

READING TEXTURES OF GRIEF: DEVELOPING AN ANTI-
ESSENTIALISING AND AFFECTIVELY ENTANGLED FRAMEWORK FOR
EXPLORING GRIEF

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Abstract

The 2013 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* presented the official entry of bereavement into a psychobiological discourse. The scientific research that precedes this latest development reveal a discourse that defines "prolonged" and "excessive" bereavement after the event of loss through death as symptomatic of an "underlying pathology". While works in the fields of poststructuralist, feminist and queer scholarship have reimagined a concept of mourning with a critical potency inter alia to charge deaths produced by current biopolicies, their ethical and political promises of relieving the subject from such grievances have left experience of loss - now under increasing pathological intervention - largely unexplored.

My project sets out to develop and enact a research practice which engages the affective and bodily experiences of loss through death to explore them as sites of alternative knowledge production on grief as well as points of resistance to the increasing biopolitical interventions on the bereaved subject. Moving to stage an anti-essentialist and affectively entangled encounter with Joan Didion's auto-biographical writings (*Blue Nights* 2011), I first review existing literature on bereavement and mourning against which I compose a framework for *reading "textures" of grief* in an intersection of affect theory and literary theory. *Reading "textures" of grief* thus brings together and engages the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Sedgwick 2003) and Rita Felski (Felski 2015) in developing a research practice which initiates in and develops from the intimacies of personal experience of loss and embodies the reflections and negotiations of the situated and implicated nature of knowledge production. My work offers a threefold contribution in initiating a dissection of the psychobiological discourse on bereavement; in recontextualising and re-imagining grief via different theoretical trajectories as a mode of *living in proximity to death* and, finally; in developing a framework for *reading "textures" of grief*.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research, it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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Signed Ida Hillerup Hansen

This is for Joachim

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Introduction

When I first read the scientific literature on bereavement I was startled by the banalisation it managed. "It is now clear that grief can be complicated, much as *wound* healing can be complicated, such that intensity of symptoms is heightened and their duration prolonged" (Shear et al. 2011: 104, my emphasis). Thus reads a summary line of the introduction to Shear et al.'s article presenting a scientific study of the status of "Complicated grief and related bereavement issues for DSM-5" (ibid.: 105). The same article returns to this analogy to conclude "bereavement is analogous to an injury and grief to *inflammation* associated with the *healing process*" (ibid.: 109, my emphases). While the simplification indicated in this wound analogy is particularly grave its logic undergirds a wave of research within the medical and psychiatric discourse which seemingly led to the formal entry of bereavement into the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM-5)¹. The logic being, if grief is a wound it comprises a temporal impairment on an otherwise contained and unwounded body. Further, the logic goes, if grief is inflammatory it ought to be treated. Until I came across this formulation I had learned from media outlet that the DSM-5 granted diagnostisation and treatment of grief had enabled the prescription of the anti-depressant drug Wellbutrin to people presenting with "major depressive symptoms" shortly after losing a loved one². This made me observe with caution the recent investment of 12,6 million Danish kroner in a research project, led by professor Svend Brinkmann at Aalborg University, to uncover the current state of grief in Danish society with a

¹ It is important to remark that the wave of research that preceded the entry of bereavement into the DSM-5 – an initiative lead by the board of trustees of the American Psychiatric Association and the DSM-5 task force – was met by significant objection from professional organisations, practitioners and critical international media. Frances, Allen J M.D. "A Turning Point for DSM-5: Will the APA Trustees finally step to the plate?" Psychology Today Website, March 21 2012, accessed May 25 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/dsm5-in-distress/201203/turning-point-dsm-5>.

² Whoriskey, Peter "Antidepressants to treat grief? Psychiatry panelists with ties to drug industry say yes." *The Washington Post*, December 26 2012, accessed May 12 2017.

central incentive being the probable 2018 addition of "prolonged grief disorder" to WHO's list of psychiatric disorders³.

What initially led me to realise the latest developments within the medical and psychiatric discourse on bereavement was my own experience of loss which prompted this research project. On January 4th 2008 my best friend Joachim died ten months after having been rushed to surgery for the swift removal of a brain tumor. The relief over a successful surgery soon wore off when learning the tumor was symptomatic of a rare and aggressive cancer, thus reappearing over and again after a second surgery, months of chemo and radiation and finally sponge-like imploding one side of his skull and effectuating a shutdown of his brain and the rest of his body. The wound analogy struck particularly hard in reminding me of the rage and sadness I felt in a couple of therapist offices I frequented following Joachim's death. Not unlike the logic behind the wound analogy, there I was offered a conversational mode whose seemingly consoling comments like "you will get over this" or "you will get better/back to normal" left me feeling utterly misunderstood and devastated. Not only did this vocabulary not belong to me, it approached and relayed the death of Joachim as a matter of treatment and return to 'normal'. Remember the wound, it needs healing however, what I needed was not simply treatment for the pain and exhaustion I no doubt exhibited there but acknowledgement in my experience of being profoundly *with* Joachim regardless of the loss I was confronting. In later reflection, my feelings of anger and frustration allowed me to consider how the logic undergirding the wound analogy, as well as its echoing through these therapist offices, far less indicates a responsiveness to the different experiences loss may be (and by this I also mean, different experiences from mine).

³ "The Culture of Grief Organisation Profile" Aalborg University Research Portal, accessed May 12 2017, [http://vbn.aau.dk/en/organisations/sorgens-kultur\(6962dfb5-9499-4f7f-971b-64f4d3e37dd5\).html](http://vbn.aau.dk/en/organisations/sorgens-kultur(6962dfb5-9499-4f7f-971b-64f4d3e37dd5).html).

Instead, it seems to relay a strikingly neo-liberal narrative of the *vital* subject and how it is expected to be relating and attaching efficiently and willingly to *life*.

My thesis sets out to explore experience of grief, not as a stage in a process of overcoming but, as a continuous living *with* the loss of the other. While my research initiates from personal experience it does so to develop an anti-essentialising (Sedgwick 2003) research practice which engages the affective and bodily experiences in loss through death as reflective sites for alternative knowledge production around grief as well as points of resistance to the increasing biopolitical interventions on the 'bereaved subject'. Conceived as such, my work is indebted not only to author Joan Didion whose autobiographical text *Blue Nights* (Didion 2011) comprises my main site of analysis but, also the efforts of other authors such as Colm Toibin (*Nora Webster* 2014) and Edwin Honig (*Poems for Charlotte* 1963; "To Restore a Dead Child" 1983) whose personal accounts offer more differentiated insight to experience of loss than is cultivated in current medical and psychiatric discourse. Inspired by these personal accounts, I have thus formulated a notion of living *with* the loss of the other as a *living in proximity to death* which I formulate and utilise throughout my research. I situate a notion of *living in proximity to death* firmly within a poststructuralist scholarly trajectory which endows a concept of mourning with reflective and productive potentiality (Derrida 2001) as well as I draw inspiration from Joan Didion's formulation of "magical thinking" which denotes a mode of living *with* her partner and husband after his death (Didion 2005).

