A Voluntary End of Earth: *Melancholia* (2011) and Jean Améry

Sebastian Thede

ABSTRACT: This essay interrogates the semantics of finality in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011), in the light of Austrian theorist Jean Améry's 1976 study *On Suicide: A Discourse on Voluntary Death*. I suggest an apsychological reading of *Melancholia*, to unwrap its narrative and philosophical reflections on a desire for the end of earth.

KEYWORDS: Jean Améry; Lars von Trier; Suicide; *Melancholia*.

It is the Middle, the work done there and
the thought that makes
the work done, which diffracts the contents
of its own compound
of freedom and boundness onto two
separate and opposite screens
and recasts the beginning as the universe of
the possible and the end
as the realm of unfreedom. It is the silent or
outspoken work done in
the Middle that sets the beginning apart
from the end and makes both
oppose each other.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Broken lives, broken strategies*

Before the Beginning

An enjambment is an altruistic thing. Each one is guided by an implicit or explicit performance of the particular ending that it genuinely (and generously) picks up on. The enjambment preserves the ending in its very nature it possesses as an ending. Needless to say that something, a certain thing, has to end to let an after-the-end take place, but this affects the end in the same way. The end has to come to an end as well to let the after-the-end begin. The end has to have an ending, yet it cannot be terminated without equally being revived, in the silent work of the enjambment: It finishes the end, just to be haunted by it over and over again.

On the grounds of these implications, narrative framings of an ending are given a specific perspective: rather than what is left of a story, the question arises for what is left of its being over, especially when the plot is essentially devoted to endings, its own personal ending in particular. Lars von Trier's highly stylized and to some extent scandal-driven elegy to our planet, *Melancholia* (2011), employs, I will argue, this very account. After 130 minutes of curating impressive and memorable canvases on film, joining a sublime and magical depth reminiscent of romanticist traditions and accompanied by a Wagnerian soundtrack, but few dialogue, *Melancholia* eventually finds an ending just as any other story. But it ends with the end of the world, or perhaps, more precisely, the end of the Earth, keeping in mind the quite anti-metaphysical touch of the film that Lars von Trier's previous work *Antichrist* (2009) already spelled out excessively, negating the transcendental bias or account of knowledge, truth, or faith in its title. In combining the end of the Earth and the end of the movie (even though a picturesque foreshadowing sets the terms in the opening sequence), *Melancholia* dwells on the annihilation of life and thought as symbolically and technically materializing a finale for narration. More radically than most of the end-of-the-world plots (unlike *Melancholia* to be labeled with the prefix of a *post*-apocalyptic setting) von Trier's Armageddon materializes the *horror vacui*. When nothing is left, nothing is left to say—a relation inherent in the fading ambition of the movie to invest in story or character-development as the end of both, earth and plot, approaches.[1]

It seems as though *Melancholia* has a lot to say about the end, the end of humanity, thus the end of storytelling, and so, in other words, the end of narration's very own metonymy in the movie's narrative. Given the film's insistence on finality, it would seem as if it does not accommodate the idea of an enjambment. Maybe there simply is none and the end has no end, which would certainly be a feat in itself, given the recent abundance of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novels, graphic novels or movies. Then again, this endlessness might be indicative of an enjambment that resides in the environment of never-ending endings: the end employs the enjambment.

[1] Christopher Peterson's analysis thoroughly relies on those parallelisms of destructive imagination and formal conditions of the end, working for instance with the important assumption that "the film stresses not only the threat to life that interplanetary collision poses but also the possible destruction of all aesthetic creations, including its own digital traces" (410).

The apparent structure of this enjambment is guided by the apocalyptic theme. A classic version deals with the plot of the survivor of the end, e.g. in all the zombielands or Last-man-on-earth stories you can name. However, a few persuasive desperados and interesting reflections managed to sneak in, prominently lead by Cormac McCarthy's contemplative post-everything case-study, *The Road*, published in 2006. McCarthy's novel is about to become the highly acclaimed aesthetical desideratum and synopsis of the most intriguing as well as popular ingredients of the last decade's take on the subject.[2] It does not seem to fit in one of the afore mentioned genres, rather draining them to a purity where it holds and develops the important generic elements of the agenda those survivor narratives are made of, withdrawn from their stereotypical—sometimes polemic—facets. Steven Soderbergh's *Contagion* (2011) is worth mentioning as another remarkable contribution. It dwells on an aggressive pandemic's structural premises and consequences with political as well as socio-economical relevance. *Contagion* could be seen as one of the most profound zombie-fiction pieces, so far. Notably, it makes do without an appearance of the undead.

