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Title: Melancholia: An Unruly Feeling

Abstract

Following decades of relentless capitalist extraction, a loss of access to healthcare and other basic medical necessities, expansions of the colonial enterprise, and reports of tragic climate disasters, a growing sentiment emerges that could be called melancholia. While melancholia is usually understood as an individual and introverted state of mind, I set out to explore melancholia as a site of action and a social response to neoliberal politics. Walter Benjamin once claimed that “melancholia designates a dialectical tension between madness and clairvoyance” (Jukić, T. “Melancholia for Modernity”, 2017, p. 253). Though, he also argued that “melancholy betrays the world for the sake of knowledge” (Brown, W. "Resisting Left Melancholy."). Similarly, in “Resisting Left Melancholy” (1999) Wendy Brown described melancholia as an attachment to a kind of politics that is non-transient or not able to overcome itself in any productive way. Knowing the dangers of advocating for melancholia, and that melancholia comes after or in deep experiences of loss, I argue that melancholia affords a mobilizing potentiality. Though the melancholic subject is beholden to a lost object, I suggest that melancholia is creative and grounded in a praxis of active remembering. Melancholia offers alternative modes of being, feeling, and acting, predicated upon a profound awareness of loss. It involves something akin to what Christina Sharpe calls “wake work” in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016). Wake work labors within the paradoxes of neoliberal democracy to rupture the hegemonic episteme that creates an all-encompassing environment of antiblackness. Melancholia can be seen as a cultural resistance to what Antonio Gramsci calls hegemony, that is, the process where one group makes its worldview appear natural so that it becomes the common grammar of a given society (Fraser, N. *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*, p. 9). Melancholia is important for imagining otherwise. I argue that melancholia, not being able to avoid the forces of hegemony, operates at the boundaries and limits of what it means for a feeling to be coerced by power.

Keywords: melancholia, politics, neoliberalism, imagination

Bio

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