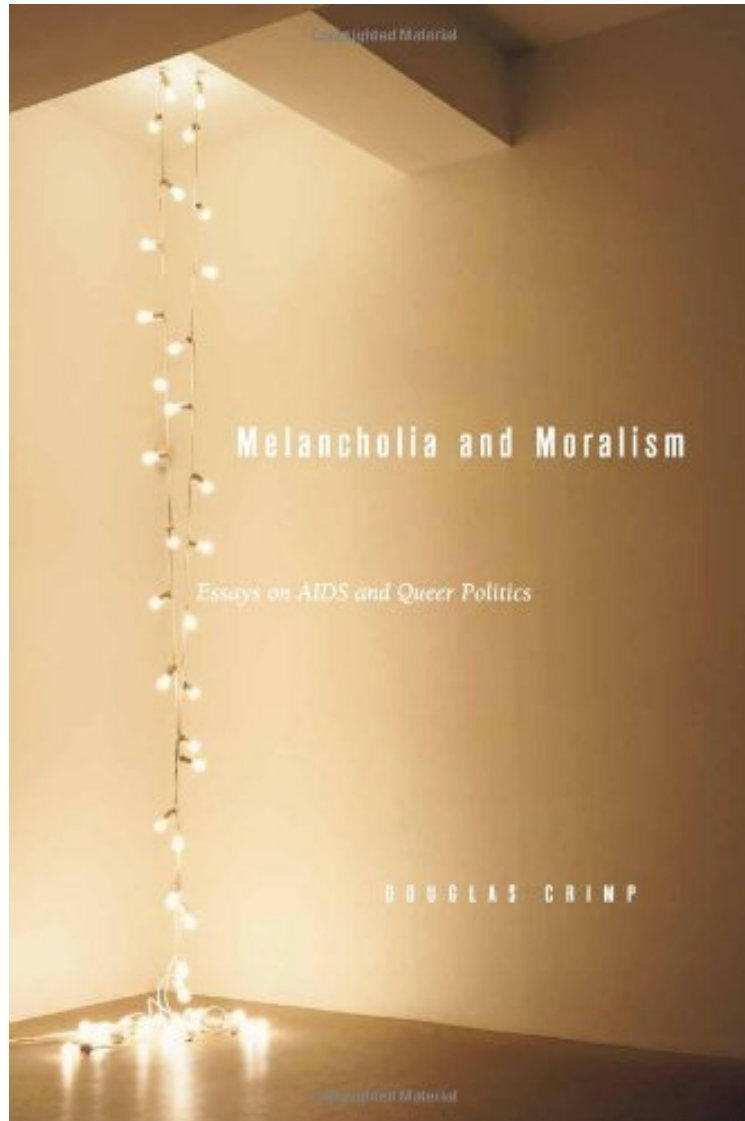


(Free) Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics

Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics

Douglas Crimp

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Douglas Crimp : Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A Necessary Antedote to Prevailing Gay Views By Kindle Customer Douglas Crimp's collection of essays, many of which were written a decade ago, still have relevance today. They provide a necessary antidote to the views of many gay commentators who claim to speak for gays and lesbians in a voice of assimilation and accommodation. Crimp deconstructs their arguments to reveal their ambivalence (at best)

and their homophobia (at worst). Crimp's essays are uneven in that for those uninitiated to the jargon of queer theory, such as myself, their meaning are not readily apparent. However, Crimp is at his best when he sets aside the language of queer theory and shares his astute observations. I also assume that Crimp views gay identity as a social construct as opposed to an immutable trait in that Crimp heavily relies upon the post-modern theories of Michel Foucault. As I believe otherwise, I am sure that this too contributed to my shortcomings in understanding Crimp's views. The reality of AIDS remains central to how gay men view ourselves and the world at large, even though we would like to believe otherwise. Crimp's discussion of the moralism (i.e., judgment that tends toward self-loathing) that has resulted from our collective, unresolved grief (or melancholia) because of AIDS is revealing, albeit not entirely convincing. The old assimilation vs. liberation dichotomy pre-existed AIDS. AIDS may have drastically moved the debate toward assimilation but I do not think that unresolved grief diminished liberation. If by liberation one means the knowledge of self and others resulting from our collective sexual experiences (or the political prerequisite of having the means and space to engage in this process) tragically it is the deaths from AIDS itself that hindered liberation. The grief arose therefrom, and remains today. Assimilation, i.e., the accommodation of our lives to the prevailing market-driven economy and the pull of tradition, was well under way before AIDS. Although I may not agree with Crimp's theory, I applaud Crimp for urging us from surrendering our sexual selves (or the process of becoming our sexual selves) by adopting a worldview that is foreign to our experiences. In his final essay Crimp bemoans the fact that very few queer theorists are able to share their liberatist views through the public media. However, Crimp concludes by amply demonstrating that queer theory/liberation does not have to be arcane through his op-ed piece explaining why now more than ever continued, frank, and non-judgmental safe sex education is necessary to stem the spread of AIDS. (Unfortunately, the New York Times declined to publish it). I hope that in the future the "mainstream" media will allow liberationists to voice their views. However, in view of Crimp's observations about the mainstream media's inability to fathom the gay experience, I am not very optimistic.