Whatever the sociological and historical implications that brought about those narratives in their overt artistic diversity, what they all have in common is that they introduce the world's end (or what it could trigger) not as a fifth act or *peripeteia*, a destruction of the whole, but actually the beginning of their plot. In centering on the civilized world from the perspective of being cut off from it, cultural techniques and constructs, commodities, social relations, structures of modern regulations and communication are being put into perspective, but from the distance, from outside.

In contrast, *Melancholia* walks a different path, leaving us (and its characters) in anticipation of the big bang, whose impact only leaves space for the fall of the theatre's curtains. Meanwhile our discourse about the movie, about its depicting its finished design has yet to begin. What happens in these pages—someone trying to write about *Melancholia*—might count as enjambment of its Armageddon, a survey of its finalized world. This applies to any discourse about texts, films, or any other representational work of art that unfolds in time

[2] For an introduction into the "publishing phenomenon" McCarthy's book should become, and a rudimentary reading of its 2009 movie adaption, see McSweeney.

and space and whose reception has at least to be paused, whose narration's end usually has to arise for a profound beginning of analysis, criticism and, discussion.[3]

Even though the end-of-the-world plot in von Trier's movie will be addressed during my argument, this *diegetic* end does not lie at the heart of this article—at least not without emphasizing the motives of finality that are intertwined with the movie's distinct exhibition of its own aesthetical finality. It is not a simple coincidence that the end of the world collides with the end of storytelling. In fact, this specific cluster of ending, after-the-end and desire for finality has been rarely shown to a major audience, and its radical structure appears to be doubled in the peculiar behavior of Justine, one of the main characters, performed by Kirsten Dunst. In these terms, she serves as a template for nihilistic, depression-like, and suicidal considerations, pitched from different angles throughout the fragmented plot. Whereas those discourses require a psychological interpretation, since they pose questions for Justine's motives, her mindset and attitudes, they also refer to the formal, narratological level of *Melancholia*. In fact, this correspondence might lead to a point, where nothingness has drained the *logos* out of psychology, e.g. as far as reasoning with Justine will fail as comprehensively as reasoning with the movie from a mere logical point of view leads to an epistemological dead end.

Austrian philosopher Jean Améry provides a helpful framework for these concerns in his 1976 phenomenological essay *On Suicide*: *A Discourse on Voluntary Death*. His predominantly philosophical approach establishes an understanding of suicide beyond a historical, political, social, moral, or psychological verdict. It rather aspires to relate to a pure moment of unintelligibility, performed by self-murder, which, as he proposes, stands as a unique resort of an individual act of freedom. Thus, Améry offers an account of how to move

[3] I say this, being aware that popular serial formats, either in comic books or on TV, have earned a hardly ignorable attraction for a new generation in Cultural Studies. I would argue that it is crucial for any understanding of series to be at least gradually open for continuation. They usually do not come with an end at first, yet criticism does already start. Nevertheless, even this beginning only becomes explicit as soon as the reading has been done. It is this kind of not merely technical but formal cause-effect relation of criticism that produces the end, in which I am interested in. For an insightful distinction between the novel's reliance on finality and "storytelling's" openness ("Actually there is no story for which the question as to how it continued would not be legitimate" (100)), see Walter Benjamin's essay "The storyteller", esp. chapter XIV.

towards an end, either in time and space, or in terms of an interpretation's chance to approximate the ungraspable.

Being in the Middle

One of the intriguing facets of death is pointedly illustrated in the second of Epicurus' *Principal Doctrines*: "Death is nothing to us; for the body, when it has been resolved into its elements, has no feeling, and that which has no feeling is nothing to us" (665). Since it is impossible to claim any first hand expertise of death, the principal "un-experience," we can only be regarded as unqualified speakers about this matter. Given this *aporia*, we should perhaps not bother to speak about it at all, and yet we do.

