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**Doctoral Thesis**

## The great health of melancholy: A study of the pathologies of performativity

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**The Great Health of Melancholy**



**Copenhagen  
Business School**  
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

# The Great Health of Melancholy

A Study of the Pathologies of Performativity

**Rasmus Johnsen**

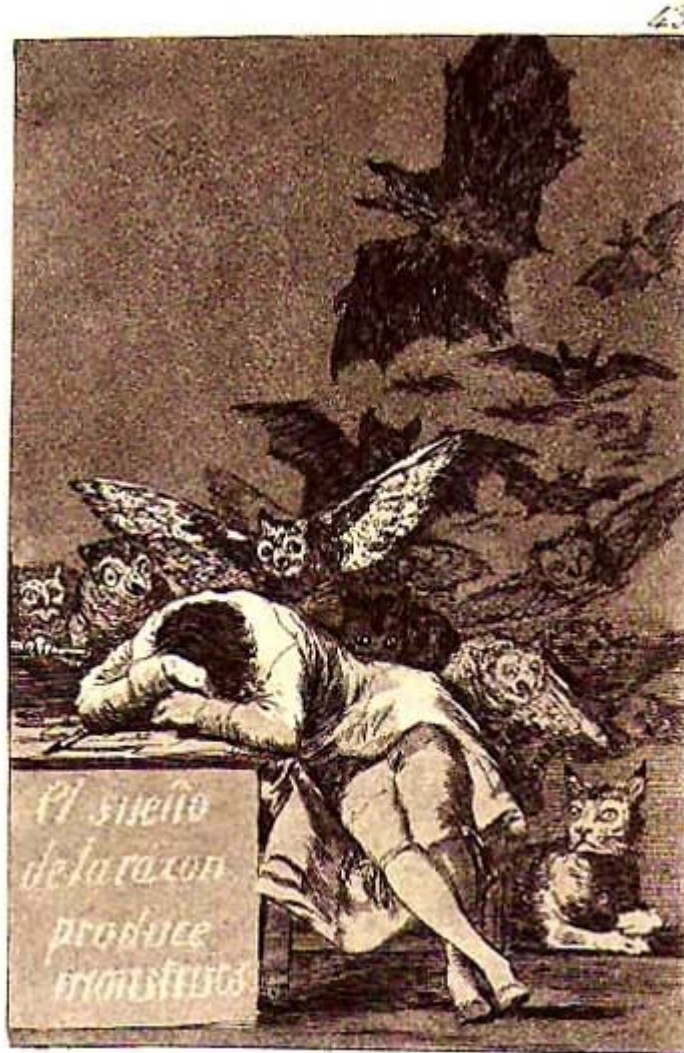
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Doctoral School of Organisation  
and Management Studies

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# The Great Health of Melancholy

A Study of the Pathologies of Performativity



Rasmus Johnsen

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Copenhagen Business School

2009



<b>PREFACE</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	<b>7</b>
PROLOGUE.....	7
1. STRESS AS A FORMAL INDICATION .....	13
2. MICHEL FOUCAULT’S HISTORICAL PROBLEMATIZATION ANALYSIS.....	21
3. MICHEL SERRES AND THE THEORY OF THE QUASI-OBJECT .....	31
4. HISTORIOGRAPHY: ONE OR SEVERAL MELANCHOLIES?.....	36
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	<b>47</b>
PROLOGUE.....	47
1. THE EMOTIONAL HYPERBOLE OF HEROIC INDIVIDUALITY.....	50
2. <i>ERŌS</i> AND THE ANTINOMY OF MADNESS IN PLATO’S DIALOGUES.....	57
3. ABNORMAL BY NATURE: MELANCHOLY IN <i>PROBLEMS XXX, 1</i> .....	64
4. SATURNINE MEN: THE DIETETICS OF MELANCHOLY IN FICINO .....	72
5. PATHOLOGIES OF PERFORMATIVITY: MELANCHOLY.....	80
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> .....	<b>87</b>
PROLOGUE.....	87
1. <i>ACEDIA</i> AMONG THE ANCHORITE MONKS .....	89
2. THE VIRTUE OF WORK AND THE MELANCHOLY OF THE SOCIAL BODY .....	98
3. THOMAS HOBBS AND THE MELANCHOLIC OF THE <i>LEVIATHAN</i> .....	104
4. THE PATHOLOGIES OF PERFORMATIVITY: <i>ACEDIA</i> .....	109
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> .....	<b>117</b>
PROLOGUE.....	117
1. GEORGE M. BEARD’S PHILOSOPHY OF NERVOUSNESS.....	120
2. THE CULTURE OF SENSIBILITY AND THE MALADIES OF THE WILL .....	124
3. THE HUMAN MOTOR: NERVES AND LABOUR POWER .....	131
4. THE MECHANICS OF MELANCHOLY: FREUD AND NEURASTHENIA.....	138
5. THE PATHOLOGIES OF PERFORMATIVITY: NEURASTHENIA .....	145
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> .....	<b>153</b>
1. A RECAPITULATION OF THE HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS.....	154
2. STRESS AND THE POPULARIZATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY .....	159
3. DEPRESSION AND THE ARTICULATION OF THE SELF.....	162
4. DEPRESSION AND SUBJECTIVITY AS A RESOURCE.....	167
DANSK RESUMÉ .....	173
REFERENCES .....	177
ENDNOTES.....	187



# Preface

This thesis is a study of three philosophical formations in the long and colourful history of melancholy as a cultural notion. For nearly two millennia the notion of melancholy helped to shape, organize, explain, focus and render manageable the encounter between individual and collective in the Western world. In terms of its implications for social, ethical, epistemological and medical norms, the multiplicity and diversity of this history is without comparison in the Occident. Yet, the work presented here is not so much an attempt to unravel its historical complexities. Rather, it is an effort to show that the history of melancholy can provide an unequalled and vital background to a philosophical study of the relations between the contemporary modes of organizing work and the individual pathos of work-related illness like stress and depression, which today has assumed a central role in the way we understand the partaking in a socioeconomic reality. In this sense, what the thesis provides is philosophical groundwork. It offers a looking glass through which the fascinating history of great achievement and personal failure that is central to the category of melancholy can be represented in all its foreignness, and yet, at the same time, can be said to reflect and illuminate the present. The philosophical formations explored here, it is my hope, can lead to a better and more complex understanding of the association in the contemporary between work-related illness and the injunction to participate and contribute as a self in the modern organization. What they provide is an attempt to inform and speak into the present from the point of view of history; not in order to reach the sublation of now and then, but in order to illustrate how philosophy, and the reflexive-hermeneutic space that it opens, persist in making us the contemporaries of a past that remains negotiable and precarious.

In this sense, the work on this thesis which I began on Copenhagen Business School in 2006, has also been a most important test piece for me in my attempt to find, maintain and use a personal voice on the threshold between classical philosophical studies, and the aspects of management and organization studies that were new to me at the time. It is my hope that the diversity of these fields, rather than being reduced to each other, are al-

lowed a space in which to grow and flourish in their diversity. The thesis began with an interest into the contemporary association between the spectacle of the experience economy and the social phenomenon of depression. It has ended as a philosophical exploration of the historical sources that may be said to constitute a background to an association like this. It is my hope that this work may offer a philosophical 'toolbox' to both my own further engagement in LAS, the research programme on management of self-management, which has provided me with an opportunity to continue my study of pathology and work today, and to those who work on the boundaries between philosophy, management and organization studies, and who are interested in the relation between tropes of work, illness and performativity today.

I want to thank first my supervisor Prof. Sverre Raffnsøe, Asmund Born and my good friend and colleague Marius Gudmand-Høyer *sine qua non*. Also Michael Pedersen and Anders Raastrup Kristensen, with whom I have enjoyed the privilege of sharing my time at CBS until now, along with Birgitte Gorm Hansen and Pia Bramming, deserve special thanks. The advice, expert assistance and corrections by Campbell Jones and André Spicer is something I have valued a lot and which has made my complex text much better. Also the opportunity given to me by Peter Case to speak in on the subject on the Bristol Centre for Leadership and Organisational Ethics (BCLOE) is something for which I am grateful. I want thank all of my colleagues at MPP for valuable comments, suggestions and cheers and for backing me when things got a little rough. Also all of my friends and my family, my father and Eva, mother, sister, Rune, Storm and Viggo deserve thanks for putting up with me.

Rasmus Johnsen, Frederiksberg, July 2009



# Chapter One

## Introducing the ‘Thing’ in the Body

### Prologue

1. Stress as a Pathology of Performativity
2. Michel Foucault’s Historical Problematization Analysis
3. The ‘Thing’ in the Body and the ‘Quasi-Object’
4. Historiography: One or Several Melancholies?

### Prologue

‘An old man who himself was extremely melancholy’, Søren Kierkegaard writes in a journal entry from 1846, ‘gets a son in his old age who inherits all this melancholy – but also has a mental-spiritual elasticity enabling him to hide his melancholy.’ (Kierkegaard 1978: 343) This little piece of self-observation, apart from representing something which to Kierkegaard was more like a condensed autobiography judging from his numerous reflections on the nature and cause of what he called his ‘thorn in the flesh’, presents an eminent motif for the present thesis. Through an inquiry into three very different periods in the broad and colourful history of melancholy, this thesis provides a philosophical and theoretical background for the study of a relation between pathology and the ability to perform in a social context today. The assertion of such a relation – represented by the burgeoning societal interest into the association between stress-related illness, depression and the way a contemporary workplace is organized (e.g. Iacovides et al. 2003) – has a socioeconomic impact on society like never before in history. In the wake of the debates, which were sparked in the 1990s as a result of the approval in December 1989 of Prozac for the American markets (e.g. Healy 1997, Kramer 1993), the societal debates about stress and depression have become linked to the question of the productivity of the ‘human resource’ and the potential humanization of work engaged within this perspective. In both fields of critical theory (e.g. Honneth 2005, Honneth 2004), sociology (e.g. Ehrenberg 1999, Petersen 2007, Willig & Østergaard 2005), work-environment studies (e.g. Marchand, Demers & Durand 2005, Levi 2001), popular management literature (e.g. Williams, Cooper 2002,

Loehr, McCormack 1997), psychiatric discourse (e.g. Bech et al. 2005, Schultz 2001) and philosophically inspired studies (e.g. Pedersen 2009) on stress and depression have been addressed as pathologies related to how contemporary work is organized. More often than not, work and mental disorder emerge in a cause-effect relation, where pathology is viewed as a direct *result* of the social role that the workplace has acquired as a place for the individual realization of the self.

Yet the assumption itself of a relation between illness and the way individuals perform in a social context is not new. Although it was not always associated with the way *work* is organized, the association between illness and performativity, between individual health and a productive life, has a long and complicated history. This thesis explores this history and the assertion in it of individual agency. Sharing with Kierkegaard's self-observation the inherent distinction between a psychosomatic state of suffering and the assertion of something like a 'mental-spiritual elasticity' of the individual will regulating it, the three historical formations with which it engages, each represent pathologies that possess connotations of health as an individual appropriation and of illness as the signal of a failure of agency. As maladies of the will – or pathologies of performativity – the *melancholy* of the extraordinary in character in Antiquity, the *acedia* of the religious man in the Middle Ages, and the *neurasthenia* of the laborious businessman around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all represent privileged and important aspects of a long tradition of illnesses associated with the reflective ability of the individual to articulate the 'self' as an object for regulation and management. It is the task of this thesis to rediscover and explore this tradition and to illustrate how it may assist and inform an inquiry into the contemporary age in order to provide a better understanding of the way illness is associated with the organization of work and performativity today.

Yet instead of focusing exclusively on this historical association as a cause-effect relation, designating a pattern of suffering in the individual body as the result of an external pressure, the thesis develops an alternative perspective, which seeks instead to ask the pertinent question about *how such associations are structured and come about*. Providing a *philosophical* perspective on the history of the pathologies of performativity, it attempts to illustrate how the reflective assertion of an individual agency

navigating on the precarious threshold between *soma* and *psyche* can inform the present in a way that transcends a traditional perception on psychosomatic illness (e.g. Greco 1998, Greco 1993). To Kierkegaard the profound depressive suffering that he believed was passed down to him by his father, the inexplicable and inarticulate burden that threatened to crush him, was thematized as a hereditary sin; but it was also associated with what he paradoxically described as an ‘uncommon resiliency’, an eminent health of mind and spirit in spite of it (Kierkegaard 1978: 334). Kierkegaard viewed his ‘thorn in the flesh’ as the gift of Governance, something to which he, from the first to the last written page of his life, was riveted and committed. The seeming *contradictio in adjecto* of this intimate and passionate relationship with suffering provides a central theme to the following. Illustrating a relationship to an indeterminate relation between *soma* and *psyche* – a ‘thing’ in the body – around which not only a psychosomatic pattern of suffering is structured, but also the different ways in which the individual can present the self as a performing subject within a social setting, the reflective relation between self and self – in Kierkegaard’s case represented as the difference between a *state of depression* and an *activity of despair* (Marino 2008: 125) – designates a sway in which the possibility of self-regulation and self-differentiation emerges as a problematic space of self-articulation. Establishing a fundamental relationship between the dimension of pathology and the dimension of performance, it is the unfolding and distribution of this space in the historical formations that constitute them as pathologies of performativity, which occupies the present thesis.

An excellent example illustrating the notion of the ‘thing’ in the body is found in Plato’s fantastic theory of the ‘wandering uterus’ taken from his great cosmological dialogue, the *Timaeus* (*Tim.* 91c) <sup>i</sup>. Describing a pattern of symptoms associated with the sexual frustration of women who remain childless too long after puberty, Plato’s theory assumes the existence in the female body of an unruly organ which, endowed like an animal with spontaneous sensation and emotion, desires to produce children. The frustration of this ill-tempered animal causes it to migrate through the body of the unfortunate, resulting in a host of physiological and psychological disturbances, until she becomes pregnant.

Albeit an anachronism of medical Antiquity, Plato's theory much later is assumed by Freud, along with his psychoanalytic colleagues, to be the first, rudimentary theory of psychosexual frustration and is thus associated with the diagnosis of *hysteria* that was fashionable at the time. (e.g. Freud 2004, Freud 1920, see also: Guttman 2006) As a proof of the scientific validity of symptoms related to the female generative systems, this theory of a 'thing' in the body typical of women to Freud illustrated an age-old awareness of the malign psychosomatic effects of disordered sexual activity. Structuring not only a pattern of psychosomatic suffering in the body of the hysteric, which it was up to the individual to articulate in a socially understandable manner, but also the pattern of authorities, institutions and technologies pointing it out, this 'thing' emerges as a precarious threshold between the individual and the collective in which the individual finds itself to exist.

Indicative of the philosophical perspective on the history of pathologies developed in this thesis, the Freudian use of Plato's theory illustrates how the regulative space opened in the bodies of hysterics was more than just an individual matter. Designating a precarious threshold between *soma* and *psyche*, between nature and culture, Plato's assumption of a 'thing' in the body of frustrated women, in the hands of Freud emerges as a *social bond*, a precarious and problematic space for psychoanalytic self-articulation, where the delimitations between individual and collective become blurred and indistinct. It is the historical unfolding of social bonds like this one in the history of the pathologies of performativity with which this thesis engages.

But before engaging in this discussion a look at how the thesis is organized will be in place. Following this introduction, the remainder of chapter one introduces the notion of the 'thing' in the body and discusses the methodological and philosophical implications of this perspective. The chapter begins with a discussion of the contemporary notion of *stress* as a formal indication of the historical dispositions that the following chapters set out to explore. Following this, a section discusses how the explorations of the pathologies of performativity reflect the methodological notion of *problem-ization* developed in the late work of Michel Foucault in the 1980s. The next section engages more directly with the notion of the 'thing' in the body, arguing that it can be seen as what Michel Serres has called a *quasi-object*

(Serres 2007, Serres 1987, Serres 1995). This section also illustrates how the perspective on the ‘thing’ in the body in this sense can be represented by the distinction made by Bruno Latour between *matters of fact* and *matters of concern* (Latour 2004). The final section of this chapter discusses the historiography of the ‘thing’ in the body, illustrating how the historical perspectives on pathologies developed in the thesis can be seen as a part of the history of melancholy.

Chapter two engages with the notion of *melancholy*, asserted to be the pathology of the extraordinary in character in Antiquity, and revolving around the assertion of the black bile (gr. *melaina cholê*) in the short Aristotelian text *Problems XXX, 1* from the *Corpus Aristotelicum* as a ‘thing’ in the body of extraordinary individuals. Removing the black bile from its place among the four humours of Hippocratic medicine, which were thought to be in balance when the organism was healthy, the author of *Problems XXX, 1* (probably Theophrastus, a follower of Aristotle) assumes the precarious notion of an *eukratos anomalia* – a well-balanced anomalism – in the black bile itself. The extraordinary in character, the great men of culturally formative achievement in art, politics and philosophy of Antiquity are melancholics, not *dià nóson*, through disease, but *dià phýsin*, by nature. While this may cause illness if they fail to govern themselves properly according to their nature, melancholy in them is not in itself pathological; rather, when it is handled skilfully, it is an expression of *êthos*, of the right character. This management of character, paradoxically, is located in the body as a physiological balance in the subject of the bile ensuing from the Aristotelian assumption of heat as the regulating principle of the body. The chapter traces the origins of this disposition to pre-historic times in the virtuosity of the tragic heroes and discusses its gradual transformation to play a central role in the dietetic theories of the genius in the Italian Renaissance.

Chapter three engages with the capital sin of *acedia*, first described in detail by the monk Evagrius Ponticus around the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., a constellation of unusual and undesirable feelings and behaviour also referred to as *the noonday demon*. First found in the coenobite monks of remote communities in the Egyptian desert, *acedia* – a kind of sinful carefreeness interfering with the virtuous activities of the monastic – was structured as a

pattern of psychosomatic suffering around a demonical possession, which made the monk inaccessible to regulation in the *theocosmos* of vice and virtue and opened his heart to the Devil. Describable as a sinful privation causing the confusion of the affective life, which enabled the 'good works' of the Christian community, *acedia* demanded constant vigilance, adhering to the burden of a social reality, which – unlike the melancholy of the extraordinary in character – was always already indebted to a 'higher' order. Focusing on *acedia* as an emotional hyperbole caused by deficient self-regulation, the chapter traces the confusion of affects from its assertion as a demon in the body of the virtuous within the context of the *theocosmos* and to its assertion as a monstrous eruption in the body of the vain-glorious melancholic within the *sociocosmos* of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651).

Chapter four concerns *neurasthenia*, the malady of the diligent and laborious individual of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialism, which was structured around the nervous force in the bodies of working subjects. Coined by the American physician George M. Beard and representing the illness of men (and women) of all classes, *neurasthenia* thematized the difficulties associated with the management of a personal store of energy in an everyday world, where the demands of progress and pitfalls of modernity challenged the autonomy and individuality of those unfortunate enough to yield to social pressure. Owing something to the two Brunonian categories of *sthenia* and *asthenia*, this pathology of everyday life thematized both the excess of stimulation of the individual when it was exposed to modern life, and the resulting incapacity of the will to react to stimulus, caused by the depletion of nervous energy. Reflected also in the Freudian understanding of melancholia, the exhaustion of the democratic individual resulting from a deficient management of personal resources designated the task of a *neuropathic household*, which made of the individual a vehicle for the refinement of natural resources into culture.

On the background of the three previous chapters, the fifth and concluding chapter of this thesis summarizes the findings of the explorations of the historical formations and discusses how these findings can contribute to an investigation of the relation between pathology, work and performativity in the present. Focussing on the contemporary problem of depression, it indicates three dimensions of this problem for further study, suggesting that

the work performed in this thesis contributes an important groundwork to the drafting of a philosophical topology of the contemporary conceptualization of productivity. First it suggests that the affinity between the contemporary phenomenon of stress and stress-management in the light of classical melancholia can be viewed as an *eroticism of modern day capitalism*. Secondly, it illustrates how aspects of the contemporary conceptualization of depressive disorder reflect the problematic formation of *acedia* in the Middle Ages and suggests that depression thus can be seen as a *fall from the social*. Thirdly, and finally, it discusses the relation of depression to work in the context of *subjectivity as a resource* modelled around the energetic tropes of 19<sup>th</sup> century neurasthenia.

Before proceeding to the investigation of the historical formations, though, the following sections will discuss in a little more detail the systematical implications of these explorations and take a closer look at the notion of the ‘thing’ in the body. First a description of how the contemporary notion of stress constitutes a formal indication of the kind of dispositions that the thesis sets out to uncover can provide not only a good introduction to the notion of the ‘thing’ in the body, but also help to point out some of the systematical dimensions which the thesis seeks to extract from its historical explorations.

### **1. Stress as a Formal Indication**

The contemporary concept of stress provides an illustrative example of this dispersive relation to a ‘thing’ in the body, representing the opening of a space for agency between *soma* and *psyche*. Resonating with Kierkegaard’s own designation in *The Sickness unto Death* (“Sygdommen til døden”, 1849) of the self as ‘a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is relating to itself’ (Kierkegaard 2004: 43), the example of stress offers what Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927) termed a *formal indication* of the disposition that this thesis engages with (Heidegger 1962, see also: Streeter 1997). Rather than grasping the concept of stress in the traditional manner of a categorical attempt to seize its object, this example traces a projective or anticipatory sketch that advances on certain prominent formal features of it as an entity, which can assist the understanding of the object of this study and provide it with a systematic dimension. As a relation

which relates to itself as a mind-body (mis)relation, the popular notion of stress articulates *both* the burgeoning interest in employee empowerment *and* the pathological problems associated with the management of the self in convergence with the demands of a productive organizational framework (e.g. Rose 1999, Pedersen & Kristensen 2009, Pedersen 2009).

Popular titles like *Creating Success: How to Deal with Stress* (Palmer & Cooper 2007), *Stress for Success* (Loehr & McCormack 1997), *Stress-Proof Your Life: Smart Ways to Relax and Re-Energize* (Wilson 2005), and *Conquer your Stress* (Williams & Cooper 2002) bedeck news-paper ads and internet flash-banners, newsstand shelves and airport bookstalls for the busy traveller, with promises of stress-busting advice that will lead to a healthier and more productive lifestyle. In a straightforward manner these titles boast advice that mixes management perspectives with psychological, physiological and neurobiological research to create insight into how to manage the stress that may build up in the body in the best way. One example that illustrates very well how stress as a ‘thing’ in the body represents a medium for both achievement and suffering is contained in the following lines from the foreword to *Stress Management for Dummies*:

Stress is an unavoidable consequence of life. There are some stresses you can do something about, and others you can't hope to avoid or control. The trick is learning to distinguish between the two, so that you're not constantly frustrated like Don Quixote, tilting at windmills. This book teaches you how to use your time and talents effectively so that stress can make you more productive, rather than self-destructive. (Elkin 1999: xxv)

Here stress is asserted to be a natural phenomenon that there is no way to avoid, but which on the other hand can be controlled, directed and sublimated by the intervention of concentrated self-management techniques. Stress, in other words, is not asserted to be pathological in itself; rather it acts as a natural potentiality that can lead to physical and mental suffering if the individual fails to take into account the pathogenic value of his or her specific disposition and environment. On the other hand, learning the trick of balancing the subject promises to increase personal productivity. Defining a healthy and productive balance in the anomaly of stress will lead to personal success, because ‘the right amount creates a beautiful tone’.



The problem that the assumption of stress as a threshold between *soma* and *psyche* presents to the individuals managing themselves lucidly illustrated by the pseudoscientific concepts of *eustress* and *distress* that were originally coined by Hans Seley (Cooper & Dewe 2004), but are now popular in use throughout stress-management programs. Designating stress as the articulation of a *natural* disposition, the ideas of a good stress and a bad stress, the *erōs* and *thanatos* of modern life-style, assert a subject that one does not only manage, but whose emissions one is also disposed to and subjected by. There are, Elkin claims in *Stress Management for Dummies*, 'the kinds of stresses that add to the enjoyment and satisfaction of our lives. We want *more* of this kind of stress, not less.' (Elkin 1999: 21) These *eustresses* are not defined in terms of illness; rather than designating anomalies, they are asserted to be natural aspects of a paradoxical balance of character *in* the anomaly that one does not simply handle in order to survive. The good stresses enable an *ēthos* – a 'right character' – in the anomaly, because 'effective stress management really comes down to effective lifestyle management' (Elkin 1999: 2). In this perspective health is not primarily a state of being. It is a highly individualized compound of *activities*, where health emerges as the precarious dynamic balance in a ceaseless process of self-differentiation. The deficiency of self-management, on the other hand, is represented as a double pathos: taken in both original senses of the word, this pathos is represented as the event of a *transience* as opposed to an ideal (the *ēthos*), and as an *affection* causing physical or mental suffering. While health is a dynamic value of self-differentiation, the possible proportions of this differentiation are represented somatically as suffering. Stress comes to represent the precarious and problematic 'thing' that *takes place* in the body and is detectable as the somatic pattern of failure or success of the self which manages itself. As a precarious bond between *soma* and *psyche* that is not reducible to something *psychosomatic*, stress functions as an arbiter of self-management (e.g. Pedersen 2009).

In this sense stress as a 'thing' in the body represents the assertion of a nature that is in fundamental conflict with itself. Or to be more precise: it constitutes a subject structured and cohered only by a fundamental conflict. It is through and only through the caesura and ceaseless rearticulation of

this subject that the self-differentiation of individual *ēthos* is constituted. The deficient self-management represented as transience as opposed to the right character emerges as the *decadence* in a literal sense (from latin *de+cadere*: fall apart) of a body that the self-differentiation passes through.

The fundamental conflict that is constitutive of this relation between *soma* and *psyche* is also represented in *Stress Management for Dummies*. The practical ‘stress-busting advice and exercises’ that are offered here function as articulating mediums disseminating stress as mode of existence to individuals. Most of these tests, tables, hints and scales are designed to tell the reader ‘how [his] body reacts’ (Elkin 1999: 25) and how stress can make him sick with individual somatic reactions. The opacity of the subject of stress is highlighted by the fact that it is both assumed to be something that defies general definition *and* a hormonal reaction, which works in a straightforward causal manner: perceived stressor – hormones – body organs and muscles. According to Elkin, muscles are prime targets for stress, but also the circulatory systems, sexuality and the immune system. Stress needs to be balanced, because ‘finding your stress balance is one of the best ways to find out if you are overreacting to the stress in your life’ (Elkin 1999: 38). The emission of stress acts as a cause for an individual profile, which is the result of a hormonal balance asserted to *you* as an individual. In other words ‘*you*’ are pointed out by stress as a ‘thing’ in the body:

Your sympathetic nervous system, one of the two branches of your autonomic nervous system, is producing changes in your body. Your *hypothalamus*, a part of your brain, is activating your *pituitary*, a small gland at the base of your brain, which releases a hormone into the bloodstream. This hormone (it’s called ACTH or adrenocorticotrophic hormone) reaches your adrenal glands, and they in turn produce more adrenalin (also known as epinephrine) along with other hormones called glucocorticoids (cortisol is one). This melange of biochemical changes is responsible for an array of other remarkable changes in your body. (Elkin 1999: 26)

As a fundamental threshold between the somatic constitution of the individual represented on a molecular level and the interpellation of the individual as an active agent, stress as a ‘thing’ in the body that can be identified, isolated and manipulated, but also mobilized, recombined and intervened on, here emerges as an emblematic representation of the object of this study. Structured around ‘objects’ that are neither fully representable

as nature, nor as culture, not fully as *soma* or as *psyche*, the pathologies of performativity presented in this thesis represent the precarious problematic fields of subjects, which designate a conflict between an individual *pathos* and the *ēthos* of performativity that can only be regulated by a reflective intervention.

As a first formal indication of the structural dimensions that this study sets out to explore historically, this conflict in the contemporary conceptualization of stress can be represented on the fundamental level of a distinction between *problem* and *response*. The emergence of stress as a ‘thing’ in the body, illustrated in the quote above in a very literal sense, culminates in the assertion a *pathological problem*, designating a host of more or less undifferentiated symptoms, which are articulated in convergence with the dimension of a *self-regulatory response*, designating a space for individual agency. Yet these two fundamental dimensions, as the indication above illustrates, are not causally organized as a challenge to which a solution exists that makes the challenge go away. As the patterns of psychosomatic symptoms are autonomic, the pathological problem in a certain manner itself represents a response to an undifferentiated and unsymbolized ‘preobject’ in the individual body, an affective reality leading towards the modality of significance. Likewise, the self-regulatory response itself on a certain level represents a *problem* as it is an adventure inscribing a symbolic dimension to this ‘preobject’ transforming affect into activity. Instead of representing a *causality*, the dimensions of problem and response represent the most fundamental categorical aspects of a *cosmology* organized around the ‘thing’ in the body.

These categorical aspects and how their organization around the ‘thing’ indicates a systematical level of exploration for the thesis is something to which we will return in the next section. For now the formal indication of stress as an *irreducible problematic* organized around a ‘thing’ in the body, and how that reflects the pathologies of performativity explored, deserves a little more attention.

The difficulty of describing the ‘nature’ of the diffuse ‘thing’ in the body pointed out by stress as a formal indication reflects a fundamental problem with which this thesis engages. Was the black bile really a physical substance that was more dominant in the bodies of melancholics than in other

people, or was it merely a supposition of early Hippocratic theories that Modern and more advanced medicine has proven obsolete? Was the coenobite monk, whose body was filled with *acedia*, really possessed by the noonday demon that tied his tongue so that he was unable to say his prayers or was his inability to see anything good in God's creation merely a result of his own sinful lack of spiritual vigilance? Was the nervous bankruptcy of the neurasthenic patient really an exhaustion of the body's natural reserves of energy or did it rather constitute a kind of inverted work-ethics, an individual resistance to the social pressures of modernity? How about the contemporary perspective? Is the imaging of the neural processes of the brain in stress a health scientific *fact* or is it a cultural imaginative?

The problem of the nature of the 'thing' in the body is perhaps nowhere as painstakingly illustrated as in the assumption of *lycanthropy*, derived from the notion of the transformation of a human being into a wolf, which was popularly used to describe a kind of melancholic individual, who would go out at night, imitating a wolf, frequenting tombs in the cemetery until daytime, where he would howl and wail madly. Thomas Hobbes' definition in *Leviathan* (1651) of melancholy as the kind of dejection which 'subjects man to causeless fears' and appears among other things as the 'haunting of solitudes, and graves' (Hobbes 2006: 41) reflects Robert Burton's call for self-knowledge in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), where he writes that while men may be 'sufficiently informed in all other worldly business', when it comes to themselves, 'they are wholly ignorant and careless, they know not what this Body and Soul are ... or how a Man differs from a Dog' (Burton 1986: 93). While the ontological problem of knowing the difference between man and dog, of distinguishing between human and animal in a categorical manner, may seem trivial to a contemporary perspective, it was more than just a formal matter to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. As the trials against alleged lycanthropes illustrate, the determination of whether the prosecuted had actually been transformed into a wolf or whether he was merely under the influence of the Devil's ability to insinuate himself into the mental processes of the melancholic mind, was a crucial prerequisite for any legal sentence (e.g. Baring-Gould 1995, Johnsen 2009). To most of the metaphysical, theological, juridical, historical, medical and imaginative literature of the period, the lycanthrope represented a threshold between man

and beast, an unresolved and unwanted indistinction that had to be worked out in order for the difference between human and animal, between reason and unreason to remain (e.g. Agamben 2004). In a theory typical of its time, Thomas Willis, a lecturer at Oxford in the early 1660s, argued that man possessed a *corporeal soul* specific to him that had two aspects: one was its *vital* part, which in the tradition of the humoral theory would inhabit the blood and enkindle it, and the second a *sensitive* part which on account of external influence would sometimes contract disproportionately with the body and thus cause delusions of metamorphosis (Jackson 1986: 348). Possessed by Satan, another theory along the same line added, the deluded would imagine himself transformed into a wolf, because the humors of his body had been confused; he would, however, not be transformed in reality, as the Devil had no power to fundamentally alter the human nature that God created in his image (Otten 1986). To science, theology and law, the lycanthrope represented a very real problem to which there seemed to be no easy solution.

Reflecting the articulation of stress on a molecular level, the problem of the melancholic werewolf may be addressed in different manners from a contemporary perspective. One way would be to explain society with nature. One such attempt can be found in the explanation of the lycanthrope as an individual suffering from *congenital porphyria*, a rare disease in which there is an inability to convert porphobilinogen to porphyrin in the bone marrow. The symptoms of severe photosensitivity, a reddish-brown coloured urine, development of pigmentation and hypertrichosis (an overgrowth of hair not localized to the androgen-dependent areas of the skin) and hyperplastic bone-marrow would explain why someone would prefer to wander about at night in secluded and isolated areas, maybe on all fours and probably mentally disturbed and fear-ridden because of the condition (Illis 1986).

Another way would be to explain nature with society: the monstrous body of the werewolf contributes to a process of identity formation by negative definition (du Coudray 2002). As a social construct of the other of the humanist subject, the lycanthrope reflects societal anxieties about morality and represents an extreme rendition of human carelessness. Such a perspective on stress would represent it as the primary trope of resistance to

the contemporary hegemony of work in late capitalism as a place for individual self-realization, involving the organization and productivity of the working subjectivity (the 'human resource') (Costea et al. 2008, Fleming 2008, Fleming 2003, Johnsen 2009)

To the philosophical perspective on the 'thing' in the body taken up here, both of these assumptions – the first explaining the evolution of a social category with nature, and the other explaining the human settlement on matters of fact by social factors – fall short, because they, in spite of constituting a dichotomy, fail to address the same crucial issue. Reducing the image of the werewolf to a problem to which one appropriate resolution exists, both perspectives fail to address the important aspect, that to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century scholars, who engaged with the distinction between human and beast, with the distinction between nature and society *in man*, the lycanthrope represented *a distinction that had yet not been made*, a battlefield of interests involving supernatural, theological and scientific knowledge alike. Rather than representing a simple problem, the lycanthrope constituted an irreducible dilemma, a *problematization* that involved continuous alertness and circumspection, but also the exercise of specific modes of questioning. Its nature, rather than representing something that was both man and beast, was that of something that eerily was *neither*, dwelling within both, but irreducible to any of them (Agamben 1998: 105).

As a *philosophical* problem this is also the challenge that the 'thing' in the body represents to this thesis. What the black bile of Antique medicine and the nervous energy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have in common is the representation of the 'thing' as not exactly nature or society, but as something that dwells paradoxically within both. Explaining the contemporary problem of stress as *either* an exclusively neurological and physiological pattern, defining the limits of the working body (a pathophysiological disease) *or* as a social construction representing the limit of the individual beyond which the demands of society become illegitimate (a social pathology) is a deadlock, because both explanations miss the trajectory of the 'thing' in question: the paradoxical articulation of a dilemma that itself seems to provide a breeding ground for specific modes of experiencing series or networks of otherwise heterogeneous elements.

The articulation of such a dilemma poses two important challenges. First, the question about how the heterogeneity of elements involved in the following explorations may be articulated systematically without merely coming to represent contradictions. This question will be discussed in the following section reflecting on the late Michel Foucault's work on *problematizations*. Secondly, the dilemma of the 'thing' in the body represents the fundamental question about the nature of the *object* of this study. Following the reflections on Foucault's historical problematizations analysis, a section arguing that the 'thing' in the body can be understood in terms of Michel Serres' theory of quasi-objects, will thus reflect on the paradigmatic status of the 'thing' as a *social bond* – what Bruno Latour calls *a matter of concern*.

## **2. Michel Foucault's Historical Problematization Analysis**

An illustrious example of how the late analytical contributions of Michel Foucault can assist an understanding of the dilemma of the 'thing' in the body and help to indicate a structural level of inquiry to the perspective developed in the following can be found in Foucault's reflections on the status of homosexuality in Antiquity. Based on the frequent mentioning of it in ancient Greek literature and art, it has often been assumed that homosexuality constituted an accepted practice in Antiquity. Yet as Foucault argues (Foucault 1996: 363-65; see also Detel 2005: 118-162), the frequent reference to homosexual encounters and pederasty in particular may be taken here also to indicate the contrary: that the phenomenon was not a triviality and that we encounter it as often as we do exactly because it was *problematic* – not least as the implicated youth risked falling into the category "prostitute" if the practice continued too long after puberty, as this would prevent him from entering any kind of political life. While the Greek mentality would tolerate pederastic encounters, it could not accept the combination of sexual submissiveness and political dominance in one person.

What Foucault's example illustrates is that the utterances and practices related to a problem like this one may be taken to be modalities of 'response' to 'problems' in the way also this study indicated such levels above in relation to stress as a 'problem' in the present. In the exemplary case of homosexuality, the utterances deal not with *whether* homosexuality was al-

lowed, but rather *when* it was, as it was not proper to the male subject, but only to the youth-object that was later to become a male subject. What Foucault's example illustrates is how the problem 'homosexuality' on this background is constituted in a relational manner associating it with heterogeneous elements, to which it might otherwise have no relation at all. In the case of homoerotic practice in Antiquity, unexpected connections between topics like man/youth/time, eroticism/politics etc., emerge and form complex problematizations in patterns or series of associations.

It is this level of problematization (rather than the problems themselves), that constitutes the fundamental field of interest to the late Foucault's analytical gaze. The formations of melancholy, *acedia* and neurasthenia, which this thesis explores, can be said also to pertain also to such a level of inquiry, as they explore the dimension of practice associated with and structured in heterogeneous patterns around the 'thing' in the body. As illustrated above in relation to stress, the association of labour with dimensions of self-regulation, pathology and performativity can be said to constitute a *problematization* in Foucault's sense of the word. What the following reflections on Foucault's methodological contribution can do is thus to provide an indication of how – and with which questions – such explorations can systematically proceed.

Although the notion of a historical problematization analysis itself was not fully developed by Foucault, it is possible to reconstruct it from his work in the 1980s (Foucault 1991, 1996b, 1996c, 2001). Research has already shown that Foucault's notion of *problématisation* occupies an important and productive place in his thinking in a broad sense (e.g. Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer & Thaning 2008, Castel 1994, Deacon 2000, Koopman 2008, Osborne 2003). The work of Marius Gudmand-Høyer demonstrates an attempt to illustrate how Foucault's reflexions on it can provide a methodological procedure for historical and philosophical analyses (Gudmand-Høyer 2009). The following reflections do not pretend to engage in a discussion of the possible implications of Foucault's contribution to methodology as such; instead the goal here is to indicate how the 'problematization analysis' – sketchy as it may be – can help to clarify the level of inquiry in this thesis and specify the problematic 'object' of this study.



As Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer and Thaning have argued, Foucault's analysis of historical problematizations asserts a level of inquiry on which the problematizations represent the objects of the analysis (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer & Thaning 2008: 232-36). This analysis itself essentially operates by means of historical exploration, given that the problematizations themselves consist of historical processes. More precisely, a *problematization* in this sense refers to the totality of historical practices, said or non-said, discursive or non-discursive, raising issues and concerns, posing questions and difficulties, inducing procedures, interventions and instruments, or introducing hitherto unacknowledged elements into the field of thought and practice. As such, Burchell argues, the formation of the problematization process has to do with 'the historically conditioned emergence of new fields of experience' (Burchell 1993: 277), which are not investigated or elucidated directly or in themselves, but indirectly through the formation of the experiential field, or "breeding ground", where they emerge. The problematic formations of melancholy, *acedia* and neurasthenia, all organized around a 'thing' in the body, can be seen as such breeding grounds, where otherwise heterogeneous elements form associations.