I open this thesis by situating my research within feminist, queer and poststructuralist scholarship on mourning and move on to an analytical review of the scientific literature that permitted the entry of bereavement into a psychobiological discourse. Observing the corrective intervention on the 'bereaved subject' who *drifts* from a biopolitical "economy of vitality" (Rabinow and Rose

2006: 215) I formulate a notion of *living in proximity to death* which enables a critical scrutiny of the relation of death to the discursive pathologisation of bereavement and more broadly within modern Western knowledge production. A notion of *living in proximity to death* thus moves me beyond the predominant theorisation of mourning in a biopolitical perspective to approaching experience of grief through a framework of affect theory (chapter I). Drawing on affect theory and literary methods of close reading I move forward to compose a theoretical and methodological framework for *reading "textures" of grief* which enables an anti-essentialising (Sedgwick 2003) and entangled (Felski 2015) approach to the affective and bodily experiences of loss through death (chapter II).

Enacting my framework for *reading "textures" of grief* I stage an encounter with Joan Didion's autobiographical text *Blue Nights* (Didion 2011) which gives the account of the loss of her daughter Quintana Roo. In an effort to reimagine the points of biopolitical intervention on the 'bereaved subject' I focus my close reading and analysis around concepts of subjectivity and temporality in relation to loss. I thus utilise my close readings as sites to explore the impact of the lost other by engaging them in analytic discussions around the inter-relational dynamism of subject experience and non-linear experience of living *in time* with the lost other (chapter III).

In ending my thesis, I reflect on the implications of developing and deploying a framework for *reading "textures" of grief*. This reflection also has me confront and reflect on the relations between my recurrent theoretical discussions and analytical questions concerning the presence of the lost other and my own experience of *living in proximity to death*. I end in an opening reflection and reimagination of the entangled movements this thesis exhibits as a topography over the impact of the other on me and a horizon for the continuation of my work.

Chapter I: from biopolitics of mourning toward grief as an affectively entangled matter

While quite some scholarship has been conducted around the concepts of death and mourning there exists little research into *how* loss as such is experienced and *what* such experience may provide. Moving toward these questions this chapter serves to situate my work within existing literature on mourning and bereavement. In doing so, its main focus is on examining *how* loss and mourning have been theorised in relation to death and with *what* consequences. Chapter I thus opens with a review of some of the existing literature on mourning within the fields of feminist, queer and poststructuralist scholarship. It then moves on to an analytical review of selected scientific literature that permitted the entry of bereavement into a psychobiological discourse and further to a discussion of the pathologisation of the 'bereaved subject' within a contemporary neo-liberal biopolitical regime.

1 Beyond the biopolitics of mourning

Originally theorised within a psychoanalytic framework, a concept of mourning is defined in opposition to a pathological conception of melancholia (Freud 1924). Where mourning defines the temporally tolerable and economical response to loss, that is, the subject's "grave departures from the normal attitude to life", melancholia indexes a "pathological disposition" (ibid: 243) symptomatic of the subject's failure to retrieve or separate itself from the lost one or lost abstraction. Some feminist scholars have made interventions into this concept of mourning and Freudian psychoanalysis in general by way of exposing the representational discrimination produced by the gendered dualism that undergirds this episteme (Cixous 1976). In "Black Sun:

Depression and Melancholia"" (Kristeva 1989) Julia Kristeva directs her intervention into the pathological connotations of Freud's concepts of depression and melancholia by arguing that a depressive vocabulary provides a discourse that should be learned rather than merely be subject to reparative imperatives (Kristeva 1989).

Along a different trajectory, the emergence and development of queer theory in a Northern American context is inextricably linked to the morbid reality of the deaths a U.S AIDS crisis hammered through queer, lesbian and gay communities. Conceived in this context, a concept of mourning not only informs modes of counter-political representation and mobilisation against silencing policies⁴, it also theorises a lethal relation between hetero-normative and homophobic policies and the deaths of particular [queer] bodies. In an article titled "AIDS : cultural analysis cultural activism" (Crimp 1987), scholar and activist Douglas Crimp uses a concept of mourning to formulate a political aesthetics that endows cultural and artistic institutions with practices and responsibilities for the active participation in the struggle against AIDS. In the article "Mourning and Militancy" (Crimp 1989) Crimp discusses how violence experienced by people with AIDS or infected with HIV informs a mode of mourning with a militant vindication. These and other works protest biopolitically produced death by theorising the violence heterosexist and homophobic discourses produce and by mobilising counter-political resistance from practices of mourning (Moon in Crimp 1987) (Bersani 1987).

In *The work of Mourning* (Derrida et al. 2001) Jacques Derrida follows a Freudian melancholic ego-identification with the lost other/object through philosophical and ethical reflection on the

⁴ As an example, ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] is an international direct action advocacy group effectively started in 1987 in New York. Staging so called die-in's, using symbolism of death and dying to protest the silent political participation in and responsibility for the ongoing AIDS epidemic. Youtube video of a 1989 ACT-UP demonstration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3zefhq9Q14> accessed April 9 2017.

dynamics of representation and appropriation. In the words of Penelope Deutscher, Derrida reconfigures the issue at stake in [Freudian] "mourning into one concerning[...] ethics of alterity" (Deutscher 1998: 166) and loss as a site in which to raise questions concerning speaking to and for the dead (Derrida et al. 2001: 29). In *Precarious Life* (Butler 2006) Judith Butler develops a concept of mourning into an ethical responsibility by arguing that "grief [is] the very thrall in which our relations with others hold us" (Butler 2006: 23). In that, Butler proposes to think through grief and mourning as ethical grounds of shared vulnerability in a primary human state and through the violence of subject constitution.

Broadly construed, scholarship on mourning presents a reconfiguration of the pathological connotations implied in a Freudian concept of mourning. Within the context of queer theory and activism, and due to the urgency in mobilising counter political action to lethal biopolitics, a concept of mourning primarily charges a movement *away* from death and loss and, consequentially, a move away from the further exploration of what experience of loss as such may entail. To be sure, I make this observation on a conceptual level and by no means to trivialise the urgency or the impact of these theoretical and political trajectories⁵. I thus note this to emphasise that it is along the productive and transformative stakes Butler and Derrida endow concepts of loss and mourning with that I foremost situate my approach to grief and loss.

⁵ What I wish to emphasise here - with no intention of undermining the significance of this work - is the risk in theorising a critical potential predominantly in the progressive move *away* from loss. This risk is both in tapping into a neo-liberal circuit of subjectification and subjugation along discourses of happiness and efficiency (Berlant 2011, Cvetkovich 2012) *and* related, in implying a 'valid' and 'whole'/'satisfactory' living only as free from loss and grievances.