While suicide might be regarded as a subset of this epistemological dead-end, I would argue that it assumes a more pertinent place in this existential logic. We are as separated from suicide as we are from any end that involves its own presence in a manner so absurd that it simultaneously terminates our discourse. This 'discourseless' end could precisely be the driving force of our captivated desire in knowing about the end. Suicide aims at an *experience* of the end. Additionally, suicide becomes epistemologically prohibited for all of those who are withdrawn from this perhaps most authentic of all intentions. Gaining access to this enclosure is again the most we can expect from an end, certainly just under the condition to respect its black box incarnation—one state akin to what Améry guides us to in his study, featuring two concepts: "Suicide" and "Voluntary Death."

Indeed this is the first important distinction we have to pay attention to. The English title, *On Suicide*, sounds like a compromise to handle the original title and its German idiom: *Hand an sich legen*. Despite the lack of an English equivalent, it is worth pointing out what Améry is interested in: The "*hand*" as the extremity *active*, the working organ that is about to manipulate the self (*sich*). The idiom contains an ambiguity that oscillates between the process of touching oneself in order to bring this 'self' to an end, and a secretly established mode of freedom. The manipulative (from Latin: *manus*, hand) act affects what it emerges from. The self that brings something about is identical with what it is brought upon. A self-producing and self-referring system is developed, encrypting the correlation between subject and object in an unknown stability. They coincide and undermine the difference

between an unchangeable human condition and malleable social normativity. It is this turning away from intellectual, psychological, or economical standards that expresses the freedom of an unapologetic self-manipulation to the end—and that addresses a particular philosophical discourse. This discourse is reflected in the poetical honesty of an expression such as "Hand an sich legen."

The Latin *sui caedere*, in all its linguistic modulations, whenever it appears as a medical *terminus technicus*, misses the relations Améry has in mind. Suicide remains a mere psychological lexeme, properly insisting on medical expertise, which cannot be thought without a certain positivistic core (and drive) of knowledge. The progressive investigation of empiric and social grounds and outcomes of suicide and Améry's philosophical implications are worlds apart, articulated in the phrasing of his subtitle: Voluntary Death—*Freitod*.

In the preface, Améry points to the discrepancies between scientific empirical investigations and a philosophical reflection on voluntary death in order to avoid misunderstandings (and to set the agenda):

> This text is situated beyond psychology and sociology. It begins where scientific suicidology leaves off. Instead of viewing voluntary death from the outside, from the world of the living and surviving, I have tried to view it from the interior of those who call themselves suicidal or suicides. (xxiii)

Here, another noteworthy distinction is made. Prognostic symptoms, certain habits or just the idea of committing suicide (suicidal/*Suizidäre*) are contrasted with its actualization (suicides/*Suizidanten*). According to Améry's skeptical understanding of what he calls suicidology—in any case the scientific background he tries to avoid—the situation of the suicidal gains a perspective that explores the meaning of self-murder. Améry thus focusses on being-before suicide without considering its structural code, the socio-economic background, psychological tendencies or probabilities.[4] Furthermore, he enriches the relation between potentiality and actualization by pointing to the concept of freedom. Even though voluntary death is linked to compulsions, motivations, which seemingly determine

[4] Ian Hacking has shown in how far modern techniques such as calculation and statistics were applied on a comparative research, devoted to the quantitative fluctuation of suicide, in order to investigate the matter in a whole, but also to establish the instruments of what is sometimes called the "probabilistic revolution." See his chapter "Suicide is a Kind of Madness" in his groundbreaking study *The Taming of Chance* (1990).

the idea of suicide, those factors genuinely differ from other cause-effect relations. As far as a valid reason for suicide is thinkable, this reason is instantly undermined by the solution itself. Consider possible forces that might add up to the suicidal as the expression of some kind of scarcity—e.g. scarcity of happiness or love. This attempt evidently leads to a questionable conclusion where suicide is doomed to answer scarcity with nothingness. A constellation paradoxical as this overshadows a causal structure of suicide on the one hand and thus leaves place for the individual's free will on the other:

> As a way of death,[5] however, voluntary death is still freely chosen even when one is trapped in a vise of compulsions; there is no carcinoma that devours me, no infarction that fells me, no uremic crisis that takes away my breath. *I* am that which lays hands upon me, who dies after taking barbiturates "from hand to mouth." (1-2)

The discrepancy between the fact of death and the contingency of *how*, *where*, and *when* finds itself dissolved in the *moment* of suicide. It is this freedom of handling contingency that makes voluntary death fundamentally distinct. In return, voluntary death, or what was considered as the potentiality of suicide, advances to be the exclusive case of *Dasein* where freedom as such can exist. A set of concepts has come into play that express Améry's project and explicate why he is concerned with moving our attention away from social, psychological, and demographical circumstances and probabilities of death, in one word: from the hard facts and our reliance on them as well as from discursive reflections on death or suicide, which are genuinely and substantially modes of coping, of living on, and living with death.

However, those aspects do not remain entirely excluded from Améry's study. In fact it is a heuristic divergence he relies on, in order to spell out the subjective and self-determined moment of voluntary death, the divisions of freedom and even activity in it. "There are many who will say, 'If everything goes wrong, I can always kill myself,'" Améry observes at one point. "After that," he goes on, "everything does go wrong and they continue to live wrong, yet a little poorer, sadder, older, sicker [...]" (133). Suicide is not to be seen as a postponed

[5] It is hard not to think of Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann in this context. She wrote a notable cycle of novels under the title *Todesarten*—the expression, Améry uses for "way of death" in the original text. Bachmann, who became famous with her modernist style and highly artistic but also politically engaged poems, novels and novellas, died herself a peculiar death in 1973, only aged 47, less than three years before *On Suicide* was originally published.

promise of freedom or an excuse for the mere anticipation of being free. An attitude like that still participates in the positivity of a logical structure, or a structural logic, whose negation Améry tries to delineate. He is interested in those choices that swap 'no world' for 'any world'; and not as a short-term reaction as soon as the world turns against them and they respond by relying on their potential to always turn against it. In contrast to suicide as a means of last resort, the suicidal person acts without even considering anymore that there is such a thing as a world, losing the chains of its mandatory existential ordeal. We are confronted with paradigms of opting out, choosing death, voting for nothingness, for the a-worldly denial: "At the moment when a human being says to himself he can throw away his life, he is already becoming free, even if it is in a monstrous way" (133).

Besides the empirical, verifiable fact of an act of killing oneself—the twisted logic of *bios*, witnessed by the physical vessel of a corpse—all suicides have this denial in common. The first eroded, afterwards dissociated, finally absent "logic of life," as Améry calls it throughout his study, is what is unique to all suicidals and suicides. The range of voluntary death is not open for measurable or gradual distinctions of motivation and *modi operandi*, or a typology, suggested by any empirical research on suicide that categorizes and archives the contextual qualities of someone's decision to kill him- or herself. From this point of view, endogenic depression could be distinguished from old age or severe sickness. Améry names several suicides, some of them famous, to demonstrate this way of reasoning. Depression might correspond with Paul Celan's death and cancer might relate to Sigmund Freud's wish to die, but those schemata fail to work on their existential equivalence—an equivalence they share with any suicide. Améry stresses another example, that of an anonymous young housemaid throughout the whole book. Her case genuinely helps to contour the suicidal's a-logical bias. Améry describes her leap to death, triggered by unrequited love she receives from a voice on the radio that belongs to a singer of Austrian love tunes, as eminently intriguing: Her acting might seem paradigmatically incomprehensible, yet it is a familiar story. In this arrangement, her specific case exhibits the unintelligibility of voluntary death in general. Her lovesickness being provoked by a disembodied voice is curious enough. The emptiness that looms behind the voice delineates the dematerialized situation Améry tries to put in its right. Whether Freud, Celan, or the housemaid: those examples do not solely have in common the act of suicide, but they all, as different as they may appear, are entangled in a certain

situation that necessarily precedes the self-manipulative act: the potentiality of suicide, or, what Améry calls the situation before the leap. The housemaid's leap denotes this very situation in a literal way. It stands for the figure that performs a sudden but controlled fall out of the uncontrollable. All suicides share this one instant of being free that exclusively unfolds in choosing to terminate all conditions of discerning a concept of freedom at all.