In such a perspective, the formulation of a series of questions directed from the present into the past, cannot be reduced to a level of historical interest; rather in a problematization, as Robert Castel argues, 'the diagnostic turned upon the present guides the reading of the past and prompts it to decode history along this line of understanding.' (Castel 1994: 241) The formal indication of stress as a problematic 'thing' in the body in this thesis thus does not serve the purpose of indicating a contemporary issue, of which it then tells the historical emergence. Rather the indication of stress as a 'thing' in the body today involves a level of inquiry pertaining to questions, which previous epochs have not asked, exactly because they are contemporary questions. The level on which stress, in the way the phenomenon has been articulated in the section above, relates to ancient melancholia, to *acedia* and neurasthenia, does not reduce the phenomena to each other, because a problematization, if one accepts that it has appeared as a field of experience in the past, where otherwise heterogeneous elements have become related, does not repeat itself (Castel 1994: 239). Instead the interest into the *present situation* of this thesis involves the articulation of prob-

lematizations, which have transformed; but on the background of a continuity that allows them to be accounted for in the present. The problematization of the 'thing' in the body does not take as its unifying principle of continuity the coexistence of its elements in the past. Rather it indicates the relationship of them to a contemporary question. The existence of the problematic formations, which this thesis sets out to explore, hinges on the manifestation of the 'thing' in the body as a contemporary problematization. This also means that the choice of sources for uncovering these formations does not reflect the history of a historian. As section 4 of this chapter illustrates, the historical literature used in this thesis consists only partly in primary sources. Most of the sources are well-known and well-represented also in secondary literature; but from the contemporary perspective on the problematization of the 'thing' in the body, the interpretation of them provides a different account that displays its own level of intelligibility.

This leads to a second way in which the following explorations reflect the historical problematizations analysis. According to Foucault the historical analysis of problematizations that constitute such a history involves an investigation of the processes on the backdrop of which aspects of human existence and vital conditions emerge as themes which inevitably must be fathomed and thus become objects for reflexion and different kinds of practice, for experience and change and for manipulation and hopes (Foucault 1984: 17). But such a history can take different forms. While this analytical plane could be used to constitute the historical *process of formation* of the 'thing' in the body, which represents a *genealogical level of inquiry*, the explorations that follow this chapter pertain instead to the mapping of their *patterns of formation* around the 'thing' in the body. Such a differentiation reflects Foucault's own distinction between *genealogy* and *archaeology*, where the first is concerned with uncovering the historical emergence of its problematizations, while the latter is associated with the *existence of these formations*. The choice of an archaeological level of inquiry in the analytic investigation of the 'thing' in the body and its association with the problematic formations of melancholy, *acedia* and neurasthenia reflects the interest of the thesis into how this 'thing' in spite of its transformations through history has functioned – and functions – as a *social bond* designating a

threshold between the individual and the collective, between the regulation of the self and tropes of performativity and pathology.

The assertion of a level of inquiry pertaining to the uncovering of patterns structured around the 'thing' in the body also opens to a third dimension in the context of which the work of this thesis can be said to reflect Foucault's late work. The *history of ideas* or *mentalities* identifies the discursive systematic that accounts for how something like melancholia, *acedia* or neurasthenia can be represented as categories of consciousness in a given period of time. An example of such a perspective on the history of melancholy can perhaps be found in Jennifer Radden's introduction to her anthology of classical texts (Radden 2000b), which seeks to identify a discursive level of reality. Unlike Radden's work, the perspective of the following does not focus primarily on *what can be said* about something, as much as it focuses on the modes in which that which is being said (and done) erupts as a problematic 'thing' for reflection and manipulation. Placing their interest on this semi-normative level, the following explorations reflect Foucault's assertion that:

Problematization doesn't mean the representation of a pre-existing object, nor the creation through discourse of an object that doesn't exist. It's the set of discursive and non-discursive practices that makes something enter into the play of true and false, and constitutes it as an object for thought (whether under the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.) (Foucault 1996c: 456-57).

Taking as its level of interest the constitution of an 'object' for thought – the 'thing' in the body – like the one mentioned here by Foucault, the historical inquiry of the following chapters seek the bundle of articulations, both of linguistic and 'material' character, the conglomerate of which makes something accessible to reflection and practice in such a way that its unity or its complexity, its verity or falsity, its consequences or its impressionability, its effects or lack of same, its value or harmfulness, its necessities or accidental occurrences can become aspects of debate, circumspection, consideration or intervention (Foucault 1996c: 456). Like Foucault's problematization this 'something', represented in the problematic formations of the following as the 'thing' in the body, to specific kinds of practice or reflection becomes an 'object', which may not exist as such or does not exist in exactly the way

it is suggested, but nevertheless ‘marks’ the reality to which it pertains. The black bile, like the nerves of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, may become object for biological admission or behaviourism, while the monstrous eruption of lycanthropy in the bodies of others may instead become a juridical, theological or moral theme, a theme for cultural critique and sociological explanation. Stress and its close proximity to depression today has become an object for managerial intervention, psychoanalytic reconfiguration, political analysis and socioeconomic calculation, just to name some.

These considerations, in their reflection of Foucault’s historical problematization analysis, may be used to assert a more systematic level of inquiry, based on the distinction between *problem* and *response* found above in stress as a formal indication of what this thesis explores. As a matter beyond the distinction between something entirely *natural* and something entirely *cultural*, the ‘thing’ in the body here was found to constitute a *distinction not yet made*. This assertion reflects Foucault’s claim that the patterns of experience associated with the problematization cannot be reduced to human *behaviour*, such as a study of social history would have it – even if these patterns of experience present new possibilities for behaviour; or to human *ideas* representable to a history of ideas as a relation between human consciousness and the already given – even though the patterns of experience are probably factors in the constitution of these ideas (Foucault 2001: 115, 1991: 388-89). The patterns of experience belong instead to the process of problematization which results in some relations, modes of behaviour, phenomena and processes becoming privileged, while others are ignored or reconfigured, forgotten or abandoned. Again this does not mean that the problematization does not pertain to reality and exists only in itself; the phenomenon – the problematic ‘thing’ – exists in the world as it is being exposed to reflection and practice at a given time in history (Foucault 1996c: 457). As Foucault explains:

[T]o analyze the process of “problematization” ... means: how and why certain things (behaviour, phenomena, processes) became a problem. Why, for example, certain forms of behaviour were characterized and classified as “madness” while other similar forms were completely neglected at a given historical moment ... How and why were very different things in the world gathered together, characterized, analyzed, and treated as, for example, “mental illness”? What are

the elements which are relevant for a given “problematization”? And even though if I won’t say that what is characterized as “schizophrenia” corresponds to something real in the world, this has nothing to do with idealism. For I think there is a relation between the thing which is problematized and the process of problematization. The problematization is an “answer” to a concrete situation which is real (Foucault 2001: 171-72).

As indicated above, the emergence of stress as a ‘thing’ in the body, in a very fundamental sense could be said to assert the dimension of a *pathological problem*, which designated a host of more or less undifferentiated symptoms. This host of symptoms, as it was also illustrated, were found to be articulated in convergence with the dimension of a *self-regulatory response*, designating a space for individual agency. As fundamental aspects of the problematization as an ‘answer’ to a concrete situation, these dimensions of problem and response can act as a guideline to the systematic level of inquiry in the following. The simultaneity of these dimensions reflects another observation on the process of problematization made by Foucault:

To one single set of difficulties, several responses can be made. And most of the time different responses actually are proposed. But what must be understood is what makes them simultaneously possible: it is the point in which their *simultaneity* is rooted (Foucault 1991: 389; italics added).

What Foucault points to here, is the indissoluble and actual relation between the process of problematization and the ‘objects’ of this problematization. Like Foucault’s problematizations, the objects of inquiry in the following chapters on melancholia, *acedia* and neurasthenia represent not only problems, but also responses and suggestions for solutions to concrete existing conditions that at the given historical times are problematic (Foucault 2001: 115). These dimensions in the following will be referred to as dimensions of *response*, which mark the realities to which they pertain. As the explorations in this thesis will illustrate the dimensions of response can often be said to be recursive to the extent that they come to constitute the privileged response of a given epoch to a given problem (Foucault 2001: 117). It is the indication of this level of social recursivity that constitutes the main contribution of the thesis in its attempt to historically and philosophically inform an investigation of the present.

What Foucault's notion of problematizations can contribute to the following is thus not only an indication of the level of inquiry on which an investigation of a precarious matter like the 'thing' in the body may be performed. It also provides an indication of what kind of systematic questions such an investigation should ask in order to discover the difficult problems and the order of response of a given period and differentiate between them. If the history of problematizations is simultaneously the history of how certain conditions ended up as a specific problematic closely tied to a dimension of response, then the exploration of a 'thing' in the body must inquire into why, how and where this 'thing' ended up being a specific problem to a specific period (Foucault 1996b: 414).

This represents the difficulty of finding a level on which to compare both that which is historically similar and that which is historically different. In the case of homosexuality as a problematization that was mentioned above, Foucault went about this difficulty by assuming a line of identical categories on the background of which he could compare the differences between the historical "formations" of homosexuality. While these dimension allowed him to represent different historical "periods" – Antiquity, the Roman Empire, early Christianity and Modernity – they also constituted different ethical categories, fleshing out modes of ethical substance, submission, work and teleology that made it possible to both analyze the problematizations in their own time according to its ethical "framework" and to compare their differences over time.

When the following chapters ask why, how and where the 'thing' in the body ended up as a problem within the context of the different problematic formations of melancholy, *acedia* and neurasthenia, it will structure its questions in a similar manner, which will be taken up at the end of each of them. Reflecting the importance of uncovering in which way the 'thing' in the body has become associated with particular problems and particular modes of response, such a level of inquiry can be represented within the following six dimension, which will constitute a structural systematic for the explorations in the next chapters. Divided as three problematic dimensions and three dimensions of response, these questions are represented below in TABLE 1.

<b>TABLE 1 Problematical Formations</b>	<b>MELANCHOLIA</b>	<b>ACEDIA</b>	<b>NEURASTHENIA</b>
<b>Pathological Problem</b>	What kind of pathology is embedded in the problematical formations pertaining to melancholia, <i>acedia</i> , and neurasthenia, respectively?		
<b>Characterological Problem</b>	Which kind of character is associated with the problematical formations pertaining to melancholia, <i>acedia</i> , and neurasthenia, respectively?		
<b>Delimitative Problem</b>	How is the individual separated from the collective in which it takes part within the problematical formations pertaining to melancholia, <i>acedia</i> , and neurasthenia, respectively?		
<b>Self-Regulatory Response</b>	What kind of self-regulatory response is associated with the problematical formations pertaining to melancholia, <i>acedia</i> , and neurasthenia, respectively?		
<b>Performative Response</b>	Which form does the performative response associated with the problematical formations pertaining to melancholia, <i>acedia</i> , and neurasthenia take, respectively?		
<b>Self-Articulatory Response</b>	How is the 'self' articulated in response to the problematical formations pertaining to melancholia, <i>acedia</i> , and neurasthenia, respectively?		

Reflecting the aspects found above in association with the stress as a formal indication, the dimension of the *pathological problem* and the dimension of the *self-regulatory response* represent the fundamental level of inquiry into: *What kind of pathology is embedded in the problematical formations pertaining to melancholia, acedia, and neurasthenia, respectively?* And: *Which kind of self-regulatory response is associated with the problematical formations pertaining to melancholia, acedia, and neurasthenia, respectively?* Representing a level of inquiry seeking to illustrate how the organization of a psychosomatic pattern of suffering around the problematic 'thing' in the body comes to be associated with aspects of performativity, the four remaining dimensions of problem and response indicate privileged areas of interest, which all add important facets to the problematizations. While the relevance of these areas to the investigations of the

pathologies of performativity can only be fully justified through the explorations of the following chapters, the contemporary phenomenon of stress again may prove helpful as an indication.

The dimension of the characterological problem thus asserts for whom the 'thing' in the body becomes a problem. This question seeks to indicate the kind of character to whom the given association between pathology and performativity is relevant. While the dietetic measures of the Italian Renaissance for example was only relevant to the extraordinary and culturally formative genius, stress as a 'thing' in the body today is relevant primarily to the *self-managing employee* as indicated by the stress-management literature quoted above. This indicates a problematic contemporary association of tropes of labour with those of pathology.

The third question in the problematic dimension engages with how – or better: *where* – the performing character, to whom the pathological patterns of suffering are relevant are *pointed out* by the 'thing' in the body. The assertion, for example, of demonical possession in the problematic formation of *acedia* sees the afflicted individual erupt on the *outside* of the *theo-cosmos*, while the pathological deepening of an otherwise productive resource in the individual body represented by stress rather characterizes an *inside* to the contemporary collective order.

On the side of *dimensions of response*, the two remaining questions function as a broadening in the same way. Associating pathology with the tropes of individual agency, the question about the performative response thus indicates how the performativity of the individual in response to the 'thing' in the body was organized. Within the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century neurasthenia, the dimension of the performative response was organized around the management of labour power as a scarce individual resource likeable to a 'second nature'. While contemporary work has taken over many of the tropes related to such a management of a personal capital, these resources, as the notion of stress formally indicates, is associated today more often with the management of *subjectivity at work*.

The final question that this thesis uses to inquire into the dimensions of response to the problematic of the 'thing' in the body indicates the mode in which the 'self' of the involved character is articulated. Although it does not make sense to speak of a 'self' in a non-historical manner, the pathologies



of performativity, as the following will show, have always been associated with the ability (and pathological inability) to represent a 'self' in convergence with the collective order they belonged to. To the extraordinary melancholic discussed in *Problems XXX, 1*, the ability to represent oneself in the context of the *exalted self-transformation*, which Nietzsche praised highly as a 'great health', was crucial, because this represented the paradoxical Aristotelian 'middle' in their anomaly. In the context of stress today, perhaps, the answer to this question can be found in the democratized version of the ability to represent a "self" of self-differentiation. As the conclusion to this thesis will reflect on in a little more detail, it is the contemporary injunction to articulate a "self" in ceaseless development that can be said to associate the problem of depression with the organization of work today.

In the following chapters these six questions pertaining to the dimensions of problem and response will constitute the structural level of inquiry into the problematizing formations organized around the 'thing' in the body.

### **3. Michel Serres and the Theory of the Quasi-Object**

Following the constitution of the dimensions of problem and response, which designate the systematic level of inquiry to the historical formations that are organized around the problematic 'thing' in the body, the challenge remains of explaining the character of this 'object' itself in a little more detail. Consequently, this section will discuss the notion of the 'thing' in the body in association with Michel Serres' theory of *quasi-objects* (Serres 2007, Serres 1987, Serres 1995, Latour 1992). Such a discussion will indicate how the 'thing' can be understood as a social bond.

Reflecting the formal indication of the 'thing' in the sections above, in Serres' words, the quasi-object 'is not an object, but it is one nevertheless, since it is not a subject, since it is in the world; it is also a quasi-subject, since it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject.' (Serres 2007: 225) The evasive character of Serres' definition of the quasi-object may be appeased, perhaps, by looking at it from the perspective of what is being developed in this thesis. As a 'thing' in the body, the black bile of the outstanding Aristotelian character is not an object in the

strict sense that a tumour or even a haemorrhage would be. Governed by the interaction of opposite energies like the froth, its euphoric counterpoint that is found in the sea, in wine and in the sperm of man (Kristeva 1989: 7), it is defined by the intervention in it and mobilization of it. Yet since it is some-thing, a *res extensa* taking up space in the world like the body, it must be an object; but only if it exists as a quasi-subject marking the melancholic who holds on to it. Like the example of the imaging of stress on a molecular level from *Stress Management for Dummies* discussed earlier, the quasi-object points out the subject that holds on to it, not the other way around. Put in terms of what has been developed above, the 'thing' is primary to the principle of individuation, weaving the individual rather than being weaved by it. The 'thing', in Serres' words: 'is the quasi-object and quasi-subject by which I am subject, that is to say, sub-mitted, fallen, put beneath, trampled, tackled, thrown about, subjugated, exposed' (Serres 2007: 227). It is through the dilemma of the 'thing' that 'I' comes to know itself – and is able to regulate and differentiate this self as a self.

Serres presents the theory of the quasi-object in terms of the *concept of play*, but from a very different perspective than the more famous *Spiel*-metaphor of his German colleague, Hans-Georg Gadamer. If the hermeneutic subject in Gadamer's concept of play is defined wholly by the 'mode of being of play as such', which does not 'allow the player to behave towards play as if towards an object' (Gadamer 1975: 102), then in Serres' work it is the *object in play* that designates both the subject and the collective that it emerges from.

Serres uses the example of a children's game, the game of *hunt-the-slipper*, where all players except one are named 'cobblers' and sit on the floor in a circle a few inches apart. The 'customer' remains inside the circle to hunt the slipper that passes from hand to hand very rapidly in the circle. The one in whose hand it is caught then becomes the new 'customer', and pays a forfeit. The slipper (in French Serres refers to the *furet*) in this game, according to Serres, resembles the quasi-object, because it points out the individual, picks her out when it is found in one of the player's hands. The one who is not discovered remains part of the anonymous chain, circulating, never recognized or discovered:

Who are we? Those who pass the furet; those who don't have it. This quasi-object, when being passed, makes the collective, if it stops, it makes the individual. If he is discovered, he is "it" [*mort*]. Who is the subject, who is an "I," or who am I? The moving furet weaves the "we," the collective; if it stops, it marks the "I" (Serres 2007: 225).

The 'thing' in the body, rather than being reducible to a natural substance or a social construction can be thought of in terms of this *furet*, the quasi-object that passes through a social group and mediates identities, both collective and personal, transforming itself while it circulates. The black bile, the demon of *acedia*, the nerves, stress in the body of the contemporary employee; these 'objects' all have in common that they pass through collectives weaving the social group and marking the "I" by exposing the individual to a Fall, to the subjugation under the dense heap of others.

This is, Serres argues, what sets the quasi-object apart from other objects: like a ball it has no value, no function or meaning unless in the hands of a subject that holds it. The demon in the desert is stupid if there is no one in the desert with it. The quasi-object is only relevant as it shuttles back and forth between individual and collective, like the slipper in the children's game, weaving the knowledge about who are subjects and who are not. Consequently, the one who plays ball is subjected not to the play itself, as Gadamer would have it, but to the circulating object that presents itself as the subject of circulation. The quasi-object witnesses the players only as relays and stations in the production of a nature ('out there'), a society ('up there') and an individuality ('in here') alike:

Playing is nothing else but making oneself the attribute of the ball as a substance. The laws are written for it, defined relative to it, and we bend to these laws. Skill with the ball supposes a Ptolemaic revolution of which few theoreticians are capable, since they are accustomed to being subjects in a Copernican world where objects are slaves (Serres 2007: 226).

As the subject of the pathos described above as the somatic pattern of failure of the self to take care of itself, the 'thing' in the body is the *martyr* (as Serres remarks, the Greek word for "witness" is martyr) that witnesses the articulation of rules, the bringing together and separation of networks of institutions and authorities and the ethical shaping of power, knowledge and morality as it passes through the individual. Reflecting Foucault's theory of

problematizations, the 'thing' is interesting as a problem because of its precarious character that designates collective identities, network relations and subjectivity.

As Serres demonstrates, the character of such a dilemma is that it emerges at a given moment in history and may disappear again unresolved as 'history and attention bifurcate' (Serres 2007: 226). The lycanthrope as a dilemma, for example, to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, represented the precarious indistinction between man and animal and the general difficulty both in philosophy, science and law of performing the human-animal divide. Yet pervasive as this dilemma was in its time, as the theories of evolution evoked the bestial inheritance of humanity and opened the potentiality for lycanthropy to all individuals within the framework of degeneracy (e.g. du Coudray 2002, Lawrence 1996), that which used to be true was no longer important; that which had supposed to be decided was no longer relevant. Reflecting Foucault's theory of problematizations, the indication of the 'thing' in the body is it emerges as problematic at a given time in history designates a realm in which something is introduced as an 'object' for discursive as well as non-discursive activity and thought out of which the truth emerges.

It is on this background that the 'thing' in the body can be thought of as a *social bond*, the nature of which may be represented by the distinction that Bruno Latour makes between *matters of fact* and *matters of concern* (Latour 2004). It was Martin Heidegger who initially provided the means for this distinction in his discussion of the ontology of the thing, *das Ding* (Heidegger 1970). As Latour points out, Heidegger illustrates how in the etymology of the word *thing* in all European languages, there exists a strong relation between the object and the word for a judiciary assembly. The Icelandic word for the parliament is *Althing*. Like the Danish *folketing* (lit.: "assembly of the people") it uses the word *thing* to designate the place for political dispute. Also in old English this meaning is reflected as the word originally designates an assembly. A *thing*, Latour argues with Heidegger, can thus be taken to mean both 'an object out there and, in another sense, an *issue* very much *in* there, at any rate, a *gathering*.' (Latour 2004: 233) The word *thing* entails a double meaning: designating both a matter of fact and a matter of concern, it refers simultaneously to an object that is ex-

pelled from the political sphere, something that stands out objectively and independently (like stress), and to the *Ding* as an issue that brings people together in its division of them, in its problematic character (also like stress) (Latour 2005). As a philosophical problem, the ‘thing’ in the body that is examined in this thesis takes exactly this form: it designates an object (the *Gegenstand* in Heideggerian terms) as a *matter of fact* that may at the same time be taken to be – or may be turned into – a *matter of concern* (*das Ding*). As reflected above, this transformation and its historical bifurcations, the direction of its ‘flow’ is what makes it interesting as a *social bond*.

As Latour (2004: 235) maintains such transformations may go both ways. An object may suddenly become a matter of great concern, while a ‘thing’ that was once the nexus of dispute may lose its precarious status, and become once again just another object. In terms of the ‘thing’ in the body, the formal indication of stress may again serve as a good example. While it can be said that the discovery of stress as a problem in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was more a rediscovery (Cassidy 1999), the term itself was almost unknown outside the engineering profession, where it was used in relation to how man-made structures (e.g. bridges) could withstand heavy loads without collapsing, before the 1940s (Haward 1960, see also: Cooper and Dewe 2005). Only with its emergence as a *condition* did it gain the popularity that it has today as a matter of great concern. On the other hand, the black bile of the humoral theories, which for about two millennia was a centre of attention for physicians, theologians and scientists alike, has passed into oblivion, as it is no longer associated with melancholy at all. If the *melaina cholé* for almost two millennia was a matter of great concern, today melancholy is reduced to be a thing of the past.

Together with the systematic dimensions of problems and response, this assertion of the ‘thing’ in the body as a matter of concern working to structure the collective identities, network relations and subjectivities in orbit around it opens the way to the historical explorations. Yet before this, one aspect remains. If melancholy is said to be a thing of the past, a discussion of *which* past is in place. The following section will engage with this question, illustrating how both the phenomena of *acedia* and neurasthenia can be seen as parts of the history of melancholy.

#### 4. Historiography: One or Several Melancholies?

In what is arguably one of the strangest works of English literature, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton (1577-1640), a mathematician and scholar who professed to be writing in the attempt to keep his own depression under control, asserts that not even the many languages of the Tower of Babel yielded the confusion of the variety of symptoms found in the phenomenon of melancholy. Burton's book, on which he worked for the most of a lifetime (preparing four editions, while his final alterations were included posthumously), in the words of his modern day editors is 'a patchwork quilt of almost half a million words of miscellaneous learning, an inexhaustible quarry of quotations, a rambling, often irrelevant, irregularly systematized commentary on the human comedy, always excessive and overflowing.' (Carter 1954: 1) Remaining more a curiosity shop of learnedness than a medical treatise, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in its time became a short cut for anyone who wanted to quickly master the art of make-shift erudition and remained so deep into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Radden 2000b).

In many ways this description of Burton's work is emblematic to the broad and colorful history of melancholy in western culture. The concept retains a place in psychiatric discourse today, referring to a *melancholic* subtype of major depression (American Psychiatric Association 2000) and some researchers hold that it should be reinstated as a distinctive mood disorder (e.g. Fink & Taylor 2007, Frost 1992), but to most people it has been reduced to a description of a sombre mood in artworks, music and cinema. Yet for over two millennia, melancholy played a central role in the cultural shaping and fashioning of the human being, covering and explaining such diverse fields as mental illness, lovesickness, artistic genius, shape shifting, mere lack of reason, sheer madness, the state of bourgeois society and hysteria in women, just to mention a few. The melancholic of the Aristotelian *Problems* was a great man worthy of praise for his contribution to culture and society, like the Renaissance melancholic exemplified by the artist with the ability to sublimate the forces of Saturn creatively. On the other hand melancholy in the 17th century was ascribable to almost everyone who objected to the Enlightenment ideology: as Böhme shows (Böhme 1988) the list covers both pietists and separatists, romantic dreamers and fanatics, enthusiasts and visionaries, 'monkish' ascetics, religionists and the

superstitious. Marxists saw in melancholy the effect of a bourgeoisie that had failed to resolve the historical social dichotomies in a positive way. The first congress of Soviet writers thus decided that the goal of literature was to oppose the social circumstances that caused the melancholy of the people. Melancholy, to the marxists, constituted bourgeois decadence (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 14).

On this background, perhaps, it is not so surprising that the two most prominent contemporary works on the history of melancholy, Stanley Webber Jackson's *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern times* (Jackson 1986) and Porter and Berrios' *History of Clinical Psychiatry* (Porter & Berrios 1999), represent two radically different perspectives. Jackson's work presents a complete and impressive historical overview of a clinical syndrome – or as Jackson indicates, a group of closely related clinical syndromes – stretching from Ancient Greece and Rome over their more curious manifestations in lycanthropy and nostalgia to their diffusion into the modern day concept of depression. Finding 'a remarkable consistency' of symptoms that explains 'the etiology and pathogenesis of melancholia and depression' (Jackson 1986: ix), Jackson's work argues for a continuity in the history of the affliction.

The standpoint taken by Porter and Berrios in their *History of Clinical Psychiatry* (1999) is the opposite. Arguing that up to the Napoleonic Wars melancholia was no more than a rag-bag of insanity states whose only common denominator was the presence of few (as opposed to many) delusions, while sadness and low affect (which were no doubt present in some cases) were not considered to be definitory symptoms, their perspective is one of a discontinuity. Jennifer Radden, in her introduction to a collection of classic texts on melancholy in *The Nature of Melancholy* (2000), also falls in this category, as she finds that the differences between melancholia and depression, are 'more persuasive than the similarities' (see also: Radden 2000b, Radden 2003: 48).

With these dissimilarities in mind, how is it possible to write a history of melancholy? How can a historical continuity be introduced into a source material of this diverse character and magnitude that sometimes seems to only be held together by difference? With its association of both *acedia* and neurasthenia with melancholy as a cultural and clinical phenomenon, the

history that this thesis tells obviously is one of both continuity and of discontinuity. As a kind of history of the ‘thing’ in body as a problem demanding an individual response of those implicated, the history of melancholy in this thesis focuses primarily on the dimensions of self-regulation and its deficiencies. This history is one of discontinuities associated primarily by their ability to illustrate a relation between pathology and performativity. To speak of *pathologies of performativity* in this sense means to provide a level of continuity, which argues that melancholy, *acedia* and neurasthenia are not reducible to each other, and yet, when they are joined, provide one history which may illustrate a central theme in Western culture.

The contours of such a history (which for good reasons cannot be more than exactly that before the following chapters) may be provided by offering a short introduction to the history of melancholy on a more general level and by reflecting on how the phenomena of *acedia* and neurasthenia are associated with it. This will also provide a welcome opportunity to introduce some of the literature, on the background of which the following chapters are written. Apart from the works mentioned above, also the psychiatrist Hubertus Tellenbach’s clinical study *Melancholy* (Tellenbach 1980) and Julia Kristeva’s *Black Sun* (Kristeva 1989) constitute important contributions to this history. Engaging with the history of melancholy from a contemporary perspective, the philosopher Michael Theunissen’s short but enlightening *Vorentwürfe von Moderne – antike Melancholie und die Acedia des Mittelalters* (Theunissen 1996) belongs also to this category.

These works show that melancholy always covered a far wider spectrum than the narrow one of *disease*. The wide range of emotional variations that it reflects, concern matters at the very heart of what it means to be human, and is thus in itself not reducible to pathology: feelings of sadness, depression, despair, anxiety, but also of being dispirited, discouraged, disappointed, dejected, despondent – or merely bored – have been known to human beings through the entire cultural history of the Western world. Melancholy, as Radden concludes ‘is both a normal disposition and a sign of mental disturbance; it is both a feeling and a way of behaving. It is a nebulous mood but also a set of self-accusing beliefs.’ (Radden 2000b: ix) This grey area between pathology and more common traits of character is very well reflected in the terminological transformation that the notion has



gone through. *Melancholia* is the Latin transliteration of the Greek *melancholia*, which in ancient Greece was largely reducible to a mental disorder involving prolonged sorrow and fear without cause. Sometimes it was just used in popular speech to denote 'crazy or nervous conduct' and – along with its cognates – denoted 'biliousness' (Jackson 1986: 4). This term, on the other hand, was derived from *melaina cholé*, later translated into Latin as *atra bilis* and the English *black bile* (*melas*, "black", + *cholé*, "bile"). As one of the four humours in Greek science, which taught the existence of four corresponding elements (earth, air, fire, and water), the black bile was believed to be the causing factor in melancholia. The Hippocratic medicine conceived of health as a balanced relationship between the four humours in the human body: blood, phlegm, black and yellow bile; and imbalance (not only in the black bile) would cause variations in temperaments as well as different states of characteristic disorders in a given person.

In English writings the various forms of melancholia, taken from Latin, began to appear in the 14th century as *malencolye*, *melancoli*, *malencolie*, *melancholie*, *melancholy*, and others variations on the basic term in medical thought (Jackson 1986: 5). During the 16th and the 17th century *melancholie* and *melancholy* became common terms for naming the disease, both in English and in other languages, where they often just came to mean the black bile itself. But in addition to denoting the illness, during this period, the terms also came to be used for describing various non-pathological states of sorrow, dejection or despair, including well-respected somberness and fashionable sadness. It was only during the 18th century, with the emergence of clinical psychiatry, that the two terms became separated once more, with *melancholia* gradually coming to be restricted again to the disease, while *melancholy* remained a synonym for it, but was also in more popular use as a diffuse term denoting different non-pathological states of mind. To some commentators this complex structure of the construct, which on the one hand stretches it towards pathological states of mind, and on the other, involves a whole array of more or less common-place symptoms, makes it comparable to the contemporary concept of depression (e.g. Jackson 1986).

The problem of maintaining a formal distinction between forms of mental disorder and more common and non-pathological states related to for

example moral dilemmas represents the most fundamental dimension of melancholy with which both the phenomenon of *acedia* and that of *neurasthenia* share a qualitative coherence. While *acedia* may be taken, as Siegfried Wenzel shows in his work *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (1967), to denote primarily despair associated with the aversion felt by man against his own spiritual good (Wenzel 1967: 48), the phenomenon – apart from a host of symptoms – shares thematically with melancholy the precarious position between pathology and non-pathology. Also *neurasthenia* takes this position in spite of not primarily being associated with the fear and sadness without cause, which has always played a central role in the history of melancholy. Although its predominant symptom was inhibition associated with the tropes of energy so popular at the time, the phenomenon's status as what Anson Rabinbach in his work *The Human Motor* (1992) calls an 'ethic of resistance to work' (Rabinbach 1992: 167) positions it on the threshold between pathology and non-pathology.

Focusing on this in the history of melancholy, the following explorations form a historical continuity on the level of self-regulation associated with this precarious threshold. It thus centres on the historical dimension of an individual ability to *perform* and on the *hyperboles of affect*, which may describe the deficiencies of this performativity. Stretching from Plato's original antinomy between *mania* and *amathia*, between madness and a kind of uncultivated ignorance of those who fail to govern themselves, and to the contemporary debates about depression and self-management, this aspect constitutes an important theme in the history of melancholy represented in this thesis. This broad definition of melancholy and its tropes follows Foucault's assertion in *The History of Madness* (1961) that the unity of the affliction was not defined by observed characteristics or by a presumed causality, but rather by a qualitative coherence, with its own laws of transference, development and transformation.

The assertion of a level of inquiry into the history of melancholy, which includes both *acedia* and *neurasthenia* by focusing fundamentally on *performativity and its deficiencies*, leads naturally to a second theme. If the history of melancholy focuses on the ability to regulate the self as a central aspect of the phenomena it includes, then it touches also on the important

issue of the representation of affects on the precarious threshold between pathology and non-pathology. As Radden argues, fear and sadness without an obvious cause have been a key aspect in the understanding of melancholy since the earliest Hippocratic writings and has stayed so ever since (Radden 2000a: 10). On this background another central theme in the following is the association in the historical formations between emotional suffering and great achievement.

As the following will show, the association between suffering and achievement has constituted a central motif in this history from the earliest references to melancholic states. In tragic drama, Orestes' attempt to avenge the death of his father Agamemnon is a good example of this. Great heroes like Ajax and Jason, as the following will show, were seen to walk the thin line between states of extreme dejection and despair and states of glory. Bellerophon, the rider of the Pegasus became famously known as the first melancholic hero, when he was mentioned by the author of *Problems XXX, 1*, who quotes Homer as saying that Bellerophon ended his life wandering "alone on the plain of Aleïum, eating his heart out, and avoiding the track of men" (953b23-25)<sup>ii</sup>. And already the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, originally entitled 'He who Saw the Deep' (*Sha naqba īmuru*) (Gardner, Maier & Henshaw 1985), portrays this relation between states of extreme emotional suffering bordering on madness and the achievement of heroic glory.

This theme ties especially *acedia* to the history of melancholy. Not because the afflicted monastic was a hero; his pattern of emotional suffering was rather taken as a sign of spiritual boredom. But because the reality of the *theocosmos* that he pertained to represented a 'higher order' beyond him, demanding an absolute vigilance in the control of his affective life. In a world where the Passion of the Christ made suffering a virtuous deed and an absolute prerequisite for the performative convergence of the monastic with the institution of vice and virtue, *sorrow without cause* was more than simply a matter of mood. Constituting an absolute vertigo of the religious order, the earthly sorrow of those suffering from *acedia* constituted not only a personal tragedy, but also an aversion against the 'good works' of Christianity when the spiritual good appeared all of a sudden to man as evil. Described by Peter Toohey as 'the Epidemiology of Individuality' in his work *Melancholy, Love and Time* (2004: 132), the affliction of *acedia*

among the anchorites with its characteristic symptoms of laziness, inertia, slowing of time and unwillingness to pursue spiritual exercises, undoubtedly represents an emblematic example of a relation between melancholic tropes of suffering and performativity associated with the ability to regulate the self.

Finally, this association of a psychosomatic pattern of suffering with performativity in the history of melancholy, which to the following represents a privileged level of inquiry, is found also on a level that can only be tentatively presented here. This level of inquiry concerns the gradual transformation of what *performativity* means in the history of melancholy. From the famous Aristotelian question in *Problems* about why all great men are melancholics, to the glorification of melancholy and the emergence of the modern understanding of the genius, which as the following will show can be traced back to Florentine neo-Platonism, the association of melancholy with creative abilities has been a theme. Emblematic of this theme is especially Dürer's *Melancholia I*, discussed in much detail by Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl in their influential *Saturn and Melancholy* (1964). *Melancholia I* portrays a figure, cheek resting on the hand, with a brooding and sombre facial expression. The combination of this melancholic countenance with the geometer's tools lying scattered and unused at the feet of the seated figure, suggests the polarity in melancholy between states of dejection and creative abilities. The long tradition of a link between creative genius and melancholy was revived in the Romanticist literary movement of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The melancholic artist was characterized by feeling deeper and by being closer to the true and sublime than ordinary people. The suffering associated with melancholy was idealized and seen as inherently valuable, even if it was dark and tormenting. The fashionability of suffering in the service of a more profound responsiveness to a heightened sense of reality was also reflected in the larger emphasis in psychiatry on the cyclical nature of affective disorders (Radden 2000a). Although today melancholy has to a large extent become obsolete as an explanation, psychiatric classifications like bipolar type II have taken over the role of representing this more sensitive state of being in the world. A quite recent example is Alice W. Flaherty's *The Midnight Disease* (2004), where she

questions whether her happiness related to hypergraphia is merely a symptom of her bipolar illness:

The scientist asks how I call my writing vocation and not addiction. I no longer see why I should have to make that distinction. I am addicted to breathing in the same way. I write because when I don't, it is suffocating. I write because something much larger than myself comes into me that suffuses the page, the world, with meaning (Flaherty 2004: 266).

At the other end of this association between creativity and melancholic states of mind, the related theme of an association between melancholy, tropes of labour and states of idleness is found. The most famous indication of this association – apart of course from proverbs like: *idleness is the root of all evil* – may be Robert Burton's observation in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* that there is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness and no better cure than business (Burton 1986: 4). The representation of certain types of activity as melancholic, but also the conviction among the medical writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Freud and Janet, that melancholia especially in women was closely related to strenuous action, linked melancholic states of mind inevitably to *productivism*, the belief that human society and nature were related primarily by productive activity (Rabinbach 1992). From being represented primarily as a mental category in relation to idleness, melancholy during the industrialization became more and more related to the 19<sup>th</sup> century obsession with *physical fatigue*. As Rabinbach has shown, states of mental fatigue were classified as 'diseases of the will' and the fashionable diagnosis 'neurasthenia' became a popular theme both in the literature of the age and an object of scientific and medical study. Mental and physical exhaustion 'was not merely the consequence of physical overexertion, but the cause of a variety of physical and mental pathologies born of the languid and torpid state of men, women and especially school age children' (Rabinbach 1992: 20).

Representing a central aspect of the history told in the following chapters, the assertion of a relation between melancholic states of mind, cultural decadence, physical exhaustion and the ability to perform as a social resource culminates in the 19<sup>th</sup> century obsession with the tropes of energy. As Wolf Lepenies has illustrated in his *Melancholy and Society* (1992), the melancholic by this time had come to represent the verso of the entrepre-

neurial *homo europaeus*, whose aggressive philosophy of action was conquering the world.

And yet, in a curious fashion, it is Nietzsche, the philosopher of the will *par excellence*, who in an aphorism from *The Gay Science* (1882) relates the history of melancholy once again with performativity in a fashion that reflects the level of inquiry found in the following chapters. In “The Great Health”, Nietzsche describes a ‘stronger, more seasoned, tougher, more audacious and gayer’ (Nietzsche 2001: 246) health than any other. It is a health that is not meant for everyone; or rather, it is a health needed *only* by those of premature birth, the ‘nameless, hard to understand ones’ (ibid.), who have set for themselves new goals in an as yet unproven future. These self-transformative ‘argonauts of the ideal’, who have ‘suffered shipwreck and damage often enough’ (ibid.), do not need this new health because they are sick. On the contrary, Nietzsche argues: they are bursting with health already; they are ‘dangerously healthy, ever again healthy’ (ibid.: 247). They need the *great* health, this health ‘that one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again’, because they are not satisfied with the goals, dreams and ideals of ‘*present-day man*’ (ibid.). The new goal they have set for themselves, and for which the great health is a mean, is the ideal of another spirit, the spirit of ‘a human, superhuman well-being and benevolence’ (ibid.).

Interestingly, this health of a future ascent in a more literal sense belongs to the past. The ‘argonauts of the ideal’ to whom Nietzsche writes and who are in need of the great health are the ones with a soul:

... that craves to have experienced the whole range of values and desiderata to date, and to have sailed around all the coasts of this ideal “Mediterranean”; whoever wants to know from the adventures of his own most authentic experience how a discoverer and conqueror of the ideal feels, and also an artist, a saint, a legislator, a sage, a scholar, a pious man, a soothsayer and one who stands divinely apart in the old style ... (ibid.)

