptical motions of the planets in their respective spheres—in relation to the earth and sun—to the movable notes (shades) between the fixed notes of the tetrachords,<sup>189</sup> thus changing them either to diatonic,

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<sup>187</sup> Bruce Stephenson, *The Music of the Heavens: Kepler's Harmonic Astronomy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 105.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>189</sup> In the ancient Greek musical system, a tetrachord is a sequence of 4 notes that span a perfect 4<sup>th</sup>, with the two outer notes fixed and the remaining two inner notes considered movable and thus determining the specific genre of the chord, whether diatonic, chromatic, or enharmonic.

enharmonic, or chromatic modes.<sup>190</sup> Reconstructing Pliny's Pythagorean planetary music, Kepler assigned Saturn the note F,<sup>191</sup> a planetary hum, which in the diatonic scale is one note of the dissonant tritone in its relation to B. Yet beyond its saturnine symbols, melancholia was also rooted in the imperfect and unstable realm of the elements: earth, wind, fire, and water, as constructed in Aristotle's theory of the spheres in *On the Heavens* (350 BC). In these musical interpretations of the universe, Kepler was not trying to set forth anything new, but in *Harmonice Mundi* he worked to magnify the reconstructions previously set forth by the famous astronomers to support what he already believed to be true: that the heavens were musically ordered by provable laws, and his new calculations described this order in the elliptical motions of the planets.

Plato of course is famous for banning some of the Greek modes from his world-building political constructions in the *Republic*. He also thought music could be more controlling and hazardous than the visual arts.<sup>192</sup> Even so in *Timaeus* he taught that the chaos of the *earlier* world was unmusical. Even to be sick was to be unmusical, to have disease and especially a lack of mental health, because being sick was the body being out of tune and the musical universe could never be out of tune. If the body when well represented the celestial music, then music that could be heard in the ancient world was a gift from the gods, a medicine that cured the mind, set the body in tune by the same formal structure that fixed the heavens in music's silent world of number and proportion via harmonious and perfect geometries. In the Platonic revival that Ficino led in

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<sup>190</sup> Stephenson, *The Music of the Heavens: Kepler's Harmonic Astronomy*, 106.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>192</sup> Kalkavage, *Plato's Timaeus*, 23.

Florence, music was a sacred medium that mediated the world above and the world below as a divine communication with god.

In his famous engraving, Dürer the mathematician, whom Panofsky viewed as a Faust figure, positions Melencolia the mathematician on a cold stone near a much-interpreted polyhedron with emaciated animals nearby, the angel's head resting in her hand just below a magic square hanging from the wall behind her. Mann's mad composer Adrian Leverkühn consulted a magic square, which he used as an aid for composition in his studio and to sublimate his melancholy into "the culturally valuable and objectively rigorous musical form of twelve-tone composition."<sup>193</sup> Panofsky and other art historians have speculated on the square's properties and function in Dürer's engraving. The square may be a mathematical talisman, as it is known as the *mensula Jovis*, or the table of Jupiter. As this magic square was devoted to the god Jupiter, the god who could bring a reversal to the bad fortunes of the saturnine intellect, Panofsky believed Dürer may have included the square to act as a balance between the darkness of Saturn and light of Jupiter,<sup>194</sup> as astrological influences were thought to be at work in the number games of sixteenth century Germany. The polyhedron in Durer's engraving is positioned prominently in the composition, and as a geometric solid may be a mathematical tool for finding musical proportions and intervals on its faces and vertices.

The polymath and the Faust figure may be viewed as manifold creations of the artistic personality. The anxiety, dark sorrow, and madness as features of the Faust figure point to the old configuration of melancholia, to its original formation defined by the

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<sup>193</sup> Palencia-Roth, "Albrecht Dürer's 'Melencolia I' and Thomas Mann's 'Doktor Faustus'," 372.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 371.

Hippocratic writers<sup>195</sup> and summed later by Aristotle in his work on the associative dreams of the *hoi melancholikoi*. When Pseudo-Aristotle poses his famous question about melancholia in *Problem 30.1*, he first defines the creative melancholic not by symptomatic traits but as an individual who possess greatness in the disciplines, either philosophy or the arts, or poetry and statecraft. Pseudo-Aristotle does not attempt to define melancholia with his question, but instead attempts to list the attributes of the *melancholic*. Aristotle wrote about melancholics in both of his treatises on dreams, but not about melancholia itself, and never recorded that it was a disease associated with the black bile.<sup>196</sup> But more than aptitudes or qualities, these categories of the melancholic are professions, and by the end of his *Problem 30.1*, Pseudo-Aristotle regards the melancholics as great philosophers, poets, statesmen, and artists who are especially susceptible to the disease features of melancholia: if the humor is too hot, it leads to madness, or if too cold, it leads to disabling inertias. To reiterate the question: Why do those who show greatness among the arts seem also to be melancholics? The ancients did not assign melancholia to a person but to a series of professions. The Renaissance polymath much later brought these attributes, among others, into the realm of the artistic personality, where they could be enacted in the characters of the painters like Leonardo and Michelangelo: one the painter-musician the other the poet-sculptor.

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<sup>195</sup> The first Hippocratic writers defined melancholia as a disease, leaving the oldest record of the term known, though melancholia is not necessarily a definitive Hippocratic disease construct, as these writers used terms that suggest an already entrenched pre-melancholia knowledge base. It may well have existed earlier, even by hundreds of years. It was not until 400 BC that the Hippocratic writers linked melancholia to the black bile in *On the Nature of Man*. See Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, 140.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

### ***Diabolus in Musica***

The inclusion of music in what Boethius had termed the *quadrivium*, along with mathematics, geometry, and astronomy, secured its status as a high art and ground for philosophical speculation since Antiquity. The idea of an ancient cosmic frequency for melancholia revived during the Renaissance, though it had never really died in the Medieval period, owing to the influence of the four humors as a mainstay among medical theories. Its substantiation was advocated by four influential figures who imagined great powers were at work in the atoms of musical material that travelled mysteriously in the medium of air to the ear. They were music theorists and composers Bartolomeo Ramos and Franchino Gaffurio, who was a friend of Leonardo da Vinci; philosopher-physician and musician Marsilio Ficino, employed by the Medici family to build an academy in Florence to recover the ideas of Plato; and magician-philosopher Henry Cornelius Agrippa, whose medical treatise Erwin Panofsky believed may have influenced the title of Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I*.<sup>197</sup> These musical doctors tracked the magical powers in music as influences from the interplay of the humors, elements, and the cosmic qualities strangely active yet ambiguously so among the musical modes and scales. Yet there was no direct correspondence handed down from the ancients that explained just how these cosmic powers worked with music to influence character. To further complicate things, the ancient modes were different from the church modes, and thus the modal ethos that governed behavior remained a conundrum yet something deeply believed in. Such was the perfect mystery for Marsilio Ficino and his contemporaries who were in the process of rediscovering, repeating, and translating the musical theories

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<sup>197</sup> See Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl on Agrippa's taxonomy, Ch. 2, 14.

of the Mediterranean cultures, from Pythagoras of Samos and the monochord, to the fifth century musician Damon of Athens, who theorized the *harmoniai* of lamentation, which of course Plato banned from his *Republic*.<sup>198</sup> If during the Renaissance artists, alchemists, and scholars thought planetary rays and astrological powers were at work through paintings capable of (when gazed upon) changing an individual's character and future,<sup>199</sup> then music perceived to have been made of the very fabric that harmonized the universe was governing those powers at work in the astrological paintings, a music of pure mathematical forms that had descended from Pythagoras, Plato, and even Boethius, who as the greatest of Roman music theorists translated the Greek music texts into Latin. This perpetuated for an early Medieval audience the idea that music ordered the universe. Music was thus much more than a hocus pocus influence on mood, as such theories might seem to hardened secular audiences, desensitized by the abundance of new age theories about mystery musical frequencies that can heal the mind and body. For the ancients music kept the world from disintegrating into chaos and nothingness. It was by musical necessity, not stylistic preference, that Plato banned the offensive modes from his perfect state. The interchange between the humors and the elements in the universe were charged by musical forces, which needed to be defined with new theories that might improve upon the old ones inherited from the Mediterranean during the Renaissance. As a physician and philosopher, it was Ficino who would unify Aristotelian melancholia with Plato's divine madness in his own musical treatise on melancholia, *De Vita Libre Tres*, that would be a great influence on the thinking of the Renaissance about the powers

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<sup>198</sup> Robert W. Wallace, *Reconstructing Damon: Music, Wisdom Teaching, and Politics in Perikles' Athens* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 34.

<sup>199</sup> Quinlan-Mcgrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in Italian Renaissance Art*, 12.

of music at work in the planetary songs and their role in the nature of melancholia and divine inspiration. It is here that the mind-body enigma would receive new interpretation. Inspiration and melancholia worked interactively and could not be separated, any more than one could in some machinic way split mind and body, something that Descartes would be blamed for during the emergence of the enlightenment, a controversy that continues to this day.

The Greeks viewed their musical cosmology as more than a mathematically complex and harmonious universe. The philosophers had believed music governed ethical conduct and encouraged virtue, without making any hard connections between music and affect. Nevertheless, music during the Renaissance was rediscovered and understood as a system of universal knowledge, rooted in the Pythagorean cosmos, in the perfection of the Platonic forms, and in the *musica mundana* of Boethius from his *De Institutione Musica*. The *musica universalis* was an immersive, mathematical universe of numbers and ratios, and the old narratives after Aristotle venerated his reported ability to hear the music of the spheres.<sup>200</sup> And while these ideas faded during the Enlightenment they remained with composers and music theorists who believed that music had great influence on the mind and body.

By the nineteenth century the physicians were curious about the interactive effects between mind and body in a new way, effects which were not just the concern of composers and music theorists. Mind-body enigmas were also on the minds of the prominent psychiatrists eager to establish the new science among the physicians in Europe who were worried about the harmful potential of music and its relation to the

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<sup>200</sup> Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 67.

nerves. The Renaissance churchmen had been concerned about the effect of the unpleasant and dissonant tritone, specifically the augmented fourth between F and B described as “*diabolus in musica*,” or the devil in music. At the time it was a very difficult interval for choral musicians to resolve, sensed as nebulous and dissonant for the church and the Renaissance ear, and composers much later would exploit the tritone as a way to sonify evil and darkness, most famously by Wagner with the Tristan chord.

In modernity Western music became the adhesive art to unite all others, restated crisply in Walter Pater’s dictum: “All art aspires toward the condition of music.”<sup>201</sup> It is in the operatic form that Wagner realized his *gesamtkunstswerk*, or total work, a musical virtuosity that synthesized meaning simultaneously across the arts, incorporating the actions of multiple disciplines, from libretto and music to visual stage design and choreography. Wagner like no other composer before him constructed the opera as a “musical entity,”<sup>202</sup> which suggests that there is mode of *being* within the structures of the opera itself. Wagner as a composer concerned some of his critics and certain physicians of the time that his music might be dangerous to the mind and cause nervousness that bordered on psychiatric illness, which the new medical profession had been coding in its emerging taxonomies since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Conscious of his civic responsibility as a composer, for the lives of successful composers were very public in the nineteenth century, Wagner had worried about his own music and

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<sup>201</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Project Gutenberg, 1910), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4060.bibrec.html>, eBook.

<sup>202</sup> In my view Wagner may have unified drama as a musical *entity*, as a state of musical being, or music that seems to be at such an intensity as to reflect and stir the unconscious mind. Such is not to misinterpret the fine work of Philip Waldron, who does not go near so far with the term *entity* as I do, but the idea here seems to gain some traction with my notions of music as the fabric of consciousness. See Philip Waldron, “The Music of Poetry: Wagner in the Waste Land,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 421.

wondered if it was indeed hazardous to his audience, causing even madness. Far more distressing than the yearning and longing shared between Tristan and Isolde and their bitter-sweet cliché of soft melancholy, Wagner and his opponents were concerned about something more serious in 1859, a nervousness, a madness thought to be at work however mysteriously in the depths of his musical compositions, especially *Tristan und Isolde*. Wagner wrote exasperatedly to his friend Malwida von Meysenburg:

'Child! This Tristan is turning into something terrible! . . . I fear the opera will be banned—unless the whole thing is parodied in a bad performance—only mediocre performances can save me! Perfectly good ones will drive people mad.'<sup>203</sup>

If Wagner allowed himself to be dramatic and overcome by the romantic idea of the inescapable connection between the genial powers of his music and the madness of his audiences, he seemed sincerely afraid of his own music, of the deep emotional response his opera might summon from those he believed were susceptible. Medical historian James Kennaway refers to a form of Wagnerian madness that was believed to have afflicted Wagner's greatest patron, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who drowned "with his psychiatrist in mysterious circumstances."<sup>204</sup> Whether a link could truly be drawn between Wagner's music and madness may be incongruous for many scholars today, but in the mid nineteenth century many people, including prominent psychiatrists, believed that music like Wagner's could cause serious mental illness.

In this way, among the composers working at the time, Wagner made for a good villain, a living Faust working among the arts as a polymath, his beautiful music inspiring

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<sup>203</sup> James Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, ed. Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The History of Medicine in Context* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 65.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

Wagnerites, while causing mayhem for those concerned about music and its potential to arouse anxiety and the passions. For those who believed the physicians and music critics and thought music caused nervous disorders, Wagner's work was something to be feared, and the newspapers of the day were ready to report it. Music was thus not always perceived as therapeutic and medicinal but could be something risky enough to be considered dangerous to the mind, even as a cause of neurasthenia.<sup>205</sup> Wagner then was the perfect anti-hero, making compositions with an increasing general chromaticism that was both beautiful and complex, yet as frustratingly new to his audiences as it was liberating for the composer, enabling him to change tonalities easily within compositions. And for the music critics, novelists and artists who believed in a line of influence that extended from Wagner's post-Romantic musical wandering to Arnold Schoenberg's progressive but total break from tonality at the beginning of the twentieth century, there would be others to take Wagner's place among the composers who emancipated dissonance and fit the role of the darkly inspired artist. Thomas Mann created a Faust who crafted musical compositions from a highly mathematical method that was similar to Schoenberg's. For Mann the deranged composer was demonically inspired yet a universal genius, and after the genocide that emerged rapidly in Germany among the system of the concentration camps, his novel brought into serious question the idea of the semblance between madness and genius, that musical production so complicated and dissonant could be implicated after the war, echoing forensic psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso's belief in a correlation between madness and genius that he reduced to a hereditary cause, as something degenerative and handed down among families.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 64.

The Tristan chord is considered by some music scholars to be the ground zero of dissonance and the flashpoint that led to the development of atonality in Modernist music. The tritone of F to B, or the augmented fourth, is the foundation of this chord, and supports the principle motive of the prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*. Wagner's chromaticism in the opera historically contributed to the dissolution of the tonal center of the key, creating a musical ambiguity that opened up greater dissonances as a departure from traditional Western harmony. Composers and music theorists have historically associated specific scales with melancholia, including the Tristan chord, and more generally the tritone, or Devil's chord. There is a significant literature about melancholia and the history of affect and key, from Classical Antiquity to contemporary times. In his *Politics*, Aristotle wrote about an "ethos of music" that linked Greek musical modes with certain character traits and ethical behaviors.<sup>206</sup> Many Renaissance churchmen believed the Medieval mode, with its varying whole and half step intervals, "[took] on its own distinctive 'mood' or character."<sup>207</sup> Yet iconic modes and keys are never far from their associated compositions. Deleuze scholar Michael Nesbitt records: "Though many musicians claim certain keys are more suited to expressing one or another musical emotion, this is presumably because a given key is habitually linked with certain compositions (say, Chopin's Op. 53 in A flat: 'Heroic')."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Carmen Cozma, "The Ethical Values of the Music Art of the Ancient Greeks," accessed 3 March 2014, <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anci/AnciCozm.htm>.

<sup>207</sup> Nick Nesbitt, "Deleuze, Adorno and the Composition of Musical Multiplicity," in *Deleuze and Music*, eds. Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (Edinburg, UK: Edinburg University Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

Melancholia had also been linked to certain chord structures as well, like the Tristan chord, which contains the notes F, B, D# and G#. In his text *Musicophilia*, neurologist Oliver Sacks explains that E.T.A. Hoffman believed the key of C# minor evoked states of melancholia.<sup>209</sup> Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, a poet, organist, and composer who lived during the eighteenth century, believed the key of E♭ minor was the darkest of all signatures. In his text *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst*, or *Ideas of Aesthetics in Music* (1806), translated by Canadian musicologist Rita Steblin, Schubart writes:

E♭ minor. Feelings of the anxiety of the soul's deepest distress, of brooding despair, of blackest depression, of the most gloomy condition of the soul. Every fear, every hesitation of the shuddering heart, breathes out of horrible e♭ minor. If ghosts could speak their speech would approximate this key.<sup>210</sup>

Schubart was likely familiar with E. T. A. Hoffman's view as a composer of e♭ minor, who wrote, "If ghosts could speak, they would have to speak in this key, with its frigid, gripping, and convulsive clanging."<sup>211</sup> Concerning distinctive key signatures, Nesbitt observes, "Each becomes what Deleuze and Guattari, speaking of art and music in particular, call 'autonomous and sufficient [musical] beings.'"<sup>212</sup> That a musical subject can be so self-determining as a mood, that is, recognizable as a mood, suggests that music and affect are linked in the intransient workings of a musical scale. "A scale may then signify musical being, serving as a musical substrate that influences the mood of the

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<sup>209</sup> Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2008), 76.

<sup>210</sup> Rita Steblin, *History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1983), 250.

<sup>211</sup> Sarah Waltz, "[E-flat Minor]," accessed January 3, 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/12283753/\\_E-flat\\_Minor\\_](https://www.academia.edu/12283753/_E-flat_Minor_); and E. T. A. Hoffmann, "E ♭ Minor," accessed January 3, 2017, [http://members.tripod.com/chip\\_miller/text.html](http://members.tripod.com/chip_miller/text.html).

<sup>212</sup> Nesbitt, "Deleuze, Adorno and the Composition of Musical Multiplicity," 59.

listener in an immersive way, since music marinates space without taking up any room in the way material objects do.”<sup>213</sup>

T. S. Eliot wrote about poetry and music and the musicality of words in his text *The Music of Poetry* (1942). Eliot believed that certain rhetorical uses of words and phrases in a poem could work as formulas for emotional action. Writing about music, emotion, and Eliot, Robert Nicolosi records that Eliot described the “objective correlative” as “‘a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which [became the] formula of [a] particular emotion.’”<sup>214</sup> Eliot’s “concept . . . calls to mind the eighteenth-century musical system known as *Affektenlehre*, whereby music was considered an oratorical art capable of arousing certain emotions through structural and stylistic formulas.”<sup>215</sup> During the baroque period some music theorists and composers thought musical scales corresponded to certain emotions in the logical system of the *Affektenlehre*. The *Affektenlehre* canonized certain emotions and feelings and thus were readily universalized in this way, while the “aesthetics of expression (*Ausdrucksästhetik*) viewed music instead as a means to articulate new emotions, emotions that are particular to each individual composer, performer, and listener.”<sup>216</sup> This was certainly Hoffmann’s intent in describing the brilliance of Beethoven’s instrumental music, or the sublime choral music he critiqued in *Kreiseriana*, but also implied in Hoffmann’s writings is that there is something automatic about inspiration, about the madness that suspends authorial

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<sup>213</sup> Kenneth Alewine, "Unseen Muses: Voice Hearing and Artistic Inspiration in Music and Poetry (Abstract)," *Aarhus University*, 2014, accessed, <http://conferences.au.dk/wmaf2014/programme/abstracts/>.

<sup>214</sup> Robert J Nicolosi, "T. S. Eliot and Music: An Introduction," *Musical Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (April 1980): 193.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> John T. Hamilton, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008), 481, iBook.

voice, which is not under the full control of the composer but is instead under the influence of some other source, whether the voice of God, as Beethoven often believed, or the impressions of nature which happen so fast as to become unconsciously or involuntarily influential. For many ancients the Greek modal ethos acted on the character of the listener, perhaps a little on immediate and temporary emotions, but the effect on mood, on the long term aspects of character, certainly must have involved something musical that was much more substantial than notions of key characteristics which fail to take mood, not emotion, into account.

While the devil's chord is not a scale or a mode, and thus not in a Greek way having the same potential to influence character via the modal ethos, its augmented fourth, historically problematic for church music, emerged much later from within the new experimental writing of Wagner's operas like *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde*, which explored dissonant chords at wider intervals, and thus strong moods that were much more than mere *sehnsucht*, or intense yearning.<sup>217</sup> Others have said Wagner's music also "looks backward to the tonality of earlier generations . . . ." <sup>218</sup> since Beethoven and other composers before him used the tritone in their compositions. Arnold Schoenberg's work also reached back to a former period of tonality but like Wagner never made a full return,

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<sup>217</sup> Wagner's general chromaticism created dissonant and undulating harmonies that influenced Arnold Schoenberg, who eventually extended Wagner's techniques by developing a musical system in which all the notes of the chromatic scale had equal value, his method of composition in 12 tones, one note related to the other. Schoenberg imagined his early atonality as an "emancipation of dissonance," freeing musical phrases that could not have been composed in traditional keys, which practice eventually led to the method.

<sup>218</sup> David P. Goldman, "Why We Can't Hear Wagner's Music," *First Things* (December 2010), accessed March 31, 2014, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/12/why-we-cant-hear-wagners-music>.

as his late works like *Survivor from Warsaw* and *String Trio* are complex 12-tone works that hallmark his late style as one of continued extreme dissonance.<sup>219</sup>

It is difficult to imagine what may be definitely intrinsic to music and its structures that suggest the darkness historically associated with melancholia, that may also be reflected in some way by the tritone or a certain scale. The ancient philosophers certainly did not propose the mechanism by which musical modes form ethical character or influenced behavior. Some musicologists like Otto Gombosi have argued that an ethos of pitch, and not intervallic structure, was the feature that defined the moral characteristics of keys for ancient Greek societies. He cites Ptolemy to unite pitch and ethos:

When a voice sings the same melody, sometimes beginning from a higher pitch, sometimes from a lower pitch, the effect produced is an alteration in the character. . . . The same melody summons a rousing impression in the higher keys and an annoying effect in the lower keys because a high pitch causes tension of the soul and a lower pitch relaxation.<sup>220</sup>

If John Searle is right in his belief that consciousness is irreducible, even though he believes it arises in the form of subjective experience from neurophysiological processes, which are by themselves reducible to the natural, what he calls “biological naturalism,”<sup>221</sup> then neither can moods be reduced to musical systems and their notes at the level of the scale or, that is to say, as mere notes belonging to a scale. But there is research from the University of Buffalo that suggests musical dreams do not need decoding like visual symbols need interpretation in other dreams because notes appearing in dream states sound the same as notes in conscious states. Perhaps this is so because consciousness and

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<sup>219</sup> Such remains ironic given Wagner’s anti-Semitism and Schoenberg’s sensitivity to it, which at times put a strain on his relationship with Wassily Kandinsky.

<sup>220</sup> Steblin, *History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, 15.

<sup>221</sup> John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 1, Kindle edition.

music share the same substance, or perhaps the same divide between mind and body in which science and dualist philosophy have been in search for the mechanism that unites the two just as they have sought to understand the workings of music and its effect on mind. As Leonardo believed, music makes the invisible world visible. Music seems to work like dreams themselves, using the unconscious to mirror (reveal) being to itself in some mysterious way that requires no interpretation, no explication, just organized sound, or notes on paper for those who can hear them, like Beethoven. If music activates the emotions, connecting both to exuberance and joy as well as the darker ineffable moods, it could thus share the same property that describes consciousness, because it emulates its workings, even in perilous, psychotic states, where music may still venture unimpeded, as it seems to have a native interlock with the mind, a capacity to echo its most inexplicable states, when words and images fail.

The tritone has a historical and thematic orientation to dissonance, but it may also serve as a more tangible figure for what remain the irreducible properties of music that are more easily grasped when conceptualized as music theory. Some Renaissance churchmen unintentionally singled-out the *diabolus in musica* because they thought it displaced the perfect 4<sup>th</sup> and 5ths of choral harmony and as such their musical traditions were set to praise God with harmonious voices, not with dissonant ones. Choral music was such a standard of ancient and Medieval churches, that music without words was accorded less status. To the spiritual pastors during the Enlightenment like John Wesley, praise was considered an antidote to melancholia, and in music it was powerfully released to modify affect and spiritual attitude, a tradition passed down by the Medieval church,

from the likes of the iconic abbess and composer Hildegard von Bingen, and from the monasteries later to the churchmen.

The departure from traditional harmony to chromaticism in the Romantic period eventually established a strong connection between madness and music, which the German fantasy writer and composer E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote about in his iconic cycle of musical critiques called the *Kreisleriana*. Hoffmann also wrote choral music, several masses and his *Miserere*, and in addition to church music he also elevated the sacred in instrumental music, which he believed had been sublimely realized in the works of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, the First Viennese School. The German philosophers Herder, Wackenroder, and Kleist believed sacred music was sublime, “producing an effect that was self-annihilating,”<sup>222</sup> and they greatly influenced Hoffmann’s theories of music composition, which explored the negation of the self as a musical experience during the composition and performance of music. For Hoffmann music composition shared an entanglement with madness, which served as a refuge from the formal strictures of reason that were elevated during the Enlightenment. In the voice of his alter ego, Kapellmeister Kreisler, Hoffmann wrote a series of music critiques in which he makes the interconnection between musical composition, the loss of the self, and madness. Implicit in the critiques of the negations of self is a loss of authorial voice in the creative space of music, which was non-linguistic and, Hoffmann thought, more like the extremes of madness which could not be set to words but could be to notes. The voice of the composer dissipated in performance, as was the case of Kapellmeister Kreisler, so that no matter how inspired by madness were his ideas in the notation, he destroyed any

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<sup>222</sup> Hamilton, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language*, 487.

manuscripts by throwing them in the fire immediately after he performed them. Kreisler rejects pre-determined musical forms in favor of spontaneous creative inspiration. For Hoffmann, “this idea of creativity is bound up with dismantling a particular notion of form, above all the concrete forms of linear narrative and personal identity,” so that Kreisler has no “personal history” and “is portrayed as decidedly ‘unknown.’”<sup>223</sup> Musical ideas channel through the composer whose being is opened by inspiration as words appear in the mind of the author like automated voices enchanted by the moment. As with Coleridge’s “automaton poet,”<sup>224</sup> the loss of authorial control is troubling for Hoffmann as it dismantles the ingenuity of the pre-existent form that should provide the framework for creative voices and expressive thoughts to emerge logically. If Kreisler is too divinely inspired, not only is there no need for predetermined forms, which have been exhausted by other composers, but his loss of identity makes him like the sibyls caught up in deep prophetic utterance, possessed by songs and melancholic divination. Preceding Hoffmann’s musical critiques by hundreds of years, Marsilio Ficino had in his translations resuscitated Plato’s “furors” in a musical sense, as “the music of divine furor, of the famous god-given manias of Plato’s *Phaedrus*.”<sup>225</sup> Ficino’s divine furor provided a direct relation between music and divinity. Divine furor was an attenuation of self in communication with the spirits through music. Thus he preferred the Latin terms “*inspiratio*” and “*occupatio*” to describe mystical states akin to possession, and the terms “*raptus*” and the Greek “*ekstasis*,” to refer to the experience of “soul loss.”<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 486-487.

<sup>224</sup> John Savarese, “Lyric Mindedness and the ‘Automaton Poet,’” *Romantic Numbers*, accessed May 31, 2014, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/numbers/HTML/praxis.2013.savarese.html>.

<sup>225</sup> Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic*, 146.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 154.

In his musical literature and in the *Kreisleriana*, Hoffmann's connection between musical artist as maker and nature as inspirer is infallibly made by his alter ego. The acoustic world of nature when properly heard is translated within, to use his word, the "hieroglyphics" of musical notation that the composer knows fluently. He thus "sees the Romantic composer as a medium, or cognitive vessel, attuned to his surroundings, and constantly translating their acoustic nature."<sup>227</sup> Nature is encoded with its own mysteries that only music may decipher, and the composer knows this code involuntarily. In "Johannes Kreisler's Certificate of Apprenticeship," Hoffman writes, "Thus the musician's sudden inspirations, the burgeoning of melodies within him, the processes of recognizing and assimilating the secret of music of nature, which is unconscious or at least not definable in words, become the guiding principles of his life and all his activities."<sup>228</sup> As if Hoffmann were channeling Coleridge's notion of the Primary Imagination, the composer's creative thoughts seem automatic, involuntary, inflected by nature without any language, music in its raw form before it is processed as notes which for Hoffmann require an equally sudden and spontaneous occurrence, so that "the art of composing consists in [the composer's] ability to seize upon his inspirations with special mental powers and to conjure them into signs and symbols."<sup>229</sup> Hoffmann intentionally uses the language of magic to approximate how the composer uses his creative skill to respond to the spontaneous input of nature. In this way, by inspiration and involuntary momentum in nature, the immediate input he cannot control, the composer decodes

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<sup>227</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, *E. T. A. Hoffman's Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism*, ed. David Charlton, trans. Martyn Clarke (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 34.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

acoustic phenomena into the abstract system of notes and harmonies of the musical world. Hoffmann concludes, “The audible sounds of nature, the sighing of the wind, the rushing of streams . . . are perceived by the musician first as individual chords and then as melodies with harmonic accompaniment.”<sup>230</sup>

Hoffmann’s ideas about composition seem to pre-figure the idea of generative music and the composer, as he continues to question the authorial voice in the disjointed structure of his works that seem shuffled and fragmented in a maddening way, to reiterate, as exemplified in his novel *The Opinions of Tomcat Murr*, with its dual narrators, and in the *Kreisleriana*, as a cycle of musical critiques written mostly in the voice of his alter ego, inserting a distance between the reader and the voice of the narrator.

Hoffmann’s identities are Doppelgängered, altered, bifurcated in the literary works, where melancholic consciousness gives way to the madness of expression and hypnotic listening. Kreisler writes down his music only temporarily, composing from his head, as Schoenberg was reported to do in his home studio, but of course without the bouts of inspired madness and enthusiasm Kreisler experiences and relates to his audience in the narrative. Like Coleridge and his Aeolian Harp, Hoffmann was fascinated and troubled by ideas of the mechanized mind and the creative possibilities of musical automata, which he explored in his literary works, in the negations of self in the composition process of his mad composer, in the authorial distancing of his narrators in the *Tomcat Murr*, and in his stories like *The Automaton*. Musical personhood is not diminished but is rather subsumed by automatic or at least involuntary pre-musical forces that are released and dissipated in the imagination of the composer before they can be trapped in the

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

musical material of notes, harmonies, modulations, and melodies. Thus the will of the composer seems to contract in order that it may be enriched by the momentum of creative inspiration. This possession theme appears elsewhere. In his short story “Das Sanctus,” Hoffmann writes about a singer named Bettina who loses her silken voice during a choral music performance. She regains it only after she “loses her sense of selfhood” and avoids asserting her own will, so that she later realizes “her voice is only secured by her capacity to melt before the transindividual realm of tones.”<sup>231</sup> The performance, not just the musical composition, must also be attuned to creative influences. But in Bettina’s case, “The inexhaustible forms of voice are not had by remaining in the form of personal identity but rather by relinquishing individual definition to the formless source.”<sup>232</sup> And also with Kapellmeister Kreisler, his divine furors, his enthusiastically-inspired “art demanded the ‘annihilation’ (*Vernichtung*) of the work and implicitly of the one from whom the work emerged.”<sup>233</sup> This annihilation of self suggests the feature of Hoffmann’s theory of music composition that is most idiosyncratic, the most closely associated to his troubling prophetic automata that speak by involuntary, automated processes. The composer like Beethoven must surrender himself to musical forces he cannot control, yet return from that world to order them in some form that may be rendered by musical means: notation, instruments and performances, which must themselves be open to involuntary influences. Hoffmann’s singer surrenders her will for the sake of rendering the inexpressible and enigmatic in music. Hoffmann similarly explored the theme of the automaton in his short literary works, and his story *The*

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<sup>231</sup> Hamilton, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language*, 497.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

*Automaton* explores musical automata alongside an investigation of both biological and technological bodies that represent what Hoffmann believed were the dangerous tensions between human contemplation and machine automation.

