

**Detachment: melancholia through unconventional
time in *The Hours* (2002) and *Melancholia* (2011)**

Written by Annemarie Jansen

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S2092565

Leiden University, Humanities Department

Master of Film and Photography Studies

Supervisor: Peter Verstraten

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Introduction

Some phenomena such as feelings and mental states are almost impossible to communicate via words. We therefore look for other ways to let people get a sense of these states in order to understand them by experience rather than just to know about them through facts. This sense of experiencing is brought about in the arts. One mental phenomena which has been repeatedly expressed through the arts is the state of melancholia. The melancholic character has been touched upon by many art forms over the course of the centuries and has been in line with the perceptions upon melancholia at the time. The melancholiac has therefore been represented as above average intelligent, creative and a prophet, but also as hysteric, mad and egocentric. The art of film has also contributed in this dialogue with many films such as *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946), *Le feu follet* (Louis Malle, 1963), *Puzzle of a Downfall Child* (Jerry Schatzberg, 1970), *Solaris* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972), *The Virgin Suicides* (Sofia Coppola, 1999), *Antichrist* (Lars von Trier, 2009), *Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Stephen Chbosky, 2012) and *Anomalisa* (Charlie Kaufman, 2015). Though all these films touch upon melancholia through the story which is being told, it is actually even more interesting in looking at the way in which it is told, through style and its construction. As it is through the style of an artwork that the information within a film is actually expressed, via experience.

Susan Sontag argues in her essay 'On Style' that ever since Aristotle introduced the theory of mimesis, where he states that all art is a poor imitation of the world (which he believes to be only a reflection of the truth as well), the idea prevails that art mirrors reality and that aesthetics oppose truth and morality. Consequently, one of the most common mistakes in analysing or even talking about art which is still made today, is the hierarchical distinction between content and style. Content is then often referred to "what the film is about" and style being "merely an accessory" and thus decorative. Sontag argues against the oppositions of the aesthetic versus ethical, art versus morality, and style versus content, which according to her all hang together. She argues how many see style as something which stands in the way of the "true story" which is told by the content. However, it is impossible to make any artwork without style, as the style *is* a part of the content and the two are interwoven. Because *how* a story is told, gives meaning to *what* is being told, style can be considered even more important than

the content.¹ Sontag describes style as the soul of the artwork while the content is merely the body in which the soul functions.² Another problem which she addresses due to the importance given to content is the idea that through artworks, statements about ‘the real world’ are being made.³ However, Sontag argues how art should be seen as an object in itself and not just a reflection of or comment on ‘the world’, saying that “art is not only about something; it is something”,⁴ although she does not deny that there is a relationship between the world and art. This goes against the idea of mimetic, as art is not obliged to mirror reality. Further, “the knowledge we gain through art is an experience of the form or style of knowing something, rather than a knowledge of something ... in itself”.⁵ The value of art is therefore found in its expressiveness in a way that it communicates more of an experience than an idea, which is the area of the style. The aesthetics in art, which are part of the area of style, nourish the consciousness. And as the consciousness aimed at action is what we call morality, morality lies in style, in *how* it is presented. It is through style that the artist communicates an aesthetic experience, which offers instructions in creating a new attitude towards ‘the world’.⁶

Two of the films named earlier that go against the common perceptions on melancholia in the way which Sontag argues for, are *The Hours* (2002) by Stephen Daldry and *Melancholia* (2011) by Lars von Trier. The films found an additional way to convert the disconnected state of melancholia towards the viewer by the disruption of something which normally is fixed and reliable, such as time. The films therefore use the notion of unconventional time in order to express the melancholic character in an atemporal experience. In *The Hours*, we follow three women throughout one day, set in different times. Although the women live in various decades, they seem to be more connected with each other, than with the people surrounding them physically. In *Melancholia*, taken along the destruction of the Earth by a planet named Melancholia. The movie is split up in two parts, the first portraying the wedding of our melancholiac protagonist Justine, the second depicting the last days on Earth. The two parts are introduced by a dramatic prelude where the last moments on the planet are presented in sixteen ultra-slow-motion Romantic painting-like shots which set the mood for

¹ Although Sontag argues that style and content are interwoven, I will often use the classical distinction between style and content in order to clarify my argument.

² Sontag, 2009, 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

disrupted time. *The Hours* and *Melancholia* as films have an added value to the psychological and medical insights on melancholia due to their unusual use of temporality. This added value is not so much in the story of the films, but in the style in which they present themselves, and in their structure.

In this thesis I will therefore research the way in which *Melancholia* and *The Hours* use unconventional notions of time in order to construct an experience of melancholia which provokes certain views on melancholia. In order to do this, I will first establish what melancholia has meant over the centuries and how it is perceived today. I will also distinguish melancholia from mourning by using Sigmund Freud's text on 'Mourning and Melancholia'. Additionally, I will argue how illnesses are used in the arts in order to introduce a character with a certain personality. Later, I will accumulate onto the two films, whereof first *The Hours* and then *Melancholia*, specifically focusing on how the state of melancholia is expressed through the unconventional use of time.

I. Melancholia

As for every mental illness, it is hard to have clear categorizations of the different types of symptoms. There is still little known about the way the brain works and whether people are born with certain predispositions for mental illness, addiction and criminality or whether it is a result of the external world. Most diagnoses are the result of a person having certain symptoms which links towards a category of symptoms many other people have experienced over time. A person is thus diagnosed as depressed or melancholic. For the sake of clarity I will categorize both disorders under the umbrella term *melancholia*.⁷ The terms and categories have fluctuated and shaped over time within different disciplines, from literature to medicine and from philosophy to psychology. Social scientist Francis Zimmerman therefore argues that it is not only a psychological, but also a culture bound syndrome.⁸ In this section I will try to highlight some of the major changes in theories about melancholia from the earliest ideas up until how we have started to see it anew ever since Freud psychoanalytic insights.

⁷ The terms 'melancholia' and 'depression' are often used interchangeably. Although in psychology today we most often speak of 'depression' as the term for the symptoms described, in the past the term 'melancholia' was most often used. As 'melancholia' has been the most used term in culture based studies, and used by Freud in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (on which my studies are based), I have chosen to use the term 'melancholia' throughout this thesis.

⁸ Zimmerman.

History of Melancholia

There has been a fascination with melancholia and humourism ever since Hippocrates's theory of the four humours which was developed around 400 BC. Lawrence Babb explains that within the four humours, the sanguine was the antithesis of the melancholy.⁹ Where the sanguine man is happy, the melancholy man is sad and fearful due to the excess of black bile in his blood. From the four humours, his is furthest away from life as it possesses the qualities of being dry and cold, which stands opposite of the moisture and heat of life. Babb brings forward the difference between having a melancholiac temperament and accidental melancholy. Where the first is opposite to nature and therefore considered an illness, accidental melancholy is triggered by the surroundings and habits of a man.¹⁰ Babb also amplifies that the life of a scholar and artist is more likely to become melancholic. According to Babb the life of an intellectual breeds melancholy, as intellectuals tend to neglect their body and only focus on their mind. The fuel of moisture and heat is all spent on their mental labour.¹¹ Renaissance physicians also believed that too much mental labour would result in physical illness and mental depressions.¹² Robert Burton (1577-1640) was one of these physicians who did research in the matter. In the Renaissance he detected the syndrome in his book *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), where he describes it as a universal malady.¹³ Many scholars argue that Renaissance physicians associated melancholy with mental capability, after the pseudo-Aristotelian idea of the melancholic genius.¹⁴ The syndrome was therefore seen as both a blessing and a curse, as it meant that you possessed an extraordinary mind.

Reaching the Romantic period in Western Europe there seemed to be a melancholiac epidemic. Whether more people were in fact suffering of the illness than before, the society of the time bred more melancholy, doctors were diagnosing via a broader scale of symptoms, or more people were calling themselves melancholic due to a trend, remains a question. Agnes Gowland studies the relationship between overall sadness and high suicide rates, and religious, legal and social changes.¹⁵ Gowland argues that instead of asking why people were afflicted by

⁹ Babb, 249.

¹⁰ Ibid., 249.

¹¹ Ibid., 250.

¹² Ibid., 252.

¹³ Burton, SUBSECT. III.- Symptoms of Melancholy abounding in the whole body.

¹⁴ Babb, 253.

¹⁵ Gowland, 81. (from MacDonald and Murphy)

melancholy, it is more interesting to examine why people described themselves as melancholic and what they meant by this.¹⁶ She raises various questions about the melancholic epidemic of the Romantic period. Although many would argue that the early modern melancholic epidemic is related to the modern depression, Gowland finds this relationship debatable as there are no clear descriptions of the symptoms which doctors labelled as melancholic. She therefore questions if, in the case the notebooks of early physicians survived, they paid attention to the same symptoms and linked them to the same idea of melancholy as physicians would do today. It is therefore hard to say that there is a clear relation between these two. Additionally, she argues that the pseudo-Aristotelian idea as the melancholic genius, whom would be endowed with profound intellectual and prophetic capacities, and how melancholia was also seen as a passionate condition, would make many artists diagnose themselves as melancholic.¹⁷

Michel Foucault goes further into depth on the classification of madness and its relation to society. He argues that the categorization of the 'mad' and the 'sane' says more about the society of that time, than the mad themselves. In the introduction of his new edition of Foucault's *History of Madness* Jean Khalifa, who specializes in history of philosophy and anthropology, claims that Foucault links madness to the mode of production which results in exclusion within society. In the Renaissance, madness was seen as a sort of knowledge, which relates to the melancholic genius. The mad were those who have been enlightened by the absolute truth, which drove them mad.¹⁸ In the Classical period madness was seen as the opposite, it was viewed upon as unreason. The mad were locked up and banned from cities. The idea prevailed that the mad deliberately chose this path of unreason. In the same period, medical doctors also gained interest in the mad. They were becoming an object of scientific study. Because the mad were locked up, they were becoming an object of observation. Foucault questions why they became an object of medicinal study while criminals and prostitutes became an object of sociological study.¹⁹ Meaning that he sees the mad more as a phenomenon caused by external social factors (for instance social relations) than as an internally caused illness. In the third period, the Modern period, the mad were seen as ill and in need of medical treatment. The mad are pulled out of every social context and it is seen as a disease only relating

¹⁶ Ibid., 83 (from reference)

¹⁷ Ibid., 89. (from reference) Gowland, 97.

