

Primož Mlačnik

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF FREUD'S THEORY OF MELANCHOLY

ABSTRACT

In the article, the author presents an interpretation of melancholy and its discourse through the perspective of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and "violence of writing". In part one of the article, the ambivalent and contradictory conceptions of melancholy in the West are outlined in order to show the working of the logic of Différance that makes any unified and universal definition impossible. Sigmund Freud first introduced a universal theory of melancholy in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), while part two of the article analyses the inherent enigmas and contradictions in Freud's psychoanalytical distinction between mourning and melancholy in the specific socio-historical context. The binary oppositions in support of Freud's dichotomy are also exposed. In the conclusion, the author shows how Freud's paradoxes are deconstructed in contemporary theories in the humanities and social sciences that address various social and political discourses.

KEY WORDS: deconstruction, violence of writing, Mourning and Melancholia, loss, psychoanalysis

Dekonstrukcija Freudove teorije melanhlije

IZVLEČEK

Članek podaja interpretacijo melanhlije in njenega diskurza skozi perspektivo Derridajeve dekonstrukcije in «nasilja pisave». V prvem delu predstavi ambivalentne in protislovne opredelitve melanhlije na Zahodu, da bi lahko prikazal delovanje logike razlike, ki onemogoča enotno in univerzalno definicijo. Ker je tovrstno teorijo melanhlije uvedel Freud, članek v drugem delu analizira notranje uganke in protislovja njegovega psihoanalitičnega razlikovanja med žalovanjem in melanhlijo. V nadaljevanju so izpostavljena binarna nasprotja, ki podpirajo Freudovo dihotomijo.

Avtor v zadnjem delu članka pokaže, kako so Freudovi paradoksi dekonstruirani v sodobnih teorijah s področja humanistike in družboslovja, ki se nanašajo na različne družbene in politične diskurze.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: dekonstrukcija, nasilje pisave, Žalovanje in melanholija, izguba, psihoanaliza

1 Introduction

The phenomenon of melancholy¹ is both one of the most inexplicable and frequently explained phenomena in the Western world, which, despite polyvalent, polysemic, and contradictory etymological explanations, has been consistently perceived as inexplicable anxiety and sadness. The reasons for melancholy, as well as its status and therapy, have, throughout the history of Western civilisation, been regularly supplemented and transformed, and have also coexisted with various systems of knowledge including medicine, philosophy, astrology, literature, and art history (Klibansky et al. 1979).

Historical articulations of melancholy have undergone a continuous evolution from Hippocrates' theory of the temperaments, the Aristotelian definition of melancholy as genius, and the Platonic definition of melancholy as a divine creative gift to Medieval religious-moral explanations of melancholy, and Renaissance-inclined interpretations that coexisted with magical, occult, and astrological ideas. Despite numerous causal and symptomatic antagonisms, many of these interpretations were uncritically reproduced to the point that it became almost impossible to study or measure melancholy scientifically. As a result, the status of melancholy up until the Renaissance became universal and general on the one hand, but increasingly pathologised in the form of disease and madness on the other. For example, it was believed that melancholy was either a consequence of the slow revolution of the planet Saturn or a sign of exceptional health or a noble character (Földenyi 2016), a prerequisite for philosophy (Ibid.: 108), and the driving force of utopian thoughts (Ibid.: 113)², or "content and formal principle of art" (Ibid.: 138). During the Enlightenment, because of the emerging

-
1. The English language allows the use of both melancholia and melancholy as synonyms. While in some translations the term melancholia appears in connection to Freud's theory, we will use melancholy because the term in the article applies to a wider range of meanings.
 2. Wolfgang Iepenes, in the work *Melancholy and Society* (1992: 17-28), analyses the relationship between melancholy and order. Melancholy was excluded from and prohibited in Renaissance literary and philosophical representations of utopian societies of totalitarian order, as well as in the utopian programs of the political avant-garde.

global system of scientific belief, the emphasis on the power of human reason and the endeavour to acquire universal knowledge (Foucault 2001: 196), definitions of melancholy grew considerably narrower in terms of the relationship between disease and madness. With the development of clinical psychiatry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, melancholy was gradually and conceptually transformed into clinical depression, and then, with the development of new diagnostic categories, was made distinct from depression, which became the disease of the twentieth century (Radden 2009; Ehrenberg 2010). Both the historical mystery of melancholy and its clear and crucial role disappeared (Földenyi 2016: 247–292). Jeniffer Radden (2009: 18) attributes the loss of its more glamorous qualities to Freud's theory of melancholy, which universalised melancholy's origins, status, and treatment.

From Freud onward, melancholy, never clearly distinguished from depression, was viewed as an affliction of the pathological individual. (Bowring 2015; Burton 2013; Földényi 2016; Freud 2001; Klibansky et al. 1979; Radden 2009). In contemporary times, this has changed profoundly. Melancholy has become an object of a number of depathologising theoretical discourses, which articulate the melancholic sentiment in relation to social relations that are intrinsically connected to race, ethnicity, gender and to postcolonial societies in general (Agamben 1993; Butler 1995 and 2004; Cheng 2000; Gilroy 2005; Kim 2007; Winters 2016; Žižek 2000).