## **ACOUSMATIC VOICES**

The term *acousmatic* defines any sound or voice whose source cannot be seen, like bells ringing in the distance from a belfry in a church. Hearing acousmatic sound or music without seeing the source point can be a pleasant and immersive experience in nature as well as across the speaker array, but acousmatic sound history is rooted directly in the voice. Pythagoras teaching behind the veil so that his students could hear him without seeing him may have emerged as a myth for some scholars of Antiquity, but whatever its origin the idea that the voice when separated from its source could have immersive god-like qualities for its audience is one of the most powerful ancient concepts in Western culture. The students of Pythagoras were taught early on the practices of silence and solitude long before the times of the church fathers or the alchemists and magicians of the Renaissance. The practice of silence made the ear the sense of focus, attuned to the world of voices and inspiration. The ancient Greeks were also a very religious people that found living examples in the stories of their gods. One scholar, observing the disciplines and habits of alchemists writes, “By adopting this solitary—and its attending melancholy—way of life the alchemists were emulating the practice of very admirable ancient forerunners; to wit, ‘the disciples of Pythagoras understood this principle, who lived in silence for five years, as did also Numa, taught by Egeria: Solon, taught by Athena; Charon, taught by Saturn; Minos, taught by Jupiter; and Lycurgus, taught by

Apollo.’”<sup>234</sup> The further this genealogy goes back in time and away from Pythagoras, the more mythic it becomes, so that we are left with epic teachers, Saturn, Jupiter and Apollo: or melancholia, sanguinity, and the Greek god of music and medicine. It is important here to remember that the Greeks were not all Aristotelians, and were a very religious people, for Socrates heard the voices of his daimonion and Plato believed in divine madness, in perfect forms that ordered a cosmos that included a robust afterlife beyond the dark cave of mortals.

Sound that is separated from its source, like an unseen jet flying at high altitude, immerses the hearer in a sonic alchemy, a world of the unseen mundane. Yet when the sound is a spoken voice, it has an enchanting effect, or when it is abrupt, for instance, as it might be for the artist just as it is for the psychiatric patient who hears voices, the effect can be startling, so that one must turn immediately to locate the disturbance behind or above or below, in whatever way originating *outside* one’s head: sound waves distributed in the medium of air from some invisible source, or ghosted in from the spirit world, or emerging from an altered state of consciousness, still so dimly understood.

It is a very ethereal activity to contemplate the connections between the acousmatic voice that is separated from its sound source and the experience of hearing voices that sound as though they come from somewhere outside the mind. The uncanny world of auditory hallucination is abstract, abrupt, intrusive, and difficult, yet also ineffable, dissonant, and mutable, but not merely imaginary or solipsistic. Some scholars in the twentieth century have likened hallucinatory experiences to the mysterious world of the *stimmung*, a mood or environment in which the world is beset by a strange

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<sup>234</sup> Noel L. Brann, "Alchemy and Melancholy in Medieval and Renaissance Thought: A Query into the Mystical Basis of their Relationship," *Ambix* 32, no. 3 (November 1985): 128.

artificiality. Kant and Nietzsche conceived in the idea of the *stimmung* a lyrical attunement, Kant appraising beauty in his philosophy, Nietzsche intoning the *stimmung* as an atmosphere that negotiates subjective experience with the immanent conditions of the external world. Some scholars have written about the *stimmung* as an explanation to describe the onset of schizophrenia. The term as defined by German psychiatry of the early twentieth century refers specifically to the aura of schizophrenia as a kind of heightened visual acuity of external objects that seem to appear with uncanny presentiment. This view however seems to miss one of the core features (symptoms) of schizophrenic onset, the typical barrage of voices.<sup>235</sup> The *stimmung* suggests interchangeability between a modified atmosphere and subjective mood, in which both the real and unreal are simultaneously and intensely experienced. The Italian surrealist painter Giorgio de Chirico lifted the term *stimmung* from Nietzsche, observing his revelatory experience that inspired him to write *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and to describe his own heightened visual perceptions during his visit to Versailles, in which all objects seemed intensely connected and familiar but in an bizarre way.<sup>236</sup> *Stimmung* might also be likened to an early expressionist view of madness that the painters like Vincent Van Gogh, Oskar Kokoschka, Egon Schiele, and Edvard Munch attempted to capture in certain portraiture. Thus the world of objects belonging to the heightened atmosphere of *stimmung* contains a visual bias, one built into the idea of mood as an external experience that can be mapped onto the outside world of material objects. *Stimmung* is a visual subjectivity, at least as described by philosophers and scholars in the past who have used

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<sup>235</sup> Schizophrenia also remains the most common diagnosis for auditory hallucinations since the twentieth century.

<sup>236</sup> Louis Arnorsson Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1992), 45, 424.

it to understand the junction between madness and creativity. This tendency in literature and music to connect composition with madness can be traced to E. T. A. Hoffmann. But the *stimmung* has inspired others to map the features of schizophrenia back on to the culture of Modernism. Once humoral theory had been diffused by rising Modernist understandings of mental illness, the German and Swiss psychiatrists split melancholia in the new taxonomy; Freud in his famous essay replacing melancholia with depression, thus associating madness with mood disorder; Eugen Bleuler and Emil Kraepelin associating psychosis with the schizophrenias, thus associating madness with the intellect and degenerative disease.

In *Madness and Modernism* Louis A. Sass writes about the *stimmung* and views madness in its new schizophrenic form that mirrors modernity and its dysfunctions. His idea of insanity is a delusional world characterized by “atmospheric qualities”<sup>237</sup> that define madness as an immersive visual experience, what R. D. Lang called “phantom concreteness” or a “feeling of material actuality”<sup>238</sup> in which subjective experience is projected upon the world of objects. If in this way an alternate consciousness is made external, then madness encodes a visual sensitivity that experiences objects in the observable world as resonate peculiar sheens, like the uncanny architecture surrounding de Chirico in his vision at Versailles, and, as Sass argues, as revealed in his paintings of stark and impersonal landscapes. Psychotic visualization seems to be essential to the aura motivating the modern artist in some mechanistic way, as if the control of thoughts must surrender some outward force. An example might be an intense peculiarity in the way

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<sup>237</sup> Louis Arnorsson Sass, *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the Schizophrenic Mind* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 87.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

light seems to emanate in a hyper-realistic way from the lacquer finish vibrating underneath the strings of an acoustic guitar, or in the desolate planes of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings, where faceless mannequins pose abstracted and mechanical. In the aura of psychosis, the object becomes super-realistic, hyper-sensed, like over-charged colors bleeding in autumn trees, abstracted, reduced, becoming the colors themselves and no longer trees. Such intensities make a paradox of the natural, something both unbearably alive and dead, a hyper-connected universe that also seems distant and detached. In Western music there is a form called the *stimmungsbild*, or "voicing-picture," a brief musical composition intended to generate an atmosphere or immersive mood, but one generated by music, not by visualization. Schumann used the form to compose *Warum* in *Fantasiestücke*, Opus 12 (1837), a series of eight piano pieces based on E. T. A. Hoffmann's novellas *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (1814). A musical *stimmung* might range from the exhilarating to the terrifying, representing voices outside the mind, seemingly acousmatic, or emerging as unbidden thoughts from some unknown origin. The sonic world of voices becomes intensified and sharpened as an external experience, the startling effect that comes from without, unexpectedly, as if from the world of spirits or dream state or elemental force. The *stimmung*, with its heightened sense of *visual* perception and enigmatic strangeness that colors the visual world of schizophrenics, does not explain the auditory moments of inspiration reported by artists, musicians, and poets who hear voices in relation to the creation of their works or during periods of madness or distress. *Stimmung* appraises a visual representation of mood, not an auditory one. Nonetheless, auditory hallucination is a prevalent mainstay of madness historically associated with Modernist schizophrenia, which Postmoderns like Deleuze

and Guattari use as a metaphor and cultural critique in their iconic work *One Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The *stimmung* may track the visual world and material objects and not the voices of schizoid phenomena because it was appropriated by de Chirico, who was a surrealist painter, and then was later re-appropriated by Modernist psychologists, like Sass, as a model to help explain psychosis. Given this visual bias among the senses, *stimmung* does not serve well as an explanation of artistic inspiration as it does not regard the auditory features of the so-called schizophrenic aura, which nonetheless bring to mind the anxiety of psychiatric patients and historically the furors of the melancholic poets and the voices of the sibyls at the peak of their prophetic utterance. Perhaps the icy, calculative, machinic and dissociative features of the *stimmung* cannot approximate the workings of psychosis across the senses simply because they may not be accounted for by the reductive positions assumed by philosophers and mental health researchers who consider schizophrenic madness as the principle matrix by which modern ideas of psychosis and artistic inspiration may be understood. In the 2500 year history of melancholia and creativity, depression and schizophrenia are much newer terms with a very short presence in the takeover of melancholia. The neural pathways of depression are still unknown, while chemical imbalances and other neurocentric interpretations of mental illness suggest advancement in understanding but in their scope do not account for the mysteries between madness and creativity, which have been debated for millennia, not merely within the decades of one revolutionary century. The longevity of melancholia has long outlasted the hysterias, neurasthenias, and shellshock of modern times.

Philosophers and musicologists have written about the *stimmung* in musical contexts. Madness then:

is essentially a return to an original state of *Stimmung*, a withdrawal from reality, which has become a source of pain and impossible reconciliation for the psyche. The madman reverts to a preconscious stage of instinct and feeling, resisting the language of social convention.<sup>239</sup>

Harvard professor John Hamilton, iterating Hegel, writes that the regression of the madman is random. The self retreats to the “preconscious” isolation of madness because of the failure of language to accommodate its extreme experiences. For the renown French philosopher and musicologist Vladimir Jankélevitch, the loss of consciousness, the dislocation of self as it emerges in the realm of the ineffable, is the “beginning of musical creation.”<sup>240</sup> Or as Hamilton writes, iterating Hoffmann, “Here a withdrawal into inwardness is a fall into madness.”<sup>241</sup> Another German word helps to illuminate this state of ineffability, of soul loss: *Nachfülen*. *Nachfülen* (to understand via powerful feeling)<sup>242</sup> is a word that suggests a strong affective influence that draws the individual into the deep yet inexpressible qualities of an experience. For my purposes, such experiences can be triggered by music but not understood in words, thus to engage the ineffable across the senses, not just the visual or analytical. *Nachfülen* is more like the musical *stimmungsbild*, the sonic pictures that join the senses, hearing into a vision to understand the weight of a long-lasting mood like melancholia, which might, for example, emerge from an unexpected sound flooding the early morning. *Nachfülen* is knowledge or

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<sup>239</sup> Hamilton, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language*, 501.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 502.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.

<sup>242</sup> *Nachfülen* is a word I first encountered from the work of Dr. Nadja Hekel in her presentation “Listen to Literature: a Cognitive Approach,” at the *Emerging Paradigms: New Methodologies in Word and Music Studies* Conference, which was held at Aarhus University in Denmark, November 2014.

understanding through affect. It is not merely emotion, which is a brief experience, as much as it is an emergent, like a long-lasting mood.<sup>243</sup> Among all the arts, music is best suited to approach the ineffable states of mind. The diminishment of the self to the “preconscious stage of instinct and feeling,”<sup>244</sup> which attenuates controlling rational thoughts, opens the composer to creative and improvisatory channels which result, at least according to Hoffmann, in new compositions of exceptional imagination. His mind inundated with the musical channels, Schumann heard angelic and demonic voices that he believed directly influenced his musical compositions.

“Voice hearing is a medico-religious phenomenon that often amplifies the ambiguous junction between creativity and mental illness. While schizophrenics and melancholics hear unbidden voices, religious poets and composers have evoked them as a method for developing compositions and poems. In ancient times, inspiration was thought to be an audible influence emanating from mysterious sources outside the mind, from the poetic utterances of the sibyls interpreting the Greek oracles to the Hebrew prophets hearing the voice of Elohim from indistinct clouds. Poets and musicians have similarly felt visited by creative ideas, and the notion that voices originate from untraceable sources suggests that inspiration is in some way automatic or susceptible to the flows of powerful influences.”<sup>245</sup> Socrates heard the voice of his *daimonion* regularly and he believed it was a kind of intuitive guide that followed him everywhere and gave him responsive advice about how to avoid danger and make important decisions.

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<sup>243</sup> See Daniel Nettle, *Strong Imagination: Madness, Creativity, and Human Nature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95.

<sup>244</sup> Hamilton, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language*, 501.

<sup>245</sup> Kenneth Alewine, "Acousmatic Voices: Creativity, Inspiration and Madness (Abstract)," *Institute for Spirituality and Health at the Texas Medical Center*, 2015, accessed 17 March 2017, <http://www.medicineandreligion.com/acousmatic-voices.html>.

To reiterate, “hearing voices that emanate from indeterminate spaces outside the mind is similar to auditioning forms of acousmatic sound, those bells ringing from a church, or the reverberations of a siren Dopplering off in the distance, where the source of the music or noise retains its vague origin. Acousmatic voices and sounds are compelling because unlike visual objects they are not easily located. As Walter Ong observed, ‘Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer.’<sup>246</sup> Likewise, music saturates physical space, unlike visual objects, which require pointed focus.”<sup>247</sup> More readily than sound humans treat visual objects as belonging to the external world, but with voices separated from their source, the effect can be powerful, inspiring and godlike, and yet other voices may be dark, startling, and troublesome.

### **Creativity, Inspiration, and Madness**

The presence of the musical Faust figure re-emerges during another peak of artists’ melancholia that occurred during the Romantic movement, which conceived melancholia as a compensatory disease that especially afflicted the poets and musicians, two professions that cultivate voice hearing and listening as methods for composition. The German Romantics perceived the mad composer as an innovative creative figure who was inspired by divine madness, so that the composers heard music first as an inner experience that required no notation on paper. E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote the novel *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr: together with a Fragmentary Biography of Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler on Random Sheets of Waste Paper* (1820), a magical

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<sup>246</sup> Smith, *Muses, Madmen, And Prophets: Hearing Voices and the Borders of Sanity*, 100.

<sup>247</sup> Alewine, "Acousmatic Voices: Creativity, Inspiration and Madness (Abstract)."

tale about a mad composer who often did not write down his compositions that occurred fully developed in his head. The novel is told by split narrators from two separate manuscripts that have fallen together by accident to form a disjointed narrative; one story told by Tomcat Murr, an intellectual feline with literary abilities; the other, narrated by Hoffmann's mad musician, Kapellmeister Kreisler. Hoffmann's text *Kreisleriana*, a cycle of musical critiques, reflects in part his ideas about composition and performance, which he believed could be nearly automated to the extent authorial voice was subordinate to creative inspiration, the performers of musical works become like human automata, or musical robots, not interpreting musical compositions as much as becoming subsumed by their enactments.

The *Tomcat Murr* influenced Schumann's extra-musical themes, whose piano cycle *Kreisleriana*, was based on the novel. As previously mentioned, Schumann heard the voices of angels and demons that affected the way he composed, and his voice hearing experiences have a direct relationship to his late composition technique. He was not alone, as there were other "composers who believed they heard cosmic voices and who were also treated for mental illness at some point in their lives."<sup>248</sup> Handel believed he heard the voice of God, and during an exhausting, self-starving, secluded period of several weeks composing *Messiah* (HWV 56), he believed the heavens opened before him in a vision in which appeared the great God himself.

Fictional musicians and composers also experience episodes of voice hearing. The dialogue between Thomas Mann's fictive composer Adrian Leverkühn and Mephistopheles is an instance in musical literary history of acousmatic voice hearing.

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

The conversation is mediated via Leverkühn's dark visions of a shape-shifting devil he can see, maybe in his imagination, or by some spiritual portal, or maybe by the hallucinations of his fractured consciousness, reduced by the spirochetes attacking his brain. In addition the role of acousmatic music and the work of its founding composer—Pierre Schaffer, who created the musique *concrète* compositional form, or the arrangement of found sounds into a sonic montage, and the term *acousmatic*—may be synthesized into the idea that voice hearing is an acousmatic form of listening that *suddenly* appears rather than emerges as a phenomena that is located outside of the immediate consciousness that auditions it.<sup>249</sup> Such creative works and techniques “explore inspiration as an auditory experience and render on a nebulous continuum, and not by distinct categories, those voices pathologized as mental illness and those celebrated as a source for artistic inspiration.”<sup>250</sup>

Very often voices marinating the hearer contain religious qualities. “In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the ear is privileged over the eye in communications with God, complicating the traditions of treatment among the disciplines of medicine, which favor the medical *gaze*.”<sup>251</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, part of the medical gaze was formed by themes of degeneration and heredity connected to mental illness, generated by physicians like Benedict Augustin Morel and Caesar Lombroso to Emil Kraepelin. Many Romantic composers seem to have suffered from symptoms of mental illness, usually related to melancholia as reported in letters but also reporting symptoms associated with syphilis, which of course has led to several dramatic

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<sup>249</sup> Or as a sonic experience that occurs outside of one's head, as with external voices, to be distinguished from internal conversations that occur between the ears.

<sup>250</sup> Alewine, "Acousmatic Voices: Creativity, Inspiration and Madness (Abstract)."

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

retrospective diagnoses for composers like Beethoven and Schumann. In the nineteenth century syphilis was not well understood, with often a long remission period usually that would allow artists and composers a period of creativity before the onset of madness in the tertiary phase for those who developed neurosyphilis. Syphilis was a very prevalent disease in the nineteenth century as it had no cure, but the general paresis of late stage syphilis was the first psychiatric illness that pointed to certain organicity. It was discovered in 1822 by French physician Antoine Laurent Bayle.<sup>252</sup> As the modern age emerged with the advent of the new medical conceptions of mental illness, the medical gaze shifted from humoral theories and melancholia as an explanation for lingering sorrow, inconsolable fear and madness, toward new psychiatric conceptions like the depressions and schizophrenias. By 1905 medicine had discovered the spirochete that causes syphilis.

Schumann believed he heard voices from the supernatural world that both inspired and tormented him. He wrote in his journal about the angelic music he heard from the heavens that was too beautiful to describe in human terms and subdued the voices of the demonic angels aiming to distress him. The voices also assisted him with his compositions, and his wife Clara Schumann observes in her diary, at “. . . nighttime, after we hadn't been in bed long, Robert got up again and wrote down a theme that he said the angels were singing to him; after he had finished it, he lay down again and then fantasized the whole night, always with open eyes directed toward heaven.”<sup>253</sup> Clara was

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<sup>252</sup> Edward M Brown, "French Psychiatry's Initial Reception of Bayle's Discovery of General Paresis of the Insane," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 68, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 236.

<sup>253</sup> Reinhard Steinberg, "Robert Schumann in the Psychiatric Hospital at Eendenich," in *Music, Neurology, and Neuroscience: Historical Connections and Perspectives*, eds. Eckart Altenmüller, Stanley Finger, and François Boller, *Progress in Brain Research* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier, 2015), 243.

also a composer and brilliant pianist, who concertized throughout Europe and supported the family with her earnings when Robert could no longer. She often wrote in her journal and in letters to close friends like Brahms about her husband's illness and the voices he heard. One evening in February of 1854, about ten days before Robert would dive half-naked from a bridge into the icy Rhine, Clara recorded his deeply distressed experience:

Morning (February 18) arrived and with it a terrible change! The angels' voices turned into terrible demons' voice with hideous music; they told him he was a sinner, and they wanted to throw him into hell, in brief, his condition grew into a real nerve paroxysm; he cried out in pain (because, as he said, they lunged onto him in the form of tigers and hyenas to seize him), and two physicians, who luckily came quickly, could barely hold him. After about half an hour he quieted down . . . he could hear friendlier voices again, that encouraged him. The physicians took him to bed . . . a few hours . . . but then he got up again and corrected his violoncello concert [op. 129], he said it gave him some reprieve from the perpetual sound of the voices.<sup>254</sup>

February 18 was a busy day compositionally as well. Schumann began his theme for the *Geistervariationen (Ghost Variations)*, which he said the ghosts of Schubert and Mendelssohn had revealed to him on the evening he heard the angelic and demonic voices, which he believed were warring for supremacy in his music. Schumann lived in a Faustian supernatural world: he consorted with demons who tormented him with damnation in hell, and next in a moment with angels who consoled him with beautiful music that was otherworldly and intoxicating. Clara writes in her journal about a major episode with the supernatural voices just before Robert's psychotic break and suicide attempt in Düsseldorf at the Rhine:

He spent Sunday the 19<sup>th</sup> in bed being tormented by the evil ghosts! He could not be convinced that celestial and subterranean weren't really hovering around him; he did believe it when I told him he was ill, his head nerves terribly overstrained, but I could not stop him believing in the ghosts for one moment, in contrast he said to me several times in a wistful

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

voice, surely you believe me, dear Clara, that I'm not telling you any untruths.<sup>255</sup>

On the next day Clara reported more activity between Robert and the angels who were on this occasion assisting with his composition:

On Monday the 20<sup>th</sup> [February], Robert spent the whole day at his writing desk . . . and listened attentively to the angels' voices, then quite often wrote some words, but not many, and listened again and again. He thereby had a look so full of bliss that I will never be able to forget it; and yet this unnatural bliss cut my heart just like when he suffered under the evil ghosts. Oh, all of this filled my heart with the most terrible worry about how it should end; I saw that his spirit was more and more disturbed and still didn't have an idea of what was still ahead of him and me.<sup>256</sup>

As accurately as Clara recorded her husband's psychotic experiences, she protected him against their insane effect upon Schumann's composition, particularly in the Violin Concerto, which she disliked so much that she blocked its publication, believing she heard elements of Robert's madness in the first movement. Clara plainly believed that "the music associated with Schumann's madness ought never be performed."<sup>257</sup> Even as early as November of 1853, Schumann became enmeshed in the world of the voices. Thus touring with Clara to perform concerts in Bonn and Holland became problematic. Schumann's loss of the conductorship in Düsseldorf, which would be his last formal post in the public,<sup>258</sup> created the social turbulence he could only retreat from with his increasing maddened imagination. For Schumann the voices were at once dangerous in their suicidal and psychotic content and perplexingly productive in their new found hold on his technique for writing hallucinated themes. Thus he was simultaneously aided and

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ostwald Peter and Lise Deschamps Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 1985; repr., 2010), 272.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 267, 271.

thwarted by the voices, recoiling in the inner world of his delusions and séances, which eventually led to the Violin Concerto and the *Geistervariationen*.

Mann's fictive composer Adrian Leverkühn hears voices during his period of madness that he transcribes as long conversations with Mephistopheles in a small apartment in Italy. Related by the narrator, Dr. Serenus Zeitblom, a colleague and friend, the conversations appear in chapter XXV of *Doctor Faustus*, which Mann positions directly in the middle of the novel, to centerpiece madness and melancholia as primary features of the composer's creativity, one that will generate a body of work inspired by dark genial voices. It is the most Faustian and melancholic section of the novel, in which the curse of the spirochetes and the composer's fling with the prostitute Esmeralda represent the ratification of his pact with the devil, to contract a creative madness in the form of a debilitating disease. The dialogue between Mephistopheles and Leverkühn suggests a doppelgänger in its construction, a self at war with a second-self, or with some imaginary external presence that is not the self. The composer battles quasi hallucinatory forces beyond his understanding, inflected by a shape-shifting devil that moves around his small apartment in Italy, donning different attire that suits strange, revolving personalities. One cannot write off the voices as imagination, because though they are schizoid they speak at great length and with intelligence. As the voices cannot be determined from which realm they originate, they are thus acousmatic at least in this sense. The voices emerge through Zeitblom's verbatim narrative presented for his audience, conversations Leverkühn has written on music paper. Word and music, voice and sound, are mixed indistinguishably from the outside, at the peripheral of the composer's consciousness, written on the staff lines that mark out musical potential. One cannot be certain where the voices come from,

whether from an outside source or from within the composer's fractured consciousness. Schumann's voices also arose from outside his mind, as is the case with any conversation that is not with one's perceived self. Sometimes the voices are familiar: Schubert and Mendelssohn imparting creative themes. At other times they represent a force, operating either as good angels inspiring heavenly melodies or as demons taking on animistic shapes that terrify the composer. It is primarily this shape-shifting capability that defines the protean nature of Mephistopheles from his first incarnations in the early modern Faust epics to the devil that torments the composer in Mann's modern re-telling of the legend. In *Doctor Faustus* the source for artistic inspiration is not melancholia but the hallucinatory and genial effects of tertiary syphilis, which bring on "mad time," "genius time," the whole inspired euphoric musical output that emerges from the stoic "ingenium" of Leverkühn's cold and loveless consciousness.<sup>259</sup> For Mann madness is given a organic cause; it is a bacterium flagellating in the complexity of the meninges and in the mater of computational musical forms.

### **Spirochetes and Musical Inspiration**

Among the plethora of retrospective diagnoses, some scholars believe Schumann suffered from bipolar illness, others syphilis, and still others from depression or some form of schizophrenia. Perhaps Schumann's recent retro-diagnosis of syphilitic madness from various scholars would dispel the myth of bi-polarity that some composer-physicians are convinced is expressed and exemplified in his compositions. This fairly recent literary medicalization of classical music plainly recasts the Faustian shadow in its modern

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<sup>259</sup> Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1997), 246, 250, 252.

syphilitic form back upon Schumann's music as a function of his medical history. As an analysis these retro-diagnoses, whether of syphilis, melancholia, schizophrenia, or manic depression, continue to broadcast the argument favoring strong connections between creativity and madness. In doing so such diagnoses, in the case of syphilis, set up newer biomedical reductions that place mad consciousness among the neurons of the brain, which mysteriously produce awareness, bathed in neurotransmitters or chemical imbalances that suggest the mysteries of the old humors, which still, apparently, have not quite let of go of the medical gaze. Medical consciousness thus continues its competitive intention for transposition alongside the development of the artistic personality, establishing its role above the religious and philosophical traditions that have shaped the original arguments of melancholia and genius since antiquity.

It is difficult to imagine some sort of threshold between external audition and inward hearing in the consciousness of creative people. It is thus difficult to assign the breakpoints between hearing as the disturbance of physical molecules in the air to electrical impulses traveling along the auditory nerve, to the memories of voices, sounds, and musical notes recalled along neural pathways, across myriad synaptic gaps, or from the quantum vibrations of the microtubules, protein matter lattices in the centrioles of the brain cells, as it has been suggested by mathematician Roger Penrose and anesthesiologist Stuart Hammeroff to explain consciousness in their theory of orchestrated objective reduction.

When one sense is compromised the qualities of another rise to the fore, like a synesthetic compensation. Consider that Goya and Beethoven, who both suffered from melancholia, went deaf in late life, which did not stop the one from painting and the other

from composing music. Sense deprivation heightened the dark visions of Goya who painted the first-floor walls of his villa in mural phantoms, witches, and saturnine myths. Beethoven's ear trumpet was an extension to the difficult physical world from which he retreated in his imagination to reorganize his internal voices with musical notes, melodies, harmonies, and rhythms. The abstract musical material was the musical code he used to bypass the outward ear with the compositional voices he heard deep in his head, beyond the inner ear. One imagines whether Beethoven ever heard acousmatic voices and sounds given his loss of hearing, phantom sounds of the orchestra pit sounding as if from outside his head, the way a lost arm retains its proprioceptive sense and phantom stimuli. Without an inward ear the Romantics believed the artist could not compose or write real poetry. Beethoven's inward ear was in a near constant musical state, as was Schumann's. The consciousness of the composer became itself musical. Following Coleridge's idea of the primary and secondary imagination, which was a conception of the imagination that worked like an input/output system (the fundamental of a basic binary system), the secondary imagination processed the external stimuli of the primary imagination and encoded it as raw materials which the various art forms could access, which were largely poetic. Thus the workings of the imagination, available to artists, would be available for use across the arts, especially via music, which Beethoven could write in his own intimate codes that did not require auditory playback to be understood and recorded. Beethoven did not need to hear the world to make music. His consciousness was already flooded with the craftwork of the musical imagination. The late works from his Third Period are thus the most complicated, as Edward Said has noted in his final but incomplete text *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the*

*Grain* (2006). Musical works imitate the mathematical realm because they emerge from an abstract universe of computational systems, the notes, scales, harmonies and rhythms of the manuscript, all created before being sounded in acoustic space by instruments in performance or, much later after Beethoven, through recordings. Maybe the acousmatic includes artistic and psychiatric voices that are heard in the abstract spaces of imagination, or beyond from the spirit worlds, or from multi-dimensional hyperspace, or from the altered states of psychosis and melancholia. They are acousmatic if they may be understood as sounds and voices whose source remains unknown, beyond the limited confines of the three dimensions.

Beethoven's volatility contributed to his persona as an agitated and paranoid composer who believed he could never be loved. In a letter from Beethoven to a friend, he writes about himself: "For you, poor Beethoven, no happiness can come from outside. You must create everything for yourself in your own heart; and only in the world of ideas can you find friends."<sup>260</sup> Unhappiness in love and the life of the ill-tempered contemplative whose only happiness can come from the world of knowledge and ideas are two traits common to the Faust figure. Beethoven never married and quarreled often with his nephew Karl to the point of crisis, during which time Karl attempted suicide with a pistol. Beethoven's physical and mental health problems worked often together to keep him in a state of gloom and melancholia, which he reveals frequently in his letters, no fewer than 33 times throughout his life, and increasingly so as he neared the end of it.<sup>261</sup> The more he had to make use of the Conversation Books to communicate on a frequent

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<sup>260</sup> François Martin Mai, *Diagnosing Genius: The Life and Death of Beethoven* (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 103.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

basis with the people chronically in his life the more he felt compelled to seek out his isolated happiness in the world of musical ideas, in the silent world of notes, rhythms, and harmonies made aloud in his head.

Since he was an eminent composer during in his own lifetime, Beethoven's medical records are robust.<sup>262</sup> Though his most famous health problem was his deafness, he also suffered from numerous ailments of the retrospective diagnosed variety, possibly from syphilis, which he may have contracted from a prostitute.<sup>263</sup> Syphilis affects the organs and potentially the brain, causing progressive insanity if left untreated. Like melancholia, many renowned figures are believed to have suffered from its symptoms. Thus here again by the nineteenth century syphilis becomes another vector for understanding the melancholic madness of the musical Faust, or as Mann dubs it, "this exhilarating but wasting disease."<sup>264</sup> Mann's fictional composer in *Doctor Faustus* intentionally infects himself with syphilis so that he may access its psychotic effects, like a mind-altering substance on the imagination, to boost his creativity and become the genial composer inspired in this case by an *undivine* madness. The syphilis myth in connection to Beethoven provides another *explanation* for his bouts of depression. Whether he had the disease is not as important as the myth that intimates he did. It may be that melancholia as a disease (not merely a temperament) had already primed the Romantic imagination to accept new variations of mind, so that syphilitic madness, like

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>263</sup> Deborah Hayden, *Pox: Genius, Madness, and the Mysteries of Syphilis* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003), 76.

<sup>264</sup> Mann's description is a reductive binary structure. It suggests that madness is at the root of artistic inspiration, but made actionable by illness, in this case a bacterial infection that isolates the origin of inspiration in germ cells, similarly as Pseudo-Aristotle isolates melancholic genius in the black bile. The mechanism for melancholia and madness are black bile and the spirochete.

tuberculosis, could ignite higher orders of creative expression while the body waned with mysterious infection. It may also be that music and madness have special relations because they are both inexplicable abstractions, capable of mirroring the deepest invisible, rousing the soul to kill the illness before killing itself.