The list of characters named here by Nietzsche as examples of conquerors of the ideal who may teach the disposition of the great health is not arbitrary. The ‘one who stands divinely apart in the old style’ most likely is a reference to the Platonic indication of a divine madness of inspiration outlined in *Phaidros* (*Phd.* 244a-249e). The true manic lover, suffering from a

form of self-transgressive ecstasy, an exciting of the self, is characterized as a species of philosopher. The term *enthousiasis*, which is used to describe him, literally means a state of divine possession (Obdrzalek 2008). The ‘one who stands divinely apart in the old style’, in Plato’s divine inspiration, experiences the great health of self-transformation through a suffering bordering on madness.

In fact most of the characters on Nietzsche’s list are taken from the opening question of *Problems XXX, 1* that it can be argued has an emblematic character to the history of melancholy: “Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic, or are infected by the diseases arising from black bile?” (953a10-13) Asking not *whether* the extraordinary in character suffer from melancholy, but rather *why*, the author hints at the pivoting point around which the following explorations of the pathologies of performativity revolve: the assumption of a natural relation in Western history between individual patterns of suffering, the regulation of the self and the ability to achieve the extraordinary – whether this ability is found within the culturally formative context of the genius or within the contemporary context of the self-managing employee.





# Chapter Two

## The Dietetics of Melancholia

### Prologue

1. The Emotional Hyperbole of Heroic Individuality
2. Erōs and the Antinomy of Madness in Plato's Dialogues
3. Abnormal by Nature: Melancholy in *Problems XXX, 1*
4. Saturnine Men: The Dietetics of Melancholy in Ficino
5. The Pathological Performance of Melancholy

### Prologue

There is little doubt that the most important classical text to the history of the 'thing' in the body presented in this thesis remains *Problems XXX, 1* from the *Corpus Aristotelicum*. It is here that the *melaina cholé* – the black bile – is singled out among the other humours of the Hippocratic humoral theory as a natural substance in the bodies of the extraordinary in character around which their paradoxical disposition is structured. Yet as this part of the thesis will illustrate, the designation in *Problems XXX, 1* of the black bile as a 'thing' in the body through which the *ēthos perriton*, the outstanding in character, must manage themselves, is part of a broader *decosmologization* out of which the care of the self as an individual responsibility emerges. With roots that are lost in time, the hyperbolic emotional response of the tragic hero represents the precarious emergence of an individual who is in ceaseless conflict with his own fate and with the divine powers of the cosmos in relation to which he must observe a harmonious position. As the next chapter will illustrate, the history of the tragic hero designates the outstanding *ēthos* of the heroic individuality in whom the excessive emotional response, which will later become the hallmark of the melancholic personality, is manifested both in a psychosomatic pattern of suffering and in the great achievements that makes him what he is. Structured around the *sublimation of suffering*, the great deed of the dejected and melancholic hero is represented as the *virtuosity* of a character whose destiny is in the hands of the gods that determine his fate. As a precursor of the later Aristotelian naturalization that designates the black bile as the

substance dominating the outstanding melancholic *ēthos*, the psychosomatic patterns of suffering among tragic heroes like Bellerophon, Orestes or Jason represents the *emotional hyperbole of a heroic individuality* that is both the source of achievement and of maddening torment.

It is to this disposition that the designation in the work of Plato of melancholy and its psychosomatic patterns of suffering as a specific kind of ignorance – *amathia* – represents the process of the decosmologization that culminates in the Aristotelian *Problems XXX, 1*. As section 2 of this chapter illustrates, Plato assumes an antonymic figure of madness that joins the notion of the hyperbolic emotional response found in the character of the tragic hero with the theory of *exallagé* – of divine inspiration. The assumption of *erōs* as an aporetic condition originating from a psychosomatic relation between pain and pleasure defines the exceptional *ēthos* of someone who suffers more profoundly than others in terms of a proportion of self-regulation. On the one hand the divinely inspired *mania* of the great heroes, the poets and the philosophers expose them to a greater danger of *disproportion* than ordinary human beings. On the other hand the notion of *amathia* designates the melancholy of the *ignorant*, whose disproportionate, insufficient or deficient self-regulation leads only to the suffering of morbid madness. Representing the loss of proportion to *ametria*, the melancholic madness of someone who fails to lead himself, in Plato's work represents an antonymic figure to that of the genius, whose 'higher' madness brings him in harmony with the Platonic cosmos as it is described in the *Timaeus*. The partial decosmologization in the work of Plato is represented by the emergence of melancholy as a kind of disproportionate ignorance of the one that, like the leader who becomes a tyrant because of excess, fails to lead himself in the proper fashion.

The assumption in the Aristotelian *Problems XXX, 1* of a natural and non-pathological kind of melancholy structured around the management of the black bile as a 'thing' in the body can be seen on this background. As the third section of this chapter illustrates, the culmination of the decosmologization of the exceptional human being results from the emergence of the black bile as a 'thing' in the body of the *ēthos perriton* – the extraordinary in character – that must be managed in order for him not to succumb to the

diseases typical of his temperament. The *melania cholé* emerges as a 'problem' of self-regulation for the specific nature of the few and culturally formative. Yet as the assumption of a 'nature' in the Aristotelian sense, this disposition is *desubstantialized* as soon as it is defined. The melancholic disposition of the outstanding human being in *Problems XXX, 1* emerges as the paradox of a nature *in conflict with itself*, because it presupposes the unnatural and exceptional in the *ēthos* that it describes. The emergence of the 'thing' in the body in *Problems XXX, 1* designates the assumption of a teleology without a *telos*, the ceaseless self-differentiation towards a higher or greater health, the provisionality of which is manifested as a psychosomatic pattern of suffering in the bodies of the exceptional melancholics. Representing this suffering, paradoxically, not as a *result*, but rather as the *prerequisite* of a natural disposition, which becomes pathological when it is deepened, the exceptional character of *Problems XXX, 1* is subjected to the manifestation of a double pathos: first as a *transience* as opposed to the ideal of the *ēthos* represented by the assumption of a 'higher middle', and secondly as the *affection* causing a somatic and psychical pattern of suffering, which structures the management of the self.

While the intercourse of the culturally formative in *Problems XXX, 1* with the black bile structuring their temperament in this sense is primarily of *prophylactic* character, the Aristotelian theory in the dietetic programs of the melancholic genius in the Renaissance is recast in a much more active fashion. As the final section of this chapter illustrates, the combination in the work of the scholar Marsilio Ficino of physiological Aristotelian arguments with neo-Platonic theory, constitutes a double Renaissance that subjects the melancholic to a two-fold source of suffering. Exposed to both the effects of the black bile and to the influences of its astrological analogue, the planet Saturn, the protean being of the Renaissance genius must actively seek to intervene on, identify, mobilize and manipulate the effects of the 'thing' in the body. Out of this double source emerges the grand theory of a dietetic of active self-transformation, which the melancholic must expose himself to *tota mente* in order to redeem his divine potential. The decosmologization represented by the history of the black bile emerges in the Renaissance as an *internalization of cosmos*, a theory of 'the heavens within us', reflecting the correspondence between protean man and the

world that surrounds him. Accentuating a psychosomatic pattern of suffering, the assumption of the black bile as a ‘thing’ in the body of the extraordinary few, emerges as an occasion for the active and continuous sublimation of suffering, which exposes the dietetic problem of self-leadership as an anticipatory sketch of the problematic in contemporary times.

### **1. The Emotional Hyperbole of Heroic Individuality**

The metaphysical resonance of the great tragedies, from *King Oedipus* to *Hamlet*, all depend on one central motif, the origin of which is lost in time: that greatness of character demands great sacrifice, that the extraordinary individual is subject to torment nearly beyond human capacity, that the line drawn between greatness and madness is thin, vague and sometimes even invisible. Western cultural history is full of melancholic heroes. As far back as any historical documentation will testify, the relation between suffering and achievement has represented an elementary theme of human existence.

Constituting an important background to the history of the *melaina cholé* – the black bile – as a ‘thing’ in the body, beginning in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in Greece, the motif of the emotionally tormented hero can be found as far back as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, originating about 3500 B.C. and counting as the first major work in the history of literature. While some elements of the history about the ruler from Sumeria, who became one of the greatest heroes of all times, will probably appear quite foreign to a modern day reader, some other elements almost certainly will not. Presenting the heroic deeds of Gilgamesh, who journeys to the end of the world to retrieve his friend and one-time rival Enkidu, who has died and been claimed by the nether world, the epic poem also portrays a very human and faulty hero, who struggles with the tormenting feelings of loss and mourning that are driving him mad. Reflecting somatic and psychopathological symptoms found in any modern day textbook on depression – mood reactivity, general dejection, a sensation of heaviness in limbs and sleeplessness – the pattern of suffering found in Gilgamesh’s character is, as pointed out by Rose Spiegel (Spiegel 1997), inseparable from the nature of his conquest. His friend Enkidu dies after a dream that foreshadows his death and Gilgamesh, struck by his death, sets out to retrieve him and to achieve immor-

tality. His restless wanderings are represented as the immediate result of losing his beloved companion, with whom he shared all good things:

Enkidu, friend, loved-one, who chased the wild ass, panther of the steppe.  
We overcame everything: climbed the mountain,  
captured the Bull of Heaven and killed him,  
brought Humbaba to grief, who lives in the cedar forest;  
entering the mountain gates we slew lions;  
my friend whom I love dearly underwent with me all hardships (IX. i, 47-51).<sup>iii</sup>

Gilgamesh mourns this loss, but the process of mourning takes on an excessive extent to which the central aspect becomes Gilgamesh's fear of his own death:

The fate of mankind overtook him.  
Six days and seven nights I wept over him  
until a worm fell out of his nose.  
Then I was afraid.  
In fear of death I roam the wilderness. The case of my friend Enkidu lies heavy in me.  
On a long journey I wander the steppe.  
How can I keep still? How can I be silent?  
The friend I loved has turned to clay. Enkidu, the friend I love, has turned to clay.  
Me, shall I not lie down like him,  
never again to move? (IX. ii, 3-14)

The epic journey that Gilgamesh undertakes to retrieve his friend from the nether world is simultaneously represented as a journey into himself and his own anxiety, constituting an uncanny description of both the non-acceptance of death and the terror of harboring a wish to die. Paradoxically, death is both the *source* of Gilgamesh's depressive dread and the *goal* of his journey. Combined with the epic's description of his appearance, this suggests that what Gilgamesh is struggling with has far more extensive implications than just the loss of a friend. Travelling to the end of the world he seeks out the ferryman Urshanabi, whose description of Gilgamesh reflects the nature of his dejected state:

Your heart is filled with sadness, your features are worn;  
there is sorrow in your belly.  
Your face is like that of a man who has been on a long journey.  
With cold and heat your face is weathered.

You roam the steppe in search of a wind-puff (X. iii, 26-29).

Adding to this, Gilgamesh himself explains that he is suffering from insomnia and that his body is aching:

No real sleep has calmed my face.

I have worn myself out in sleeplessness; my flesh is filled with grief (X. v, 28-29).

While Spiegel may be right in assuming that passages like these suggest that Gilgamesh is suffering from what today would be referred to as a clinical depression (Spiegel 1997), to the study presented here, this in itself is not the crucial point. Rather, what is interesting is how the state that Gilgamesh is in shares with the modern day construct of depression what may be referred to as a *hyperbolic emotional response*, manifested as a psychosomatic pattern of suffering. Reflecting the famous Freudian designation of melancholia as an excessive mourning over a lost object that the ego has turned on itself, Gilgamesh's obsession, which keeps him sleepless and darkens his features, makes not only his ego destructively void of meaning, but also robs the world around him of all substance as if there was no difference between the two. Yet where the hyperbole in Freudian theory is the source exclusively of pathology, in the case of the melancholic hero, the torment of the excessive emotional response also represents the source of his great destiny.

The *hyperbole of heroic individuality* found in the myth of Gilgamesh is well-known and found in many versions. A beloved one dies and is lost to the nether world, where a hero like Gilgamesh, compelled by sorrow, comes close to – and is yet so far from – retrieving him or her. The power to do this, whether it be through rage verging on madness or through artistic genius, springs from the ability of the abandoned to persistently and inconsolably deny death its right and sublimate emotional suffering into action. It is this motive in the tradition of the myth of Gilgamesh that serves as an important background in the following: the individual and heroic ability to sublimate suffering in order to achieve the extraordinary.

Another myth of Sumerian origin tells the story of Ishtar, goddess of life and fertility, and her attempt to reach the nether world in order to save her lover, the shepherd-god Tammuz, and bring him back to life. This myth is reflected in the myth of Demeter, goddess of grain and fertility, who, like

Ishtar, travels beyond life to retrieve her daughter Persephone, who has been abducted by Hades, the king of the nether world, who wants to make her his queen (Spiegel 1997). Famous also is Orpheus, the artist-god, who descends to retrieve his beloved Eurydice from the shadows of the underworld, and fails when he breaks his promise not to turn around and look at her. As Maurice Blanchot comments, paradoxically this failure is Orpheus' way of being true to his destiny, because he has actually been turned towards Eurydice all along: 'he saw her when she was invisible and he touched her intact, in her absence as a shade, in that veiled presence which did not conceal her absence, which was the presence of her infinite absence' (Blanchot 1999). Finally, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which begins with the poet gone astray in the middle of his life after losing his beloved Beatrice, also presents the excessive emotional response as a source of inspiration. It is Dante's famous melancholy and his possible contemplation of suicide (more references are made to this in Canto I and Canto XIII) that makes him enter that place where 'all hope is abandoned' and journey through the underworld with his travel-companion, the poet Virgil.

The wide recognition of Bellerophon, the Homeric hero who attempted to storm the heavens on the Pegasus, as the first melancholic, can be seen in this context. Mentioned by Aristotle as the primary example of those extraordinary in character that were susceptible to the diseases of the black bile, Bellerophon's dejection, anxiety, loneliness and rejection of any human contact resulted from the loathing of the gods who turned on him. The sixth song of Homer's *Iliad* tells the story of the hero's great deeds and tragic ending, when:

... Bellerophon came to be hated by all the gods, he wandered all desolate and dismayed upon the Alean plain, gnawing at his own heart, and shunning the path of man (XI.200-203).<sup>iv</sup>

Bellerophon's suffering is an indirect result of his great virtue, as he rejects the advances of a queen and consequently has the gods turn on him. It is only after his incredible achievements, his hunting down and killing of the chimera, and his final triumph, that he is struck by the emotional suffering that leads him to shun other people completely. The Homeric hymns offer no psychological explanation to Bellerophon's sudden state of mind; only that the gods seem to agree in their wrath. As Jean Starobinski points out

(Starobinsky 1960: 3), the greatest hero of all times, who withstood all *human* challenges, is unable to fight against the hatred of the gods. In the Homeric universe the ability to associate with other people, to live among one's peers in the normal way, is dependent on the divine guarantee of the cosmos in which man must find his place. Without the benign acceptance of the gods, he is left to loneliness and all-consuming self-torment (Starobinsky 1960: 3). As a *foreign and invasive subject of sublimation* that constitutes a background to later Aristotelian assumption of the black bile as a 'thing' in the body, the melancholic sentiment found in the hyperbolic emotional response of the great hero may be associated with a kind of agitation that upsets the cosmos in which man must find his place. *Heracles melancholicus*, of whom Virgil in the *Aeneid* says that he burns with the *atrum fel*, the black bile, or simply with melancholy (VIII.219-220), is a good example of this, as Heracles' madness is not described as an illness or even characteristic of the protagonist, but rather as an attack, maybe even something god-sent that periodically upsets the order of cosmos and constitutes his heroic character (Theodorou 1993b: 36).

Yet the association of melancholic madness with heroic character, which brings a relation between suffering and achievement to the foreground, can also be found in a context where it possesses a *characterological* meaning. The example of the hyperbolic emotional response as a trait of character, rather than a fit, provides an illustrative background to the melancholic *ēthos* that is the central theme of *Problems XXX, 1*. With the representation of a 'psychological' depth lacking in the Homeric hymns, the examples of Orestes and Jason, as Peter Toohey has shown in a work that among other themes explores the relation between character and melancholy in Antiquity (Toohey 2004), constitute typological examples of melancholic *personalities*, whose achievements were closely related to a hyperbolic emotional response manifested in psychosomatic pattern of suffering. Providing early illustrations of the melancholic as a type, these examples represent the dispositions of their characters within a precarious context of *nosos*, of disease, that was later to become essential to the understanding of melancholy in Western cultural history.

Toohey primarily illustrates this in his discussion of a vase painting of Orestes from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, where the dejected hero is depicted in the agi-



tation caused by his melancholic disposition. Orestes' famous madness is often understood as a result of his matricide. At the advice of Apollo he had killed his mother, Clytaemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus, to avenge the murder of his father, Agamemnon. Yet in spite of Apollo's blessings, Orestes finds himself haunted and tormented by the Erynies, the deities of vengeance, for his bloodguilt. On the painting discussed by Toohey, Orestes has fled north to Apollo's shrine, where the god will attempt to purify him of his deed. He is sitting with a dissatisfied, tired and even unhappy expression on his face, while Apollo, wearing a similar facial expression, holds over his head a piglet, whose blood is intended to wash away the pollution of the matricide. To their left the Furies similarly seem to be in a deep melancholic state. Yet, as Toohey argues, "The Purification of Orestes" does not depict the melancholic sentiment as a lack of mental activity. Rather, there are 'clear signs of mental activity – of agitation' (Toohey 2004: 17), illustrated by the way Orestes holds his sword and by the tautness of his torso. What we find in Orestes' state of mind is an example of a madness that rages with inner turmoil and activity. Varro, the first century B.C. Roman writer and scholar, termed the condition *insania* on this background and later also Cicero in *Tusculans* suggests that Orestes was the victim of melancholic illness (Toohey 2004: 17.)

That Orestes' violent melancholia, unlike that of Heracles, possesses characterological meaning, is supported by the fact that his madness is not reported by a messenger, but is rather represented on stage. In a hallucinating scene he can feel the attack coming. Elektra, his sister, informs us that six days have gone by since his mother's burial, during which Orestes has not eaten or washed, and has stayed hidden in bed, occasionally crying or jumping around as seized by madness. It is on these terms that the *nosos*, the disease, which is introduced very early by Elektra, is central (Theodorou 1993: 25) to an understanding of Orestes' character.

The psychosomatic pattern of suffering in the melancholic hero, as illustrated by Toohey, is even more lucidly represented in the example of Jason, the Hellenic hero of the poem on the voyage of the *Argo* by Apollonius of Rhodes (ca. 295 B.C.). Although Jason, the protagonist of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, is not usually characterized as a melancholic by the ancient writers (Toohey 2004: 43) – at least not in any medical sense – his reaction

to the challenges and adversities of his epic journey is often more than merely tearful and emotional. The medical historian Stanley Jackson produces a translation of ‘signs of melancholy’ in the medical author Soranus of Ephesus, whose description – although outdating the *Argo* considerably – can be helpful in understanding what is at stake in the early descriptions of the melancholic type. These symptoms include:

... mental anguish and distress, dejection, silence, animosity toward members of the household, sometimes a desire to live and at other times a longing for death, suspicion of the part of the patient that a plot is being hatched against him, weeping without reason, meaningless muttering, and, again, occasional joviality; precordial distention, especially after eating, coldness of the limbs, mild sweat, a sharp pain in the esophagus or cardia ... (Jackson 1986: 35).

As Toohey points out (Toohey 2004: 43f.), many of Jason’s character traits comply with Soranus’ list of symptoms. He is depicted as ‘brooding over the enormity of the impending tasks’ (1.460-61)<sup>v</sup>, as ‘utterly resourceless because of his woeful circumstances’ (2.410), as ‘distraught in wretched and helpless ruin’ and a few lines later as ‘wrapped in excessive fear’ (2.627-28). He complains over sleeplessness (2.632-33) and is despairing (4.1347). When the nymphs appear to assist him, Jason is not only amazed, but also ‘grief-stricken’ at their appearance and he turns away from the support they offer in ‘absolute helplessness’ (4.1313-18). After the disappearance of Heracles he falls utterly still:

But Jason, amazed and utterly helpless,  
Said never a word, one way or the other, but sat there  
Bowed under his heavy load of ruin, in silence,  
Eating out his heart (1.1286-1289).

Interesting about this last quote, of course, is the formulation, ‘eating out his heart’ (“*thymonedôn*”), which revokes the Homeric description of Bellerophon also quoted by the author of *Problems XXX, 1*. The symptoms of Jason, represented along the lines of the hyperbolic emotional response that is typical of the tragic sufferer, provide an insight into the character of the melancholic *ēthos*. As Toohey points out, such ‘anxieties and dejections, while foreign to any Homeric hero but a mourning one, are in Jason’s case excessive, even for a Hellenistic hero’ (Toohey 2004). What we find in the character of Jason, as he is described by Apollonius, is the element of the

emotionally excessive response to suffering represented as absolutely central to the idea of a melancholic sentiment. As a background, not only to the later assumption of a melancholic *ēthos* found in *Problems XXX, 1*, but also, as the next section will illustrate, to the Platonic dichotomy between a divine madness and a melancholic ignorance dependent on character, the motif of the tragic melancholic hero represents an intimate and precarious relation between suffering and achievement, out of which the management of the self emerges as a kind of *virtuosity*.

The virtuosity designating the heroic character, at least in the cases discussed above, can be identified on the background of a remarkable consistency in symptoms of both mental and physical suffering (Jackson 1986). Dejection, anxiety, sorrow, sleeplessness, rumination, indigestion and different forms of both mental and physical pain accompany the great achievement of both Gilgamesh's raging sorrow and Bellerophon's slaying of the Chimera. Orestes' vengeance, even by the Ancient writers, was viewed within the context of a violent melancholic disease, which like Jason's dejected and sorrowful states constituted a part of his character. As a foreign and invasive body, the melancholy of these tragic heroes constituted the anomalism of a hyperbolic emotional response that challenged the cosmos they were a part of, but which also *pointed them out* as extraordinary characters. Implying an activity involving the virtuosity of an individual struggle with and ability to balance the somatic manifestations of a disease, the melancholic structure of these characters provides a background for the gradual emergence of an individual responsibility and ability to manage a self defined by its ability to sublimate suffering into great achievement.

## **2. *Erōs* and the Antinomy of Madness in Plato's Dialogues**

In the opening of Plato's *Symposium* a comment is made about a certain Apollodorus, the narrator of the dialogue, characterizing him as 'the maniac' (*Smp.* 173d). Although the words are said, it seems, mostly in irritation with Apollodorus, because he has a tendency to characterize everyone but Socrates – including himself – as a failure, the words are interesting, because they provide an entrance in philosophy to the theme of madness as a disposition specific of character discussed above in relation to the tragic hero. Not that Apollodorus is ever characterized as a tragic hero – quite the

contrary. Apollodorus is a maniac because of his obsession with Socrates. The term *manikos* is used about him to refer to the vehemence and excess of both his praise and blame (Bury 2008). But the reason that Apollodorus is characterized as mad is not only that he is obsessing about Socrates; many others did that too. The reason is that he is absolutely out of line in the way he does it. And what is more, it does not seem to be something he does only in this situation, as much as it seems to be something in his character: in the *Phaedo* the same Apollodorus is present with a few others at Socrates' deathbed. Here everyone is affected in much the same way, alternating between laughing and weeping – but, Phaedo says, 'especially one of us, Apollodorus – you know the man and his ways' (*Phd.* 59a). The suggestion of Apollodorus as a well-known example of emotional imbalance is interesting here, because it opens up to both Plato's conception of an antonymic figure in the understanding of madness, and to a subtle relation between this, the concept of *erōs*, and the ability to be someone who seeks real knowledge – a philosopher.

Reflecting the assumption of suffering as a prerequisite of heroic achievement found in the previous section, this theme may be represented by starting with Phaedo's reference to the unusual mixture of pain and pleasure in the people present in prison with Socrates on his last day in the *Phaedo*. Phaedo's indication that everyone shared this 'strange' or 'out-of-place' (*atopon*) emotion can be seen as a reflection of what Socrates tells his friends when he first sits up and speaks:

What a strange thing that which men call pleasure seems to be, and how astonishing the relation it has with what is thought to be its opposite, namely pain! A man cannot have both at the same time. Yet if he pursues and catches the one, he is almost always bound to catch the other also, like two creatures with one head. I think that if Aesop had noted this he would have composed a fable that a god wished to reconcile their opposition but could not do so, so he joined their two heads together, and therefore when a man has the one, the other follows later. (*Phd.* 60b)

The strange emotion that Phaedo refers to, Socrates identifies as part of all humanity: to the most intense feelings of pleasure belong also intense feelings of pain. Moreover the two sensations seem to stand in a constitutive relation to each other, indicating that the person who seeks a life in

pleasure must also submit to a life in pain – or at least to fierce oscillations between the two. That what Socrates describes is not only true for some, but for everyone, can be seen by his reference to the fictive Aesopian fable, which, as Bruce Rosenstock has pointed out (Rosenstock 2004: 245), is the very reverse of the Aristophanic fable in the *Symposium* about the origin of *erōs* from the severing of a single creature. This creature, a kind of androgynous human being with four hands, two faces and two sets of sexual organs, was separated into two parts by Zeus, when he found out that it was trying to attack the gods because of its self-sufficiency. According to Aristophanes, *erōs* came into being as a longing in the two parts to be reunited (*Smp.* 189e-191d). In the *Phaedo*, on the other hand, this condition is reversed and represented in terms of a *psychosomatic relation*, when Socrates explains about the curious conjunction between pain and pleasure and later adds that ‘every pleasure and every pain provides, as it were, another nail to rivet the soul to the body and to weld them together.’ (*Phd.* 83d)

It is on the background of this psychosomatic relation that Socrates’ reference to the origin of *erōs* in his explication of the conjunction between pain and pleasure becomes interesting to the present study of melancholy. While the circular combination of pleasure with pain may represent a condition of being human, the emotional oscillations it causes may be more violent in some than in others. In the emotional response of Apollodorus’ character, Plato certainly seems to suggest that this is the case. What is of interest here is that exactly Apollodorus in the *Symposium* is simultaneously presented as someone, *who does not possess erōs at all*, one who lacks any understanding of it. It is out of the antinomy between a morbid madness like this and the divine madness of the tragic hero who possesses *erōs*, that melancholy first emerges as a problem of self-regulation.

The temptation to understand Apollodorus’ role as a narrator of the *Symposium* as an indication that he has been caught up by *erōs* exists because he is ‘preserving’ the speeches that he recounts. But as Rosenstock argues (Rosenstock 2004: 243), rather than merely understanding the *Symposium* as a dialogue *about erōs*, its narrative structure also suggests that it is designed to dramatize and manifest *erōs*. In contrast to this, Apollodorus’ memorization of the speeches does not dramatize *erōs* at all. De-

spite his obsession with Socrates, Apollodorus' documentations of what Socrates has done, precise as they may be, are hardly erotic in themselves. As Rosenstock suggests, Apollodorus is more 'like a record with a scratch', ever-repeating the story of Agathon's feast over again and again (it is even indicated that he did this only a day before). Apollodorus, although he himself might think otherwise, is an *ignorant* when it comes to *erōs*, merely making it his job to document everything Socrates does and says every day. Before taking on that task, he says, he 'simply drifted aimlessly' (*Smp.* 173a). While his encounter with philosophy might have given him a purpose in life, the hyperbole of his abnormally excitable disposition (referred to even by himself as 'raving' (*Phd.* 173d)) has not allowed him access to the heart of the matter according to the *Symposium: erōs* itself. Although Apollodorus *feels* stronger than people normally do, something in his character denies him the understanding and grasping of *erōs*.

The role of *erōs* in philosophy and the relation in it to the combination of pain and pleasure as it is treated in the *Phaedo* is the subject of Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* on the education in love that he received from Diotima. Socrates explains that Diotima taught him that *erōs* is a *daimôn* that shuttles back and forth between gods and men, rounding out 'the whole' and binding 'all to all' (*Smp.* 202e). While *erōs* exists as an attraction between that which is set apart, it also – reminding of the circular combination of pain and pleasure in the *Phaedo* – works to relate separates and make them whole. *Erōs* is the son of Poros ("resource") and Penia ("poverty"), and therefore, Socrates explains, his life is a lot like theirs:

In the first place, he is always poor, and he's far from being delicate and beautiful (as ordinary people think he is); instead, he is ... shoeless and homeless, always lying on the dirt without a bed, ... having his mother's nature always living with Need. But on his father's side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, an awesome hunter, always weaving snares, resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a lover of wisdom through all his life [...] (*Smp.* 203c)

Being the product of a paradoxical combination of resourcefulness and lack, *erōs* is at the same time in need, and itself in possession of the means to solve that need. In this way *erōs* is literally *a-poria*, 'bewilderment' or 'embarrassment'. But representing a 'problem' in this sense is not necessar-

ily negative. As Socrates describes in the *Meno* (*Men.* 84a), reducing someone to *aporia* can have a purgatory effect, because it illustrates to the one who merely thought he knew what he was talking about that he does in fact not know it and compels him – instils in him the desire, *erōs* – to investigate it further. As an *aporetic problem*, *erōs* itself is of the positive: it demands of the assailed to be handled intelligently.

Exactly the theme of intelligence is interesting here, because it touches on the question of melancholy as a problem of self-regulation, which has been mentioned above. Apollodorus lacks *erōs*, not for want of trying, but because he does not *understand* the way it works and is merely obsessing about what Socrates thinks and does. When it comes to *erōs*, Apollodorus is an ignorant in the characteristic sense covered by Plato's use of the melancholic sentiment in the condition of *amathia*. As illustrated by the psychiatrist Hubertus Tellenbach, the ignorance of Platonic *amathia* results from an inharmonious unison of the human body and soul that does not live up to the paradigm of the well-proportioned cosmos as it is described in the Timean vision of man and world (Tellenbach 1980: 7). *Amathia* designates a condition where the domination of the material body over the soul has deteriorated from the wish to learn to the *unteachability* of someone with a character flaw. Reflecting the definition in the *Republic* (*R.* IX, 573c) of the leader who fails to lead himself as a deranged, as *melankolikos*, the specific condition of *amathia* compares with the excessive gesture of someone who tries to rule, not only over human beings, but over gods as well, and whose hyperbole results in *tyranny* as both the individual and the state degenerates. As a later chapter will illustrate this assumption of an analogue between the health of the individual and societal body plays an important role in the history of melancholy as a 'thing' in the body, as Thomas Hobbes defines the melancholic derangement of the individual who fails to lead his passions in terms of the degeneration of man into beast in the *Leviathan*.

The assumption of a fine line separating grandeur and failure and governed by self-regulation is also found in the *Phaidros*, when Socrates characterizes ignorance by providing the example of a man who thinks that he has mastered harmony, only because he is able to produce the highest and the lowest notes on his strings. Although that is not what a good teacher

would do, Socrates asserts, this man can be approached as an ignorant, but of a special dispositional kind: ‘You stupid man [*melancholais*], you are out of your mind!’ (*Phdr.* 268e) The use here of the term *melancholais* amounts to more than mere stupidity: the *melancholic* stupidity of the man who thinks he is a virtuoso because he can play the high and the low tones shares with Apollodorus the kind of ignorance that results from the deficiency of self-leadership. To Plato melancholy is a kind of ignorance resulting from the excessive emotional response to a psychosomatic flaw of character. It is in this sense that *amathei* is related to the inability to achieve the divination of *erōs* and its purgatory, productive effects.

To the present study the disposition of melancholic ignorance is interesting because it is supplemented by the Platonic assumption of *the opposite kind of ēthos*, that of the divinely inspired. Representing a preliminary exposition of the precarious Aristotelian naturalization of the black bile as a ‘thing’ in the body, the designation in *Phaidros* of a god-given transformation, the *exallagé*, which as a condition must be strictly differentiated from the morbid state of *mania* as described above (*Phdr.* 244b), constitutes an antonymic figure of madness. Not for the average man, this inspired disposition governed by *erōs* is, as Socrates states, a matter for the exceptional in character. Prophets and sibyls, great sufferers like Orestes, poets and artists, all those who like Socrates himself are absorbed by *erōs*, are subject to a greater health: that of the divine *mania* that finds genial proportion with cosmos.

To Plato the assumption of an antonymic figure of madness, representing both the melancholy of someone unable to achieve *erōs* because of a character flaw resulting in deficient self-leadership, and the divine madness of the genius, as Tellenbach illustrates, is closely linked to the Platonic reception of the Hippocratic antinomy between pain and pleasure presented above (Tellenbach 1980: 9). Something like this is already hinted at in the *Symposium*, when Eryximachus in his speech argues for the existence a kind of love responsible for physical health, found between the heterogeneous elements of the body. It is the task of the doctor and his patient to restore the symmetry between those elements that have come to predominate over one another through repletion and depletion (*Smp.* 186b-d).



But as Tellenbach shows (Tellenbach 1980: 6), it is in the *Timaeus* that Plato's reception of the Hippocratic doctrine is most obvious. Here both the divine symmetry and the melancholic dissymmetry that have been discussed above, are thematized within the context of the 'diseases of the soul that result from a bodily condition' (*Ti.* 86b). The disproportion of the hyperbolic attitude resulting in 'a multitude of bad temper and melancholy' (*Ti.* 87a) is psychosomatic in character and incorporates Hippocratic elements into the Platonic ordering of the soul and the body. As Tellenbach argues, it is in this Hippocratic context that the Platonic understanding of the melancholic as an ignorant must be seen. Like *mania*, its counterpart among the two basic characterizations of the *nosos psychés* ("diseases of the soul", *Ti.* 86b), *amethia*, the melancholic ignorance, results from an imbalance between body and mind: when inside the living thing the soul is more powerful than the body, then if the soul becomes too excited, the body becomes ill. Similarly, when the body is stronger than the soul, this can lead to 'the greatest disease of all: ignorance' (*Ti.* 88b). None of these conditions are present when the body and the soul are found to be in harmony. Modeled after the harmony of the cosmos (*Ti.* 88c-d), the Hippocratic notion of disequilibrium is integrated into the Platonic world order in the *Timaeus* (Tellenbach 1980: 7).

The result of this introduction of a Hippocratic perspective on proportion into Plato's thought, in reference to the emotional hyperbole of the tragic hero discussed in the previous chapter, represents a partial *decosmologization*, because it presents the hyperbolic movement from the right measure into the excessive and pathological in terms of *ēthos*. The combination of the motif of a relation between pleasure and pain with the notion of an *excessive reaction* that leads to either *mania* or *amathia* – melancholic ignorance – constitutes a partial internalization of responsibility structured around the disposition of psychosomatic suffering. It is the deficient self-regulation of this responsibility, related to character, that separates the ignorance of the melancholic individual from the divine inspiration of *erōs*. As a fall from cosmos, the pathological state of the emotional hyperbole constitutes a loss of symmetry contrasted by the divine *mania* of the exceptional one who sublimates psychosomatic suffering into cosmic symmetry, through the genius of their character. Structured around a pat-

tern of suffering represented by the Hippocratic antinomy between pain and pleasure, both the *ēthos* of the Platonic genius and the *ēthos* of the melancholic ignorant, the exceptional proportion of genius and the hyperbolic disproportion of ignorance, are subject to a virtuous activity, the origin of which is no longer completely external to their terms. If the first are able to achieve the cosmic symmetry of divine madness through the dispositions in their character, the latter suffer the consequences of their dispositions which lead them into excess. Through the introduction of Hippocratic theory into the Platonic worldview, the emotional hyperbole becomes closely related to the balancing of a *psychosomatic relation*. While this relation, in the work of Plato, is still found within the confines of a cosmic world order, the Aristotelian assertion of the *melaina cholé* as a ‘thing’ in the body of the extraordinary, which can lead to both geniality and to disease, if it is not managed in the right manner, *naturalizes* the precarious *ēthos* of the melancholic type as someone *abnormal by nature*. This is the theme of the following chapter.

### **3. Abnormal by Nature: Melancholy in *Problems XXX, 1***

Although there can be no doubt that the writings on melancholy in late Antiquity and all through the Middle Ages focuses nearly exclusively on the pathological effects of the black bile (Jackson 1986, Klibansky et al. 2001) it is similarly reasonable to say that no single text on melancholy has had the influence of *Problems XXX, 1*, which examines also the positive effects of the *melaina cholé*. As already mentioned above, even though the text belongs to the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, it is probably not written by Aristotle himself, but by his follower and kindred in spirit Theophrastus, who is known to have written a whole treatise on melancholy, where he, among other things, pursues the question of a relation between geniality and melancholy (Tellenbach 1980: 9, Theunissen 1996: 3). The text’s focus on a kind of *non-pathological melancholic ēthos* supports this claim, as Theophrastus was also the author of *Characters*, a treatise containing thirty brief descriptions of moral types, like flattery, complaisance, surliness, arrogance and irony. But as Philip van der Eijk (van der Eijk 2005) has shown in an interesting study, the theory of melancholy in *Problems XXX, 1* corresponds quite well to the concept of melancholy as it is represented in other

parts of Aristotle's work, indicating that there is no reason to doubt that Aristotle supported this theory.

The historical popularity of *Problems XXX, 1* can to some extent be attributed to the fact that it constitutes the first comprehensive study of the melancholic temperament in a specific type of character, even though the author never gives a definition of melancholy – or even mentions the term *melancholia*. Having been understood first and foremost as a 'monography of the black bile' (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 76), and even as a sort of phenomenology of the creative genius (see for example: Radden 2000b), *Problems XXX, 1* opens up a whole new tradition in the understanding of the influence of the black bile by asserting it to be a 'thing' in the body of the culturally formative, around which their self-regulation is structured.

As the following illustrates, in *Problems XXX, 1* the black bile is the primary subject. This is all the more interesting, because the Hippocratic medicine treated it as a part of a larger cosmological framework – and even believed it to be merely a secondary phenomenon, a degeneration of the yellow bile or the blood (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 53, see also: Flashar 1966: 24). In the Aristotelian text the black bile is detached from the doctrine of the four humours and their relation to the elements, resulting in a *decosmologization*, not only of the Hippocratic notion of balance ("*krasis*"), but also of the Platonic notion of proportionality, which was the subject of the previous chapter. It is out of this decosmologization that the black bile emerges as a 'thing' in the body, which calls for management and nurture by the extraordinary in character in order for them to meet the demands of their nature. Compared to the Platonic notion of the divinely inspired madness, which would lead the exceptional few to a higher order of symmetry, the Aristotelian portrait of the melancholic extracts the moment of achievement from that of divination and places it in man, in the nature of the few, who – paraphrasing Nietzsche – have a need for a 'greater health' (G2 382). If the Platonic theory of the divine and metaphysical inspiration of *erōs* separated the genial sharply from the pathological, the Aristotelian notion of a non-pathological melancholic *ēthos* collapses this distinction and conceives instead of a type of character, whose genial nature makes him more than averagely susceptible to the diseases associated with the black bile. This is also the reason that the real principal of *Problems XXX, 1*

is not melancholy itself or the ones who have succumbed to its diseases, but *the ones who find in themselves the natural ability to manage their suffering* in order to achieve the potential greatness of their character. Constituting a preliminary sketch of the contemporary problematization of a self-regulation structured around a 'thing' in the body, the paradoxical *ēthos* of the extraordinary few is the primary interest of this chapter.

This assumption of a genial *ēthos*, more susceptible to melancholy than the average, is indicated by the framework of the text in shape of its opening question:

Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic, and some to such an extent that they are infected by the diseases arising from the black bile, as the story of Heracles among the heroes tells? (953a10-13)

Interesting about this question is of course that it does not ask *whether*, but rather *why* all men of creative genius are susceptible to – but not necessarily infected by – the illnesses of the black bile. The assumption of a kind of outstanding character – the *ēthos perriton* mentioned above – that is inclined to achieve great things, but on whom the influence of the black bile is very strong, is underlined by the reference to the tragic heroes. As discussed above, the hyperbolic individuality of the tragic sufferer constitutes a character in which the gift of heroic achievement is united with the affliction of madness.