¹⁸ Khalifa, xvi.

¹⁹ Ibid., xvii.

to the individual, not society.²⁰ According to Foucault, madness is more a consequence of the norms of society and who falls out of these norms, than of the individual him or herself. When we lock away the mad or label someone as mad, this automatically means that we perceive ourselves as reasonable²¹, which would say more about the ‘reasonable’ than the ‘mad’.

To sum up, what and whom has in history been referred to as melancholic has been far more than the people actually suffering with the disease. This is partly due to the intellectual character associated with melancholia, and partly because it isn’t clear what have been the qualifications for the illness over time. Also, Foucault argues that who are seen as mad in a certain time and place, goes together with what is perceived as normal. We therefore need to take into account the social and political conditions at the time when we discuss ‘epidemics’ of melancholia and madness.

Mourning and Melancholia

Originally, Sigmund Freud was a neurologist but in his writings, which are the foundation of psychoanalysis, he claimed that most behaviours have underlying impulses which may be unconscious.²² Among other things, Freud wrote about the relationship, differences and similarities of mourning and melancholia in his essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’. As these ideas are still one of the leading basis for our contemporary understanding of melancholia, I will take his theory as a base for my study.

According to Freud, the main similarity between mourning and melancholia is the loss of an object, being either a loved person or something that has been replaced by another such as a country, liberty or an ideal. The loss of an object leads to a state of mourning, which we expect to be overcome after a certain lapse of time and we look upon it as something natural. The leading characteristics of melancholia are a loss of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, restraint from all activity and a lowered self-regard which can become so severe that it leads to a delusional expectation of self-punishment.²³ The first three characteristics are met with those of mourning. However, the profound difference is the last characteristic relating to the disturbance of the ego. The loss in melancholia can be seen as more of a loss of an ideal kind, meaning that it is not necessarily a physical thing that has been lost. If it is a loss of this kind, it is the lesser problem *whom* is lost and more *what* is lost with

²⁰ Ibid., xviii

²¹ Ibid., xxvii.

²² Vickers.

²³ Freud, 244.

it. The sufferer can mostly not perceive consciously of what this lost object exactly is, which contradicts to mourning, where the object loss is conscious.²⁴ Whereas the object loss in mourning leads to the world seeming empty; the loss of object in melancholia leads to the idea that the ego itself is empty and worthless.²⁵ The melancholiac does not believe that something has changed inside of him or her, but feels as if he or she has become enlightened of one's own unworthiness which has been there all along. He or she feels as if before the enlightenment, one was blind of these failures and feels guilty to one's relatives for having to cope with such a person. This hate towards one's own ego results in sleeplessness, refusal of nourishment and a loss of the instinct of wanting to stay alive. The melancholiac also believes that one has a better eye for reality than people who are not melancholic.²⁶ Freud argues that the accusations the melancholiac makes towards him or herself, are actually an accusation towards the other. He explains that this is the result of the feelings towards the other (which could be another person or anything else in the external world) turning onto the sufferers own ego.²⁷ At one moment there was an object loss, but instead of the libido searching for a replacement of object (as would normally happen), the shadow of the lost object falls upon the ego. Freud adds that "the object-choice has been effected on a narcissistic basis"²⁸, meaning that the mourning has turned upon the ego itself which supports the symptoms of refusing nourishment. Suicide is the extreme form of this self-hate where it is more powerful than the ego itself.²⁹ Another characteristic of melancholia which is not necessary but often the case, is the tendency to turn into mania. Mania has the direct opposite of all symptoms as it is characterized by an overwhelming feeling of triumph and joy. The state can alternate with melancholia in periodic relapses, leading to the hypothesis of circular insanity. During manic periods, the person who is normally melancholic has pushed his or her ego aside. Freud explains this shift by an example of a poor man winning a large sum of money which relieves him from his deepest and chronic worries, causing relief and extreme joy. Freud argues that though the two states seem to be complete opposites, the corresponding characteristic of melancholia in mania is the fact that the object of this triumph of the ego is unknown to the sufferer.³⁰

²⁴ Ibid., 245.

²⁵ The ego, simply put, being the way one presents oneself in public. The ego manages our impulses (the id), and makes it possible to live in a society.

²⁶ Ibid., 246.

²⁷ Ibid., 248.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 251.

³⁰ Ibid., 254.

Representation of Melancholia

Susan Sontag studies the representation of illness in our society. According to Sontag, the way we perceive illness and the ill, has fluctuated over time. Where the Greeks saw illness as a punishment for the sinners, in the nineteenth century this turned over to illness being a way of self-expression of the will.³¹ In pre-modern times there was the ideal of a well-balanced character with limited expressiveness. Anyone who would not act accordingly to this ideal was seen as mad. From that moment on, illness was seen as something which results from particular character traits. It was seen as the result of excess feeling, revealing desires of which the patient probably was unaware.³²

Sontag explains in her book *Illness as a Metaphor* that looking ill has since the 19th century been viewed upon as something chic. The look was then associated with tuberculosis which was seen as the illness for creative minds and free spirits. This idea that the character of a person would cause the illness, worked in both ways. After a while, people wanted to look ill as an element of style, expressing the way they want to be perceived. People would therefore willingly eat less and take less care of themselves in order to look as if they were ill. That way, people would see them as interesting characters. The tubercular look became more and more appealing to women as it represented a vulnerability and superior sensitivity.³³ Looking ill was then seen as part of being artistic and having a romantic personality³⁴ and while the beauty image of men changed during the 20th century, the thin and fragile look of women is still present in our society.³⁵

According to Sontag, melancholy can be seen in the same fashion as tuberculosis. Melancholy is also seen as an artist disease as it takes a sensitive person to feel such deep sadness.³⁶ It was seen as someone sensitive, creative and a being apart, but also hectic, a reckless creature of passionate extremes. Melancholiacs were people whom were too sensitive to bear the horrors of the vulgar, everyday world.³⁷ These characters are seen as both passionate and repressed.³⁸ They seem to feel too much and society represses them to fit into the well-

³¹ Sontag., 44.

³² Ibid., 46.

³³ Ibid., 30.

³⁴ Ibid., 29+31.

³⁵ Ibid., 30.

³⁶ Ibid., 32.

³⁷ Ibid., 33+36.

³⁸ Ibid., 40.

balanced ideal. This repression only adds to the melancholic sadness. The illness brings out both the worst and best of that character.³⁹

In literature and art, diseases were used to give a character a certain personality. She argues that different diseases, represent different character traits. The names of the diseases are therefore not only used to describe the disease, but often also are used as metaphors for other phenomena.⁴⁰ Due to the duality in the melancholic character, the melancholiac is often represented in characters whom are above average intelligent, artistic and interesting, but also as weak, unpredictable and egocentric. According to Sontag, melancholy is used in the arts instead of depression, as depression is melancholy minus the romantic notion.⁴¹

As I have shown, melancholia is to be distinguished from mourning. When melancholic, one is not grieving a loss of something in the external world, but of one's own ego which is internal. However, grief can result in melancholia as the loss of the external can lead to the loss of one's ego. It is hard to form a clear understanding of the history of sufferers of melancholia due to different factors. As the terms and categories have fluctuated over time, it is hard to know if the described victims of melancholia or madness, suffered of modern day melancholia. Also, because melancholia has been linked with the artistic genius it is questionable if all self-diagnosed melancholiacs actually suffered from the illness. Later, disease was seen as part of one's character and caused by particular character traits. Thus the self-diagnosis of melancholia went one step further by the ill-look becoming a trend amongst people who wanted to be perceived as creative. In the arts, melancholiacs were used to give a character his or her personality. The representation of these characters is often dualistic as they are either depicted as weak and self-centred, or creative and intellectual.

However, in some cases the representation of melancholiacs has been done in a far more interesting way. The duality of the illness is then portrayed, even the categorisation of 'mad' and 'sane' is in some cases addressed. Some films can even be seen as critiques towards our common view upon melancholiacs. Two films which both have an interesting way of depicting melancholiacs are *The Hours* (2002) and *Melancholia* (2011). The two movies have a certain overlap but also a certain amount differences in their depicting. In the following two chapters

³⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 60.

⁴¹ Ibid., 51.

I will analyse both films and focus on how the portrayal of melancholia is done in both the style and content.