### **Mann's Mad Composer in *Doctor Faustus***

In Thomas Mann's late work *Doctor Faustus*, published in 1947, Schoenberg's musical theory and principal contributions to Modernist music are modeled in the artistic achievements and character of Adrian Leverkühn, a composer who makes a pact with the devil (consummated in Adrian's contraction of syphilis from a prostitute), to make brilliant music that will make him famous for 24 years of creative output in exchange for his soul upon his death. As an exile in America, Mann frequently visited the home of Theodor Adorno, and sought his help as a musical guide through the complexities of 12-tone composition that Adorno would certainly have known well as a philosopher of aesthetics and music and as an advocate of complexity and Schoenberg's new music. Mann and Schoenberg knew each other and lived in Los Angeles, as did Adorno. Mann regenerates the Faust myth to structure his story of a demented genius whose music is too plaintively realized as a "demonic" representation of the horrors of the Holocaust and German national guilt. In his work *On Late Style*, Edward Said notes "that the virtuoso appears in European musical life as an independent force after and as a result of the exemplary careers of Liszt and Paganini, both of whom were composers and demonic instrumentalists who occupied a major role in the mid-nineteenth-century cultural

imagination.”<sup>265</sup> Said also reminds us about the difference between the performing musician as “virtuoso” and the composer. “The virtuoso, after all, is a creation of the bourgeoisie and of the new autonomous, secular and civic performing spaces . . . .”<sup>266</sup> Composers in the nineteenth century were sometimes skilled performers, but often they conducted their works in public and spent much of their time writing them.

*Doctor Faustus* is not exceptional in its portrayal of virtuosity and musicianship as vilifications of artistic genius. Many well-known virtuosic musicians were similarly vilified in the popular culture of the nineteenth century. Paganini for instance was thought to be demon possessed. Neither is *Doctor Faustus* Mann’s first attempt to explore themes of musical decadence. In his long short-story *Tristan*, which is set in a sanatorium for tuberculars named “Einfried,” an obvious allusion to Wagner’s house in Bayreuth, ‘Wahnfried,’”<sup>267</sup> Mann explores the relationship between a writer, Detley Spinell and Gabriel Klöterjahn, the wife of a merchant. Spinell and Gabriel exchange romantic passions vicariously in her performance of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* on the piano. She is unfortunately overwhelmed by the music in a matter of days and perishes to her ailment. There were many Romantic ideas circulating in the popular and intellectual cultures of nineteenth century Europe, currents of thought in which both Mann and Schoenberg were initiated, that connected artistic achievement with illness and disease. The Romantic poets had glamorized madness, melancholia, and tuberculosis as diseases belonging to the sensitive artist. Poets like John Keats, who died of tuberculosis, wrote about their migrations to other climates thought beneficial to passing through the

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<sup>265</sup> Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2007), 118.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 74.

more ethereal inspirations of the disease. Mann viewed certain diseases, particularly tuberculosis, as both a high state of spiritual sensitivity and artistic creativity. One scholar notes, “It is true that Mann seems to uphold the earlier relationship between disease and spirit: ‘Disease makes a certain critical contrast to the world, to life’s mean, . . . makes its man take refuge with the free spirit, with books, in cogitation.’”<sup>268</sup> Certainly it is a historic melancholic trait to find refuge in books, in long periods of study and serious reflection.

Musicians of course were neither immune to tuberculosis nor its supposedly otherworldly effects on the creative imagination. Schoenberg was accused of being insane by some of his contemporaries (Strauss thought Schoenberg should visit a psychiatrist) just as his ardent supporters venerated him. That Adrian Leverkühn contracts syphilis from a prostitute, suggesting an unholy genesis or “birth” of Leverkühn’s musical genius, may be a narrative inspired by the social and cultural context in which Mann matured as an artist. Morel’s theory of degeneration, of a heredity decline and his association of the poor classes with disease, particularly sexually transmitted diseases, had created a foundation for understanding anyone on the margins of society as potentially deviant, unhealthy, and a danger to the status quo. Modern artists who had attracted negative attention to their works, like Schoenberg, were criticized through a Morelian lens, working, however unintentionally, as promoters of the degeneration theory of social decline, one that worked its way into Mann’s fiction. But he was not exceptional in his beliefs. Music critics like Kalbeck, who had criticized

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<sup>268</sup> W. H. Rey, “Return to Health? ‘Disease’ in Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*,” *PMLA* 65, no. 2 (March, 1950): 21.

Schoenberg's work as "pathological,"<sup>269</sup> and others who had suggested it was suitable for the "psychiatric listening room,"<sup>270</sup> were also contributors to a national myth about art and degeneracy, one that connected heredity with moral behavior, suggesting that biology determined individual character.

Mann's fictive composer contracts syphilis from a prostitute in a questionable sexual encounter, effectively demonizing the composer and the afflicted woman. In one critique on *Doctor Faustus* and its connection to disease, W. H. Rey writes, "In *Doctor Faustus* we are dealing with a different disease which develops in the merciless solitude of the sufferer: not the morally neutral tuberculosis, consuming the patient in a gently elevating glow of fever, but syphilis."<sup>271</sup> This is a nasty dark disease; it does not kill softly like the heightened state intoxicated by a tubercular muse. Mann's conception of disease, the author tells us, appears to have shifted in *Doctor Faustus* from spiritualized tuberculosis to a demonized syphilis. Depending on what population group experiences disease often determines its construction, how it gets mapped onto bodies. Sensitive poets for Mann experience a spiritual elevation in their malaise. The prostitute transmitting disease in his novel is rendered as a demonic agent. "Instead of the general affinity between spirit and disease . . ." as with Mann's earlier works like *The Magic Mountain*, Rey continues:

. . . we now find in *Doctor Faustus* the very real medical process of a bacteriological infection of the spiritual center of the organism, a process whose significance is not limited to the medical sphere but unfolds its full meaning in the abyss of the demonic. What happens in the moment of the horribly grotesque and yet incomprehensibly moving union of Adrian with the bearer of the poison cannot be defined by medical banalities such as contamination. The author calls it 'demonic conception' and this

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<sup>269</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 105.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>271</sup> Rey, "Return to Health? 'Disease' in Mann's *Doctor Faustus*," 21.

expression indicates the gruesome secret which hovers over their fateful wedding of the pure spirit with the power of the demon, that destructive impregnation.<sup>272</sup>

By mixing with a deviant woman, the composer becomes corrupted, as an act of immoral consummation, the selling of his immortal soul, a pact signed by its most ancient form of ratification, the blood covenant enacted in the exchange of blood from one to the other. Mann's *Faust* narrative, written shortly after World War II, seems to restate themes of degeneration that emerged almost a century before from Morel. That deviant social groups, those plagued with modern diseases and those thought to be carriers of more than infections and thus thought also to be at the heart of a national problem, were culpable from birth for simply being born poor and without social position. Mann's themes of degeneration mix art with illness, and illness with demonic consummation as source for inspiration. Leverkühn's musical breakthrough is genial because it is an attempt to express suffering and lamentation but its failure is musical complexity, which for Mann owes its origin to the demonic. This is the struggle within Mann after the Holocaust: that art even through fictive musical compositions (which are based on real systems Schoenberg developed) fails to approximate the extreme sorrows of human experience, which even his words cannot communicate in the form of a novel. Nonetheless, Mann deeply believed in the suffering artist as one who was inspired by his illness. For Mann there is no strict separation between illness and inspiration. It is a mysterious nexus, powerful, yet fraught with complexity. Like Aristotle 2300 years before him, who associated the source of creative inspiration with the temperature and status of the black bile in the body, Mann located both the source and destruction of Leverkühn's artistic

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

brilliance in the spirochetes of syphilis. Arian's voice-hearing experience with Mephistopheles is perhaps a hallucination of the demented mind, bringing a wasting disease with a slow time-clock and immediate artistic inspiration.

A significant quote appears here from Mann's novel, in the voice of his narrator, Dr. Serenus Zeitblom, who interprets the story of Adrian Leverkühn. He speaks to the sense of crisis in Germany during and after the days of the war. The "silent seclusion" that Zeitblom relates suggests the conditions of exile and displacement as perhaps Mann would have experienced them to some extent while living and writing from a safe remove from Germany in Los Angeles. Mann writes in the voice of his narrator:

For us Germans, the period *about* which I am writing was an era of governmental collapse, capitulation, revolts born of exhaustion, and helpless surrender in the hands of strangers. The period *in* which I write, and which must serve to help me here in my silent seclusion to put these memories to paper, bears within its horribly swollen belly a national catastrophe compared with which our former defeat now looks like a mild mishap, a sensible liquidation of a failed enterprise. An ignominious ending will always be more normal, something quite other than the divine judgment that hangs over us at present, just as it once descended upon Sodom and Gomorrah—a judgment that we did not, after all, call down upon ourselves that first time.<sup>273</sup>

Mann's interpretation of the crisis in German modernity, and thus German Modernism, is perhaps reflected in his fictive composer's dissonant musical representations, which model Schoenberg's compositional techniques, however imperfectly.<sup>274</sup> But it is more than musical brilliance and complexity, which really are the signs that do the work of metaphors of decadence, more than anything else, that is at

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<sup>273</sup> Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, 354.

<sup>274</sup> Schoenberg did not think Leverkühn understood composition in 12 tones, and had only a rudimentary understanding that he would have been taught by someone like Adorno. See Theodore Ziolkowski, "Leverkühn's Compositions and Their Musical Realizations," *The Modern Language Review* 107, no. 3 (July 2012): 837.

the center of Leverkühn's decline, his literal physical and mental deterioration. His decomposition, his gradual decline and descent into syphilitic madness, reflects qualities of a degeneration narrative that departs sharply from the music of Schoenberg and his legacy for the new composers of serialism like Berg and Webern. With the exception of one great masterpiece, Leverkühn's artistic brilliance generates defunct compositions, those born from a Satanic pact and the unholy consummation with a prostitute. These artistic symbols seem crafted as a scenario, if called upon, would support the structural arguments of Morel's theory of degeneration. Again, it is important to remember that this is not the first fictional work in which Mann designs his plot around a theme of degeneration. The subject is very much on his mind earlier in life, explored in his first novel *Buddenbrooks*, and again in his long short story, "Tristan."

Mann's demented composer and notions of artistic decadence are like those of characters from literary works written during the fin-de-siècle, the time period when Mann matured as an artist. It is this time in literary history that Pick critiques in his text concerning the tension in Europe over social decline and degeneration in his seminal work on the history of degeneration and physiognomy in Europe at the time of Mann. If Leverkühn must be a genius, he must be a nervous one, and like Faust figures before him, he cannot participate in a real marriage; he can never love. His vows are unholy. Mann's composer is a nervous mirror of all that he found to be anxious about in the culture of German art that was created in a time of great brutality, fascist rupture, and social inequality, vast racism, and extreme uncertainty. These anxieties after the war and the Holocaust are given a voice in Leverkühn's Faustian world of decadence and decline, a time when incomprehensible horror was a global mainstay, a time when, as Adorno

once remarked, the poetry of flowers and beauty could no longer be written. In Mann's novel, it is only through a demonized gift that an art can be developed that may accurately interpret the intense suffering of such ineffable pain. Historian and Adorno-Foucault scholar James Schmidt writes:

In the novel, Leverkühn faces the problem of how to go on composing in an age when, as the Devil, echoing Kretzschmar (whose words were taken from Adorno), explains, 'the historical movement of musical material has turned against the self-contained work.' His solution came in the demonic gift of a technique of musical composition in which the twelve notes of the music scale are related only to each other and not to the conventional rules and expectations associated with tonal music. With the method, Leverkühn composes a series of works, culminating in *The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*, a cantata that achieves the one thing in music that 'is not fictitious, not a game': 'the unfeigned and untransfigured expression of suffering.'<sup>275</sup>

It is the musical system of Mann's fictive composer—the new technique of composition in 12 tones, through which a generative system is realized only in music, because words fail to account for such extremes—that most closely approximates the inconsolable pain and anguish of the darkest times. It is Schoenberg's system that Mann borrows to suggest the only configuration of art that could effect such tragic times, but at the same time is rendered by a man whose gift is nonetheless demonized by pacts and syphilitic consummation. Such suggests a conflicted tension in the novel that reflects one within Mann himself, one of his own grappling with his Jewish otherness as a writer, and the need to find his identity in his writings as an outsider and artist.<sup>276</sup> He also grappled with the beast of Nazi Germany that emerged from his nation and from former notions of

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<sup>275</sup> James Schmidt, "Mephistopheles in Hollywood: Adorno, Mann and Schoenberg," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 153-154.

<sup>276</sup> George Bridges, "Thomas Mann und das Judentum (review)," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 24, no. 4 (Summer, 2006): 157.

German nationalism he had once held, as the grotesque slaughter of millions of Jews through the machinic assemblage of German propaganda and war making, resulted in the death camps and mass extermination.

Schoenberg was never psychotic or treated in a psychiatric hospital, and the compositional techniques attributed to Leverkühn in Mann's novel represent in some crude form those of an authentic nature that belonged to Schoenberg in the real world. Such a connection was impossible for Schoenberg to miss, and thus his response to Mann was swift and direct. In a letter to Mann after the publication of *Doctor Faustus*, which was published in *The Saturday Review*, Schoenberg accuses Mann of taking "advantage of his literary property."<sup>277</sup> Schoenberg writes:

Sir: In his novel 'Doctor Faustus' (SRL Oct. 30) Thomas Mann . . . has produced a fictitious composer as the hero of his book; and in order to lend him qualities a hero needs to arouse people's interest, he made him the creator of what one erroneously calls my 'system of twelve tones,' which I call 'method of composing with twelve tones . . . Leverkühn is depicted, from beginning to end, as a lunatic. I am now seventy-four and I am not yet insane, and I have never acquired the disease from which this insanity stems. I consider this an insult, and I might have to draw consequences.<sup>278</sup>

Mann denied that his character model represented the personality of Schoenberg in any way. His response to Schoenberg is rendered in a way that suggests Mann was offended by Schoenberg's taking offense. He replied:

The idea that Adrian [Leverkühn] is Schoenberg, that the figure is a portrait of him, is so utterly absurd that I scarcely know what to say about it. There is no point of contact, not a shade of similarity, between the origin, the traditions, the character, and the fate of my musician, on the one hand, and the existence of Schoenberg, on the other . . . It is a sad spectacle to see a man of great worth, whose all-too-understandable

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<sup>277</sup> Arnold Schoenberg and Thomas Mann, "Letters to the Editor," *The Saturday Review*, January 1, 1949, accessed 7 December 2015, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/SaturdayRev-1949jan01-00022?View=PDF>.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

hypersensitivity grows out of a life suspended between glorification and neglect, almost willfully yield to delusions of persecution and of being robbed, and involve himself in rancorous bickering.<sup>279</sup>

Only a Jewish man could tell another Jewish man, in so many words, that he had “delusions of persecution” just three years after the Holocaust. Leverkühn is a synthetic model, an amalgamation of both Nietzsche, who contracted syphilis and descended into madness, and Schoenberg, who had realized the achievements and musical breakthroughs. Attributed to Leverkühn in the novel. While he was clearly not a psychiatric patient nor was he ever insane, many people thought Schoenberg too difficult and eccentric to appreciate as a composer. The Nazi propaganda machine declared his music degenerate, as they did the music written by all Jews and Blacks and any musical works about Jewry or the Old Testament with Jewish names.

Schoenberg was exiled from Germany in a way that Mann was not, and this is partly due to their responses to the tragedy and horror of the war and the Holocaust. Mann’s response is expressed in fiction through the voice of a demented composer, whose gifts apparently must rise from demonic inspiration in order to approximate that are inexpressible in words. Leverkühn’s talents mirror the characteristics of Schoenberg’s principal musical achievements, but Schoenberg’s musical achievements are only a system, just as Leverkühn’s. Leverkühn’s compositional work is a lamentation, a sorrowful interpretation. Schoenberg’s works of this period are neither fictional nor entirely sorrowful. They are ultimately generative. They express a continuance and a sense of return from exile, if simply to say that the death machine in Germany was stopped even if at incalculable cost. Adrian Leverkühn, the anti-heroic

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

figure of music, descends into madness and deteriorates into imbecility. He is the producer of the age.

I do not compare Schoenberg to Leverkühn as much as I compare Mann's and Schoenberg's responses to tragedy and the mass extinction event created by the Nazis. They both use their art to express their innermost tensions, but Mann's vehicle is fiction, and thus his voice is a surrogate in the form of a literary figure. Mann, through Leverkühn, thus lapses into sorrow. Schoenberg, through his own music, and while experiencing major illness, does not retreat into sorrows but rather bursts out into resilience. Schoenberg's departure from Mann's melancholic response is dramatic and generative. The scathing critiques once railed against him by German music critics that lambasted his talent by disparaging his character with medical labels like "pathological" and "psychiatric," were countered in his music by a decidedly opposing force, one that was at once generative and analogous, not a counter-critique or argument against a position. Both artists used art as vehicles to help them understand the ineffable tragedies that had just occurred throughout Europe. Both of them had been forced into exilic (melancholic) positions, although relocated eventually to Los Angeles, thus escaping the horrors of the camps. Both artists use their craft to express at least in part the agony and anguish of being displaced from one's home country by a diabolical machine that desired them both dead. What is most interesting in this regard is the essential tone of each response to suffering. Mann's tone was a lament. Mann's surrogate was a demented bourgeois composer. Schoenberg's tone was the voice of ghetto survivors. His tone was responsive via a certain atonality, a recognition of an intense calamity that is not mitigated but in some strange way comforted by a difficult and dissonant music.

## NERVES and DEGENERATION

In the 1930s the Nazi propaganda machine created an exhibition it called *Entartete Musik*, which declared the musical works of Jewish intellectuals degenerate and dangerous to the German public. Over thirty thousand composers and artists fled Germany and many of these became refugees in the United States. Three of the most famous of these exiles, Theodore Adorno, Thomas Mann and Arnold Schoenberg, eventually settled in Los Angeles, along with many others, joining an unprecedented concentration of intellectual and artistic talent.<sup>280</sup> Adorno, Mann and Schoenberg were well into their late careers as artists, and each responded in different ways to the horrors of the war and genocide that they had escaped. While Adorno believed that a poetry of beauty could never be written again after the Holocaust, Mann's late style expressed a deeply conflicted spirit in his novel *Doctor Faustus*, a reworking of the German legend, this time centered around a demented composer whose pact with the devil ends in his descent into madness and physio-chemical deterioration. Schoenberg's late works were dissonant, un-hummable, complex and exclamatory; all qualities that were by this time of his exile the trademarks of his method of composition in 12 tones. Mann's novel, the music theory of which Adorno guided in many ways through the discussions they shared as friends, was ultimately a melancholic response to the incomprehensible suffering and loss unleashed by the mechanisms of war, genocide and oppression. It became essentially an ode to sorrow and mass extinction. Schoenberg's response to these horrors was of course musical, and though dissonant and difficult, it was also hopeful and creative. It was Mann's late work, *Doctor Faustus*, which recast Schoenberg's music

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<sup>280</sup> Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *A Windfall of Musicians: Hitler's Emigres and Exiles in Southern California* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 23.

theory as a demonic export of a demented fictional composer. The short letters exchanged between them, published in *The Saturday Review*, in which Schoenberg and Mann argue contrary positions regarding the use of his musical property, which Mann at least publically concedes to be a historic space where the rivalry between a composer acknowledged as arguably the most significant of the twentieth century defended his intellectual contributions against a fictional re-working by a complex novelist who coveted being regarded as one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century.

After engaging the traumatic history of the dark collective experience that targeted the Jewish people and nearly destroyed an entire culture, almost anyone with an understanding of the Nationalist Socialist machine of Germany in the 1930s may discern why the Nazi's created exhibitions that depicted the art and music of Jewish intellectuals as degenerate. But understanding that music was associated with degeneration and nervousness within a medical model and regarded as a signifier of social decline in late nineteenth century Europe may seem less obtrusive to some. As a Modernist composer living in the Weimar Republic, Schoenberg, his music, and his Jewish identity were later denigrated by the Nazi propaganda assemblage as degenerate, pathological, insane and ultimately unhealthy for the people. The theme of degeneration becomes attached to the works of Arnold Schoenberg even before the Nazi's declared his music degenerate, partly through the effect of critical reviews of his early music, as a kind of demonizing virtuosity with psychiatric illness. Nonetheless, Schoenberg's late style was expressed as the opposite of its portrayal within the Nazi propaganda machine. His music became in his late years a generative response to the sufferings of the Jewish people, and thus not merely the expressionist compositions of a famous composer. All these items place two

of Schoenberg's principal late works, *A Survivor from Warsaw* and *The String Trio*, op. 42 in their proper creative context of exile, illness, protest, and longevity. Schoenberg and Thomas Mann experienced their late style periods in exile, generating works that attempted the impossible task of interpreting the horrors of war and genocide. Mann wrote a Faustian novel about a composer, modeled on Schoenberg's musical achievements, which were a foil to the lamentations that Mann's fictive composer engages. An analysis of Schoenberg's musical system helps us to understand Schoenberg's concept of "the emancipation of dissonance"<sup>281</sup> as an application of his creative process: as one generative of style and idea, expression and logic, that helped him to engage the intense suffering of Jews from the Polish ghettos.<sup>282</sup> Schoenberg's works thus may be viewed as a melancholic response, a creative assemblage that responds dramatically to the horrors of the Holocaust and to the deterritorialization of his immigrant status and the vilification of his music in Hitler's Germany.

### **Schoenberg, Mann, and the Theory of Degeneration**

In understanding how Schoenberg's late style music became a melancholic response to Nazi propaganda that targeted his music and the Jewish people, it is important to understand the idea of degeneracy as it developed in psychiatric medicine in the nineteenth century. The theory of degeneration also illuminates the work of Thomas

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<sup>281</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 215.

<sup>282</sup> Schoenberg's elevation of the idea as a musical thought is realized as both logic and artistic expressiveness in his works. Schoenberg said he did not write *12-tone* compositions but *12-tone compositions*. Schoenberg's source of artistic fertility was the idea, not method. This is ultimately a generative strategy for creating musical works, so that while the method might be the 12-tone system, the musical thought is the expressive product. In the case of *A Survivor from Warsaw*, it is a freedom in the deterritorialization of suffering in the camps represented in Schoenberg's piece.

Mann and his Faust novel about a mad composer who contracts syphilis from a prostitute. It is important also to know that music and nervousness become tightly associated in the nineteenth century, and why anxiety and madness were thought to be products of listening to music, if we are to better understand why some music critics and theorists labeled the music of Moderns like Schoenberg as insane, and why Thomas Mann would write a novel about a demented composer modeling Schoenberg's theory of 12-tone composition, and why Schoenberg responded with outrage that Mann would use his intellectual property as the work of a mad fictive composer. In the late nineteenth century, music was considered by some as both a source of degeneracy and a stimulant to pathological behaviors. Schoenberg was born in 1874 of middle-class parents. He emerged as an artist in a time when decadence was regarded as an aesthetic condition, during the emergence of the Vienna Secession, the Art for Art's Sake movement and the fin-de-siècle. This was a time when art, literature and music were often commentaries on degeneracy, practiced by bohemians, and critiqued by *flaneurs*.

The theory of degeneration, as a psychiatric concept, was put forth in Benedict Augustin Morel's 1857 text *Traité des dégénérescence physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine*. Morel developed ideas about degeneration as having not merely physical features and symptoms, but that these features reflected a moral disease. Morel had a hereditary understanding of degeneration, as something passed down in families and in social groups. It was the theory of degeneration that became the "principle means by which nervousness came to be regarded not just as a matter for individuals, but something that could be true of nations and cultures."<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 91.

In his text *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder 1848-1919*, historian Daniel Pick observes, “The dominant scene of degeneration . . . was displaced from the individual (specific cretins, criminals, the insane and so on) . . . to society itself.”<sup>284</sup> In the late nineteenth century, a “medico-psychiatric theory”<sup>285</sup> of degeneration contributed to the general idea of a sense of decline in civilization, which circulated in the arts and in the “elitist theories of civilization and its discontents”<sup>286</sup> held by many intellectuals in Europe. At the close of the nineteenth century, Mann was writing short stories like “Tristan,” which explored the life of a despondent novelist, whose connection to music and romantic notions of disease in a Swiss sanatorium suggest a theme of degeneration. Mann would revisit this theme of decline and degeneration in his late style novel *Doctor Faustus*, an exploration of music in the life of a syphilitic composer who descends into madness. At century’s end, Schoenberg was composing Romantic expressionist pieces that experimented with chromaticism as a departure from traditional Western tonality. In his departures from traditional ideas of consonance, Schoenberg began to realize in his compositions “more faith in disquiet than rest, uncertainty than knowledge, difficulty than ease.”<sup>287</sup> The progressive displacement of the tonal center engendered the music that was best suited for the new relativistic physics.

Nervousness was not only viewed as a disease itself, not just as something expressed as a reaction to modernity, and not just as some vague signifier of a malaise. It was a medical condition that could be activated by listening to powerful music. But the

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder 1848-1919* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Thomas Harrison, *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 18.

propensity for nervousness, as any other form of degeneration, was not acquired in the ether. Morel believed behavioral pathologies were heritable, so that “parents with syphilis or those suffering from alcoholism might pass on a weakened inheritance and make their offspring a ‘specimen of degeneration—a morbid deviation from the normal type.’”<sup>288</sup> Pick observes, “The notion of inherited criminality and endemic social pathology can be found across the political spectrum in the troubled climate of the Third Public.”<sup>289</sup> Pick’s study of degeneration is literary and historical, oriented partly in nineteenth-century France, within the political and social context of Morel’s work in the 1850s. By focusing on primary sources written by Morel and Lombroso, and including other psychiatrists like Morel’s student Valentin Magnan, Pick essentially organizes his study of degeneration around a “medico-psychiatric” model, characterizing the history of degeneration as a medical problem that was mapped on social bodies. With the concept of degeneration emerging as a medical condition, it required a medical intervention to alleviate its symptoms, which were worrisome to many elites who imagined a decline in civilization.

If music was associated with nervousness, it was thus a medical danger, harmful to the mind and thus harmful to the body. Mind-body associations were strong in the late nineteenth century, a period when hypnosis and the art of suggestion were medicalized with the conditions of hysteria and neurasthenia. It thus seemed obvious to some physicians like Morel that a medically hazardous connection existed between music and nervousness. With the rise of the eugenics programs in America and Germany, it would seem sensible to many physicians and psychiatrists in the early twentieth century to link

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<sup>288</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 91.

<sup>289</sup> Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder 1848-1919*, 4.

heredity and degeneracy, a theory that was based on Malthusian interpretations of scarcity and population control, and drawn from interpretations of social Darwinism, evolutionary theory, and other progress narratives. It is in this context of degeneration as a medical problem, as an inherited condition based on ideas of race, not merely as a response to modernity or social decline, that would much later be super-kindled in the propaganda hurled against Jewish intellectuals and musicians by the Nazi's in the 1930s. This is the assemblage of hate that drove artists like Schoenberg, Mann and Adorno out of Germany and into exile. This is the machinic construction of biology as behavior that led to the early deaths of intellectuals like Walter Benjamin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and a massive assembly of musicians, composers, poets and artists who could not flee from the camps nor their lethal efficiency.

In his book about music and illness, *Bad Vibrations*, James Kennaway also orientates his analysis of degeneration with its relationship to the body. Specifically, he writes a history of the idea of music as a cause of disease within Western medical discourses, a discourse that was also prominent among European physicians like Morel and Magnan. Kennaway picks up the discussion of the medical model of music in the eighteenth century, where the cult of sensibility was always located “somewhere between enlightenment and pathology,” and particularly a “medical hostility to what was seen as excessive sensibility.”<sup>290</sup> In the eighteenth century, the notion of excessive sensibility generated hostility within some physicians. It was physicians like Tissot and Cheyne who “combined this hostility towards modern culture with the application of the idea of nervous over-stimulation to cultural and social questions.”<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 32.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

The medical conception of music thus began to shift from a cosmological force that rationalized proportions and influenced the soul to an expression of nervousness that affected the body. Kennaway writes, “This development within the Enlightenment culture of sensibility took music further from its traditional context of cosmic harmony and toward a materialist conception of music linked closely to the body, its pleasures and pathologies.”<sup>292</sup> With music linked to the body, the discourse that associated music and nervousness developed within the medical model as a manifestation of degeneration. Thus neurasthenia and music became strongly connected in the minds of many psychiatrists in the nineteenth century. This connection remained as a vital element that would support the theory of degeneration, which the Nazi’s would later employ during their *Entartete Musik* campaign. Kennaway writes, “The combination of racism, reaction and misused psychiatry in music that had developed through the Weimar Republic and into the Nazi era reached a peak with the ‘Degenerate Musik’ exhibition in Düsseldorf in May 1938.”<sup>293</sup> In the program notes accompanying the *Entartete Musik* exhibition, “one sees many echoes from the discourse of pathological music” so that “the music of Arnold Schoenberg was described as ‘hysterias become sounds.’”<sup>294</sup> The stamina of psychiatric language that originated in mind-body explanations of hysteria from the nineteenth century was called up and used as propaganda in 1938 by the cultural assemblage in Germany known as the *Reichsmusikkammer*, which supported the *Entartete Musik* exhibition.

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 114.

Nazification imposed a ban on all Jewish classical music, the composers of which were considered degenerate, and though certain districts banned all jazz, blues, ragtime and swing music, “jazz experienced an upturn in the years of the German Blitzkrieg,”<sup>295</sup> as Germany invaded Poland in September of 1939. Swing, and swing dancing, though originally banned by the *Reichsmusikkammer*, a German cultural production and arts reform organization led by Richard Strauss (who thought Schoenberg should “see a psychiatrist” after hearing some of his music), thus actually gained in popularity, even though the *Reichsmusikkammer* “was intended to consolidate, purify, and strengthen Germany’s cultural life.”<sup>296</sup> It is not that the Nazi’s thought composers and performers of jazz and swing were acceptable to the pure German state. German officials in various districts merely bowed to the popularity of the music, especially with its connection to the 1936 Berlin Olympics.<sup>297</sup>

Pick notes the etymology of the French word *dégénérescence*, which he relates, “developed in the later-nineteenth-century European psychiatry obsessed with the naming and the fixing of conditions . . . .”<sup>298</sup> Pick develops his study of degeneration as principally a European phenomenon represented in psychiatric narratives like Morel’s. Pick’s research on degeneration “maps out various conceptions of atavism, regression, relapse, transgression, and decline within a *European* context [emphasis mine] so often identified as the quintessential age of evolution, progress, optimism, reform or

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<sup>295</sup> Music and the Holocaust, "Reichskulturkammer and Reichsmusikkammer," *holocaustmusic.org*, accessed 20 November 2015, <http://holocaustmusic.org/politics-and-propaganda/third-reich/reichskulturkammer/>.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>298</sup> Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder 1848-1919*, 8.

improvement.”<sup>299</sup> The terms transgression and decline are key terms here, because Pick further develops them as a theme that partly explains the racist assault on Jews in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.