Winner, Trade Illustrated Category, 2003 Association of American University Presses (AAUP) Book, Jacket, and Journal Show. In *Melancholia and Moralism*, Douglas Crimp confronts the conservative gay politics that replaced the radical AIDS activism of the late 1980s and early 1990s. He shows that the cumulative losses from AIDS, including the waning of militant response, have resulted in melancholia as Freud defined it: gay men's dangerous identification with the moralistic repudiation of homosexuality by the wider society. With the 1993 march on Washington for lesbian and gay rights, it became clear that AIDS no longer determined the agenda of gay politics; it had been displaced by traditional rights issues such as gay marriage and the right to serve in the military. Journalist Andrew Sullivan, notorious for pronouncing the AIDS epidemic over, even claimed that once those few rights had been won, the gay rights movement would no longer have a reason to exist. Crimp challenges such complacency, arguing that not only is the AIDS epidemic far from over, but that its determining role in queer politics has never been greater. AIDS, he demonstrates, is the repressed, unconscious force that drives the destructive moralism of the new, anti-liberation gay politics expounded by such mainstream gay writers as Larry Kramer, Gabriel Rotello, and Michelangelo Signorile, as well as Sullivan. Crimp examines various cultural phenomena, including Randy Shilts's bestseller *And the Band Played On*, the Hollywood films "Silence of the Lambs" and "Philadelphia," and Magic Johnson's HIV infection and retirement from the Los Angeles Lakers. He also analyzes Robert Mapplethorpe's and Nicholas Nixon's photography, John Greyson's AIDS musical "Zero Patience," Gregg Bordowitz's video "Fast Trip, Long Drop," the Names Project Quilt, and the annual "Day without Art."

From Publishers Weekly These 16 essays, originally published in journals or given as speeches between 1987 and 1995, cover the social and political consequences of AIDS, topics increasingly ignored or downplayed. Crimp (*On the Museum's Ruins*), professor of visual and cultural studies at the University of Rochester, casts a wide net in a variety of such interrelated fields: the politics of displaying AIDS-related art at museums, the use of the term "politically correct" to attack politicized art about the epidemic, how the mainstream media covered Magic Johnson's announcement that he was HIV-positive, the relationship of "outing" to AIDS activism. While writing in an academic tone, Crimp is unafraid of practical (and controversial) topics, as in the 1987 essay "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic" which traces how antisexual, homophobic attitudes about sex fueled rather than halted the spread of AIDS, and will raise eyebrows even today. Crisp is also not afraid of criticizing other gay male writers, like Randy Shilts and Andrew Sullivan, though his judicious comparison of Sullivan's AIDS status and his own recent HIV infection is both moving and insightful. Almost all of these essays were written in the heat of political and social debates and maintain their relevance in a changed world, though some readers will lament the lack of emphasis on AIDS in the developing world. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal The author of *On the Museum's Ruins* and editor of *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, Crimp (visual and cultural studies, Univ. of Rochester) shores up the crumbling constructivist arguments in queer theory with a needless insistence on the return to the "us vs. them" strategy of confrontational politics. He confronts the conservative gay politics that replaced the radical AIDS activism of the late 1980s and 1990s, arguing that the AIDS epidemic is far from over and as such still plays a crucial

role in queer politics. Crimp's arguments are weakened by his reliance on essays that are mainly academic conference papers, most dating back 20 years. Critiques of Randy Shilts's *And the Band Played On*, Jesse Helms's warfare against the National Endowment for the Arts, and decades-old PBS TV shows on AIDS are by now already dated. Because most of the author's essays probably appear in conference publications, libraries need not purchase them again in this form, although academic libraries with extensive queer studies collections may want to purchase this title out of convenience. Jeff Ingram, Newport P.L., OR Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. "A history of recent activism written with critical intelligence..." Alan W. Grose, *Lambda Book Report*"In his searing writings, Crimp takes on those who would suppress the exuberant gay sexual revolution." McGovern, au"For all its fiercely and finely argued points, *Melancholia and Moralism* is a deeply sympathetic book." Richard Kim, *The Nation*"With HIV infections on the rise, our health care systems in disarray, we need his righteous voice more than ever." Thomas McGovern, *Afterimage*"Crimp is one of our greatest voices and *Melancholia and Moralism* demonstrates importance of his role in the AIDS crisis." Thomas McGovern, *Afterimage*