2 The biomedicalisation of bereavement

In the following pages I move to an analytical review of some selected of the scientific literature on bereavement. My predominant focus is on examining the relation of death to the discursive pathologisation of the 'bereaved subject' within a contemporary biopolitical regime. I have chosen to analyse these articles because of their institutional location, that is, they derive from and circulate within established fields of psychiatry, psychology and bio- and clinical medicine. It is important to remark that the entry of bereavement into the 2013 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) – an initiative lead by the board of trustees of the American Psychiatric Association and the DSM-5 task force – was met by significant objection from professional organisations, practitioners and critical international media⁶. Out of the wider selection of articles I have reviewed, this analysis mainly draws on two studies the other articles cross reference (Zisook et al. 2012 and Shear et al. 2011).

The official point of entry of bereavement into a psychobiological discourse is marked by the removal of the so called "bereavement exclusion" (BE) from the 2013 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM-5). Until its removal, the BE existed within all editions of the DSM since the 1980 edition (DSM-III) as an *exclusionary* parameter for diagnosing "major depressive episodes" (MDE) as such (Zisook et al. 2012: 426-7). The double-catch in the exclusionary definition and function of the BE is to be found in the alignment it implicitly installed between "bereavement-related depression" (BRD) and MDE or what Zisook et al. term "nonbereavement-related major depressive episodes" (NBRD) (Zisook et al. 2012:

⁶ Confer footnotes 1 and 2. While I emphasise the nuance additional voices brought to this context I will not go further into deciphering the various arguments of the criticism they offer. My focus at this point remains with exploring what perceptions of grief were cultivated by the discourse that led up to the entry of bereavement into the DSM-5.

426-7). While the BE was intended to negate the MDE diagnostisation of a person who presented depressive symptoms if these [symptoms] were caused by or related to the event of loss, it in fact provided the diagnostic definition of bereavement by aligning its [bereavement's] symptomatic presentations with that of MDE. Put slightly different, by distinguishing "bereavement-related depression" (BRD) from "major depressive episodes" (MDE) only on the grounds of a related loss, the BE reaffirmed the syndromal and pathological status of both (Zisook et al. 2012: 426). Moreover, by withholding a MDE diagnosis the BE indicated the acceptable or 'normal' duration for a person to grieve or to remain in a state of "bereavement-related depression" (BRD) and thus not only implicitly defined bereavement as pathology it also defined bereavement in functional terms to the process of overcoming or adapting to loss (ibidem.; Shear et al. 2011: 106-7)⁷.

Because most of the studies these scientific articles refer to caution the direct alignment of "bereavement-related depression" (BRD) under "major depressive episodes" (MDE) (Shear et al.: 2011: 111) it is interesting to observe how the debate over the BE removal in fact depends on an already existing diagnostic classification of MDE (Zisook et al. 2012: 442; Shear et al. 2011: 105). On the grounds of the DSM-III's subtle syndromal alignment between BRD and MDE, the scientific debate before the 2013 edition DSM-5 BE removal was able to limit its evaluation of the validity of maintaining the BE to the question of whether or not empirical evidence found that "bereavement-related depression" (BRD) fundamentally differs from "nonbereavement-

⁷ In their further argumentation for the realisation of an individual diagnosis of "complicated grief" (CG) and its treatment, Shear et al. note that symptoms of CG, understood as a prolonged and intensified reaction to loss, "derail or impede healing after loss" (Shear et al.: 2011: 105). Later in the article, it becomes clear that a concept of healing is related to the conceptualisation of 'normal' bereavement as a process of adaption to the deprivation [of "access to the deceased" (ibid.: 107)] loss entails. Through 'normal' bereavement, the subject is expected to develop an "adaptive response entail[ing] understanding the finality and consequences of the loss and redefining life goals and plans in the absence of the loved one" (ibidem.). In that, 'normal' bereavement is perceived as functional to the process of overcoming loss.

related major depressive episodes" (NBRD) or MDE (Zisook et al. 2012: 426-7; Shear et al. 2011: 111). In other words, in formulating the deciding factor around whether or not the severity and duration of BRD are similar to MDE, this debate exposes how BRD is already considered a pathology. What is more, from the syndromal alignment between BRD and MDE followed further arguments for the diagnostic realisation of bereavement as "complicated grief" (CG) (Shear et al. 2011: 104-5). This argument similarly holds that if bereavement can be shown to presents symptomatically *similar* to MDE in terms of impairment and duration it need be individually diagnosed (Shear et al. 2011: 105, 111). Significantly, a mainstay of Shear et al.'s study and argument is that CG "reflects an *underlying* psychobiological dysfunction" (Shear et al.: 2011: 105-6, my emphasis). This move derives a rationale from the argued syndromal similarity between BRD and MDE to assert that BRD is a discretely existing syndrome. The dualism [exterior/interior] in this terminology of "*underlying* psychobiological dysfunction" (ibidem.) indicates the inward collapse of bereavement from an experience with circumstantial and individual specificities to constituting symptomatic presentation of a psychobiological pathology. In effect, this terminology leaves behind any inquiry into the experience of bereavement as such and established an imperative BRD's diagnostisation and treatment.

What is exposed in the above line of argumentation is the broader "truth discourse" which Nikolas Rose characterises as "the new diagnostic gaze of psychiatry" (Rose 2006: 198). "[T]he new diagnostic gaze" denotes the operation of a psychiatric episteme according to a logic of psychobiological detection and treatment. This is on account of a scientifically "flatten[ed] distance between conduct and its organic basis" (ibidem.) which has led to the refinement and more recent molecular classification of mental disorders and the increasing

psychopharmacological intervention on the subject. The rationale evident in the argument for the diagnostic realisation of CG - evident even in the removal of the BE which in effect permits intervention on the 'bereaved subject' - echoes the larger rationale of this "truth discourse", which is, *what* pathology the mind exhibits the brain can and need be corrected for (Rose 2006: 198-9). In other words, within this "truth discourse" bereavement is perceived as one more case of syndromal anomaly that can and ought to be corrected. Further utilising the terminology Rabinow and Rose provide, the rhetoric these articles exhibit around their argumentation for the removal of the BE and the diagnostic realisation of CG can be approached as "strategies for intervention" (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 197) that operate through and justify the psychopharmacological intervention on the subject "in the name of life and health" (ibid.: 197). Rabinow and Rose continue to specify these discourses as particular to an "economy of contemporary biopolitics operat[ing] according to logics of vitality, *not mortality*" (ibid.: 211, my emphasis). Thus provided, the aim at correcting the symptomatic presentation of the 'bereaved subject' under a rationale of reparable pathology is covered in a language that represents depressive experience, whether bereavement related or not, in negative terms and its absence and circumvention as indication of a positive and healthy living⁸.