But the opening question of *Problems XXX, 1* distinguishes the *ēthos perriton* not only from the heroic individual, to whom the rapture of melancholic rage was a matter of cosmic fate, but also from the divine possession of the Platonic erotic. In the exceptional human being of *Problems XXX, 1* the greatness of character is structured around the *natural substance of the black bile*. The *ēthos perriton* of *Problems XXX, 1*, as Michael Theunissen points out (Theunissen 1996: 11), are outstanding *diá physin*, 'by nature'. As a 'thing' in the body of the extraordinary in character, the potentially harmful and pathological character of the black bile is asserted as a prerequisite for great achievement. As Theunissen argues (Theunissen 1996: 9), the surprising thing about this is the indication of something *negative* as a prerequisite for the *positive*.

To understand this precarious indication, it is necessary to take a closer look at the way the author of the text in *Problems* understands melancholy as an element of character, of *ēthos*. While the presupposition in the question quoted above is that all men of outstanding character are melancholics – and are at least more susceptible to the illnesses of the black bile than others – the contrary is not necessarily the case. All melancholics are not geniuses. This is indicated among other things by the ambivalent use of the word *perritos*, ‘outstanding’. The word can certainly be taken to mean ‘outstanding’ in the positive sense of someone of excellent or extraordinary character. But it is also used in a more neutral sense, denoting simply something strange or out of the ordinary. As Theunissen points out (Theunissen 1996: 9), the meaning of the word varies through *Problems XXX, 1*, sometimes denoting the positively extraordinary and gifted and sometimes referring simply to the abnormal. But in the somewhat odd supposition that turns the opening question around and ends the text, in which it is stated that all melancholic persons are outstanding (“*perritoi*”), not owing to disease but by nature (955a38-39), the only way the expression makes any sense is by indicating ‘*abnormality*’. If the assumption cannot be of a character that is a genius, *because* he is a melancholic (as this would contradict the assumption in the opening question of the genius as someone especially susceptible to the diseases of the black bile), then the assumption of the extraordinary melancholic at the end of the text, must paradoxically be of someone who is *naturally out of the ordinary*. The melancholic in *Problems XXX, 1* is not a natural genius; he is something as rare as an *abnormal by nature*.

This interpretation is supported by the indication that the black bile resides in everyone to some degree, but that this does not mean that everyone is a melancholic (954a26). Everyone, even those who are not abnormal, can succumb to the illnesses of the black bile; but to most people these conditions, arising from the consumption for example of daily foods, have no effects on their *ēthos*, on their character. Only those in whom ‘this temperament exists by nature’ are affected in such a way that they develop different characteristics according to their different temperaments. The ones in whom the bile is found ‘considerable and cold’ have a tendency to become ‘sluggish and stupid’, while the ones who have it ‘excessive and hot’ become

‘mad, clever and amorous and easily moved to passion and desire’ (954a33-34). It is clear from the description of these average bilious characters that they are not especially inspired or extraordinarily creative, but also that their hyperbolic emotional response to the effects of the bile may make them appear different from everyone else owing to their condition. These melancholics may be abnormal by nature, but they are not necessarily geniuses.

It is among these anomalies, though, that the author of *Problems XXX, 1* finds those who are. Some melancholics, where the bile is warm-natured, but in whom the hyperbolic response is moderated and the ‘excessive heat has sunk to a moderate amount’ are found to be ‘more intelligent and less eccentric’, and they are ‘superior to the rest of the world in many ways, some in education some in arts and others again in statesmanship’ (954b1-3). In these exceptional human beings, abnormality is not an effect of disease. Rather it is a consequence of a natural disposition that is both the subject of their great achievements and of their above average susceptibility to the diseases of the black bile:

For just as men differ in appearance not because they have faces, but because they have a certain type of face, some handsome, some ugly and some again having no outstanding characteristics (these are of normal character), so those who have a small share of this temperament are normal, but those who have much are unlike the majority. If the characteristic is very intense, such men are very melancholic, and if the mixture is of a certain kind they are extraordinary (*perritoi*). But if they neglect it, they incline towards melancholic diseases ... (954b21-29, translation modified)

As a moderation of the emotional hyperbole found in those who are abnormal by nature, the geniality of the extraordinary in character emerges on the background of an act of self-regulation. Structured around the black bile, this act of self-regulation is governed by a psychosomatic pattern of suffering designating it as a *prophylactic activity*.

This becomes clear from the description of how the extraordinary melancholic in *Problems XXX, 1* becomes ill. The relation between the melancholic and the black bile in his body is explained within the context of the temperature of the bile, which can be both very hot and very cold. These qualities, as the author informs us, are the greatest agents in life when it

comes to the making of character (955a33). On the one hand, when the bile becomes colder than it should, it produces 'all kinds of despair' (954b35). On the other, if it is too warm it produces for example over-confidence (954b30) or madness (954a25). The relation of respectively *dysthymia* and *euthymia* – of being dispirited or excessively overjoyed – to the prophylactic activity of the melancholic, the author seeks to illustrate through the example of wine. As the consumption of wine can produce different kinds of emotional responses of both cheerfulness and despondency, the black bile, which like wine is full of air (955a35), can produce hyperbolic emotional states of either manic elation or depressive desolation in the melancholic body. The mixture of the two is dangerous to the melancholic because the heat of the wine, according to the author, has a tendency to cool the natural heat of the bile in the body and may bring him to 'commit suicide after a bout of drinking' (954b35). Thus, while the average people will drink 'to the point of drunkenness' (955a4) to become more confident, the melancholic is inclined to go and hang himself if he attempts the same (955a10). This hyperbolic and negative inclination is an effect of the melancholic *ēthos*, which unlike the wine that brings it about only temporarily, lasts all life (953b17).

It is the task of the *ēthos perriton* to manage the 'thing' in the body towards a median optimal composition of cold-and-warm-galledness on the background of this. In the melancholic character, referred to by Hubertus Tellenbach as the *meson*-type in order to indicate his inclination towards a middle (Tellenbach 1980: 10), the abnormality, under the right auspice of self-regulation, can be extraordinary in character and come to represent the precarious 'right mixture' from which geniality springs. It is this '*eucrasia* in the anomaly' that makes the non-pathologic melancholics extraordinary (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 51f.). Responding to the task of regulating the paradoxical nature of the black bile, the *ēthos perriton* can achieve the higher balance of the abnormal. It is in this sense that the disparate 'thing' in the body emerges as the paradoxical subject of the *prophylactic activity* of the extraordinary in character.

What is interesting about this etiological description of suffering and achievement in the melancholic character is the difference it constitutes to

the Platonic conception of *melancholic ignorance* discussed in the previous chapter. If the *amathia* of the Platonic melancholic was a result of a character flaw, which set his disposition against that of the divinely inspired in possession of *erōs*, there is no qualitative difference between these states in the melancholy of the extraordinary character of *Problems XXX, 1*. Structured around the paradoxical nature of the ‘thing’ in the body instead, the circular and bipolar form that the diseases of the black bile take, are exclusively the result of deficient self-regulation causing the hyperbolism. Furthermore, as Theunissen points out (Theunissen 1996: 15), the way the diseases set in the melancholic character is not through the eruption of an anomaly; rather, as the illustration provided by the author with the example of wine shows, the diseases of the black bile constitute *a deepening of an already, naturally present anomaly*. The melancholic character in *Problems XXX, 1* becomes sick – and more so than others less so inclined – because he neglects to manage himself according to his *ēthos*. It is in this sense that he can be said to be subjected to the effects of a double pathos: on the one hand his pathological condition is represented as a *transience* as opposed to the paradoxical ideal of his *ēthos*, caused by a hyperbolic emotional response, and on the other this transience is manifested as a physical and mental pattern of suffering at the limits of which he gradually gains knowledge of himself. In contrast to the irredeemable ignorance of the Platonic melancholic, the *ēthos perriton* of *Problems XXX, 1* ceaselessly transforms himself through the suffering to which his ‘thing’ in the body subjects him. As the paradox of a teleology without a fixed telos, it is in the nature of the extraordinary melancholic to ceaselessly seek out his own limitations and treat them as the provisional *telos* of his ‘higher balance’. It is around this management of a natural disposition, defined in terms of the circular polarity between the exalted and the dejected, that the culturally formative activities of the extraordinary in character – the philosophers, legislators, poets and artists of *Problems XXX, 1* – are structured. Steering clear of the excesses that will make him mad, the outstanding character must manage the inequality which sets his *ēthos* apart from the average. Naturalizing the Platonic antinomy of madness, which separated the pathological from the inspirational, the disposition of the *ēthos perriton* in *Problems XXX, 1*



represents a ceaseless activity of self-differentiation structured around the black bile as a 'thing' in the body.

This is supported by Theunissen's argument that the ideal ethical middle of Aristoteles' *Ethics* does not count for the *ēthos perriton*. Although the author of *Problems XXX, 1* recommends a tempering of the excessively hot black bile as a remedy to avoid disease, the ideal, natural middle, Theunissen claims, is completely unattainable to the melancholic in character. Instead the melancholic is left to seek out the middle continuously, *pròs tò méson* ("towards the average middle"), something that will never constitute a perfect balance, but only a weakening of the symptoms he is inclined to (Theunissen 1996: 16f.) Reflecting the Nietzschean notion of a 'great health' the melancholic disposition of the exceptional melancholic character in *Problems XXX, 1* emerges as a transformation of the ethical "Be good!" into the typical Hellenic "Be different!" (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 91), which has a definitively modern ring to it.

The emergence of the black bile as a 'thing' in the body of the extraordinary melancholic of *Problems XXX, 1*, on the background of this has three important implications for the present study. First, it constitutes the *culmination of a decosmologization* where the idea of a higher cosmic order, indicated by the suffering of the tragic hero, and by the Platonic idea of a divine symmetry of madness, is substituted for the natural substance of the black bile in the body of the melancholic. The difference between the proportionality formed by the *erōs* of divine madness and the disproportion with cosmos found in the inability of the melancholic ignorant to lead the self, is reduced to the natural form of a substance, which is the source of both pathology and geniality and is subjected to self-regulation.

Secondly, the internalization resulting from this decosmologization transforms the question about greatness of character into the problematic of a paradoxical *ēthos* that is in constant and irreducible conflict with itself. Desubstantialized by the internal disparity in it, the assumption of a natural kind of non-pathological melancholy forces the extraordinary in character to a *prophylactic activity of care for the self* structured around a psychosomatic pattern of suffering.

Thirdly, and finally, the assumption of the potentially pathological as a prerequisite for the great and culturally formative achievement, results in a ceaseless and incessant activity of self-differentiation through this pattern of suffering. As the paradoxical designation of a makeshift *telos*, the knowledge of the self gained on the limits of the 'elevated existence' peculiar to this *ēthos*, invites a *dietetic activity* designed to actively *sublimate suffering into achievement* through the 'thing' in the body. While suggested in *Problems XXX, 1* by the example of the Syracusan poet, who is better when he is ecstatic (954a38) and also by the consequent use of intoxication as an analogy to the productivity of the naturally melancholic, this perspective is not fully unfolded in Antiquity. But as the following section will illustrate, the positive rehabilitation of the Platonic notion of divine madness in the Renaissance is unfolded in the dietetic philosophy of Marcelo Ficino, who re-establishes the Aristotelian notion of the black bile as a 'thing' in the body as the background for what became a theory of geniality. Here melancholy is asserted also in its double character *aut Deus aut Deamon*, as either 'an angel of heaven or a fiend of hell' (Walkington 1607, in: Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 361, note 23) in a theory of sublimation that allows for those who are born under the astrological influence of Saturn to much more actively seek pleasure in the suffering of their peculiar disposition.

#### **4. Saturnine Men: The Dietetics of Melancholy in Ficino**

In what was later arguably to become the 'manifesto' of the Renaissance, the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486),<sup>vi</sup> the great Italian humanist Pico della Mirandola focuses attention on the capacity of man and on the human perspective. Like his good friend, Marsilio Ficino, whose dietetic philosophy will be the primary subject of this chapter, he considered the scholastic questions of logic and semantics to be futile and was instead preoccupied with the relation of the human to the divine. Being the summit and purpose of God's creation, man had before him a great, if not easy task: the creation of himself out of the gifts that he had been possessed with by the powers of the universe. The *Oration* begins along this line: re-telling the story of creation, it sketches the foundation to a radical anthropology of self-transgression and sublimation that encompassed the Renaissance man and came to reiterate and unite the Platonic and the Aristotelian notions of the

extraordinary in character with a general theory of genius. Change and metamorphosis, Pico asserts, is not a lack of stability in created life; rather it is on the autarchic capacity for change that the dignity of man rests (Jeanneret 1996: 129). This is made clear by his answer to the question about the excellence of human nature. Why, he asks 'should we not admire more the angels themselves and the beatific choirs of heaven?' (§3, 5) His answer comes in the form of an odd version of the biblical genesis: at the end of creation, when 'God the Architect' (§4, 10) had nearly completed his work, created both angels and animals and put them in heaven and on Earth, he longed for someone who would exist 'to ponder the meaning of so great a work, to love its beauty, and to wonder at its vastness' (§4, 12). This being was to become man; but as everything created was complete, and the highest, the middle and the lowest orders were already assigned, no archetypes remained to model from. Man, the final creation and 'creature of indeterminate image' (§5, 18) would have to do without anything of his own, sharing instead a little bit of what belonged to every other being. With this gift, man's lack of predefinition instead became an endowment: he could take the role, the appearance and the function he wanted to and fashion himself as he responsibly desired. In return for the lack of fixed identity that set him apart from all other beings, he gained the freedom to be the architect of his own nature:

Constrained by no limits, you may determine it for yourself, according to your own free will, in whose hand we have placed you [...] We have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that you may, as the free and extraordinary shaper of yourself, fashion yourself in the form you will prefer. It will be in your power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish; you shall have the power, according to your soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher orders, which are divine. (§5, 20-23)

Man, Pico maintains, is the being that has been granted the task to master his own destiny at the risk of both ultimate failure and ultimate glory. Subject only to himself, he will have the power to cultivate his being in every which direction he would desire: his vegetable seed will make him plant-like, his sensual seed like a beast; with his rationality he can turn into a celestial being, and his intellectual gifts can make of him 'an angel and a son of God.' (§6, 30) As a creature of metamorphosis, he is a *chameleon* (§7, 32)

and even symbolized by Proteus, the ancient Greek sea-god, who possessed the ability to tell the future, but would change his shape to avoid it (§7, 34).

It is in the light of this conception of man as a protean being that we should see the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino. Reiterating the Platonic notion of a divine madness and combining it with the physiological arguments of the Aristotelian *Problems XXX, 1* by maintaining that madness does not have the proper effect on the mind unless it is assisted by the material means of the black bile, Ficino's theory of human genius develops out of the Aristotelian theory of the 'thing' in the body discussed in the previous chapter a specific notion of *dietetics* that was only provisionally present before. As in Pico's work, man is not merely subjected to the influences of specific physical properties; rather, he is free to seek out and cultivate different powers in order to design himself in his own image. These thoughts, shared by the Italian Renaissance with the Reformation in the North, emerges out of the urge for emancipation, both of the individual and its nationality, which sought to liberate notions of 'personality' from their ties to hierarchies and tradition (Burke 1998). In both the Italian South and the Germanic North the humanistic dealing with philosophical problems emphasized the newfound self-awareness of a specific type of autarchic human being and sought to emancipate the individuality of personality (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 352). As the following will illustrate, *melancholy*, the influence of the black bile on the body in those who was found under the auspices of Saturn's astrological authority, played a very special role in this. If the human being in the antiquity of Aristotle had been relatively bound in terms of nature, but free from the influence of the stars, the emancipated human being of the Renaissance, on the other hand, found himself struggling with, manipulating or succumbing to these powers as a part of a grand dietetic gesture structured around 'the heavens within us' as Ficino writes in a letter (Faracovi 2005). The autarchic *homo literatus*, who was stretched out between heroic notions of self-affirmation, on the foundation of a suffering sublimated into productive pleasure, and the despairing self-doubt of someone who is exposed to powers beyond his control, sketched out what became the ethical form of the modern genius. This form was the result of a double Renaissance: on the one hand of the neo-Platonic under-

standing of the Saturnine powers, according to which the highest of the planets was also responsible for the highest powers of the soul; and on the other of the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy from *Problems XXX, 1* according to which all great men were melancholics (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 358). The Renaissance melancholic suffered not only under the pressure of his psychosomatic constitution like his Aristotelian cousin; he also had the astrological influences of Saturn that were both benign and terrifying to answer to.

As Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl have shown in their work on Saturn and melancholy (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001), the astrological understanding of Saturn as a planet with precarious and equivocal qualities reflecting the peculiar polarity of melancholy discussed in the first three sections of this chapter, was not an invention of the Renaissance, but have roots that reach back into Antiquity. Providing an external analogy to the black bile as a 'thing' in the body, the ambiguity of the planet's properties was clear already in the Arabic astrology: Saturn is said here to be dry, but sometimes it is described as moist; its reference is to the deepest poverty, but also to the greatest wealth; it is said to symbolize both deceit, honesty, belonging and long journeys at sea – and the people born under it include both slaves, criminals, the powerful and the ones who are silent because of deep thought and the secret wisdom they possess (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 209f.). The same kind of equivocation is found in the understanding in early Roman sources of Saturn, this dark and mysterious ruler of the heavens, as someone who exercises his fundamental power over the universe from an inverted perspective: he sees everything on its head from his place on the axis of the heavens, thus manifesting an evil gaze on the world. In his hands he bore the fate of all fatherhood and of old age (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 220f.).

Beyond referencing to his status as father of the universe and the highest of the planets, this indication also points to Saturn's origin out of the deity Cronus, who was probably the most ambivalent of all the Greek gods. As noted by Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl (2001: 212f.) this paternal figure can rightfully be called the god of contrasts, not only because of his influence, but also because of his own fate: he is the father of the three very different rulers of the world, Zeus, Poseidon and Hades and seems to have in him all

of their qualities. He ruled the world in the Golden Age where everything was abundant and he invented agriculture; but he also functions as the de-throned god who sadly roams the farthest shores and waters of the earth. He is chained and imprisoned, living in or even under Hades' kingdom Tartarus, but also counts sometimes as the Lord of the Dead. He is the father of men and gods alike and, most famously, also the evil one who feeds on his own children, eater of raw flesh, the god who drinks up all other gods in him.

Although this polarity in the figure of Cronus can be taken to have inspired the properties that defined the ambivalent astrological influences of Saturn as a planet under whose auspices those who both suffered the diseases of the black bile and enjoyed its intellectual gifts were placed in Ficino's theories of the genius, it was the influence of its function in the neo-Platonic tradition that made the difference. These theories shall not be extensively discussed here. It suffices instead to say, as pointed out by Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl (2001: 237), that the notion of a generally positive planetary influence propagated here, did more for Saturn than for the other planets. In the neo-Platonic tradition that so greatly inspired Ficino and his school of thought, Cronus is reinterpreted as the mightiest figure in the philosophical pantheon: he becomes *nous* ("pure spirit") in contrast to Zeus, who signifies the soul. It was this glorification of Cronus, no longer as an agent of worldly powers, but as a representative of the highest and most pure force of thought, which enabled Ficino to find in Saturn's influence an affinity with Plato's notion of a divine madness and to combine it with the influences of the black bile as a 'thing' in the body. It was not only the shared qualities of the planet and the melancholic – the coldness and dryness, the propensity to loneliness, dejection and excessive fear, but also to visionary states of mind – that related the two. It was also the analogy of their effects on the melancholic bodies: like the black bile, Saturn possessed both the quality of lethargy (because of its slow revolution it could equip those born under it with 'leaden feet'), but also the power of intelligence and contemplation (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 245).

This is perhaps nowhere as lucidly illustrated as in the admiration in the Renaissance of the tragic and melancholic hero. Ficino's emblematic use of the suffering Prometheus, also a name in the Orphic mysteries for Cronus

(Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 239), as a mythical paradigm for the melancholic genius, merged the theme of the tragic sufferer, with the Platonic notion of *erōs* and with the Aristotelian traditions of melancholy as a 'thing' in the body. According to Ficino, Prometheus was instructed by divine wisdom to gain possession of the divine fire, that he interprets as reason, but this exhilarating task also proved to be Prometheus' bane: on the highest mountain of his insight he was also most miserable of all, gnawed at forever by the vultures of the mind, symbolizing the torment of inquiry (Brann 2002: 95). It is on this background that Ficino's dietetic philosophy of the melancholy genius as a subject leading himself under the double influence of the saturnine powers and the black bile as a 'thing' in the body unfolds. Having the property of the Earth itself, the black bile:

... continually incites the soul both to collect itself together into one and to dwell on itself and to contemplate itself. And being analogues to the world's center, it forces the investigation to the center of the individual subjects, and it carries one to the contemplation of whatever is the highest, since, indeed, it is most congruent with Saturn, the highest of the planets. Contemplation itself, in its turn, by a continual recollection and compression, as it were, brings on a nature similar to the black bile (Ficino 2000: 90).

Retaining the properties of the deepest things, the black bile will lead the philosopher, who is under the direction of Saturn, on an intellectual journey, sublimating the mere earthly life to a heavenly and eternal level. Thus the Platonic divine inspiration, which Ficino finds in the emblem of Prometheus' heroic *erōs*, is not only passively received; it also *actively instigated and sought out* by those whose constitution allows them to give in to their melancholic nature *tota mente*, and place themselves under the guidance of Saturn, the Planet of Tears.

Ficino's *De vita tres libri* ("Three Books on Life", 1489), from where this quote is taken, unlike his *Theologica Platonica* that he himself considered his most important work, is not so much a book of philosophy as it is a book on the health of this character. More specifically, it deals with the healthy life of the intellectual, who is inclined, like Ficino was himself, to melancholy and emotional suffering. As Radden has argued (Radden 2000b: 87), it is not only the singling out of the health of the intellectuals for special attention, but also that *De vita* was the first Renaissance work to reiterate the

Aristotelian link between suffering and achievement in *Problems XXX, 1*, and to develop the notion of the astrological influence on the black bile of Saturn, which makes it unique. The combination of these elements with the development of a dietetic theory structured around the psychosomatic pattern of the black bile endows *De vita* with a perspective, which constitutes a direct prolongation of the problematization of self-regulation emerging from the ancient theories about melancholy. Including both concrete advice about how to live – avoidance of excess of any kind, a reasonable use of the day, good living quarters, the right nutrition, good digestion, massages and musical therapy (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 2001: 384f.) – and more theoretic reflections about how the melancholy can be optimally cultivated, Ficino's dietetic philosophy of melancholy represents a conclusion to the perspective on the 'thing' in the body developed in the previous chapters.

In *De vita* (Radden 2000b, Ficino 2000: 88-93) Ficino brilliantly illustrates this. Here he develops his dual perspective on the health 'of those who devote themselves fulltime to literary studies' (p. 88) by referring to Hippocrates as a physician of the body, while Socrates is one of the soul. Both kinds are important, as the sublime achievement of 'the high doors of the Muses' (p. 89) will not be possible without combining them. Already this rudiment is interesting compared to the prophylactic theories found in the Aristotelian *Problems XXX, 1*. Whereas the author of *Problems XXX, 1*, as illustrated above, focused primarily on the predisposition in the extraordinary in character towards the diseases of the black bile, Ficino focuses on *the dietetic importance of maintaining good health* in order to be able to achieve greatness.

This is also illustrated by the emphasis on the importance of achieving a moderation of the hyperbole in a passage reflecting the attempt of Aristotelian melancholic to reach a 'higher middle' in the anomaly, which was also discussed in the previous chapter. Learned people in particular, claims Ficino, are told 'scrupulously to avoid phlegm and black bile, even as the sailors do Scylla and Charybdis' (ibid.). Like the hero Odysseus, they must avoid the two monsters threatening their sanity and find a moderate way between them. For the Scylla of phlegmatic sloth 'dulls and suffocates the intelligence', whereas the Charybdis of melancholy, where it is 'too abundant or vehement, vexes the mind with continual care and frequent ab-



surditities and unsettles the judgment' (ibid.). Without either phlegm or black bile to stop them, the learned people would not only be 'unusually healthy', they would also be 'the happiest and wisest of mortals' (ibid.).

Yet, because of the combustible nature of the black bile, this *crux*, which threatens the learned with the extremes of the two monsters, also offers possibilities. With a moderate temperature it not only steers the learned clear of disease; it also provides a middle passage between the monstrous fangs of insanity towards genius. As Ficino claims in *De vita*, with reference to Plato's *Phaedrus*: 'without madness one knocks at the doors of poetry in vain' (p. 91). No one can be intellectually outstanding if they are not 'deeply excited by some sort of madness'. Melancholy, Ficino states, unlike any other humour, has a 'great tendency towards either extreme, in the unity of its fixed and stable nature' (p. 92). In this it is 'like iron; when it starts to get cold, it gets cold in the extreme; and on the contrary, once it tends towards hot, it gets hot in the extreme'. But like the reaction in lime, when it is sprinkled with water, the melancholic humour is easily kindled and when it is kindled, it burns intensely. This combustibility also provides the learned with a means to control and sublimate it:

Extremely hot, it produces the extremest boldness, even to ferocity; extremely cold, however, fear and extreme cowardice. Various grades between cold and heat, however, it produces various dispositions, just as wine, especially strong wine, characteristically induces various dispositions in those who have imbibed to the point of drunkenness, or even just a little too freely (Ficino 2000: 92).

At this heart of Ficino's genial theory it becomes clear that man's drive towards and sublimation of his own inert 'divinity' is not only a matter of steering clear of disease; instead the assumption of an underlying affinity between contemplative rapture and the divine madness that lifts the soul beyond its corporeal limits prompts man *to use material causes and dietetic means to manage the black bile in his body* in a way that was only tentatively present in the Aristotelian *Problems*. Being born under the auspices of Saturn, meant to the melancholic genius not only to suffer under its influences. The saturnine influence on the somatic subject of the black bile also constituted an agent for the realization of his hidden 'divine' potential, available only through a meticulous dietetic management of the melan-

cholic body. The rule of Saturn over the melancholic complexion also played a cooperative role in the provocation of the human genius (Brann 2002: 95).

Ficino's dietetic philosophy of melancholy provides an interesting conclusion to the perspective on the emergence of the 'thing' in the body developed in this part of the thesis. Representing the *theory of an active sublimation* structured around the pattern of psychosomatic suffering, constituted by the black bile as a 'thing' in the body, his theory accentuates the importance of self-regulation to those extraordinary human beings whose hyperbolic emotional response makes them both more susceptible to the diseases of the black bile and more inclined to geniality. As a theory also of *active self-transformation* based on this dietetic knowledge, Ficino's theory provides an important background to the contemporary problematization of the 'thing' in the body. While the implications of his theory gained its own life in the assumptions of the artistic genius as someone fashionably melancholic and more receptive to influence than others (e.g. Schleiner 1991), the assumption of the black bile as a direct subject of influence in the bodies of the extraordinary human beings waned. The following part of the thesis will take up the assumption of *acedia*, a sinful affliction emerging first among anchorite desert monks in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., manifested as a psychosomatic pattern of suffering caused by the inability to control and manage affect and represented as the *noon-day demon*.

## **5. Pathologies of Performativity: Melancholy**

As the first of the three areas of interest, which this thesis has set out to explore, the problematical formation of melancholy that has been the subject of the sections above has a privileged status. This status it owes not exclusively to the fact that it is the first and as such constitutes the frame of reference on the background of which the following chapters inevitably will be seen. The real privilege of the formation structured around the black bile in the bodies of the outstanding is that in it the drama of the great tragedies becomes *theory*. The 'theoretical man' of whom Nietzsche wrote that he possesses an 'infinite satisfaction with what *is*' (BT 15) here comes not only to occupy the Greek *scene*, but also to represent its *theoros*, its spectator. The decosmologization described in the sections above not only represents

a deconstruction, but also the gradual opening of a space for individual self-regulation, the implications of which are still relevant and problematic today. Representing what has been developed in this chapter within the context of the six dimensions of problems and responses introduced in the beginning of the thesis are summarized in TABLE 2 and explicated in the following.

Firstly, the *pathological problem* that presents itself in the conceptual formation of melancholy emerges as the gradual transformation of the hyperbolic emotional response of the tragic hero into a *circular antinomy of madness* divided between excessive states of exaltation and dejection and associated with self-regulation, thus being MANIC-MELANCHOLIC (see TAB.

<b>TABLE 2 Problematical Formations</b>	<b>MELANCHOLIA</b>	<b>ACEDIA</b>	<b>NEURASTHENIA</b>
<b>Pathological Problem</b>	MANIC-MELANCHOLIA CIRCULAR ANTINOMY	DESPAIR BINARY ANTINOMY	EXHAUSTION ERUPTION OF IMMANENT ANTINOMY
<b>Charac- terological Problem</b>	THE EXTRAORDINARY	THE REJECTED	THE SENSITIVE
<b>Delimitative Problem</b>	PERIPHERY	OUTSIDE	INSIDE
<b>Self- Regulatory Response</b>	DIETETICS	VIRTUOUS LIVING	NEUROPATHIC HOUSEHOLD
<b>Performative Response</b>	ACHIEVEMENT	WORK AS VIRTUE	WORK AS SECOND NATURE
<b>Self- Articulatory Response</b>	SELF-TRANSGRESSION  SUBLIMATION	CONTROLLING AFFECT  ABSTINENT SUBLIMATION	RESOURCE ADMINISTRATION  PSYCHOANALYTIC SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

2) First found in the Platonic designation in the *Phaidros* of a divine state of the madness – the *exallagé* – that had to be strictly differentiated from the morbid states of mania, this antinomy was associated with the inspiration of the few and extraordinary, whose disposition made them more susceptible than others to the psychosomatic *nosos psyches*, the diseases of the soul. When the *ēthos perritón* of the Aristotelian *Problems XXX, 1* was described as someone struggling with the diseases of the black bile, the problem was also represented within the context of this circular antinomy. Opening a space for self-regulation structured around the temperature of the black bile as a ‘thing’ in the body, the Aristotelian naturalization of melancholy came to point out a specific character, who would be able to take control of his opportune disposition in order to achieve what it was in his paradoxical nature to achieve. With Ficino’s later appropriation in the Renaissance of the Platonic and Aristotelian theories, this antinomy of violent mood swings became more than a disposition, it came to represent the *ideal* of the genius, who would have to expose himself actively to it in order to turn dejected impotence into glorious achievement and freedom.

This idealization in Ficino’s work of the circular antinomy as something specifically associated with self-regulation among the geniuses that were governed by the combustibility of the black bile is reflected in the second of the dimensions, the dimension of the *characterological problem*. As indicated in this chapter, the problematical formation of melancholy also describes the gradual emergence of a specific character, in which the melancholic disposition in its offset is non-pathological and non-morbid. As an EXTRAORDINARY the negative in this character is presented as a prerequisite for the positive. Already indicated by the association of achievement with great suffering in the characters of tragic heroes like Orestes and Jason, the *elevated normality* of the *non-pathological melancholic* emerged as a precarious and complex modality, which represented a virtual mode of existence that separated success from failure. This *ēthos* is reflected in the Platonic distinction between those who like Socrates and his peers possessed *erōs* and those who did not, like Apollodorus whose quest for knowledge was bound to fail because of his characteristic and irredeemable ignorance. Constituting a background for the Aristotelian *ēthos perritón*, who was

paradoxically *abnormal by nature*, the anomaly of the inspired was structured around the ability to achieve a *higher balance* through self-regulation, where most people would fail. *Problems XXX, 1* associated this achievement with the extraordinary character whose hyperbolic nature made him more susceptible than others to the pathologies of the black bile, but as illustrated above, it was only with the assumption of man as a protean being in the Renaissance that this disposition became the ideal of the culturally formative genius.

The *delimitative problem* of the extraordinary melancholic, indicating the designation of the borderline between the individual and the collective, can be seen to reflect this. As *anómalos* the self-regulating character that emerged out of the gradual decosmologization, which the chapter has presented, always appeared on THE PERIPHERY, not only of the collective in which he took part, but also of his own self, as the pathos he was subjected to pointed him out at the limits of his capabilities. The figure of the heroic, but tragic individuality, which struggled to find and possess its place in cosmos, is emblematic of this defining inequality. When the Homeric hymns left Bellerophon, on whom the Gods had turned on account of his rebellious attitude against the cosmic order, wandering in broken solitude on the barren Alean plain, it was no coincidence. Rather it reflected the fate of the *culturally formative*, appearing always as a transgression of the already constituted collective order. Culminating in the precarious Aristotelian designation of the *ēthos perriton*, whose legislative, philosophical or artistic contributions placed them always at the *limit of the collective*, the peripheral appearance of the culturally formative in the conceptual formation of classical melancholy was constituted as a state of exception which redefined the collective from which it was excepted. Illustrated as a kind of makeshift *telos* for a teleology that possessed none, the elevated existence of the outstanding melancholic, whose disposition was structured in a psychosomatic pattern of suffering around the 'thing' in the body, appeared in terms of a transgressive inequality with both the collective, the self and nature. It was on the periphery of all three that the delimitation of the melancholic took place. The inequality of the extraordinary melancholic was found both in terms of his exception from the collective and in terms of the disparity of his natural disposition, which separated him from himself and

designated in the gradual opening of this rift a space for self-regulation. It was the appropriation of this space in Ficino's Renaissance theories of sublimation, with which the chapter concluded, that the fundamental foundation for a theory of the *genius* was laid.

As a conceptual formation representing the emergence of the extraordinary character on the periphery of a gradual decosmologization, the problematic dimensions presented above was closely associated with the dimensions of response. Thus, the *self-regulatory response* was dominated by the gradual transformation of the *pathos*, which subjected the heroic individual to his cosmic fate, into the full-blown DIETETICS OF SUBLIMATION in Ficino's Renaissance theories. As illustrated in the chapter above there was no principal difference between the hyperbolic emotional patterns to which the tragic hero was subjected and his achievements, which made him what he was. The opening of a space of self-regulation for the exceptional in character gradually changed this. Already the Platonic assertion in the *Symposium* of *erōs* as an *aporectic problem*, which contained the resources for its own solution for those few who had it in their character to be possessed by it, indicated how that which had used to be a matter of divine intervention gradually became transposed into a dimension of individual manipulation. But although the *internalization* of the heroic virtuosity, represented by Socrates' theory of divine madness, did open a space for self-regulation, it was not before the Aristotelian naturalization in *Problems XXX, 1* of the black bile as a subject of manipulation that the association of melancholy with great achievement came to flourish. As illustrated, the nature of the Aristotelian self-regulation was of *prophylactic character*, indicating the necessity of the naturally gifted melancholics to manage the combustibility of the black bile towards the 'higher middle' for which they were disposed. Representing the boundless and unending necessity for self-regulation in a teleology without *telos*, the *eucrasia anomalia* of the outstanding and culturally formative melancholic gave form to a 'greater health' of geniality. It was this 'greater health', which became the fundament for the active dietetic theories of the Renaissance melancholics. If the dietetic gestures in the Aristotelian theories were mainly concerned with maintaining the health of a type who was characterized by his susceptibility to the diseases of the black bile, the active self-regulative response of the Renaissance melancholic

came to mobilize and manipulate the inverted cosmos of the 'heavens in man', emblematically symbolized by the planet Saturn, in order to achieve the greatness of geniality.

Although this axis of self-regulation illustrates the transformation of the heroic virtuosity into the dietetics of the genius, what holds these ends together is the dimension of the *self-articulatory response*. From the classic gesture of sublimation through the psychosomatic pattern of suffering, which has been illustrated in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, to the active self-transformation of the Renaissance genius in Ficino's dietetic theories, the self-articulation of the melancholic character took the form of SELF-TRANSGRESSION. As a mode of sublimation, the self-transgression of the extraordinary in character indicated the primary trope for performativity.

As a *performative response* to the problematic dimensions presented above, however, the self-transgression presented in this chapter was closely associated with and took the form of ACHIEVEMENT. The roots of this performative response representing achievement through self-transformation was found in the *pathos* of the tragic hero, whose sublimation of a psychosomatic pattern of suffering emblematically allowed him to travel between the worlds of man and gods. In a certain sense, this *logic of transgression* represented the source on which the virtuosity of the heroic individual was based. As the chapter has illustrated it was the consistency of this logic, which gradually came to transform the hero's virtuosity into the *self-techniques* of the outstanding in character, whose performative response to his precarious disposition became represented as the extraordinary achievement of cultural formation. Structured as a conceptual formation associated with psychosomatic suffering around the black bile as a 'thing' in the body, the dietetics of the Renaissance finally came to represent this performative response in terms of the *genial*.





# Chapter Three

## *Acedia* and Virtuous Living

### Prologue

1. *Acedia* among the anchorite monks
2. The virtue of work and the melancholy of the social body
3. Thomas Hobbes and the melancholic of the *Leviathan*
4. The pathologies of performativity: *Acedia*

The desert grows: woe to him who harbours deserts!

F. Nietzsche: *Dionysos-Dithyrambs*

### Prologue

The Aristotelian assumption of a paradoxical melancholic disposition, as the previous part of this thesis has illustrated, naturalized the hyperbolic emotional response of the heroic individual and organized it around the ‘thing’ in the body so that it could be managed dietetically by the extraordinary in character. While the black bile emerged from this history as the unequalled and problematic subject of dispute, the notion of the ‘thing’ in the body among the coenobitic monks who suffered from *acedia* is both more diffuse and more opaque, because it is no longer located within the naturalistic framework of the humoral theories. As this chapter will illustrate, both the assumption of the *noonday demon* (a reference to the ‘destruction that wasteth at noonday’ of Psalms 90, 6) that according to the work of the monk Evagrius Ponticus possessed the *accidiosi*, and later in this tradition of the melancholic as a *lycanthrope* in the popular theories of Robert Burton, designates the ‘thing’ in the body as a psychosomatic pattern of suffering structuring the inability to control and manage affect. Constituting the conflict between the individual and the moral scheme of the capital vices which at its very bottom was based on a pathological conception of human behaviour, the tradition analyzed in this part of the thesis thematizes the ‘thing’ in the body as the manifestation of a confusion of affective energies in the attempt of the individual to regulate the self within the context of a theological and moral conceptualization of the world.

Representing the sinful *privation* of the monastic, whose mental or physical suffering prevented him from taking any pleasure in his spiritual calling, the vice of *acedia*, unlike that of the melancholy described in the previous part, lacked any notion of ecstatic combustibility. On the contrary, as the first of the following chapters will illustrate, *acedia* can be described in terms of psychosomatic symptoms resulting from *a sinful dejection in the exercise of virtuous activities*. As a ‘thing’ in the body, the demon of *acedia* represented the *lack of care* in the monk whose deficient management of the self opened him to worldly sorrows instead of inspiring in him the virtue of godly sorrow that he should be sharing with the suffering Christ on the cross. As a *sinful freedom from the virtuous sorrow*, the demonic combination of sloth and sorrow inspired in the monk by the sin of *acedia* represented not so much an absence of suffering as a privative misappropriation of suffering resulting from the deficient management of affects. While this may seem to some extent to make *acedia* comparable to the Platonic notion of *amathia* – the melancholic ignorance of someone unable to achieve *erôs* because of disproportion – the sinfulness of the noonday demon consisted in a mark of depravity rather than in ignorant stupidity. The inability to lead the self according to the moral standards of the church found in *acedia*, as Thomas Aquinas has it, is opposed to the virtue of *spiritual joy* and consists in the aversion against God himself. Conceivable according to Thomas as a superficial perception of God, the sin of *acedia* came to be represented by the monastic feelings of ill health that led to the quenching of the soul’s spiritual voice and made the inner life of the monk inaccessible to the moral standards of the Church.