The situation before the leap manifests the pure equivocation, or pure insignificance, towards consequentiality. The actuality of the suicidal's potential has no value in the situation before the leap. Whether the suicidal evolves to become the actual suicide is all the same for the given modality, thus evoking a climax of equality: being before the leap is not even interested in a concept of voluntary death, simply because it is not interested in concepts at all. Moreover, this state is not just to be considered as a realm of freedom and as a source of a particular kind of activity, but also as the epistemological sphere of autonomy and sovereignty:

> Waiting for death is just a kind of passive action, insofar as this paradox, imposed upon me by grammar, is allowed. But voluntary death, the killing of oneself, is without a doubt an activity not only in grammar but also in fact. [...] Anyone who wants to commit suicide is breaking out, out of the logic of life. (Améry 12-13)

This kind of breaking out, the denial of life and of the world as was sketched out above is always an act of revolution, while it certainly does not deny a particular discourse. According to its own idiosyncrasy of denying—of nothing's characteristic negating—anything that is part of the logic of life becomes flawed. The agents of that logic, the living beings and servants of existence, the work of the super-ego are being cut off.

> Even before any questions are asked, those ready to kill themselves shrilly scream, 'No!' or they numbly say, 'maybe someone has to, but not me, and I'm not going to bow down to an ardent compulsion that comes from somewhere outside as a law of society and from within as a *lex naturae*, and I don't want to recognize anymore.' (Améry 13)

An utterance from the last verses of Schiller's *The Bride of Messina* (1803) expresses Améry's concern: "Life is not the highest good of all" (14). This signals the negating, the outside of the logic of life, because this assertion contradicts any logical grammar. Goods do only exist in life; to count anything higher than life means to refuse to succumb to the analytical truth of existence as a meta-good. Considering this point, Améry becomes political, relying for

instance on Foucault's investigation into madness and its account of exclusions and ostracisms out of a constantly norm-reproducing social collective that seems to be fundamentally shattered by revocations of the *logos*. His book can be understood as an attempt of inclusion of the suicidal, stating that large-scale processes of emancipation of many heterogeneous outsiders would still leave out the *scandalon* of voluntary death. Améry succinctly comments on this situation when he observes: "I don't see why the suicidal should remain the last great outsiders" (52).

It seems as if von Trier's *Melancholia* retraces both social deviance and existential negation. This theoretical duality is actually separated in the formal structure and arrangement of the movie. The narrative is split into two parts, both located at an ostentatious family estate and centered on the two sisters Justine and Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg). The first chapter introduces us to the social contexts that establish a twisted ambience for Justine's character. We encounter her on her wedding-day, within a framework that represents significant institutions and hence a certain symptomatology of the 'logic of life': a pressure of socializing and functioning in an intersubjective context; dealing with friends, networking and small-talking professionally—her boss (Stellan Skarsgård) persistently confronts her with work matters—and negotiating the intricacies of family obligations. By eventually spoiling her wedding reception, she articulates her own version of a Melvillean 'I would prefer not to' as a negating vow. Her denial is perceived as massively deviant and improper behavior by those present. After all, this understanding is nothing less than a personal but moreover existential misunderstanding: first, Justine's deviance unobtrusively stands on the shoulders of the transgressive claims that are made by the surrounding characters on her. From this perspective, her personality openly points to the striking superficiality and egocentrism of her peers. More importantly, her behavior is misunderstood as deviant in itself, when the concept of deviance itself is seen as deviant. It is overseen in this account that Justine not only neglects the relevant norms and attitudes but the standards of normativity or defining oneself (and someone else) over attitudes as a whole.