2.1 The relation of death to the pathologisation of bereavement

I italicise the latter part of the above sub-section's quotation because its emphasis on a contemporary biopolitical "economy of vitality[, *not mortality*]" (ibidem.) may miss the analytic nuance I want to explore in the relation of death to the pathologisation of bereavement within the

⁸ Reminded, my observation on the relation between a notion of the 'good life' and a neo-liberal circuit of subjectification along discourses of happiness and efficiency, confer footnote 2.

wave of scientific research before the BE removal. Where death is more often perceived as the negative produce of, or as simply overwritten by, biopower I want to argue that death *incites* biopolitical response. This argument intervenes into the predominant conceptualisation of death in scholarship that work in a context of biopolitics. Before exploring my argument further, I will briefly delineate this negative tendency through a review of some of the scholarly works that operationalise a biopolitical framework for theorising death.

In theorising the shift from a sovereign form of power that takes "life and let[s] live" (Foucault 2003: 247) into a regulatory biopower that "consists in making live and letting die" (ibidem.), Foucault (re)formulates death from being the most obviously "spectacular manifestation of the absolute power of the sovereign" (ibid.: 248) to being "the moment when the individual escapes power" (ibidem.). Foucault continues that death, because it no longer symbolises the power of the sovereign, is disqualified of meaning and he himself manifests this disqualification by postulating "power literally ignores death[...] death is outside the power relationship" (ibid.: 248). Biopolitical theorists have since taken up with the positive/negative binary that follows a Foucauldian delineation of biopower's positive and productive force within a domain of life. Giorgio Agamben (1998) and Achille Mbembe (2003) offer different theoretical complications of contemporary biopolitics to account for their produce of exclusion and outright annihilation. Agamben, in taking the legal figure of *homo sacer* to reflect on biopower's ability to kill through its exclusive inclusive hold on bare life, *zoe*, by qualifying it as *bios* (Agamben 1998). Mbembe follows to make some intervention into Agamben's annihilating state of exception through a concept of necropower that denotes the intentional workings of ultimate power and domination⁹

⁹ This is, something like or reworking a Foucauldian concept of sovereign power.

in zones and policies of death *within* life (Mbembe 2003). For Esposito's perception of an immunitarian paradigm, the notion of biopower's productiveness¹⁰ encompasses even the exclusionary practices and effects that function to secure and retain immunity from external threats. Thus, even when their outcomes are negative and lethal they are part of and necessary for a positive biopolitical circuit of producing and preserving life (Esposito 2013: 84-5)¹¹. While these accounts complicate Foucault's relegation of a concept of death to account for biopower's negative practices and outcomes, their efforts in charging the production and effects of death to some extent operate from and thus return death to a conceptual negativity. Instead of perceiving of death in negative terms or as denoting negative relations, I argue that death *incites* biopolitical response and that this dynamism can be detected in the interventions made on the 'bereaved subject'.

Throughout the scientific articles a terminology of "normal bereavement" (Zisook et al. 2012: 426¹²) emerges either explicitly or implied *through* a concept of "complicated grief" (CG) (Shear et al. 2011: 104-5). This terminology is interesting for exemplifying how a notion of 'normalcy' is dependent on the delineation of a pathological or negative antonym¹³. What this term ["normal bereavement"] accomplishes is the establishment of the 'normal' time and relations of the subject.

¹⁰ Hence, positivity in a biopolitical sense, ie. the productive biopolitical practice of "*making* life".

¹¹ In more than one sense these practices are negative, both in the exclusionary effects of their barrier building against 'external threats' and, in the reductive impact these practices have on the 'community' they seek protected in that their preservation of life will work for that end until it is reduced to securing "mere survival (Esposito 2013: 85).

¹² In Shear et al. the term "normal grief" is predominantly used (Shear et al. 2011: 104-5).

¹³ I imply a reference here to Robert McRuer's critical charging of the relation of dependency a norm strikes with its production of a pathologised antonym. Focusing on the socio-political and cultural construction of disability, McRuer holds, disability is produced by and contingent on a system of compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer 2006: 2-3, 6-7).

The pathological symptoms of "bereavement related depression" (BRD) or "complicated grief" (CG) are repeated between the articles as

"*prolonged and intensified* acute grief[:] strong yearning for the person who died, *frequent* thoughts or images of the deceased person, feelings of *intense* loneliness or emptiness and a feeling that life without this person has no purpose or meaning[...] *dysfunctional* thoughts, *maladaptive* behaviors and emotional *dysregulation* such as *troubling ruminations* about circumstances or consequences of the death, *persistent* feelings of shock, disbelief or anger about the death, feelings of *estrangement* from other people and changes in behavior focused on *excessive* avoidance of reminders of the loss or the opposite, *excessive* proximity seeking to try to feel closer to the deceased, sometimes focused on wishes to die or suicidal behavior (Shear et al. 2011: 105, my emphases)¹⁴.

Where "normal bereavement" is expected to bring about an "adaptive response entail[ing] understanding the finality and consequences of loss and redefining life goals and plans in the absence of the loved one" (ibid.: 107) CG is primarily defined by a 'failure' to do so. Thus, the prerequisite for defining CG as pathology is the prolonged duration of pathological symptoms (ibid.: 105). An important observation to make here is that when a defining parameter of CG is temporally qualified, it reflects how the subject's relation, that is, its *attachment* to the deceased is per definition pathological. Because the intervention on the 'bereaved subject' is temporally suspended and justified on the grounds of the *prolonged* duration of bereavement, the aim of intervention remains unchanged and is from the outset the 'impossible' or 'unreasonable' relation the subject remains to the deceased, to death. When bereavement is deemed temporally acceptable, it is only insofar as the above cluster of behaviours can be retained as the time of

¹⁴ Another interesting demarcation of what is not "uncomplicated bereavement" is offered by Zisook et al.; [C]ertain symptoms that are not characteristic of a "normal" grief reaction, such as *guilt* about things other than actions taken or not taken by the survivor at the time of the death, *thoughts of death* other than the survivor feeling the he or she would be better off dead or should have died with the deceased person, morbid preoccupation with *worthlessness*, marked *psychomotor retardation*, prolonged and marked *functional impairment*, and *hallucinatory experiences* other than thinking that he or she hears the voice of, or transiently sees the image of, the deceased person (Zisook et al. 2012: 426). Also appearing in Simon NM, et al. 2005: 395.

"acute grief" (ibid.: 105), that is if you will, an emotional, physical, cognitive state of exception *within* the process toward or accomplishing healing or *until* the subject's relapse into "adaptive response" (ibid.: 107). My argument that death *incites* biopolitical response acknowledges that the intervention on the 'bereaved subject', which the scientific articles strategically present in a vocabulary of relapse from a pathological and depressive presentation, *operates* according to a contemporary biopolitical "economy of vitality" (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 215, 211). However, my argument adds that the intervention not merely overwrites the pathological and depressive presentation of the 'bereaved subject' but, *reacts* to correct for its 'misconception' in perceiving of itself *through* or *in* relation to the deceased. Thus, the biopolitical intervention on the 'bereaved subject' reacts to its [the subject's] relation and attachment to death.