Pick interprets Morel’s ideas about social pollution as Morel’s response to the dangers of “internal transgression,” which is one of four kinds of social pollutions Pick borrows from Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger*. Pick writes, “*Dégénérescence* evoked . . . above all danger from internal transgression rather than inter-racial ‘pollution’.”<sup>300</sup> To be sure, the Nazis were concerned with racial pollution, but internally, amongst its own people, Germans living and working as faculty and musicians in major German universities represented a wide range of musical preferences, and among these was the new dissonant music that Schoenberg’s compositions engendered, a perceived impurity living respectably and famously among music programs that would eventually be driven out by a campaign designed to purify German culture of all corrupt musical influences, picking clean any chance of Jewish influence blemishing musical favorites like Beethoven and Wagner. The Nazis, particularly through propaganda channels, wanted to oust Modernist composers of Jewish heritage like Schoenberg because of racist hatred for Jews and also because of the degeneration narrative it had inherited from the nineteenth century, as theories of social decline and as an export of eugenics programs and sterilization campaigns that emerged in the early twentieth century. It is thus within this context of degeneration, as a theory of social endangerment to the German people, thought to be the result of moral corruption, nervousness and imbecility attributed to the Jews, that eventually lead to the expulsion of Jewish intellectuals, and finally to the death

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 39.

camps like Auschwitz and Dachau. The Nazi's particularly vilified the music of composers like Schoenberg because of his influence on other musicians and his international reputation as the principal modern composer of Europe, one who developed a breakthrough method of composition in 12 tones.

What is more, the Nazis wanted to own the long historic tradition of German music, establishing a classical tradition based on, at least from the nineteenth century, Beethoven and Wagnerian Romanticism and not the early chromaticism of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, the Second Viennese School. Enamored with Wagner's gross anti-Semitism and his essay on the subject "Das Judentum in der Musik," the Nazi propagandists failed to notice any sign of Schoenberg's aesthetic emergence from a post-Wagnerian Romanticism and his continued experimentation with chromaticism and dissonance that began with Wagner not Schoenberg. Kennaway records, "Books like Karl Blessinger's *Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, Mahler: 3 Kapitel Judentum in der Musik* . . . expanded on Wagner's theory in *Judaism in Music* that Jews could merely ape German musical forms."<sup>301</sup>

Wagner opened the doors to modern music with his "Tristan Chord,"<sup>302</sup> in his opera *Tristan und Isolde*. The Tristan Chord was thought to reflect a melancholy musical structure<sup>303</sup> because it is was one of the most famous instances in formal music in which dissonance is so strongly left unresolved.<sup>304</sup> Wagner and Mahler influenced later composers who put dissonance at the center of their compositions like Arnold

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<sup>301</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 113.

<sup>302</sup> Stephen Fry, "Tristan Chord," *YouTube*, accessed 13 December 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWlp7lBomW8>.

<sup>303</sup> Nesbitt, "Deleuze, Adorno and the Composition of Musical Multiplicity," 59.

<sup>304</sup> Fry, "Tristan Chord."

Schoenberg, who as a young man once said he had seen Wagner's great operas between 20 and 30 times each.<sup>305</sup> It was Wagner's melancholic opera *Tristan und Isolde* that was thought by some intellectuals to inspire nervousness and madness,<sup>306</sup> hallmark signifiers of degeneration that obviously escaped those who designed and managed the anti-Semitic musical assemblage in Germany in the 1930s.

Historically associated with passions and emotion, it was natural for some in the late nineteenth century to see music in the light of hysterical reactions and charismatic responses to virtuosic performances, inspired by a demiurge, anticipated most among women, who were thought especially susceptible to the suggestive powers of music. Composers were sometimes thought mad, and their music was thought to be in some way capable of transmitting a sense of derangement to the listening public. The "anti-Semitic tropes" aimed at the "nervous Jew" came from the "discourse of pathological music" that was leveled as a "hostile commentary, especially in relation to Mahler and Schoenberg."<sup>307</sup> Kennaway observes that some physicians believed music "could be the expression of degeneration on the part of the composer, and crucially, also that it could over stimulate the nerves of listeners and bring out degeneration."<sup>308</sup> We know Wagner worried over how his audiences would respond to the maddening powers of his opera. Thus the composer was also suspect and considered the originator or vector of pathological forces beyond his control. "Music could be regarded as an expression of

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<sup>305</sup> H. H. Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg* (London, UK: John Calder, 1959; repr., 1964), 18.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 65.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

latent degeneration on the part of the composer especially as the cult of genius was incorporated into the debate.”<sup>309</sup>

But why was music associated so distinctly with nervousness and degeneration in the nineteenth century? A cultural shift in Europe at the close of the eighteenth century occurred within the cosmology of music, which pushed against ideas centered around astral influences on music and the soul, a shift toward the medicalization of music as a cause of disease.<sup>310</sup> Kennaway writes, “The shift in thinking on music and nerves from sensibility to pathology around 1800 was the result of music’s incorporation into medical theories that blamed over-stimulation for sickness.”<sup>311</sup> Music as a cosmological force had long ceased to have direct validity for the emerging profession of psychiatry in the nineteenth century, and had begun to be seriously questioned by many natural philosophers in the seventeenth century. Physicians also shifted their focus within humoral explanations of disease in the eighteenth century, from mysterious imbalances of substances and fluids influencing elemental states to nerves and fibers that energy traveled upon throughout the body, generating anxiety, what Foucault called, in *History of Madness*, the “mechanics of tension,” working in “organic fibers . . . like a musical instrument.”<sup>312</sup> The shift in humoral theory from mysterious fluid substances to fibrous nerves helped to steer the medical conception of the body as one fraught with exhaustion and tension, characterized by new mysterious illnesses like neurasthenia and hysteria. The old hydraulics of the body were complicated by fibers pulsing with nervous energy, electric moods, jolting spasms. In the nineteenth century, some physicians theorized that

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 31.

the body was a site revealing a physiognomic signature for disease and mental illness. Psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso was looking for such stigmata in the profiles of criminals, artists and outcasts. French art critic Edmond Duranty believed he had discovered a new realism in art, the “image textuelle,”<sup>313</sup> or the image as a literal text of modern life that could be read. Duranty believed that the Impressionist painters like Degas had captured certain physiognomic signatures on canvas, depicting physical details among the common people that revealed the environments in which they lived. Linking the immediacy of impressionism with physiognomy, Duranty’s cohort Henri Thulié observed, “To understand a physiognomy well, one must render the impression that one has when one sees it. There are always conspicuous features in a face or a costume that are immediately striking.”<sup>314</sup> Thus, similarly in the social sciences and in medicine, a link continued to be suggested between moral behavior and physiognomies. Forensic psychiatrists like Lombroso believed behaviors were inscribed upon the face. Criminality, as a form of degeneration, was a biological feature for Lombroso, one that could be measured and tracked. Morel also insisted on a biological link between degeneration and moral behavior, and “continually invoked some notion of the degenerate, a given individual whose physiognomic contours could be traced out and distinguished from the healthy.”<sup>315</sup>

In the nineteenth century, “Composers were particularly likely, it seems, to display [the] stigmata of degeneration, as the pathographer Oswald Feis argued . . . ‘It is clear that among composers an extraordinary number have been mentally ill . . . . They

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<sup>313</sup> Carol Armstrong, “Duranty on Degas,” in *Critical Readings in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism*, ed. Mary Tompkins Lewis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 167.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>315</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 106.

are degenerates in Magnan's sense."<sup>316</sup> Music critic Max Kalbeck wrote that Schoenberg's Second Quartet of 1907 was "not an aesthetic but a pathological case."<sup>317</sup> Another German critic leveled a more damaging analysis in a German music magazine, stating: "Schönberg 'is a sick man who has turned the concert hall into a psychiatric listening room.'"<sup>318</sup> The influence of Morel's work extended beyond medical circles, contributing to a cultural momentum among the bourgeoisie and upper classes, a sense of malaise and decline that appeared in newspapers, novels, flyers, magazines and much of the artwork of fin-de-siècle Europe. Valentin Magnan, a student of Morel, "distinguished between 'higher degenerates' and others, such as prostitutes and anarchists."<sup>319</sup>

The music of Schoenberg during his expressionist period thus becomes associated with anarchic impulses, powerful moods and deep, subjective disquiet, even madness. His work was complicated and harsh, difficult to follow, dissonant and demanding on his audiences, and it required patience to listen to. Schoenberg's compositional techniques were experimental, technical, complex and cerebral, generating a difficult music that seemingly sprang from Romantic ideas of genius and iconoclasm. These were features critics and bourgeoisie audiences reacted to in magazines and associated with the virtuoso. Schoenberg's music was discordant and unfamiliar, transforming his image into a demented artist for some, primed for the psychiatric listening room. His music was modern, and modern was mad. Schoenberg's musical profile stood defiantly outside tradition and the familiar. It seemed to some to have many of the *signs* typically associated with collapse and breakdown. Music had always been in some way, since

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<sup>316</sup> Foucault, *History of Madness*, 207.

<sup>317</sup> Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease*, 105.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

Classical Antiquity, a reflection of the cosmos, and by that connection to astral influences, registered a status of humankind as a well-tuned body. Thus some viewed as a sign of decline and degeneration the strong dissonance that emerged from Schoenberg's compositions, which generate even today strong responses from those who much prefer the traditional tonality of composers like Verdi.

Schoenberg's music was similarly associated with projections about his mental status. It would only be some time, by his middle years, until his music would be understood to reflect the status of his identity as a Jew and his life put in danger of deportation, and if not that, extermination. Schoenberg was fortunate to be able to leave Germany in the early 1930s. His first stop has been Paris, where he stayed to make plans to help get as many other Jews out of Germany as possible.<sup>320</sup> Mann's medico-humanist critique of the complexities and dissonance of 12-tone music and the diseased mind of a mad composer acknowledged Adorno's statement that no beautiful poetry could ever again be written after a war that took over 50 million lives, and in Germany systematically exterminated over 6 million Jews, including the mentally ill and the handicapped.

Among the critiques of medicine and art, and among the theories of naturalist writers like Émile Zola, character was a matter of birth and environment. Four hundred years before, Leonardo had imaged melancholia and the grotesque in his caricatures. Now melancholia and insanity might be studied in the lines of the face and as the influence of the humors that shaped the skull and set the composition of the face through new ideas based on physiognomy and phrenology. Thus there arose a new profile of the

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<sup>320</sup> Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder 1848-1919*, 9.

melancholic and the madman. The new melancholic emerged as a new kind of artist, a new type of musician and poet, one who was perceived to be idle and lazy, from the scavenging *poète maudit* too busy with chemicals and poor hygiene, to the dandy and *flâneur* that levied social critique on artists and the emerging culture of modernity that was itself perceived as wrapped in Western malaise, an illness that could not be readily shaken, the mind shocked and over stimulated by chemicals and purchase.

## Chapter 4 The *Flâneur*

The origins of the *flâneur* are rooted in the history of melancholia and its designation of the poet as a wandering idler. The idle poet, not engaged in the industries of work, was thought to be susceptible to bouts of melancholia and madness, an idea which had generally prevailed among physicians during the long eighteenth century and into the age of the symbolist poets in France in the nineteenth. In the seventeenth century Robert Burton wrote his epic work on melancholy as a way to ward off idleness, staying occupied with his long task to avoid the slow creep of the illness. “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy,”<sup>321</sup> he observes, acknowledging his craft as an effective therapy. Elsewhere he seems emphatic, “There is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness.”<sup>322</sup> Samuel Johnson wrote a series of essays related to a theme of idleness, and he was often impoverished and plagued with a variety of illnesses, even once arrested for debt. According to Boswell he had suffered from crippling spells of melancholia that had left him at times unable to work. In the eighteenth century the crisis point of melancholia as a disruptor of daily labor (tasks) and engagement with long-term employment was naturally connected to the problem of recurrent debt. Christopher Smart’s father-in-law had the poet admitted to St. Luke’s Hospital for Lunatics, which worked to confine him from ecstatic states of prayer in the streets, as he had been known to fall unexpectedly on his knees, encouraging others to join in wherever he might be. Johnson was skeptical of the confinement and quipped once that he’d be glad to pray

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<sup>321</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 20.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

with Kit Smart.<sup>323</sup> The captivity may also have served the father-in-law's purposes as a makeshift debtors' prison for the poet. During his confinement at St. Luke's, Smart wrote his long poem *Hymn to the Supreme Being: on a Dangerous Fit of Illness*, and also what are generally considered his masterpieces, *Jubilate Agno* and *A Song for David*. After a series of suicide attempts, during what he later referred to as a period of insanity, the English poet William Cowper, a little younger than Smart, was also confined to an asylum, the Collegium Insanorum at St. Albans, under the care of his physician, who was also a poet, Nathaniel Cotton. Cowper circulated among his friends a *Memoir* of the experience, in which he relates that the first onset of madness began after he had failed to appear at an examination for a Clerkship in the House of Lords. Cowper is now considered an originator of the Romantic movement and created a new poetry about everyday life in the English countryside that was inspired by his long walks during periods of recovery and during what he often called his *leisure* in letters to friends. Cowper's epistolary achievements are impressive, filling four volumes in the Wright collection and five in the King and Ryskamp edition. His poetic works like *The Cast-away* and *The Task* were greatly admired by Coleridge and Blake. Yet even though he became famous as a late bloomer who only began publishing his poems in his 50s, he lived quietly with his friend Mary Unwin in a state of early retirement, which was nevertheless accelerated by periods of acute psychic derangement that persisted throughout his life.

In many English translations of literary works in the French, *flâneur* and dandy are interchangeable terms. In this way it is easy to view the Sensibility poets like Smart

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<sup>323</sup> James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2008), 211.

and Cowper as dandies, if the term is taken to mean an idler, or especially an artist or writer who is perceived as one. But it was the French poet, art critic, and essayist Charles Baudelaire who distilled the *flâneur* as a literary figure and keen artist, who was by his own estimation of modernity an observer of what is fleeting and eternal in the everyday mercantile life of the arcades in Paris, the network of covered passageways lined by shops and curios in the old city. Baudelaire was greatly revered by the French symbolist poets like Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé, who understood his dark obscurity and endorsed his vanguard contributions to nineteenth century prose poetry. Baudelaire lived deeply in his techniques of poetry, often to his own torment, and in his methods of *flânerie*, which did not arise randomly from the slack creative vortices of Parisian life. The *flâneur* is the last of the melancholic figures to arise among the poets, musicians and artists—working primarily during the last 100 years of melancholia, alongside the ascent of Freud, German psychiatry, and early neuropharmacology. The *flâneur* is a figure and ideal, first developed in the eighteenth century, imagined as the wanderer, the idle observer, refined in the nineteenth century by Baudelaire as the sensitive aesthete, the urban stroller, the poet walking the streets of Paris, intoxicated by new sensations, boutiques, tobacco shops, and absinthe cafes.

The much analyzed Haussmannization of Paris, a government plan to upgrade narrow Medieval pathways and replace the old configurations with the new grand boulevards of Paris, was also a social demolition that displaced the arcades that spellbound Baudelaire as an intimate and universal space for strolling and exploration. Baudelaire developed his poetic vision as a method of imaginative observation, from the mystery and enchantment of the shops set close to each other, and the people of all types,

from the ragpickers to the fashionable women with their crinolines and parasols, browsing under glass passageways in the arcades. *Flânerie* was the *art* of poetic observance, but in Baudelaire's design, it was critically enacted from the vantage of the reflective poet moving about as a loner among the crowds, as an expert of the new modernity mimicked in the real time caricatures of modern art, from the paintings of Daumier to the watercolors of Constantin Guys, who was in Baudelaire's estimation the prototypical "painter of modern life,"<sup>324</sup> though his friend Edouard Manet had outshone all others for the emergent role. Modernity was an important project for Baudelaire, his preoccupation to see the new in the old, to find the anachronistic in the bustle and hurry at his own slow pace, lagging behind usually, carrying a nervous and cranky attitude that he managed still to mask in public with his sophistication and sharp attire. In his book of poems *Paris Spleen*, Baudelaire mapped the ancient melancholic organ of the body onto the convoluted streets of Paris and its arcades, marking urban alienation and modern nervousness as fits of spleen that appear as tense portraits in the poems. The spleen was the site of the old humor since the time of Galen, just as old Paris was home to antique melancholic features, a city that in Baudelaire's poems processed the new urban bile through its veiny streets and nervous circuits. The poems in *Paris Spleen* were more than what helped him to develop his own series of poetic caricatures, vignettes like the drawings he so admired from Guys, and the paintings he elevated in Manet, the more provocative painter of modern life. Baudelaire had crafted these poems from the mental images he had collected during his long walks through the arcades, bringing the everyday and the ordinary under a new artistic appraisal, one that merged the melancholy of the old

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<sup>324</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London England: Phaidon Press Limited, 1964; repr., 1995), 1.

city, its narrow walkways and crowded shops, with the fashionable cafes and curious objects of the new mercantilism. But what most interested Baudelaire about the arcades was its underworld, one afflicted with poverty, intoxicants, cholera outbreaks, prostitution, and general overcrowding: a coral reef of melancholies, a uniquely modern ecology of madness.

In eighteenth-century Europe, the ancient tension between idleness and occupation rematerialized in the spike of melancholia and madness among poets and writers as both a source of religious inspiration and mental illness, which began among proto-Romantic poets like Smart, Cowper, and Blake but also developed alongside the notion of the idler as a writer of drug induced visions, beginning with Coleridge and De Quincey, and later with Baudelaire, whose invention of the *flâneur* as a bohemian, indirectly influenced the rise of literary painters like Van Gogh, who was also a prolific writer of letters, a hungry reader, and in the last months of his life in Auvers-sur-Oise, the psychiatric patient of *flâneur* etcher Dr. Paul Gachet, who treated artists' melancholia with homeopathic remedies and prescribed artistic work like painting as a therapy, which by this time passed for a form of idleness in the new industrial society of the Victorian era, which had become absorbed by the new productivity of labor intensive occupations after its long rebuild of Paris as the capital of art and spleen.

The *flâneur* is a quasi-religious figure, emerging from the ancient idea of *acedia*, an antique form of sloth from the times of the Church Fathers in the long history of idleness. German-Jewish art historian and philosopher Walter Benjamin used the term *nachzügler*, a laggard or straggler, to refer to one who lags behind, yet simultaneously dragging the

detritus of history forward into the present. The relationship between idleness and the arts is ancient and was available to Renaissance scholars to comment on the pastimes and creative habits of artists who were not always at work on their commissions from patrons. Vasari records Leonardo erected “uncanny, crazy contraptions (*pazzie* is the word he uses)” in “his house in order to frighten his visitors.”<sup>325</sup> Leonardo also created lightweight mechanical works like automatons for parades, the theater, or to impress the court with his more whimsical inventions, and he left many patronal works unfinished, as did Michelangelo, a tendency that their employers believed was characteristic of idleness. Like Leonardo, Baudelaire was handsome, cosmopolitan, an eccentric polymath, and a good conversationalist. Though no scientist, Baudelaire sometimes preferred the view that poetic life could be captured through reason and calculation, part of the observant trait he was building into his invention of the *flâneur*, which broke somewhat from the traditionally Romantic aversion to empiricism and rationality. The literary *flâneur* possessed an ambidextrous consciousness that worked from multi-disciplinary traditions, employing both analytical and imaginative skills, a verbal toolset honed by a visual orientation to the world.<sup>326</sup>

Even so, the Poe-translating Romantic-minded Baudelaire, suffering from syphilis and under its apparent melancholic influences, had demoted reason and calculation as regulating forces of creative works in suggesting an entire culture had been “syphilised” by the new modern art. Syphilis, like melancholia, could not be separated from the body

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<sup>325</sup> Wittkower, *Born under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists*, 77.

<sup>326</sup> Leonardo was a productive writer, leaving thousands of pages in his notebooks on the subject of visual art. Baudelaire was the leading art critic of his day and drew original caricatures, admiring the vision of artists like Manet and Guys who captured the manners and expressions of everyday people.

as a biomedical disease that affected certain organs. Just as the Hippocratic writers had linked melancholia to the biles only to have the Aristotelians tie it back to the poets and sibyls, Baudelaire had in the nineteenth century connected virtuosity in the creative arts to syphilitic inspiration and, as a young *flâneur*, to artistic decadence. Thus Baudelaire's poetry, particularly his poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, explores dark sensuality, classical decay, and an empathy for the miseries that afflicted social outcasts, vagrants, and prostitutes of the old Parisian neighborhoods, a world which seemed to cultivate his melancholia and personal torments, especially his strangely persistent idea of irremediable damnation.<sup>327</sup> The idea of damnation was also a preoccupation of the poet William Cowper, who had suffered a lifelong battle with madness and melancholia in the Age of Sensibility, when the poet could still work in a condition of leisure without harassment. As Walter Benjamin records in *The Arcades Project*, it was not possible in the nineteenth century, an age of industrial productivity, to work from the condition of leisure without being labeled an idler and treated as such.<sup>328</sup>

Prominent in Baudelaire's experience is also the effect of the intoxicants of modernity upon the poet, the chemicals of the day like opium and hashish to be sure, which he experimented with, but also the feedback and overstimulation from the interactions with the arcades and from the newly re-engineered Paris and its

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<sup>327</sup> Baudelaire wrote about his experiences as a poet as if they were symptoms from a diagnostic criterion for melancholia.

<sup>328</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 802. Art historian Walter Benjamin introduced the Baudelairean art of *flânerie* to academia in his highly elliptical work *The Arcades Project*, a mammoth super text of quotations and commentary that collected the discarded material histories of nineteenth century Paris, a history which he never finished. The *flâneur* has served as a staple figure for critical reflection across several disciplines in academia, a phenomenon peaking in the 1990s and receiving an aesthetic revival in the twenty-first century as a foil to the illusion of productivity that has entranced high-achieving digital cultures in both academia and its counterparts in the business world.

overwhelming bustle that shocked the eye. For Baudelaire the new commerce was a devil.<sup>329</sup> All the browsing for purchase in the city had overstimulated the senses, which had become woozy with seeing and hearing, and many souls expressed frustration by urban life and its uncertainties. These distractions had also created a condition of boredom within Baudelaire, or the idea that he had become susceptible to *ennui*, a disaffection that filtered the energies and self-perceptions of intellectual and literary life in Paris in the mid nineteenth century. The iconic public works project Napoleon III had given to the Prefect of the Seine, his architect Georges-Eugene Haussmann, had made the city unrecognizable with its wide-ranging sidewalks and grand boulevards. The massive architectural makeover had pulled the denizens out of the dreamscape of the arcades into the wakeful gaslight of modern Paris. In his memoir *Les Paradis artificiels*, [*Artificial Paradises*], Baudelaire imagines intoxicated dreamlands from the luxury of well-appointed rooms in the Hôtel Pimodan, where his senses are dulled by laudanum and hashish that nevertheless opened hallucinated vistas that simultaneously debilitated his health. This technique to alter the senses was ancient and reiterated throughout European culture, famously so in Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, a text which Baudelaire had in mind and translations of which formed the bulk of his own accounts of intoxication.

Especially for the younger Baudelaire, the “poisons” as he called them, that altered his sense of reality like opium, hashish and alcohol, became important to his brand and practice of *flânerie* as a developmental technique for the poet in search of a way to *envision* the text, to abstract graphical themes from visual hallucinations, an idea

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<sup>329</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, trans. Christopher Isherwood (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1994), 88.

in opposition to the traditional auditory bearing that the ancient poets appropriated as oracles attuned to voices as the source of poetic inspiration. The mature Baudelaire however rejected the experimental use of drugs and decried their long-term effects on the mind and body. They had certainly ravaged his own, as the syphilis broke its dormancy decades after his infection, when he reported in his journal that he had “felt the wind of the wing of madness pass over”<sup>330</sup> him. When he and De Quincey had been younger, hallucinatory chemicals had injected a powerful influence upon artists, poets and musicians, as they were a way of life in the nineteenth century, shifting ideas centered on Romantic notions of the imagination as the apparatus of creative inspiration to altered states of consciousness and creative subjectivity. Psychoactive substances like opium and cocaine were prevalent as recreational drugs, and as remedies they were readily available from the chemist shops and apothecaries of London and Paris without a prescription until after Baudelaire’s death in 1867. Alongside the widespread obtainability of intoxicants and narcotic home remedies was a corresponding shift in medicine from the old humoral explanations of psychiatric illness to new theories about nervous pathologies and new experimental treatments with electricity for melancholia and madness. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, a religious sect in the eighteenth century of which Cowper was a member, invented an electrical machine that he believed would revive melancholics from low spirits.<sup>331</sup> Paul Ferdinand Gachet, the famous French physician who treated Van Gogh, experimented with electric shock treatments. Near the turn of the century, Pinel had minted (or appropriated) the term *neurosis*. Medical interest emerged in theories on nervous disorders like neurasthenia, a disorder of

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>331</sup> Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression*, 79.

the mind and body, which was later thought to afflict the privileged professional classes (similarly as Cheney's "English Malady" afflicted the upper-middle-class *sensibility*). The neuropathological upgrade of the ancient Hippocratic illness *hysteria*, which Charcot had showcased in theatrical experiments by putting his patients under hypnosis at the *Salpêtrière*, became a part of the development of an unmusical psychiatric taxonomy. The new prosaic diagnoses of depression and manic depression (and its split from *dementia praecox*, a proto-schizophrenia), Emil Kraepelin introduced as gradual replacements for the more magisterial and poetic *melancholia* around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>332</sup>

## RELIGIOUS VOICES

In the 1750s Christopher Smart wrote several poems on a theme of the supreme being, each winning Cambridge Seaton Prizes, an award based on the theme.<sup>333</sup> His "Hymn to the Supreme Being: on a Dangerous Fit of Illness" was written to show his recovery from mental illness and his piety as a Christian. Many scholars recently have questioned his status as a mental patient, wondering if he was ever mad at all. Others wonder to what extent his alcoholism interacted with his manic fits and fist fights that ended in jail time. In 1745 he wrote a song titled "Idleness," performed that summer in Vauxhall, in which the singer praised languor as a creative muse. As a poet he was enormously creative, even while supposedly languishing in an asylum for the insane. Though he had lost his

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<sup>332</sup> The clinical shift from melancholia to depression happened in successive editions of Kraepelin's highly influential book *Psychiatry: A Textbook for Students and Physicians* (1896, 5<sup>th</sup> edition). See Edward Shorter, *How Everyone Became Depressed: The Rise and Fall of the Nervous Breakdown* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99-102.

<sup>333</sup> See Christopher Smart, "Life of the Seaton Prize Poems and their Authors," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 1801, 301.

freedom and the control of his own affairs, and though his wife left him and he lost his children, having been committed by his father-in-law, the publisher John Newbery, he did not languish. His most imaginative work, *Jubilate Agno*, was written along with translations of the Psalms while he was confined in the asylum. *Jubilate* contains thirty-two surviving fragments and is a long free-verse poem with a modern structure and unique syntax. Smart wrote the poem over a four-year period at a minimum number of lines per day.<sup>334</sup> Such indicates a deliberate control over its construction, a non-manic exuberance for lines written in paced surges. The poem was not published until the twentieth century (1939), with the title *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song from Bedlam*, its Latin title replaced with one designed to emphasize what some thought was its odd psychiatric appeal.<sup>335</sup> Even though he had been confined to a madhouse, Smart was able to be productive with his writing and retain his intellectual vitality with a very lean library of just a few volumes. He was not completely isolated from the world, however, and had access to daily newsprint and to the *Gentlemen's Magazine*.<sup>336</sup> His conditions represent the exact opposite environment in which one could expect to flourish, but he was allowed to write and kept away from the apparent alcohol addiction that may have worked as much to get him into trouble as his religious mania. Few of his letters have survived, and in one he wrote that he had "no human friends."<sup>337</sup> His extreme isolation from human companionship did not stop him from immortalizing, in an often-

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<sup>334</sup> Clement Hawes, "Poised Poesis: Ecstasy in *Jubilate Agno*," in *Reading Christopher Smart in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Min Wild and Noel Chevalier (Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 90.

<sup>335</sup> Frank Key, "Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*," *The Public Domain Review*, 2011, accessed August 22, 2016, <http://publicdomainreview.org/2011/01/31/christopher-smarts-jubilate-agno/>.

<sup>336</sup> Chris Mounsey, *Christopher Smart: Clown of God*, Bucknell Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture (Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press, 2001), 238.

<sup>337</sup> Hawes, "Poised Poesis: Ecstasy in *Jubilate Agno*," 88.

anthologized section of the *Jubilate*, his cat Jeffery, who lived with him in confinement. Smart's long poem is a celebration of creation and the natural affinities between the animal kingdom and humankind. After the creative output of about three lines per day, Smart was released from the madhouse and stopped working on the *Jubilate*. His misfortunes continued almost unabated when he was admitted to Potter's private asylum in 1759, since he was pronounced "incurable" and could not afford to stay at St. Luke's. He was eventually rescued, only to wind up in the King's Bench debtors' prison, where he died either of a liver disease or possibly pneumonia in 1771, aged 49.

Almost ten years younger than Kit Smart, and considered an originator of the autobiographical poem, William Cowper developed his poetic voice as an observer of the countryside on long walks, similarly as Baudelaire presented the new urban landscape of Paris as a *flâneur* and peripatetic. Cowper's idler lived in a state of creative leisure, withdrawn from the mechanisms of the world. This was owing to his early retirement, to his recovery walks, which enabled his imagination as he moved out into nature where he could reflect and sample from an external environment. Raising hares, tending gardens, taking morning strolls in town, these were the non-competitive preoccupations of the gentleman in retirement, withdrawn from bustle and career, from the ego pursuits that deviled him, particularly his failure at the Clerkship to confront his challenger for that position in the House of Lords, which occurred shortly before the first round of failed suicide attempts generated by the first onset of insanity. In his *Memoir* Cowper reveals a great apprehension for the public defense he was to give for the Clerkship position before his lapse into madness.

In the Age of Sensibility, poets explored the idea of madness as a means of poetic inspiration, even as a form of hygiene. Cowper sought out mad afflictions, exchanging the expectations of his career among the journals after his failed public exam for the life of a poet who wrote in his leisure. It was in retirement, which he wrote about to one of his early correspondents, Lady Harriet Hesketh, that Cowper believed he would find contentment as a kind of compensation for his affliction. After his release from the asylum in St. Albans, Cowper wrote to Lady Hesketh:

You know, by experience, how pleasant it is to feel the first approaches of health after a fever: but, Oh the fever of the brain! . . . I write thus to you that you may not think me a forlorn and wretched creature; which you might be apt to do, considering my very distant removal from every friend I have in the world; a circumstance which, before this event befell me, would undoubtedly have made me so: but my affliction has taught me a road to happiness which without it I should never have found; and I know, and have experience of it every day, that the mercy of God . . . is more than sufficient to compensate for the loss of every other blessing.<sup>338</sup>

Many of the Romantics viewed poetic virtuosity as a compensation for enduring long bouts of melancholia, just as Cowper seems to suggest his newfound leisure was a compensation for his own afflictions. The fear of melancholia and madness associated with long periods of idleness that had frightened Robert Burton, Cowper had sought as a refuge from his examination for the Clerkship of the Journals in 1763. This episode would become his *second* encounter with melancholia, historically referred to by Cowper scholars as “the second derangement,” which almost ended in his suicide in 1763. In his *Memoir* he records:

I now began to look upon madness as the only chance remaining. I had a strong foreboding, that so it would one day fare with me; and I wished for it earnestly, and looked forward to it with impatient expectation. My chief fear was that my senses would not fail me time enough to excuse my

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<sup>338</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Correspondence of William Cowper* 4 vols. vol. 1 (St. Claire Shores, MI: Scholarly Press, 1904; repr., 1979), 25.

appearance at the bar of the House of Lords, which was the only purpose I wanted it to answer.<sup>339</sup>

The “strong foreboding” he mentions may refer to a voice-hearing event. Cowper was a clairaudient, a voice-hearer. His annotator Thomas Wright had described in his four volume collection of the poet’s letters, one hundred years after Cowper’s death: “. . . but of all cases of clair-audience among literary men, Cowper’s is the most extraordinary; all through his life he heard voices, mostly of a distressing character, especially during his last decade.”<sup>340</sup> But it is at this second crisis that Cowper had begun to suffer from psychotic delusions, and had bought a broadside on the street which he thought had been written about him. He had visited a chemist to buy a vial of laudanum with which to overdose himself. In 1753, Cowper had experienced his first bout with melancholia (ten years to his second), while he was a student in the Middle Temple. In the *Memoir* he writes:

I was struck, not long after my settlement in the Temple, with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same, can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror and rising up in despair.<sup>341</sup>

His first derangement lasted for about a year. In this time Cowper remembers reading Herbert for comfort, but then a friend later advised him that reading the poet would likely only “nourish” his melancholy rather than alleviate it. In the *Memoir* he reports a momentary breakthrough from his first melancholy.