II. The Hours (2002) – Stephen Daldry

The Hours was published as a novel in 1999 by Michael Cunningham. Later, in 2002, David Hare wrote it into a movie which Stephen Daldry directed. The story revolves around the novel *Mrs Dalloway* written by Virginia Woolf. The book describes one day in the life of Mrs Dalloway and this idea is preserved in the film as we follow three women during one day, portraying their whole life. The main characters in the film all have their own struggle with melancholia which is brought forward as a constant battle between life and death. The characters all have very different personalities and live different lives in different times. However, the story of *Mrs Dalloway* and their struggle with melancholia binds the characters together. We follow Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman) while writing her book in 1923 England, Laura (Julianne Moore) while reading the book in the 1951 suburb in California and Clarissa (Meryl Streep) seemingly acting the book while organising a party in 2001 New York City. She organises the party for her poet friend and old lover Richard (Ed Harris), who later turns out to be Laura's son. He has AIDS and in the end commits suicide. The film was mostly praised when it came out and was nominated for nine Academy Awards which of one was won by Nicole Kidman for best actress. The film had its premiere on Christmas Day in New York and Los Angeles. *The Hours* has an interesting way of portraying the melancholia of different characters, each in their own way. The main themes throughout the film linked towards the melancholia are time, male oppression and repression of feelings, and a struggle between life and death. But even more than that, the film uses an unconventional time structure which adds an extra layer to the portrayal of melancholia. I will analyse how this time usage is implemented and what it has as an effect, alongside the themes of repression, and conclude with how the film depicts melancholia in general.

Mrs Dalloway

Mrs Dalloway is a novel written by Virginia Woolf in 1925. The story follows three characters for one day and thereby focusses on the thoughts and inner dialogues of these characters. Thomas Caramagno writes about Woolf's suffering of manic-depression and demonstrates how her condition is recognizable in the novel. Woolf wrote in her diary that she wanted to

write a book where sanity and insanity existed alongside each other.⁴² To express either the sanity or insanity of the characters she uses the inner dialogue and literally gets into the character's head. Caramagno states that "how we create and interact with our daydreams ... serves as a model for how we relate to others and to self".⁴³ By following the daydreams of the characters, she constantly shifts from sanity into insanity, taking the reader along with the bipolar illness.⁴⁴ The three characters in the novel stand for the stages of the bipolar disease were sufferers constantly shift from melancholia into mania. Peter stands for the precursor state, Septimus is the psychotic "mixed" state and Clarissa is the happy state.⁴⁵

Repression

As a cause of melancholy, repression is pointed out as one of the most severe. *The Hours* has depicted problems of male oppression and the repression of feelings. Both forms of repression are shared with the characteristics of a 1950's melodrama, which many characteristics in *The Hours* seem to be referring to. The element of repression is integrated in both the style and content of the film. For instance, in various scenes our characters are isolated by the framing. The framing of the characters, point towards the miscommunications between the three women and the rest of the world. Also, they build walls around them which often become visible decor of the scenes. One of the scenes that shows male oppression best is where Laura waves Dan goodbye through the window of their home. The window had a special import in terms of the social and symbolic positioning of the woman in the 1940's and 1950's. The window was the interface between inside, the feminine space of the family and reproduction, and outside, the masculine space of production. It served as a means of communication between these two worlds, but was also a place where the female pathos was often represented.⁴⁶ In Laura's scenes this is made explicit as it also plays in the 1950's where her husband goes off to work every day and Laura stays at home with her son, just like all of the other women and men in their neighbourhood. In the scene where Dan goes off to work, Laura looks from the window as Dan gets into his car. Instead of having clear windows, bringing in the light, we see Laura moving away a small part of the curtains, only making her face visible while in the window we see the reflection of the California palm trees. Dan does not seem to be aware of his wife's condition

⁴² Woolf, *Diary 2*, 207.

⁴³ Caramagno, 214.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴⁶ Doane, 2.

and almost naively believes that everything is perfect in his life, including his wife. He does not look further than the mask Laura tries to wear. The curtains show how the couple dysfunctions in communication by covering the windows as they block the view from outside, inwards. Just as Laura wears a mask to cover her feelings for the rest of the world, including her husband. This becomes even more apparent when Dan – somewhat later in the movie – wants to tell little Richard about how he met Laura and how he always imagined this perfect life that they are living after eating his birthday cake, unaware that the cake partly caused Laura to have a mental breakdown. Later in the evening we see Laura crying on the toilet while Dan is lying in bed. They are talking about their neighbour Kitty who had to go to the hospital, as he believes “just for a check-up, nothing serious”. The viewer knows this is not the case, as Kitty told Laura her appointment was in order to get a tumour out of her uterus. This relates to the oblivion in which Dan views his wife’s condition. Laura reacts with saying “I’m terrified” as she bursts into tears, trying not to let Dan notice. Dan asks “why?”, to which she replies whispering “only the idea that she might disappear”. This points towards her feelings of her own situation, wanting to run away. Soon after, Dan changes the subject to how great his day was, not knowing that Laura almost killed herself and is now crying just a few steps away. The camera is situated in the bathroom, first showing Laura sitting on the toilet and Dan lying in bed, visible through the half open door. Again, this resembles the relationship between Laura and Dan, where Dan is only aware of a small part of Laura’s mind. During the scene we see long close-ups of Laura and her tears, while Dan is shortly portrayed through the bathroom door a few times. This brings the spectator closer to Laura’s feelings and more distanced from Dan. Towards the end of the scene, the camera lengthens the shots of Dan, bringing the camera closer towards him, while Laura tries to put her mask back on. The scenes described, show us that Laura feels repressed by her environment where she is to act as the perfect housewife in a male dominated world.

The repression is shown as well, although in a different way, in Clarissa’s scenes. When she first visits Richard she brings flowers. We see her in the elevator and shot from above. The open part on the top of the elevator frames Clarissa with her colourful flowers, while the space around her gets darker as she goes up. Although Clarissa tries to act cheerful and as if everything is fine, she is suppressing her true condition. Once she arrives at the door, Richard immediately names her Mrs Dalloway, making a clear connection between her and *Mrs Dalloway*. During the scene the camera constantly follows Clarissa’s movements in long shots as she immediately takes over the house, letting in light through the windows and arranging

the colourful flowers. This is in contrast with the shots of Richard which are very still, emphasizing the dynamic, manic Clarissa, versus the static, melancholic Richard. Richard later on in the scene says “Mrs. Dalloway, always giving parties to cover the silence”, which exactly describes Clarissa’s way of suppressing her feelings. Kim Kwangsoon writes how Clarissa is also repressed by her past as she seems to be the only care taker of Richard, whom is her old lover. By constantly being occupied with the care for Richard (the past), she cannot fully live her own life with Sally (the now)⁴⁷. Although this male domination has a different form than Laura’s case, her life is dominated by a male as well. Another moment of repression in Clarissa’s scenes is when she is sitting in her bedroom whilst Sally is trying to talk to her after arriving home. Although Sally immediately hears that Clarissa is not O.K., even though she says she is, Clarissa keeps on answering as if there is nothing wrong. Almost the entire conversation is filmed without the characters being in the same room, making clear that Clarissa is not showing herself to Sally, neither physically nor mentally.

When Virginia tries to escape to London, her husband Leonard stops her. A fight on the platform follows where there is an interesting editing and positioning of the camera at work. When the fight starts, Leonard expresses his worries in anger he explains to her that she isn’t the best judges of her own interests. We see only subjective shots of Virginia (Leonard’s view on her) shot from behind Leonard’s head which is visible, and externally focalized shots of Virginia and Leonard together. Virginia is not given her own frame and the few shots where we see Leonard over Virginia’s shoulder are a fraction of a second. This camera work amplifies what Leonard and Virginia are then fighting about, which is that she is only seen through the eyes of others and that she is not permitted to make her own decisions. Once she starts to convince Leonard that she is able to make her own decisions and that it is her right to do so, we see more and longer close-up shots of Virginia. This scene shows a change in the way Virginia feels oppressed by Leonard on both the narrative and visual track.

Struggle Between Life and Death

Suicide is a constant danger in the movie as we know that Virginia will drown herself in the end. During the first scene we follow Virginia who is committing suicide. Although this is our only story line based on true events and many people know that Virginia Woolf committed suicide, portraying the act at the beginning of the film emphasizes the tragic end of our protagonist and informs the spectators unfamiliar with Woolf’s end. The knowledge of the end

⁴⁷ Kwangsoon, 197.

of the character also leaves the spectator with an extra awareness of the terrible symptoms included in the illness of the characters. In the movie, all the characters portray a constant struggle between life and death.

Virginia has tried to kill herself twice before the time in which the movie is set. Although she doesn't seem to be on the edge of committing suicide again in the day which the movie depicts, there is a constant fascination with death. When her niece and nephews find a dead bird, she lays next to it, looking amorally towards its peace and calmness. The next shot is of Laura lying in bed, who then decides to kill herself. Later that afternoon Virginia "escapes" her country house and runs off to the train for London. The fight on the platform with Leonard follows where she says that if she has to choose between Richmond and death, she chooses death. She sees Richmond as death and London as life. By fleeing to London she is trying to overcome her death wish and choose life. Alongside that, she is determined that someone in her novel should die. Whether it is Mrs Dalloway that should kill herself or as she later decides, the poet. Virginia's conversation by the fire with her husband acts as an explanation of why Richard found it necessary to end his life. When Leonard asks why someone has to die, she tells him some of us have to die for the rest of us to value life more, as a contrast.