In the article, the author introduces the thesis that melancholy is not the unambiguous and universal phenomenon that Freud presents in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" ("M&M"). Applying Derrida's methodological principles of deconstruction, an analysis of the contradictions in Freud's theory of melancholy is presented and accompanied by a critical reflection of Freud's other texts. In addition, the author will demonstrate that Freud's theory of melancholy is dependent on the social context from which it emerged, suggesting that its theoretical and empirical representation is not neutral. The author demonstrates that the distinction between mourning and melancholy is problematic, because Freud did not, in his definition of mourning, consider certain sociological and anthropological aspects that have become more prominent in contemporary, progressive articulations of melancholy. In this regard, one of the aims of this article is to provide a deconstructionist backbone to the depathologising theoretical articulations.

2 Deconstruction

A pharmacological relationship toward melancholy has existed throughout the history of Western thought.³ A short survey of the development of the discourse about melancholy shows that, from the earliest interpretation of melancholy in antiquity, it has been accompanied by ambivalence, duality, and contradiction. Ambivalence can be found in individual historical periods as regards the origins of melancholy, its status, and therapeutic treatment. This ambivalence is inherent not only in the dominant discourse but also in efforts at theoretical approaches to melancholy. In terms of historical definitions, two have remained stable: inexplicable sadness and anxiety, and the reproduction of ambivalence. Even attempts to define melancholy are melancholic, because with each new definition or manifestation of melancholy, we are unable to attain its essence, which is both lost and changed with new definitions. As a result, we can conclude that the most suitable methodological strategy for exploring the social and cultural dimensions of melancholy is deconstruction, because we are not seeking to establish the truth or origin, but rather to demonstrate that no representation is neutral (Bowman 2008: 154). With deconstruction, we attempt to demonstrate the constructedness of all representations, and to reveal the series of decisions that result from conventions, institutions, and consensus. From the perspective of deconstruction, we attempt to demonstrate that the mentioned processes represent “the stabilisation of something essentially unstable and chaotic” (Derrida 1996 in Bowman 2008: 127). To deconstruct means to show that each interpretation is inevitably partial, unfinished, and contingent, because it supports certain values and institutions at the expense of others (Ibid.: 40). Strategies of deconstructive readings include the supplanting of implicit or non-existent dimensions of the text with explicit formulations (Silverman 1989: 4), indicating that one of the central purposes of deconstruction is overturning binary oppositions (Ibid.: 9).

3. Here this term is used as a derivative of *pharmakon*, found in Plato's *Phaedrus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002: 68–69). The term *pharmakon* merges two opposing concepts as it means both poison and remedy. It is as a part of the myth about the god Theuth, the inventor of numbers, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, who offered the invention of writing to the Egyptian King Thamus. Theuth praises writing in relation to memory because of its capacity to accumulate knowledge, and correct, heal, and assist memory. But Thamus rejects writing as a dangerous and redundant tool of forgetting, an invention that gives the appearance of wisdom but will only impoverish remembering because it will no longer be composed from inner but rather external signs. Jacques Derrida criticises Plato's (and Socrates') condemnation of writing (*telos*), which he understands as the beginning of logocentric Western philosophical thought, which gives speech (*logos*) an advantage over writing because it is more rational, the one true essence of being and presence (Derrida 1997).

Because the focus of historical explanations has shifted from the individual body, through external natural or spiritual sources, to the individual mind, it is necessary to reflect on theories of melancholy through Derrida's critique of Western logocentrism, which like "the most original and powerful ethnocentrism, [is] in the process of imposing itself upon the world, controlling in one and the same order" (Derrida 1997: 3). It does so by attributing the origin of universal truth to logos, by establishing an unproblematic analogy between speech and words, signifiers and signified, and by ignoring non-linguistic factors such as historical and social context.

Derrida argues that logocentric thought does not consider the so-called violence of writing, the order of signifiers, words that by being written down become signifiers of signifiers. This first means that the difference is lost between the signifieds, which are in rational logocentric thought the carriers of origin and truth, and signifiers, and second that absolute truth and meaning are lost. When writing becomes self-referential, this means that meaning becomes "in a truly unheard of sense, a determined signifying trace, [which] is to affirm that within the decisive concept of ontico-ontological difference, all is not to be thought at one go; [...]" (ibid: 23). Thus writing comprehends language, meaning "[...] action, movement, thought, reflection, consciousness, unconsciousness, experience, affectivity, etc." (ibid.: 9), and begins to eliminate and erase, to become language itself, the movement of signifying, that différenciates, thus producing differentiation and deferral of meaning (ibid.: 23).

This, in the context of "the violence of theory", means that new theories first build on past theories, and in time completely replace them and eliminate discontinuity among them –différenciating themselves. In other words, they simultaneously disregard the social-historical context of their own emergence, and again retroactively invent the origin (in this case of melancholy), which is then permanently connected with the displacement⁴ of meaning or the change in understanding of the relation between the dichotomies through which we explain and experience the world.