In this state of mind, I continued near a twelve month; when having experienced the inefficacy of all human means, I at length betook myself to God in prayer. Such is the rank our Redeemer holds in our esteem that we never resort to him but in the last instance when all creatures have

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<sup>339</sup> William Cowper, *Memoir of the Early Life of Willaim Cowper, Esq* (New York, NY: Philo B. Pratt, 1817; repr., 2015), 29-30.

<sup>340</sup> Wright, *The Correspondence of William Cowper*, 1, 22.

<sup>341</sup> Cowper, *Memoir of the Early Life of Willaim Cowper, Esq*, 18.

failed to succor us! My hard heart was at length softened, and my stubborn knees brought to bow. I composed a set of prayers, and made frequent use of them. Weak as my faith was, the Almighty, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, was graciously pleased to hear me.<sup>342</sup>

In a visit to Southampton for a few months, recommended to regain his health (seaside retreats being a common therapy of the eighteenth century), the poet records a sublime moment near the sea, where he feels the presence of God restoring his soul.

We sat down upon an eminence, at the end of that arm of the sea, which runs between Southampton and the New-Forest. Here it was, that on a sudden, as if another sun had been kindled that instant in the heavens, on purpose to dispel sorrow and vexation of spirit, I felt the weight of all misery taken off; my heart became light and joyful in a moment; I could have wept with transport had I been alone.<sup>343</sup>

Yet even after this seemingly sublime moment, Cowper feels that his peace is only the result of visiting the seaside, after which he returns home to London and burns his prayers. His melancholia was in this way cyclical and almost impossible to shake. Work and rest and continued prayers seemed to be the only things that could bring temporary comfort to him.

Thus by the time of Cowper's second derangement, in the throes of his condition, retirement had become a necessity, a permanent mode of recovery, which ironically served as much a hindrance as it was an aid against the affliction he had feared and suffered from all of his life. In the many portraits made of him, like the stipple engraving by William Blake, which was a copy in deference to the portrait by Lawrence, Cowper is often depicted wearing his convalescent's cap, possibly a visual statement that the poet was not only in retirement but in a state of recovery from melancholia. The cap might

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

then function as a visual sign of the working poet's hazards with writing, ever on the job in his leisure, doing the good work of recovery as he was able to. In the history of epistolary works there is no example so riddled with moments of melancholic despair as Cowper's letters. His melancholia was literally incapacitating and so severe as to be inexplicable and maddening, restricting his focus to the same apparent obsessional thoughts and looped feelings. In a letter from February 2, 1793 he records:

It is with great unwillingness that I write, knowing that I can say nothing but what will distress you. I despair of everything, and my despair is perfect, because it is founded on a persuasion, that there is no effectual help for me, even in God. From four this morning till after seven I lay meditating terrors, such terrors as no language can express, and as no heart I am sure but mine ever knew. My very finger-ends tingled with it.<sup>344</sup>

In his letters to William Haley and Samuel Teedon like the sample above, he is often in low spirits, along with his companion, Mary Unwin, the widow of a minister who lived with him at Olney up until her death. Mrs. Unwin is also frequently afflicted with low spirits, according to Cowper's accounts in various letters. It is clear that gaps appear in his correspondences over the years at the onset of insanity periods, when everything appears abruptly to shut down and no writing is produced for years afterward. Writing in the fall of 1792 to Cowper's gardener, Samuel Teedon, the poet laments:

I am not well, but far from being so. I wake almost constantly under the influence of a nervous fever; by which my spirits are affected to such a degree that the oppression is almost insupportable. Since I wrote last I have been plunged in deeps, unvisited, I am convinced, by any human soul but mine; and though the day in its progress bears away with it some part of this melancholy, I am never cheerful, because I can never hope, and am so bounded in my prospects, that to look forward to another year to me seems madness.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Correspondence of William Cowper* 4 vols. vol. 4 (St. Claire Shores, MI: Scholarly Press, 1904; repr., 1979), 365.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 312-313.

It is the experience of severe melancholia that leaves its sufferers believing theirs is a unique affliction no one else could possibly understand without first-hand knowledge and there is no evidence to suggest this to be untrue. The lack of production haunted him, and with his melancholia it was impossible to proceed with any work, not only because his health would not permit it but because he did not have his leisure. He continues to Teedon:

In this state of mind how can I write? It is in vain to attempt it. I have neither spirits for it, as I have said, nor leisure. Yet vain as I know the attempt must prove, I purpose in a few days to renew it.<sup>346</sup>

Leisure was not just time to work on writing projects or freedom from the immediate burdens of employment that hinder long term artistic development. Leisure was Cowper's method, his technique of continuous recovery from derangement, his creative mainstay. It was in the form of an expectation that his professional obligations were wrapped up not at least so much in ego pursuits, though he does admit having ambitions to be a writer, but often as much in a desire to disappear into obscurity, into the listlessness and fear of his melancholy. To his cousin Lady Hesketh he writes,

I am not ashamed to confess that having commenced author, I am most abundantly desirous to succeed as such. I have (what perhaps you little suspect me of) in my nature, an infinite share of ambition. But with it, I have at the same time, as you well know, an equal share of diffidence.<sup>347</sup>

If Cowper was confident about his contributions to his own health and well-being with his care of animals and gardens, he was equally "diffident" about his persistence to take on the long writing projects that fell outside the conversational pieces of polite agrarian eighteenth-century society, like the Homeric translations, or the annotations of

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>347</sup> William Cowper, *Poems of William Cowper, Esq: with a New Memoir* (New York, NY: Leavitt and Allen, 1860), 17.

Milton, or even shorter works like “Lines Written During a Period of Insanity.” Shorter works like these, and his iconic late poem “The Cast-away,” which explores his lifelong sense of alienation from friends after experiencing the woes of his derangements, only reinforced his melancholic self-image, his view of genius breaking away from the Augustan notion of muses and divine inspiration, even though below the line of consciousness his creative mind was in transformation, from writing about neo-classical themes in an outmoded language using obsolete techniques, to the new everyday observations he could inscribe in plain blank verse, which had come from his new practices developed in his leisure mode, the new lyrical style that emerged from the long winter walks and that would enlighten the greater part of his masterpiece *The Task*. Leave it to the work-shy Cowper to give his longest poem, published in six books, a title more associated with toil than leisure, but then leisure had become his official space for finding a new muse, a new source of poetic inspiration emergent in the natural world.

It was not his seeking out madness as a form of poetic inspiration that Cowper found his life’s work as a poet. It was after enduring the extreme torment of madness and the long bouts with melancholia that he intuited a means of expression in nature, of finding a source point in the natural world that spoke to his poetic sensibilities. In Book III of *The Task*, Cowper meditates on his status as a melancholic in the country, where he has gone to recover from his wounds:

I was a stricken deer that left the herd  
long since. With many an arrow deep infix’d  
my panting side was charg’d, when I withdrew  
to seek a tranquil death in distant shades.  
There was I found by one who had himself  
been hurt by th’ archers. In his side he bore,  
and in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.  
With gentle force soliciting the darts,

he drew them forth and heal'd, and bade me live.  
Since then, with few associates, in remote  
and silent woods I wander, far from those  
my former partners of the peopled scene;  
with few associates, and not wishing more,  
here much I ruminates, as much I may,  
with other views and men and manners now  
than once, and others of a life to come  
I see that all are wand'ers, gone astray  
each in his own delusions; they are lost  
in chase of fancied happiness, still woo'd  
and never won.<sup>348</sup>

When the poet reflects on the source for his healing, which in this section of *The Task* is Jesus, who also bears his scars, he can see with clearer vision the pain and (delusions) of others, thus bearing up his own. Similarly, when Cowper reports some sort of breakthrough with God, usually after a period of prayers or spiritual insight, as was the case in his memoir after his second derangement and first onset of insanity, he reports a radical reduction of his melancholia and madness, when he feels freed from his misery and regains his interest in intellectual pursuits. Thus when the poet feels his salvation, when writing his hymns to God, for instance, his condition is greatly improved; when the sense of damnation returns, and it did often, the poet eventually lapses into deep sorrow and paralyzing madness. This was a cycle that lasted his whole life, and no poet struggled so with the recognition of his faith or redemption.

In Cowper's leisure time he was industrious and active when he was not depressed, or in "low spirits" as he commonly refers to the condition in his letters. The idleness associated with periods of melancholy he warded off, when he could, with his writing projects, like Burton. His gardens and his hares, once the therapies *after* his derangements, became the source of unexpected poetic energies, in new voices he heard

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

during long walks in the countryside. Cowper could write simple poems about his hares with lyric diction, or compare his state of mind to a wounded deer in recovery in the deep forest, thus prefiguring the Romantics, along with Blake and Smart. *The Task* is just such a work, but it started out on the suggestion of Cowper's exuberant friend, Lady Austen, who put the idea to mind in the form of a challenge, to make a long poem in blank verse about the sofa, which he did, and which resulted in a new proto-Romantic orientation to nature and its voices that Cowper could never have manufactured with the old language or its metered strictures.

Even with the natural voices that excited him in his new lyrical poems, the idea of being an outcast from society never quite left him, especially in his late style work "The Cast-away." For much of his life Cowper believed he was condemned by God (a Faustian condition), and most intense the effect was during his five major psychotic episodes. Though he was not an idler in the classical sense, and certainly not a *flâneur* of the Baudelairean frame, which a strict Methodist ethos would have prevented, his convalescing retired status represented a departure from position and profession when he was ill, working his garden, walking, visiting neighbors, and raising hares. Unlike men of wealth and leisure from titled families in England, Cowper lived on a small family allowance, and his discipline in writing letters, translating Homer into Latin, and writing poetry in blank verse, then translating that into the Latin, kept him productive when he could work. But his melancholia and lapses into madness nearly destroyed his output and stifled his creative interludes, which seemed to be bookended with severe periods of affliction. In particular, his third derangement in January of 1773 lasted a year and four months and set off a four-year period of paralyzing inactivity in which he produced very

little. From that time on there are no surviving letters until May of 1776. These were long years of debilitating mind that had nearly immobilized him and almost razed his consciousness. From a letter in 1786 he wrote, “My snuff-box from Anonymous on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January, on which day, twelve years ago, I plunged into a melancholy that made me almost an infant.”<sup>349</sup> On that day in 1773 he had a seizure and later in February a presentiment, a voice heard in his Latin-attuned ears that shocked him, saying: “*Actum est de te, periisti*—‘It is all over with thee, thou hast perished.’”<sup>350</sup> If after a time as a student in the Middle Temple Cowper had sought a form of madness as a refuge from the realities of work and social position, he was twenty years later still combating religious voices and periodic relapses into madness from which by this time he could never fully recover. He was nonetheless a courageous poet to have finished a long poem in six books, *The Task*, which is considered his best work, and over four volumes of correspondence to friends and colleagues, not to forget his short poems and light verse that made him the most popular poet of England in his day. Cowper thus had worked hard as a writer, if starting so late in life as a poet and translator, but hardest when he endured his interminable depressions and disruptive psychotic episodes, which had taken down others in suicides much sooner in life, who could no longer endure melancholia’s ineffable pain, or its assault on the senses, or find any rest in any normal train of thinking to buffer against its extreme darkness and mad paradoxes.

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<sup>349</sup> Wright, *The Correspondence of William Cowper*, 1, 134.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

## William Blake

In the flyleaf of a book by the phrenologist Johann Spurzheim, *Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of the Mind, or Insanity*, William Blake recorded a vision he experienced of the dead poet William Cowper, who spoke to him. In the margin Blake wrote:

Methodism etc. p. 144. Cowper came to me and said: "O that I were insane always I will never rest. Can you not make me truly insane? I will never rest till I am so. O that in the bosom of God I was hid. You retain health and yet are as mad as any of us all—over us all—mad as a refuge from unbelief—from Bacon, Newton and Locke."<sup>351</sup>

The idea that madness had beneficial effects on the mind and could be a hygiene for mental health was popular for the sensibility poets and later the symbolist poets of France. In the 1790s Charles Lamb had written to the young Coleridge in praise of the effects of madness on fancy during a recent stay in an asylum. Much later in 1855 Gerard de Nerval wrote about the experience of madness during his own period of mental illness in his text *Aurelia*, exclaiming, "I do not know why they call it illness—I never felt better."<sup>352</sup>

William Blake was a poet-painter and an autodidact in all his interlocking fields except for engraving, in which he was professionally trained as an apprentice at the age of 14, the same year he wrote his mantic poem "Mad Song." With his wife he suffered poverty throughout most of his life and the eventual loss of illustrating clients owing to his original visions,<sup>353</sup> which could not be evoked by the techniques of mass production

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<sup>351</sup> Hazard Adams, *Blake's Margins: An Interpretive Study of the Annotations* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishers, 2009), 146.

<sup>352</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995; repr., 1998), 646-647.

<sup>353</sup> William Blake, *The Portable William Blake*, ed. Alfred Kazin (New York, NY: Penguin, 1976), 3.

he had improved upon, but which had come from his unique palette and were inspired by the voices he had begun to hear since his childhood, and for which some later thought him mad. His lifelong financial struggle and social isolation made him, as Alfred Kazin has described, “a craftsman who could not earn a living.”<sup>354</sup> Blake was never confined in an asylum like Smart or Cowper, and his avowals for hearing voices as divine revelations others in his sphere had at least tolerated. Having suffered a failed engraving project, he fell back on the support of his patrons Thomas Butts and William Haley. In 1800 he left London to live for three years at Felpham, what he called “my three years’ Slumber on the banks of the Ocean.”<sup>355</sup> The cottage near the ocean provided by Hayley was located on his estate, where he had been writing a biography of Cowper that Blake was to illustrate with engravings.

Blake’s acknowledgement of poetic madness as a form of inspiration began early in his youth in the “Mad Song,” which is found in his *Poetical Sketches*. The poem is a warning against madness when poetic inspiration is not balanced by the melancholic night, the night that tempers the day, “for light doth seize my brain, / with frantic pain.”<sup>356</sup> Praising the night is a convention of the mad song.<sup>357</sup> The night for Blake is however melancholy, a buffer to the splenetic light that pierces his mind. In another poem from the same collection entitled “Song,” Blake’s speaker welcomes the dreams of the day and the fancies from the glassy stream beside which he reclines in reverie, but his inspired musings by day seem counterweighed by his walk at nightfall “. . . along the

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>357</sup> F. R. Duplantier, “Method in Blake’s “Mad Song,”” *Blake an Illustrated Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1979): 103.

darken'd valley in silent melancholy.”<sup>358</sup> Madness as a theme is also revisited in his mature work *The Four Zoas*, a manuscript he did not illustrate and which he abandoned as an unfinished work in 1807. *The Four Zoas*, or four living things, is a work exploring ancient consciousness and spirituality that the poet had originally titled *Vala*. Blake did not finish this epic poem because he experienced a depression, the main reason he and his wife went to the seaside resort at Felpham, but also so he could recuperate from his financial losses resulting from a failed publishing venture that included several engravings from his work *Night Thoughts*. To the writer George Cumberland, in a letter from the time in 1799, he wrote, “As to Myself, about whom you are so kindly Interested, I live by Miracle.”<sup>359</sup> The tremendous effort and time lost in his professional life naturally contributed to the eccentric whorl of psychological disturbances and agitations. Blake had worked hard, even if his work was too original in its vision to have any commercial appeal. He laments in the same letter, “For as to Engraving, in which art I cannot reproach myself with any neglect, yet I am laid by in a corner as if I did not Exist, & since my Young’s Night Thoughts have been publish’d, Even Johnson and Fuseli have discarded my Graver.”<sup>360</sup> Blake quotes another client’s rejection of his work, who remarked on his unique visions in his engravings: “Your *Fancy*, from what I have seen of it, & I have seen a variety at Mr. Cumberland’s, seems to be in the other world, or the World of Spirits, which accords not with my Intentions, which, whilst living in This World, Wish to follow *the Nature of it*.”<sup>361</sup> Blake worked extremely hard in a messy trade with toxic chemicals for developing and inking metal plates. But many potential clients

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<sup>358</sup> Blake, *The Portable William Blake*, 68.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

and some of his colleagues could perceive only eccentricity in his work, which they found too fanciful, supernatural, and rarefied to be of any concrete use, thus to be busy or even productive with impractical creations was for some of the people who could have supported his work a form of idleness.

Blake and his wife were enthusiastic about the new surroundings near the cottage, which afforded superb panoramas of the coast. Another reason he was very happy with the cottage initially was because his voice hearing experiences and visions increased there immediately. In a letter to sculptor John Flaxman in September of 1800, after he had just arrived at Felpham, Blake wrote:

I have begun to work. Felpham is a sweet place for Study, because it is more Spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all sides her golden Gates; her windows are not obstructed by vapours; voices of Celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, & their forms more distinctly seen; & my Cottage is also a Shadow of their houses.<sup>362</sup>

He also wrote a poem about the cottage's conductive ability for spirits and compared it to an angel's ladder reaching to heaven, with ready access to the poet's ear. *The Four Zoas* is Blake's epic poem of consciousness and madness, its form and subject matter divided into nine nights, a work he had begun in 1797, just before his struggle with melancholia. In a letter to George Cumberland in 1800 he writes, "I begin to Emerge from a Deep pit of Melancholy, Melancholy without any real reason for it, a Disease which God keep you from & all good men."<sup>363</sup> Blake struggled against going mad while at Felpham, and so he produced no public verse and worked quietly on his engravings for the Cowper volume and those few commissions from his other major patron, Thomas Butts. It is madness and depression that affect him, not as diagnoses, but

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Blake, "Letters to Cumberland: 2nd July, 1800," 706.

as events that have happened to many artists. Madness is thus trans-temporal, and while it is filtered socially among the ages, it remains a reality that transcends the limitations and reductions of periods and historical lenses. Some critics have speculated for Blake, by retro diagnosis, a schizophrenic condition, but madness defined differently across the ages remains as madness in modern times. Nothing could have been more of an affront or more unreasonable to an Enlightenment audience than madness. Blake was very critical of rationality in his poems, especially those from the prophetic books, in which he elevated imagination, what he called Entharmion, its representation, as a foil to Urizen, his symbol for reason. His drawings, watercolors, and prints were so visionary and strange that they alienated him from most in the publishing world who simply could not understand his unique subject matter or his difficult mythologies, those esoteric allegories developed in the prophetic books like *Jerusalem* (a work he completed in Felpham) and *The Four Zoas*, which he eventually relinquished to fragmentation and obscurity.

### **CHEMICAL VOICES**

A wandering intellectual and idler, the *flâneur* was thought to be a fashionable melancholic on a journey of gazes and urban dream visions, withdrawn but in the public, an individual lost in a critique of the crowd. Nevertheless, one suffering, impoverished, hypochondriacal, yet in actual poor health, the *flâneur* of this sort is like the ragpicker, collecting ideas from the detritus of living, the bohemian struggling to make a profit from unconventional writings, making occasional gains, in Baudelaire's case, with his Poe translations.<sup>364</sup> The peripatetic *flâneur*, walking off his melancholy throughout the city,

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<sup>364</sup> Baudelaire sympathized with the ragpickers and wrote about his experiences watching them work in the streets. Though in his youth he was rich with inherited money, after squandering much of it on expensive art, including works by Delacroix, and fakes from dishonest antique dealers, he had

sought a cure in this way, warding off *ennui*, but in turn also regenerated his melancholy with idle processes, through the phantasmagoria of strolling, by becoming absorbed in the sensory agitation of the metropolis. Aided by intoxicants, the arcades of imaginary Paris are revisited in the mind of the wanderer. Baudelaire's world is a labyrinth: mythical, magical, former, nostalgic, melancholic: it is the Parisian arcade of the nineteenth century, the abode of *flânerie* and the *imaginaire*. Like Aristotle's melancholic dreamer, flooded with phantasms, the *flâneur* as a dreamer also was flooded with images. The art of *flânerie* is one of locale and the image of locale . . . the *ennui* of the spleen, that ancient organ, which for Galen, Walkington, and Burton stored and processed the melancholic humor. For Baudelaire the spleen is mapped onto the dark catacombs and glassy arcades of old Paris. Baudelaire's critique on the listless effects hashish and opium had on the artistic mind as an addict is not unlike the melancholic figure decrying the immersive silence of her creative tools in Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I*, the angel staring off with a vacant gaze beyond the frame at some narcotic phantasm, incomprehensible images that both excite and freeze the metaphoric powers of the artist. The mature Baudelaire "contemplated with horror the ravages in the human personality caused by prolonged indulgence in drugs, and especially the weakening of the will by the draining away of energy."<sup>365</sup> The desire for "Lethe," or oblivion in some of his poems, creates a tension with his intrinsic curiosity of the city, his recurring image of it in his poems as a distant ship in the harbor. Perhaps the ship represents the lure and promise of transport, like a drug, to other unexplored realms, but it may also be the curiosity of its

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become poor. He was thus not a prissy public intellectual in poverty, and neither in his youth, when Théophile Gautier described him as "a dandy who had strayed into Bohemia." Stacy Diamond, introduction to *Artificial Paradises*, by Charles Baudelaire (New York, NY: Citadel Press, 1996), xiii.

<sup>365</sup> Enid Starkie, *Baudelaire* (New York, NY: New Directions, 1958), 378.

cargo, its rare and potent imports that he engraves onto the city in its state of spleen. Baudelaire had admired De Quincey's life, but understood a tragedy in it that he believed he had shared with him, "the sad fact that his mind was teeming with ideas and projects, but that he had not the determination to give them shape on paper."<sup>366</sup> This deflation of the energy to work is the condition of the melancholic *flâneur*, in which the status of the artist as *flâneur* becomes confused with the state of mind generated (drug intensified) by the debilitating forces of illness. The narcotics could only have amped the malaise. In a letter Baudelaire wrote to his mother, December 11, 1858, just one year after the first publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, he laments what he once perceived through altered states, when he thought the influences of drug intoxication would be useful as a technique of poetic ecstasy. He reported, "My *Opium* causes me an infinity of worry. I am obsessed by an idea that I have created something really detestable. What is the good of learning to distinguish the various poisons if I cannot get more talent out of them?"<sup>367</sup> His letter suggests an increasing sense of malaise and discomfort that he believed was connected with his addiction to opium, even though his enthusiasm remained to publish his work on opium, since it was still incomplete and had already been rejected by his first choice for publisher.<sup>368</sup>

*Les Paradis artificiels* was published serially in *Revue Contemporaine*, then as a reworked volume in 1860, almost ten years after Baudelaire had published his essay "On Wine and Hashish," recounting his experiments with artists, novelists, and poets at certain hashish parties in the apartments of Boissard, where Baudelaire had lived as a

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Letters of Charles Baudelaire to his Mother*, trans. Arthur Symons (New York, NY: Benjamin Blom, 1971), 135.

<sup>368</sup> Diamond, *Artificial Paradises*, xix.

young poet.<sup>369</sup> In *Les Paradis artificiels* Baudelaire is initially enthusiastic about his new experiences with opiates and their potential to augment his poetic vision with modern utterance. For all the highs Baudelaire informs his novitiates about in his experiences at the Club des Hachichins, eating hashish and opium with his artistic associates, the cautionary lows he reports, mixing them with his translations from De Quincey, are disabling as much as hallucinatory. He records in the essay section titled “On Wine and Hashish”:

The second stage [of hashish intoxication] is heralded by a feeling of coldness in the extremities and a vague oppression which seizes your drowsed senses; your fingers turn, as they say, to butter. Your head grows heavy and a general numbness pervades your entire being.<sup>370</sup>

Baudelaire cautions the novice to ingest hashish only in the company of friends and while being in good spirits, avoiding melancholy moods of any sort, especially as the duration of the intoxication may last for twenty-four hours and is hard on digestion, its effects compelling the will to a dead stop. He continues:

Then the hallucinations begin. External things, forms and images, swell to monstrous proportions, revealing themselves in fantastic shapes as yet unimagined. Instantly passing through a variety of transformations, they enter your being, or rather you enter theirs.<sup>371</sup>

It was the French psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol who defined the term hallucination in the modern sense Baudelaire uses it. But what is important in the next passage is that the influence of the intoxication in the form of hallucinations begins

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<sup>369</sup> Baudelaire had the apartment decorated with original works of art, expensive draperies, and volumes from his favorite poets.

<sup>370</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, trans. Stacy Diamond (New York, NY: Citadel Press, 1996), 19.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*

to take on a source of inspiration for the poet, as a synesthetic technique for re-envisioning poetic utterance across the sense modalities emerges. He reports:

The most singular ambiguities, the most inexplicable transpositions of ideas take place in your sensations. Sound holds color, color holds music. Musical notes become numbers and you resolve, with astonishing rapidity, prodigious arithmetical calculations in time to the music that swells in your ears.<sup>372</sup>

This synesthetic source of poetic inspiration finds its way in perhaps his most famous poem from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the “Correspondences,” which describes a similar instance of synesthesia, a transposition of perceptions in which one sense suggests the qualities of another in the second stanza of the poem:

Like long-held echoes, blending somewhere else  
into one deep and shadowy unison  
as limitless as darkness and as day,  
the sounds, the scents, the colors correspond.<sup>373</sup>

The opiates bring the poet to a simulated “intellectual paradise”<sup>374</sup> and to a state of immobilizing bliss. “A vast languor, not without charm, settles over your mind, an indolence which prevents you from endeavoring any intellectual labor or action.”<sup>375</sup>

Baudelaire believes hashish, unlike wine, is self-isolating, useless, leading to indolence as the drug of choice for “solitary pleasures . . . favored by miserable idlers.”<sup>376</sup>

Nonetheless his opiated reveries bleed into some of his poems and he writes his own long essays on his times as a young rich literary man who had not yet reached his fame nor the impoverishment his unwise dealings and difficult personality would produce for him.

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>373</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, trans. Richard Howard (Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 1982), 15.

<sup>374</sup> Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, 21.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 25.

Ultimately, venereal disease and drug addiction brought the poet to final ruin and tragically to his death aged forty-six years, leaving his mother behind to bury him, a fear that had haunted him much of his life.<sup>377</sup>

Baudelaire's reportage as a *flâneur* drug user prefigured Kraepelin, Freud, and the depression industry of the twentieth century. This is suggested in a letter to his mother in December of 1857, in which Baudelaire wrote about his weakened state and his public rejections as a professional poet as if they were symptoms within a diagnostic criterion that parallels modern depression. Recorded here:

I have much to complain of in myself, and I am astonished and alarmed by my condition. Do I need a change of air? I cannot tell. Is it my sick body that weakens my will and mind, or is it a spiritual cowardice [that] wears out my body. I do not know. But what I do feel is an immense discouragement, a sensation of unbearable isolation, a perpetual fear of some remote disaster, an utter disbelief in my capacity, a total absence of desire, an impossibility of finding any kind of interest. The strange success of my book and the hatred it roused interested me for a little, but afterwards I fell back again. You see, dear mother, that I am in a fairly grave condition for a man whose profession is to produce and clothe creatures of the imagination. I ask myself unceasingly: what is the good of this? What is the good of that? There you have the veritable soul of spleen.<sup>378</sup>

While Baudelaire occasionally experimented eating hashish with luminaries like Gautier, Balzac, and Nerval in the 1840s, he never had much use for the drug and decried its effects on the body. He was not so critical of opium initially: the drug he was addicted to. It might be expected that he became addicted recreationally, via some extended experimentation, but like many others who used hallucinogenic drugs, De Quincey and Coleridge for example, Baudelaire became addicted while using the drug for medical

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<sup>377</sup> F. W. J. Hemmings, *Baudelaire the Damned* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Reader, 1982; repr., 2012), 1.

<sup>378</sup> Baudelaire, *The Letters of Charles Baudelaire to his Mother*, 116.

reasons. De Quincey used opium “to relieve a facial neuralgia brought on by toothache,”<sup>379</sup> and for Baudelaire opium helped with the symptoms of progressive syphilis.

In *Paris Spleen* Baudelaire becomes the painter of everyday life, one growing increasingly miserable, as his poverty, hunger, addiction and disease produce his slow destruction in the old city. In *Paris Spleen*, in the opium prose poem, “Double Room,” Baudelaire recounts his hallucination of his bedroom as both a paradise and a nightmare. In the first part of the vision, the atmosphere of the room is otherworldly, where the language of the idler ornaments and languishes. Baudelaire records:

A room that is like a dream, a truly spiritual room, where the stagnant atmosphere is nebulously tinted pink and blue.

Here the soul takes a bath of indolence, scented with all the aromatic perfumes of desire and regret. There is about it something crepuscular, bluish shot with rose, a voluptuous dream in an eclipse.

Every piece of furniture is of an elongated form, languid and prostrate, and seems to be dreaming; endowed, one would say, with a somnambular existence like minerals and vegetables. The hangings speak a silent language like flowers, skies and setting suns.<sup>380</sup>

The opiated source of his inspiration takes the form of a mysterious woman who reclines enchanted on the bed. The language becomes more exotic as it introduces her presence in the room.

Muslin in diaphanous masses rains over the window and over the bed, spreads in snowy cataracts. And on this bed lies the Idol, the sovereign queen of my dreams. But why is she here? Who has brought her? What magic power has installed her on this throne of revery and of pleasure. No matter. She is here. I recognize her.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Hemmings, *Baudelaire the Damned*, 239.

<sup>380</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, trans. Louise Varèse (New York, NY: New Directions, 1947; repr., 1970), 5.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*

In the second part of the vision, the atmosphere of the room turns netherworldly, tuned abruptly to the darker realities of his melancholia that predominate like a decadent fragrance, coloring his entire mood, which suffers a dramatic change. A harsh knock at the door disrupts the beatific vision, turning his stomach, which has been ravaged by years of hunger, poor nutrition, pipe tobacco, wine and hashish.

The paradisiac room and the idol, the sovereign of dreams, the *Sylphid*, as the great René used to say, the whole enchantment has vanished at the Specter's brutal knock.<sup>382</sup>

For Baudelaire it is boredom, world-weariness, that informs his melancholia more than anything else. *Ennui* is the great horror to be avoided, the languor of the wastrel and the ragpickers in the streets, collecting the thrown away and unwanted. The poet's ideas lie in ruin and disuse, like the creative tools scattered about the feet of the melancholic angel in Dürer's famous engraving. Overwhelming debts litter his calendar due dates. *Ennui* is the incapacitating kill switch to artistic inspiration:

Horrors! I remember! Yes, I remember! this filthy hole, this abode of eternal boredom is truly mine. Look at the stupid, dusty, dilapidated furniture; the hearth without fire, without embers, disgusting with spittle; the sad windows where rain has traced furrows through the dust; manuscripts covered with erasures or unfinished, the calendar where a pencil has marked all the direst dates!

And that perfume out of another world which in my state of exquisite sensibility was so intoxicating? Alas, another odor has taken its place, of stale tobacco mixed with nauseating mustiness. The rancid smell of desolation.<sup>383</sup>

The only object which ties the first part of the dream to his present reality, thus the only thing at this stage of his life that he believes brings him any sense of creativity or blissful reverie is the opium.