Laura chooses life by not killing herself and leaving her family to lead another life. She later explains to Clarissa that it was either running away or killing herself. She felt as if there was no choice. However, to Richard she is dead by making that choice. This is made apparent in the cinematography by showing a picture of Laura in her wedding gown.⁴⁸ The camera pulls away from the picture making the pills next to it visible. This could suggest the way Laura once wanted to kill herself, but are actually the pills Richard has taken causing his manic episode as he later explains to Clarissa. These pills are given to him in order to treat his mental suffering which is possibly caused by his melancholic mother and her leaving at a young age. We hear sirens on the background and Richard looking outside of the window while pushing the curtains away. The older Richard is constantly wearing his spaceship bathrobe, which is the exact same fabric as his bedding in the 1950's (Figure 2). This shows us that the events concerning his melancholic mother when he was a little boy, are still covering him and causing his melancholic

⁴⁸ This points towards the death in photography for which Roland Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida*. Knowing this, we see that Richard's suicide is announced a few times in the film by putting a picture of him in the décor. We are shown a picture on his parents bedside table when Laura is crying in the bathroom and in Clarissa's hallway there is also a picture of him.

mental state. We see a shot of him screaming “mommy” behind the window as a young boy, still with the sound of the sirens haunting us (Figure 1). The windows resemble the imprisonment of Richard’s self as a child in his old self and how he is now imprisoned in his illness. After this, there follows a close-up of old Richard where we see his flaked face with a tear rolling down his cheek while the camera is pulling away from him. Another shot of Richard crying from a different angle and in a different posture show us a jump in time, while we still hear dramatic music, sirens and car honks. As Clarissa arrives in the apartment she sees Richard pulling apart his apartment, claiming that he needed to let in some light. This can be seen as a metaphor for Richard experiencing a moment of clarity where he realises (as he tells Clarissa) he still has “to face the hours, and the hours after the party, and the hours after that”, addressing his battle with time. The idea that his life as it is, can go on for years, is something which he expresses in discomfort. Richard rips away the paper covering the window which lets the reality come in and sits at the window as he starts telling Clarissa about the morning they fell in love. He then partly cites Virginia’s suicide note by saying “I don’t think two people could’ve been happier than we have been”, where after he throws himself out of the window.

This event has an ambiguous character. On the one hand Richard chooses death over life as he finds his state not worth living. However, on the other hand Virginia writes out his death for him, for which I will argue later on. By performing this suicidal act, Clarissa is freed from his oppression and can finally lead her own life without caring for Richard. Therefore, his death means her life. After Richard’s death, Clarissa can finally let go of her past. This is made evident by Laura visiting her to tell her why she left. Clarissa’s daughter says “so that’s the monster” when Laura arrives, which describes how Richard used to describe his mother. However, Laura is finally able to tell Clarissa why she had to leave her family and Clarissa seems to empathise with her. When Virginia reads out her suicide note during the last shots of the movie, we hear her say “to love it for what it is” whilst we see Clarissa in the hallway, ready to go to bed, smiling contently as if she has finally been able to close the chapter of Richard. When we hear “and then to put it away”, she switches off the light and closes her bedroom door. This beautifully portrays the way in which Richard’s death was necessary for Clarissa to move on.

The idea that Virginia Woolf had for her book *Mrs Dalloway*, namely depicting sane and insane next to each other, can also be seen in the film. All the characters seem to have moments of sanity and insanity throughout the film. Clarissa seems to be sane and cheerful, but as the film progresses, seems to show signs of insanity. For instance, when an old friend

arrives too early for the party. Laura seems insane in the beginning of the film, clearly feeling not well and repressed by her environment to the point that she wants to end her life. However, her character regains her strength by the scene where she talks to Clarissa. She is the only one who chooses life for herself. She made a strong decision for her own happiness by leaving her family, which she explains as being the sane thing to do. Virginia at moments seems insane, but is sane by the fact of being one of the most brilliant writers ever lived.

Time

Showing the ending of a character's life in the beginning in the film as is done in *The Hours* goes against the conventional time in storytelling. In a way it announces the atypical use of time in the story to come. Time is the main worry of all the characters as they all struggle to face the hours in which their lives will continue. Virginia, in the end, cannot deal with the hours due to her mental condition, Laura cannot conform herself to living the perfect-housewife-dream her husband wants from her, and Richard cannot (as he himself says just before his suicide) face the hours after the party, and the hours after that due to his AIDS in combination with his mental condition. Clarissa seems to fill in the hours with things that are trivial, like organising the party, buying flowers and getting excited over crab. She seems to be the only character who, even though it is hard at times, finds life and thus the hours' worth living.

It is immediately clear that we follow the day of the three women living in different times. These times are most synchronized to each other when the characters wake up and make themselves ready for the day. We first see the three partners coming home after already have been out (Sally, Clarissa's partner seems to be secretly sleeping somewhere else, but this does not come back in the rest of the story). Our main characters are all first shown in bed after which Clarissa and Virginia get up, wash their face, pin up their hair and then look in the mirror. They both seem to look empty towards their own reflection. Laura does not look in the mirror but looks as if she is disappointed that she has woken up, where after she starts reading *Mrs Dalloway*. The women do not seem to be connected in time with the people surrounding them which also comes forward from the first scene, given that all the partners of the characters have been up for a while when they get up themselves. Also, they all seem to be taken up in their own dream world while talking to their partners. Virginia is taken up by her book, not wanting to have breakfast or lunch as she has come up with her first sentence and prefers not to live in reality but in her own story. Laura finds herself in the world of the book as she immediately starts reading it when woken up. Her husband looks in all the cabinets searching for food and

obviously isn't aware of the placement of objects in the kitchen, suggesting that he normally isn't in there. Clarissa gets up and shouts to her partner that she will get the flowers - which her partner has forgotten - for the party which she is organising of which only she seems excited. All characters, but especially Virginia, don't want to conform to the schedule she is expected to follow. This results in getting up late and not caring for mealtimes.

What is even more interesting than their individual time, is the way in which the characters' times are woven together. The characters seem to be telepathically connected through time, via the book *Mrs Dalloway*. Where Virginia is writing the book, Laura is reading the book and Clarissa is acting the story. By doing this, the film suggests that even though times change, this does not lead to significant differences in the experience of melancholia. The characters all have different lives with their own expectations, but they all share the emotions that come with it. Another layer in the intermingled time is the novel of *Mrs Dalloway* that is repeated through history, showing that art indeed lives on. This is amplified by Richard's last sentence, saying "I don't think two people could have been happier than we've been", which is repeated from Virginia Woolf's suicide note. Where Virginia Woolf wrote *Mrs Dalloway*, Richard is the writer in *The Hours*. We never find out what his book is about or what the title is, but from the dialogues in the film we can make up that Clarissa has the leading role in his book, that Richard calls Clarissa "Mrs. Dalloway" from day to day, and that the novel is perceived as difficult for most people. Richard also tells Clarissa that he wanted to depict everything that happens in a moment in his book, and everything happening at the same time. The descriptions of his book seem to have a lot in common with the novels *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Hours*. When speaking to Clarissa, he says that does not believe that his book will live on. This is exactly what the movie is about, a work of art which lives on through different lives. Not only is it read by people in different times, it seems as if the story is repeating itself in the course of time. In the film there is a forward moving sense of time during the days of the characters, but not in time in general. A moment in the film that puts extra emphasis on this concept of time is when Richard thinks he has already been to the event which Clarissa is hosting later that evening. He says he remembers it clearly, but that he must be "falling out of time", confusing past, present and future. The film suggests that instead of years following each other, everything is happening at the same moment. It is 1923, it is 1949 and it is 2002 at the same time.

Virginia seems to be connected with Laura's and Clarissa's worlds and from that, writing her book. That she is not merely sensing the events in their lives and writing from that, but is actually deciding what course Laura's and Clarissa's lives will take, is made clear through a

number of decisive moments in the film. The first being when the women have got out of their beds. Clarissa looks indecisive of what she should do. We then see Virginia in her writing room where she mumbles “Mrs. Dalloway said, she would buy the flowers herself”, after which Clarissa immediately says these words out loud to her partner and starts her day. Interestingly, Laura also says the words out loud when reading the book. The reason I believe this to be is because Laura is a part of Virginia’s perception on Mrs. Dalloway. Although her character seems to be quite different, at all the decisive moments, she seems to be part of the weight of the choice Virginia is making to the story of her protagonist. The next decisive moment is when Virginia is questioning whether Mrs Dalloway should die. First, we see Laura dropping of Richard at day-care and driving to a hotel with a bag full of pills. However, before she takes the pills she reads the book after which she falls asleep. When Virginia then decides that she will not let Mrs Dalloway die and perhaps someone else, Laura seems to be dreaming that she is drowning as water rushes into the room from under her bed. Once Virginia has spoken out her change of mind, Laura awakes and says that she cannot do it. Afterwards she goes back to Richard and her home. During the next decisive moment, Virginia’s scripting does not happen at the event itself. However, it is still clear that she has prescribed the event. Richard has already thrown himself out of the window when shortly after we see a scene of Virginia and Leonard by the fire. Leonard asks her whom will die in the book. Virginia replies that the poet will die, the visionary. After this, there is an immediate shot of young Richard lying in bed. This form of editing shows that Richard’s life and his end have been already written by Virginia. It also shows that Richard’s ‘choice’ of death over life is not entirely his, as it has been evident from the moment he was a little boy. This also raises the question whether suicide can be seen as a deliberate choice, or if sufferers feel like it is the only option.

Another part of the film which supports this idea of non-linear time is the portrayal of Virginia’s suicide. The first shots of the film and the last are the same shots of Virginia committing suicide by walking into the river with rocks in her jacket. As Virginia has committed suicide two times before the start of the film, it would be arguable to say that the first scene could be her first or second attempt and the last scene depicts her last and final attempt. However, as the location and the clothes of Virginia are exactly the same, there must be another meaning to these scenes. I believe that the scenes support the claim that everything is happening at once. By that, it actually doesn’t matter if the scenes depicted are the same event or that the one follows the other as it has happened both at the same time. This again supports the idea that suicide is no choice but the only option.

Both of the scenes have a different voice over though both are brought as to contain Virginia's suicide note. When researching Virginia Woolf's suicide note I found the original text which Nicole Kidman reads out as a narrator on the audio track in the first scene. It is not directly clear why the last suicide note is different from the film, nor is it written about by critics and analysts. Kwangsoon does mention it briefly, but doesn't question why this has been done.⁴⁹ However, the last note seems to bring forward the struggles of melancholia that are depicted explicitly in the film.

