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Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism

Jonathan Flatley

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The surprising claim of this book is that dwelling on loss is not necessarily depressing. Instead, Jonathan Flatley argues, embracing melancholy can be a road back to contact with others and can lead people to productively remap their relationship to the world around them. Flatley demonstrates that a seemingly disparate set of modernist writers and thinkers showed how aesthetic activity can give us the means to comprehend and change our relation to loss.

The texts at the center of Flatley's analysis?Henry James's *Turn of the Screw*, W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, and Andrei Platonov's *Chevengur*?share with Freud an interest in understanding the depressing effects of difficult losses and with Walter Benjamin the hope that loss itself could become a means of connection and the basis for social transformation. For Du Bois, Platonov, and James, the focus on melancholy illuminates both the historical origins of subjective emotional life and a heretofore unarticulated community of melancholics. The affective maps they produce make possible the conversion of a depressive melancholia into a way to be interested in the world.

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