Described as an unbearable tempest of the soul, the demonic spirit of *acedia* demanded the constant watchfulness and vigilance of the susceptible monk, who had to hold his sinful disposition in check. The disorientation of the affects originating from the intermediate position between *soma* and *psyche* held by *acedia* constituted an idle condition towards which the monk had to take voluntary action in order to rectify his conduct. As the second chapter in this part of the thesis will illustrate, this rectification was structured around the recommendation of *work* as a therapeutic measure meant to cure the dejected states of idleness. It was out of these therapeutic measures that *acedia* came gradually to be identified in a more popularized

version as the sin of *sloth* or *idleness*, which constituted a danger to all christians, but also came to emphasize primarily an external behaviour that no longer involved the ‘thing’ in the body to the same extent as before.

Yet with the implication of work as a virtue, structured by the juxtaposition of sloth and *busyness* in the idealization of the state as a body, the ‘somatic’ manifestations of the inability to control and lead affect re-emerged on another level. Emphasized by Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as the *unhealthy disorder* in a society, *melancholy* came to represent the somatic pattern of illness in a societal body that was out of balance, caused by the inability of its members to observe their right place.

As the third and final chapter of this part of the thesis illustrates, in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* this analogy between the management of affects on an individual and a societal level is presented as an analogy between the melancholic individual, whose deficient management of passions literally transforms him into a beast and the famous dictum ‘*homo homini lupus*’ describing the state of nature, where man is ‘a wolf to man’. As an anarchic and threatening ‘thing’ in the body of both the individual and the state corpus, the *lycanthrope* represents the melancholy of someone who fails to lead himself within the normative boundaries of the commonwealth. Represented by Hobbes as a result of *vain-glory*, the transformation of the melancholic body into a beast designates the pathology of an *excessive desire for power* with no place in civilized society.

### **1. Acedia among the Anchorite Monks**

When Dante reaches the filthy shores of Styx in the *Divine Comedy* he finds a slimy swamp inhabited by muddled people, who are fighting each other violently; not just with their fists, but with their entire bodies, tearing at each other with their teeth. Underneath these people, who have been defeated by their anger, he can make out everywhere bubbles on the surface. These bubbles are caused by the sighs of the *accidiosi*, the slothful, who lie submerged beneath the water. These sinners, his companion Vergil informs him, have to gurgle their hymns wedged in the slime, because they cannot speak in full words:

We had been sullen

in the sweet air that's gladdened by the sun;

we bore the mist of sluggishness in us:

now we are bitter in the blackened mud (*Div. Com.* VII.121-126).<sup>vii</sup>

Trapped bitterly in the deepest regions of hell, their song barely audible, these neighbours of the wrathful, who held their anger in, were darkened by the *accidioso fummo*, the mist that clouds both mind and soul in spite of the kindness of a sun that would warm them.

That Dante would have them gurggle *hymns* is no doubt a reference to the original occupation of these poor souls: the sinful 'weariness or distress of the heart' as John Cassian calls it (Jackson 1986: 65), which the christian church by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century had come to know by the term *acedia*, was first found in the ascetic Egyptian desert monks and was related to their struggles with isolation and temptations of the flesh as anchorites. This constellation of unusual and undesirable feelings and behavior, which was often referred to as *the noonday demon* was first described in detail by Evagrius Ponticus (A.D. 345-399), himself a monk, who had withdrawn to a community that was part of a cluster of hermit colonies gathered at Nitria and Scete and the "Desert of the Cells" not far southeast of Alexandria (Wenzel 1967: 4). Like in other colonies of the same kind, the monks here lived separately and gathered only to common worship. As Siegfried Wenzel explains in his excellent work on *acedia* (Wenzel 1967), these people were mostly common Egyptian peasants without any education, who were often not prepared for the rigorous and intense tests of the ascetic's life. Among the eight different 'vices' that could befall them *acedia* is named by Evagrius as the sixth and is said to be the most oppressive of all the demons (Evagrius 2003: 93). Possessing the monk between the fourth and the eighth hour (at noon, between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.), this demon, in Evagrius' powerful words, 'makes it appear that the sun moves slowly or not at all, and that the day seems to be fifty hours long.' The monk becomes restless, looking constantly towards the window, or he jumps out of the cell 'to watch the sun to see how far it is from the ninth hour [3 p.m.], to look this way and that'. The demon also overwhelms him with a sense of dislike for the whole place, and compels him to think that all love has disappeared from the community of the brothers, so that he can find no one who can offer

him consolation. He also makes the monk long for other places, where he is convinced that he can easily find ‘the wherewithal to meet his needs and pursue a trade that is easier and more productive’, adding that pleasing the Lord is not a question of place. Along with this dislike of the community the demon makes the monk remember and think of the close relations of his former life, comparing his long lifetime with the ‘burdens of asceticism’. In short, the demon in the body of the monk ‘deploys every device in order to have the monk leave his cell and flee the stadium’.

*Acedia* is not followed by any other demon, Evagrius explains; but the relaxation and the time of ‘ineffable joy’ that comes instead is exactly the illusion, which makes it the most oppressive. Opening the soul to other temptations and vices that the monk has struggled to be rid of (Evagrius 2003: 83), it makes him be quick to undertake a service, for example, but in the end only to his own *private* good: he ‘proposes visiting the sick, but is fulfilling his own purpose’ (Evagrius 2003: 84).

On the background of the exploration of melancholy and the black bile as a ‘thing’ in the body of the extraordinary in character, the first important question that Evagrius’ description of the spiritual flaw of *acedia* brings to mind is of course if the two phenomena are the same. Is *acedia* simply melancholy presented within the moral conceptual framework of the ecclesiastical writers and their lay followers and no longer within the physiological scheme of the humoral dispositions developed by the Hippocratic writers? As Robert Daly has shown, *acedia* at least shares symptoms with melancholy by including difficult emotions and feelings that are known to this day in psychopathology: the loss of sources of gratification and emotional attachments, loss of motivation, dejection, hopelessness and sadness, low self-esteem, diminished span of concentration, nostalgia, irritability, isolation, apathy and suicidal tendencies, just to name some (Daly 2007: 32).

Yet a look at the psychosomatic pattern of suffering structured around the demon of *acedia* will attest to one important difference: as Noel Brann has also pointed out (Brann 1979: 198), the notion of *acedia* lacks completely the physiological quality of *ecstatic combustibility*, which was crucial to the understanding of melancholy as a subject of sublimation associated with the hyperbolic emotional response of the exceptional in character. As a ‘thing’ in the body, *acedia* constituted only the pathological manifesta-

tions of an unwanted disposition that prevented the afflicted monk from completing his chores. Wenzel provides an example from the 11<sup>th</sup> century of a monk who associated *acedia* primarily with the drowsiness that befell him and his fellow monks in the early morning: ‘The coming of dawn, at which time *acedia* falls upon us more heavily, must find us upright and busy with reciting the Office.’ (Wenzel 1967: 30) The monk praises the example of the saint Rodolphus, who would overcome this *acedia* by tying ropes to the ceiling of his cell, hang himself from them by the arms and sing the psalms extended in this position.

Apart from the sleepiness, *acedia* would also manifest itself as a general feeling of illness, along with more specific symptoms, which are similar to some of those we described in melancholy, but with the particular effect of upsetting the monks exercise of his spiritual duties. The weakness in the knees, pains in the limbs and fever experienced by the monastic was in no way associated with his achievements other than in the negative. As Andrew Crislip argues, the psychosomatic pattern of suffering produced by the demon of *acedia* in the monastic body has the specific result that [the monk] is unable to pray the synaxis. An illustration of this is provided by an anecdote attributed to Amma Theodora (probably a 4<sup>th</sup> century monastic of Lower Egypt), who asserts that dejection and the demon’s work: ‘weighs down the body through illnesses, ... debility, ... and slackening of the knees and all the body’s members. It dissipates the strength of the soul and body, so that [one might say]: ‘I am ill and not strong enough to perform the synaxis.’” (Crislip 2005: 147)

The manifestation of a psychosomatic pattern of suffering associated with the monk’s inability to meet the moral demands of his spiritual life, is reflected also in the problem of *aphonia* that is often attributed directly to the demonical possession of the monastic body. Another example speaks of a general heaviness of the limbs and the monk continues by explaining how ‘once, this demon of *acedia* ... took hold of my tongue and prevented me from performing the office because he had placed a heavy weight on my head, and a burdensome disease ... on all my limbs.’ (Crislip 2005: 147) Reflecting the unpleasant fate of the *accidiosi* in Dante’s *Inferno*, who suffered eternally the sin of the terrible paradox they lived: choosing the darkness of the soul in the broad daylight of God’s grace, the psychosomatic manifesta-

tion of muteness was often associated with demonical possession. As Starobinski indicates (Starobinsky 1960: 26), some writers described *acedia* as a quenching of the soul's voice, which made the inner life of the monk gradually more inaccessible and incommunicable.

While sharing a family resemblance to the extent that many of their symptoms were the same, another important difference between the ancient conception of melancholy as a 'thing' in the body of the extraordinary and the demonical possession associated with *acedia* is found in this sinful disposition. To the ideal of a virtuous, Christian life, whose goal it was 'to bring about a relationship between human beings and God, who are not the same' (Campbell 2001: 11), *acedia* constituted a *sinful privation*, even if it was an involuntary one, drying out any source of communication, not only with others, but also with God himself. As the psychosomatic pattern of a *dejection in the exercise of virtue* structured around the demon in the monastic body, *acedia* represented the pathological conception of human behaviour found at the roots of the moral scheme of the capital vices.

Interestingly, this definition of *acedia* allows also for a differentiated perspective on the role of the hyperbole, which played an essential part in melancholy in Antiquity. While the notion of the hyperbolic emotional response in the understanding of the black bile as a 'thing' in the body was gradually involved in the decosmologization that culminated in the dietetic programs of the Renaissance genius, the excess of affect in the Medieval conception of *acedia* was only representable as *the negative source of pathology*. Crislip provides an example that illustrates this, describing how the monastic's *excessive practices of asceticism* were seen as the work of the demon of *acedia* that possessed his body. In the form of an anecdote describing the spiritual guidance of a master to a young monastic, who burns to become a solitary before he is ready, the *acedia* in the body of the student is associated with his inability to moderate his practice. The master advises his disciple to allow good time for rest and comfort in his asceticism, but as soon as he is on his own he begins to question the advice he has been given and on the third day falls prey to *acedia*:

... instead of eating, drinking, and sleeping when faced with demonic affliction, "he sang an abundance of psalms" and fasted until dark because of the demon's subversive influence. Instead of finding rest at night, he was haunted by fright-

ening – perhaps erotic – images: an Ethiopian “gnashing his teeth” at him in bed. (Crislip 2005: 154)

Representing the result of excessive performance during the exercise of spiritual duties, the psychosomatic pattern of suffering found in *acedia*, as this example illustrates, was associated with the inability to regulate the self properly according to some external moral standard. Designating the deficient management of affects, the phenomenon of *acedia* within the framework of the ecclesiastical vices represented *the sinful and privative deepening* of a pattern of suffering in the monastic who failed to regulate himself.

The assumption of *acedia* as a privative and sinful kind of suffering, prompted by the individual inability to manage affect, is supported by two important indications. First, the association of the phenomenon with the notion of *care* implicated by the etymology of the word. Deriving from the Greek *akedia*, it is a compound. The first part is the prefix *a-* which means “not” in the same way as the prefix “un-” does in English. The second part is the abstract noun *kedía*, which itself comes from the more concrete noun *kedos* – translatable into ‘care’. Thus *acedia* primarily points to a negative: the lack of care. As David Holden has pointed out (Holden 2009: 7) the kind of ‘care’ implicated here is of a special kind; *kedos* means ‘care for others,’ because it is the kind of care that you show when someone dies. It designated the practice related to the death of a loved one, to washing the body, attending the funeral, and seeing the remains of the person respectfully buried. *Kedia*, then, meant the exercise of *kedos*, caring for others respectfully and expecting nothing in return. The ‘carelessness’ of *acedia*, in its association with a psychosomatic pattern of suffering structured around the demon in the body of the monastic, in this sense implicated not so much a complete lack of care, as it designated the lack of care for others associated with a privation of suffering.

This becomes even more lucid in the association of the phenomenon with the medieval distinction between two kinds of *tristitia*, two kinds of sorrow, of which one was virtuous and the other sinful. As Mark Altschule has illustrated, (Altschule 1967: 779) the medieval belief that a dejection of spirits may be either rational or irrational, finds its origin in a few words in the Corinthians (7, 10). Here St. Paul distinguishes between two kinds of sorrow, one coming ‘from God’ and the other ‘of the world’. The ‘godly sor-



row' that Christ felt when he was dying on the cross is much appreciated because it causes repentance. The 'worldly sorrow' on the other hand – the despair and dejection over worldly matters – causes only death. According to an early exegetic, Altschule indicates, what Judas Iscariot, who gave up Christ to the Romans, succumbed to, was the latter form of *tristitia*. To the notion of *acedia*, which for a long time led an interchangeable career with *tristitia* on the list of capital vices (e.g. Wenzel 1967, Daly 2007), this distinction is interesting primarily because Judas' suffering is defined, not in terms of an unforgivable sin (as God has it in his power to forgive everything), but in terms of *the excess of his remorse*. It was Judas' deficient management of affect that allowed the Devil to lead him away from the beneficent sorrow and cause his paltry death instead. Like the *tristitia* that opened Judas up to the influence of the Devil, *acedia* designated an inability to lead affect that caused the sinful deepening of a pattern of suffering in the monastic.

But still *acedia* was not reducible to this second kind of *tristitia*. As a third thematic separating it from melancholy in the Hippocratic framework, *acedia*, as the following illustrates, was associated with a paradoxical *freedom from care* seen from the perspective of the kind of repentance that virtuous sorrow could lead to. Culminating in the Thomistic perception of it as the result of a 'superficial perception of God', *acedia* as a 'thing' in the body of the monastic represented the privation caused by a psychosomatic pattern of suffering, which led to the sin of being careless about that which one should really care for. Representing the precarious position of *acedia* within a moral framework as a pathological manifestation in the individual body on the threshold between *sin* and *vice*, this theme illustrates how the diseases of demonically possessed erupted as a crisis with implications also for the social order.

It was John Cassian (ca. 360 – 435 A.D.), who was responsible for the tabulation of the effects of the capital vices, and for the establishment of a list of the virtues replacing them in the human heart. Travelling in Egypt and visiting the hermit colonies, Cassian came to know Evagrius and his teachings. Cassian transformed the Greek *akedia* of Palestine and Egypt into the Latin '*de spiritue acediae*', where it remained in Western Europe for over a thousand years as *acedia* or *sloth* (Daly 2007: 34). He added to

Evagrius' description of the noonday demon the symptoms of *weariness* and *anxiousness* and specifies further that the danger it poses is especially directed against the desert monks. Like Evagrius he was concerned with the harmfulness of the affects to the ascetic practices, to which they constituted practical barriers:

Our sixth struggle is with what the Greeks call *acedia*, which we can refer to as wearied or anxious heart. It is akin to sadness and is the peculiar lot of solitaires and a particularly dangerous and frequent foe of those dwelling in the desert. It disturbs the monk especially around the sixth hour (12 a.m.), rushing in upon him like a kind of fever at just this time and inflicting upon the enfeebled soul the most burning heat of its attacks at regular and set intervals. Some of the elders declare that this is the "midday demon" that is mentioned in the nineteenth psalm. (Cassian 2000: 219)

Although Cassian's description of *acedia* is not notably different from that of Evagrius, it is interesting here, because of Cassian's endeavors to establish a fixed moral system of the vices in relation to the virtues. As Wenzel points out, in the work of Cassian, the monk's *acedia* is responsible for either sleep or flight from the cell, while the virtue related to it is *fortitude* – 'strength' or 'courage' (Wenzel 1967: 20). Within this moral framework of vice and virtue *acedia* emerges on the precarious threshold between sin and vice. This is illustrated by Robert Daly in his discussion of the difference in Christian Medieval Europe between the two.

If sin proceeded from freedom because the act it constituted was not compelled but was effected by the capacities of a person or author who was responsible for his action and accountable to God for them, then these acts constituted a refusal of God's love or a resistance to God's grace. The question, of course, is if vice proceeded from freedom in this way. As Daly points out, making a distinction between sin and vice implies that a 'vice is conceived of as a more or less enduring trait of an individual's character', which is then 'deemed variously a habitual fault, flaw or defect ("*vitium*") relative of some norm of conduct, or as a tendency or disposition to seek degrading pleasures and/or to engage in degrading practices.' (Daly 2007: 41) In contrast to the sin that is more exclusively related to one action, the vice represents a disposition or shameful habit, a *mark of depravity*, which would "stand in for" the desired disposition. Reflecting the Aristotelian ethics, the

vice originates in a wrong estimate over time of “the good” and with this temporal aspect is in opposition to virtuous activity. *Acedia*, as Daly explains, could very well be a sin if the actions it implicated proceeded from freedom; but vices were not simply viewed as effects of freedom and the two terms were often used without distinction, making it hard to give a clear univocal answer to whether *acedia* was one or the other. Rather, in the context presented in the work of Cassian, *acedia* erupts on the precarious threshold *between* the two. Representing a *flight from virtue*, it is the demonically induced diseases of the sufferer who leads him astray. Yet within the moral framework of *vice* and *virtue* the victims of the demonic illnesses are held responsible for their condition and its rectification (Crislip 2005: 149). As a problematization of the monastic’s ability to lead the self within the moral scheme of the capital vices and virtues, *acedia* was not simply the name of a habitual sin. More precisely it designated a set of pathological traits within the afflicted that had complex or variable relation to an activity (or a lack thereof), which was *acknowledged* as a sin.

When Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* later defines *acedia* as *tristitia de spirituali bono* (II, 2, *quae*. 35), as the kind of sorrow or aversion that man feels against the spiritual good, it is the paradox of this precarious situation that is reflected. As Wenzel writes, *acedia* in the work of Aquinas is ‘conceived as, essentially, the aversion against the spiritual good when it appears to man as evil’ (Wenzel 1967: 48). The character of the sin of the *accidiosi* is not like the sins associated with the other vices; whereas the glutton, for example, is excessive in his love of food and drink, something that is *created* by God, *acedia* constitutes the much more problematic aversion against God *himself*.

As Theunissen has pointed out (Theunissen 1996: 27), Thomas’ definition in the *quaestio 35* on *acedia* of the *Summa Theologica* has to be read in the light of his definition of joy in the *quaestio 28* on joy. *Acedia* is a special vice, and its effects even a special sin, because it is opposed to *spiritual joy* – the love of Creation. In this sense it reflects both Kierkegaard’s later notion of *despair* and the broader based feeling of a general disintegration of values in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in the Nietzschean notion of *nihilism*. Its character of *psychosomatic privation of sorrow* is not limited to the individual it affects; instead it spreads across and infects *everything*

good in the world. It is evil, not just because it is a sin in action, but because it is more fundamentally a sin of the heart infecting all other activities.

As Theunissen has shown (Theunissen 1996: 31) the paradox of *acedia*, according to Thomas emerges because of a superficial perception of God that is characterized by the inability to penetrate to the source of joy. It is as such that *acedia* represents a *sinful freedom from care*: as the eruption of a privative deepening of suffering structured around the noonday demon as a 'thing' in the body, *acedia* simultaneously represents a crisis in the moral framework that surrounds it. The lack of care in *acedia* is not just a carelessness associated with individual virtue; it is a carelessness that is also thought to *prevent* the virtue of the social body, because of the individual's deficient management of affect. This precarious analogue between the pathological patterns of suffering in the individual body and the social pathologies of melancholy which emerges out of the medieval notion of *acedia* as a sinful freedom from care will be the interest of the following chapter.

## **2. The Virtue of Work and the Melancholy of the Social Body**

In his work on *acedia*, Siegfried Wenzel quotes from a 12<sup>th</sup> century sermon by Abbot Isaac of L'Étoile on the episode from Matt. 8, 23-27 of Christ's sleeping in the boat of the Apostles, when a great storm rises. While this passage is often used to emphasize the comfort of those who have faith, Isaac's interpretation is somewhat different. Using the metaphor of the violent storm to point out the importance of constant and vigilant watchfulness, he interprets the episode as an image of those religious who have slackened in their faith in false security, and have thus let Christ 'fall asleep' in their hearts and souls. The storm, which Isaac thinks of as Christ's doing, shakes those who have become mentally inattentive out of their '*acedia*, which leads to the flow of evil thoughts, like an inner and unbearable tempest'. Concluding with a forceful exhortation to always be watchful and alert, Isaac declares:

Woe to you if Christ sleeps in you! The wind wakes, the sea wakes, the storm and waves of evil thoughts wake, and thousand tides of temptation come upon you, if only He is asleep in you ... Therefore let us be vigilant, brethren, let us be vigilant above all against the plague of *acedia*! (Isaac de Stella, *Sermo XIV* quoted in Wenzel 1967: 33).

The paradoxical position of *acedia* on the threshold between a sin, constituted by an act of freedom, and a vice related to the natural or habitual condition of the monastic, as discussed in the previous chapter, erupted as a problematization of the monastic's ability to control his affects. With the gradual evolvment of the moral scheme of the capital vices and virtues, the focus came to be on the question of the personal responsibility for rectification. As reflected in Isaac's sermon quoted above, although the demon itself might attack where one would least expect it, the afflicted monk had a significant degree of responsibility, both to be always alert about the origins of the spiritual disease, whether it was a result of demonic possession or not, and, as a penitent, to take voluntary action against it. Daly has shown (Daly 2007: 41 ff.) that the acknowledging of the vice as a sinful disposition, with the help of the church and God's grace could rectify the penitent's conduct and character. He would have to seek the ministrations of the church, receiving both the exhortations and the compassion of others, examine his conscience and confess his sin in order for it to be forgiven by a priest of the church (e.g. Gudmand-Høyer 2006).

The attitude found in Abbot Isaac's sermon also points to another issue. While the previous section showed that *acedia* shared with the conception of melancholy within the Hippocratic framework of the humoral theories a pattern of psychosomatic suffering, primarily as a kind of sinful *tristitia*, structured around the demon in the body, it also had in it an element definable as laziness or indolence. The abbot's exhortations to stay alert and the definition of *acedia* as a demon that might come at the time when the spiritual practices proved most difficult, show that the affliction represented more than a physiological problem; rather, the intermediate position between *soma* and *psyche*, between body and spirit, held by *acedia*, corresponded to a crisis in the moral framework of which it was a part. The sin of *acedia* meant more than only a withdrawal from spiritual exercise because of pains in the body. The demonically induced pain in the sufferer, though very real, was a manifestation not of aversion with work or toil in itself, but of a confusion or even disgust with that which should be the object of man's greatest love and hence should guarantee the spiritual value and joy of his activities within the moral scheme of vice and virtue. Or in Wenzel's words: 'At the root of *acedia* lies, not physical exhaustion or a weakening of man's

will or intellectual darkness, but a disorientation of his affect or, as we would say today, his emotional life.’ (Wenzel 1967: 64) As Wenzel readily adds this *affectus* should not be taken as a “feeling” in the modern sense of the word. To the medieval Christian affect was a question of will and love resulting in “good works”.

It is the understanding of *acedia*, not as laziness in itself, but as a despairing confusion that omitted the afflicted, who failed to lead his affects, from the “good works”, which explains its close historical relation to labour. Emerging on the threshold between the monastic, who had come to be possessed by *acedia* and the moral crisis implicated by this in the societal framework surrounding him, *the virtue of work* represented the correspondence between the health of the individual and the health of the social body. This correspondence is reflected in Robert Burton’s famous assumption about business as the best cure for melancholy and in such later proverbs as ‘idleness is the root of all evil.’ From the earliest known sources of *acedia*, manual work, in the right measures, was recommended therapeutically as an effective treatment of the ‘thing’ in the body. Crislip quotes Evagrius for the following advice: ‘Give thought to working with your hands, if possible both day and night ... In this way you can also overcome the demon of *acedia*.’ (Crislip 2005: 156) Also Cassian’s chief weapon against *acedia* is manual work, which he suggests, should be applied to the ‘ulcers, which spring from the root of idleness’, so that Christ may heal them ‘like some well-skilled physician’ (Cassian 2000: 10ff.). The more sophisticated ‘interiorization’ (Jackson 1986: 73) of *acedia* in the Scholastic tradition is not less associated with work, even if it sometimes recommends the opposite. Those of the *accidiosi*, some writers suggest, who suffer from a ‘natural cause’ of the vice (which could be for example melancholy), or have been practicing excessive feats of asceticism to save themselves, may be better helped by not practicing endurance or manual work, but by taking a walk or even dieting (Wenzel 1967: 59).

Even if the primary target was the spiritual nature of the individual monastic, the inability in *acedia* to maintain a regular and temporally bound sense of discipline and work in a social setting played a major role in these therapeutic measures. It was within the context of the popular view of the vice as *idleness* that the sins associated with *acedia* became failures that

was no longer restricted to those who lived an ascetic life in the desert, but was potentially dangerous for all Christians as the sin of *sloth*. This shift in emphasis to a focus on external behaviour, Jackson suggests, was related to the practical concerns of clergy and flocks with sinfulness in general and its assessment in confession and penance (Jackson 1986: 73). As Jackson has illustrated elsewhere, the association of sloth with a reprehensible idleness, which was the primary target of critique from both lay and religious leaders alike, gradually shifted the attention away from the psychosomatic pattern of suffering in the bodies of the afflicted. The dejection and despair associated with the 'thing' in the body of the monastic possessed by the demon of *acedia*, in the own life that sloth acquired in post-medieval religious and secular writings, was no longer a primary target of criticism (Jackson 1981).

The transformation of *acedia* as a vice that was first and foremost concerned with the precarious pathological manifestations that resulted in a neglect of spiritual matters, to the popularized version of sloth, which was more concerned with one's worldly status and profession, indicates that toward the end of the Middle Ages, the sin of *acedia* came to implicate a broader notion of negligence of duties in a *social body*. The implication of the virtue of work must be seen in this light. As an antagonist of sloth, the virtue of *busyness* took the place of the virtues of *fortitude* or *spiritual joy*, and as such constituted a change in the meaning of *acedia* away from its focus on the 'thing' in the body to a reflection of a general change in society towards a greater significance of worldly performance. While sloth was certainly also related to the organization and execution of spiritual matters, the virtue of work, which also found support in the Bible (for example in Job 5:7 'man is born to work, and the bird, to fly'), became more a prominent theme, indicating the point of convergence, the threshold, between the individual and the social body.

Wenzel provides two cases, which exemplify this shift towards the assumption of a precarious relation between the individual and the societal body in a brilliant manner. The conception of sloth in the treatise "On the seven Deadly Sins", attributed to Nicholas Hereford (ca. 1385) defines the sin in the conventional manner of the tradition of *acedia* by referring to it as 'slouthe in Gods servise'. But immediately after this it turns around and speaks instead of 'ydelness in servise of God' (Wenzel 1967: 91), represent-

ing the moral failure of the slothful to observe his place in the societal body. The difference here between the reference to the original conception of *acedia* the sin and idleness in matters of worldly work servicing God does not prevent the author from naming and discussing idleness in three estates: that of priests, “gentil men” and labourers. Sloth here, as Wenzel maintains, simply means the neglect in the obligations of one’s status or profession.

The same three estates are named in the second example, taken from an extract of a sermon by Thomas Brinton, bishop of Rochester (1373-1389), but here they are all subsumed under the different genera of the work served to them:

Since man is by nature born to work, the army of Christians, which chiefly consists of three degrees, namely the prelates, religious, and workers, must hope of the kingdom of God be constantly occupied: either in the works of active life (which are works of mercy, such as feeding the poor, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and similar things), or in the works of contemplative life (which are praying, keeping vigil, preaching, hearing divine matters, etc.), or in the works of human servitude (such as digging, plowing, sowing, reaping, and working with one’s own hands). In consequence, those miserable idlers who are not usefully occupied in any of these three degrees and hence are unfruitful, deprive themselves by divine justice of the kingdom of God. (Brinton *Sermo* 20, quoted in Wenzel 1967: 91)

Disappeared here, and completely replaced by a notion of worldly matters related to the virtue of work, is the psychosomatic pattern of suffering represented by the demon of *acedia* possessing the hermit monks of the Egyptian desert. From representing first and foremost a therapeutic measure designed to assist the monk’s management of affects, which led him to stray from the path of virtue, work in Brinton’s sermon has acquired a central position in the moral structure of a human society, organized by status and generic duties. Idleness, on the other hand, represents nothing like an emotional pattern of suffering, but indicates a crisis in the divine organization of God’s kingdom. The sin of *acedia*, once representing activities associated with the inability to regulate affect, because of a psychosomatic pattern of suffering structured around the ‘thing’ in the body, here has become a largely secular concept, with little or no relation to *soma*, reflecting instead



the incipient aspirations of a society based on the both symbolic and material value of labour.

Interestingly, this transformation of the sin of *acedia* from being a spiritual affliction among the desert monks to indicating a more worldly negligence of one's obligations to society, converges with the conceptualization of melancholy as a *pathology of the social* represented in the context of the correspondence between the individual and the social discussed above. The assumption of society, reflected in the thoughts of Hereford and Brinton quoted above, as an organization that would come apart without the absolute compliance of its individual parts, was already expressed in the strong Platonic tradition of viewing the state as a body whose functionality depended on the cooperation of its members. The organic metaphor of the state became popular already in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in the work of the Bishop of Chartres, John of Salisbury. In Salisbury's *Policraticus* (1159) the state is idealized as a body, whose health represents the good of all its members (Salisbury 1990). The offices of the state and their roles in society are here described analogously to parts of the body, with those who exert governmental authority first, those who perform its functions second and thirdly those who are governed, but do not govern others. While the primary tier represents the head that is also the prince, who must function accordingly, with governors and judges as his eyes and mouth, the senate as his heart and the church as his soul, the second likens the hands, internal organs and flanks. Including for example soldiers and tax collectors as hands and the bureaucracy of the state as the organs, the primary and secondary functions are all carried by the peasantry and the guilds of craftsmen, who constitute the feet of this governing *golem*.

The dysfunctional government, in this analogy, accordingly is a result of an illness or a conflict between the differing parts, not only working one way from the superior functions to the lower, but both ways so that 'an injury to the head', according to Salisbury, 'is brought home to all its members, and that a wound unjustly inflicted on any member tends to the injury of the head' (*Pol.* IV, 24). Emphasizing the mutual dependence of the single members and their duty to fulfil exactly their purpose, the proper relation between the parts would constitute societal health, while the appearance of conflicting goals among them would make the body sick. When Thomas

Hobbes in 1651, at about the same time as Robert Burton's sixth and final edition of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* was released posthumously, published his *Leviathan*, the disease of a societal body out of balance with itself had been given the name *melancholy*.

As the following will illustrate, in Hobbes' work melancholy came to be represented in a dual manner that borrowed from both the ancient tradition of melancholy and the medieval tradition of *acedia* to represent the results of a deficient management of the self. Constituting both a representation of how the body of the commonwealth could deteriorate once again into the natural state if its parts did not manage to lead themselves according to their proper place, and the somatic manifestation of this deterioration as a transformation of the civilized man into an animal, melancholy in Hobbes' work emerges as a moral conception of the excess or defect of the 'Desire for Power' in the *Leviathan*.

### **3. Thomas Hobbes and the Melancholic of the *Leviathan***

The assumption in Hobbes' work of melancholy as a pathology, which threatens not only the sanity of the individual but also the health of the commonwealth, although this relation has not been extensively developed in the literature, is influenced by Robert Burton (Rossello 2008, Malcolm 2002). In his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which was very popular at the time when Hobbes wrote and published the *Leviathan*, Burton develops a theory of melancholy that emphasizes the individual ability to control *human passion*, thus reflecting the moral association of *acedia* with the inability to regulate the self according to the standards of the ecclesiastical moral framework. In short, as Wolf Lepenies has illustrated in his work *Melancholy and Society* (1992), melancholy to Burton is equal to *disorder*. It is found both on an individual level, where it is represented as an imbalance in the passions, and on a social level, where it is designated as a *social pathology* in the humoral constitution of the state body (Lepenies 1992: 22). Reflecting the organic metaphor of the state in the work of Salisbury mentioned in the previous chapter, in one example of this, Burton makes a reference to the work of a colleague and describes how the state in question 'was like a sick body which had lately taken physic, whose humours are not yet well settled, and weakened so much by purging, that nothing was left

but melancholy' (Burton 1986: 45). The implication of a correspondence between the diseases of the individual body and the state, which was represented in the tradition of *acedia* and sloth, culminates in the work of Burton. Like the designation of melancholy in the individual body as a result of the failure of self-mastery over the passions, the corresponding melancholic emissions in the *soma* of the state here is represented as a decadency that can lead to collapse. The pathology thus had to be purged in order for the societal body to survive:

Kingdoms, provinces, and politic bodies are likewise sensible and subject to this disease ... whereas you shall see in many discontents, common grievances, complaints, poverty, barbarism, beggary, plagues, wars, rebellions, seditions, mutinies, contentions, idleness, riot, epicurism, the land lie untilled, waste, full of bogs, fens, deserts, &c., cities decayed and poor towns, villages depopulated, the people squalid, ugly, uncivil; that kingdom, that country, must needs be discontent, melancholy, hath a sick body and had to be reformed. (Burton 1986: 43f.)

The understanding in Hobbes' *Leviathan* of the melancholic subject as someone incapable of regulating himself within the framework of the commonwealth can be understood within the context of this analogues correspondence between the individual and the social body. In chapter VIII of the work, named 'Of the Vertues commonly called intellectual; and their contrary defects', Hobbes defines the melancholic as a mad individual, whose dejection has subjected him to fears with no cause. His madness appears in different manners; in superstitious behaviour, in the groundless fear over something particular; or in 'the haunting of solitudes and graves' (Hobbes 2006: 41).

It is specifically the allusion to the haunting of graves as something typical of the melancholic, which is interesting to the following. This allusion is taken from Robert Burton's understanding of *lycanthropy* – the wolf-madness which was a subject of great interest to the period – as a specific kind of melancholy including 'howling about graves and fields at night' (Burton 1986: 113). In the context of the *Leviathan* Hobbes' description of the melancholic suggests a precarious and interesting correspondence between the lycanthrope and the crisis of the commonwealth associated with the return to a natural condition, where, in the words of Hobbes' famous dictum, man is a wolf to man: *homo homini lupus*. On the one hand the

melancholic individual in Hobbes' universe, as the following will illustrate, is someone in whom madness has interrupted the use of reason. On the other hand, melancholy also signals the irruption of the beast in man, which signifies a crisis in the social body of the *Leviathan*. In the Hobbesian melancholic, the psychosomatic pattern of suffering associated with the madness of someone unable to control their affects, emerges simultaneously in the analogue of the beast as a 'thing' in the body of man representing the crisis of a social pathology.

This argument can be illustrated in the context of study of melancholy in Thomas Hobbes performed by the scholar Mauro Simonazzi. As Simonazzi has shown, reflecting the precarious problem of the human-animal divide in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Otten 1986, du Coudray 2002, Fudge 2003), the difference between pathology and normality in Hobbes' *Leviathan* is a quantitative, rather than a qualitative one (Simonazzi 2006: 6). Melancholy, in other words, is conceptualized as a *moral* defect.

The distinction that Hobbes makes between men in the chapter VIII of the *Leviathan* on grounds of the development of their wits can be seen in this context. While the natural wit, consisting in the 'Celerity of Imagining' – the swiftness of thought and its steady direction – has as its contrary the dullness of mind, the acquired wit, which proceeds from the proper management of reason and passions, has madness. As Simonazzi illustrates, the difference between wits is closely related to the greater or lesser intensity of 'desire of power' that also sets men apart (Simonazzi 2006: 51). While a proper development of the intellectual gifts originates from a well-tempered desire of power, a weak desire for the same results in *giddiness* and *dullness*. It is in the space between these two extremes that the individual differences among men are modulated; but as soon as this modulation goes beyond their boundaries, the *excessive desire for power* becomes pathological:

And therefore, a man who has no great passion for any of these things; but is as men term it indifferent; though he may be so far a good man, as to be free from giving offence; yet he cannot possibly have either a great fancy, or much judgement. For the thoughts are to the desires as scouts, and spies, to range abroad, and find the way to the things desired: all steadiness of the mind's motion, and all quickness of the same, proceeding from thence. For as to have no desire, is to

be dead: so to have weak passions, is dullness; and to have passions indifferently for every thing, GIDDINESS, and *distraction*; and to have stronger and more vehement passions for any thing, than is ordinarily seen in others, is that which men call MADNESS (Hobbes 2006: 41, original capitalization and emphasis).

Reflecting Antiquity's understanding of the hyperbolic emotional response in the two manifestations of madness, mania and melancholia, Hobbes' variants of fury and melancholy result either in the *excessive confidence in oneself* or in the *inability to satisfy ones desires*. The title given by Hobbes to these excessive expressions of passion 'whose violence, or continuance, maketh madness', is either 'great *vain-glory*; which is commonly called *pride*, and *self-conceit*; or great *dejection* of mind.' (ibid.) As problematizations of the image of thoughts as scouts or spies seeking out solutions to the problem of life, these two pathological effects of the desire for power are results of the *deficient management of the self*. While the desire for power in the individual who understands how to regulate himself can cause well-tempered joy, the vain-glory and the great dejection of the mind, which Hobbes ascribes to the melancholic in character, will cause the madness of excess. The precariousness of managing an existence between the two extremes without succumbing to excess is underscored by Hobbes' use of the image of Prometheus, as already indicated in chapter two a figure central to the tradition of melancholy:

For being assured that there be causes of all things that have arrived hitherto, or shall arrive hereafter; it is impossible for a man, who continually endeavoureth to secure himself against the evil he feares, and procure the good he desireth, not to be in a perpetuall solicitude of the time to come; So that every man, especially those that are over provident, are in an estate like that of *Prometheus*. For as *Prometheus* (which interpreted, is, *The prudent man*) was bound to the hill *Caucasus*, a place of large prospect, where, an Eagle feeding on his liver, devoured in the day, as much as he repayed in the night: So that man, which looks too far before him, in the care of future time, hath his heart all the day long, gnawed on by the feare of death, poverty, or other calamity; and has no repose, nor pause of his anxiety, but in sleep. (Hobbes 2006: 60, original emphasis)

Illustrating the difficult task of managing a human existence that is always already projected into the dangers of an unknown future, the image of Prometheus represents the temptations of man that can lead to excess of pas-

sion from which melancholic madness follows. As Simonazzi argues, vain glory and dejection of mind, which are the two effects of a pathological projection of the desire for power into the future, are described by Hobbes in psychological terms as the *hyperbolic* effects of the '*sudden glory*' of the passions which causes 'those *grimaces* called LAUGHTER' or of the '*sudden dejection*' of the passion 'that causeth WEEPING'. Reflecting the importance of this theme in the tradition of melancholy presented so far, melancholy in Hobbes in this sense can be described as a disorder closely related to the complex dynamics of self-regulation that govern the functioning of the passions (Simonazzi 2006: 53). But whereas the hyperbolic emotional response of the melancholic in antiquity was the hallmark of an ecstatic combustible disposition structured around the black bile, the birth of society required a sacrifice. As Simonazzi argues, in the state of nature there was room for two anthropological types: on the one hand, *the moderate man*, who pursued the middle class values of caution and safety at the expense of passion and glory; and on the other, the *vanaglorious man* for whom there does not seem to be room in the civilized society (Simonazzi 2006: 54).