“Dear Leonard, to look life in the face, always to look life in the face and to know it for what it is, at last to know it. To love it for what it is and then to put it away. Leonard, always the years between us, always the years, always the love, always the hours.”⁵⁰

Virginia describes the struggles of all the characters in the film putting the realisation of what life is into words. All characters have had this realisation in different ways. The second sentence refers to the way Virginia ended her life, Laura chose a new life and left her family, Richard ended his life after reminiscing his happiest moment with Clarissa, and Clarissa was forced to choose her own life as a result of Richard's suicide. The letter is also a note to the two other characters in the film with all the years between them, but they all struggle with the hours. The connection between the characters seems to become stronger when Richard's death has been 'offered'. Clarissa is finally able to live for herself instead of Richard, and meets Laura for the first time. When hearing Laura's side of the story which she has heard for years from Richard, she finally knows the situation Laura was in and understands her choice. This way Virginia's predicament becomes true as “some people have to die in order for the others to value life more”.

The closing lines, in my opinion, perfectly resemble in which way the mental states of the characters and thereby melancholia in a broader sense is depicted in the film. The characters seem to be living in another world, in another time than their partners and relatives. They all experience the struggle with their male dominated environment, which is causing their repression and melancholy. Because of their melancholy they experience time in a different way, which causes them to sense an intuitive connection with each other. This experience

⁴⁹ Kwangsoon, 193.

⁵⁰ The Hours, 1:44:44-1:45:46

legitimizes the way time is interwoven in the narrative structure of the film. As I have argued this shows that, although times change and the world changes, the emotional experience of melancholia remains the same. It is a condition which does not conform to conventional time and has the quality of binding sufferers through time. In the story this is literally done by linking the characters with a book, binding together the characters' modes of feeling outside of time. The film shows how the women do not feel connected with their surroundings and what is expected of their male dominated environment. In order to survive they try to mask their feelings towards the outside world. Through the style it is shown how little the partners actually know and understand their melancholic wives. The women and their partners live in different notions of time and the movie is structured by this notion of time which is felt in melancholia.

III. Melancholia (2011) – Lars von Trier

Lars Von Trier is a sufferer of melancholia which has clearly been the inspiration of many of his films. Andrada Munteanu even calls von Trier's last three films a "Depression trilogy" including *Antichrist* (2009), *Melancholia* (2011) and *Nymphomaniac vol. I* and *vol. II* (2013).⁵¹ The film which - according to the maker himself - is closest related to his own mental state has been *Melancholia*⁵², which he has written and directed. *Melancholia* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2011⁵³ where Kirsten Dunst was awarded as best actress. In the film we follow Justine (Kirsten Dunst) who, in the first part of the film, is getting married to Michael (Alexander Skarsgard). Her sister Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg) and Claire's husband John (Kiefer Sutherland) own the estate where the film is situated.

The film starts with a dramatic prelude where the ending of the earth, and thus of the film, is portrayed and is cut into two parts: the first, named after Justine, which shows her wedding party and the second, named after Claire, which shows the last days of the planet. Melancholia is the planet that destroys the earth, and at the same time is the condition in which Justine finds herself. Von Trier has expressed that the film is inspired by his own melancholia and that Justine embodies his mind at that time. The factual melancholia is manifested in the

⁵¹ Munteanu, abstract.

⁵² Thorsen.

⁵³ During the press conference at the Cannes Filmfestival in 2011, von Trier stirred an upheaval by saying that he is a Nazi and that he understands Hitler. After this comment he tried to explain that it is the German Romantic aesthetic which the Nazis cherished, he was referring to and that "Hitler did some bad things, but I understand him".

first part of the movie, but gets its contours and meaning due to the prologue and the second part. With the film, von Trier goes against the common views on people suffering from melancholia which I will argue in the following chapter.

Solaris

Von Trier takes great inspiration from Andrej Tarkovsky's movies which, among other things, can be seen in these 'intervals of dead time'. Robert Ebert writes the following about the criticism of Tarkovsky's movies:

"It's often said they're too long, but that's missing the point: He uses length and depth to slow us down, to edge us out of the velocity of our lives, to enter a zone of reverie and meditation. When he allows a sequence to continue for what seems like an unreasonable length, we have a choice. We can be bored, or we can use the interlude as an opportunity to consolidate what has gone before, and process it in terms of our own reflections."⁵⁴

Ebert also states how Tarkovsky's later films "are uncompromised meditations on human nature and the purpose of existence"⁵⁵ and that after watching one of his films, there was a lot to think about. We can clearly see how Tarkovsky has influenced von Trier as he has adopted this slowness, and its invite for contemplation with it.

His film *Solaris* (1972) tells the story of the same named planet, only consisting of ocean, which turns out to be a giant consciousness. *Solaris* materializes all the hidden desires of the people entering its atmosphere. There is no doubt that *Solaris* in particular has been a great influence for the making of *Melancholia*, the most factual characteristic as both being stories about fictional planets consisting only of ocean, being involved with the state of mind of the protagonists. Both films are dealing with human consciousness by letting planets reveal the protagonists' true desire. Another similarity is the way both films invite the viewer to contemplate through lengthy images.

⁵⁴ Ebert.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The Wedding

The film about melancholia and the world's end begins (after the prologue) with a million-dollar wedding in a castle because, as von Trier says, "if everything has to go to hell, it needs to start off well"⁵⁶. The wedding begins with the limo which is too long for the curvy country road they are driving on, predicting the outcome of the couple's marriage.⁵⁷ The newly weds try to help the chauffeur to get past these corners, but fail and end up walking barefoot to the wedding. The scene takes five minutes, but when the couple arrives we are told that they are two hours late. During the party Justine constantly takes off to either take a bath or go for a stroll. However, we are never given any sense of how long these escapades take. All shots of Justine on her own have a certain slowness in them, but once she re-joins the party we are taken along with the quick editing following the party rhythm. The couple's first dance is on La Bamba, but after one short shot of Michael and Justine, we see Justine dancing with numerous men while the same song keeps playing on the background. Every change of partner is shot from a different angle, as if Justine's pace is hard to keep up with.⁵⁸ Because it is hard to know how long Justine is at the party, how long she was dancing and how long she has left, it is hard to evaluate Justine's behaviour during the wedding. Her time does not seem to synchronise with the guests time which fits contemporary definitions of melancholia.⁵⁹ Both this and the long scene of the limousine are "von Trier's intervals of dead time, in which time is derailed, losing its linear momentum".⁶⁰ It is surprising that no matter how many times Claire explains or mentions the time schedule in the film, we as spectators lose a sense of time in the event. Due to the discontinuous editing there is a lack of cohesiveness and the use of a shaky hand held camera conforms to the way Justine experiences time. It suggests that the spectator himself or herself is situated in the wedding, through the eyes of Justine. Von Trier initiated on filming the movie himself with a handheld camera but this turned out to be too difficult. Although the handheld camera has still been used in the majority of the shots, he ended up using professional camera men. He was destined to make the film, and especially the wedding, seem like an amateur home video. To achieve this, the camera men weren't told what to focus on or where exactly to stand when recording a scene.⁶¹ This creates the feeling that it is filmed by an uncle

⁵⁶ Thorsen.

⁵⁷ Munteanu, 62.

⁵⁸ Figlerowicz, 23.

⁵⁹ Evans, 377.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 377.

⁶¹ 'Lars von Trier and others tell about melancholia's visual style'

who likes to record the family events. Von Trier explains that he wanted to contrast the prettiness of the wedding by making the shots as amateur as possible.⁶² Once Justine's state becomes more stable in the second part of the film, the camera also slows down and becomes stadier. One of the few shots which is completely smooth is the shot of Justine and Claire riding their horses the day after the wedding while the planet is hunting them, as I describe later on. This contrasts all the chaotic shots of the wedding, where von Trier indeterminates time.

Empty Rituals

In an interview with Nils Thorsen, von Trier explains that melancholiacs view most rituals as empty. The wedding is one of the biggest rituals in our Western world where often the ritual seems as more important than the marriage itself. It is a ritual where everybody is supposed to be happy and it should be the best day of the bride's life. Everyone constantly asks Justine whether she is happy, which she is in the beginning, but after her parent's fight during the dinner she realises the emptiness of the ritual of marriage. This realisation of its emptiness is supported by the fact that we don't gain any information about the relationship between Michael and Justine. Once at the wedding, Justine seems to lose the feeling of intimacy with Michael at the same pace as her losing the enthusiasm of marriage in general. Additionally, the departure of Michael from the wedding is shown as a minor event in the film, almost unnoticeable. Even though a wedding should be with people who care about you, the guests at the wedding don't seem to notice Justine's mood. Even when she has disappeared multiple times and has to throw the bouquet but doesn't - which makes Claire throw it for her - the guests cheer and laugh as if nothing strange is going on. This separates Justine from the crowd as you aren't supposed to bring down the atmosphere of a wedding, being almost a social rule. Justine does not conform to these rules and although she still tries to do so in the beginning, her motivation becomes less and less. This makes the wedding an uncomfortable event to watch.