The violence of writing implies that difféérance is necessary and unavoidable. The substitutions of words inherent to the supplementary character of violent

4. Derrida's thesis about the displacement of meaning in language, which itself produces an inexplicable absence, could also be literally understood, in the wider discourse on melancholy, in the sense of physical displacement. Nostalgia was one of the collective, entirely melancholy anxieties, which was frequently reported in the seventeenth century. As Svetlana Boym points out in the work *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001: 16), nostalgia was the original affliction of physically displaced people (students and soldiers), which resulted from their existential disorientation.

writing are inseparably constitutional to the establishment of any kind of discourse that produces language and identity, a meaningful experience of reality and language, a defence against the articulations of finitude and disorder. The violence of writing is necessary because it reduces the pressing alterity. While writing discloses the "liberation of the signifier from the domination of linguistic form" (Derrida 1976 in Marsh 2009: 280) and introduces "space, separation, and mediation to a putatively peaceful and proximate presence" (Marsh 2009: 277), it also introduces oblivion and eliminates otherness.

In the context of our investigations, this implies that we could treat melancholy in a more Foucauldian spirit, as a discursive object that is established between different sets of statements and events, institutions, economic and social processes that condition its emergence (Foucault 2002). In terms of the development of definitions of melancholy, it is possible to follow the violence of writing through theories about melancholy as constitutive elements of different complex and historically interwoven discourses, a process that reached an important peak with Freud's theory of melancholy, which introduced as much clarity as confusion.

3 The Enigmas and Contradictions in Freud's Dichotomy

Articulations of melancholy were formed on the borders of different discourses until Freud, who joined and united different articulations under the psychoanalytic discourse, thus striving to account for the universality of the working of the human mind. Freud "[...] addressed the heterogeneous nature of melancholy and the fact that no clear definition has emerged within psychiatry" (Dozois 2000: 168). He did this in an innovative way by introducing the category of the unconscious into his tripartite meta-psychological theory of human psychopathology: "The unconscious was a category that enabled Freud to address and solve the Cartesian duality of body and soul, and to provide reliable knowledge of mental life although the object of study was not directly observable or quantifiable" (Makari 2007: 4). The unconscious penetrated the one object (of mind) that was impenetrable. While Freud went against the scientific rationalist current by an unorthodox "deconstruction" of the idea of rationality associated with the Enlightenment, he was still "very much a product of Enlightenment and materialism (as well) as the patriarchal and Victorian culture of Vienna" (Dozois 2000: 176). Although certain authors claim that psychoanalysis was only "an amendment and corrective to the Enlightenment's narrow insistence on reason" (Makari 2007: 451) and that Freud still gave too much autonomy to the reason of an individual (Butler 2004: 22), Freud's theory of melancholy is not classically logocentric,

precisely because of the category of the unconscious, which places the ultimate origin and truth of melancholy at the centre of the discrepancy between reason and unreason, and therefore does not succumb to deconstruction that easily.

Freud was attempting to solve the historically contradictory definitions of melancholy with an innovative theory, that both supplemented and completely replaced previous definitions of melancholy in a violent, ostensibly interhistorically and interculturally universal way, which on the one hand pathologised melancholy, but on the other enabled contemporary thinkers to reappropriate Freud's account in order to establish and develop contemporary political and social discourses. Although Freud's theory contains many enigmas and contradictions, we should not be tempted to throw up our hands and conclude: "The tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues, as the chaos of melancholy doth variety of symptoms" (Burton 2013: 50).

In the essay "M&M" (1917), Freud juxtaposes melancholy with mourning. He does this on the basis of both clinical research conducted with his own patients, and an analysis of tragic central characters in Shakespeare and Goethe's canonical literary works. Mourning and melancholy are identified as two different responses to loss that share certain common traits but also have significant differences (Freud 2001: 237-258). Both conditions respond to "the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (Ibid.: 243). Both responses share the characteristics of a painful mental state, loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the capacity to love, the inhibition of all activities. Nevertheless, the melancholic response to loss is radically different: either the object is lost only as an object of love, or it is not even clear what has been lost (Ibid.: 245). For this reason, Freud defines melancholy as a pathological disorder, as illness. Self-reproach, self-abasement, delusional expectations of punishment, disturbance of self-regard tend to be absent in mourning (Ibid.: 244).

According to Freud, mourning is more rational because reality-testing reveals that the object is indeed lost, and thus it is necessary to withdraw the libidinal investment from the lost object, and transfer it to a different object, that is to cease identifying with the lost object. This process is painful, and therefore Freud characterises mourning as work. With melancholy, the subject resists the painful reality of withdrawal. Although the object is lost, the melancholy individual preserves it in such a way that the object-cathexis is abandoned but not transferred to another object. Rather it is directed inward and this results in the splitting of the ego, which in turn manifests as relentless self-reproach that should rightly be directed toward the lost object: "In this way an object-loss [is] transformed into an ego-loss" (Ibid.: 249). For this reason, Freud characterises melancholy as irrational.

The work of mourning and the work of melancholy are resolved in the unconscious, and in the case of mourning is unimpeded. For Freud, the end of mourning is clear: the cessation of identification with the lost object and libidinal investment into a new object. The end of melancholy, on the other hand, is unpredictable, because the process is entirely unconscious, and is burdened by ambivalent, regressive, and narcissistic conflicts that may lead to a sudden transformation to manic victory over the lost object (Ibid.: 254).

