

The melancholy medium

Description

default watermark

Itâ??s depressing when spoilsports sully the open and aspirational ethos of the Internet with anxieties and obsessions about cyber wars (CNN). Two weeks ago the Independent.ie reported, â??North Korea has blamed South Korea and the United States for cyber attacks that temporarily shut down websites at a time of heightened tensions over the Northâ??s nuclear programme.â?• Thatâ??s depressing.



The Internet transitions easily from purveyor of hope and sociability to quintessential antidote to innocence and happiness. The Internet is already the complete melancholic medium.

Iâ??ve been reading up on how melancholy works.

Melancholy is not just misery, sadness, sloth and madness. Itâ??s a complex emotion, and much more complicated than happiness. Melancholy is a bit of an industry now. In fact itâ??s a â??cultural industry.â?• Melancholy is rooted historically in several cultural movements: not least, Romanticism, the Symbolists, and the literary production of the Elizabethan Age. Shakespeareâ??s *Hamlet* shows

melancholy in all its complexity. Hamlet says, â??How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world!â?• But Hamletâ??s is a sardonic, witty, sarcastic, ironic and justifiably aggrieved kind of melancholy. Itâ??s also self reflexive.

The play is threaded with the theme of observation, spying, suspicion, second guessing, and surveillance. Polonius spies on Hamlet through a tapestry; and *Hamlet* is a play that includes a play, with an on-stage audience. Shakespeare delivers much of the sardonic wit of *Hamlet* (the play) around the performance of this other short play *The Mousetrap*, which Hamlet recruits to entrap his murderous uncle the king, whoâ??s in the audience. Through such reflexive indulgence, *Hamlet* (the play) comes across as the opposite of innocence.

Alas, poor Yorick

Melancholy is a meta-mood â?? being sad about oneâ??s own success, and sometimes joyful about the demise of others. Whereas happiness implies blissful unawareness to circumstances, melancholy recognises and endures â??the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.â?• Many commentators are keen to associate melancholy with a kind of genius. Itâ??s a productive, profound and slightly dangerous kind of realism. Thatâ??s also the Internet. Hereâ??s how.

default watermark

1. Autobiography. The Internet is populated by stories, including the autobiographical stories of countless bloggers. Thereâ??s an inevitable melancholy to autobiography, not least that raised by the question of whether anyone is really interested.

2. A medium obsessed with itself. When people call each other on the telephone they rarely talk about telephones. Bloggers often talk about the Internet, the medium they are using. With good reason, the Internet is obsessed with the Internet, as are Internet communities. This dimension of self-reflexivity is commensurate with the self-obsession of melancholy.

3. Surveillance. The Internet is a medium for checking up on people, eavesdropping on confessionals, picking up salacious gossip, and reading between the lines. Concern about online privacy provides another dimension to the Internet as melancholy medium.

4. Entertainment. In so far as the Internet has become a medium for entertainment, it inherits all the melancholy of the play, entertainment and celebrity. See We are all entertainers.

5. Loss. This is the major feature of melancholy picked up by Jonathan Flatley as a condition of modernity in general. Whether or not the Internet was ever innocent, it joins with the contemporary lament that things used to be better.

6. Remembering. Melancholy has great traction in the realms of remembering and forgetting, for which the Internet is an eminently able medium. See Oblivion.

Human accomplishment in the round thrives on diversity â?? national, ethnic, religious, lifestyle, and **emotional diversity**. Itâ??s a good thing we have the Internet to keep that diversity intact for the time being. As melancholic medium, the Internet serves as cure for guilt, our guilt at denying the unalloyed happiness we are supposed to feel. See The happy medium.

References

- Bowring, Jacky. 2008. *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Harpenden, Herts, UK: Oldcastle
- Flatley, Jonathan. 2008. *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1990. Mourning and melancholia. In A. Richards (ed.), *The Penguin Freud Library, Volume 11: On Metapsychology*: 251-268. Harmondsworth: Middlesex: Penguin.
- Keren, Michael. 2004. Blogging and the politics of melancholy. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, (29) 1, http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1401/1491.
- Wilson, Eric G. 2008. *Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy*. New York, NY: Macmillan

Notes

- Also see Wellbeing and geometry, Melancholy and media, After affects, Pleasure with malice, We are all entertainers, and The happy medium.
- The first Doctor Who episode tonight by Steven Moffat purveyed a kind of melancholic gloom: souls trapped in the wifi, thereâ??s something in the wifi, editing people, re-writing them, harvesting human minds, human souls trapped like flies in the World Wide Web â?¦ â??Isnâ??t that basically Twitter,â?• said Clara.

default watermark

Category

1. Media

Tags

1. Hamlet
2. melancholy
3. meta-mood
4. mood

Date Created
March 30, 2013
Author
rcoyne99