It often looks like Justine's wedding dress is suffocating her as she can hardly move in it and struggles to get it on. At one point John makes up the excuse that there are "some troubles with the dress" whilst Justine is actually taking a bath to escape the party. The dress is one of the objects which symbolise tradition and consumerism, together with the cake, the bouquet, plates and a wishing balloon. These symbols are constantly shattered, caught on fire or ripped apart. These tiny incidents announce Justine's meltdown and also refer to all the traditions and

⁶² Thorsen.

rituals which soon will be shattered collectively as the whole earth will be destroyed, causing them to lose their existence and meaning. Melancholic people often have these doubts in rituals, however in order to cure this, they are advised to partake in small daily rituals like sleeping a certain number of hours and taking walks daily. The other characters in the film, especially Michael, Claire and John, seem to be aware of Justine's melancholia. Nonetheless, they refuse to accept her attitude and do not understand that it cannot simply be fixed by making her partake in these rituals. The marriage feels like it is only there with the intention to pull Justine out of her melancholia. They try to let her know how much time and effort has been put into her wedding and they are desperately waiting for any sign of recognition. The time, effort and large sum of money which the wedding has cost, is automatically assumed to pull Justine out of her 'bad mood'. Another attempt to make her happy is of Michael, who has bought an entire apple yard for her so that "if she has any days in which she feels sad", she can sit in her large apple yard. When Justine gets up and walks away from Michael's story without taking the photograph of the yard with her, Michael seems to not understand how his purchase hasn't cured his wife or just made her happier. Although many people would find it hard to legitimize Justine's behaviour, the wedding scenes show the severeness of melancholia where there is no room for compensations by rituals. When Michael leaves the wedding and thus his wife he says "this could have been a lot different", to which Justine replies "yes, but what did you expect", finally realising and accepting her own condition.

Finding Meaning in Art

The scene where Justine re-curates the art room with artworks that resemble melancholia shows that the movie belongs to a long artistic lineage in its choice of theme. Additionally, it serves as a moment of contemplation for Justine as she is looking for something of value, for the things other people see as valuable, such as rituals, wealth and consuming goods, seem empty to her. The abstract images with which the room is filled, resemble these modern empty objects of desire, while the classic paintings she replaces them with, resemble her melancholic feelings. Von Trier adds that suffering is seen as more true and realistic than happiness, which is why we see difficult relationships as more real than perfect ones.⁶³ Justine finds the melancholic feelings she is experiencing in classical paintings and one by one pulls out books of the cabinets and replaces the abstract paintings with references to her mental state.

⁶³ Thorsen.

First, she pulls out Pieter Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow* (1565), which (not so incidentally) has also played a big part in *Solaris*. The painting depicts a group of hunters returning home after a day of hunting, empty handed in a wintery landscape of which you almost get cold by looking at it. The hunters hang their shoulders as there is no food to bring home to, leaving behind them a track of deeply sunken footsteps in the snow. Further to the left you see an inn with a sign hanging half-loose, almost falling to the ground. A small group is tending a fire which seems to be getting out of hand. These elements all seem very provisional and precarious, as if something awful is about to happen. In the distance there is a community ice-skating on the lake. However, this joy is not part of the hunters as they look down on it, it seems to be out of reach.⁶⁴ *Hunters in the Snow* is one of the five surviving paintings (originally there were six) in the series depicting The Labours of the Months of Pieter Brueghel the Elder. Each painting presented a panoramic landscape at a different time of year. The painting which is missing is the representation of spring – the season of hope and new beginnings. This accidental aspect of the series is almost a poetic reference to the hopelessness of melancholia. As the painting shows mountains, one wonders how this can be a Dutch or Flemish scene. According to Fisun Guner, Brueghel painted the series during a religious upheaval in the Netherlands which probably caused him to represent country life how he imagined it once was, or how it should or could be.⁶⁵ This longing of the world as it should be, rather than it is, interacts with the longing of Justine for a place that once was or a place that should be. Perhaps a time where people were much more in balance with nature and where often nature would control society, instead of the other way around. The painting is comforting and unsettling at the same time which would describe how the state of melancholia feels for Justine as she finds both reassurance and unease in the condition at the same time. As already explained, this correlates with the blessing and the curse as which melancholia was viewed upon in the notion of the artistic genius.

After this, Justine pulls out maybe one of the most discussed melancholiacs in history: Ophelia, Shakespeare's character in his play *Hamlet*, written in 1609. As shown in Figure 3 she is portrayed by John Everett Millais based on the description of her suicide given in the Shakespearean play. Ophelia's death was described as an accident. She climbed out of her window, wanting to pick flowers from a willow tree, when she dropped into a creek. While her dress initially held her afloat, "her garments, heavy with their drink" caused her to sink and

⁶⁴ Guner.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

drown.⁶⁶ It is a much debated subject what drove Ophelia mad and which form of madness she possessed. Camden argues that it was Hamlet's love, or non-existent love for Ophelia which drove her mad. He also notes that young women do not go mad from the loss of a father, but rather from a loved one.⁶⁷ Camden also argues that the Elizabethans saw Ophelia's condition as erotic melancholy, which occurs to women who have too much passion and don't become mothers.⁶⁸ James J. Marino analyses Ophelia's repression in the play. During the play, she sings love ballads, which at the time weren't considered as high art. As the elite ideal of a lady at that time was to be quiet, Ophelia breaks through this expectation and repression by singing her ballads.⁶⁹ Ophelia puts her feelings into low art songs as it was more acceptable for women of a low standard to pursue their passions and speak their mind, than it was for women of the high standard.⁷⁰ According to Caralyn Bialo, Shakespeare did this to point out that her madness is not something that can be put in words; it is something that can only be felt through experience.⁷¹ There are aspects of Ophelia which we can relate to Justine. Our protagonist is also a melancholic woman who seems to be repressed in the society and the position within this society which she is living in. She has a dream wedding with a very patient, nice and handsome man on a large estate and even gets a promotion, but from all these elements she only finds more repression. She is constantly expected to be happy and thankful, but instead wanders off and snaps at her boss. As for Ophelia in the painting, Justine is slowly drowning, although still floating on the water surface between life and death. Her marriage offers temporal relief from her melancholia, but soon her melancholia takes hold again and she drowns in sorrow. Von Trier opposes the portrayal of Ophelia as a shadow of Hamlet by his common usage of women as his main character. Rather than representing the melancholic woman as weak, he shows that she is actually the only one who truly understands reality. Also, the weak character of Michael amplifies this strong character of Justine.

Another painting which Justine adds to the art room is *The Land of Cockaigne* (1567) (in Dutch: Het Luilekkerland), which relates to her critical view on society's consumerism. Although many painters in history have depicted a mythical land where there is plenty of everything, Pieter Brueghel's depiction of the land and its inhabitants is not meant to be

⁶⁶ Hayes.

⁶⁷ Camden, 253.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 254.

⁶⁹ Bialo, 299.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 300.

⁷¹ Ibid., 297.

flattering as the bloated men on the ground have eaten so much that they cannot even move anymore. Frank H. Ross studied the painting in relation to the Dutch and Flemish political climate at the time. As we see three men laying on the ground representing the “three divisions within society: soldier, peasant, and wealthy burgher”⁷², he mainly argues how the three men depicted form a wheel where the fourth spoke is missing. The goose on the plate lies on the position of the missing fourth person. According to Ross, the Flemish nobility was mocked by naming them ‘geese’ at the time (referencing to beggars).⁷³ The painting therefore serves as a critique towards the nobles who would prevent the wheel of society from functioning properly.⁷⁴ *Land of Cockaigne* was the first (and most famous) in many of Brueghel’s paintings to be a criticism towards society. He became well known for developing this form of expression in using popular culture to spread political ideas.⁷⁵ In the film, Justine’s boss shows her latest advertorial during his wedding speech. The advertorial which Justine’s boss constantly wants a tagline for has a clear visual reference towards this painting (see Figure 4). Although the element of the spinning wheel with the missing spoke isn’t pictured in the photograph, we can see references in the table, the angle of the photograph and the positioning of the women as they lay in almost the same positions as the men in the painting. The general critique in the painting can be applied to Justine’s feelings towards society and its void as she experiences it. When Justine snaps at her boss it feels as if she is talking towards the entire consumerist and capitalist society. She says “What if instead we try and sell you to the public, Jack? Well then, surprisingly, I’d arrive right back where I started from – at nothing”. In this line, Jack resembles the emptiness of most products. Justine establishes the emptiness of consumerism as - at the core of it - they are selling nothing but a void. The many times it is stated how many holes the golf course of the estate has and how much the wedding costs, which is all later shattered by Melancholia, support this claim. Additionally, in consumerism images are not used to resemble the contemplation she is trying to find in the art room scene. In commercials, on the contrary, images are used in a volatile way in a rapid flow. Because of its constant flow, images lose their meaning as every image is immediately followed by the next, bigger, brighter one. It therefore does not even matter what the image is, due to the constant flow, every image will become banal. Justine is doing the opposite by attempting to find strength and healing powers in the still, classical paintings. The rapid flow of images can be seen in the same line as the

⁷² Ross, 312.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 314.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 328.

shaky camera movements of the wedding. Justine has trouble with synchronizing with the time of the others and longs for slowness and contemplation. Paintings invite us to stand still in time and contemplate on their meaning and how they relate to ourselves. As already commented on in Tarkovsky's films which inspired von Trier, this invitation for contemplation is essential. The function of making paintings a big part of a film is therefore in order to invite the viewer to look at the film as they would look at a painting. The art room scene is accordingly a fundamental part of the movie, especially in combination with the prologue. It seems contradictory to say that these two parts of the film could be subtracted from the film, without the story losing its meaning. This is because the two parts add an extra layer of meaning to the mental state of Justine. Although there is no real explanation why Justine is feeling melancholia, if one researches the paintings in the art room and relates their meanings to the context of the film, there is an entire extra story told. The scene is also a tipping point between Justine not knowing what is wrong and still trying to adjust to the atmosphere of the wedding, and her taking action by reaching out to her mother who tells her to "stop dreaming" and get out of her situation.