The difference between melancholy and mourning appeared to be clear at this point, but this would not last. Indeed Freud himself would introduce paradoxes to this dichotomy in his later evaluations of certain mechanisms. The first area where we find a lack of clarity is the dual and contradictory role of identification in mourning and melancholy. Namely, Freud observes that identification is not necessarily regressive because it occurs prior to object-cathexis (Freud 1962: 18). In the chapter, "The Ego and Superego" in his later work *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud suggests that identification is not limited to melancholy, and also that it is not necessarily a substitute for object-cathexis, but "that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution toward building up what is called its character" (Freud 1962: 18). Freud argues that in the early phases of the development of human identification, we cannot distinguish among object-cathexes because they play a constitutive role to the extent "that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of these object-choices" (Ibid.: 19). Freud later makes the supposition that "this introjection which is a kind of regression to the mechanism of the oral phase" (Ibid.)⁵ perhaps even plays a mitigating role in the abandonment of the object (Ibid.).

Freud's student and colleague Karl Abraham (1988: 422–470) later confirmed this supposition in the case of a patient whose wife had died. He observed that identification with the lost object was not a phenomenon that appeared only in melancholy, but also in mourning. After his wife's death, the patient declined food for many weeks until one evening he ate a large meal prior to going to sleep. Abraham presents the positive role of identification in the dreams of the widower that had cannibalistic motifs in which the body of his wife is reconstructed: "In the normal person it is set in motion by real loss (death); and its main purpose is

5. In this context, Freud uses the term introjection for the process characterised by the return of libidinal energy from the abandoned object to the individual ego, which results in uninterrupted identification with the lost object. Abraham, following in Freud's footsteps, also uses the expression, though introjection does not appear frequently in translations of Freud's essays. Although strictly speaking these are not synonyms, I use the term identification rather than introjection when referring to Abraham.

to preserve the person's relation to the dead object, or—what comes to the same thing—to compensate for his loss" (Abraham 1988: 438). According to Abraham, identification in mourning is a path to the withdrawal from the lost object, while in melancholy, where it is manifested through the oral consumption of the lost object, it is a sign of libidinal narcissistic regression, an archaic form of mourning. Identification therefore can be pathological or constitutive, immoral or moral. The lost object can be internalised to help us with the work of mourning, or we can internalise it in order to derive masochistic pleasure from continued identification. Identification thus occurs in both mourning and melancholy. This means that not only does melancholy borrow symptoms from mourning, but mourning borrows strategies of confronting loss from melancholy. What's more, Freud, in a letter to the Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger in 1929, nine years after his daughter's death, admits how long and difficult is the work of mourning, how there is no replacement for a love that we do not want to let go of, and attributes a certain morality to this position (Freud 1960 in Clewell 2004: 61). The role of identification is therefore contradictory. In the formation of a person's human character, identification is crucial to the formation of critical capacities of functioning, and the moral instance of the superego. It also plays a positive role in mourning. In melancholy, identification, despite increased moral activity that is directed toward total critical self-destruction (Freud 2001: 246–248), becomes regressive because of its non-functionality. In melancholy, identification with the lost object signifies the denial of losses that have already occurred, and prevents the beginning of the work of mourning. In mourning, identification admits the loss and prevents the slide into melancholy.

Despite the fact that Freud's findings are empirical, what is crystallised in the juxtaposition of his purportedly sharp dichotomy is a meta-theoretical or ideological tendency toward the creation of a binary opposition between mourning and melancholy, an opposition in which, as is characteristic of western logocentric thought, one signifier in the dichotomous pair has a positive connotation and the other has a negative connotation: rational – irrational, moral – immoral, normal – pathological, authentic – inauthentic, mature – immature, modern – archaic, etc. Moreover, there is something even more puzzling on the level of binary oppositions. Because Freud establishes a powerful yet dialectical psychoanalytical discourse of melancholy as pathological mourning (in opposition to non-pathological mourning), the "violence of his essay" is precisely in the alterity that was excluded. Freud's dichotomy is missing the fourth unit, that is, non-pathological melancholy. Before we address this issue, let us focus on the loss and the replacement of the love object in the social context.

3. 1 The Social Context

It is necessary to regard Freud's dichotomy within the social context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a period that brought fundamental changes in attitudes about mourning and death. Namely, modern western society experienced a sudden decline in collective and public rituals of mourning, the social role of which had been the domestication of death and reintegration of the community (Turner 1974 in Bahun 2014: 16). Death became "invisible", overlooked, and denied – mourning rituals and the event of death itself were privatised, medicalised, and bureaucratised (Ariès 1977 in Homans 2000: 1–11). Death was made taboo, and all public displays of mourning were demonised (Gorer 1977 in Clewell 2004: 44).⁶

Freud resisted this trend, insisting on the necessity of the work of mourning and returning the debate to the public discourse (Clewell 2004: 45) albeit in a questionable manner. First, he did not consider the sociological and anthropological aspects of the problem of mourning in his theoretical work. Second, he also fell victim to the "taboo on mourning". Although the essence of Freud's dichotomy and psychoanalysis itself was the pursuit of the rational and ethical rebirth of the bourgeoisie, and, within this framework, the logic of the work of mourning is clear – a liberated and uninhibited ego (Freud 2001: 245) – Freud nevertheless appears to place the entire burden (of loss) either in mourning or in melancholy on the individual. In this historical period, the secular West suffered from a lack of cultural fictions that would ease the confrontation with death, and Freud in his rationalist manner also denounced individual fictions, including the hallucinatory wishful psychosis with which the individual preserves the lost object (Ibid.: 244).