2.2 The drifting subject within a biopolitical economy of vitality

The 'negative' and pathological relations that are drawn *though* the subject in the above quoted definition of CG imply the subject's 'normal' experience *as* the ability and willingness to attach to a reality in which the deceased no longer figures or has no *real* impact. A summary line that initiates with "the person who died, the deceased person" (Shear et al. 2011: 105) and unfolds in negative relations of "loneliness or emptiness[...], no purpose or meaning[...], feelings of *estrangement* from other people[...], *excessive* avoidance of reminders of the loss or the opposite, *excessive* proximity seeking" (ibidem., my emphases)¹⁵ conveys how the subject suffers from its attachment to the non-living. With this, it also implies how the subject should instead be attaching to a reality inhabited and animated by the living. It is possible to detect an economising

¹⁵ Notice the similarity to Freud's conception of the subject's "grave departures from the normal attitude to life" (Freud 1924: 243).

rationale behind the correction of the subject according to 'positive' relations and through that (again) infer that the debate around the diagnostisation of bereavement circulates within and reproduces the vitalist and able-ist¹⁶ ideological and economical circuit specific to contemporary neo-liberal biopolitics¹⁷. Through this formulation, it is possible to read the discursive production of the subject's 'positive' relations as a reflection of the norms of this biopolitical economy and, to read the 'negative' and pathological definitions produced around the 'bereaved subject', not simply as the overwriting forces of biopower but, as biopolitical responsiveness to the subject that *drifts*, through attachment to death, away from a willing "mode of subjectification" (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 197, 211)¹⁸.

The biopolitical intervention on the 'bereaved subject' however not merely exhibits the intervention on the subject that *drifts* from its willing subjectification through 'positive' and vital relations. It exhibits a particular biopolitical responsiveness and aggressive intervention on the subject who relays attachment to what a contemporary biopolitical "economy of vitality" (ibid.: 215) perceives and produces as non-vital; dead; absent. The *drifting subject* is therefore disturbing in more than one sense; through its attachment and responsiveness to the ideologically non-vital which disturbs, not merely its willing and vitalist subjugation but more importantly, the undergirding ontologised structure of life/death this vitalist ideology projects itself through. The

¹⁶ Confer with footnote 14.

¹⁷ Here, I imply Rabinow and Rose's notion of a contemporary biopolitical "economy of vitality" (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 215, 211).

¹⁸ It may be significant to note that within this biopolitical "economy of vitality" (ibid.: 215) that cultivates both "strategies for intervention" and "modes of subjectification" through a language of "quality of life, even happiness" (ibidem.) a discourse of mental health has taken the shape of a "field of truth" (ibid.: 215) entirely. Thus, the diagnostic alignment of CG in proximity to the classificatory entry of MDE may be approached as one site of an increasingly aggressive regulation of the mind or rather of mental attitude.

drifting subject is disturbing for exhibiting a *living in proximity to death* which constitutes a glitch in an ontological system that defines death in binary and opposing terms to life.

When I argue for the biopolitical responsiveness to death, I do not mean to introduce a vitalist discourse on death by arguing for its animate ability to incite biopolitical intervention. In other words, this is not an affirmative politics on death or the less than human living along the lines of a feminist vitalism or posthumanism presented in the works of Rosi Braidotti (Braidotti 2013) or Jane Bennett (Bennett 2010). Rather, it is a critique of *how* bereavement is produced as "complicated grief" (CG) (Shear et al.: 104-5) and corrected as pathology along a structure of 'negative' relations that reflects and follows the ontologised position death holds in a Western metaphysics as the ultimate end. By arguing that death *incites* biopolitical response I mean to emphasise that, when biopolicies intervene to retrieve *the drifting subject* through a formulation of its attachment to the deceased as 'negative', medical and psychiatric epistemes are foremost exhibiting the working and effect of the ontologised status of death as the ultimate rupture to the 'reality' they represent. The outcome of manufacturing the corrective retrieval of the subject as 'positive' is the default conceptualisation of loss and death as 'negative'.

2.3 *Living in proximity to death* as a site of alternative knowledge production

Karen Barad terms the ontology that informs Western knowledge production the metaphysical substrate of "representationalist belief in the power of words to mirror preexisting phenomena" (Barad 2003: 802). With this Barad offers, first, that knowledge production, in prescribing what can be known or produced as knowledge of reality, pursues and mirrors representationalism. Second, that taking a "performative" approach to "discursive practices" enables a critique of the

assumptions made in their efforts to align "descriptions and reality" (ibidem.). Returning to the scientific articles' repeated description of "complicated grief" (CG), what this terminology manages is to produce bereavement as a pathology *through* its relation to death. Either in a negative line of association argued caused by the "bereaved subject's" continued proximity to the deceased or by concluding a 'failure' of the subject to relapse to the adaptive response that is expected to follow the event of loss. The sentiment these scientific articles cultivate is that relations to the deceased, that is to death, are unhealthy and unreasonable because they are attachments to "finality[...] loss[...] absence" (Shear et al. 2011: 105). In other words, the message conveyed is that death is what life is not or rather, with this analytical review has made it tenable to suggest, life is all that is produced as *living* within an ideology of vitality and, death is not.

As earlier noted, while the intervention on the 'bereaved subject' may operate according to a vitalist ideology's strategising mantras of health and life, it *reacts* to correct for the 'bereaved subject's' *misconception* in perceiving of itself *through* or *in* relation to the deceased, to death. The intervention on the 'bereaved subject' thus indicates representationalist efforts in aligning [the] living with a 'reality' which is ideologically delineated as the realm of life. This means, as I have argued, that these biopolitical interventions indicate a responsiveness to death by surging to return the *drifting subject* to a vitalist grip and away from a *living in proximity to death*.

Reminded, this is not an argument for the vitality of death but, an argument that asserts that within a Western dual ontology death enacts a representationalist structure of relations in life and on the living along the pseudo-dichotomies of [existence/]*non-existence*; [animacy/]*inanimacy*; [positivity/]*negativity*; [presence/]*absence*. In other words, in this representationalist scheme

death or the dead should have no *real* – meaning, metaphysically *real* - impact on the living subject and when they do, such impact is defined and corrected as pathology. Hence, the corrective language on the subject's continued experience of cognitive, affective, emotional, physical interaction with and responsiveness to the deceased or lost after the event of death as a too "*excessive proximity* [or as too] *intense*" (Shear et al. 2011: 105). What is instead expected to develop in this relation is the end of impact.