It is in this sense that the figure of the melancholic in the work of Hobbes can be said to bring with it a certain awareness of that which was lost in the commonwealth, and which also – when it erupts again in the deficient control of the passions – constitutes a crisis in the social body of the *Leviathan* comparable to the one proposed by Burton. Reflecting the psychosomatic pattern of suffering found in the *accidiosi* caused by the evil influence of the noonday demon who possessed him, the culmination in Hobbes's *Leviathan* of melancholy as a *relational disorder* of everyday life, associated with the frustration of the desire for power, signifies the irruption of the beast within man in a world where the passion for expenditure had been substituted for the passion of calculation. As a pathology associated with the excessive display of passions rendering human carelessness, melancholy is here structured around the animal as a 'thing' in the body that simultaneously represents the crisis of a theological and moral conceptualization of the world.

It is in the similar context of *a psychopathology of everyday life* to which everyone in principle is susceptible that the following will continue to

explore the ‘thing’ in the body. But whereas the noonday demon of *acedia*, hiding among the monks in the Egyptian desert, specified a tradition that culminated around the time of Hobbes with the assertion of the emotional hyperbole as an animal in man, the subject of the *nerves* came to represent a problematization of the democratic man.

#### **4. The Pathologies of Performativity: *Acedia***

Returning to the structural level of the six dimensions of problem and response, which this thesis has set out to investigate, it is clear from the sections above that the problematization of *acedia* explored in this chapter represents a considerable change of perspective from the problematization of melancholy, which was explored in the previous chapter. This change comes down to more than the difference between the conceptual framework of the two: that *acedia* was concerned primarily with the difference between vice and virtue adhered to by ecclesiastical writers, while the formation of melancholy subscribed primarily to the medical theories associated with the infirmities caused by imbalances between the four bodily humours. The essential shift which this chapter has been concerned with is not only found on a conceptual level, but also in a fundamental shift away from the drama of subjectivity associated with the extraordinary, who emerged as the culturally formative spectator at the periphery of his own private tragedy. Unlike the monastic or the Hobbesian melancholic, the extraordinary existence of the outstanding was never indebted to any other ‘higher’ reality than its own. Always already a deficient life-form in the perspective developed in the sections above, the melancholic was subjected exclusively to himself and to the precarious ‘thing’ in his body, which made his character uneven to itself. The most striking difference between him and the character described in the sections just presented is that the latter does not find himself at the periphery, but always already *in the middle of a social reality*. In that sense if the history of melancholy was also the history of the *theoros*, the ‘theoretical type’ who watched himself take a central place on the Greek *scene*, the history of *acedia* explored above, at least at its offset, represents the history of the *martyr* – the Greek word for “witness” – of a personal sacrifice to a higher reality. The monastic character suffering from *acedia* was born into a reality in which man and God was already separated,

like evil and good, vice and virtue. To him suffering made not only the reality of the affliction clear, but also the painstaking reality of God and the world. Not only an individual issue, the psychosomatic pattern of suffering structured around the monstrous eruption of demons and wolves in the bodies of the afflicted, adhered to *the burden of a social reality*, the historical implications of which also represents the gradual transformation from the *theocosmos* of the Church Fathers to the *sociocosmos* of the Hobbesian *Leviathan*.

<b>TABLE 3 Problematical Formations</b>	<b>MELANCHOLIA</b>	<b>ACEDIA</b>	<b>NEURASTHENIA</b>
<b>Pathological Problem</b>	MANIC-MELANCHOLIA CIRCULAR ANTINOMY	DESPAIR BINARY ANTINOMY	EXHAUSTION ERUPTION OF IMMANENT ANTINOMY
<b>Characterological Problem</b>	THE EXTRAORDINARY	THE REJECTED	THE SENSITIVE
<b>Delimitative Problem</b>	PERIPHERY	OUTSIDE	INSIDE
<b>Self-Regulatory Response</b>	DIETETICS	VIRTUOUS LIVING	NEUROPATHIC HOUSEHOLD
<b>Performative Response</b>	ACHIEVEMENT	WORK AS VIRTUE	WORK AS SECOND NATURE
<b>Self-Articulatory Response</b>	SELF-TRANSGRESSION  SUBLIMATION	CONTROLLING AFFECT  ABSTINENT SUBLIMATION	RESOURCE ADMINISTRATION  PSYCHOANALYTIC SELF-DIFFERENTIATION



Reflecting the Heideggerian notion of the burden of existence (“*Last-charakter des Daseins*”) (Theunissen 1996), the pathological dead weight of *acedia* represented the problems associated with the compulsion to existence itself. The *characterological problem* presented in the sections above for this reason was not that of the extraordinary; it was that instead of the outcast, THE REJECTED (see TABLE 3), who represented the precarious Other of the collective or even, as it became quite clear in the case of the Hobbesian melancholic, *the casualty of the social formation*. More than the paradox of a contradictory nature, the characterological problem presented above was that of someone *living* a contradiction. This contradiction was found first in the paradoxical etymological construction of *acedia* as a concept. Representing not necessarily the problem of someone who did not care, but rather the problem of one whose care lacked the quality of the virtuous, the negation of *kedos* implicated a careless treatment of a practical situation. The specific carelessness of *acedia* was associated with the kind of activities that presupposed a joy of existence and a surplus of life. The contradiction in the lives of the *accidiosi* was emblematically found in the gurgling hymns of the monks submerged in the slime of Dante’s river Styx in the fifth circle of hell, who died as they had existed: embodying in death the terrifying darkness which they had harboured in life in the light and warmth of the world above, these poor souls were the victims of a love defective. The contradiction they embodied was the *dejection in the exercise of the virtue*, the darkness within the light, the sorrow over God.

This existential contradiction was reflected in the *pathological problem* of *acedia*. Describing a BINARY ANTINOMY in contrast to the circular alternation of melancholy and mania, the pathological problem described in the sections above was only representable in *negative terms*. Nowhere was this as lucidly exemplified as in the assertion of the psychosomatic pattern of suffering in the body of the monastic as a demonical possession. The name of this noon-day demon may of course be said merely to refer to the fact that it took control of the monk at the time of day when the sun was strongest and the work that he undertook hardest. But Evagrius’ description of it also seemed to suggest something more. Apart from being associated with the middle of the day because it appeared at the hours around noon, the title which was given to the demon, in the light of the negation it represented,

could be said to refer more symbolically to an *existential darkness*. As Theunissen (1996) has pointed out, the model for the Kierkegaardian pseudonym with the same name, Johannes Climacus, saw in *acedia* the paradox of death surrounding the monastic in the middle of life. The same is suggested by Dante when he finds himself, in the famous opening words of the *Divine Comedy* ‘midway upon our journey of life ... within a forest dark’. The pathological problem associated with the noonday demon was the negativity of *anhedonia* (Willner 1993), the inability to experience pleasure from normally pleasurable life events, the terrible feeling of feeling nothing when one ought to feel only joy (Jaspers 1948).

As especially Evagrius’ description showed, the central problem of the terrible paradox of a sorrow over God represented more than a private issue. Or to phrase it otherwise: it constituted the complex problem of a *sin of privation*. The demonical possession itself was described as an overwhelming feeling of dislike with the whole monastic community; but while this feeling made of the demon in the flesh a terrible opponent, the worst was what came after it: the ‘ineffable joy’ of the time of relaxation after the demonical attack filled the monastic with the illusory feeling of a need to do good to save himself – that is for his own *private* sake. Opening his soul to temptations and vices of all kinds, this problem constituted the heart of the pathological pattern. It was this privative character of affect that led to the confusion, which made the monk inaccessible to both himself and the God who would have mercy on his soul. Emblematically illustrated in the differentiation between two kinds of sorrow, one coming from God and the other of the world, the confusion of affect found in the case of Judas Iscariot’s privation of sorrow represented the problematic at the bottom of the pathological problem of *acedia*. While Judas’ remorse itself was justified, its reasons were flawed as the excess of it opened him to the influence of the Devil. Constituting what may be termed a negative *imitatio Christi*, it came to represent the negative experience of the reality of the world as a place of suffering. A terrifying vertigo of God, the demon of *acedia* which took hold of the monastic body represented a sinful and privative deepening of a natural and existentially given pattern of suffering, and as such the pathological problem manifested itself as DESPAIR. It was this matter of a confusion of affect at the heart of the sin of *acedia* that was carried over into the

Hobbesian *sociocosmos* and came to represent a crisis in the social body of the *Leviathan* long after the burden of God had been exchanged by the burden of the social formation of the Commonwealth. The pathological projections of the desire for power represented by Hobbes as the passions of sudden dejection resulting in weeping or sudden glory resulting in laughter were examples of privative hyperboles associated with the melancholic inability to regulate the self within the framework of the social formation.

It is along the lines of this confusion at the heart of the sin of *acedia* that the *delimitative problem* of *acedia* can be found. The delimitation of individual from collective in the chapter above was constituted primarily as a negative experience of the fundamental existential rules of the reality into which this individual was introduced. For the monk this meant the experience of God in the mode of negation. If St. Paul's conversion in Damascus can be viewed as a literal dejection, as he was struck to the ground and blinded (Acts 9:1-30), leading *into* the body of Christ representing the Christian community (Romans 12:5, Corinthians 12:27), then the terrifying dejection associated with the demonical possession of *acedia* led *out* of the body of Christ and into the despair of exile from the community of the virtuous. Hence the delimitative problem points to a complex situation of being simultaneously in the middle of a social order and yet on its OUTSIDE. In this sense the monastic individual as opposed to the Greek melancholic was found in the middle of reality, as stated above, but always falling out of it. As a mark of depravity, the psychosomatic pattern of suffering structured around the demon in the body constituted a threshold between the collective *nomos* and the individual *physis*. The problem of delimitation was the problem of the vertigo of a cosmological order: on the one hand as the *eruption* of the monstrous Other of the collective in the individual body causing despair; and on the other of a *crisis* in the social body where the individual regulation of affect fell out, a state of exception representable as a *social pathology*. As a brother of Agamben's *homo sacer* especially the Hobbesian melancholic's rejection from the Commonwealth because of his deficient regulation of his desire for power, illustrated the correspondence between the individual and the social body. Advertising the threat of dissolution of the social order, the melancholic represented the eruption of an immanent disorder that made the state body appear *tamquam dissolute*, as

if it was dissolved (Agamben 1998: 105). This was seen in Hobbes' assertion of the melancholic as a *lycanthrope*, a wolf-man, whose excessive desire for power, for which the greater good of the Commonwealth had no space, had rendered mad.

Essentially structured around the problem of freedom, the three problematizing dimensions explored above in this light demanded responses that were very different from the ones associated with the dietetics of the classic Greek melancholic. While self-regulation to the extraordinary was an important aspect contributing to his management of a natural disposition, in *acedia* and the later Hobbesian version of melancholy it was the self-regulation itself that became pathological. The pathology associated with *acedia* consisted in doing the right thing wrong. The *self-regulatory response* to the problematic dimensions fleshed out above, was thus primarily concerned with the VIRTUOUS LIFE within the moral framework of the *cosmos* within which the individual existed. In relation to *acedia* this response emerged on the threshold between sin and vice as a precarious attempt to lead the self on its intermediate position between *soma* and *psyche*. If *acedia* represented a disorientation of affect, more than a physical exhaustion or a weakening of man's will, then the demonically induced pain which the afflicted felt was the result of a self-inflicted carelessness with vice resulting in sinful activity. This carelessness, as it was illustrated, had to be resolved by therapeutic measures. Closely associated with the gradual transformation of the meaning of manual work from representing merely a therapeutic tool, to constituting a virtue in itself, this self-regulatory response constituted an important structural part in the transformation of the *theocosmos* into the *sociocosmos* of Hobbes' political theories.

Thus the *self-articulatory response* associated with the sinful disposition of *acedia* was primarily concerned with THE CONTROL OF AFFECT articulated as ABSTINENT SUBLIMATION. The symbolic assertion, for example in Isaac of L'Étoile's sermon, of *acedia* as an unbearable inner tempest resulting from the slackening of faith and leading to the 'sleep' of Christ, illustrated very well the importance of assuming a personal responsibility for rectification, which evolved with the gradual institutionalization of the moral scheme within the framework of capital vices and virtues. It was as a *sin of the heart* that *acedia* assumed the role of a threshold, which made it

primary to other sins. Infecting the world with a spiritual meaninglessness that reflected Nietzsche's later notions of nihilism, *acedia* assumed a special role as other, minor sins followed with its implied slackening of faith. From concerning primarily the coenobite monk, the self-articulation associated with the threat of this spiritual despair gradually came to concern practically *all* members of the Christian community. The personal acknowledgment of vices as sinful dispositions, for which one would have to seek the ministrations of the church in confession, evolved into a general exhortation to make oneself accessible to moral advice. Simultaneously the evolvment of *acedia* into the notion of *sloth* saw the problem of a demonically induced pattern of psychosomatic suffering in the individual wane as the problem became associated largely with notions of *laziness* instead.

It was within the context of this shift in self-articulation from concerning the threshold between vice and sin to representing the much more general ability to maintain a regular and temporally bound existence that the Hobbesian melancholic was of interest. Representing the madness of someone whose deficient regulation of passions resulted from the difficult task of managing a human existence that was always already projected into the uncertain future of the *sociocosmos*, melancholy in Hobbes' *Leviathan* like *acedia* was associated with the confusion of affects resulting in an inability to lead the self for the sake of a greater good. Culminating here, the problem of a correspondence between the pathological states in the body of the individual and in the body of the moral framework, underlines how the articulation of the self was concerned with *becoming accessible to management*. Yet, as an important problem which played a central role in the transition from the *theocosmos* where *acedia* was found, over the intermediate position of *sloth*, to the Hobbesian melancholy in the *sociocosmos* of the *Leviathan*, the problem of making oneself accessible to management also played a central part in the transformation of the importance of work. The dimension of the *performative response* in the sections above is represented first and foremost by the transition of the importance of manual labour from a secondary position in the Christian 'good works', where it was associated with the deeds performed for others, to an absolute primary position of crucial socioeconomic importance in the idea of work as a virtue in itself in the *sociocosmos*. *Acedia* and the problem of becoming accessible to

management played an important role in the gradual transformation of this response as manual labour was recommended broadly as a *therapeutic measure* against the spiritual despair it implicated. The transformation of *acedia* into the much broader implications of *sloth* gradually saw the spiritual dimension of the problem wane for the problem of *idleness* to which the implication of work as a virtue itself was a response. Whereas the problem of *acedia* had been concerned primarily with the demonic dejection, which exiled the monastic from the body of Christ, the virtue of work in the *sociocosmos* was a response rather, as it was illustrated above, to the neglect of the obligations of one's status or profession within a socioeconomic framework. It was within the context of this transition that work, as a performative response to the correspondence between individual suffering and social pathology, attained the position from which it was later to emerge as the pivotal point of a whole culture treating it as a kind of second nature. This, as the following will illustrate, was the culture of nervous disorders.

# Chapter Four

## The Neuropathic Household of Neurasthenia

### Prologue

1. George M. Beard's Philosophy of Nervousness
2. The Culture of Sensibility and the Maladies of the Will
3. The Human Motor: Nerves and Labour Power
4. The Mechanics of Melancholy: Freud and Neurasthenia
5. The Pathologies of Performativity: Neurasthenia

### Prologue

Despite their many differences, the two independently evolved conceptual formations of melancholy and *acedia*, the first subscribed to by the writers inspired by the Hippocratic-Galenic humoral theory, the latter by the ecclesiastical writers and their lay followers, shared one fundamental issue: the dispositions designated by them were always ascribable to *someone in particular*. Whether it was the Aristotelian *ēthos perriton*, whose extraordinary disposition constituted a precarious relation between suffering and achievement, or the *accidiosi* in whom the mapping of maladies of affect and behaviour onto the *soma* was the result of a social analogy, their affliction was that which pointed them out and set them apart from the opacity of their collectives. Like Foucault's "infamous men" (Foucault 2000: 157-176) who were snatched by their momentary articulations from the darkness in which they could have otherwise remained, the psychosomatic pattern of suffering structured around the 'thing' in the bodies of the melancholic geniuses or the despairing monks in these traditions apprehended and exposed them in a fleeting trajectory that made them *stand out*. Even the general possibility of a hyperbole of affect constituting a crisis in the social body of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, which democratized the motif of a monastic correspondence between an individual and a social pathology, singled out the melancholic on the background of the chain of collectively. It was not before the theories of evolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century began to designate bestiality as a shared point of the origin of the species, when these theories placed the animal within the bodies of *everyone*, that this age-old designa-

tion of the 'thing' in the body as the marker of a precarious individuality began to wane. With the assumption of the *nerves* as a 'thing' in the body in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the precarious character of a disposition associating the psychosomatic pattern of suffering in the individual body with the ability to lead and manage the self, gradually became a possibility for *anyone*. Designating the 'thing' in the body, the pathological character of *neurasthenia*, coined by the physician George M. Beard, came to reflect the gradual emergence of a democratized culture of articulation directed at the psychosomatic pattern of suffering in the bodies of individuals. The injunction to articulate the 'thing' in the body in a socially acceptable and understandable manner culminates in the Freudian conceptualization in the famous "Mourning and Melancholia" of melancholy as a hyperbolic emotional response to the loss of an object. Associated with the inability to self-differentiate through the overcoming of suffering, melancholy here emerges as a problematization of the ability to manage the self within the context of *a meaningful and productive life*. It is as a background to this that neurasthenia, the pathology structured around the nerves as a 'thing' in the body of the modern individual, is of great interest.

Representable within the context of the two Brunonian categories of *sthenia* and *asthenia*, neurasthenia thematized both the *excess of stimulation* of the individual who was exposed to the modern world and the resulting *incapacity of the will to react to stimulus*, because of the pathological depletion of the individual reserves of energy found in the central nervous system. As the first of the following chapters will illustrate, Beard's designation of neurasthenia as a *nervous bankruptcy* implicated a kind of *neuropathic household* associated with an individual responsibility to know and manage the self.

As a pathology of sensitivity to the demands of modern society, neurasthenia came to represent the failure of the individual will to stand its ground against modernity, structured as a pattern of psychosomatic suffering around the nerves. The second section of this chapter of the thesis will illustrate how nervousness emerged as a pathology of everyday character, problematizing the prophylactic articulation of the limitations of the individual body, which both defined the boundary beyond which social de-



mands were deemed illegitimate and a place from where the individual could no longer return without the help of therapeutic medicine.

Representing a much broader appeal than the traditions explored in the previous chapters, neurasthenia on this background became a disease of labour; an affliction of the ambitious struggler in the burgeoning economic system of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialism to whom work was a *second nature*. As the third chapter of this part will illustrate, the pathological exhaustion of the nerves resulting from fatigue not only focused on the impairment of energy as a productive resource, but also on this energy as the individual body's unique capital, its *Arbeitskraft*. Designating the 'thing' in the body as the primary site of its conversion, what the historian Anson Rabinbach calls the *transcendental materialism* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, came to predicate the notion of a single *Kraft*, a force of nature that could be transformed into productivity. As a problematization of the individual attempt to provide a goal-oriented use of the body's most valuable asset, neurasthenia came to constitute a relatively simple mechanistic explanation that focused on the pathological deficiency of an individual will to lead the self productively because of exhaustion. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this perspective had transposed the problematic of the 'thing' in the body from one affecting only the extraordinary in character into the sphere of work, where it potentially affected everyone, transforming *idleness* into the paradoxical ideal of the working class, rather than a mortal sin.

Freud's theory of melancholy can be seen on the background of the materialistic and mechanical assumption of the nerves as a 'thing' in the body subjected to the individual will. His therapeutic method, which promised to help his clients by transforming their hyperbolic 'hysterical misery' into an 'everyday unhappiness' was based on the restoration of the nervous system, which would enable the inhibited will of the melancholic to once again project himself in into a meaningful and productive existence. The Freudian conception of melancholy designates the structural emotional hyperbole of a mourning lament ("*Klage*") that has become an accusation ("*Anklage*") in the melancholic who consequently has lost the ability to articulate his or her suffering as a pattern of self-differentiation through 'inner travail'. The 'thing' in the body of the individual becomes the target of a therapeutic articulation, which designates the pattern of suffering as the field of a produc-

tive transformation of the self, whose gesture is obstructed and shattered by the melancholic lack of meaning.

### **1. George M. Beard's Philosophy of Nervousness**

To a contemporary reader the most surprising part of the Heidelberg chemist Wilhelm Weichardt's invention in 1904 of *antikenotoxin* was perhaps not that it constituted an antibody to the poisonous substances that he imagined gathered like quickly approaching, dark clouds in the bodies of the rodents, which he exposed to strenuous physical exercise. Rather the fact that Weichardt believed his invention to be a vaccine to cure fatigue, revolutionizing mankind by abolishing weariness *altogether* and transforming human bodies into tireless machines (Turner 2008) may seem curious. Yet Weichardt's designation of a substance in the bodies of the rats from which he could extract the toxin that constituted an essential chemical base of the antibody, was part of a much broader, social pattern of interests, associating worries about changes in the processes of civilization and the emerging science of work, with exhaustion and mental illness. If one phenomenon summarizes the conglomerate of these interests in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century it is *neurasthenia*, the pathological state of fatigue structured in a pattern of psychosomatic symptoms around the central nervous system, first coined in 1869 by the American physician George Miller Beard.

A forerunner not only of Freud in his study of neurosis but also of the contemporary popularity of the cognitive and behavioural sciences, Beard's popularization of neurasthenia was based on work that was far from original. As Charles Rosenberg indicates, Beard was neither a profound nor a critical thinker. His medical writings constitute a mosaic pattern of the fashionable and controlling ideas of his time, making it the familiarity, rather than the novelty of his theories which made them so easily and rapidly accepted (Rosenberg 1962: 245). Yet Beard's conviction of an underlying kinship between a range of seemingly unrelated symptoms of illness which were not, he believed, reducible to hysteria or hypochondria is important to recognize, especially to the present study, as his consequent attempt to bring order to the chaotic field of the so-called functional nervous disorders provides a crucial example of the kind of introspection and rela-

tionality implicated by the nerves as a 'thing' in the body. Motivated partly by his own experiences, Beard managed to blend scientific theories from physics, neurophysiology and technology about the nature of nervous impulses, energy-conservation and biological evolution into a disease entity, which was not only plausible, but provided the lack of nervous energy as a medical answer applicable to a broad range of more or less obscure symptoms (Sicherman 1977: 39). Ever growing in number, the list of symptoms of neurasthenia was quickly expanded to include such variables as:

Tenderness of the scalp (cerebral irritation, cerebraesthesia); tenderness of the spine (spinal irritation, myelasthenia); tenderness of the teeth and the gums; tenderness of the whole body (general hyperaesthesia); general and local itching; abnormalities of the secretions; vague pains and flying neuralgias; flushing and fidgetiness; tremulous and variable pulse with palpitation; sudden giving way of general or special functions; special ideosyncrasies in regard to food, medicine, and external irritants; sensitiveness to changes in the weather; a feeling of profound exhaustion unaccompanied by pain; ticklishness; desire for stimulants and narcotics; insomnia; nervous dyspepsia; partial failure of memory; deficient mental control; seminal emissions; spermatorrhea; partial or complete impotence; changes in the expression of the eyes and countenance; mental depression with general timidity; morbid fear of special kinds, as agoraphobia (fear of places); astraphobia (fear of lightning); sick headache and various forms of headache; disturbances of the nerves and organs of special sense; localized periphral numbness and hyperaesthesia; general and local chills and flashes of heat; local spasms of muscles. (Beard 1879: 246)

When Beard in 1881 published his *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences*, he had listed more than 75 neurasthenic symptoms, indicating the broad range of phenomena believed to be attributable to a pathological weakness in the nervous system. As Barbara Sicherman argues, it was the implied precision of this broad range of symptoms that offered practitioners an emphasis on what they could do for their patients, rather than exposing their impotence, at a time when most physicians felt only comfortable with clearly organic disorders (Sicherman 1977: 39). Providing a relatively simple, mechanistic explanation to a problem that was hampered by the fact that no two individuals would experience it in a uniform symptomatological manner neurasthenia was a huge success. As Beard could only hope that it would 'in time be substantially confirmed by microscopical and chemical examinations of those patients who die in a neuras-

thenic condition' (Beard 1869: 217), it was justified almost entirely by scientific models found elsewhere.

Reflecting primarily the recent discovery of the first and second laws of thermodynamics, Beard's definition of nervousness as '*nervelessness – a lack of nerveforce*' (Beard 1881: 5) emphasized the central nervous system as a reservoir of energy. The German physicist and physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz, whose argument that the forces of nature are forms of a single source, was an important influence on Beard (Rosenberg 1962: 249). Only a few years later this assumption of a universal, natural force powering both man and his machines alike was joined by Rudolf Clausius' formulation of the second law of thermodynamics, which established that any energy transfer from warmer to colder bodies in isolated systems undergoes entropy.

The offset of the enormous social confidence sparked by the implications of the theory of thermodynamics, which was caused by the realization in the 1850s and 1860s that a dissipation of force is inevitable, is reflected in Beard's theory of neurasthenia. The notion of *nervous bankruptcy* applied by Beard to describe the differences between individual reserves of nervous energy is more than a metaphor. Constituting one among a few privileged terms that he used to illustrate the importance of nervous energy to the body, nervous bankruptcy, he claimed, results basically from the individual's overdraw of his 'accounts':

In finance, a man is rich who always lives within his income. A millionaire may draw heavily on his funds and yet keep a large surplus; but a man with very small resources – a hundred dollars in the bank – can easily overdraw his account; it may be months or years before he will be able to make himself square. There are millionaires of nerve-force – those who never know what it is to be tired out ... and there are those – and their numbers are increasing daily – who, without being absolutely sick, without being, perhaps for a lifetime, ever confined to the bed a day with acute disorder, are yet poor in nerve-force; their inheritance is small, and they have been able to increase it but slightly, if at all; and if from overtoil, or sorrow, or injury, they overdraw their little surplus, they may find that it will require months or perhaps years to make up the deficiency, if, indeed, they ever accomplish the task. (Beard 1881: 9f.)

Constituting a correspondence in the individual body to the assumption in the universal theories of thermodynamics of a single force of energy,

Beard's use of the bank account as a metaphor reflects the individual task of self-regulation related to the 'thing' in the body. Designating the nerves as this 'thing', around which both the reserves of productive energies and the pattern of their pathological depletion are structured, Beard's 'philosophy of nervousness' emphasizes an individual reserve of energy, the conservation of which can be modulated more or less successfully by the meticulous care of the individual and his physician. The origin of the differences in the amount of nervous force in the single bodies, Beard argues, is essentially hereditary, something which he believed had recently been proved by experiments that showed how damage to nervous tissue might be passed down from one generation to another (Rosenberg 1962: 251). This argument was in line with hereditary explanations of mental illness and with the pervasive contemporary theories about degeneration that was often used to argue for social difference between race, gender and class (e.g. du Coudray 2002, Herman 1997). Neurasthenia in this sense was assumed to be the result of the depletion of a limited natural resource found *within* the individual on the background of the deficient management of a hereditary resource.

A similar assumption is represented by another popular example in which Beard draws on the work of Thomas Edison, whom he worked with for a short period. In order to illustrate another important theme in neurasthenia, namely the limited amount of pressure under which the individual can sustain himself, Beard asserts that the research into electric light 'is now sufficiently advanced in an experimental direction to give us the best possible illustration of the effects of modern civilization on the nervous system.' (Beard 1881: 99) In all calculations made to estimate the force supplied by any central source of energy, Beard argues, it has been made clear that there is a limitation to the number of lamps which can be interposed on a circuit without its failing. Illustrating another correspondence between the individual body and a natural phenomenon, this example emphasizes the individual need to care about the amount of stresses to which the body is exposed.

The popular analogies provided by Beard to illustrate the causes and effects of nervousness in the body work to supply the relatively simple mechanistic framework that came to constitute an answer to the very dif-

fuse external pressure on the modern individual. Set apart from the Ancients primarily by five elements – steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences and the mental activity of women (Beard 1881: 96) – this individual was under the imminent and constant threat of succumbing to states of exhaustion from which it no longer could return on its own:

The force in this nervous system can, therefore, be increased or diminished by good or evil influences, medical or hygienic, or by natural evolutions – growth, disease and decline; but none the less it is limited; and when new functions are interposed in the circuit, as modern civilization is constantly requiring us to do, there comes a period, sooner or later, varying in different individuals, and at different times of life, when the amount of force is insufficient to keep all the lamps actively burning; those that are weakest go out entirely, or, as more frequently happens, burn faint or feebly – they do not expire, but give an insufficient and unstable light – this is the philosophy of nervousness. (Beard 1881: 99)

Suggesting a neuropathic household, which must be constantly observed by the individual, Beard's philosophy of nervousness designates a *ceaseless prophylactic activity* constructed to balance the 'thing' in the body in order not to suffer under the expenditure of the energy located within it. While this activity, as the next section will illustrate, had for a longer period been the privilege of the higher classes who suffered from the fashionable effects of glamour resulting from affluence, neurasthenia as a *pathology of everyday life* quickly democratized it. As Sichermann illustrates, a study of diagnoses in two New England clinics shows, that by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, neurasthenia had become the most frequent diagnosis among working-class patients (Sicherman 1977: 44). Reflecting the activity of both the extraordinary melancholics and the despairing monks of the early Middle Ages, the introspection of the potential neurasthenic designated a prophylaxis structured around the 'thing' in the body; but if these early examples of subjections to a psychosomatic pattern of suffering had been reserved for eccentrics and sinners, the definition of neurasthenia as an exhaustion of energy related to a general sensibility made this activity accessible to anyone.

## **2. The Culture of Sensibility and the Maladies of the Will**

The immense influence of George M. Beard's work on the conceptualization of nervousness as a state of pathological exhaustion associated with a gen-

eral sensibility to the challenges of modernity and civilization, is attested to by the fact that in Europe the affliction was often referred to merely as 'Beard's Malady'. But despite the popularity of Beard's work, the idea of the nervous system as an organ sensible to external influence was not something for which he can be credited. In terms of dealing with psychiatric afflictions, already George Cheyne's *The English Malady* (1777) argued for disorders as a result of disturbances in the nervous system. As Roy Porter has pointed out in his introduction to a newer edition of Cheyne's work (Cheyne 1991: vii), Cheyne believed that such sickness was growing more frequent, and argued that it should be viewed as a 'disease of civilization' related to the pressure on the individual by the demands of modern life. Cheyne viewed this malady as a phenomenon, which was first and foremost found in English nobility, because their luxurious lifestyle made them more susceptible to nervous disorders.

The assumption of neurasthenia as an affliction found among the higher classes, who were engaged in the spectacular performances of fashionable society is reflected in one of the most prominent textbooks on neurasthenia of the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, written by the French Dr. Achille-Adrian Proust. Achille-Adrian Proust was father to the now more famous Marcel Proust, who was not only the author the immense *À la recherche du temps perdu* ("In Search of Lost Time" 1913-1927), but perhaps also the greatest literary neurasthenic of his age. Considered a sickly child from his early years, where he suffered asthmatic attacks, he spent long periods of his life in bed, where he is also said to have eventually written his great work. It may very well be Marcel Proust's sickly condition, combined with the character of his literary work and his frequenting of the fashionable Parisian society, which inspired his father in his description of the neurasthenics' disorder. At least the older Proust, together with his co-author Gilbert Ballet, decidedly argued against neurasthenia as a neurosis among anyone else but the cultivated middle and upper classes that held intellectually demanding positions of work (Rabinbach 1992: 157). These 'society' women and men would be under immense moral pressure during their frequent visits to the Parisian saloons, where they would have to 'work' hard to take care of their reputations:

One can easily be convinced of this by picturing oneself the existence led, especially in the Parisian world, by those who are called in the current slang “society” men and women. Those who go out much and especially women, have their whole day taken up by the duties that convention and vain care of their reputation impose on them: visiting dinners, balls, evening parties make their life one of continual constraint, and of obligations without respite (Proust 1902: 21f.).

Like Thomas Mann’s main character Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain* (1924), those who became the refugees of Europe’s growing number of sanatoriums were bourgeois. Reflecting a spreading *culture of sensibility* with more than pathological implications, the general notion of sensibility that used to be the hallmark of the extraordinary in character, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century on had entered a process of democratization, sparked by an elite full of Enlightenment ideologies (e.g. Porter 1995, Barker-Benfield 1992). As Joachim Radkau argues in his work *Das Zeitalter der Nervosität* (Radkau 1998) the ‘nervousness’ of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century not only constituted a diagnosis, but also a specific cultural aspect that both came before and outlived neurasthenia.

The broad based description of the symptoms of neurasthenia as arranged around the pathological sensibility of the ‘thing’ in the body, described by the Danish physiologist and pathologist Peter Ludvig Panum can be seen on this background:

The symptoms of neurasthenia are constituted as *a pathological sensibility to impressions* that used to pass unnoticed; trivialities appear very austere, minor predicaments build up in the mind of the patient to become insurmountable impediments, portending calamity and ruin. He becomes impetuous, irascible and sees the world only as a vale of woe. Or he becomes fretful, arguing back and forth endlessly without determination, living in constant fear of calamities to come. Strong sense impressions have an excessive effect on him, lightning and thunder even inspire terror (Panum 1904: 491; my italics and my translation).

Reflecting the gradual democratization of an extraordinary sensibility to external influences, Panum’s general description of neurasthenia as ‘a pathological sensibility to impressions’ involving anxiety, irresoluteness and dejection, implicates a pathology structured around the receptivity of the nerves, specifying this as the cause of the nervous exhaustion. The depletion of the nervous energy in the neurasthenic patient results from a vul-



nerability to a broad and diffuse pattern of both trivialities and more serious matters impressing themselves on the individual.

Growing out of the empiricist insistence in the works for example of Bacon, Locke and Hume on the receptivity of the senses as a matter of not only moral importance but with profound ontological implications, this assumption in Panum's work of neurasthenia as the result of a *hypersensitivity*, assigned to the nerves as a 'thing' in the body a central role as the organ of sensitivity. As a popular critical attack on the Kantian anthropology that had asserted the central role of reason, the designation of the nervous system as the physiological source of all emotional life was fashionable among the medical intellectuals of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Another example is the work of Carl Lange, the Danish physician and psychologist who formed what became known as the James-Lange Theory of Emotions with William James, in his famous work *The Emotions* (orig. 1885). Here Lange criticizes the Kantian anthropology for what he believes to be a psychologically unrealistic focus on the general role of reason (Lange & James 1922: 33). The James-Lange Theory of Emotions, which became an important factor in the development of the cognitive and behavioural sciences, instead emphasizes the nerves as a sense organ by viewing emotions as a result of physiological changes created by the autonomic nervous system in response to experiences in the world (e.g. Ellsworth 1994).

It is on this background that neurasthenia can be viewed also as a *disease of the will*. As a 'thing' in the body, the nerves represented not only the source of suffering, but also a source of emotionality and volition that was vulnerable to external influence and could inhibit the will so profoundly that it could no longer transform itself into volition. In *The Diseases of the Will* (1884), written by Théodule Ribot, an influential editor of the *Revue Philosophique*, neurasthenia is represented primarily as a functional pathology structured around the inability to *act*. Transforming neurasthenia into a disorder which was not primarily concerned with pathological *lack* (as implied by the lack of nervous force in Beard's understanding of neurasthenia), Ribot's work focused on the disorder of a will that lacked the capacity to direct and project itself in the right, goal-oriented manner. The *inhibition* of the will resulting from the deficient care of the nervous energies here is the central issue.

Coming from an anti-Kantian perspective like most of his materialist colleagues, Ribot's understanding of the will, as he argues, is not derived from the 'state of consciousness, the "I will", which indicates a situation' (Ribot 1915: 2). Rather he takes his perspective from the psychophysical fundament of the will in the nervous system and its immanent pathological manifestations, its dissolution. In Ribot's view, the Kantian argument for a free will is problematized by the fact that every form of volition is the result of nervous activity:

It is not the state of consciousness as such, but rather the corresponding physiological state which transforms itself into an act. In short, the relation is not between a psychical event and a movement, but between two states of the same kind, between two physiological states, two groups of nervous elements, one sensory and the other motor. If one insists upon making of consciousness a cause, all remains obscure; but if it is considered as simply the accompaniment of a nervous process, which alone is the essential element, all becomes clear and the imaginary difficulties vanish. (Ribot 1915: 6)

The designation of the will as a 'physiological state which transforms itself into an act' is especially interesting here, because of Ribot's understanding of the pathological manifestations of this will. Maintaining a wholly physiological perspective, Ribot argues that *desire* is constituted as an incomplete form, for example in the actions of small children and savages, of the fully developed physiological manifestation of the will that he refers to as the *ideomotor*. To the adult and civilized, the ideomotor represents a physiological guarantee that affects are transformed into sensible volitions, when experiences have accumulated enough for the intellect to arise. When an individual is suffering from 'diseases of the will' as a result of nervous fatigue the ideomotor becomes dysfunctional and the individual is subjected once again to the desire, which habit or reflection otherwise had come to modify or restrain. Pathology, Ribot argues, shows how the activity of desire 'is augmented when the will is diminished, and persists when it disappears.' (ibid.) As a curious reflection of the emotional hyperbole of the Platonic leader who becomes a tyrant because he fails to lead himself Ribot finds this represented also in 'the case of despots, placed by their own opinion or that of others above the law'.

Constituting a bulwark against the augmentation of self-destructive thoughts in fatigued individuals, the morally impeccable will to Ribot represented an anti-thesis to the primitive form of affective life: *desire*. If desire represented the lack of self-control, the will, structured around the management of the 'thing' in the body, constituted a superior form of material power counteracting its negative effects (Rabinbach 1992: 165). The vulnerable will in Ribot's work, in this sense represents a *ceaseless prophylactic activity* structured around the nerves in answer to the imminent threat of succumbing to the inferior form of desire. The *pathology of the will* represents the conscious 'I will' not transforming itself into volition in a goal-oriented and self-differentiating manner. Ribot provides an illustration of this by referring to one of the famous cases treated by one of the founding fathers of French psychology, Etienne Esquirol:

A magistrate, very distinguished for his learning and power of language, was, as a result of troubles, attacked with a fit of monomania ... He has recovered the entire use of his reason but he will not go out into the world again, although he recognizes he is wrong; ... "It is certain," he said to me one day, "that I have no will except not to will; for I have all my reason; I know what I ought to do; but strength fails me when I ought to act (Ribot 1915: 29).

Neurasthenia in the work of Ribot emerges as the malady of a will that has lost control over itself and has succumbed to a precarious state of *not-willing* as the result of external pressure. As a part of a general democratization of a culture of sensibility, the pattern of psychosomatic symptoms structured around the nerves in the body of the neurasthenic focused on the challenges of modern life against the autonomous will of the individual, whose general orientation in life was in danger. As a pathology of everyday life, neurasthenia represented not only a clinical diagnosis, but also the broader implications of a diagnosis of the present, focusing on the exposure of individuality to for example life in the big city.