This is closely connected with Freud's understanding of human subjectivity the main component of which is narcissism. In his essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914), Freud "[...] actually reduces object-love to narcissistic love" (Clewell 2004: 46), the insinuation being that what individuals see and love in the other is only their own reflection. In the context of melancholy and mourning, this means that whether or not the loss is normal or pathological, the individual's response is selfish. And yet even this disillusioned and almost cynical premise must be understood in the wider context, which brings us to the second area of ambiguity related to the status of loss in mourning and melancholy.

6 For a detailed discussion of the anthropological and sociological dimensions of societal changes in the area of mourning, mourning practices, and the relationship to death, see Geoffrey, Gorer (1965): *Death, Grief and Mourning*. New York: Doubleday; Fussell, Paul (1975). *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press; Arès (1977). *The Hour of Death*. New York: Oxford University Press.

In "M&M", Freud states that the reasons for melancholy extend beyond mourning, which is usually caused by a real loss such as the death of a love object, or losses of something abstract such as ideals, values, or homeland (Freud 2001: 243). Although these losses can trigger a melancholy response, it is not necessarily so comprehensive. A melancholy response to a loss may also "include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence" (Ibid.: 251). In this context, the best criticism of Freud is Freudian: how could he be so certain that given the complex dynamics of the human psychic life, the melancholic experience of loss "is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" (Ibid.: 245)? There exists a third possibility that obscures the difference between mourning and melancholy. This possibility is introduced by Kathleen Woodward who argues that Freud's strict differentiation between mourning and melancholy paralyzed the discussion (Woodward 1990: 94). She also reproaches Freud for flaws in describing the logic of the work of mourning: "Freud leaves us no theoretical room for another place, one between a crippling melancholy and the end of mourning" (Ibid.: 95).

This third theoretical space is precisely the issue we addressed at the end of the third chapter. On the level of binary oppositions that have established the psychoanalytical discourse of melancholy, there is a fourth, missing unit, which is excluded from Freud's binarism. Here we are referring to non-pathological melancholy, a new category, a melancholy that is not irrational, self-destructive, or narcissistic, and above all not individual, but which also is not socially articulated or rationalised, and therefore is collectively overlooked. Non-pathological melancholy, as we imagine it, is more widespread among the population than pathological mourning, but is less intense and inhibitive.

This third possibility of non-pathological melancholy, as emphasized by Woodward (1990), obscures not only the discontinuity between mourning and melancholy, but also, and more importantly, exposes the difference between melancholy and depression. In this regard, we must not forget that Freud wrote on the basis of his analysis of depressed patients, and that he considered melancholy a depressive disorder. In the context of narcissism, the fundamental conflict between morality and reality is justified, but nevertheless, as Steiner observes, it is surrounded by ambiguity: "It is confusing that the word depression has been applied both to the state that accompanies mourning and to that which results from the defences mounted against mourning" (Steiner 2005: 85). Abraham, who built on Freud's theory with his work with manic-depressive patients, also did not make a distinction between melancholy and depression. In addition to

the difference between melancholy and depression,⁷ an important distinction also must be made in terms of pathology. If the majority of the population in a certain historical period experiences a psychological phenomenon then it becomes difficult for us to classify it as pathological. Looked at from the viewpoint of the majority, such a phenomenon becomes "normal".⁸

Paul Verhaeghe pointed out this epistemological limitation of clinical psychiatry in his work *On Being Normal and Other Disorders*, in which he makes the argument that "one finds no form of psychopathology without some feelings of depression and/or anxiety" (Verhaeghe 2008: 259). Verhaeghe reaches the conclusion that the category of normality is dependent on quantitative deviations from the average, actual "measures" or quantity, which is problematic within clinical psychiatry because a unified and objective measure, a so-called normal level of depression, is inconceivable and immeasurable especially in the contemporary era when depression, because of how widespread it is, could be considered normal from an "objective" moral perspective. The ideal of normality, frequent in Freud's work, is also an ideal upon which the psychiatric field was formed, although it is a fictive ideal that is always socially and culturally conditioned (Verhaeghe 2008).