"It is now clear that grief can be complicated, much as *wound* healing can be complicated, such that intensity of symptoms is heightened and their duration prolonged" (ibid.: 104 my emphasis). Thus reads a summary line of the introduction to Shear et al.'s article on the review of the status of "Complicated grief and related bereavement issues for DSM-5" (ibidem.). It later returns to this analogy to continue "bereavement is analogous to an injury and grief to inflammation associated with the healing process" (ibid.: 109). What this passage foremost advises is that grief is reparable. Like a wound, it is suggested, grief is a temporal impairment on an otherwise contained and unwounded body. Notice the framing of wound and inflammation within a narrative of repair. Here is provided a positivist logic of invincibility or impermeability through a circular narrativisation of natural healing. The banalisation this analogy manages presents a significant indication of the reductionism that motorises the 'advances' the psychopathological discourse on grief claim to have made in understanding what it may mean for someone to have experienced loss. Instead, in comparing grief to a wound that *will* and has to heal (but may need help to do so), this analogy further trivialises and forecloses the exploration of the experience of loss as such.

The pathological status imposed on the 'bereaved subject' foremost reflects the workings of a larger discursive practice. In Barad's terminology, a concept of "discourse" complicates the elemental zoom Rabinow and Rose offer to "that which constrains and enables what can be said" (Barad 2003: 819). I would thus follow, the strategically corrective vocabulary of 'normalcy' or 'positivity' these scientific articles present does not merely produce but in fact reflects the already constrained and enabled ontological point of reference and perpetual horizon within which the conditions of the human subject are imagined. This is a horizon that foremost delineates life as the opposition to death, associatively, as vital opposed to non-vital. This tendency, I have already noted, a psychopathological episteme is not alone in abiding to. If approached through the terminology offered by Barad, the concept of 'normalcy' the scientific articles produce through the delineation of bereavement as a temporal pathology or impairment [remember the wound], indicates an "object" within a "knowledge practice" (ibid.: 815, 819). An "object", which explicates one margin of representationalist correction. Following this line of thought further, diagnostic interventions on the 'bereaved subject', rather than presenting a developed nuance and sensitivity to the experience of loss, are "objects" in "local cuts" or "agential cuts" (ibid.: 815, 819) which exhibit a logic of impermeability and a perpetual horizon of possible, even necessary, reparation. Within a psychobiological "truth discourse" (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 197) specifically, the 'bereaved subject' emerges as an "object" of reparation through the epistemic or "local cut" enacted by death's standing as the ultimate rupture in a Western dual ontology. This is why I proposed the, so called, syndromal presentation of bereavement is per definition pathological because, while the scientific articles claim bereavement only becomes pathological in its prolonged state, what in fact constitutes the moment it becomes pathological is the "local

cut" (Barad 2003: 815, 819) enacted through death from where the cause and the aim of reparation emerge as the intervention on the "bereaved subject". Presenting attachment to the deceased, the 'bereaved subject' not simply reflects an unwillingness or 'failure' to repair. It challenges an ontologised logic of impermeability by not aligning its relation according to the border which separates life from death and instead by exhibiting its permeated living *with* the other by *living in proximity to death*.

For now, only the scientific literature on bereavement has provided some specification of the affective, cognitive, physical and emotional experiences that may emerge around loss; "strong yearning[...], frequent thoughts[...], feelings [...]intense [...], feeling [...] dysfunctional thoughts, maladaptive behaviors and emotional dysregulation[...] ruminations [...], feelings of shock, disbelief or anger[...], feelings[...], behavior[...] excessive[...] excessive [...], closer" (Shear et al. 2011: 105). Where these affective and bodily expressions delineate the target of biopolitical intervention and signify the entry of bereavement into a psychobiological discourse, this chapter has utilised them as sites through which to explore the ideological and ontologised status of death in Western metaphysics and knowledge production. Through analytic review of some selected literature on bereavement I have scrutinised the discursive pathologisation of the relation between the 'bereaved subject' and the deceased. From this I have argued that, within a contemporary biopolitical "economy of vitality" (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 215, 211), death is not merely to be perceived as the produce of or overwritten by biopolicies rather, death *incites* biopolitical response. By formulating a notion of the *drifting subject* I have discussed the biopolitical intervention on the 'bereaved subject' as a "mode of subjectification" (ibid.: 197)

specific to a neo-liberal biopolitical ideology and economic circuit of vitality. Further exploring my argument, I have moved beyond a framework of biopolitical theory to discuss the consequences of the ideological and ontological standing of death in Western metaphysics (Barad 2003). Through this discussion, I have refigured a notion of the *drifting subject* to a notion of *living in proximity to death* as a preliminary articulation that moves me toward an exploration of the experience of loss as alternative sites of knowledge production around grief otherwise more or less ignored within the existing literature.

Chapter II: developing a theoretical and methodological framework for *reading "textures" of grief*

The previous chapter concluded its reviews of literature on mourning and bereavement with a discussion of the consequences of the ideological and ontologised status of death within Western metaphysics and knowledge production. I have noted how a conceptualisation of death within scholarship that charge a biopolitical context may further foreclose an already under-engaged examination of *how* loss is experienced and *what* such experience may provide. I now move beyond this context to compose an alternative theoretical and methodological framework for approaching grief. Drawing on affect theory and literary methods of close reading, this chapter composes a framework for exploring affective and bodily experiences of loss in anti-essentialising (Sedgwick 2003) and entangled (Felski 2015) terms. Where chapter I observed a tendency in the reviewed bodies of literature to pre-conceptualise or collapse experience of loss under associations of negativity, present chapter moves this work ahead by formulating the guiding question for its continued exploration not in terms of "what grief *is*" but, "what grief *does*?"¹⁹.

Moving toward the close reading and analytical discussions of chapters III and IV the following sections compose a combined theoretical and methodological framework for *reading "textures" of grief*.

¹⁹ This formulation is inspired by the move Sedgwick makes from epistemological fixation to affective and phenomenological inquiry (Sedgwick 2003: 17).

1 Developing a theoretical approach to affect contingency

My understanding and deployment of a framework of affect theory draws from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's approach to affect contingency. Developing this approach Sedgwick draws from psychologist Silvan Tomkins' theorisation of affect (Frank and Sedgwick 1995). While Tomkins taxonomy of nine basic affects may seem to signal a structural rigidity to his framework, his theory of affect "depends on a number of different kinds of crossing between analog and digital forms of representations" (Sedgwick 2003: 102). Provided, the nine basic affects are not discretely existing units responsive only and homologically to external and digital on/off stimuli but, represent a many-valued conceptual pattern of graduated and multiply differentiated responsiveness over an analogue range of affective arousal (ibid.: 101, 103). Consequentially, affective arousal has the quality of making an "individual care about quite different states of affairs *in quite different ways*" (ibid.: 103). With this conceptual proposition Tomkins not only unsettles the possibility of a basic categorical structure of affects but also, the possibility of definitionally distinguishing affective response according to a dual structure of internal and external stimuli, that is, in relational terms of response and stimulus (ibid.: 104). From this theory, Sedgwick develops a conceptual approach to affect contingency, conceiving of affects as randomly and unexpectedly attaching to "things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects" (Sedgwick 2003: 19) (Pedwell and Whitehead: 123). Tomkins analogue model, Sedgwick suggests, makes it possible to suspend the causal relation developmental psychology²⁰ establishes between some emotional responses to some objects (ibid.: 98). In other words, Tomkin's analogue model

²⁰ As one example of the operation of a determinist behavioural logic.

endows affects with a freedom that distinguishes them from the instrumental and direct orientation of drives toward "aim[s] different from themselves" (ibid.: 19).