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

In this narrow world, but with plenty of room for disgust, there is one object alone that delights me: the vial of opium: an old and dreadful love; and like all mistresses, alas! prolific in caresses and betrayals.<sup>384</sup>

The artificial highs that he appraised in the hashish essay he elevated in his critique of opium, for which he also felt ambivalence, which is encoded in “Double Room.” The potencies he tried to extract from his experiences with opium and hashish did not correspond one-to-one to his techniques for envisioning his poetic texts most of the time, with “Double Room” being the only known exception. The opiates he used to mollify the symptoms of his disease and hunger, as with the madness that poets like Cowper had sought to lessen the fragility and crisis of faith in God, were plainly too destructive to the psyche and too debilitating to the body to foster the creation of disciplined artworks. Baudelaire knew he could not achieve an original vision of modernity and everyday life in his poems under the continuous, disjointed influences of opium and hashish, even though he knew he was addicted to laudanum. He also understood the restorative powers of hard work and how they often worked against the effects of illness, addiction, and idleness. Under the subheading of *Hygiene* in his journals he wrote: “To heal all things, wretchedness, disease or melancholy, absolutely nothing is required but an *inclination* for work.”<sup>385</sup> Even so, he continued to take laudanum for his pain reduction regimen, and he continued to have hallucinations that were ambivalent in nature, both illuminating and powerfully disabling, entrancing at the peak of his opium intoxication, and repugnant as the effects of his phials of laudanum wore off. Baudelaire may not have understood how his melancholia and addiction to opiates interacted with each other to accelerate his mind-body decline. Whatever

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>385</sup> Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, 98.

techniques of poetry he believed the opium may have afforded, the effect was oblique when it surfaced at all, though similarly disabling, exacting a cost from his being, as no artist creates in a fit of spleen or psychedelic trance. Baudelaire thus did not write *about* his experiences with addiction by dictation. The influence of his substances on his poems arose later in the text, like the growth of vegetation occurring after a season of acid rain. Baudelaire understood this hazardous exchange, horrified as he was by its results, and had determined his sufferings with the secondary symptoms of syphilis and digestive problems agitated by hunger, could only be the irremediable consequences of his obsession with damnation. The opiates had given him both bliss and torment, and his response was ultimately a negative critique of both. He concludes:

Horrible situation! To have a mind teeming with ideas and to be unable to cross the bridge that separates the imaginary countries of reverie from the positive harvest of action! If those who read me now have ever needed to produce something. I don't need to describe for them the despair of a noble, clear-sighted, gifted mind, struggling against that very particular damnation. An abominable enchantment! Everything I have said about the weakening of willpower in my study on hashish is applicable to opium.<sup>386</sup>

## LITERARY VAN GOGH

Vincent van Gogh the literary artist was a polyglot who wrote over 800 letters. At one point in his correspondence he began to write more frequently in French, and preferred that language over Dutch even when writing to his brother Theo. The first letter Van Gogh wrote in French was letter 155, written to Theo in June of 1880, when Vincent was twenty-seven years old, the year of his decision to become an artist and devote the full force of his massive energies to painting. In the following passage from that letter, Van

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<sup>386</sup> Rosemary Lloyd, *Charles Baudelaire, Critical Lives* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2008), 135.

Gogh wrestles with the notion of idleness and the purpose of his life after a string of so many false starts, failed love interests, rejections from employers, and his subsequent poverty and affliction. He records:

I'm writing you somewhat at random whatever comes into my pen: I would be very happy if you could somehow see in me something other than some sort of idler. Because there are idlers [of one sort] and idlers [of another], who form a contrast. There's the one who's an idler through laziness and weakness of character, through the baseness of his nature; you may, if you think fit, take me for such a one. Then there's the other idler, the idler truly despite himself, who is gnawed inwardly by a great desire for action, who does nothing because he finds it impossible to do anything since he's imprisoned in something, so to speak, because he doesn't have what he would need to be productive, because the inevitability of circumstances is reducing him to this point. Such a person doesn't always know himself what he could do, but he feels by instinct, I'm good for something, even so! I feel I have a *raison d'être*! I know that I could be a quite different man! For what then could I be of use, for what could I serve! There's something within me, so what is it! That's an entirely different idler; you may, if you think fit, take me for such a one.<sup>387</sup>

No one worked harder than Van Gogh, and from the very beginning of his relationship with his physician in Auvers-sur-Oise, Dr. Paul Gachet, the doctor encouraged the painter to work diligently as a distraction against illness, against the melancholia he had completed his doctoral thesis on, having written an original work with no medical clichés. Gachet completed his medical degree at the Montpellier Medical School, a renowned institution second only to the medical school at Bologna in provenance. His thesis on melancholia opens “with a philosophical statement, mentions the great men of science and letters who were afflicted with melancholia, and goes on to speculate that whole societies and nations may have been affected at various times.”<sup>388</sup> Van Gogh's

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<sup>387</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, between 22 and 24 June 1880, Cuesmes, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let155/letter.html>. 155.

<sup>388</sup> An interesting chapter on Van Gogh's physicians appears in Wilfred N. Arnold, *Vincent Van Gogh: Chemicals, Crises, and Creativity* (Boston, MA: Birkhäuser, 1992), 207.

preoccupation with hard work, the elevation of labor in his paintings and his mainstay sensibility of feeling generally useful, which drove his painting binges in the fields, greatly influenced his ideas about painting outside, in the manner of a *plein air* artist, as opposed to working in the studio as Gauguin his brief roommate in Arles preferred, or on the days the weather was bad. Van Gogh believed working in the city was a hindrance to his creativity and his vision as an artist. Yet he also viewed nature as an elemental force that existed in both the city and the country, because the feeling of the artist could be captured in the form and technique of the painting, not especially in its subject or idea.<sup>389</sup>

The *flâneur* was for Baudelaire and later Walter Benjamin essentially of two sorts, the cosmopolitan and the ragpicker, the urban sophisticate and the unkempt laborer. It is easy to determine which figure of the *flâneur* Van Gogh was, given his love for the roughhewn and discarded, for painting peasants and field workers, and for dressing in his workman's clothes, his painter's smock, which often appears in his self-portraits.

Painting was his personal technique for recovery when he was in the hospital at Arles or at Saint-Paul's in Saint-Rémy, when he was allowed to paint, which meant when he was not eating his paints or drinking poisonous terpenes, but his writing was also his therapy in the evenings, especially his letters to Theo. In the summer of 1889, Dr. Peyron had suspended Vincent's access to his studio space in the hospital, which had been directly across from his bedroom. Vincent had experienced an acute recurrence of his attack on 16 July 1889. Theo had reported to his sister Willemien that Vincent had been feeling very badly for two consecutive weeks. Vincent was not well enough to paint

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<sup>389</sup> Wouter Van der Veen, *Van Gogh: A Literary Mind* vol. 2, Van Gogh Studies (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Van Gogh Museum, 2009), 162-163.

partly because he had not stopped ingesting toxic substances. In a letter to Theo dated 22 August 1889, Vincent lamented:

For many days I've been *absolutely distraught*, as in Arles, just as much if not worse, and it's to be presumed that these crises will recur in the future, it is ABOMINABLE. I haven't been able to eat for 4 days, as my throat is swollen. It's not in order to complain too much, I hope, if I tell you these details, but to prove to you that I'm not yet in a fit state to go to Paris or to Pont-Aven unless it were to Charenton.

It appears that I pick up filthy things and eat them, although my memories of these bad moments are vague, and it appears to me that there's something shady about it, still for the same reason that they have I don't know what prejudice against painters here.

I no longer see any possibility for courage or good hope, but anyway it wasn't yesterday that we found out that this profession isn't a happy one.<sup>390</sup>

For over a month Vincent had not been outside of the hospital, or even to the first floor or garden in the center of the old cloister. Owing to the effects and image-making of popular culture, many have a conception of Van Gogh as the manic painter who was out in the fields constantly at work, producing multiple canvases “in one go” as he put it. Although there were productive periods in Arles—or on site at the hospital grounds and adjacent olive groves of Saint-Rémy, or also in the beautiful pastoral hamlet of Auvers-sur-Oise, where under the care of Dr. Gachet, he averaged a painting a day during the remaining 70 days of his life—there were also the instances of attack and depression in the hospital when Van Gogh was simply not able to work for long periods of time. In the same letter to Theo, Vincent asks for his brother's help in speaking with Dr. Peyron about his quandary.

Dr. Peyron is really kind to me and really patient. You can imagine that I'm very deeply distressed that the attacks have recurred when I was

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<sup>390</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, 22 August 1889, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let797/letter.html>. 797.

already beginning to hope that it wouldn't recur.

You'll perhaps do well to write a line to Dr. Peyron to say that working on my paintings is quite necessary to me for my recovery.

For these days, without anything to do and without being able to go into the room he had allocated me for doing my painting, are almost intolerable to me.<sup>391</sup>

In one of his self-portraits he painted in the hospital in Saint-Rémy, Vincent appears in his painter's smock, holding his brushes, similarly as he had appeared in his workman's clothes in *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* (1889), with his easel and Japanese prints in the background of his studio in the Yellow House. In that portrait, painted shortly after his self-mutilation during Christmas, there is a resilience in his face and determination to continue his work as an artist in bandages, as if he were a veteran wounded in a war, eager to return to the front. He had come back home; he had picked up his brushes and was ready to set out for new work in his imaginary Japan and mock-paradise in Arles, the defunct Studio of the South, abandoned by Gauguin, harassed by the townspeople. Still, this was a recovering artist staring back at us in the picture, a painter, not a madman. About the self-portrait at the hospital in Saint-Rémy, one art historian improvises a similar theme, observing:

There is a confrontational atmosphere in this painting. It is the only one of the self-portraits which shows him in his working clothes. . . . Having been banned from his studio and denied the use of paints for so many weeks, he is telling the world and Dr. Peyron in particular, that he is back in the land of the sane and able to practice his profession.<sup>392</sup>

This is not the only portrait that shows the painter in his work clothes, but is rather one of the same ilk as the other portraits in which he appears with his brushes and in smocks.

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Edwin Mullins, *Van Gogh: The Asylum Year* (London, UK: Unicorn Press, 2015), 77.

Though Van Gogh eventually regained his strength and was able to return to his studio to paint, and onto the grounds and olive groves near the hospital in Saint-Rémy, there was still a concern that he might have a relapse. Vincent did not believe Dr. Peyron thought he was mad and rather believed his attacks were episodes of epileptic seizure. Theo had written as much in a letter. Theo was still tasked to find a good doctor for Vincent and a place to live where he could work peacefully and have a balanced life on his own after he left the asylum at Saint-Rémy.

Van Gogh had become very concerned about living in the old cloister with other mental patients. Walking through the drafty corridors and arched hallways on heavy tiled floors, or climbing the precipitous steps to the second floor of the hospital at Saint-Rémy can be an overwhelming experience, as the asylum stands today much as it was when Van Gogh was there. The acoustics are awash with deep reverbs and the cold outside drafts in under the heavy wooden doors, as the high ceilings and broad walls seem to radiate heat upward and away from the floor, leaving a chilly atmosphere in the living space below. Van Gogh believed the environment of the old monastery was affecting his mental health, exciting strange religious passions and ideas within, agitating his senses so that he might experience another “religious exaltation.” In a letter to Theo on 20

September 1889, he fretted:

And I insist on repeating it – I’m astonished that with the modern ideas I have, I being such an ardent admirer of Zola, of De Goncourt and of artistic things which I feel so much, I have crises like a superstitious person would have, and that mixed-up, atrocious religious ideas come to me such as I never had in my head in the north.

On the assumption that, very sensitive to surroundings, the already prolonged stay in these old cloisters which are the Arles hospital and the

home here would be sufficient in itself to explain these crises—then—even as a stopgap—it might be necessary to go into a lay asylum at present.<sup>393</sup>

The idea as Vincent saw it was that if he had “another fit of religious exaltation,”<sup>394</sup> and he feared that in the coming winter one might recur, then Theo would know what to do in arranging his immediate transfer to Paris.

Vincent was growing increasingly tired of the asylum at Saint-Rémy, of his nearly two-month confinement inside the hospital, since his attack in mid-July, and of the treatment of his fellow patients.<sup>395</sup> In a letter written to Theo on September 10, he lamented:

The treatment of the patients in this hospital is certainly easy to follow, even on a journey, for they do absolutely *nothing* about it, they leave them to vegetate in idleness and feed them with stale and slightly spoiled food . . .<sup>396</sup>

Vincent was convinced there would be another attack and used his work as a buffer against it. “But I myself am *counting* on it recurring, but only work preoccupies me so thoroughly that I think that with the body I have it will continue like this for a long time. The idleness in which these poor unfortunates vegetate is a plague . . .”<sup>397</sup> The painter greatly feared that something overwhelming might overtake him, and his concern with his environment and its ancient religious atmosphere seemed to stir up this sensitivity.

He confided to Theo in the postscript of the same letter:

You’ll understand that I’ve tried to compare the second crisis with the first, and I say only this to you: it appears to me to be some kind of

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<sup>393</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, 20 September 1889, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, in “Van Gogh: The Letters,” <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let805/letter.html>. 805.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Vincent had created portraits of some of the patients in the hospital and generally felt a kinship for them, even if he believed some of them were worse off.

<sup>396</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, 10 September 1890, in “Van Gogh: The Letters,” <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let801/letter.html>. 801.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

influence from outside rather than a cause that comes from within myself. I may be mistaken, but whatever the case I think you'll consider it right that I'm a little horrified by all religious exaggeration. I can't help thinking of good André\_Bonger, who himself let out loud shouts when anyone wanted to try out some unguent or other on him.<sup>398</sup>

In in the late spring of 1890, Van Gogh was released from the hospital at Saint-Remy and traveled to a village approximately 30 kilometers northwest of Paris, to be put under the care of Dr. Paul Gachet, a psychiatrist who treated patients in Paris, but whose specialty was treating artists like Pissarro, who had been a patient and made the referral on Vincent's behalf to visit the physician's country house in Auvers-sur-Oise, the village where Vincent had rented a garret above the café at the Auberge Ravoux. Vincent took his daily meals there and lived in a tiny room next to a Dutch painter. Auvers had become a kind of artists' colony, attracting painters like Daubigny and Pissarro,<sup>399</sup> who had visited the Gachet home, where existed the most impressive collection of impressionists works the doctor had been amassing for some time. Van Gogh had come to the north to recover from the illness he believed he acquired from his days in Arles and Provence. Early on about Gachet he wrote:

. . . . I readily think that I'll end up being friends with him. He told me, besides, that if melancholy or something else were to become too strong for me to bear, he could well do something again to lessen its intensity, and that I mustn't be embarrassed to be open with him. Well, that moment when I have need of him may indeed come, however up to today things are going well. And they may get even better, I still believe that it's above all an illness of the south that I caught, and that the return here will be enough to dispel all that.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Daubigny's house and lawns were converted into a museum that features several of his daughter's designs and motifs hand-painted on the walls.

<sup>400</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh and Jo Van Gogh-Bonger, 25 May 1890, Auvers-sur-Oise, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let875/letter.html>. 875.

Van Gogh had been averaging a little more than a painting a day in Auvers, venturing into the countryside to paint the turbulent oceanic wheatfields, and into the village to paint the thatched cottages and the old Medieval church underneath a brooding black-and-blue sky. He had also painted the two legendary portraits of Dr. Gachet in the melancholic pose with the foxgloves, and one of his daughter Marguerite at the piano in the physician's living room, which was cluttered with paintings, etchings, and Victorian bric-a-brac. On 6 July 1890, Vincent had spent the day at his brother's apartment in Paris, having lunch with his wife Jo, and received visitors like Albert Aurier.<sup>401</sup>

Toulouse-Lautrec had showed him his own portrait of another woman at the piano, which had astonished Vincent, since he had just finished the one he had made of Marguerite Gachet in Auvers.<sup>402</sup> The visit had otherwise not gone very well,<sup>403</sup> and in a letter from Theo to Vincent on 14 July 1890, Theo shares his concerns for his brother's fragile health:

I hope, my dear Vincent, that your health is good, and as you said that you're writing with difficulty and don't speak to me about your work, I'm a little afraid that there's something that's bothering you or that isn't going right. In that case, do go and see Dr. Gachet, he'll perhaps give you something that will buck you up again.<sup>404</sup>

After Van Gogh returned on the train to Auvers, he resumed his frantic work habits, exploring new canvases he had been contemplating, like *Daubigny's Garden*, which he

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<sup>401</sup> Aurier had *recently* written a colorful piece about Van Gogh's art in *Mercure de France* in January, less than a year before the artist's death.

<sup>402</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh and Jo Van Gogh-Bonger, 10 July 1890, Auvers-sur-Oise, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let898/letter.html>. 898.

<sup>403</sup> Vincent had endured a long train ride back to Auvers, and had not felt well, despite the attention that his work was now gaining and the admirers who came to Theo's to visit the painter because of it, especially after his exhibit that Aurier had made so recently famous for him in his article. It seems the closer Vincent's reputation moved towards fame the closer he was to his own death.

<sup>404</sup> Theo Van Gogh to Vincent Van Gogh, 22 July 1890, Paris, in "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let901/letter.html>. 901.

painted behind the artist's large home, and some panoramas of the wheatfields, which further exhausted his already frayed mind and depression-depleted physical energies. He had shared his own concerns about his health in Auvers to Theo.<sup>405</sup> "It is no slight matter when we are all made aware that our daily bread is at risk, no slight matter when for different reasons we are also made aware of the precariousness of our existence."<sup>406</sup> Jo had reported he seemed very fatigued and haggard during his visit, and very much wanted to return home to get back to his paintings, missing a chance to visit with Guillaumin, a fellow painter and friend. His sensitivity to the financial drain he believed he had become on Theo and his new family stressed him considerably. In a letter to Theo he confided:

Once back here I too still felt very saddened, and had continued to feel the storm that threatens you also weighing upon me. What can be done—you see I usually try to be quite good-humoured, but my life, too, is attacked at the very root, my step also is faltering. I feared—not completely—but a little nonetheless—that I was a danger to you, living at your expense—but Jo's letter clearly proves to me that you really feel that for my part I am working and suffering like you.<sup>407</sup>

Vincent's sense of financial guilt and the frustration over his achievements as a painter he manages much better in his native Dutch to his mother and sister Willemien. In his last letter to them, Vincent reports on the calm effects of the garden and the countryside, and later to Theo on their positive therapeutic effect, though he also reveals the extremes of

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<sup>405</sup> Vincent was more than fatigued and depressed, as his letters suggest he was more worried about finances now that Theo had a newborn to take care of in addition to his wife, Jo. Some Van Gogh critics have theorized that these increased financial pressures are the reason he may have killed himself.

<sup>406</sup> Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh and Jo Van Gogh-Bonger, 10 July 1890, Auvers. "Van Gogh: The Letters," <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let898/letter.html>. 898.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

feeling evoked in the new wheatfield paintings, which continued to drain his energies.

To Theo he records:

There—once back here I set to work again—the brush however almost falling from my hands and—knowing clearly what I wanted I’ve painted another three large canvases since then. They’re immense stretches of wheatfields under turbulent skies, and I made a point of trying to express sadness, extreme loneliness.<sup>408</sup>

On 27 July 1890, Vincent walked into the fields to paint the countryside as was his habit for years, but this time he returned limping to his garret, having lost a tremendous amount of blood from a self-inflicted gun-shot wound to his chest. He had survived for two days with Theo by his side, and finally died on 29 July 1890, aged 37. Theo recorded his last words in a letter to his sister Elisabeth: “He himself wanted to die, when I sat at his bedside and said that we would try to get him better and that we hoped that he would then be spared this kind of despair, he said, “*La tristesse durera toujours*” [The sadness will last forever].”<sup>409</sup>

For those physicians in the late nineteenth century like Gachet who had kept traditional ideas of melancholia and its relationship to the artists alive, others rising from European psychiatry, like Emil Kraepelin and Eugen Bleuler, were re-writing the medical taxonomies, replacing melancholia—which as a single term had done the heavy work of medical diagnosis for over 2500 years—with terms like depression, manic depression, and schizophrenia. Freud would further redefine melancholia and distinguish it from mourning in his famous essay of 1917, but in his own way as a classicist, and like Gachet, he kept the traditions between art and nervous illness alive. Freud defined

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> "Theo van Gogh to Elisabeth van Gogh: 5 August 1890," *Van Gogh's Letters*, accessed September 18, 2016, <http://www.webexhibits.org/vangogh/letter/21/etc-Theo-Lies.htm>.

modern melancholia using the same cardinal symptom of prolonged sadness for no apparent cause as the Hippocratic writers had done so long ago. Freud had also allowed unknown causes for melancholia to remain buried in the unconscious, and to conclude that the term had simply too many symptoms out of which to construct a unitary theory.<sup>410</sup> Jennifer Radden observes, “Despite the essay’s novelty, several features of the older, Renaissance tradition appear to have found their way into Freud’s writing here.”<sup>411</sup>

Idleness among creative people who suffered from mental illnesses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a perceived reality, one necessary, and against which the remedies of hard work could temper the throes of melancholia and madness, from Burton’s dictum that all idleness leads to melancholia, to Gachet’s insistence that Vincent plunge headlong into his painting as a means of staving off his affliction. The idleness of the poets and *flâneurs* was never a complete inactivity, except during periods of severe melancholia and madness, when as artists naturally they were unable to work. And while labor was intensive and required the disciplines necessary for any complex craft, the efforts of poets and writers and other artists and composers were not the same as those manufactured by the industrial ideal, the toils based on productivity that drive—especially today with computers—the business and academic ecologies of the electronic world. Art was messy but not industrial, not oppressive, and for Blake it could be nothing but vision, a sympathy for the chimney sweeper. The frantic madness that the young Blake had intuited and warned against in his early songs was moderated by a form of reflective melancholy that could help the poet process the sudden visions and voices that inspired by day yet that in themselves offered no interpretation.

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<sup>410</sup> Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, 282.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*

If Smart had found his affiliation to the animal kingdom praiseworthy in the asylum, Baudelaire had lamented the languorous and splenetic in the flux of urban alienation. If Cowper praised nature as a check against despondency, Baudelaire though plagued by syphilis had turned his gaze at least momentarily outward—from his early days as a young *flâneur* experimenting with hashish and opium at the Hôtel Pimodan—to the ragpickers, vagabonds, and street musicians of Paris in his new prose poems, primed by an awareness of urban outcasts like Blake in London, the poet intoxicated by the new milieu Baudelaire had seen imitated in the caricatures of artists he believed were imaging the infinite iterations of modernity, its self-generated *ennui*, its melancholia, its damning influences.

## FUTURE MELANCHOLIES

### Chapter 5 The Automaton

In the beginning of the twentieth century, melancholia became depression. While it left medical taxonomy as a central idea for organizing mental illness as a clinical phenomenon, it did not leave the culture that it had defined in the West for over 2500 years. Melancholia instead filtered through the newly remediated systems of civilization, as a term that had lost its humoral status in medicine but defined the gaze of a new uncertainty, an alienating modernity, still the hallmark of genius and a plague on the poets, but also a symbol of madness, global war, and megadeath. The age could be melancholic in ways it had never before. No longer a mere disease nosology, no longer the menace of German psychiatry, melancholia was in the new machines that vied to control the world, machines of war, computation, mass transit, and communication. It remained a diagnosis in the hands of artists, critics, mathematicians and philosophers, as it had always been since Aristotelean times. The shift in medical taxonomy from melancholia to depression occurred gradually across multiple editions (at least 8) of Emil Kraepelin's *Psychiatry: A Textbook for Students and Physicians*, the final version of which was published in 1913.<sup>412</sup> This was a time of great upheaval in the visual arts that witnessed Kandinsky's early abstract musical paintings, *Composition #7* appearing in 1913, and in music, Arnold Schoenberg's free atonal compositions searching for a new logic to order his own emergent method towards a new music composed outside any formal key. 1913 was also the year Ezra Pound published his iconic poem "In a Station

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<sup>412</sup> Shorter, *How Everyone Became Depressed: The Rise and Fall of the Nervous Breakdown*, 99-100.

of the Metro” in the equally iconic journal *Poetry*. The rise of Dada, through which artists like Duchamp had questioned the role of authorship and the idea of originality, appeared alongside other movements in art like surrealism, which had first attempted in its early period to depict the workings of the subconscious mind, the interactions of the imagination and dreams with the dark realities of modernity. André Breton, had called his movement “pure psychic automatism.”

The workings of automated intelligence had also been a focus among inventors, engineers, and scientists in Western culture since the Enlightenment. Self-organizing machines are rooted in the history of melancholia and its designation as a figure for exploring consciousness. The automaton is the central (multi-mediated) figure to represent late modernity. This is so in part because it synthesizes then deconstructs the technological work of art as Benjamin perceived it in “an age of mechanical reproduction.” Or, as Postmoderns have restyled his work lately, in “the age of its technological reproducibility.”<sup>413</sup> The automaton is technology at a rubicon, a (hybrid) between science and art in a state of instability. The automaton is a figural system representing technological attempts toward machine self-consciousness, science becoming self-aware, and in late modernity, a digital narcissism based on a calculative vision and binary logic that some transhumanists believe will construct the digital consciousness as a form of infinite longevity through uploadable being. It is thus in the perceived nature of AI to be computational and self-directed, to require no movers. Turing’s iconic paper on Universal Machines in 1936, “On Computable Numbers, with

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<sup>413</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, and Howard Eiland 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 24.

an Application to the *Entscheidungsproblem*” and Von Neumann’s self-replicating machines and his development of digital computer architecture, defined the Atomic Age within a period of great global instability, during the second world war and the loss of over 52 million lives. The automaton became a developmental figure to help demonstrate abstract mathematical proofs, perform cellular automata experiments, rehearse problems of uncertainty, appearing in the innumerable iterations calculated by the Turing machine, to probe the depths of AI and [un]decidability, including its counterpart QI (Quantum Intelligence), after the physics of the early twentieth century and its kind, and the following Atomic Age, mirroring Democritus and his ancient atomic theory, ever looking, according to Hippocrates, for the seat of melancholia among his anatomical experiments. The technology behind the collapse of the atom as the most destructive force in nature at the close of the second war, also generated the most creative force in the emergence of the digital computer. This dual nature reflected the structure and cardinal condition of melancholia that had lasted over 2500 years, as an unknown force that was enormously self-destructive as it was generative. Now these energies had algorithms to define their uncertain structure, probabilities left undecided and open to infinite potentials, so that numbers created things automatically, by self-referential instruction sets, a binary logic discovered by Leibniz running on an architecture created much later by von Neumann. The effects on the world were literally apocalyptic, and the uncertainty and instability of computational science and creative media back then have replicated into the present, into an undefined and over-hyphenated age, whether post-organic, post-digital, post-human, post-modern or something else.

Before this period of near infinite reproducibility, technological instability, and global cataclysm, the emergence of a mechanical melancholia was symbolized in various automata traceable in the writings of Hoffmann and Coleridge about uncanny musical instruments that were unsettling, horrific, and unmelodious. By the turn of the century, the cardinal features of Hippocratic melancholia, prolonged sadness and fear without cause, had submerged into the dark automatic unconscious, the highly associative and enigmatic source of inspiration for expressionists like Schoenberg in music and Kandinsky in visual art, who viewed the unconscious as an apparatus that could express what Kandinsky called the “inner necessity.” Around the same time, a counter to the elevation of the new had emerged among artists like Michel Duchamp and the Dadaists, who questioned the authenticity of the author and the notion of originality, presenting as their own works found objects and ready-mades that suggested a work of art was an iteration belonging to a much larger series, in what Walter Benjamin had already dubbed an age of mechanical reproduction, lamenting the loss of immediacy and uniqueness in works of art.

These mechanistic iterations had been influential within German psychiatry and its interpretations of mental illness and inventions on the unconscious. No longer relevant to Modernist medicine at the turn of the century, having lost its humoral intellect, melancholia was finally replaced by the new term *depression*, which Kraepelin described in the 8<sup>th</sup> iteration of his taxonomy as an “automatic machine”<sup>414</sup> that disabled the volition of its sufferers, leaving them unthinking and listless, their daily behaviors expressed as mechanical actions without will or intention. Thus in the early twentieth

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<sup>414</sup> Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, 261.

century, many of the most influential figures in German psychiatry believed those who suffered from depression could be expected to exhibit symptoms that resembled the workings of automata, behaviors which historically had been associated with musical instruments in writings related to the tension between the organic and mechanical, the creative and the destructive impulses that inflect early twentieth century ideas of melancholia. (In the eighteenth century alone, a period of great interest in the automaton, one encounters Goethe's marionette in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, whom Kraepelin cites in his text on psychiatry;<sup>415</sup> then Coleridge, whose poems anticipate the musical automaton as an apparatus of creative inspiration: "Ode to Dejection," "Eolian Harp," "Kubla Khan," and "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit"; and also the classic musical automata that populate E.T.A. Hoffmann's iconic short story "The Automaton," which imagines a super-harp driven by powerful storm winds.)

In a prosaic age of multimedia propagation and information surplus inflected by forms that immerse and overload the senses, the musical automaton reloads its eerie artificial echo as a semblance of the musically human within a history that suggests consciousness itself is musical. The musical automaton is thus an abstraction that models the problem of melancholic consciousness and its relation to computational being, poetic inspiration, and its shift to the more prosaic depression as both a diagnostic criterion and a prevailing response to an apocalyptic worldview. The shift in poetry from the lyric to prose that began with the French poets of the nineteenth century, occurred during a similar metamorphosis in medicine in the renaming of melancholia, the poetic term, to depression, the prosaic term, in the early twentieth. Put another way, when the rhyme

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

scheme vanished and the lyric waned, the armature of poetry for over 2500 years was replaced by an upsurge of prose poetry, an event that was synchronous with the conversion of the more poetic *melancholia* to the more prosaic *depression*. As the age became more prosaic and less poetic, so did its medical terms.

### **MECHANICAL ORACLE**

Aristotle's discussion in his treatise on dreams about the *phatasmata* of his melancholics affirms the ancient conception of *envisioning* the future through dreams and prophetic utterance, the role assumed by the poets inspired by madness and the sibyls of the Greek temples. Since the times of the sibyls, divine madness as a form of melancholia had been concerned with predicting the future, especially through the discernment of voices, whether from intoxicants, the rustling of sacred oak trees, or among the mantic tones of bronze cauldrons. Through consultations with the temple priestesses the unknown could be divined from an unperceivable future and its cloud of uncertainties. Greek temples also used automata to animate doors and fountains to suggest to aspirants that the divine presence was near and thus might be consulted through the Pythia. The automaton of ancient times was a model functioning in the Greek religion as a system behind the scenes, as a network and not as a persona, which was sometimes used dramatically in the Greek chorus. Elaborate tubing systems were also installed in temple structures where it was important to project voices to be heard as if they were emanating from the supernatural world within the walls surrounding the supplicants.

Ancient cultures like the Greeks and Hebrews were greatly concerned with the future and obsessed with discerning its courses. Jacob Burckhardt once keenly observed, "With the Greeks we are dealing with a people whose belief in divination was truly

unlimited, who were occupied with the future in large matters and in small, with the destinies of the individual and the state, every day and every hour.”<sup>416</sup> The oracles and sanctuaries functioned to discern the future of both the individual and the state. In ancient Greece the oracles were located in temples. On the limestone slopes of Mount Parnassus, source point of the Muses, lie the ruins of the ancient high place at Delphi, the temple of the musical god Apollo, where the petitioner was warned in advance of consultation with the Pythia: *gnothi sauton*, “know yourself.”<sup>417</sup> It was, as Foucault says, intended as wise technical advice to be heeded, potentially to one’s peril if not, for the Delphic principle meant technically: “Do not suppose yourself to be a god.”<sup>418</sup> To be in consultation with the Pythia was to inhabit a system of riddles. Being at one remove in the contortions of the Pythia’s ecstatic state could be a dangerous thing, her predictions beheld in awe, where extreme utterance held the status of prophecy, where out of the unstable world of chaos and creation emerged reliable truths for good or bad.