The Arrival of Melancholia

The final scene of the first part shows Justine and Claire taking the horses for a ride. Shot from a helicopter view zooming further and further onto the sisters, we see them galloping over the long country road while hearing the Tristan and Isolde soundtrack. This is referring to the planet which is slowly coming closer to the earth without them fully noticing. Only Justine feels that something is wrong but cannot fully come to terms with what exactly. When her horse Abraham refuses to cross a bridge, she notices that the red star, which was explained to her to be Antares (the brightest star of Scorpius of which later we discover that this is Melancholia) is missing from the sky.

This scene serves as an introduction to the second part, where we start off with seeing Justine as fragile as ever, fully sank into her melancholia. She comes back to the house in order for her sister to take care of her. At first, while Melancholia is hiding behind the sun (as we learn from Leo), it is obvious that Justine is unable to care for herself due to her melancholia. However, the closer the devastating planet comes towards the Earth, the better Justine's mood seems to get. In one scene we are set outside of the house at night where Claire sees Justine walk into the garden to the rocks by the river. Justine gets undressed to bathe in Melancholia's light when the planet is reunited with Justine, after being hidden behind the Sun. It is as if she

is pulling the planet towards the earth, seducing it. Justine seems aware of the devastating truth to come and is welcoming the destruction of the planet with open arms. The closer Melancholia gets to the Earth, the more the sisters change roles. Justine becomes calm and peaceful while Claire panics. According to Bonny Honig, the director was told by a therapist “that melancholiacs are good at handling catastrophe, because they are more prepared for it than others”.⁷⁶ It feels as if Justine has been preparing for the loss of the Earth her whole life and is at peace with the idea of its ending. Doyle questions whether Justine’s melancholia can be seen as trauma of a future event. Her body already mourns what is going to be lost without her realising it from the start. According to Briohny Doyle, the idea that the mad or the prophet is melancholic exists because they can foresee future catastrophes.⁷⁷ She tells Claire that nobody will mourn the Earth as it is as “Earth is evil”. In the film there is a constant parallel or confusion with the individual and the communal between momentary sensations and long-term disasters.⁷⁸ The main character suffers from melancholia, which is linked to suicide wishes and there is a planet approaching the Earth, destroying it completely. Claire tries to flee from the house when it is clear that the planet will hit, but is stopped by the car and golf cart not working. However, when the planet hits she isn’t safe on earth anywhere. As Leo says at one moment in the film “you can run but you can’t hide”. Von Trier argues that when melancholia hits, what normally functions suddenly fails.

Where the marriage is an event in which the party seems more important than the marriage itself, in the case of the end of the world, there are no set rituals. Justine and Claire have an argument on how they should spend their last moments on earth where Claire wants to meet on the terrace and drink a glass of wine and says that she wants “to do this the right way”. Justine finds the plan “a piece of shit” and proposes to “meet on the fucking toilet”. In the end, Justine and Leo build a ‘magic cave’ made of a few sticks stacked into a triangle. The opposing views of Claire and Justine go in line with the empty rituals which I discussed earlier. Claire’s proposal is bound to her idea of wealth and happiness, namely a glass of wine on the terrace of her large estate. She wants to grasp onto her comfort until the last minute, trying to distract herself from the truth to come. Justine knows that this truth is inevitable and doesn’t see the function of any ritual as it distracts from the truth, which will come either way. However, because of her love for Leo and her will to comfort him, they end up building the cave. Instead

⁷⁶ Honig, 629.

⁷⁷ Doyle, 33.

⁷⁸ Figlerowicz, 26.

of going to an actual cave, Justine and Leo build a fragile triangle in an open field, which offers entirely no protection. That way, the 'cave' resembles the reality of death as there is no way to escape it or to protect yourself from its fate. Munteanu argues that this can be seen as a reversed version of Plato's cave. Where Plato's cave illuminates the characters from the truth, this cave enlightens the characters; embracing the truth of their situation. The fragility of the cave also serves a ritual function in the perception that every adjuration is an empty gesture. In melancholia, all illusions we normally tell ourselves to protect the ego, fall away.⁷⁹ Justine even sits with her back towards the approaching planet, knowing it is coming, but also knowing there is nothing she can do to stop it. This attitude relates to her melancholia, as she knows it is part of her, but she can only accept it and let it steer her mood while she sits in the passenger seat. When every illusion of safety falls away for Claire, she finally finds herself in the same existentialist reality as Justine: an empty world without hope, with no escape. Claire says "you have it easy, don't you", when she expresses her worries to Justine about the approaching planet and becomes irritated by the calmness of Justine in, considering the situation they find themselves. Justine holds the power in the last part of the movie as she already understands the merciless of the universe.

The Prelude

Justine's strength is extraordinarily portrayed in the prelude of the film, consisting of sixteen colour slow-motion shots. Because of its super slow-motion, it takes a while before you notice that the images are moving, which together with their overly polished (almost plastic) look gives the feeling of futurist Romantic paintings. Each image refers to a later part in the movie and the wrapped sense of time in the prelude contrasts the fast, unstable shots of the wedding to come.

The movie starts with a portrait of melancholia; an image of Justine gazing into the distance while birds fall from the heavens, suggesting the existentialist implication that humans can never fully master or understand the strong force of the natural world. Next we see a perfectly symmetrical lawn, referencing the garden of Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1966). In front we see a sundial and on the lawn someone is swinging around a child, like a tiny clock,⁸⁰ depicting the time on Earth which is running out. We also see the dual shadows of the threatening light of Melancholia and the Sun. The tamed symmetry contrasts the wildness

⁷⁹ Pinter.

⁸⁰ Sinnerbrink, 114.

of the first shot, but the dual shadows show the lurking catastrophe which humans have no control over. The position of the camera, looking out on the lawn, prefigures a setting in which human behaviour can be observed, like its classical reference.⁸¹ We then are shown Pieter Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow* (1565) and after a few seconds, we see that the painting is burning. Next, we are presented the big blue planet Melancholia crossing a red star, which later we learn to be Antaris. This is followed by a shot of Claire trying to run across the golf course while clenching her son, but sinking into the ground, still trying to escape the inevitable truth. The attempted escape with its sinking footsteps is accompanied by hail falling from the sky, which makes a reference to the hunters in *Hunters in the Snow* very convincing (Figure 5). She is failing as a mother to protect her child from Melancholia, just as the hunters are failing as hunters by not being able to feed the village during winter. The flag of the nineteenth hole refers to limbo as we are later told in the movie that the golf course contains eighteen holes. Being in limbo means "an indeterminate space and time between past and future, divine prophecy and cosmic nightmare, hallucinatory vision and anticipatory recollection".⁸² This explanation clearly resembles the state where Claire and Justine find themselves and which is also established in the movie by showing the end in the beginning. This has as an effect that the viewer knows that the scenes are the last moments on earth, the moments between past and future. Next we see Justine's beloved horse, Abraham, falling to the ground with northern lights on the background. This could be a homage to Andrej Tarkovsky's many horses.⁸³ Another interpretation would be the name Abraham referencing to Karl Abraham, Freud's companion when writing *Mourning and Melancholia*. We then see Justine on the golf course with her arms stretched as if Christ, while mots are falling dead from the sky. The image provokes the idea that Justine is partaking in the *danse macabre* and is part of nature. She is thriving off of the entering of Melancholia into the Earth's sphere. Another shot follows, this time of the house in the background with Justine, Claire and Leo standing separately in front of it with the planet that symbolises their character above them. A shot is shown of the *danse macabre* of the two planets, building the tension towards the devastation. Then we see a shot of Justine raising her hands while electricity comes out of her fingers. It is apparent that the worlds devastation makes Justine more powerful. It becomes clear that the images we see are not chronological when we see Justine walking through the trees in her wedding dress, while a grey mass is

⁸¹ Munteanu, 60.

⁸² Sinnerbrink, 115.

⁸³ Sinnerbrink, 115.

pulling her back. It is as if nature is pulling her back as she tries to run away from it. This refers to a later point in the film where Justine explains her melancholia to Claire during the wedding, describing it as if trying to move forward while being pulled back by grey yarn. We see a shot of the planets closer together, more equal in size. Then, the garden burning from the inside of the Victorian style house. Von Trier next takes us to the image of Justine clenching a wedding bouquet while floating down the river in her wedding dress, which gives another clear reference to *Ophelia*. We then see Justine and Leo in the forest, preparing the magical cave. Leo looks up into the distance and we see another shot of Melancholia swallowing the earth, where after there is a black screen.

The soundtrack that hunts us during the entire movie, but especially during the prelude, is the prelude to Richard Wagner's Romantic opera *Tristan and Isolde*. The Romantic song is known to express the beauty in tragedy, the essence of melancholia. The planet Melancholia in the film is also both devastating and beautiful, adding a mystic blue to the moonlight. Wagner rejected the conventional ideas about composition of his time and created a piece where there is a constant feeling of suspense by incorporating sharply discordant notes. The audience constantly longed for the harmony but this point was never reached.⁸⁴ Von Trier also used this notion of suspense in *Melancholia* in favour of the portrayal of melancholia, as one longs for solutions and happy endings, but everything just keeps on shattering in the most beautiful way. The suspense in the soundtrack supports the suspense which is created in the film by Melancholia's entering of the sphere, while the Romantic features of the soundtrack accompanies the polished images of the prelude and set of the film.