The narrative thus establishes a crooked picture of a pseudo-rational negotiation with a principle that only takes place in a sphere beyond communication, contact, or access. The slightest chance of mutual understanding would not simply manifest a minor aberration in

Justine's character but result in the deletion of what she is representing at all. Regarding the methods of the movie, it is crucial to note that it brings about this double logic: reasoning, structure, and a-logic, symbolism and contingency. After all, the apocalypse, as well as the movie's name emphasize this simultaneity. Peterson has a point when he observes that:

> [w]e are […] initially invited to interpret the film's title as referring to a psychological or emotional state, what contemporary psychology calls 'depression' but went by the name 'melancholia' from ancient Hippocratic medicine through modern Freudian psychoanalysis. (401)

Yet the movie delineates this emotional state in an aesthetical conflict that strikes any possible cultural, hermeneutical common-sense as much as Justine is pejoratively eyeballed by her friends and family, longing to understand: it is, as Peterson puts it so neatly, "a total eclipse of the sign" (403), in terms of the liquidation of meaning that Justine's peers are confronted with and feel provoked by.

'Melancholia' begins to be the name for many things that find themselves represented in the movie, all the way down to its structure. It evokes a distant state of Justine's mind as well as her being-before-the-end, the situation before the leap or the withdrawnness from the logic of life. It also refers to the menacing planet that carries the name 'Melancholia' itself, including its threat, but also drive and expectation. It sums up the poetics of the movie in terms of its style[6] and its depiction of the own end of its narrative. In an often quoted essay, Freud brought mourning, melancholy, and a deserted world together: "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (246). The compromised ego that lost contact with its outside brings about a formula for the situation before the leap in von Trier's movie, reading Melancholia, the planet, and *Melancholia*, the movie, as Justine's alienated inner world that turned inside out.

Nonetheless, a quite simplistic understanding of the cataclysmic orb, destined to destroy the earth, would be to read it as a redemptive materialization of Justine's unconscious, which implies the transition between the two chapters as an evolved interconnection between planet and person. It marks the passing of the critical point that directs Justine from a more

[6] Poe famously noted, since beauty always comes with a striking sadness, "Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones" (484).

or less covert fatigue of life to a fulfilling inner solitude, right at the moment when the movie switches from theatrical drama and tragedy to a meditative poetic cartography of sublime agony (Justine) and nightmarish anxiety (Claire). The dramatic reduction is initiated by the reduction of *dramatis personae* in part two, thanks to the departure of the wedding party, which disappears simultaneously from the movie's and Justine's concern. The party's eventual extinction thus seems like a distant closed plotline, from another world, a world, where metaphysics or the knowledge and power of sociology and psychology reign. There, all attempts of trying to reason with Justine's idiosyncrasies, be it from her sister, her brother-in-law (Kiefer Sutherland) or her employer are in vain. When she arrives at the wedding, Melancholia, the planet, is already on the horizon, the collision inevitable and Justine in the midst of the before-the-leap-situation.[7]

The beginning of the movie might not be the end of the world, but it serves as the beginning of an existence in the middle that rapidly turns out to be already a situation before the end which still is too confined to begin. After all, this foreshadowing of the planet is shaped as the irreversible process of Justine's disembarkation from the logic of life, but never spelled out as simply a social or psychological decline. For this interpretation her shallow environment is to be held responsible. Her difficult parents (Charlotte Rampling, John Hurt), the neat groom (Alexander Skarsgård), the overly concerned sister with her patriarchal husband, and even the obnoxious wedding planner (Udo Kier) who considers the whole event as his private oeuvre, are set at risk by the childish and thus socially inappropriate behavior of the bride. Von Trier achieves to disguise these peculiar habits without letting the movie become a parody.

The rather stereotypical context of hypercivilized *ennui* which is part of the logic of capitalism and its discontents collides with the self-serving systems of creativity and aesthetics—as it turns out, Justine works as a copywriter in an advertising firm where both atmospheres are cannibalistically brought together. The movie's depiction of an apolitical indifference and jaded social environment surely serves as a spotlight for exoteric factors

[7] The movie never clearly gives reason that Justine is to be considered strictly suicidal. What Améry offered as the situation before the leap might nonetheless apply to the representation of *Melancholia*, even without a confirmation or even trace of her being suicidal. As I inclined, both come together via their situation beyond world and logic.

and discourses. But just like those do not even seem to matter to Justine anymore, they are also contingent in the discourse of the movie. Short cuts that do not patiently remain on one setting, almost bi-polar scenes, elliptically suggested storylines, rudimentarily developing the other characters without ever leaving more than a contour, an epileptic cinematic stutter, and finally the *ritartando* in act two, achieve a narrative embedment in a contrast between world and emptiness. Eventually, just like Justine, the isolated family estate will have lost its communication with the outside world.