When we think about the third possibility, about the place between melancholy and the end of mourning,⁹ and about the phenomenon of non-pathological melancholy we have delineated, a change of perspective might help us describe such a space, namely the perspective that has already been alluded to: sociological and anthropological dimensions as well as changes in the area of mourning. We must allow for the possibility that losses can be collective and social (for example, religious, eschatological, with relation to historical memory or the future...), which

-
7. The differences between melancholy and depression are not merely differences in the diagnostic chaos that has emerged because of advances in psychiatry and pharmaceutical treatments after World War II, but can also be a result of a different understanding of the individual in the mid-twentieth century from that which prevailed at the end of the nineteenth century. In this sense, melancholy is a manifestation of the individual divided and liberated from traditional authority, which results in moral anxiety and guilt connected to the law before which the individual is always inadequate. Depression, in contrast, is a manifestation of the independent democratic individual who, because of megalomania, cannot admit inadequacy and as a result suffers existential anxiety and shame before the social gaze. (Ehrenberg 2010: 129).
 8. Freud also confirms this, attributing the proliferation of anxiety to the modern way of life. See Freud, Sigmund (2014). *Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness*. Freiburg: White Press.
 9. Sanja Bahun fills this space with what she calls countermourning, which includes alternative mourning rituals that combine the melancholy preservation of the lost object and the therapeutic qualities of mourning (Bahun 2014: 8).

means that the understanding, articulation, and replacement of the lost object is prevented by the scope and abstraction of the lost object which must first be recognised in order for us to mourn (Bahun 2014: 16). Given this perspective on Freud's theory of melancholy, undefined loss can also uncannily refer to the lost possibility of mourning (Homans 2000: 17). Jonathan Flatley confirms this when he states that Freud did not actually improve our understanding of melancholy but rather offered us "an allegory for the experience of modernity, an experience [...] that is constitutively linked to loss" (Flatley 2008: 2), which is the result of the accelerated pace of life, the loosening of community ties, the dissolution of traditional authority, and many other demographic and political changes that accompany the plethora of changes we tend to call progress (Bahun 2014: 17).

If we continue with this line of thought in a Foucauldian fashion, the formation of the psychoanalytic discourse of melancholy was not only influenced by abstract losses brought by the transformation of institutions, the crisis of mourning practices, the taboo of death, and the rationalist Enlightenment ideas and also by important external events, namely World War I. The constitutional violence of Freud's theoretical writing was thus linked to actual violence, which sunk the majority of Europe's population into non-pathological melancholy.

3. 2 World War I

World War I was one of the most inexplicable and irreplaceable social losses in history. It both prevented mourning and triggered a sort of collective melancholy, introducing the "idea of endless war as an inevitable condition of modern life" (Fussell 1975 in *ibid.*: 204). This event is also important for understanding the historical circumstances and background of Freud's essay, "M&M", completed in May 1915. When the war began, Freud's sons were conscripted, and the family went into "a state of mourning-in-advance" (Abraham and Freud 1965 in Bahun 2014: 204). In addition, in 1915 when he was sixty, Freud fatalistically foretold his own death in the next two-year period (Jones 1955 in Schiesari 1992: 33). At that time, he also parted, both theoretically and as friends, from Carl Gustav Jung (Bahun 2014: 24). Therefore, in light of Freud's previous pessimistic essays written during the war, we might interpret "M&M" as an attempt to optimistically break out of his own melancholy situation.

In the work "Thoughts for the Reflections about War and Death" (Freud 1918), which includes two essays and was probably written in March and April 1915, six months after the outbreak of war, Freud writes about the confusion generated by war as regards the degradation of the most precious human values and the collapse of civilisational norms:

The individual who is not himself a combatant and therefore has not become a cog in the gigantic war machinery, feels confused in his bearings and hampered in his activities. /.../ Among the factors which cause the stay-at-home so much spiritual misery and are so hard to endure are two in particular which I should like to emphasise and discuss. I mean the disappointment that this war has called forth and the altered attitude toward death to which it, in common with other wars, forces us (Freud 1918: 1).

By this time, Freud already knew that certain losses were resistant to the work of mourning, and that, in such cases, melancholy became the only possible and indeed predictable response. According to Freud, the disappointment brought about by war should not be regretted since it was caused by the juxtaposition of reality with the breaking of illusions with which people had previously eased their life and rejected the image of man as a creature of instincts (Freud 1918: 8). This disenchanting web of Freud's thoughts once again reveals fundamental contradictions in the difference between mourning and melancholy. On one hand, he interpreted the eruption of war as the failure of mourning, which resulted in melancholy and the self-destructive release of aggression. On the other hand, he admitted that precisely those excluded from the aggression were the ones who experienced melancholy. What he was unable to admit during the war, although he later admitted in the already mentioned letter to Ludwig Binswanger, was the possibility that the work of mourning was impossible during a period of social crisis or fundamental and incomprehensible loss in which the impoverishment of the world or the ego, although this does not occur in the unconscious, are beyond individual choice or decision.

Derrida also supports the argument that mourning is always unsuccessful and irreconcilable, that consolation is not possible, and, similar to Burton (2013), focuses on one of his aporia, relating to a contradiction that is also present in Freud's differentiation: "There is no metalanguage for the language in which a work of mourning is at work" (Derrida 1996: 172). Furthermore, irreconcilable, unsuccessful, unrecognised, and abstract collective losses have become, despite the non-existence of metalanguage, the cornerstone of contemporary deconstructionist accounts of melancholy as both a non-pathological condition and the discursive object of different so-called progressive social and political discourses.