With the slowness of the prelude Von Trier contrasts the hand held camera technique which is used in the rest of the film. The ultra-slow-motion of the prelude also hints towards the warped sense of time when being melancholic as not only you, but everything around you seems melancholic. You lose your sense of yourself and everything around you. This slowness is a disturbance of the conventional notion of time which goes together with the contemplative characteristic of melancholia. Von Trier strives for a contemplative aesthetic in his movie, presenting it as a painting rather than a conventional film where images are rapidly shown after one another which leaves no time for reflection. The ultra-slow-motion clearly makes a suggestion towards a much needed slowness in images which has already been established in the art room scene, inviting the viewer to treat the medium of film with the same intensity as is done in museums, by seeing it as an art form instead of mere entertainment. This

⁸⁴ O'Brian, 104.

unconventional way of presenting time is supported by the fact that it is a prologue. A prologue normally is an introduction to a story, where information is given of the events that happened before the time when the story begins. Contradictory, in the film the events of the story itself and end of the story are portrayed alternately. To speak the words of Shakespeare in *Hamlet*; “time is out of joint”. The disruption of time in the prologue is a reaction towards the suffocation Justine feels during the wedding, where every minute is scheduled, imprisoning her in a programme. The destruction of the Earth by an approaching planet disrupts the conventional time as the finiteness which seemed far away is instantly here. This disruption brings Justine freedom, whilst it suppresses Claire.

During the prelude, von Trier also introduces the characters and lets the spectator know that everything we see in this film will in the end be destroyed. This gives the spectator the position of prophets who know the devastating truth to come. Justine is portrayed as *Ophelia*, drifting away, and as being pulled back by yarn whilst wearing her wedding dress (Figure 6). However, she is also portrayed as a prophet, being a part of the *danse macabre* and gaining strength from the approaching catastrophe (Figure 7). This links towards the duality of her mental state. Claire is, in contrast, depicted as sinking away in ground of the golf course, which resembles the illusion of safety she feels towards the over-the-top large estate she is living on. She is panicked and clenching onto Leo, whom she desperately wants to bring to safety, but obviously that is not an option. She seems to fight the slow time of the prelude by running, but by doing that, even sinking deeper into the ground. Whilst Justine finally synchronizes with the slow rhythm and thriving off of it. The way Claire and Justine are portrayed in the prelude summarizes how they are portrayed in the rest of the film. Justine is the romantic melancholiac, the artistic genius, having her condition as a form of strength and almost psychic ability as she claims to “know things”. In the prelude this is emphasized by depicting Justine as a prophet, in sync with nature, partaking in the death dance. Claire can be seen as the nurturing mother and a normal person.⁸⁵ She tries to take care of Justine and is very patient with her sister, but lacks in understanding the depth of her mental state. She makes her favourite dish to cheer her up and thinks that freshly cut flowers next to her bed will help her to get better. John is the scientist, always relying on data. He takes his views on Justine one step further. To him, Justine should just snap out of her melancholia as they have paid for her wedding so she has nothing to be sad about. Once he realizes that the scientists were wrong in their calculations of the planets track, he cannot handle this failure of science and commits suicide. When it becomes clear to Claire

⁸⁵ Thorsen.

that the planet will hit earth, she panics as well. Claire is comfortable on earth and its culture and therefore has something to lose. To Justine the world is already a dead thing.⁸⁶ The melancholiac is already mourning for a dead object as nothing on earth has meaning to her. As I have shown, the two parts in the film are crucial to the understanding and portrayal of Justine's melancholia. In the first part Justine cannot conform to the expectations of society while all the others (except for her mother) do not see what is so difficult. Justine seems to be living in a different rhythm from the rest of the guests which is depicted by her wandering off and von Trier's disorienting way of filming and editing. The emptiness of the marriage and her job, reference to the emptiness in the rituals and our culture which many melancholic people feel. The second part shows the strength and calmness of Justine in an apocalyptic situation which mirrors the prophet and melancholic genius. She is not frightened by the soon-to-be end of the world as it is already a dead place to her. This shows that melancholia is more of a strength and a full understanding of the truth and - thus without the illusions - than a weakness where you don't see clearly. To von Trier, the enlightenment is the thing that makes melancholic people melancholic, as everything turns out to be trivial and the world is a hopeless place. By breaking these illusions in *Melancholia* through literally shattering the entire planet, suddenly 'the others' who find the Earth a pleasant place, are turned into the mad men. This correlates to Foucault's ideas about mad men: who are called mad in a society says more about the society than about the mad. The most important aspect of this madness, to von Trier, has to do with time. The level of madness you are in correlates with your attitude towards time, namely in what extent we deviate ourselves from the conventional temporal order. The prologue supports this idea that it is not the melancholiacs who are ill, but the society itself which is ill by empowering Justine while Claire sinks into her own illusion of temporality and 'wealth'. Von Trier makes us aware of the void of our society and brings forth an alternative for the meaningless of our culture with its empty rituals and volatile images by presenting images which invite contemplation in the prelude and in its classic pictorial references. As explained earlier, melancholiacs see themselves as enlightened and having a more real sense of reality than others. As we can see both Justine as von Trier as melancholiacs, we can argue that von Trier is trying to let the viewers experience the enlightenment he has found due to his melancholia.

The cause of Justine's melancholia is never explained – because attempting to explain it would be hopeless, just as escaping the end of the world is hopeless. When we are depressed,

⁸⁶ Doyle, 30.

it feels as if the world is ending, which we accept with open arms, as the end of the world means the end of suffering. The movie also shows how it is easier to let yourself fall fully into the melancholia, than fighting it. Melancholia does not 'fly-by' as the rational would say. It consumes you - and everyone you love - fully, swallowing you completely. Through the disruption of time, the two movies let the sane meet the insane and question one's own position in the spectrum.

IV. Conclusion

What is most apparent in both movies is how the melancholiac relates to the 'others' in sense of time. By this, they suggest that the state of melancholia is in line with the way the sufferer relates oneself to the 'others' in general. Despite the fact that the films have a different intention, they do relate in an unorthodox form of temporality which is executed in the style of the film. This especially is interesting as the loss of a sense of temporality is not a symptom which is discussed in the facts about melancholia in the psychological and medical journals.

In *The Hours* this execution is done by a parallel montage, creating a mosaic of storylines where intuitive connections are evoked. Through editing, the spectator is shown how the different personalities in different times are connected through them not being connected with clock time, and thus the not being connected with the 'others'. In *Melancholia* the unorthodox form of temporality expresses itself in a certain indeterminacy concerning the course of time and even more so in the prologue with its slow-motion scenes which are presented as paintings. *The Hours* shows clearly how the melancholiac distinguishes oneself from the 'others' via something ungraspable, which is carried out through the notion of time. In *Melancholia* the melancholiac's time and beliefs are brought forward as being a reaction to the outer world, both being the planet approaching and the contrasting beliefs and perception of time in the 'others'. The way in which Justine experiences another notion of rhythm and time, is mostly expressed through editing and camera movements.

Due to the two parts of the film with each their own depiction of melancholia and the prelude where time is almost completely subtracted, the viewer is encouraged to re-evaluate one's position in the spectrum of sane and insane. As the common views are that the melancholiac is the insane, the film turns this idea around halfway the second part as when the rest panics, Justine is able to find herself in a state of serenity, which has already been announced in the prelude. Also in *Melancholia*, the use of paintings provokes a different attitude towards time. Where film is constantly moving from one image to the next, often

leaving no time for contemplation, paintings encourage people to take the time to look at one image. As the films both show the endings of the stories at the beginning, they express the inevitability of the condition of the protagonists. This is important as the common view of the 'others' towards melancholiacs is that they should *just snap out of it*. By depicting the end in the beginning of the films, it is demonstrated that the condition is no choice, but a certainty for its sufferers.

By using an unconventional notion of time the films take something which one can always count on, as time will always pass in the same intervals and will always be there, and turn it upside down. Suddenly one is disoriented and detached from the set rules such as linearity and cause and effect. Time is also the phenomena which the 'others' in the films seem very obsessed about, in the sense of clock time. Where Charlotte is constantly letting the wedding guests and Justine know the schedule, Leonard is concerned with Virginia's mealtimes. The phenomena of clock time which rules the modern world and people find comfort in, changes its laws. This makes us aware of the fragility of everything else we experience as stable and reliable, such as ourselves. The melancholiac does not go in sync with the rhythm of the 'others', but seems to live in a different notion of time.

What the films show is that art connects us through time and connects emotional states through culture and time, as it is the only way to communicate these states, which I argued for in the introduction. In *Melancholia* this is shown through the great number of classical references in the arts. In *The Hours* this is presented by the three lives all being intermingled through the book of *Mrs Dalloway*. By the making of the two films, a position is therefore added in the dialogue of art concerning melancholia. The films both have an added value to the common views on melancholia as they let the spectator experience the loss of connection with the outside world, which is common in melancholia, through the disruption of time. This experience is created by the way in which the stories are constructed and stylized and provoke new ideas and insights about the state of melancholia. Because, the way the protagonists do not relate to the 'others' in time, suggests how melancholia should not be seen as an individual illness, but as a state which is provoked by the way one relates oneself to the outside world.

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‘Lars von Trier and others tell about Melancholia’s visual style’, Channel391, On: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAMOR898yyc> .

Appendix



Figure 1, screenshots of *The Hours*, left: 01:25:25, right: 01:25:22.



Figure 2, screenshots of *The Hours*, left: 00:47:04, right: 01:30:03.



Figure 3, *Ophelia* (John Evert Millais, 1852).



Figure 4, left: *Land of Cockaigne* (Pieter Brueghel, 1567), right: screenshot from *Melancholia* 00:17:42.



Figure 5, screenshot of *Melancholia*, 00:02:33.



Figure 6, screenshots of *Melancholia*, left: 00:05:17, right: 00:06:20.



Figure 7, screenshots of Melancholia, left: 00:03:19, right: 00:04:38.