The two sisters Justine and Claire lend their names for the two chapters. The second one, which is built around Claire, emphasizes an unavailing struggle that Justine has already left behind. Her being-beyond the logic of life promotes her to a meta-discourse about that vanishing logic. Claire's husband John, whose attempts to rationally observe and calculate the planet's trajectory with an antiquated (and phallic) telescope personifies the voice of reason among the characters. Ironically, he is the first and only person committing suicide. He is guided by his clockwork competence of deduction, e.g. in fabricating a rudimental instrument to measure the flight path of Melancholia, being nothing but a toy. Right after it reveals the inevitability of a collision (and thus its own dysfunctionality), John takes the reasonable way out—which absurdly turns out to be suicide in the twisted world of the movie. Claire also participates in her husband's logic: she uses, like any *homo faber* would, instruments, the internet, knowledge, calculations to cope with the dancing and—for his part—erratically moving, epileptically and elliptically cruising planet. She seems not to be in a position to live out this logic by escaping, either across the borders of the logic of life, like Justine, or according to this very logic, like John, who crowns the whole of his life decisions by reasonably killing himself.

At last, Claire truly experiences the situation of having nowhere to go. "Where're you going?" asks Justine in one of the last dialogues. "To the village." "This has nothing to do with the village." The village, the outside world—be it civilization, logic, or meaning—is collapsing. Whereas for Claire this is the end, something we intriguingly cannot understand, conserved by the enjambment, which serves the end as the unintelligibility per se, Justine has passed it by abstracting from it. She does not dwell on some kind of insignificance or inexistence of the village, but rather separates herself from it. What happens has nothing to

do with it; it stands beyond a network of significance, where something like a village still denotes or represents anything. Given the end as the unintelligibility per se, Justine's coding and Améry's theory deliberately opt for a freely chosen enjambment. It is placed beyond the hermetic realm that necessitates and deserves a regular end, rather a philosophical experiment of freedom than an unrequested downside to life. Their enjambment, their after-the-end remains in the endlessness. Améry is able to show in how far it is exclusively the subject of an endless theoretical consideration.

After the End

The finale of the movie shows a small wooden pile, resembling the fragmentary architecture of archaic buildings. With Melancholia approaching, it looks like a caricature, but also the legitimate imagination of shelter. The rural, pagan, pre-neolithic cabin thus represents a symbolical synopsis of *Melancholia's* (and Melancholia's) destruction of all metaphysical shelter. Justine already stated, nihilistically enough: "When I say that we're alone, we're alone. Life is only on earth. And not for long." What happens, after the small amount of time that is left before life runs out, is that it is not life, but discourse and epistemology, which have vanished. The existential problem between object and subject has been solved by deleting the subject.[8]

In accordance to this choreography, Améry ponders the possibility of an imaginative counter-part that could be the reader: "You have lived and it was for nothing, because one day the world that you've been carrying inside you, the *entire* world, will perish" (43). In respect to Justine, her inner world is more than symbolically mirrored in the autumn-like and vague colors of her environment that eventually will perish, being struck down by Melancholia itself. Planet Earth is analogous to her inner world, for this inner world is pure emptiness being nonexistent by virtue of the worldly gap outside that is just earth, she is living on, pure matter and nothing more, which is so much longing and deserving to be destroyed, almost in a sexual act of unification. The wedding from chapter one seems to be

[8] This indeed seems to pave the way for the recent movement that calls itself Speculative Realism, and which goes back to Quentin Meillassoux's essay *After Finitude*. See esp. the first chapter on "Ancestrality", which oscillates around this thought of epistemological grounds in a realm without an experiencing subject.

doomed initially. Now we might know why: the true wedding-scenario (along with the wedding night) was yet to come with the collision of the planets, leaving Melancholia as the spouse, the one true lover. The embracement of Améry's insight, expressed for instance in an anti-metaphysical meditation like his or in the solemnity of apocalypse like Justine's, is followed by the reflection of ending and cutting the ties to the factum of life, already entering something new, but at least in the reflecting light of taking it as what it is, maneuvering as freely as possible.

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