The implication of the conceptual suspension affect permits informs the theoretical premise of my main argument and underpins my analytic exploration of what experiences of loss through death may provide beyond an assumptive plunge into a generic domain of grief as relations of negativity and absence, only. In other words, it allows for a suspension of the causal alignment of loss – negativity. Same conceptual elasticity allows me to explore my analytical observations as points of resistance to the currently developing discourse on bereavement. While I will elaborate on the different concepts Sedgwick's conceptual approach comprises as I proceed with my close reading and analysis in chapter III, the main theoretical premise I draw from it provides that affect, grief therefore, cannot be epistemically pre-determined rather, given affects' contingent qualities experiences of loss need be ontologised through a perceptive approach to their local organisations. In the following sections, I will elaborate on the methodological and analytic concept Sedgwick develops for approaching affect which will inform the close readings and analyses of chapters III and IV.

1.1 "Texture" as concept and level of analysis

I have come to understand that for Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick "texture" is an analytical and methodological concept that she develops within a broader work on affect theory and employs in close readings of literary texts (Sedgwick 2003: *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy and Performativity*). Sedgwick is a literary critic understood to be one of the scholars pioneering queer theory within a Northern American academic context. While "texture" is developed within

Sedgwick's strain of work on affect its analytic and theoretical impetuses are influenced by the strain of her work generally catalogued as queer theory which Sedgwick herself refers to as her anti-homophobic analysis (Sedgwick 1990: *Epistemology of the Closet*)²¹. While part of the focus of her anti-homophobic analysis is on exposing the repressive effects of dominant structures, Sedgwick is adamant in cautioning the methodological and analytic foreclosures the paranoia this awareness to power's discursive effects projects through critical theory and practice (Sedgwick 2003: 10, 123-6). Observing the paradoxically uncritical effects of enacting a habituated critical injunction, Sedgwick reformulates her methodological approach from a defensive fixation on whether or not "a particular piece of knowledge [is] true" (ibid.: 124) to concern the "cognitive / affective" engagements that emerge from inquiring into what knowledge *does* (ibid.: 124, 126). In that she indicates her investments in a larger anti-essentialist project whose theoretical and analytical interest in reading for/th "the full array of "narrative consequences" (Moffat in Herman et al. 2012: 213) runs through her concept of "texture". The conceptual freedom Sedgwick develops from Tomkins' theoretical model of affect provides two (and likely more) analytical insights (Sedgwick 2003: 19). First, it enables a critical tracing of norms and their effects through emotional structures²². Second, it enables a conceptual opening in which to explore the contingent and graduated organisations affective experience may comprise. In simple terms, it enables an anti-essentialising and explorative inquiry into experience.

²¹ An anti-homophobic analysis is geared to scrutinise the public/private structure that, Sedgwick asserts, dominates recent Western cultures in which same sex desire has come to enjoy the status of both norm and open secret (ibid.: 1). Such structure is homophobic, Sedgwick argues when deconstructing some 1900th century literary landscapes marked by public/secret, hence hetero-/homosexual, structures with bias toward the former and the epistemological closeting of the latter.

²² Hence Sedgwick's focus on structures of public/private; hetero-/homosexuality.

Through Tomkins, Sedgwick delivers an enabling formulation of affect contingency; "[t]here is literally no kind of object which has not historically been linked to one or another of the affects" (Tomkins in Sedgwick 2003: 19). From this observation Sedgwick develops the assertion that affective response cannot be categorically or epistemically pre-determined therefor, their local organisations need be explored and hypothesised (ibid.: 13, 17). Following this formulation of the potentiality in affects and a range of possible attachments to a range of possible objects, Sedgwick suggests a perceptive approach to "texture" as a level of analysis. "Texture" has no intrinsic physical scale but "comprises an array of perceptual data that includes repetition[...] whose degree of organisation hovers just below the level or shape of structure" (Sedgwick 2003: 14). "Texture" then, is a way of conceptualising and exploring emotional and affective response through the local contingent organisations they make of perceptual data (Sedgwick 2003: 17). Sedgwick gets at the drifting meanings of "texture" through Renu Boras' essay "Outing texture" in which he makes a conceptual distinction between "texture" one x and "texxture" two x'es. "Texture" two x'es is the kind of texture that comprises the historical, substantial, material information about its own coming about (ibid.: 14). I am inclined to relate a concept of "texture" two x'es most immediately to a project of tracing normative emotional structures. However, if the perception of "texxture" two x'es, that is, the relations between physical properties or perceptive data *and* emotions – if the perception of "texxture" two x'es is subject to differing scales, such as repetition, distance *and* senses, such as touch and hearing (ibid.: 16, 19), a conceptual drift happens; "textural" perception turns increasingly toward a concept of "texture" one x that subsumes its material history under its sensory quality and, in that, turns questions

from fixation on epistemology toward questions concerning phenomenology and affect (ibid.: 16-7).

In my reading, the conceptual drift traced above indicates Sedgwick's notion of the analytical potentiality in affect contingency. While Sedgwick's introductory presentation of the methodological and analytic use of "texture" is both complex and thorough, it takes up relatively little space in the publication of related essays (*Touching Feeling* 2003) and I have thus looked to less explicit passages for further indication of its use. In same publication Sedgwick presents the essay "Shame, Theatricality, And Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*" (Sedgwick 2003: 35-65). Briefly rehashed, Sedgwick gets up close and intimate with the affective organisations taking shape around the anal awareness and concerns of Henry James. In my reading of this essay, Sedgwick operationalises "textures" analytic insights in an explorative reading that makes use of the freedom and potentiality affect contingency holds when moving to explore the anal attachments and associations James makes around his rectum as affective movements of love and compassion rather than oblivious self-absorption. This effort is summed up by Sedgwick's appeal that a reader listens to James' sexual language rather than filter it through insulting epistemic privilege, such as the example she offers of a psycho-analytic insistence on reading sexuality in terms of "repression" and "self-ignorance" (Sedgwick 2003: 54). I suggest, that what Sedgwick offers instead is a re-imagining of this scenario of anal obsession from the normative overdetermination that structures relations to the rectum as pathology²³ to movements of obsessive, sure, attentive affection. The complicating and unfolding

²³ Signally perverted, imbecile and homosexual threat. See as example of the charging of such underlying heterosexism and homophobia "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (Bersani 2009).

maneuvers I take this "textural" reading enables for an exploration of affective experience has influenced me profoundly in the theoretical questions and analyses my close reading pursues.