4 Contemporary Deconstructions

As previously mentioned, Freud's psychoanalysis is founded on Enlightenment ideals. The same could be said of Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholy, which on the level of binary oppositions hold different discursive

connotations in the wider context of modernity. For example, Freud's idea of the work of mourning is a manifestation of the utopian goals of modernity and the imperative that imposes new beginnings and the erasure of the past (Jay 1993 in Clewell 2004: 58). In this system of differentiation, melancholy can only be a manifestation of the failure of the project of modernity and its dystopian completion, as it seeks to restrain exaggerated enthusiasm for the recollection of a "forgotten" reality of unrecognised social losses. If melancholy is the kind of critical force that draws attention to the irrational and immoral, the underbelly of modern progress, then it also seeks to destroy all the binary oppositions upheld by modernity (moral – immoral, rational – irrational, modern – archaic, etc.), on which Freud's grounds his differentiation between mourning and melancholy.

If we sharpen Freud's dichotomy and add to the connotation of the signifying pair of mourning and melancholy other pairs, which the differentiation between mourning and melancholy inherently assumes (authority– non-authority, control–chaos, power–powerlessness, majority–minority, amnesia–remembrance, status quo–change, etc.), then we begin to understand why the representations that emerge from Freud's dichotomy can be reactionary, and why there are numerous contemporary theories from the fields of humanities and social science that address these oppositions in the context of historical loss and contemporary social and political struggle. The theories soften Freud's dichotomy in the favour of what has been termed non-pathological melancholy, that is, the incompleteness of the process of mourning, to the utopian capacity of melancholy and the abstract social losses that are followed by collective forms of melancholy.

In this regard, George Winters (2016) writes about the collective losses and melancholy of people of colour and other marginalised groups in America. He is critical of Freud in terms of his portrayal of mourning, which involves a predisposition to treat ideas and people in the same way as interchangeable things (Winters 2016: 124). In other words, successful mourning implies a reified consciousness, an individual whose losses do not become part of his character. Winters argues that "the emphasis on replacement and substitution in Freud's [...] essay downplays [...] losses that cannot be recovered and in some cases even recognised" (Ibid.: 125). He claims that mourning is on the side of the idea of progress that tends to "diminish and mitigate the tragic qualities of history and human existence" (Ibid: 15), while he imagines melancholy as a sentiment (hope draped in black) that allows envisioning alternative social orders (Ibid: 22).

Judith Butler (1995; 2004) writes about the melancholy of gender minorities. She also challenges Freud's portrayal of the work of mourning and the impossible substitutability of the lost object. She argues that melancholic identification with the lost object is crucial for the same-sex gender formation (Butler 1995:

168–169), but nonetheless remains ambivalent about melancholy. Mourning, in the context of heteronormative culture, acquires new meanings of a violent ordering to accept losses that are unacceptable, an imperative to forget what is immoral, unnatural and, “uncultural”. She argues that when certain kind of losses are cancelled by a set of culturally prevalent prohibitions, we can expect culturally prevalent forms of melancholy (Ibid.: 171). Because one cannot abandon the emotional ties with the lost object without undermining the constitution of self, mourning itself is violent (Butler 2004: 30) and irrational since we cannot apply the Protestant ethic to mourning rationally (Ibid.: 21). In contrast, melancholy is a sign of “the dehumanisation that emerges at the limits of discursive life, limits established through prohibition and foreclosure” (Ibid: 36). It can be simultaneously considered as a refusal to mourn and an inability to mourn losses that are not recognised as a part of a public discourse. This is also how Paul Gilroy (2005) and David Kim (2007) address the inability to mourn, either as reactionary or progressive melancholy responses that are inherent to paradigmatic shifts and changes in political regimes.

Anne Cheng (2000) similarly argues that there are many historical and abstract losses that play a constitutive role in the racial subject-formation. She argues that “melancholy offers a powerful tool precisely because it theoretically accounts for the guilt and denial of guilt, the blending of slave and omnipotence in the racist imaginary” (Cheng 2000: 12). Nonetheless, she remains critically ambivalent towards melancholy. Similarly to Butler’s cultural normativity, she portrays it as a response to the cultural ideal of whiteness: “Melancholy registers the experience of being rendered invisible, of being both assimilated into and excluded from the social order” (Cheng 2000 in Winters 2016: 20). Like Butler, she also views melancholy in terms of marginalisation, and more importantly, dispossession: “In a sense, exclusion (of the ego and the object), rather than loss, is the real melancholic retention” (Cheng 2000: 9). To view melancholy as a mode of being dispossessed, included through exclusion, is overturning Freud’s account of melancholy of loss as possession. It contrasts the famously re-formulated definition of melancholy by Giorgio Agamben (1993: 20) – that was later criticised by Slavoj Žižek’s disavowal of contemporary “ethical twists” (2000: 658) –, as a mode, in which the individual possesses an object that was actually never lost but remains unobtainable forever.