At the foot of Mount Tomaros in northwestern Greece is the ancient temple of Zeus, in Dodona, near the modern city of Ioannina. The site is considered by archaeologists to contain the oldest of the Greek temples, and is mentioned by Herodotus, putting its age at least over 3000 years. To hear the messages of the oracles the temple priests listened for the voices in the rustling leaves of the sacred oak. The priests also listened to the ring tones of musical instruments, bronze cauldrons hung from the trees or set from tripods, chanting obscure utterance, like the Pythia of Delphi. Supplicants asked their questions, and the priests inscribed them on thin lead tablets to give to the Pythia for

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<sup>416</sup> Vandenberg, *Mysteries of the Oracles: The Last Secrets of Antiquity*, 21.

<sup>417</sup> Michel Foucault et al., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 19.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

consultation, tablets that have been preserved for over 2400 years, from the time of the Hippocratic writings. Archaeologist Philipp Vandenberg writes, “What took place at Dodona in the earliest period is unique, however in the whole world of antiquity for another reason: in no other oracle did the ears play such an important role.”<sup>419</sup>

Dodona also contains the ruins of a *bouleuterion* (large council house) and an amphitheater, at the top of which a single tree is alighted, as if a thing to be consulted, perhaps regarded like a familiar of the Pythia, and today remains enigmatic, as trees are fit to become that are singled out in an open field or near the rocks and reeds at a marshwater; a permanent fixture in the theatre above an audience these days of mostly pocked stones set in steep semi-circular rows, cracked and worn by over 2400 years of wind and rain. The atmosphere at Dodona is peaceful, its remarkable silence intermittent only with the dull metallic bells of distant goatherds, in a mountain valley where the winds track all day and slightly bend the trees. The ruins of the temple at Zeus, no more than 20 to 25 feet in dimension, are withered down to the nub of an outdoor room, its votives gone missing, its walls and columns long ago relocated, now in their current eroded forms serving as a trace around a much newer oak tree, though one still antique looking, standing in for the original it is supposed to represent in a space of low-lying stone walls, some tainted in pink and lilac like the residues of old molds that have seeped into an ancient rockbed. Dodona is interesting because its priests interpreted messages from the sounds produced by uncontrolled winds in tree leaves, and later the winds played the bronze cauldrons of the temple like musical instruments, the priests (and priestesses) anticipating voices in the long-ringing pitches reverberating from the

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<sup>419</sup> Vandenberg, *Mysteries of the Oracles: The Last Secrets of Antiquity*, 30.

resonant lips of large bells. In his chapter “The Artificial Voices at Dodona,”

Vandenberg continues:

The predictive function of the gongs of Dodona, derived from the resounding of the bronze bowls, no doubt arose by accident . . . Only when it was believed that voices could be identified more loudly and more clearly than in the rustling of the oak tree did the gongs of Dodona take on a predictive function.<sup>420</sup>

The bronze cauldrons performed the function of live musical streams that assisted the priests in an automatic way, providing a stimulus to interpretation, a musical substrate from which the message of the oracle could be derived and interpreted.

### **Musical Automata**

Music has been integral in the development of instruments to help practitioners of various arts predict the future since ancient times. The bronze cauldrons delivered wind-wrought sounds that through priestly interaction regenerated the voices of the oracle in the temple at Dodona. In the first century BC, musician and inventor Hero of Alexandria “suggested creating music by striking a taut chord by hammer.”<sup>421</sup> This configuration suggests an action similar to a piano. In his text *Automata*, he described “automatic machines able to create stage effects in temples,” like magically opened doors that were designed to impress the curious, and he invented automata that “resembled human or animal actions like birds singing or self-operating beings.”<sup>422</sup> “The Ancient Greeks were clearly obsessed with the notion of creating mechanical living beings or automata.”<sup>423</sup> In *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices*, by Al-Jazari Ibn Al-Razzaz, a

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>421</sup> Sara Tagliagambara and Gabriele Niccolia, *Leonardo da Vinci: Automations and Robotics* (Poggio a Caiano, IT: CB Edizioni, 2011), 11.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 9.

twelfth century astronomer, inventor, and artist, Al-Jazari describes his mechanical “boat with 4 automatic musicians that floated on a lake to entertain guests at royal drinking parties. The floating ship could play music thanks to four musicians: two drummers, a flautist, and a harpist.”<sup>424</sup> Art history scholar Sara Tagliagambe further describes the musical automata aboard the ship:

The mechanical device is particularly interesting for the presence of the two drummers. The two musicians played drums thanks to a programmable device with cams and plungers that, knocking on levers, create the percussion: it was a programmable drum machine. The devices could play different scores and rhythms . . . Al-Jazari created a band, consist[ing] of musical robots, able to have ‘more than fifty facial and body movements during each musical selection.’<sup>425</sup>

Many automata were musical because of the power of melody and sound to enchant or suggest the magical, features important for ritual as well as entertainment. During the revival of automata in the Renaissance, inventor-artists created artificial motion and programmable action using mechanics. Leonardo’s drawing of a musical automaton (CA 579r)<sup>426</sup> reveals a mechanical drum machine crafted from a system of loops, cords, pulleys and notches that he designed in humanoid form, whose control mechanism, the wooden ratchet device (CA 1077r)<sup>427</sup> that programmed the stick strokes, was the notched heart of the automaton. It is interesting that the programmable ratchet mechanism was installed to function as the heart and not as the brain, possibly for some logistical reason that overrode any symbolic significance of placing the mechanism in the head. The automaton’s playback control was animated by the movement of wheels in a self-propelled cart to which the automaton was attached. Leonardo created an early

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 16-18.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 113-124.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 124.

programmable drum machine in the form of a robot likely for use in parades, and possibly to impress the court and the Duke of Milan at Sforza Castle.

In the spirit of the mechanical and animated, there was an automaton craze that hit courtly life in Europe in the eighteenth century, producing musical automata that entertained and impressed audiences in private courts and marveled larger audiences in the civic arena, especially in the opera houses.<sup>428</sup> Musicologist Carolyn Abbate writes, “Late eighteenth century German opera displayed a sudden fondness for magic zithers, violins, flutes, and bells, the self-starting instruments whose mechanics were investigated contemporaneously by the great automaton makers of the Enlightenment. These autonomous instruments in operas were associated with Orphic power, and the greatest work in this tradition is Mozart’s *Magic Flute*.”<sup>429</sup> The uncanny automaton of ancient times, the machine intended to enchant and mystify, did not return until the Romantic era, and broadly so in German literature, as a way to explore the netherworld of mechanical animation in musical performance.<sup>430</sup> “From a perspective at the beginning of the twenty-first century,” Abbate continues, “musical mechanism is patently disquieting; it was patently so by the time E.T.A. Hoffmann wrote his famous stories about automata, after 1810.”<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> “. . . in the latter half of the eighteenth century, automata were celebrated inventions and familiar art objects.” Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, Princeton Studies in Opera (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 105.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>430</sup> Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), Loc. 2357, Kindle.

<sup>431</sup> Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 105.

## VOX AUTOMATA

Hoffmann's long short story "The Automaton" is centered around a form of early AI. In the story the intelligence resides in an automated Turkish figure that has the power to predict the future and to read the mind. While its outward construction and movements are sensational for audiences, serving an entertainment function, its intelligence works as an oracle that is able to know the soul of the petitioner that comes not so much to appraise its animated gestures but to hear its whispered pronouncements in the form of uncanny answers to whatever question may be posed. Hoffmann's vision of the automaton is thus a dark warning, a looming concern about the disconcerting presence of automata masked by the fascination in the eighteenth century with mechanized animations in familiar humanized forms that generated nonetheless a soulless tension in their audiences. Abbate discerns:

The animated figure we confront, astonishingly talented at assuming human functions, suggests that we could look down to find our own chests covered by brass plates, ripped open to expose 'an elegant clockwork' within. The perfected mechanical man injures human individuality and consciousness.<sup>432</sup>

During an unserious exchange between the automaton Turk, his audience and two college students (Ferdinand and Lewis), in what amounts to a show of disrespect, Ferdinand makes jokes about the Turk's predictive powers. He then poses to the Turk a cryptic question about the happiest moment in his life, and the Turk answers knowingly, uncannily, in a whispered response only Ferdinand can hear, which is his technique, prognosticating the future death of Ferdinand's one true romance with his beloved, a woman whose image Ferdinand wears inconspicuously from a gold necklace. The

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 195.

pronouncement unsettles him deeply, brings him to a melancholic state, during which he also marvels at the unseen mechanism by which “the invisible being,”<sup>433</sup> the intelligence behind the animation of the automaton, “reads the very soul of the questioner,”<sup>434</sup> especially those who do not respect its enigmatic workings. The prognostication is like William Cowper’s voice of condemnation that tells him upon his third derangement that his life is finished.

Ferdinand and his friend Lewis visit Professor X, the inventor of the automaton Turk, hoping to discern its mystery and to question the professor about its dark prognostication over Ferdinand. The Professor opens his hall of musical automata to his guests, and performs a cacophonous musical jam session on a piano with them. The automatic band includes an orchestrion,<sup>435</sup> a mechanical flautist, a glass harmonica player, two mechanical percussionists, and an assortment of mechanical clocks on the walls. Lewis attacks the music as horrific, soulless, and eerily motorized. In his critique of the automata he generalizes, “At all events, all machine-music is to me a thing altogether monstrous and abominable; and a good stocking-loom is, in my opinion, worth all the most perfect and ingenious musical clocks in the universe put together.”<sup>436</sup> Ferdinand also disliked the music of the automata, but was fascinated by the mechanical performance of the strange band, even if it was stiffly rendered.

As a music critic and mouthpiece for Hoffmann, Lewis next opens his discussion on the organic features of musical performance in general. “For is it the breath, merely, of

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<sup>433</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Automaton* (London, UK: Read Books, 2012), 27.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>435</sup> A mechanical instrument designed to imitate the sounds of an orchestra, which was actively developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Emily I. Dolan, “The Origin of the Orchestra Machine,” *Current Musicology* 76 (Fall 2003): 7.

<sup>436</sup> Hoffmann, *The Automaton*, 35.

the performer on a wind-instrument, or the skilful [sic], supple fingers of the performer on a stringed instrument, which evoke those tones which lay upon us a spell of such power, and awaken that inexpressible feeling, akin to nothing else on earth, the sense of a distant spirit world, and of our own higher life therein?" Lewis reveals that it is via the music of the air, in the crystalline tones of the spheres, that inspiration for musical works may be experienced, just as Ferdinand had heard the perfect singing voice of his beloved, in bell-like tones pure and crystalline, that woke his strange awareness in the middle of a dream. Lewis recalls:

I often used to listen, on quiet moonlight nights, to hear if those wondrous tones would come to me, borne on the wings of the whispering airs . . . those nature-tones have not yet all departed from the world, for we have an instance of their survival and occurrence in that 'Music of the Air' or 'Voice of the Demon,' mentioned by a writer on Ceylon—a sound which so powerfully affects the human system, that even the least impressionable persons, when they hear those tones of nature imitating, in such a terrible manner, the expression of human sorrow and suffering, are stuck with painful compassion and profound terror!<sup>437</sup>

All throughout "The Automaton" it is an idealized perfection in the tonality of bells, not in the metallurgic calculations of mechanical mixtures, that inspiration filters through to the artist and to the musical performer, who renders a natural performance that is opposite in character to the mechanical harshness of the musical automata of Professor X's studio creations. "Make me thy Lyre, even as the forest is," writes Shelley in "Ode to the West Wind," throwing his imagination to the afflatus that is associated with the wind as the source of musical inspiration. The poet commands a transformation into a musical instrument, as a thing capable of animation driven by external, unseen forces like an Æolian harp or a tree of wind chimes. Shelley willfully submits to the musical influences

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

of external forces to generate the motion of his poem. Ferdinand gives the example of the Æolian harp, that generative musical instrument played by the wind, emitting random tones in a melancholic musical mode. When Ferdinand asks Lewis his opinion of the Æolian harp, he replies,

Every attempt . . . to tempt Nature to give forth her tones is glorious and highly worthy of our attention . . . yet we have only offered her trifling toys, which she has often shattered to pieces in her indignation. Much grander [an] idea than all those playthings (like Æolian harps) was the ‘storm harp’ which I have read of. It was made of thick chords of wire, which were stretched out at considerable distances apart, in the open country, and gave forth great, powerful chords when the wind smote upon them.<sup>438</sup>

It is not just the nature tones “wondrously engendered in the air” that move on the kind of organically formed music that Lewis and Ferdinand hear in the woods or in their dreams that challenge the mechanized performances of the musical automata. It is rather a powerful, melancholic sound that Lewis had heard before at his residence in East Prussia.

He relates:

I had been living there for some time; it was about the end of autumn, when, on quiet nights, with a moderate breeze blowing, I used distinctly to hear tones, sometimes resembling the deep, stopped, pedal pipe of an organ, and sometimes like the vibrations from a deep, soft-toned bell. I often distinguished, quite clearly, the low F, and the fifth above it (the C), and not seldom the minor third above, E flat, was perceptible as well; and then this tremendous chord of the seventh, so woeful and so solemn, produced on one the effect of the most intense sorrow, and even of terror!<sup>439</sup>

Thus the cardinal symptoms of melancholia, intense sorrow and fear, are present in the music in a sublime way, whether automatically intoned on giant wind-driven storm harps in a valley, or in some liminal space between dream and woods, where organ music rises

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 39.

in seventh chords. A famous pen and brown ink drawing from Hieronymus Bosch “The Hearing Forest and the Seeing Field” (1500), features anatomical human ears hovering in a grove of trees, and eyes peeping out from a meadow, reflecting an old Dutch proverb about the tensions between the city and the countryside,<sup>440</sup> but the image also represents an entranced nature, watching and hearing, a nature that might be regarded similarly in some neighborhood of East Prussia, but one speaking as with a voice, resounding as a musical instrument in the distance, intoning gloomy minor thirds and enchanted sevenths.

Coleridge also used musical instruments in his iconic poems to suggest sources of imaginative inspiration, as instanced in *Kubla Khan*, a narcotic dream vision manifested to the music of lady dulcimer, honeydew, and the milk of the poppy. In “Eolian Harp,” the poet’s inspiration is treated as an auditory experience that is moved by external forces. As the harp is a stringed instrument played randomly by the wind, so the poet’s imagination is the musical instrument on which the inspirational muse plays, rousing ancient pre-conscious images that appear in his visionary poems like *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.<sup>441</sup>

The musical intensity of the imagination as a creative faculty is pitched by some outer source and expresses the opposite energy of his poem about melancholia, “Dejection: An Ode.” An Æolian harp also appears in the beginning of this poem; the speaker, which is recognizably Coleridge’s voice, laments his flawed muse, figured again as a musical instrument that would sound better if it were silent given his inability to

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<sup>440</sup> Vereycken Karel, “With Hieronymus Bosch, On the Track of the Sublime,” *The Schiller Institute*, 2011, accessed October 2016, [http://schillerinstitute.org/educ/aesthetics/bosch\\_by\\_vereycken.html](http://schillerinstitute.org/educ/aesthetics/bosch_by_vereycken.html).

<sup>441</sup> For more about Coleridge and Julian Jaynes’ theory of the bicameral mind, see Judith Weissman, “Vision, Madness, and Morality: Poetry and the Theory of the Bicameral Mind,” *The Georgia Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1979).

create anything in his current listless and idle state, engrossed in the dull pain that stifles his creativity. Coleridge is a transitional figure-poet oscillating between madness and drug-induced vision of poetic inspiration. It is a musical instrument that modulates his mood. In “Dejection: An Ode,” the poet laments,

This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence  
unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade  
than those which mold yon cloud in lazy flakes,  
or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes  
upon the strings of this Eolian lute,  
which better far were mute.<sup>442</sup>

It is the dissonance in his mood that blocks the instrument’s beautiful expression, a bad wind paralyzing the chance for melody. Thus for many artists in Coleridge’s day there was a tension between creative control and surrender to creative inspiration, what later became an impulse as imagined by German psychiatrists much later during the time of melancholia’s medical morph to depression. The young Coleridge struggled with the anxiety between inspiration in “Eolian Harp” and artistic creativity in *Kubla Khan*, and its final shutdown in “Ode to Dejection.” When he was living with a surgeon who helped him with his opium addiction and depression, Coleridge wrote about this tension in his essay “Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit,” as a late work, published posthumously in 1840, which reflected a change in his view of consciousness and its nature in the creative imagination.

It is in his mature period in which his focus shifted from the poems to the philosophical and theological, though he wrote poetry throughout his life. Coleridge critiqued the formation of poetic inspiration as an automaton consciousness, which he

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<sup>442</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. H. J. Jackson, The Oxford Authors (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1985), 113.

likened in his earlier poems to the strings of a musical instrument vibrating in the wind, the creative faculty so dominant that the poet is left more stunned by the sublime than in control of his craft.<sup>443</sup> The muse of his poems is a dynamism, constructing musical instruments as mindforms. Rendering inspiration as a musical instrument was his mainstay, but he could not reduce the poet to a mere mouthpiece. Coleridge struggled with the Bible as a written document created by human minds, not the inspired work breathed through the prophets, whom he supposed had created their own words. In his late career essay “Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit,” he writes:

But let me once be persuaded that all these heart-awakening utterances of human hearts—of men of like faculties and passions with myself, mourning, rejoicing, suffering, triumphing—are but as a Divina Commedia of a superhuman—O bear with me, if I say—Ventriloquist;—that the royal harper, to whom I have so often submitted myself as a MANY-STRINGED INSTRUMENT for his fire-tipt fingers to traverse, while every several nerve of emotion, passion, thought, that thrids the flesh-and-blood of our common humanity, responded to the touch,—that this SWEET PSALMIST OF ISRAEL was himself as mere an instrument as his harp, an AUTOMATON poet, mourner, and supplicant;—all is gone,—all sympathy, at least, and all example. I listen in awe and fear, but likewise in perplexity and confusion of spirit.<sup>444</sup>

Coleridge was caught up in the ambiguities of being an artist in control of his craft and a poet alert to the reception of what voices outside his thoughts might visit his imagination as an inspiration, to be filtered and rendered in the poem at hand. Though *Kubla Khan* was written in 1797, he did not publish the poem until much later, the same year he published *Christabel*, in 1816, after Lord Byron had given his poet friend a private audience and encouraged their publication together.<sup>445</sup> On the evening that he

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<sup>443</sup> Savarese, "Lyric Mindedness and the 'Automaton Poet'," 1.

<sup>444</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Confessions of a Inquiring Spirit* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 17.

<sup>445</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (East Sussex, UK: Delphi Classics, 2013), Loc. 839, Kindle edition.

composed the poem, “in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of opium taken as a check for dysentery, at a Farm House between Porlock and Linton,”<sup>446</sup> he fell into a deep sleep. In the first publication of *Kubla Khan* in 1816, the original preface registers:

The author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort.<sup>447</sup>

In his intoxicated state, Coleridge experiences an automated dream vision, a string of images that appear autonomously alongside equivalent poetic expressions, set to the music of the dulcimer played by the Abyssinian maid.

A damsel with a dulcimer  
In a vision once I saw:  
It was an Abyssinian maid,  
And on her dulcimer she played,  
Singing of Mount Abora.  
Could I revive within me  
Her symphony and song,  
To such delight 'twould win me,  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!<sup>448</sup>

The experience features multiple art forms and it is ultimately synesthetic, with the music turning on the image machine in the poet’s imagination, like the *phantasmata* in the dreams of Aristotle’s *melancholikoi*. The music is the catalyst that animates the state of consciousness through which the automated visuals appear simultaneously with the self-generated expressions that Coleridge would later transcribe to words when he awoke

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Coleridge, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, 102.

<sup>448</sup> Coleridge, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Loc. 877-901.

from his dream. The poet had been interrupted by a visitor from Porlock on business, and when he returned to finish his poem, he had forgotten the rest of the vision and could not transcribe it to words. But this method of composition was revelatory, spontaneous, and very similar to William Blake's experience of merely dictating the progression of a poem without effort. Coleridge awoke from a deep dream to record his poem, but the images, the expressions, and the music have been set by a power he does not fully grasp, and that he cannot rule out as a kind of automaton consciousness, a suspension of authorial control, a release of poetic voice, so that the transcription becomes a passive participant to the enigma of original creation. Shelley also shared a fascination with the mysterious sources of artistic inspiration, and with Coleridge's lament over the loss of authorial control in automatism. In his *A Defense of Poetry*, Shelley wrote:

A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness . . . and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.<sup>449</sup>

Most of Shelley's poems come from a mind very conscious of writing them and not from muses as agents of a bicameral mind, as Judith Weismann argues is the case with Milton and his muse, Urania.<sup>450</sup> Milton invoked Urania while writing *Paradise Lost* and believed his muse combated his unwanted voices at night, influences he compares to Bacchanalian voices that tormented the "Thracian Bard" of pagan times.<sup>451</sup> In Book VII the poet dictates:

In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round  
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou

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<sup>449</sup> Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 376.

<sup>450</sup> In Roman mythology Urania is the muse of astronomy. Milton invoked the influences of the heavens while dictating his epic, similarly as Job addresses the constellations in the Bible.

<sup>451</sup> Weissman, "Vision, Madness, and Morality," 121.

Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn  
Purples the East: still govern thou my Song,  
Urania, and fit audience find, though few.  
But drive farr off the barbarous dissonance  
Of Bacchus and his revellers, the Race  
Of that wilde Rout that tore the Thracian Bard  
in Rhodope, where Woods and Rocks had Eares  
To rapture, till the savage clamor dround  
Both Harp and Voice; nor could the Muse defend  
Her Son. So fail not thou, who thee implores:  
For thou art Heav'nlie, shee an empty dreame.<sup>452</sup> (VII, 26-39)

For Julian Jaynes the poets who heard voices in connection with a muse existed in a schizophrenic state, hearing voices that nowadays suspend the mind lost in robotics. He observes:

Our mental space begins to vanish. We panic, and yet the panic is not happening to us. There is no us. It is not that we have nowhere to turn; we have nowhere. And in that nowhere, we are somehow automatons, unknowing what we do, being manipulated by others or by our voices in strange and frightening ways in a place we come to recognize as a hospital with a diagnosis we are told is schizophrenia. In reality, we have relapsed into the bicameral mind.<sup>453</sup>

In Jayne's bicameral reality, madness with the principal feature of hearing voices, is a residual influence that modernity inherited from the ancients. It was passed down as melancholia across the centuries. In Plato's *Dialogues* there are four forms of madness,<sup>454</sup> but in modern times there are numerous types delineated in psychiatric manuals. For Jaynes schizophrenia best represents the old bicameral state of the ancient poets because a principal feature of that diagnosis is voice hearing. Yet poets with

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<sup>452</sup> John Milton, "Paradise Lost," *dartmouth.edu*, accessed November 28 2016, [https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading\\_room/pl/book\\_1/text.shtml](https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/book_1/text.shtml).

<sup>453</sup> Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 405.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 406. Jaynes refers to Plato for the four forms of madness: "prophetic madness due to Apollo, ritual madness due to Dionysus, the poetic madness 'of those who are possessed by the Muses' . . . and, finally, erotic madness due to Eros and Aphrodite."

mental illness nowadays have been diagnosed with the affective disorders and depressions more often than with schizophrenia.<sup>455</sup>

Voices in ancient times served the predictive function in the sibyls and prophets. In modernity, often styled as a time of great uncertainty, the predictive function that once belonged to the sibyls and prophets is sought in the electronic machine, in its algorithms, its simultaneous access to data, and its transhumanist vision in the approaching future to immortalize consciousness. In a world of functional numbers where nearly everything is calculated, the computer is the basic unit of consultation. It is the decider of the undecidable, the predictor of the unpredictable.

In twentieth century medicine schizophrenia is an understanding of madness that is often paired with the automaton, with systems skewed and eccentric, visionary and mathematical. In schizophrenia emotion is flattened. If in ancient philosophy melancholia and divine madness were known by poetic ecstasy and emotional outburst, an influence that lasted for over 2500 years, then the schizoid became its intellectual counterpart in the late twentieth century, defining madness as a rarified cognitive atmosphere with an aura, and this among an outgrowth of machines in a technocracy with a dependence on invention and calculation. This is a major way schizophrenia had been encoded in Western culture, particularly among the writings of French intellectuals like Deleuze and Guattari, as a bewilderment with logic itself perceived through hallucinogenic filters. Schizophrenia is the breakdown of an algorithm as melancholia

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<sup>455</sup> See Nettle, *Strong Imagination: Madness, Creativity, and Human Nature*, 141-147. Nettle examined well-known studies of creativity and mental illness based on qualitative evidence—mostly biography and letters of artists—from Kay Redfield Jamison and Professor Arnold Ludwig. Nettle concluded from that data that poets suffer 10 times “the going rate of affective disorder” compared to the general population, 143.

had been the breakdown of the soul. Mental illnesses through their medical descriptors have been enfolded back into the aesthetics of culture in an attempt to define the condition of an age.

Machines as oracles serve the old melancholic function, like digital sibyls, producing riddles and forecasting strange predictions from huge data sets. Alan Turing's machine was universal and vatic, constructed to solve riddles, to encode and break codes, to probe undecidability. Built to run the binary logic of a seventeenth-century mathematician, its hardware was envisioned alongside the fission of the atom in a time of global war and previously unimaginable destruction. Since the time of Democritus, who theorized a conception of the atom and toiled among his anatomical dissections to find the source of his melancholia in the body (not the Greek soul as Plato had thought, or in Aristotle's dreams)—the dual nature of melancholia has always been a representation of the binary and atomic. In most constructions of melancholia throughout the ages, from Plato's divine madness and Aristotle's hot and cold bile, to Ficino's celestially-influenced humors, either inanimate or fiercely burning, the binary nature of melancholia has been theorized, as the body has been atomized: a creative type alongside an enormously destructive one, the force that creates a universe and another that destroys it.

## **AUTOMATIC UNCONSCIOUS**

The Romantics were intrigued by the creative powers of the mind beyond its conscious effort to control them through the workings of craft or the techniques of expression. Art became a method for tapping into the processes of mentation that seemed to be on the threshold of awareness. Coleridge thought poetic ideas were similarly processed by the imagination but he could not shake the frustration when ideas so spontaneously occurred

that he had felt played like a musical instrument, a metaphor of mind, fitting with his notion of the “automaton poet.” One scholar has written about the Romantic view of expression as an item of the sub-conscious. “Paradoxically speaking, the sub-conscious expresses itself in a moment of sudden realization. The Romantics emphasized that point by suggesting that the actual moment of creation lies on the threshold between the ‘sub-conscious’ and ‘consciousness.’”<sup>456</sup> Neither the arts or automatism presented any mechanism for such inspiration by the turn of the century, though Freud had just published his major work on the unconscious *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Romantic brain science viewed consciousness (after Thomas Willis who believed the soul was located entirely in the cerebral organ), as an organic (material) residing in the brain and not as a function of mechanical processes.<sup>457</sup>

As mental states perceived just below awareness, the unconscious had loomed in psychoanalytic literature as something dark and chaotic, a realm of mind to be tapped into or discerned through dreams and suggestion via associative logics and hypnosis. Yet Freud did not possess a complete hegemony in theorizing the unconscious or understanding its processes. Recent work has been written after the cognitive revolution about the emergence of the unconscious as an invention more than a discovery in the nineteenth century.<sup>458</sup> Markus Iseli has applied cognitive theory to Romantic ideas in the work of Thomas De Quincey and his writings about the subconscious in his text *Thomas*

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<sup>456</sup> Rüdiger Görner, "The Hidden Agent of the Self: Towards an Aesthetic Theory of the Non-Conscious in German Romanticism," in *Thinking the Unconscious: Nineteenth-Century German Thought*, eds. Angus Nicholls and Martin Liebscher (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 136.

<sup>457</sup> Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6, 8.

<sup>458</sup> See Angus Nicholls and Martin Liebscher, eds., *Thinking the Unconscious: Nineteenth-Century German Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

*De Quincey and the Cognitive Unconscious*. Iseli posits that an understanding of the cognitive unconscious can be retro-applied to De Quincey's works written 200 years earlier, that reveal the unconscious as a productive agent as opposed to the Freudian view of the unconscious as something controlled by lower-brain functions and drives that are incuriously dark and primitive. Citing cognitive theory, Iseli observes:

In 'Unconscious Processes' (2013) Kihlstrom reviews recent research and establishes the following categories within the concept of the cognitive unconscious: automaticity, implicit perception, implicit memory, implicit thought, implicit learning, implicit emotion, and implicit motivation, implicit being the established term to denominate unconscious mental processes and contents in cognitive research. They are all part of the cognitive unconscious and stipulate a form of complex and rational cognition, as opposed to the lower level mechanisms of Freudian theories.<sup>459</sup>

It is reductive to re-write Freud's conception of the unconscious merely as a product of the lower drives and the Id. Freud placed great weight on the significance of dreams as windows to unconscious processes working symbolically and creatively. Dreams are rational yet complex processes that oftentimes generate irrational content that has often been the source of creative inspiration for poems, like Coleridge's dream about *Kubla Khan*, which greatly influenced De Quincey, whose most iconic work is about opiated dreaming. Freud also directed interest to meaning just below lines of awareness in the powers of free association. It is here in both instances, in dreams and associations, that Freud's theory of the unconscious resembles Aristotle's notion of melancholic genius in creativity, in the *phantasmata* (series of dream images) and the associative logic of metaphors he thought were crucial to poetic arts. For Freud the unconscious was dark and perplexing, a place among the deeps of the mind to be explored in his newly minted

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<sup>459</sup> Markus Iseli, introduction to *Thomas De Quincey and the Cognitive Unconscious* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Palgrave, 2015), 46, Kindle.

talk therapies, again through free association and hypnosis. Iseli notes, “Few writers have been more preoccupied by the inner depths of the mind than De Quincey and Wordsworth . . .” and both believed “‘that the power was dark, unaccountable in its working,’ and ‘both have the wish to track the power of association back to its source.’”<sup>460</sup> These words sound much more in league with a Freudian view of the unconscious, which had emerged partly from German thought in the nineteenth century.<sup>461</sup>

The powers of association suggested in the unconscious state are like the disparate connections of Aristotle’s melancholics (*melancholikai*) in the visions of their dreams, the nightmare powers of the *phantasmata* that influenced the great poets because of this special imaging faculty, which is different from Plato’s conception of “divine madness,” in that it was through the powers of association with Aristotle and the powers of ecstasy with Plato that revelatory art was realized. An ecstatic performance could include poets of ancient times, who recited their poems live, often playing the lyre, from which the major genre of lyric poetry, alongside the epic and tragedy, had emerged, so that the ancient connection between music and poetry had long been fundamental, influencing the later *Ars Poetica* of Horace, in which is inflected the famous dictum of poetry’s other sister: *Ut Pictura Poesis*, as in painting so in poetry. Aristotle’s focus in his treatise *On Divination in Sleep* is also visual, hovering as it does around the sensitivity of melancholics to the *phantasmata*, the multitude of images melancholics are bombarded with in their dreams, but which provide a fertile substrate from which to make disparate connections that sometimes forecast the future accurately, thus a prophetic utterance that

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>461</sup> Nicholls and Liebscher, *Thinking the Unconscious*, 22.

is not ecstatic.<sup>462</sup> According to classics scholar P. J. Van der Eijk, in the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle claims a divinity in the dreams of melancholics, but in his treatise *On Divination in Sleep*, it seems by matter of practice, of endless repetition, not divine inspiration, that melancholics hit the mark of prophecy.<sup>463</sup> This does not mean that the *phantasmata* were without mysterious force. Aristotle wrote that melancholics possessed a genius that suspended rationality, what he called *sphodrotēs*, or the power of the imagination to impart intensity to the phantasma.<sup>464</sup>

In his essay on Aristotle and melancholy, Van der Eijk observes, “It is again striking that melancholics are categorised as belonging to the group of ‘irrational people’ (*alogoi, aphrones*) and that a relation is perceived between their lack of reason and their prophetic powers.”<sup>465</sup> Their irrational state suspends reason.<sup>466</sup> It is in this state that the melancholics make utterance (or accurate predictions) charged from the intensity of their strong imaginations, not just when they are pneumatic, a physiological condition like drunkenness, but in the dream state, as the associations may be discerned from the image patterns that appear in the *phantasmata*. What styles Aristotle’s definition of the predisposition of the melancholics to experience the *phantasmata* during the sleep state and from these dreams to discern accurate predictions, is their automatic technique involved, to make associative conclusions from disparate elements that had been deeply

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<sup>462</sup> Aristotle is keen on metaphorical powers in melancholics even in the visual realm of dreams, not just the textual and performative realms of his *Poetics*. “A determining factor for the divination of melancholics is said to be not only the number of images that they are confronted with, but also a certain ability for making connections by association between objects that are far apart.” Quoted in Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, 144.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 144-145.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

encoded in the signs (*sēmeia*) of dreams. Dreams were important to Greek physicians as well and their signs were widely believed by many intellectuals to be therapeutic and prognostic.<sup>467</sup> In his *Poetics* Aristotle also highpoints the importance of metaphor in defining melancholic genius, the ability that he believed was most suited and definitive of the best poets. He records, “The most important thing is the ability to use metaphors. For this is the only thing that cannot be learned from someone else and [is] a sign of natural genius; for to produce good metaphors is a matter of perceiving similarities.”<sup>468</sup> This is what the melancholics do best, they perceive similarities, make connections creatively through the device of metaphor, which like the dream state may also have automatic qualities filtering inspiration.