One illustrious example of this is found in a widely read and discussed sociological dissertation published in 1895 by Max Nordau (Wagner 1956). By drawing also upon the other great explanatory figure in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that of inheritable degeneration, Nordau claims that the etiology of the increasingly prevalent neurasthenia was 'the vast fatigue which was experienced by the generation on which the multitude of discov-

eries and innovations burst abruptly, imposing upon its organic exigencies greatly suppressing its strength, which create favourable conditions under which these maladies could gain ground enormously, and became a danger to civilization' (Nordau 1895: 3). The same attitude towards neurasthenia is taken by the German sociologist George Simmel his famous essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (Simmel 1950), which was originally a result of a series of lectures conducted alongside the Dresden city exhibition in 1903. Simmel's essay illustrates well the critical attitude that many theorists and practitioners of the time took towards the individual's life in the big city. Based on the assumption that the will of the individual is threatened by the intensification of nervous stimulation, Simmel argues for a fundamental dichotomy between the intimate life of the individual and the social forces that impress themselves on him. He commences by stating that the 'deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces' (Simmel 1950: 409). The discrepancy between man's historical heritage and external culture, between the calling upon man to set himself free in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and for example the division of labour, forces man to struggle against 'being leveled down and worn out by a social-technological mechanism'. This discrepancy, Simmel argues, is nowhere as profound as in the metropolis, where a type of individuality has emerged, whose psychological basis consists in the '*intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli' (Simmel 1950: 10). The contrast between the small town and rural life of earlier times and life in the metropolis consists in the intensified societal impression on the nerves 'with each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life' (ibid.). It is out of the individual dealing with this fundamental conflict that a prophylactic activity emerges, which illustrates how the diffuse pressure of modernity is matched by an equally super-individual, mechanistic psychological response. As Simmel argues, the metropolitan type of man 'exists in a thousand individual variants', but these variants act in a conformal manner by developing a protecting organ 'against the threatening currents and discrepancies' of the external environment. It is out of intellectual effort, which the creation of this organ demands of the individual that the phe-

nomenon of the 'blasé attitude' emerges as a result of 'the rapidly changing and closely compressed contrasting stimulations of the nerves' (Simmel 1950: 413). This psychological hardening of the will in the intellectual, metropolitan type is a good example of the assumption of a mechanistic response to the diffuse pressure of modernity that was widely accepted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a threat to the nervous energy of the individual.

The gradual democratization represented by the emergence of a culture of sensibility in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as this chapter has shown, made neurasthenia a pathology of everyday life to which virtually everyone was susceptible. In contrast to the traditions explored in the previous chapters, the nerves as a 'thing' in the body, constituted a democratic phenomenon, around which the concerns about the relation between society and the individual was structured. Oriented towards a neuropathic household, the prophylactic activity of the individual will had to balance the 'thing' in the body in response to both the inner individual and the outer social stimuli that threatened it with overstimulation. While this *oikos* was by no means reducible to the sphere of work, as the next section will illustrate, it here gained a generality that underlined its socioeconomic importance. As a reserve of energy, the nervous force also became representable in the analogy of labour power, as a resource to be harvested in the individual body.

### **3. The Human Motor: Nerves and Labour Power**

The actual conditions of someone who experienced the 'complete exhaustion of supreme nerve centres' is recorded in *The Autobiography of a Neurasthene* by Dr. Margaret A. Cleaves (Cleaves 1910: 5). The work, which was assessed by the *Boston Gossip of Latest Books* to be of great value, because of the author's indications to 'her nervously afflicted sisters' of better ways to live, is the biography of a physician, who knows from experience 'the worst of this condition without a pathology, but which evidences a definite pathological physiology.' Reflecting the household of the 'thing' in the body within the socioeconomic context of work, Cleaves' documentation of a get-away trip to Long Island represents very well the convergence of nervous energy and labour power. In the ancestral home of a patient, where she has settled to work, she experiences a nervous breakdown. Armed with books of

reference, data and papers, the intensity of her arrangement drains her of energy:

Every morning we rose early and immediately upon the completion of breakfast – by half past seven always – I began my labours. Hour after hour I toiled interested beyond words in what I was doing and unconscious of the fact that I was hour by hour exhausting my nerve centres (Cleaves 1910: 5).

Brought up with a stern sense of duty, which the narrator attributes to her Puritan ancestors, she will not give up work although she feels exhausted, until at some point she is stricken by terror at the sight of her own colourless and quivering hands. Only then does she realize that ‘the strange incomprehensible feeling of desolation and danger’ (Cleaves 1910: 60), which she is sensing, is a sign that she has been overwhelmed by *neurasthenia*. Wearily walking down to the boat and setting out across the sound to reach the main land, she reflects in a way reminding of the blasé attitude of the previous section:

All was beauty about me, everything was full of the joy of life, but I could not feel it. I knew it was all there, that everything was just the same, but I had neither part nor parcel in it. I was glad my work was done, simply because I could not strive any longer (Cleaves 1910: 61).

Back in the city and struggling with a profound sense of shame, she calls on one of her ‘neurological friends’, who sees her even in advance of other patients. He examines her and concludes that she has ‘sprained her brain’ and needs to see a different side of life (p. 63). Maintaining that she has followed his advice and learned from the incident on Long Island, she still only increases the intensity of her work, but does not tell her physician about it. As she says:

... I felt he would discourage me and I simply had to do it. The impelling force within me, which is always driving me at full speed, would not slow down. To me it is infinitely better to wear than to rust. Inactivity is stagnation. As I write these pages, I am living at top speed and white heat ... Still I know perfectly well now how far I dare go. I did not then. Even now I would not be awakening neuronal memory of pain, sleeplessness, mental anguish, impaired physical strength, if I had not a purpose in it ... (Cleaves 1910: 67).

Commenting that there is of course a loss in this mode of life, but that the ‘expenditure of precious nerve energy’ (Cleaves 1910: 68) is better spent

achieving something useful than merely regretting that it is lost, the anonymous physician of *The Autobiography of a Neurasthene* concludes: 'Work was and is second nature. It meant not only the means of living, but life, the power to do and to be.'

Cleaves' description of a nervous breakdown associated with the deficient regulation of the energies in the body, along with her description of work as a kind of nature comparable to *life* itself, provides a brilliant description of how neurasthenia became a democratic phenomenon within the context of work. Reflecting the combustibility of the black bile as a 'thing' in the body, here represented within a socioeconomic context, her description of a life at 'top speed and white heat' illustrates the precarious convergence of the neuropathic household of the individual and the notion of labour power which grew out of the transvaluation of work invigorated by the classical political economists and the enlightenment thinkers. Representing the universal notion of labour as a source of value to be gathered in the individual body, *labour power* became the object of widespread scientific studies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With it a growing interest in the negative effects of pathological fatigue focused on the depletion of the working body as a natural resource. The division and specialization of labour, which became more and more commonplace during European industrialization, for example, was listed by Beard as the primary reason for nervous illnesses among the working classes (Beard 1881: 101).

A pathological exhaustion specifically related to the development of the concept of labour as a resource to be found and yielded in the individual body is one of the main subjects in Anson Rabinbach's fascinating study *The Human Motor* (1992). Like Weichardt's announcement of a cure against fatigue with which this chapter began, the literature that Rabinbach's study examines, is concerned not only with the human body and the extent to which it can be productive, but also with the conservation of the energy reserves found in it and the threat of their depletion. Reflecting the mechanical framework that was explored in the previous section on Beard's concept of neurasthenia, Rabinbach examines the metaphor of the *human motor*, which came to provide a new overarching scientific and cultural framework to thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by conflating the human body and the industrial machine to one automata toiling to convert energy into me-

chanical work. As Rabinbach argues, it was the metaphor of the motor which enabled society to manage the energies of the working body in the attempt to harmonize them with those of the industrial machine (Rabinbach 1992: 2).

Whereas the sin of sloth and idleness growing out of the tradition of *acedia*, as already discussed above, constituted the earlier predominant moralistic mode of conceptualizing and dealing with resistance to labour, the industrial metaphors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century theories about work introduced the newer problem of mental and physical *fatigue* as an object of scrutiny, which emerged both as an obstacle to be overcome and as an omen of the ultimate decline and failure of civilization. Like neurasthenia (and to a large extent indistinguishable from it) the phenomenon of pathological fatigue, which came to dominate the discourses of political economy, medicine, physiology, psychology, and politics, also focused on the energy reserves of the individual body both in terms of constituting a natural threshold that preserved them from dissipating under the strains of modernity and in terms of pathological exhaustion. As Rabinbach reflects, fatigue was not only a negative property but could also be linked to the individual body's natural ability to resist the demands of productivism. The trope of fatigue:

... also represented the legitimate boundary of the individual's physiological and psychological forces beyond which the demands of society become illegitimate and destructive. Fatigue thus defined both the limits of the working body and the point beyond which society could not transgress without jeopardizing its own future capacity for labour (Rabinbach 1992: 23).

Although the tropes of neurasthenia and the tropes of pathological fatigue were often homonymous to the extent of inseparability, one aspect of difference is important. If the psychosomatic pattern of suffering implied in the conception of neurasthenia focused primarily on the overstimulation of the 'thing' in the body resulting in the pathological degeneration of the autonomous will, then the neuropathic household associated with the theories of pathological fatigue in the working body focused on the loss of natural resources. If neurasthenia had the impairment of the will as a key factor, the broader debate about pathological fatigue focused on the loss of productive abilities in a socioeconomic context.



Although the two tropes cannot be reduced to each other, the convergence between them in the notion of labour power is interesting because it illustrates how by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the assumption of an energy source associated with the individual management of a ‘thing’ in the body was not only generalized, but had also become unavoidable. As Rabinbach argues, the concept of labour power, which became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a dominant trope of the pervasive materialistic theories of the time, provided the analogy of the bank account, which Beard used to illustrate the stock of nervous energy in the body, with a gravity that he could not have given it himself. Corresponding on a socioeconomic level to the assumption of a relation between the nerves as a ‘thing’ in the body controlling volition and the exhaustion of neurasthenia, the dichotomy between labour power and fatigue came to be an indicator of the body’s unique capital (Rabinbach 1992: 6). As Rabinbach argues, the distinction between a creative act and alienated labour that had been appropriate to a preindustrial era, by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became superseded by the energeticist model of mechanical work, which made the work performed by humans, the gears of an engine, the motions of planets, in short society and nature virtually indistinguishable (Rabinbach 1992: 47). It was primarily the development of the notion of labour power, as the resource of the individual working body, which suggested an analogy between the human and the machine as motors converting energy into mechanical work. As what Rabinbach describes as a *transcendental materialism*, predicating a single power, which was viewed as the source of all motion and matter, labour power came to designate the manifest actualizations of the universal and yet invisible source of energy, when it was processed productively. It was under the auspice of this transcendental materialism that society, in Rabinbach’s words, became ‘assimilated to an image of nature powered by protean energy, perpetually renewed, indestructible, and infinitely malleable’ (Rabinbach 1992: 46). Reflecting Ribot’s assumption of the ideomotor transforming desire into will, the labour force of the working body as a resource related to this overarching trope of energy, constituted the primary site of conversion for the forces of nature, when they were transformed into productivity. It was on this background that the 19<sup>th</sup> century notion of fatigue, reflecting the precarious status of neurasthenia as both a prophylaxis against the de-

mands of society and a pathology of exhaustion, came to indicate a physical entropy of the individual body. Rather than constituting a sharp dichotomy between health and illness, fatigue came to designate the effects of a deficient management and regulation of the natural power in the individual working body. As such it came to signify both the simple effects of considerable work and the dystrophic exhaustion, which in the worst case could lead to mental illness. If the phenomenon of neurasthenia offered a relatively simple, mechanistic explanation to a diffuse multiplicity of symptoms associated with modern life and structured around the sensibility of the 'thing' in the body, then the potential depletion of labour power constituted also a potential socioeconomic crisis. As a democratized phenomenon, the culture of a sensibility, which had once been reserved to the extraordinary, emerged in terms of the moral problem of a will unable to provide a goal-oriented use of the body's most valuable asset, its labour power. Structured around the neuropathic household of the nerves, this problem came to have a horizon of its own.

The universal character of the assumption of labour power as the individual capital of the working body in the 19<sup>th</sup> century political debates can be illustrated by the curious example of Paul Lafargue's scandalous pamphlet *The Right To Be Lazy* (1880). Posited by Rabinbach as the most poignant objection of its time to the new productivist metaphor of labour power (Rabinbach 1992: 34), this infamous text constitutes a brilliant example of the elevation of the concept of energy to be the basis and source of all reality. It illustrates how, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the debates about labour power, an outside to the assumption of the body as a reservoir of energy to be managed intelligently by the individual was no longer representable. Lafargue's assertion of the right of the proletariat to *idleness*, which used to be a sin, illustrates how the problem of the neuropathic household related to the 'thing' in the body had transcended the context of pathology to be subsumed under a general problematization of the right to labour power.

To the embarrassment of his father-in-law, Karl Marx, Lafargue's essay begins with a mockery of the famous 'spectre' in *The Communist Manifest* (1848): 'A strange delusion possesses the working classes of the nations where capitalist civilization holds it sway.' (Lafargue 1907: 9). This delu-

sion, Lafargue holds, 'is the love of work, the furious passion for work, pushed even to the exhaustion of the vital force of the individual and his progeny' (ibid.). With this indication of a convergence of the individual's life force and his labour power, Lafargue goes on to complain about 'the sacred halo' that economists and moralists have cast over work and declares that 'work is the cause of all intellectual degeneracy, of all organic deformity.' (ibid.) Even Jesus, Lafargue maintains, preached idleness and the great Jehovah himself is the best example of the ideal of laziness: 'after six days of work, he rests for eternity.' (ibid.)

Sadly, even the proletariat follows the 'disastrous dogma' of work, thereby 'betraying its instincts, despising its historic mission'. It is on this background that the working classes must free themselves from the yoke of productivism and oppose the 'most terrible scourge that has ever struck humanity' (Lafargue 1907: 29f.). By destroying the doctrine of idleness as a sin, it must come to recognize that its real freedom lies in *preserving* the energy of the working body, rather than taking over the means of its conversion:

But to arrive at the realization of its strength the proletariat must trample under foot the prejudices of Christian ethics, economic ethics and free-thought ethics. It must return to its natural instincts, it must proclaim The Rights to Laziness, a thousand times more noble and more sacred than the anaemic Rights of Man concocted by the metaphysical lawyers of the bourgeois revolution. It must accustom itself to working but three hours a day, reserving the rest of the day and night for leisure and feasting (Lafargue 1907: 29).

Rabinbach may be right in asserting that Lafargue's essay is no more than a naïve anachronism, with its obversive idealization of the virtues of idleness and idyll of a working class dedicated to consumption and luxury (Rabinbach 1992: 35). But while the assumption of a 'Right to Laziness' serving the natural instincts of the working body may be said to be naïve, Lafargue's antinomy of work and idleness also illustrates how dominating the trope of energy had become in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a part of the *social conflict* structuring society in different classes, the infamy of Lafargue's elevation of idleness to a virtue instead of a sin shows how little room there was for an alternative conception of man within the all-encompassing horizon of productivism. Lafargue's doctrine of laziness, exactly *because* of its persisting

infamy to work ethics, provides a very good example of how the assumption of a protean energy resource structured around a 'thing' in the body became a crucial piece in the understanding of society as defined by a political conflict between class interests.

#### **4. The Mechanics of Melancholy: Freud and Neurasthenia**

It may seem like an odd idea to read Sigmund Freud and especially his short essay "Mourning and Melancholia" from 1917, which will be the primary topic in the following, within the context of the framework that has been presented in the previous sections. There is no doubt that Freud's work is found on the limit of the tradition of the nerves, representing a waning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century obsession with the protean energies of the body, and signalling also the dawning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of a tradition more concerned with the opaque realms of the human unconscious. Known as the father of psychoanalysis, Freud himself represents the inauguration of a whole new way to articulate and understand the inside of man.

Yet for exactly that reason it may be interesting to look at how his work reflects the social, medical and epistemological norms structured around the nerves, which have been explored above. Like many of his contemporaries, Freud cast his model of man in energeticist terms, transposing the notion of protean energy to the dark realms of the human unconscious and ascribing pathological states to fluctuations in or diversions of the *perpetuum mobile* of the drives.

This model is a close to perfect reflection of the conflictual relation between the individual and the social modernity explored above, but if the conflict of the sensitive individual with the world it inhabited was constituted as a dichotomy between an inside and an outside, the Freudian subject represents an *internalization* of the conflict. The Freudian subject, like the *socius* it grows out of, is structured and held together by conflict. Transposing the externality of diffuse pressure on the nervous system to a conflict between hierarchies of the psyche, Freud describes a subject in whom the splitting of the self constitutes the unity of the person. Like the theories of evolution planted the beast, which had used to represent an absolute outside, *within* man as a source of origin, Freud integrated an animalistic part – *das es* – into civilization - *das Über-ich*. The two extremes

were then asserted to constitute the extreme parts of the model personality of the individual.

Represented as a discontent with civilization, the frustration caused by the experience of the conflict between the two extreme sides of the psyche, according to Freud, could become so strenuous that it became pathological, causing neurotic psychosis. It was the *sense of guilt* which presented itself to the *ego*, pinned down between civilization and its discontents, which exhausted the individual of nervous energies. Pathology, in this Freudian sense, was not qualitatively different from the problems associated with an everyday bourgeois life, but represented instead a *deepening* of an existential condition that lead to nervous exhaustion. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), although the work never directly defines the nature of the “discontent” that it addresses, Freud speaks of the *anxiety neurosis* developing in those who are for some reason unable to recognize their guilt for what it is and deal with it (Freud 1946: 495). The anxiety neurosis results directly from the failure to recognize the conscience of guilt produced by the process of civilization, when it surfaces as a general feeling of discontent or diffuse discomfort, for which other causes are articulated (i.e. compulsory neurosis) (Freud 1946: *ibid.*). Presented within the context of the question about how civilization – on the level of the Freudian psyche represented as *das Über-ich* – renders harmless the aggression which is directed against it by *das Es*, the anxiety neurosis represents the eruption of pathology in the individual, when the conflict between self and self becomes so profound that the ‘I’ begins to come apart. Reflecting the physiological assumption presented above of a moral *ideomotor* in Ribot’s *Maladies of the Will*, which could be rendered dysfunctional by neurasthenic exhaustion, the constant pressure of the moral law, which separates the Freudian ‘I’ from the dark recesses of its unconscious animalistic drives, can become so severe that it leads to nervous disorders.

Freud’s psychoanalysis – referred to by himself as his ‘cathartic method’ – must be seen on this background. Its task is not to remove the conflict between the sense of morality and the drives altogether, but merely to restore the reflexive subject to a state in which it is able to handle the conflict on its own. In an essay discussing “The Psychotherapy of Hysteria” from 1912,

therapy is explained as a method to restore the nervous system to a less agitated state, enabling the hysteric patient to help herself:

When I promised my patients help and relief through the cathartic method, I was often obliged to hear the following objections: "You say, yourself, that my suffering has probably to do with my own relation and destinies. You cannot change any of that. In what manner, then, can you help me?" To this I could always answer: "I do not doubt at all that it would be easier for destiny than for me to remove your sufferings, but you will be convinced that much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into everyday unhappiness, against which you will be better able to defend yourself with a restored nervous system (Freud 1912: 120).

The primary task of the psychoanalytic method is not to heal, but to transform the hyperbole of *hysterical misery*, found in the anxiety neurosis – and as we shall see in Freud's definition of melancholia – to a level of *everyday unhappiness*, where the patient, with the help of a restored nervous system, can take care of the self by themselves. In the tradition of existential thought found in Kierkegaard and later in Heidegger, the assertion of *anxiety* as a mechanism through which selves reflexively turn back on their own boundaries, the Freudian assertion of the emotional hyperbole of hysterical misery in this sense represents a pathological inhibition of the will. Associating the boundaries of selfhood with both the exhausting overstimulation of the nerves and with the inability of the will to react to stimuli, Freud's subject represents an immanent version of the neuropathic household described above, structured around the same assumptions of a protean energy in the body. Pathology here emerges not as an *outside*, the other side of health, but rather as the eruption of an antinomy *immanent* to health, associated with the ability of the subject to manage the self correctly. Emblematic of the tradition described in the more materialistic terms associated with neurasthenia, this assertion of a *pathology of everyday life* culminates in the Freudian assumption of the neurosis as a *deepening* of an everyday pathos, with which the subject exists as a fundamental condition. The pathological state, which Freud associates with the exhaustion of the nervous system, is not qualitatively different from what defines the subject as such; rather it is the deepening of the conflict, which at the same time structures the subject, which is pathological.

Associating this pathological deepening with the conditions of a subject who suffers under and struggles with loss, Freud's 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia" can be read in this light. The Freudian melancholic, in analogy to the neurasthenic's exhaustion, is someone in whom overstimulation has caused a pathological inhibition of the will that as such is no longer able to perform its duties. Characterizing someone who *knows* that he has lost, but unlike the person in mourning fails to see *what* he has lost there, the Freudian melancholic is defined in terms of his inaccessibility to himself and to others. As it will be illustrated, this implicates two important aspects to the theme explored in this thesis: first, the Freudian melancholic is characterized as someone in whom the internalization of the conflict explored above has led to an inhibition of the will. Secondly, and important because it emblematically points away from the materialistic tradition of the nerves, this inhibition is associated with the inability of the self to *differentiate* and reinvent itself at its own limits. While the first of the two aspects, as explained above, constituted a central characteristic of the problematization of the neuropathic household, the second was only tentatively present here. Pointing deep into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, the definition of the melancholic as someone dejected by the inability to differentiate the self through reflective activity marks a threshold between the functional pathology of neurasthenia and the contemporary assumption of depression as a pathology problematizing the ability to be and become a self. Freud's essay points towards contemporary conceptualizations of depression as a phenomenon concerned with a societal demand to be and become an entrepreneurial self.

"Mourning and Melancholia" has gone largely unchallenged in psychoanalytic accounts of melancholy and depression (Radden 2000a: 282), despite the fact that it breaks nearly completely with the historical associations of melancholy. But because of its introduction and development of such key psychoanalytic concepts as projective identification and introjection it is considered by many to be one of Freud's masterpieces. The essay, as Radden points out (Radden 2000b: 282), is concerned with three aspects that it associates with melancholia in ways that distinguish it from the earlier writings on the subject: the theme of loss, the strong emphasis on self-accusation in the melancholic subjectivity and the elaborate theory of nar-

cissism, identification and introjection that it introduces. Especially the last of these three aspects provides an important theme in later psychoanalytic theory on the nature of depression, for example in the works of Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva (e.g. Kristeva 1989, Klein 1975). As the following is more concerned with the affinities of the Freudian theory to the traditions explored in this thesis, it will primarily engage with the implications of the first two aspects of loss and self-accusation.

Freud commences “Mourning and Melancholia” arguing for a correlation between the two conditions, which he finds justified by their general picture. Comparing the emotional states associated with grief to the symptoms of melancholia, he maintains that melancholia consists in:

... a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment (Freud 1917: 283).

Except for the last of the symptoms, which will be explored in more detail later, Freud makes no qualitative distinction between mourning and melancholia; rather the central characteristic of the mourning position provides him with an explanatory perspective on melancholia. Mourning, Freud maintains, ‘is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on.’ (Freud 1917: 283) Although a tradition of amatory mania exists in the literature presented above that might reflect this association of the melancholic sentiment with the feeling of *loss* found in mourning, the Freudian approximation of the two conditions remains surprising. The dominant reaction to frustrated love in Antiquity was violence, while the romantic notion of lovesickness and its literary depictions during Romanticism seems to have represented a whole other phenomenon altogether (e.g. Toohey 2004, Mohr 1990). Yet Freud not only insists on the association, he also maintains that mourning and melancholia share on an etiological level the problem of object-loss as a defining characteristic. Coming to speak of this problem in the dynamic terms of the libido, which reflects the tropes of energy associated with the neuropathic household explored in the previous chapters, he describes the struggle with the loss of at-



tachment and how this may result in a condition, the intensity of which may come to resemble psychosis:

The testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to this object. Against this demand a struggle of course arises – it may be universally observed that man never willingly abandons a libido-position, not even when a substitute is already beckoning to him. This struggle can be so intense that a turning away from reality ensues, the object being clung to through the medium of a hallucinatory wish-psychosis (Freud 1917: 284).

The loss of an object of great personal importance, according to Freud, can be so traumatic that it leads the subject into a *wish-psychosis* that it takes time to resolve, while the beloved object is preserved in memory. The process that accompanies the libidinal attachment of the drives to the lost object is painful, but as long as the ego once again ‘becomes free and uninhibited’ (Freud 1917: 284) through the work of mourning, it is not pathological.

The psychical pain that accompanies melancholia, Freud maintains, is not qualitatively different from the one found in mourning. What sets the melancholic position apart from the mourning position is the symptom of self-loathing and the expectation of punishment mentioned above. Associated with the mourning process that consists in the painful realization of a loss, the melancholic patient who shares this pain, as Freud argues, may be aware *that* he has lost and even *of whom* he has lost. But he is tragically unaware of *what* he has lost there:

In grief the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and chastised. He abases himself before everyone and commiserates his relatives for being connected with someone so unworthy. He does not realize that any change has taken place in him, but extends his self-criticism back over the past and declares that he was never any better (Freud 1917: 285).

While the analogy between mourning and melancholia associates the pattern of suffering with the loss of an object, the distinguishing feature in melancholia, according to Freud, is the replacement of the object with the ego, which the melancholic presents as hopelessly despicable and unalterable. The conflictuality of the pair *Es/Über-Ich* in melancholia represents the inhibition of a will which has turned on itself. The *complaint* (“*Klage*”)

associated with the healthy and self-differentiating process of mourning is transformed by an excessive emotional response into the *accusation* (“*Anklage*”) of the self against the self. The melancholic suffers under the internalization of the lost object, the loss of which he substitutes for his own self. As a pathological process of objectification, this mechanism by Freud is asserted to be the problem of a conscience, which distinguishes itself from the rest of the ego:

We see how in this condition one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, looks upon it as an object. Our suspicion that the critical institution of the mind which here is split off from the ego might also demonstrate its independence in other circumstances will be confirmed by all further observations. We shall really find justification for distinguishing this institution from the rest of the ego. It is the mental faculty called conscience that we are thus recognizing (Freud 1917: 286).

It is the assertion of melancholia primarily as *a pathology of the conscience*, which is interesting here. The Freudian reflection of the exhausting conflict structuring the subject susceptible to neurasthenia represents an internalization of the neuropathic household. But the assumption of this inner conflict in Freud’s work has broader implications. The aggressive expectation of punishment found by Freud to be a matter associated with the melancholic conscience not only causes the exhaustion of the nervous energies, representing both an inability to participate in the socioeconomic development of society and a personal bankruptcy. It also associates the pathological deepening of the emotional apparatus with the *inability of the self to become a self* through the self-articulation in the process of mourning. Representing the melancholic inability to self-differentiate as *a pathology of self-hood*, Freud’s essay points out of the materialistic tradition of the nerves, towards the contemporary assumptions of depression as a functional disorder associated with the exhaustion caused by the demands to be and articulate the self in the socioeconomic terms of new management technologies.

## 5. The Pathologies of Performativity: Neurasthenia

Another return to the systematic perspective constituted by the six dimensions of problem and response, within which also the problematizations of melancholy and *acedia* has been represented, will illustrate that the pathology of neurasthenia, and the tropes associated with it, although it is clear from the sections above that it has a framework of its own, in some respects bear strong similarities to what has been explored in the previous chapters. Beyond the symptomatological consistencies between the three pathologies of performativity, this is especially true for the affinity between *acedia* and *neurasthenia* as phenomena associated with sociality as *civilization*. In both the case of *acedia* and the shift implicated by Hobbes' notion of melancholy and in the case of neurasthenia, the idea that civilization bred self-inflicted sickness has been illustrated to be of emphatic importance. Yet the designation of such an affinity covers over a much more categorical differ-

<b>TABLE 4</b> <b>Problematical Formations</b>	<b>MELANCHOLIA</b>	<b>ACEDIA</b>	<b>NEURASTHENIA</b>
<b>Pathological Problem</b>	MANIC-MELANCHOLIA CIRCULAR ANTINOMY	DESPAIR BINARY ANTINOMY	EXHAUSTION ERUPTION OF IMMANENT ANTINOMY
<b>Characterological Problem</b>	THE EXTRAORDINARY	THE REJECTED	THE SENSITIVE
<b>Delimitative Problem</b>	PERIPHERY	OUTSIDE	INSIDE
<b>Self-Regulatory Response</b>	DIETETICS	VIRTUOUS LIVING	NEUROPATHIC HOUSEHOLD
<b>Performative Response</b>	ACHIEVEMENT	WORK AS VIRTUE	WORK AS SECOND NATURE
<b>Self-Articulatory Response</b>	SELF-TRANSGRESSION SUBLIMATION	CONTROLLING AFFECT ABSTINENT SUBLIMATION	RESOURCE ADMINISTRATION PSYCHOANALYTIC SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

ence, which is of great value to the following explication: if *acedia* was an affliction concerned with the *lack* of civilization, then neurasthenia rather represented its opposite, an illness primarily associated with *too much* civilization. The neurasthenic, and the tropes associated with his pathographic profile, as the sections above have illustrated, concerned the challenges of modernity to the autonomy of the individual. Not rejecting, but focusing instead on the need to refine the process of civilization in order to ensure that the individual would not succumb under its pressure, the tropes structured around neurasthenia were concerned with ensuring the lightness of being rather than the virtuous burden of existence associated with *acedia*. While this focus on the individual hints at another affinity, that between the sensitive artist and the culturally formative Aristotelian melancholic, the assertion of such a likeness also covers over a more important disparity: although the culture of nervousness, which mapped maladies of behaviour and affect onto the nerves as a 'thing' in the body, found its sources on the stage of affluent and fashionable society, neurasthenia was more concerned with *normalization* than with the *originalization* of the exceptional. Representing the beginning *democratization* of the sensitivity that had used to be reserved to the extraordinary, the tropes of neurasthenia explored above concerned the laborious, rather than the culturally formative, the *entrepreneur* rather than the *genius*. If the paradoxical nature of the *ēthos perriton* both allowed his genius and made him susceptible to the diseases of the black bile, then *work as second nature* was both the democratic gateway to success for the struggler, and the threshold beyond which the depletion of the definite and not inexhaustible quantities of energy resources in the body became irredeemable. Continuing the symbolic assertion of a line of sight emblematic for the characters represented within the different problematizations, the potential neurasthenic may be understood as a *custodian*. If the *theoros* of melancholy represented the emergence of the peripheral spectator and the *martyr* the witness of personal sacrifice in the *theocosmos*, then the custodian as a guardian or keeper (from the latin *custodis*) who *watched over* a personal stock of resource may be the best way to represent the character who had to navigate between a neurological and a socio-economic reality.

The language that mediated between these two realities was the language of EXHAUSTION (see TABLE 4). Representing the primary trope of the *pathological problem* explored in this chapter, the depletion of a personal reservoir of energy structured around the nervous system was constituted in a fashion that owed much to the Brunonian division of pathology into two categories: respectively the excess of stimulation and the incapacity to react to stimulus. The depletion of the nerve force through excessive demands, according to Beard's medical model, would cause irritation and send exhaustion pulsing through the body, manifesting symptoms in the most unlikely places and fashions. This process itself caused a weakening of the individual will, causing disorders on another level that were reducible to the social imaginaries of the lower classes: degeneration, poverty and moral blemish being some of them. Representing a kind of *physiological bankruptcy*, the pathological problem, rather than describing the circular antinomy of the manic-melancholic or the binary antinomy of the despairing accidiosi, in this sense represented an IMMANENT ANTINOMY to the will itself, erupting primarily as the pathological lack of *Kraft*, which caused a protean variety of other secondary symptoms stretching from anxiety over fear of lightning to impotence or extreme fatigue. Variations of this pathological problem were found in three emblematic contexts: that of the neuro-mechanical impairment of the will associated with hypersensitivity to the phenomena of the modern world, that of labour power which could be exhausted as a result of the excessive spending of the personal capital, and that of the Freudian economy of the drives, the deficient control of which could lead to the hysterical misery of the anxiety neurosis.

The representation of a *characterological problem* of the problematization of neurasthenia can be seen on this background. Constituting the problem of THE SENSITIVE within the modern world of impressions, the *democratized sensibility to impressions* of the character, which was pivotal point in the sections above, represented a nexus of conversion between nature's raw material and the culturally refined. Both in the literal sense as a *human motor* and in the figurative sense of Ribot's ideomotor transforming desire into will that influenced Freud, the characterological problem was that of one whose function as a *perpetuum mobile* installed as an intermediate link between nature and culture might blot out any individual characteristics

and threaten to erase the human. The sensitive character represented here in this sense also functioned as a *seismograph of the social*, whose individual autonomy and private existence was constantly under siege. An emblematic example of this was Simmel's notion of the prophylactic *blasé attitude* of those whose nerves were torn and tattered, because they had been exposed to life in the big city too long. The internalization of conflict in the split subject of Freud's psychic apparatus, whose exposure to the exhausted nervous system resulted from the excessive strain between the natural desires of the Id and the 'civilizing' process of the super-ego, illustrated that the characterological problem associated with *neurasthenia* was one that had to be managed successfully in order at all to become a 'self'.

The conflict associated with the difficult task of becoming and maintaining a 'self' in the social context was also what designated the dimension of the *delimitative problem* of the problematization presented in the sections above. If the threshold between collective and individual in the problematization of melancholy was found at the ever-transforming peripheries of both, and in the problematization of *acedia* as the precarious eruption of the other of the social within it, then the delimitation of the neurasthenic individual erupted as a threshold on the INSIDE of the social itself, beyond which its demands were illegitimate and from where, in the worst case, the subject could not return on its own. This complicated problem of delimitation may best be understood by thinking about the difference between the *anomaly* of the melancholic and the *abnormality* of the neurasthenic. What defined the first was primarily his peculiarity as an exception from the rule. The abnormality of the neurasthenic, on the other hand, was not primarily representable as strange, unique or unusual; rather it constituted a deviation from the norm, which in its turn had nothing natural about it, but was always somehow retrospectively determined as a virtual community. As Sverre Raffnsøe has pointed out (2001: 132-141), the *norm* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not representable as a fixed moral framework beyond the common, which one had to conform to. It took the form rather of an *enclitic common goal* that was only determinable through the ceaseless evaluation of practice. An emblematic example of this indiscernibility between the abnormal and the norm was found in the Freudian (in)distinction between the process of mourning and the condition of melancholia, from which the sub-

ject needed help to return. As the eruption of a disorder immanent to the 'normal' and healthy process of mourning, the condition of melancholia represented the nervous and *hysterical misery*, which had to be returned to a state of *everyday unhappiness* in order to be regulated properly on an individual level. As a representation of the difficulty associated with maintaining a healthy 'self' capable of projecting the will within the social context, the neurasthenic individual emerged as the deepening of an always already constituted conflict with the collective, an immanent pathological manifestation of everyday life, which was only determinable over time.

As the first of the three dimensions of response, the *self-regulatory response* represented within the context of the problematization of neurasthenia was constituted as the task of a NEUROPATHIC HOUSEHOLD. Reflecting the task of maintaining a 'self' on the threshold between nature and culture, which functioned as a nexus of conversion of a naturally given, but definite and exhaustible protean source of energy, the self-regulatory response represented above was explored as a *prophylactic activity* structured around the nerves as a 'thing' in the body in three privileged dimensions. Firstly, as a regulation of the moral will to civilization, which functioned as a bulwark against the self-destructive and confusing anti-thesis constituted by desire as affective life's more primitive form. Emblematically illustrated by Ribot's mechanistic assertion of the *ideomotor*, this dimension represented the will as a dynamo transforming the 'raw material' of affects into civilized volitions being projected into a socioeconomic reality. Secondly, the regulation of labour power as a personal capital in the working body constituted the transformation of natural resources into productivity and value. Owing much to an analogous association of the human body with the steam engine and drawing on the theory of both the first and the second law of thermodynamics, the regulation of labour power as a source of value to be gathered in the individual body was constantly hampered by the threat of fatigue, representing the depletion of resources which also constituted a socioeconomic crisis. Thirdly, and finally, the Freudian economy of the drives represented by the internalization of a similar model in the psychic apparatus saw self-regulation becoming an issue of the conscience, which had to control the ceaseless strain that the ego was under in the conflict between the super-ego and the id. This psychodynamic regulation associated the deple-

tion of nervous resources with the anxiety neurosis, which over time would make it harder and harder for the afflicted to regulate and manipulate the 'self' and guarantee its projection into the public sphere.

These three levels of regulation all reflect the *self-articulatory response* of the problematization explored above. Describable as the RESOURCE ADMINISTRATION of the character who had to regulate and project the different manifestations of a protean source of energy from a neurological and into a socioeconomic reality, the mode of self-articulation found here assigned to the individual the task of a ceaseless mediation between the unrefined and the refined, between nature and culture. The most emblematic illustrations of this neuropathic household was beyond doubt found in Beard's likening of the nervous system to a bank account, with which he sought to demonstrate how nervous energy could both be wisely invested in the future, spent prudently or splashed out recklessly, and in his likening of it to an electrical circuit that could only take so much pressure without failing. But in terms of the self-articulatory response these illustrations, which are concerned with watching over the precious nervous resources, all have to be seen in combination with the injunction to projection that likened man to a dynamo, a vehicle of ceaseless alteration of the protean energies that circulated in him. The crisis of an inhibited will or of the inability to self-differentiate, which set the Freudian melancholic apart from his peers, designated the real antinomy to the articulation of the 'self' as the entrepreneurial locus of activity. The mode of PSYCHOANALYTIC SELF-DIFFERENTIATION which associated the ability to redefine, reinvent and reevaluate the past in terms of the future constituted an important aspect of the articulation of a 'self', to which, as the anonymous physician of *The Autobiography of a Neurasthene* commented, inactivity was stagnation and to wear infinitely better than to rust. In this sense neurasthenia and the associated articulation of an entrepreneurial 'self' was always closely related to the all-encompassing assertion of labour as the democratic arena of the aspiring businessman.

The democratization of the possibility for achievement asserted by this assumption of WORK AS A SECOND NATURE was what governed the *performative response* of the problematization explored above. The example of Lafargue's reinvention of idleness, no longer as a sin, but instead as a weapon



in the struggle between the classes, illustrated how by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century labour itself had attained a new and central role in a society where the conflict of the social constituted the unity of the community. No longer associated with the culturally formative achievements of the extraordinary, with the hardships of the ascetic, or even with the virtue of work as a goal in itself, performativity here had become completely subsumed under the notion of labour power that no longer seemed to have an outside to it. Labour and the tropes of achievement associated with it became the democratic arena on which everyone could attain the status of an *achiever* and potentially come to display individual independency.



# Chapter Five

## Conclusion: Aspects of Melancholia

1. A Recapitulation of Historical Dimensions
2. Stress and the Popularization of the Extraordinary
3. Depression and the Articulation of the Self
4. Depression and Subjectivity as a Resource

As indicated in the first chapter, the primary task of this thesis was the constitution of three problematic formations pertaining to the association between pathology and performativity (in the melancholia of Antiquity, in medieval *acedia* and in the neurasthenia of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialism) with the intent of creating a philosophical background for the exploration of such an association in the present age. With the conclusion of the previous chapter, the bulk of this work has now been completed. As three, very diverse formations that represent problematizations structured around a 'thing' in the body, the pathologies of performativity explored in the chapters above have been shown to constitute a tradition that ties into the history of the association between the heterogeneous tropes of work, performance and pathology in Western culture. Yet, while these explorations each can be said to represent precarious instantiations that describe the plight of the individual at different times in history, the task of indicating how they can inform a philosophical investigation of the present remains. Reflecting Adorno's formulation in *Minima Moralia*, such an endeavour itself can be described as a *melancholy science*, hesitant and evasive in its attempt to subject modern life to critical reflection without becoming enmeshed in the dangers of maintaining a critical perspective on society from within society. Coming to know the truth about life in its estranged form, as Adorno has it, means to investigate 'the objective powers that determine individual existence even in its most hidden recesses' (Adorno 2005: 15). The following recapitulation and indication of fields for further study may be said to reflect this relation between life and production referred to by Adorno, in which the former to a certain extent is reduced to the latter.