This contrast opens up a new set of paradoxes that are unfortunately beyond the scope of this article. Because we attempted to consider melancholy as both an individual and collective sentiment, and as a discursive object, it becomes increasingly difficult to address all of its rhizomatic qualities: to properly articulate it as a non-pathological condition, and to even argumentatively disregard

Freud's original dichotomy. Nonetheless, we can assume that if the lost objects (in this case abstract, collective, and social losses) are discursively included through exclusion, and therefore, unmourned, individuals who find themselves in the mode between possession and dispossession will be subjected to violence, which presumably has more to do with writing too little than too much – with the lack of a discourse that includes the historical, social otherness, and thus enables the work of mourning.

5 Conclusion

As we have demonstrated, the historical ambivalence of the definitions of melancholy did not end with Freud's essay "M&M" that merged with different definitions in the psychoanalytic discourse. Using the principles of deconstruction, we have shown that the binary system of differences that structure Freud's dichotomy contains a number of fundamental paradoxes that become even more apparent when a comparison is made between "M&M" and Freud's other essays and the socio-historical context in which "M&M" emerged. We have also demonstrated that the binary system of differences and the representations that emerged from Freud's essay can be problematic because of the conceptualization that disregards the historical, social, and anthropological dimensions of loss and mourning that are connected with changes in mourning practices, the changing western relationship towards death, and important events such as the World War I. We have shown that there is a fourth condition missing from Freud's dichotomy. Non-pathological melancholy is the focus of contemporary theories from the field of humanities and social sciences that apply Freud's indispensable distinction in the depathologisation of theoretical and political discourses of gender, racial, and postcolonial relations, attempting to disconnect melancholy from its pessimistic connotations, and use it as a tool to expose historical tragedies and injustices.

We have demonstrated that contemporary deconstructions of Freud's theory delineate melancholy as a condition that has many different causes that emerge from abstract and unrecognised collective losses as well as discursive discontinuities and eliminated differences. We established Freud's dichotomy as an important hermeneutic instrument with which we can analyse a vast array of social and political discourses. In the context of the violence of writing, non-pathological melancholy is the alterity excluded from Freud's account of mourning and melancholy. However, this Foucauldian framework remains to be articulated as an object of future endeavours.

Bibliography

- Abraham, Karl (1988): *Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis*. London: Maresfield Library.
- Agamben, Giorgio (1993): *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bahun, Sanja (2014): *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Countermourning*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bowman, Peter (2008): *Deconstructing Popular Culture*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Bowring, Jackie (2015): *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Great Britain: Oldcastle Books.
- Burton, Robert (2013): *On Melancholy*. London: Hesperus Press Limited.
- Butler, Judith (1995): *Melancholy Gender – refused identification*. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues: The International Journal of Relational Perspectives*, 5 (2): 165–180.
- Butler, Judith (2004): *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London and New York: Verso.
- Cheng, Anlin Anne (2000): *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Clewell, Tammy (2004): *Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss*. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 52 (1): 43–67.
- Derrida, Jacques (1996): *By Force of Mourning*. *Critical Inquiry* 22 (2): 171–192.
- Derrida, Jacques (1997): *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dozois, David (2000): *Influences on Freud's Mourning and Melancholia and Its Contextual Validity*. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 20 (2): 167–195.
- Ehrenberg, Alain (2010): *The Weariness of Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age*. Montreal in Kingston; London; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Flatley, Jonathan (2008): *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Földenyi, Laszlo (2016): *Melancholy*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Foucault, Michel (2001). *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. London in New York: Psychology Press.
- Foucault, Michel (2002): *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Freud, Sigmund (1918): *Reflections on War and Death*. New York: Moffat, Yard and Co.
- Freud, Sigmund (1957): *On Transience*. Available from: https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_Transience.pdf (Accessed 26. 1. 2018).
- Freud, Sigmund (1962): *The Ego and the Id*. New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Freud, Sigmund (2001): *Mourning and Melancholia*. In J. Strachney (ed.): *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916) On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement. Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*: 237–258. London: Vintage Publishing.

- Gilroy, Paul (2005): *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Homans, Peter (ed.) (2000): *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End*. Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia.
- Kim, Kyuman David (2007). *Melancholic Freedom: Agency and the Spirit of Politics*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Klibansky, Raymond, et al. (1979): *Saturn and Melancholy*. Netherlands: Kraus Reprint.
- Makari, George (2007): *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Marsh, Jack (2009): Of violence: The force and significance of violence in the early Derrida. *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 35 (3): 269-286.
- Radden, Jennifer (2009): *Moody Minds Distempered: Essays on Melancholy*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schiesari, Juliana (1992): *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss*. Ithaca (USA): Cornell University Press.
- Silverman, J. Hugh (1989): *Derrida and Deconstruction*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Steiner, John (2005): The Conflict between Mourning and Melancholia. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, LXXIV: 83-104.
- Verhaeghe, Paul (2008): *On Being Normal and Other Disorders*. London: Karnac.
- Winters, R. Joseph (2016): *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy and the Agony of Progress*. Durham, London: Duke University Press.
- Woodward, Kathleen (1990): Freud and Barthes: Theorizing Mourning. *Sustaining Grief*. *Discourse* 13 (1): 93-110.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2000): Melancholy and the Act. *Critical Inquiry* 26 (4): 657-681.

Information about the author

Primož Mlačnik
 Junior Researcher
 Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana
 Kardeljeva Ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
primoz.mlacnik@fdv.uni-lj.si