In his texts on dreams the reason of the melancholics is in some way impaired or suspended, resulting in a lack of control over the interpretation of the streams of *phantasmata*. The melancholic dreamer then is like the automaton, associative and prophetic, the loss of reason being a loss of a mind in control of itself, which is a kind of madness, open to perceiving similarities in the signs presented in the dreams but not controlling their content. The melancholic of the *Problemata* does not have impaired reason, is not locked into a dream state.<sup>469</sup> And Aristotle’s genial poets in the *Poetics* seem to be in full creative control of their metaphorical imaginations. Still, the ability to make comparisons across disparate entities is present in both the melancholic dreamer and the melancholic poet across Aristotle’s writings. In the case of Pseudo-Aristotle, the

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 165-166.

*peritton*, or “the exceptional personality,”<sup>470</sup> as Julia Kristeva defines the term, is not a manifestation of the diseased melancholic suffering from the unnatural form, which is expressed in the destructive Hippocratic symptoms of prolonged fear and sadness or as one of the forms of classical madness. It rather commands a balanced condition, a state of *eukrasia*, between the hot and the cold, through which genius is expressed in exemplary works. And yet even some of the exceptional ones are prone to the unnatural form that is experienced in disease, “and some of them to such an extent to be affected by the diseases of the black bile.”<sup>471</sup>

This creative form detailed in Pseudo-Aristotle’s treatise, which many contemporary theorists link with heat and manic energies, does not exclude the associative form of genius that authentic Aristotle describes in his treatise *On Divination in Sleep*, or in his *Poetics*, or in *Eudemian Ethics*, across which he links the associative qualities of genius to his *hoi melancholikai*, his motley group of melancholics. In Book Seven of *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle writes about the “*hoi ekstatikoi*,” which refers to that group of melancholics ““who are prone to get beside themselves,””<sup>472</sup> to be reckless, out of control (*akrasia*) with passion. Aristotle’s metaphorical intelligence is a creative faculty, but still requires the wind (*pneuma*) or some other energy to power it. It is highly associative, this creative faculty, this imagination, but by itself, without influence and motion, it cannot attain its full productivity or reach the brilliance that benefitted the

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<sup>470</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>471</sup> Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, 18.

<sup>472</sup> Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, 149.

character of Pseudo-Aristotle's melancholic as a great poet, an artist, a philosopher, or statesman.

### **Schoenberg's Mad Automaton**

Schoenberg's melodrama *Pierrot Lunaire* (*Moonstruck Peter*) Opus 23, appeared during the early summer of 1912 as an iconic work of Modernist invention that presents the figure of the tormented artist as mad puppet. In the libretto for this melodrama, taken from 21 surrealist poems by the Belgian poet Albert Giraud and set in a series of 7 poems in three parts, Schoenberg creates a figure from the old cult of Commedia and Italian comic art. Pierrot is from the vein of the *poète maudit*, and is convinced he has no head (#13), a common trope among the hallucinations of the mad. Giraud did not invent the moonstruck figure maddened by cosmological forces. Poetic flares and episodes of immediate lunar inspiration appear elsewhere in Romantic works by a number of authors who suffered from melancholia or were confined to asylums. In Clement Brentano's *Godwi* (1802) "Eusebio's voice was struck like a matchstick by the moon."<sup>473</sup> There is also among Romantic puppet figures a diminishment of reflective powers given over to some form of automated creative response. In Kleist's final play *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* (1810), the central character "Homburg appears like a string puppet at the mercy of his own sub-conscious being."<sup>474</sup> He fails as an officer to perform his military duties because he has become a somnambulist entranced by the moon. These figures represent the artist working along a maddening borderline between creative control and

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<sup>473</sup> Görner, "The Hidden Agent of the Self: Towards an Aesthetic Theory of the Non-Conscious in German Romanticism," 130.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

involuntary inspiration, as Coleridge had lamented his own loss of control through his figure of the automaton poet. The unconscious thus intervenes in Kleist's play when its lead character is disabled by sleepwalking on a moonwatch, rendering him as a kind of puppet on strings pulled by mysterious forces.<sup>475</sup> Similarly in Giraud's collection *Pierrot* is disabled by moonlight but in a musical way. In Giraud's poem "The Moon's Violin," *Pierrot* envisions that his melancholic violin is played by moonbow.<sup>476</sup>

The Moon, with slow and slender ray,  
With the gentleness of agony,  
Caresses with its irony,  
Like a luminous white bow,  
The spirit of the trembling violin.<sup>477</sup>

Like Coleridge's Aeolian harp, *Pierrot's* violin is not played by a musician but by the indeterminate yet uncontrollable forces of nature. The potencies at play on these symbolic musical instruments are unpredictable, seemingly randomized, but potentially ferocious, like Hoffmann's Aeolian harp powered by storm winds in his long short story "The Automaton." Elsewhere in Giraud's poem, the spirit of *Pierrot's* violin is "trembling" with "silence and harmony" having "languid and disturbing dream[s]"<sup>478</sup> serving as a metaphor for the consciousness of the *flâneur*, its expressiveness and creative intention mysteriously immobilized, awakened only by moonlight. The poet's mind as a

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<sup>475</sup> Kleist wrote a short story with an opposite theme *On the Theater of Marionettes*, in which the puppets are so skilled that they are said to outperform human dancers. This is the genial nature of the machine thought to possess near supernatural talents, as it was with the early digital computers that were pit against the chess masters, humankind and machine in perennial competition. In Kleist's story the principle dancer of the city opera observes, "... it would simply be impossible for a human being to even hold his own with the mechanical figure. Only a god could measure up to inert matter in this regard." Heinrich Von Kleist, *Selected Prose of Heinrich von Kleist*, trans. Peter Wortsman (Brooklyn NY: Archipelago Books, 2010), 269.

<sup>476</sup> Albert Giraud, *Pierrot Lunaire*, trans. Gregory C. Richter (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2001), 65.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*

musical instrument is struck by an intangible influence and the result is a creative resonance like vibrating strings. Whether powered by the wind or moonlight, these instruments as symbols of consciousness maintain a dual nature, one generative and destructive, miming the classic and historical dyad of melancholia that is at once inspiring and terminative, expressive and unstable. If Aristotle thought the *pneuma* powered the dreams of the melancholics, as Jaynes suggested that *phrenes* inspired the ancient bards, the Romantics believed the imagination could be powered by the mysterious forces of nature that at least temporarily suspended the artist's control.

### **Unconscious Inspiration**

At the turn of the century the interest in the source of artistic inspiration continued among artists like Kandinsky, who believed in an art-forming *apparatus*, and Schoenberg, who credited the unconscious with inspiration for new work. In a letter to Kandinsky in 1911 Schoenberg remarked: "What you call the 'Unlogical' ('Die Unlogische') . . . I call 'the elimination of the conscious will in art.'"<sup>479</sup> Then much more emphatically, he continued, "Art belongs to the unconscious! One must express oneself! Express oneself directly! Not one's taste or one's upbringing, or one's intelligence, knowledge or skill. Not all these acquired characteristics, but that which is inborn, instinctive."<sup>480</sup> Schoenberg had perhaps been influenced by his friendship with the psychoanalyst Marie Pappenheim about his understanding and reformulation of the theory of the unconscious. In his work *Harmonielehre*, the composer writes:

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<sup>479</sup> Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe, 1900-1916* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994; repr., 2007), 55.

<sup>480</sup> Bryan R. Simms, *The Atonal Music of Schoenberg, 1908-1923* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71.

The artist's creative activity is instinctive. Consciousness has little influence on it. He feels as if what he does were dictated to him. As if he did it only according to the will of some power or other within him, whose laws he does not know. He is merely the instrument of a will hidden from him, of instinct, of his unconscious. Whether it is new or old, good or bad, beautiful or ugly, he does not know.<sup>481</sup>

Schoenberg suggests his musical inspiration is strangely automated by an unknown power that works on his mind and emotions like an expressive instrument. His interpretation of artistic inspiration recalls Coleridge's automaton poet. Though the power is inexplicable Schoenberg associates it with the unconscious.

Among the poets of the time Yeats and Eliot had mined the possibilities of automatic writing. Pound had also been influential for Eliot, and had written in 1913 in the then two-year old *Poetry* magazine that the new poetry had arrived by "steals from the French."<sup>482</sup> It was Jules Laforgue, the French Symbolist poet, who had influenced Eliot arguably more than Pound, as Eliot had acquired Laforgue's complete collection of works when he was at Harvard. It was Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Breton, and Apollinaire who had acquired the prose experiment in free verse down the French line from Baudelaire and his *Paris Spleen*. To the extent this may be true, then the new poetry in the time of Pound and Eliot had started among the *flâneurs*, that motley company of late melancholics. The interest in automatism as a method and technique for creative expression in literature is broadly rendered, but at least for Eliot it had been an interest but less so as a source of the supernatural as it was for Yeats.

On the subject of automatic writing and illumination from his historic Norton

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Ezra Pound, "Paris," *Poetry* 3, no. 1 (Oct-Mar 1913-14): 27. Pound of course was referring to all English verse-art since Chaucer. The full sentence reads, "Practically the whole development of the English verse-art has been achieved by steals from the French, from Chaucer's time to our own, and the French are always twenty to sixty years in advance."

Lectures given at Harvard in the winter of 1932-33, Eliot observed:

That there is an analogy between mystical experience and some of the ways in which poetry is written I do not deny . . . though, as I have said, whether the analogy is of significance for the student of religion or only to the psychologist, I do not know.<sup>483</sup>

In the autumn of 1921 Eliot had previously been treated for neurasthenia by the Swiss psychiatrist Dr. Roger Vittoz at Lausanne.<sup>484</sup> This was around the time he had been writing *The Wasteland*, when he did not fail to recognize, as Thomas Mann had not, the sometimes-inexplicable influence he believed ill health had on the poetic psyche. In the Norton Lecture he continued:

I know, for instance, that some forms of ill-health, debility or anemia, may (if other circumstances are favourable) produce an efflux of poetry in a way approaching the condition of automatic writing—though, in contrast to the claims sometimes made for the latter, the material has obviously been incubating within the poet, and cannot be suspected of being a present from a friendly or impertinent demon . . . . This disturbance of our quotidian character which results in an incantation, an outburst of words which we hardly recognise as our own (because of the effortlessness), is a very different thing from mystical illumination.<sup>485</sup>

Eliot sought treatment for his depression, self-diagnosed as “*aboulie*—lack of will,”<sup>486</sup> but did not make use of Freudian therapies and instead allowed Dr. Vittoz to discipline his thinking back into writing poetry.<sup>487</sup> This was the same year he developed his theory on the dissociation of sensibility, the notion of a split between thought and feeling that occurred after metaphysical poetry, a divide between intellectual ideas and immediate

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<sup>483</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1933; repr., 1939, 1964), 144.

<sup>484</sup> Amanda Jeremin Harris, "T. S. Eliot's Mental Hygiene," *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 46.

<sup>485</sup> Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 144-145.

<sup>486</sup> Louis Menand, "Practical Cat," *The New Yorker*, 2011, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/09/19/practical-cat>.

<sup>487</sup> Harris, "T. S. Eliot's Mental Hygiene," 45, 48.

sensation that the poets like Donne had kept unified, as the immediate sensation of the vocal Muse that had ordered blind Milton's complex web of allusions in *Paradise Lost*. Eliot's walk backward is to that tradition of the intellectual poets who did not lose themselves in frenzy or fits of emotion yet fused the intellect with the full encounter of sensibility. Eliot's theory of depersonalization, in his iconic essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," better explains his view of originality in poetry. He writes,

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.<sup>488</sup>

This is Eliot at his flattest, distancing the personality from the poem, in exact opposition to the more manic confessional mode of the poets that would follow him in the 1950s like Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath.

### **Kraepelin's Melancholic Automaton**

By the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of his *Textbook of Psychiatry*, circa 1909-1913, Kraepelin had developed new categories in his taxonomy that replaced melancholia with depression, which he had enfolded into his definition of manic-depressive insanity. In the 8<sup>th</sup> edition, Kraepelin records short passages in his criteria for depression that are extracted from his qualitative findings among his patients. He begins with a general statement about a mental state among a group of patients that is eventually reduced to a mental state about a single patient. Kraepelin notated:

The patients frequently describe that change of their inward state, which is usually called 'depersonalisation.' Their presentations lack sensuous colouring. The impressions of the external world appear strange, as

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<sup>488</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Poetry Foundation*, 1920, accessed December 2, 2016, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/essays/detail/69400>.

though from a great distance, awake no response in them; their own body feels as if not belonging to them; their features stare quite changed from the mirror; their voice sounds leaden. Thinking and acting go on without the co-operation of the patient; he appears to himself to be an automatic machine.<sup>489</sup>

He continues with a quote revealing a similar mechanical quality of the depressive state in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*:

'I stand as though in front of a cabinet of curiosities, and I see little men and little horses moving about in front of me, and I often ask myself whether it is not an optical delusion.'<sup>490</sup> [And continuing in another translation]: 'I play along—rather, I'm played with like a marionette; and sometimes I take hold of my neighbor's wooden hand and I recoil with a shudder. In the evening I resolve to enjoy the sunrise, but I don't get out of bed; during the day I look forward to take pleasure in the moonlight, but I remain in my room. I don't rightly know why I get up, why I go to bed.'<sup>491</sup>

These short quotations from patient narratives are the reports from which Kraepelin designed his criteria for his *Textbook of Psychiatry*, which had a wide-ranging effect for decades on the nosology of mental illness and its development. Even the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD) have built their diagnostic categories partly on patient reports that describe the experience of mental illness reduced to a set of symptoms. In describing his illness category of manic-depression, Kraepelin had noted the machine-like experience of a patient who *felt* very little, enlarging his definition to include the group as though they were automatons, a total depersonalization, a distancing and sense of separation even from their own bodies.

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<sup>489</sup> Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, 261.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

<sup>491</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther/Die Leiden des jungen Werther: A Dual-Language Book*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 101.

## Automatic Iterations

In one sense this depersonalization is opposite the feeling of jubilation that Christopher Smart experienced with his poetry, but it is similar to the machinic rhythms of his masterpiece *Jubilate Agno*, in its odd structure that supposedly revealed his instability as an inmate in the madhouse. The Let/For configuration of *Jubilate Agno* suggests a programmed cadence, given a twentieth century aesthetic for higher level computer languages, in which English like commands are executed and written out with the logic of truncated syntax. One Smart scholar wrote, “The Let/For structure of the *Jubilate* is an ideal form for improvisation, for playing the offbeat against the expectations established by its repetitive form.”<sup>492</sup> The repetitions of the Let/For structure read a little like a computer language, suggesting a substrate from which creative change in the text emerges, when either a mutation or improvisation occurs, like cellular automata repeating the same instructions over and again until new patterns arise. The iterative force of *Jubilate Agno* if published before the twentieth century would not have had the same effect because the eighteenth century could not have anticipated computer languages, even with the binary logic of Leibniz, which had no way then to be perceived as a higher level computer language. As *Jubilate* was not published until the twentieth century, its language could not reveal the aspect of the technology that had not even been theoretically invented in the mathematics, yet nevertheless exhibits a technological awareness that seems strangely intuited from the future. Literary critics have sometimes commented on the remarkably modern sound of Smart’s language in *Jubilate*, but from the vantage of modernity, some 200 years after it was written, the poem’s form is

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<sup>492</sup> Hawes, “Poised Poesis: Ecstasy in *Jubilate Agno*,” 92.

uniquely technological, generative, and predictive. The poem is like a microcosmic example of artistic inspiration as an automatic event. Smart is jubilant in the original voice of this poem that he believed came from a higher source, similarly as Milton believed in the voice of his Muse, Urania, as a Christian Dissenter and Puritan, who ultimately believed his long poem *Paradise Lost* was inspired by God. The apparent reduction of authorial control during the writing of poetry that Coleridge lamented and challenged in the automaton poet, Milton and Smart welcomed. Except for Smart, Milton was perhaps the last truly bicameral poet in the English language.<sup>493</sup>

Though Smart's structural method is *repetition* in *Jubilate*, an original voice still arises from the text. Smart is ecstatic in his technique of writing, not associative. The poem stands on its own apart from its exotic discovery and publication as the work of a mad poet who lived in an eighteenth-century madhouse and wrote amusing verses about his cat Jeoffry. Such original voices as Smart's and Eliot's must have stood out in an age of mass reproduction that Walter Benjamin lamented in his iconic text *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936). The tension between organic forms of artistic expression and creativity, which the Romantics viewed in opposition to the mechanized performances of musical automata, re-appeared dramatically in Benjamin's critique of the new in the mass mediated forms of art production that were replicating in the twentieth century. Associated with the Frankfurt School, but even more informally working as a literary *nachzügler* (one who lags behind), Benjamin pulled from the Romantic era a sensibility that could be critical of the new technologically reproductive systems in art of the modern era. For Benjamin, a German Jew who worked during the

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<sup>493</sup> Weissman, "Vision, Madness, and Morality," 120. "Milton, in the seventeenth century, was probably as truly a bicameral as has existed since Homer."

time of the Hamburg School—with which other Jewish art historians like Aby Warburg and Irwin Panofsky had been associated—there had been a recent devaluation of the original artwork and a lost mystique in art, or that by near endless mediation art had lost its charisma and luminosity as an original object to behold. In his critique Benjamin wrote:

. . . what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura. This process is symptomatic; its significance extends far beyond the realm of art. It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced.<sup>494</sup>

These iterations in mass media extend the life of an object, in its mediated form, into perpetuity. Benjamin used the word “actualize” to suggest the mediated object had been rendered as a symbol, a mere representation. It is thus a work of art with infinite longevity but only in symbolic form, replicating across technologies and time periods. For Benjamin the mediated world created a remove from the world of objects and reality. The mediated world of mass production was a fantasy and advertising was a dream-like system that did not value the surplus existence of the mundane and discarded, the detritus of culture that Benjamin found so enchanting in the Parisian Arcades, following the influence of Baudelaire and the theoretical impulses of the good Marxist. The stream of dream like images became a phantasmagoria that dulled the senses. Whatever original power that art possessed was hijacked by a trickster mediation of it, whether photographs, sound recordings, or magazines. Somehow the work of art was less original, more issued and iterated, overstimulating the mind with copies of itself.

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<sup>494</sup> Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 22.

Benjamin's unfinished tome, *Passagen-Werk (Arcades Project)*, is a massive montage of notes and quotations collected into chapter length sections called *Konvoluts* that form a salmagundi about the glass-covered Arcades in nineteenth century Paris before the upheaval and redesign of the urban walkways and grand boulevards of the city that Haussmann had reconfigured. What is distinctive is that Benjamin's commentary and interpretations are outnumbered and overwhelmed by the quotations themselves.<sup>495</sup> Early during the compilation of the work Benjamin had remarked, "Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show. I shall appropriate no ingenious formulations, purloin no valuables. But the rags, the refuse these I will not describe but put on display."<sup>496</sup> Benjamin wished to imitate Baudelaire's ragpicker, collecting the discarded objects of the culture, like a garment that he would weave without using his own threads, without any linkage that came from himself except the intention to assemble one thing with another in certain ways and in the various sections under their own themes. It is like the programmer inputting a general code that has not been originally authored, only copied and compiled for a machine to execute at runtime. Benjamin's text is a literary devaluation of authorship, similar to Duchamp's ready-mades that he had found and placed into the context of unoriginal art without any authentic signature, facture, or ownership. If the automaton was a robot without original thoughts, the Modernist was now a practitioner of the unoriginal, the copy, the citation, the iteration of aesthetic codes to form a new scholarship. Inspiration became replication.

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<sup>495</sup> Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by other Means in the New Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 25-26.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Genius, once the trademark of the melancholic, the Faust and *flâneur*, had seemingly now become the mere iterations of the automaton.

To understand melancholic consciousness, it has been historically important to speculate on its formation, using poetry and music to illuminate the creative process and the apparatus of inspiration. Coleridge and Hoffmann wrote about the tension between organic sources of creative inspiration in poetry and music versus mechanical performances by automata, usually in music, since it is the most performative art. Similar tensions between the organic and the mechanical have resurfaced in contemporary arguments for computational modes of artificial intelligence that fantasize its upload to the machine (Kurzweil and his notion of the singularity) versus the quantum intelligence model of consciousness (developed by Sir Roger Penrose and Dr. Stuart Hameroff), which locates consciousness organically in protein lattices of microtubules in the brain. These tensions between AI and QI continue the modulation of consciousness via the machine and the organism, or now as an augmentation or hybrid, so that the uncertain barriers between the two have melded indistinguishably in an age of multiplicity and simulation, where mind no longer is restricted to the brain but is extensible into the body and the social networks it inhabits. Descartes' *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, in an age of machines, will likely incorporate with the *res automata*. This triplicate, or the destructive and creative force as a technological merge, was co-existent in melancholia and its cognates as a duality throughout the ages. This is expressed in contemporary times as the tension between the machine and the organism, which is really expressed more as an anxiety that when palpable becomes predictive. For many the oracular consultation in the twenty-first century is no longer with the priestly self; it is

with the intelligent machine. And that machine is in an unknown state (unconscious), one that emulates the unstable features of anxiety (prolonged fear) and a tendency to break down and deteriorate (sorrow, bit rot), because the logic that sustains it is ultimately and permanently flawed. This is a digital melancholia already in a mode of nostalgia for its former revolutions and impermanent binary. For mathematicians, inventors, and transhumanists who believe in a singularity, then the bicameral phase of the machine may be in breakdown mode: the machine unconscious of itself finally becomes self-aware.

## Coda

### The Figures of Melancholia

Theophrastus had created the melancholic figure to explore a complex problem for his philosophy as a student of Aristotle interested in medicine, plant powers, and the body. His question connecting melancholics with exceptional creative achievement in the *Problemata* resulted likely from his study at the Lyceum with Aristotle, who had set up, at least with some intention, the figural approach in his treatises on dreams about the melancholics, the *hoi melancholikoi*. It is here that a momentum was created in which Western philosophers turned to medicine to develop a theory of the mind and its connection to the bodily fluids that to their audiences must have seemed very original. Starobinski's "Golden Age of Melancholia" in the Renaissance was realized in the lives of the polymaths, many of whom worked as painters and as genial melancholics who helped to elevate painting's status among the arts as a sophisticated mode of knowledge production that occurred during the so-called visual turn of Renaissance science and the rise of the visualization of anatomical bodies. Painting borrowed the genial status of melancholia to support its elevation in the culture as a fine art, on the level of poetry and music, in part because so many painters seemed to have, or at least claimed to have, a melancholic condition.

Melancholia persisted among the writings and attitudes of the poets in the modern and late-modern eras after medicine modernized and recast it as depression. Melancholia and its *cognates*, to borrow Stanley Jackson's word, circulated among its figural representations in Western culture before finally submerging into the Freudian unconscious as prolonged sadness and fear without cause or sensible explanation that the

psychoanalysts believed responded to talk therapy, free association, and hypnosis. What is significant here is that not only did Freud not kill off melancholia, since he kept it alive as a part of the unconscious in his famous essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” but the Aristotelian emphasis on the *phantasmata* in dreams and the art of metaphor necessary for poetics to make connections among disparate things seem to be in a unique alignment with Freud’s formation of the unconscious as a creative entity, through free association and the symbolic life of dreams and their interpretation. While the unconscious for Freud was dark, anarchic, and stirred by drives, its workings also possessed an associative logic that powered the dream state, one similar to the *phantasmata* of Aristotle and the associative qualities he believed defined the melancholics, who had special abilities for metaphor, which differed from Plato’s conception of divine madness and the ecstatic poets.

Throughout history the two forms of melancholia, the medically debilitating one and the genial one, have generated for many a *mythopoiesis* between mental illness and artistic brilliance. Melancholia in this work has not been tracked as a persona, or as some side act affected by the pretentious. Melancholia, even in its modern forms that are today called depression, is too often lethal. It is not a fashionable illness, not a pose struck by cosmetic-minded artists that serve as fodder for academics and scholars who do not understand the illness or its real history, or the devastations it has landed on artists throughout the centuries. The high suicide rate among major poets alone suggests that creative melancholy is not some lighter form of melancholia, however fashionable the idea may seem to those throughout history and in contemporary academia who apparently

have never experienced the horrors of madness or the ineffably painful depths of recurrent crippling depression.

### **The Renaming of Melancholia**

Esquirol wrote, “The word melancholia, consecrated in popular language to describe the habitual state of sadness affecting some individuals should be left to poets and moralists whose loose expression is not subject to the strictures of medical terminology.”<sup>497</sup>

Kraepelin did not feel similarly and replaced melancholia with the term depression in the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of his psychiatric taxonomy in 1913, the year the final edition was issued.

Depression as a term had been used in the nineteenth century by luminaries like

Beethoven, who had complained of it in his letters. He also used the term melancholy.

The phasing of melancholia was not immediate at the turn of the century throughout European culture. Nonetheless the medical community that favored the term depression over the old humoral term melancholia brought a seriously underweighted idea to an experience that is difficult and in many cases impossible to describe. Edward Shorter concludes, “. . . to understand why the nervous breakdown became less fearsome, we have to understand how melancholia was turned into depression.”<sup>498</sup>

William Styron’s memoir, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*, begins with his acute awareness of the fatal nature of melancholic depression. Styron’s words are freighted in long sentences, written out and sculpted like the intricate materials of the sophisticate who is not contrary but willing to tolerate the stubborn and burdensome

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<sup>497</sup> J. E. Esquirol, “Mèlancholie,” in *Dictionnaire des Sciences Médicales par une Société de Médecins et de Chirurgiennes* (Paris, France: Panckoucke, 1820), 148. Quoted in Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression*, 101.

<sup>498</sup> Shorter, *How Everyone Became Depressed: The Rise and Fall of the Nervous Breakdown*, 99.

resistance of melancholia's heavy language. It is for him like a heavy water that is yet indefinable. He writes:

For myself, the pain is most closely connected to drowning or suffocation—but even these images are off the mark. William James, who battled depression for many years, gave up the search for an adequate portrayal, implying its near-impossibility when he wrote in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: ‘It is positive and active anguish, a sort of physical neuralgia wholly unknown to normal life.’<sup>499</sup>

Styron wrote of his illness experience as being often “in the throes” of it, realizing that he “had been laid low,”<sup>500</sup> and prompted to “describe the evolution of the malady” that “might have a fatal outcome.”<sup>501</sup> He observes, “The most honest authorities face up squarely to the fact that serious depression is not readily treatable.”<sup>502</sup> If melancholia is incurable by medicine, the prevailing authority of modern times, it is not understood by it either. Styron determines:

Depression is a disorder of mood, so mysteriously painful and elusive in the way it becomes known to the self—to the mediating intellect—as to verge close to being beyond description. It thus remains nearly incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it in its extreme mode.<sup>503</sup>

Styron introduces Chapter IV with a view of these two words, but suggests that the medical replacement of melancholia with the term depression may have been damaging to the perception of the disease that extends beyond the limitations of medicine. He writes:

Melancholia would still appear to be a far more apt and evocative word for the blacker forms of the disorder, but it was usurped by a noun with a bland tonality and lacking any magisterial presence, used indifferently to

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<sup>499</sup> William Styron, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, 2012), 20, iBook.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

describe an economic decline or a rut in the ground, a true wimp of a word for such a major illness. It may be that the scientist generally held responsible . . . had a tin ear for the finer rhythms of English and therefore was unaware of the semantic damage he had inflicted by offering 'depression' as a descriptive noun for such a dreadful and raging disease. Nonetheless, for over seventy-five years the word has slithered innocuously through the language like a slug, leaving little trace of its intrinsic malevolence and preventing, by its very insipidity, a general awareness of the horrible intensity of this disease when out of control.<sup>504</sup>

Melancholia—an antique term that arose 2500 years ago from the early stirrings of Western medicine —suggests ancient humors that circulate invisibly but with great powers over the mind, as the old model of how the body worked before the body could be entered and explored. Even in the early days of anatomical exploration during the Renaissance, melancholia continued to be the problem of artists who, in its lesser forms were lazy or putting on airs; in its blacker forms, inspired by dark muses, possessed by demons, or touched by the supernatural. Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*<sup>505</sup> is a dissection of early modern consciousness and its melancholia in the terms of those times. If the humors were out of balance until recently, our chemicals are just as imbalanced in modern bodies: electric, endocrinal and neuro-aestheticized, animated by transmitters, synaptic exchanges and firing neurons.

Recently it has been suggested by humanists like Edward Shorter and Ian Hacking that the diagnosis of melancholia, minus its old humoral features, should be resurrected in medicine as a term since depression does not always involve feelings of sadness when it is experienced as a dullness that is treatment resistant to anti-depressants or appears in its full-blown forms and is accompanied by psychosis. Names matter in medical taxonomies, especially names of mental illnesses. Depression needs a new terminology

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>505</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

that reflects its realities in the lives of creatives and across all professions and walks for the people who experience the illness in some form or another almost every day.

Another reason melancholia lost its magisterial presence as a poetic term in the culture was the emergence of the prosaic age. The shift in poetry from the lyric to prose that began with Baudelaire and the French poets of the late nineteenth century, follows a similar metamorphosis in the renaming of melancholia. Or put another way, the gradual decline in poetry of the lyric and the rise of prose in poetry followed melancholia's remake as depression at the turn of the century. As the age became prosaic so did its medical words. Medical treatises, once delivered as poems in Ancient Greece, the birthplace of Western poetry, are rendered entirely in prose, having no need of poetry's former legitimizing status, thus participating in the paragone between prose and poetry. The emerging prosaic age was a challenge to poetry and seized the notice of Baudelaire, who wrote in his journal, "Always be a poet, even in prose."<sup>506</sup> Baudelaire's prose poems are works made in the last days of melancholia as it was being reshaped by the same prosaic forces that had given medicine a metallic ear for the new taxonomy of mental illness. In the middle of the nineteenth century, poetry had begun to be modern and gradually abandoned the rhyme and the line as organizing units of the poetic tradition that it had maintained among the arts with the same remarkable longevity as melancholia had governed medicine for more than 2500 years. Melancholia was always the poet's illness. Even when melancholia was musical or visual, or troubled the lives of composers and painters, it was still the affliction of poets voiced through the poetics of other arts.

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<sup>506</sup> Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, 98.

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