But even on this background the history of the three problematic formations explored in this thesis cannot be represented as one of decline. Not only the inconclusiveness of its character, but also on a more profound level its fundamental indication of how life has always somehow been estranged prevents this. An indication of how the tradition of an association between performance and pathology can inform the present is not gained by combining the three formations and claiming that this combination constitutes the emergence of the contemporary society. The complex job of illustrating the relevance of what has been unfolded in the chapters above to an investigation of the present consists not in reduction, but in the task of keeping the formations apart and in insisting on the enduring relevance of their peculiarities and diverse character, while seeking to subtract from them themes of interest that can assist a critical understanding of the social today. On that note, what follows in this concluding chapter is neither a complete and methodical exhaustion of the themes introduced and discussed in the previous chapters. Nor is it reducible to a *fourth* formation exclusive to the present, which replaces and crowns the historical dimensions explored above. Instead of pertaining to the sublation of the past into the present 'age', the critical perspective of the following will be gained by exposing the '*untimeliness of times* in the present' (Kristensen 2008) in a search for contemporary tendencies loaded with aspects of the history explored above. The 'melancholy science' of the following reflections attempts to indicate a level for critique of contemporary society; but it does this also by demonstrating (in good, melancholic style) the eccentricity of the present. Pertaining to an opening, rather than to closing down, the task of this informative level is to indicate areas for further investigation which are beyond the scope of this thesis.

### **1. A Recapitulation of the Historical Dimensions**

The explorations of the dimensions of problem and response constituted by the problematic formations of the melancholia of Antiquity, by medieval *acedia* and by 19<sup>th</sup> century neurasthenia may be arranged in TABLE 5, which constitutes an overview of the historical findings of the thesis illustrated within the context of the systematical framework developed in chapter one.

Before continuing with the broader based reflections on how these dimensions may inform a philosophical inquiry into the contemporary association between pathology and performativity, a short recapitulation of the ‘cosmologies’ is in place.

<b>TABLE 5</b> <b>Problematical Formations</b>	<b>MELANCHOLIA</b>	<b>ACEDIA</b>	<b>NEURASTHENIA</b>
<b>Pathological Problem</b>	MANIC-MELANCHOLIA CIRCULAR ANTINOMY	DESPAIR BINARY ANTINOMY	EXHAUSTION ERUPTION OF IMMANENT ANTINOMY
<b>Characterological Problem</b>	THE EXTRAORDINARY	THE REJECTED	THE SENSITIVE
<b>Delimitative Problem</b>	PERIPHERY	OUTSIDE	INSIDE
<b>Self-Regulatory Response</b>	DIETETICS	VIRTUOUS LIVING	NEUROPATHIC HOUSEHOLD
<b>Performative Response</b>	ACHIEVEMENT	WORK AS VIRTUE	WORK AS SECOND NATURE
<b>Self-Articulatory Response</b>	SELF-TRANSGRESSION SUBLIMATION	CONTROLLING AFFECT ABSTINENT SUBLIMATION	RESOURCE ADMINISTRATION PSYCHOANALYTIC SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

The DIETETICS of THE EXTRAORDINARY melancholic of Antiquity, structured around the black bile, was organized in a CIRCULAR ANTINOMY relating states of exaltation and states of dejection with each other. As the assumption of a paradoxical nature found in the outstanding and culturally formative of character, whose disposition found them always at the PERIPHERY of the collective order they pertained to, the *eucrasia anomalia* – the well-balanced diversity of melancholy – constituted the precarious ‘great health’ of SELF-TRANSGRESSION, which in time came to be the mark of genius. Modelled as an aporetic and erotic figure of sublimation that designated the

task of self-regulation between the hyperboles of affect, this paradoxical nature took as its base the assumption of a negative, which could be transformed into positive and creative ACHIEVEMENT. The black bile of the melancholic *ēthos* in this sense was attributed a fundamental, exasperated inclination to *ēros* ensuing from temperature as the mechanism that unhinged the moral equilibrium, to which normality was bound. As an ambiguous object of love-hate, to which the exalted states associated with both madness and geniality were connected, the 'thing' in the body of the extraordinary melancholic emerged as the nexus of dynamic self-manipulation for those to whom the ordinary 'middle' of the Aristotelian ethics were unobtainable. The sinister consequences that this nature, constituted by the aporetic conflict itself, might have for the individual, were redeemed only by the indissoluble promise, which the doctrine of geniality held for those who found it in themselves to manage and regulate their disposition towards an ever inaccessible *telos* beyond even the confines of *ēthos*, of their 'right character'. This self-devouring pathos of melancholy, as the potentially pathological takes the form of the healthy, and becomes a paradoxical prerequisite for great achievement, contains a figure, which by all means, I will argue in the following, is with us today – albeit in a very different form.

Although it shared with this classic notion of melancholy symptoms of severe depression, the DESPAIR of *acedia* – the name given by the church fathers to affliction also known as the noon-day demon – was of a very different character. The BINARY ANTINOMY of this pathology, structured around the assumption of demonical possession and associated with the death of the soul induced by the deficits of VIRTUOUS LIVING within the conceptual framework of vice and virtue in the *theocosmos*, designated the topology of THE REJECTED, whose privation of affect constituted a flight from the richness of spiritual possibilities of man placed before God. Emerging as a fall from the world of the living, *acedia* was the mortal evil of those who found themselves suddenly on the OUTSIDE of the social reality to which they belonged. The ambiguous negative value of *acedia* in this sense was not related to achievement in the manner found in melancholy, but took instead WORK AS VIRTUE as the therapeutic answer to the desperation implied by the

horrified flight from that which one could not evade in any way. The performativity of the religious men, which evolved into a the more generalized struggle with sloth, took the form of CONTROLLING AFFECT, as it was subjected to the context of the *sociocosmos* in the guise of melancholy as a social pathology. But to both *acedia* and the later Hobbesian melancholic, the monstrous eruption in the body of a ‘thing’ that threatened to spiral out of control because of hyperbolic affect, the withdrawal from divine destiny or simply from the virtue of ABSTINENT SUBLIMATION did not mean that the afflicted simply forgot the proper categories of a virtuous life; rather the fundamental indistinctness of the phenomenon was found in ambiguous relation of despair to the desire to take part itself. This ambiguity was what set the phenomenon apart from the laziness implied by the concept of sloth as the affliction of someone answering to a goal, which revealed itself only in the act by which it was also rendered unobtainable. The reversal of the process of frightful and vertiginous negation implied by *acedia* was not a matter of lack of salvation – as the opportunity for that showed itself painstakingly and relentlessly – but that instead of finding a way to eclipse the desire which knew itself to be in despair. As the ‘despair which knows itself to be despair, aware therefore of having an ego in which something eternal resides, and now despairingly wishes not to be itself, or despairingly to be itself’ in the words of Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard 2008: 162, my translation), *acedia* as a pathology of performativity designated the mortal malady of man placed always already in a social reality.

The affliction also of the individual placed in the middle of a social reality, neurasthenia like *acedia* was concerned with civilization and its antinomies. But if *acedia* was the pathology of the one whose inability to regulate the self constituted the lack of civilization so lethally symbolized by monstrous eruption, then the EXHAUSTION of THE SENSITIVE, who failed to observe the physiological laws of his NEUROPATHIC HOUSEHOLD, resulted from too much civilization, from the pressure associated with the modern lifestyle of the ambitious businessman, whose shattered nerves affected his ability to transform desire into volition. In this sense the abnormality of the neurasthenic erupted on the INSIDE of the social as an IMMANENT ANTINOMY designating the failure of agency. As a ‘thing’ in the body, the nerves marked an indeterminate border between the pathological state of the will

and an agitated social body, which ceaselessly threatened to crush the individual autonomy. Weaved into the fabric of a socioeconomic reality, the task of the democratic man, whose fibres were perpetually strained, was the RESOURCE ADMINISTRATION that worked to transform the culturally imaginaries of protean energies into productivity. The excessive build-up and discharge of energies in the body borrowed from energy physics, which was attributed to be the cause of a diffuse host of mental and physiological symptoms stretching from depression to palpitations and impotence, was widely represented in the tropes of investment and possible bankruptcy. Thus the language of the nerves was also the language of the aspiring and entrepreneurial businessman, designating a democratized trope of performativity, by which potentially everyone through hard work could attain the affluence and glory that had used once to belong to the fashionable upper classes of society, and earlier yet to the geniuses, who had it in their nature to achieve great things. Bound indissolubly to the tropes of labour and to the assumption of WORK AS SECOND NATURE, the depletion of nerve force through excessive demands was the affliction of the burgeoning economies bursting with social mobility, dynamic entrepreneurs and ambitious achievers, who acted as an intermediate link for the protean, natural resource as it was turned into culture and volition in the environment of high-tension and non-stop tempo of life that the American civilization prided itself of. The language of the nerves, unlike that of the black bile and that of the demon in the body in each their fashion, was not the language of the exceptional, but that of the general public whose aspiring hopes for a good life might be crushed under the weight of societal demands.

It is these three 'cosmologies', structuring problematic patterns of heterogeneous elements in each their distinct fashion around a 'thing' in the body, which may be said to constitute a tradition of pathologies of performativity. With this recapitulation of how they are organized in mind, the following sections will attempt to point out some of the privileged themes in the contemporary association between pathology and performativity, which they may be said to tie into and inform.



## 2. Stress and the Popularization of the Extraordinary

A discussion of how the three problematic formations of classical melancholy, *acedia* and neurasthenia can open up to new modes of philosophically questioning the present may begin by assuming again a perspective on stress, which was used in chapter 1 as a formal indication of the kind of disposition that this thesis set out to explore. As the formal indication illustrated, like no other phenomenon today, stress and the tropes surrounding it assume the existence of a natural relation between pathology and performativity to the extent that such an association has become a matter of course, the truism of a mode of existence that is accessible to anyone, even if it is different from individual to individual. Or as the author of *Stress Management for Dummies* puts it: 'Everybody has it, and everybody talks about it, but no one really knows what stress is. Why? Because stress signifies different things for each of us, and also really is different for each of us.' (Elkin 1999: xxvi) As already indicated in chapter 1, the opacity of stress as a 'thing' in the body is assumed to be impenetrable because it – paradoxically – constitutes a collective phenomenon that differs from individual to individual. Yet, the historical problematizations explored in this thesis may be said to contribute to the opening of a field in which stress and the tropes surrounding it – primarily the modern-day phenomenon of depression and its relation to the way work is organized – may be understood in a new light. The following sections will be occupied with the indication of this field.

First, and most fundamentally, the perspective developed in the first chapter of this thesis illustrated how stress as a 'thing' in the body today is much more than just the byproduct of a particular modern lifestyle. Stress is a mode of existence that involves and associates the whole life with – even subsumes it under – productivity in its assertion of an individual ability to distinguish between the pathos of over-work and the beautiful tone of balance, the *ēthos* of *eustress* associated with individual agency. Yet in the light of what this thesis has found, the assumption of a paradoxical 'nature' to which the working subject pertains and which designates the individual ability to identify, isolate, manipulate, mobilize and recombine stress as a 'thing' in the body, constitutes a precarious *generalization of the extraordinary*. As I have also discussed elsewhere (Johnsen 2008), in the light of

classical melancholy, the assumption of stress as a natural potentiality that can be turned into productivity through self-management techniques carries a strong affinity with the disposition of the *ēthos perriton*, the exceptional in character described by the author of *Problems XXX, 1*. But if the disposition found in the Aristotelian assumption of an *eucrasia anomalia* was reserved for outstanding and culturally formative genius, then stress constitutes the democratization of the extraordinary and its subjugation under the general tropes of labour power. The assertion of stress as a subject that *takes place* in the body on the background of the individual's ability to control and regulate the hyperboles of affect associated with its pathological manifestations, in the light of the conception of melancholy as a 'thing' in the body, can be seen to open up for a topology differentiating between over-work and burnout in the self-managing employee of today's work-place. Remembering the fundamental association of melancholy with *ēros*, such a philosophical topology of productivity may be said to understand stress as an *eroticism of modern-day capitalism*, as it takes the relation of the individual to the 'thing' in the body to be a *joie d'amour*, an unstoppable and ambiguous love-hate relationship ceaselessly rearticulating itself as the arbiter of self-management. Like the disposition structured around the *melaina cholé*, the mode of existence associated with stress is mapped onto a circular antinomy between the highs and lows of the 'corporate athletes' who in the words of the authors of the best-selling *Stress for Success* 'need to (1) deepen their capacity to tolerate stress of all kinds and (2) increase their ability to respond to stress in ways that bring full performance potential within reach' (Loehr & McCormack (1997: 5). To speak of the circularity in such a generalized mode of existence as the eroticism of modern-day capitalism is more serious than it may sound; it hints at the traditional association of melancholy with the obsessive and exhausting obligation to the impossible object of health, of balance and of happiness. In this context stress appears as the erotic process engaged in the ambivalent exchange with the unreality of the phantasmagoric 'great health' of melancholy, the infatuated mode of self-transformation that always gazes beyond itself towards the 'next level of performance' which is identified as the 'next level of health and happiness as well' (Loehr & McCormack (1997: 5). The precarious trajectory of the erotic object in the bodies that it passes through

in this teleology without a *telos* itself is the decadence identified by Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo* (1908):

To look from the perspective of the sick towards *healthier* concepts and values, and again conversely to look down from the fullness and self-assurance of rich life into the secret labor of the instinct of *décadence*—this has been my actual experience, what I have practiced most, in this if in anything I am a master. (Nietzsche 1967: Wise 1)

To this gaze, health and illness are not mutually exclusive terms. Rather, health emerges as discernible from the pattern of suffering structured around the ‘thing’ in the body only as a transformative and sublimating gesture, what Nietzsche also refers to as ‘my will to health, to *life*’ (Nietzsche 1967: Wise 2). The incessant self-transformation of the culturally formative in the context of stress-management becomes the exhortation to the ceaseless self-differentiation of the ‘athlete’ who not only has his gaze fixed always already on the new frontiers of productivity, health and happiness, but also gazes back at the ‘thing’ in the body as the *dejecta*, the excrement of the erotic process.

The opening of such an informed philosophical perspective on the contemporary phenomenon of stress does not reduce it to melancholy. The point to make is not that we have all become melancholics. As already indicated in the section about Foucault’s historical problematization analysis, the past field of experience that melancholy could be said to constitute does not repeat itself. Rather, what a philosophical topology of productivity concerned with the ‘thing’ in the body can do is to open up for an inquiry informed by the historical findings: what, for example, does it mean to speak of labour in the general terms of achievement to which the classical concept of melancholy pertained? What exactly is popularized in the generalization of the extraordinary? The individual ability to differentiate between the dimensions of the pathological and of the performative? Heterogenization as opposed to normalization as a novel mode of socialization? A virtuosity of existence? It is questions like these that the philosophically informed perspective on the contemporary pathologies of performativity will have to deal with. Implicating that the ‘thing’ in the body is always already a social bond, indicating a crisis in the assertion of the individual self within a social context, the philosophical topology of the ‘thing’ in the body will have to seek

its answers in the exploration of the way we perceive the association between tropes of labour, pathology and performativity today in the light of history.

While the following will touch on some of these questions, the answer to them lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, the indication made above of a contemporary erotic circularity of productivity points to another topic for further investigation, which the findings of this thesis inform. In *Bipolar II* (2006), a self-help book for patients suffering from manic depressive disorder by Ronald R. Fieve, a professor of clinical psychiatry from Columbia, the same emblematic circularity can be found. Dr. Fieve's book promises to 'enhance your highs, boost your creativity, and escape the cycles of recurrent depression' and to help by answering important questions like: 'How do you channel hypomania's creative fire without getting burned?' Presenting medical breakthroughs that preserve a 'hypomanic advantage', Dr. Fieve offers advice that echoes the findings of this thesis: 'Maintain a sense of control. This means an ability to face future situations with determination rather than helplessness' (Fieve 2006: 248).

Such self-help advice, which takes the *ecstatis* of the individual in its literal sense to mean a *displacement* (from gr. *ek* "out" + *histanai* "to place, come to stand"), with which this individual becomes a *social being*, relates depressive disorders to the tropes of productivity and stress and reflects the assumption that ours is *the age of depression* (Horowitz & Wakefield 2005, 2007). As Emily Martin has illustrated in an interesting study of mania and depression in American culture, the connection between market and the trope of mania today is more than metaphorical. Manic depression and the economic order, Martin argues, today is 'linked through structures of feeling' (Martin 2007: 249). As I will suggest in the following, this link between the cyclical eroticism of stress and productivity, and depression as a contemporary phenomenon, can be informed by what this thesis found in the problematic formation of *acedia* and illustrate how depression today can be viewed as a problem of self-articulation.

### **3. Depression and the Articulation of the Self**

A perspective on the contemporary phenomenon of depression as a fall from the social in the sense found in the problematic formation of medieval

*acedia* may be found by reflecting on the status of the individual in a society where the ability to differentiate the self in the circular fashion articulated above, has attained a crucial socioeconomic status that relates the despair of the vertiginous to the tropes of productivity and labour. In other words, another aspect of what this thesis has found opens up to the discussion of the status of depression today, how it is related to the eroticism of the 'thing' in body and to the ability to articulate the self as a self in the context of a socioeconomic reality.

A point of departure for this perspective may be found in the work of Axel Honneth, the professor of social philosophy and leading heir to the critical tradition as director of the famous Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt. Honneth programmatically understands the contemporary phenomenon of depression as the manifestation of a *social pathology* associated with an institutionalized injunction to realize and maintain a *self* (Honneth 2005, Honneth 2004, see also: Willig & Østergaard 2005, Petersen & Willig 2004). To Honneth the notion of social pathologies as 'those developmental processes of society that can be conceived as processes of decline, distortion' (Honneth 1996: 370) became the central matter for a diagnosis of the present in the 1990s (Kristensen 2008). The position he defends is that the processes of individual self-realization in Western societies today to a large extent have become a 'feature of the institutionalized expectations inherent in social reproduction', where they are 'transmuted into a support of the system's legitimacy' (Honneth 2004: 467). The result of this reversal, Honneth claims, is 'the emergence in individuals of a number of symptoms of inner emptiness, of feeling oneself to be superfluous, and of absence of purpose.' Based on the work of the French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg in *La fatigue d'être soi* ("The Exhaustion of Being Oneself", Ehrenberg 1999), Honneth concludes that today there 'remains for individuals only the alternative of simulating authenticity or of fleeing into a full-blown depression, of staging personal originality for strategic reasons or of pathologically shutting down' (Honneth 2004: 204). Resulting from structural transformations in the electronic media, the advertising industry and business enterprise, the expectations concerning the ability to become a 'self' have attained a socioeconomic importance, which heavily increases

the social pressure on the individual. What began as the individualism of self-realization:

... has since been transmuted – having become an instrument of economic development, spreading standardization and making lives into fiction – into an emotionally fossilized set of demands under whose consequences individuals today seem more likely to suffer than to prosper. (Honneth 2004: 474)

Although Honneth's precarious assumption that the depressive disorder is something one flees *into* may be more than problematic from a clinical standpoint, the association it makes of depression with the socioeconomic order, the way contemporary work is organized and the ability to be and become a self can be seen as emblematic of a popular critical view on how the nearly epidemic spreading of depressive disorder in Western societies today can be explained. While a whole other story of depression can also be told, Honneth's standpoint opens up to a topic where the despair associated with the problematic formation of *acedia* is very relevant. If the surge of depressions today can be seen as the result of a social pathology associated with the ability of the individual to realize an authentic existence, then it is because it shares with medieval *acedia* as a 'thing' in the body the terrifying association with a despair that knows itself to be despair and suffers the disdain of the social order, which sees it as a vulgarity and a sin against the work ethics of modern day capitalism. This aspect of modern day depression, which sees in it a 'sinful' flight from the social exhortation to become and articulate the self in the erotic manner described above, may be difficult to accept in the light of the attention the phenomenon enjoys. Yet, the ambiguous negative value of this 'thing' in *acedia*, which described the privation of affect and the hyperboles of the despair implicated by it, may be said to inform an unresolved aspect of depression as it has become associated with socioeconomic tropes of value-creation. Like *acedia* was not opposed to desire and attention itself, but instead to the virtue of joy and the satisfaction of the spiritual good, an aspect of depression today is associated with the vertiginous inability to articulate the 'thing' in the body and make it accessible to management.

How a perspective on depression can be developed that takes into account the findings of *acedia*, can be understood by drawing on the theory developed in the work *Black Sun* (1989) by the French psychoanalyst Julia

Kristeva. Kristeva's work is interesting, because it approaches depression in a manner similar to the one developed in the chapters above, viewing the melancholic suffering as a pattern structured around a 'Thing'. Although Kristeva's inspiration for this perspective is primarily taken from Heidegger's philosophy of *Das Ding* (Heidegger 1970), her understanding of the 'Thing' comes close to the assertion in this thesis of the 'thing' in the body as an opaque relational object, which structures the relation between individual and collective. As Simon Critchley has pointed out, Kristeva's 'Thing' is 'the *soleil noir*, the black sun of melancholia ... a light without representation, the unknown object that throws its shadow across the ego' (Critchley 1999: 216). Remembering how *acedia* asserted the 'thing' in the body to be a monstrous eruption, which the afflicted was bound to in despair as the pattern of suffering it implicated signified the inability to exercise the virtuous, Kristeva's assertion of a non-representable locus of suffering in the depressive, a 'black sun' of immeasurable suffering, can be approached in terms of the inability it signifies in depression to articulate a self that is open to management within the socioeconomic reality. Depression, according to Kristeva, signifies a fundamental lack of meaning, which even makes it difficult to write about:

I am trying to address an abyss of sorrow, a noncommunicable grief that at times, and often on a long-term basis, lays claims upon us to the extent of having us lose all interest in words, actions and even life itself ... Within depression, if my existence is on the verge of collapsing, its lack of meaning is not tragic – it appears obvious to me, glaring and inescapable (Kristeva 1989: 3).

To Kristeva, the depressive pattern of suffering – like the 'thing' found in *acedia* – is a presence, shining even with the paradoxical light of a cold sun, which looks like nothing else and feels like nothing else. It is an affect, which cannot be understood linguistically but in reality subtends the activity of language. What characterizes the depressive subject's problem in this (cold) light, is *the inability to speak in a meaningful way* (Watkin 2003: 86). The depressive, from Kristeva's theoretical standpoint, suffers from a *pathology of articulation* associated with a fundamental loss of meaning. *Melancholia*, she argues, 'is the institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia' (Kristeva 1989: 9). Depressive speech is *dead speech* in the sense that it remains a-symbolic and unable to articulate the character of

the sadness which from the outside is representable only as ‘the most archaic expression of an unsymbolizable, unnameable narcissistic wound’ (Kristeva 1989: 12). This narcissism reflects the privation of affect found in the problematic formation of *acedia*.

To Kristeva the analytic framework of psychoanalysis, understood as the analysis of the interaction between psyche and soma through the distribution of drive energies (Watkin 2003), holds a privileged place in the cure of the depressive’s linguistic disorder. Entitled “Psychoanalysis – A Counter-depressant”, the first chapter of *Black Sun* revolves around the role that the space opened by psychoanalysis for voice and interpretation plays in getting the depressed to construct a text out of their dead language. As pointed out by William Watkin:

Psychoanalysis’ cure for melancholia consists precisely in an act of reading the radical speech and expression of the depressed and converting their avant-garde expressive material into a more socially and culturally acceptably symbolic and meaningful text. It does this by allowing the depressed to discover differentiation ... (Watkin 2003: 92).

Reflecting the Freudian designation of the ‘talking cure’ as a help to return from ‘hysterical misery’ to ‘everyday unhappiness’, Kristeva’s argument is that psychoanalysis provides the socially acceptable text, which again will make the hyperbolic language of depression accessible to modification and offer an alternative to the non-differential language of dead speech. From the point of view developed in this thesis on *acedia*, this aspect of modern day depression is comparable to the position of the monastic whose both literal and symbolic *aphonia* that was interpreted as the quenching of the soul’s voice made him inaccessible and his spiritual life incommunicable to the extent that he would have to seek the ministrations of the Church.

Yet to liken aspects of the modern-day phenomenon of depression to the spiritual despair associated with *acedia* has profound implications. In such a light, the privilege held by psychoanalysis as the provider of a language in which the dead speech of the depressed can again become articulate and present the afflicted with a space for self-differentiation, is broken, and points to a much more fundamental shift in the socialization of the individual. If the socioeconomic value of being able to articulate a self, suggested for example by the managerial tropes associated with the ability to contrib-



ute as a self at work (Costea, Crump & Amiridis 2008, Fleming & Sturdy 2008, Fleming & Spicer 2003, Alvesson & Willmott 2002, Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen 2009), in this light is taken for granted, then it opens up for a discussion of depression as a flight and diversion from the most authentic possibilities of Being, as the cathartic effect, which used to be the privilege of psychoanalysis has been transformed it into a social injunction. Depression, on such terms, signifies a fall from the social, not primarily as an *effect* of how society is organized, but as a glaring vertigo of the socioeconomic value of the tropes of self-realization. Associating the contemporary focus on depression with *acedia* will mean to open for a discussion of how the pathological inability to articulate the ‘thing’ in the body as a social bond – to ‘work with oneself’ in terms of making the self accessible to management – represents a crisis in a society, where the ability to articulate meaning, even if it is associated with disorder, is primary to the pattern of suffering which may appear meaningless. As a fall from the erotic relation to the ‘thing’ in the body, which sees the hyperboles of affect as parts of a ceaseless and meaningful process of self-differentiation, the somnolent stupor of the depressive, from the perspective of *acedia*, represents the vertiginous terror of a social bond that has become void of meaning in a society where even suffering can represent a meaningful trope to those who work with themselves in it. The perspective developed in this thesis thus opens up for a discussion of depression as a fundamental *crisis of self-differentiation*.

#### **4. Depression and Subjectivity as a Resource**

In the light of the problematic formation of *acedia*, depression as a pathology of self-differentiation today assumes the vertiginous position of the social formation that values the ability to articulate, mobilize, regulate, manipulate, and manage the social bond of the ‘thing’ in the body as the *ecstasis* of a productive virtuosity. It is a fall from the social, or as Kristeva has it: ‘a waste with which, in my sadness, I merge. It is Job’s ashpit in the Bible’ (Kristeva 1989: 15). Yet the sin that it constitutes is not directed against God; it is a violation instead of the exhortation to articulate the ‘thing’ as a social bond, a sin against the ‘self’ as a productive vehicle that has attained an important role in the contemporary socioeconomic order of society.

This aspect of depression as a contemporary social phenomenon opens up to the final subject, which I will point out as a privileged topic for further study on the background of the findings in this thesis. Depression, and its association with *subjectivity as a resource* today, constitutes a field of interest which can be informed by the energetic tropes of the problematic formation of neurasthenia and its assertion of a neuropathic household, an individual *oikos* designating the ability of the subject to manage a personal stock of socioeconomic capital. The problematic formation structured around the nerves as a 'thing' in the body, as illustrated in chapter 4, was primarily concerned with the tropes of the protean resources in their physiological quality as neurasthenia came to signify the deficiency of self-regulation leading to neurological bankruptcy. Transposed onto the contemporary tropes of depression in their association with the organization of labour, this figure of exhaustion precariously assumes subjectivity to be a limited resource, the exhaustion of which results in the collapse of the self as a socioeconomic resource. Such a perspective on depression can be found in *La Fatigue d'être soi* (1999), a work on contemporary depression as a social phenomenon that has set a standard for the sociological debate, inspiring the standpoint of Honneth and others (e.g. Honneth 2005, Honneth 2004, Willig & Østergaard 2005, Petersen & Willig 2004, Hammershøj 2008, Petersen 2007).

Ehrenberg's thesis is that depression today is manifested as the *mental fatigue* of a sovereign individuality. Transformed from being a disorder primarily concerned with sadness without cause, depression has become a disorder of activity for the individual, whose societal task it is to become, articulate and maintain a 'self':

Madness is the verso of the subject of reason, the Freudian neurosis that of the subject of conflict, depression that of an individual that wants only to be itself and can never catch up with this demand as if it was chasing its own shadow, the shadow on which it is also dependent. Depression is the pathology of a conscience *that is only itself* and is never completely filled by this identity, never is active enough – too wavering, too charged. (Ehrenberg 1999: 265, my translation)

Modelled on the 19<sup>th</sup> century's tropes of energy, Ehrenberg's assumption of depression as a mental fatigue represents a shift of perspective on the na-

ture of the personal resource. If the self-regulatory response of the potential neurasthenic was represented as a regulation of the forces of nature as they were converted in the body, then the shift from the outside to the inside of the individual asserted by Ehrenberg transforms the management of physiological resources into a management of *affective resources*. The contemporary phenomenon of depression in the light of the tropes of productivity of 19<sup>th</sup> century neurasthenia takes the form of a functional disorder (Petersen & Willig 2004). To the philosophical topology of productivity that can be developed on the background of the findings in this thesis, this naturally opens up to a discussion of the quality of labour resources today. If the primary quality of the natural resources, modelled on the discovery of the first and second laws of thermodynamics, was their scarcity, then the transposition of this model onto subjectivity as a resource at work today represents itself a problematic anthropogeneric aspect of the managerial exhortation in organizations today to employees to expand and intensify their contributions *as selves* on the workplace (Costea, Crump & Amiridis 2008, Fleming & Sturdy 2008, Fleming & Spicer 2003, Alvesson & Willmott 2002, Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen 2009). Can the assumption of nervous energy as a limited resource, which was defined primarily in terms of quantity, be said to be the same as a psychical or affective resource, which is defined instead in terms of its in principal indefinite character and its quality as something demanding ceaseless articulation and rearticulation? Providing a privileged place to study the association of depression as a pathology of performativity with the qualities of the *human resource*, the trope of subjectivity as a resource at work, in the light of what this thesis has found, contributes to an investigation of the performativity of the *self-managing employee*, whose personal capital, rather than consisting in nervous energy, consists in affective resources, which have to be articulated and ceaselessly rearticulated in a language manoeuvring within the space of the hyperboles of affect attributed to the circular antinomy described above. The modern day depression as a social phenomenon in this light is not representable as a part of the eroticism of stress-management, but rather as a part of a binary antinomy, a repulsive incapability to contribute in a society, where the hypomania of affect has become normalized as a productive resource.

On this background, stress as an eroticism of modern day capitalism and its relation to the contemporary social phenomenon of depression as the pathology *par excellence* of the self-managing employee, who must regulate a stock of affective resources, can be seen as a field constituting a privileged *topos* for the study of the association between pathology and performativity today. Providing a philosophical background on which to study this *topos*, the three problematic formations of melancholy, *acedia* and neurasthenia represent a tradition of phenomena that all tie into and inform such a study. Apart from constituting a privileged source of information to such a topology the history of the 'thing' in the body explored in this thesis may also be said to describe the history of how labour came to be associated with achievement, how that which used to be the privilege of the extraordinary in character was gradually transformed into a trope of work. It illustrates how the virtuosity of the genius came to be subsumed under the general notion of labour power as the spectacle of self-transgression has come to rest with the self-managing employee as a *mode of production*. Representing a transformation of what it means to be 'culturally formative', the spectacle of the sublimating self-transgression associated with the great achievement of the extraordinary melancholic, in modern work-life can be represented as the burden of ceaseless self-differentiation of an individual, whose self-articulation paradoxically must represent the articulation of a productive social bond. Depression in this light is not only the terrible and tormenting crisis of an individual, but also the crisis of a socioeconomic reality, which subsists as a social community through the ever-differentiated articulation of individual selves.

The history represented in this thesis thus suggests that the virtuosity of achievement, which was the hallmark of the genius, today has become an important aspect of the way work is organized. As what Paolo Virno has called a 'virtuosity in the workplace' (Virno 2004: 61), this designation of the self-managing employee as a *performer*, who transforms affective resources, like linguistic competence, knowledge and imagination into labour power, can be said to be emblematic to the present age. Virno thinks of this performativity as 'an activity which requires the presence of others, which exists only in the presence of an audience' (Virno 2004: 60) and suggests that this mode of production, as a model for contemporary work, has be-

come prototypical of wage labour. While this assumption may be questioned, the findings of this thesis suggest that the activity of the working virtuoso as an activity that produces value without finding its own fulfilment, without ever becoming fully objectified as an end product, is closely related to the trajectory of the 'thing' in the body. If Virno is right in assuming that the virtuosity of work, which can be said to absorb important features of the historical formations described in the chapters above, involve 'the very *anthropogenesis* in the existing mode of production' (Virno 2004: 63), then this implies that the passions of the 'thing' in the body bear an important relevance today to the study and critique of modern day capitalism. Returning to the motive of Plato's "wandering uterus", the unruly organ that traversed the bodies of childless women in the social order of Antiquity, we may say that the study of the trajectory of the 'thing' in the always already social body of the human resource may contribute to a better understanding of both the plight of individuality today and of its possibilities for resiliency.



## Dansk resumé

Temaet for denne afhandling er en undersøgelse af tre historiske 'formationer' organiseret omkring en 'ting' i kroppen i melankoliens brede og farverige historie i et forsøg på at skabe baggrund for en filosofisk undersøgelse af sammenhængen mellem patologi, arbejde og performativitet i samtiden. I denne forstand er der tale om et stykke filosofisk grundforskning, der forsøger at etablere og åbne et felt for mødet mellem de klassiske, filosofiske discipliner, og temaer i organisationsteori og ledelsesfilosofi. Afhandlingen begynder med en formel indikation af hvorledes stress som et samtidsfænomen kan betragtes som en 'ting' i kroppen, der hverken kan reduceres til ren natur eller ren kultur, men placerer sig hinsides de to som et *socialt bånd*, et refleksivt og selv-regulativt *topos* for en undersøgelse af hvordan patologi, arbejde og performativitet associeres i dag. Afhandlingen fortsætter i kapitel 1 med en nærmere metodologisk og filosofisk undersøgelse af begrebet om 'tingen' i kroppen, henholdsvis i sammenhæng med den sene Michel Foucaults arbejde med den historiske problematiseringsanalyse og i sammenhæng med Michel Serres' begreb om *kvasi-objektet* som et indikativt mellemværende, der hverken kan reduceres til at være subjekt eller objekt. Kapitel 1 slutter med en historiografisk refleksion over den litteratur som afhandlingen har benyttet sig af i sin udarbejdelse af de tre historiske dimensioner, der skal informere samtiden, og med en indikation af hvilken historie i melankoliens historie afhandlingens fokus på 'tingen' i kroppen benytter sig af.

De tre følgende kapitler udgør afhandlingens hovedbidrag og består i tre undersøgelser af 'tingen' i kroppen som strukturerende element for forholdet mellem sygdom, præstation og performativitet i henholdsvis den klassiske melankoli, middelalderens *acedia*-forestillinger og det 19. århundredes opfattelse af nerverne i neurastenien. Kapitel 2 beskriver melankolien i Antikken og opfattelsen af den som det ekstraordinære menneskes sygdom, organiseret omkring den sorte galde som en 'ting' i kroppen, der beskrev en særlig og prekær natur for de kulturskabende og kulturbærende genier. Det viser hvorledes melankolien hos disse udmærkede naturer ikke primært opfattedes som en patologi, men i stedet som en disposition, der kunne sublimeres som *etos*, men som også, hvis den ikke blev reguleret tilstrækkeligt,

kunne resultere i maniske eller depressive udfald. Som en *circulær antinomi* viser den klassiske melankoli sig at åbne et rum for diætetisk selvregulering organiseret omkring en 'ting' i kroppen, der kan sublimeres og lede den rette natur mod den store, verdensomvæltende præstation.

Kapitel 3 fortsætter de historiske undersøgelser af 'tingen' i kroppen ved at henlede opmærksomheden på middelalderens *acedia*-forestillinger, et fænomen forbundet med en slags syndig skyldsfrihed eller sorgløshed, der også var kendt som *middagsdæmonen*. Først organiseret som et mønster af psykosomatiske lidelser omkring den dæmoniske besættelse af eneboermunkene i den egyptiske ørken, beskrives *acedia* som en *emotional hyperbol* afstedkommet af en manglende selvregulering, en affektiv privation som gør munken utilgængelig for både sin egen og omgivelsernes ledelse. Som en affekt-forvirring i forbindelse med udøvelse af dyden i den sociale realitet kan *acedia* ses om en monstrøs 'ting' i kroppen, der tegner og beskriver den manglende evne til at lede sig selv.

I kapitel 4 henledes opmærksomheden på neurastenien i 1900-tallet og opfattelsen af nerverne som en 'ting' i kroppen, der forbandt det sensitive individ med sine omgivelser i forestillingen om en neuropatisk husholdning, hvormed den enkelte skulle administrere sin nervekraft i krydsfeltet mellem modernitet, arbejdskraft og indre drifter. Som et forbindelsesled mellem en demokratiseret kultur og en uhæmmet natur, der skulle tæmmes igennem den menneskelige vilje, blev nerverne som en 'ting' i kroppen til som et forbindelsesled mellem den enkeltes vilje og autonomi, samfundets socioøkonomiske krav og forestillingen om naturen som en *kraft*, der kunne høstes, manipuleres og omsættes til produktivitet og kultur i individets krop. Neurastenien kom på denne måde til at symbolisere en 'neuropatisk bankerot' for det individ som ikke formåede at foretage en klog investering af sin nervekraft i sig selv og ønsket om et lykkeligt liv.

I kapitel 5, der også fungerer som afhandlingens konklusion, opsummeres de systematiske undersøgelser af de tre historiske formationer omkring 'tingen' i kroppen, ligesom det forsøgsvist indikeres hvorledes de alle tre kan siges at 'tale ind i' samtidens opfattelse af en sammenhæng mellem patologi, arbejde og performativitet. Dette afsluttende kapitel fokuserer på den måde som de tre historiske formationer tematiserer aspekter af depression som en samtidspatologi, der forbinder performativitet med patologi og



arbejde. Ved at vende tilbage til stress som en formel indikation, illustrerer kapitlet hvorledes den cirkularitet omkring 'tingen' i kroppen som blev beskrevet i forbindelse med den klassiske konception af melankoli kan siges at bidrage til en forståelse af *stress som den moderne kapitalismes erotik*. Herefter vises det hvorledes aspekter af middelalderens *acedia*-forestillinger kan bidrage til en forståelse depression som et samtidsfænomen der handler om *artikulationen af et 'selv', der er tilgængeligt for både ledelse og selvledelse*. Afslutningsvis indikeres en sammenhæng mellem disse opfattelser af stress og depression og den socioøkonomiske vigtighed som *subjektiviteten som ressource* har antaget i samtiden. Det er disse tre områder som kan udgøre baggrunden for en filosofisk topologi over produktivitet i samtiden.



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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup>All translations of Plato are from (Plato 1997). References are made according to the Stephanus standard.

<sup>ii</sup> All references to *Problems XXX, 1* are made according to Bekker's (1831) standard edition of *Corpus Aristotelicum* in Greek. The translations found in the text follow the standard English edition translated by E.S. Forster (Aristotle 1984).

<sup>iii</sup> All references to *Gilgamesh* are made according to the standard of the Gardner translation (Gardner & Henshaw 1985). First tablet in capital roman numerals; then column in roman numerals; followed by verse.

<sup>iv</sup> The references to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* follow the number of the song (in Roman numerals) and the number of the verses in the song (in Arabic numerals). The translations are quoted from Samuel Butler (Homer 2008: 200-203)

<sup>v</sup> All references to Apollonius' *Argonautica* follow the number of the song (in Roman numerals) and the number of the verses in the song (in Arabic numerals). The translations are quoted from (Apollonius Rhodius 1912) and are made according to the Loeb Standard

<sup>vi</sup> All references to *Oration on the Dignity of Man* from (Pico della Mirandola 2008) are translated by Pier Cesare Bori.

<sup>vii</sup> All references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* are taken from (Dante Alighieri 1995), translated by Allen Mandelbaum.