2 Formulating a methodology for *reading "textures" of grief*

I approach my research using methods of literary analysis and specifically by enacting methods of close reading (Lentricchia and DuBois 2003; Gallop 2007). As a broader method of reading, close reading takes its cue for approaching texts from a turn in literary theory broadly termed New Criticism and locates exploration of meaning in text at the level of language, that is, on what language *does*. In other words, a method of close reading enables inquiry into the production of meaning beyond the immediate surface of the text. In analysing auto-biographical text as my primary material I draw my main terminology from a methodology for interpreting life narrative (Smith and Watson 2001), while with my specific interest in reading for experience of loss and grief, I deploy Sedgwick's conceptual approach to affect contingency by reading at the level of "texture" (Sedgwick 2003: 17). Sliding from the terminology of a particular methodology toward a conceptual approach to affect, I develop a combined methodology for *reading "textures" of grief*. I thus move the main premise of my theoretical framework into my methodology by utilising my analyses not merely to try a theorisation of experiences of grief but, to demonstrate how a practice of reading text itself is not simply "a cognitive activity but an embodied mode of attentiveness that involves [a reader] in acts of sensing, perceiving, feeling, registering, and engaging (Felski 2015: 176). In that, I take a methodological cue from Felski's "postcritical reading" (Felski 2015: 173) and Sedgwick's anti-essentialising approach to not reduce the possibilities a reading (or any other critical engagement) may offer to the aim of

relieving a paranoid, suspicious tracing and exposing of the apparatus and effects of power (Sedgwick 2003: 10-2, 123-6; Felski 2015: 23, 33-5). While my analytical chapters are written in the awareness of the normative and regulatory structures emerging in the developing discourse on bereavement, my primary motif in staging an encounter with *Blue Nights* (Didion 2011) is not to uncover or decode how power works and effects experience but, to explore affective experience around loss by enacting an anti-essentialising (Sedgwick 2003) and embodied practice of reading as an affective, mutually inter-active entanglement between text and reader (Felski.: 173, 176, 182).

2.1 Reading as an affectively entangled practice

My analytic reviews of literature on mourning and bereavement reflected a tendentious lack of engagement with the experience of loss and grief as such, that is, a lack of engagement beyond a vocabulary of negativity which I suggested is reflected throughout modern Western knowledge production's representationalist perceptions of death as the ultimate rupture and end. In very simple terms, dealing with death within most of these epistemes means dealing in passivity; negativity; absence²⁴. Above I presented how my theoretical framework morphs into my method of reading when I enact an "affective hermeneutics" through Felski's "postcritical reading" (Felski 2015: 173). An "affective hermeneutics" does not presume a text to be the passive material utilised by a reader in efforts to uncover a truth beyond or through it instead, this approach perceives of text as a nonhuman actor²⁵. A nonhuman actor, Felski offers by invoking a

²⁴ I have not gone far into but sought to indicate the significant interventions into this tendency through poststructuralist scholarship and engagements with a concept of mourning (chapter I).

²⁵ A very interesting observation here is on a tendency in Western intellectual history of perceiving text as "a monument to dead thought (*histoire*) nor a self-referential web of linguistic signs (*écriture*). Rather, it springs to life

line of phenomena not unlike Sedgwick's line of possibilities for affective attachment, is "anything that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference" (ibid.: 163). A perceptive approach to "texture", Sedgwick asserts, unsettles the dual hierarchies between subject/object; active/passive because in perceiving "texture" the subject has already been touched, that is, moved to try out a "textural" hypothesis. Similar to the ontological stakes Sedgwick offers, Felski's approach to texts as nonhuman actors, challenges a hermeneutic hierarchy that assumes interpretive ability to reside with a reader only and to come about in the critical process of deriving from or endowing the text with meaning. Instead, Felski wrestles hermeneutics from the status of human privilege and the privileged practice of critique (ie. hermeneutics of suspicion ibid.: 2-4, 10), to be a "substance"[...] a property of the world itself" (ibid.: 175). As such, she places the subject within chains of events in which nonhuman actors as well as humans are implicated. One may follow to suggest that exploring affect, and experience of loss namely, through an "affective hermeneutics" (ibid.: 173) and at the level of "texture" enacts a research strategy and practice that not only theorises experience of loss beyond an ideological vocabulary of negativity but, embodies a practice that unsettles the hierarchical relations of subject/object; active/passive which structure the epistemic grounds of Western knowledge production.

While the theoretical premise that runs throughout my work and informs my main argument is based in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's approach to affect contingency, the point from which I initially conceived this work was not a theoretical query but, my own experience of loss. This means, developing my argument and theoretical and analytic inquiries has remained motivated by the questions my personal experience of loss raised. Rather than departing from an already

via a mundane yet mysterious process in which words are animated by readers and reanimate readers in turn" (Felski 2015: 175).

theorised concept of mourning, my own affective and bodily experiences of grief provide the stuff from which my questions initially arose and much later developed into my main research question "what does grief *do*?" The most profound of these questions emerged through the pervasive sensations of impact I kept feeling in relation to Joachim after his death and thus concerns "how my sense of 'self' was, and remains, constituted through Joachim; how I am *with* and *through* him regardless of his death." I have thus used the specificity of my personal experience to initiate and explore an alternative research practice through which I compose and think through some theoretical and methodological questions around living *with* the lost other, that is, *living in proximity to death*.

Because I develop my methodological and theoretical inquiry from a point of personal experience, this work is manifest to the situated and implicated practice of knowledge production (Haraway 1988). Or, in a formulation closer to my theoretical and methodological framework, *reading "textures" of grief* manifests how every encounter with our research materials, every act of reading is a different affective entanglement and attachment; "an embodied mode of attentiveness that involves us in acts of sensing, perceiving, feeling, registering, and engaging" (Felski 2015: 176). In the same way I have allowed the specificity of my own experience to inform my research practice it has led me to choose an autobiographical textual account of loss as my main site of analysis. My introduction accounted for the indebtedness of my work to an autobiographical tradition of writing about grief and the inspiration and leverage I draw from the work of Joan Didion (*A Year of Magical Thinking* 2005; *Blue Nights* 2011) as well as the efforts of other authors such as Colm Toibin (*Nora Webster* 2014) and Edwin Honig (*Poems for Charlotte* 1963; "To Restore a Dead Child" 1983). By engaging with autobiographical material I

further situate my work within scholarship that approaches autobiography and life narrative as sites of knowledge production and resource to explore modes of representation along the complex intersections of subjective experience (Smith and Watson 2001: 258; Griffin 2005: 119; Moffat in Herman et al. 2012).

Joan Didion is an American author best known for her novels and literary journalism. *Blue Nights* (Didion 2011) is Didion's autobiographical text and account of the loss of her daughter Quintana Roo. Choosing this text as my main source and site of analysis reflects two main incentives aside from the above listed methodological reflections. First incentive is to engage the work of a critically and popularly acclaimed contemporary author whose recent publications (Didion 2005; 2011), which deal explicitly with loss, have remained largely under-engaged in a critical discourse on grief. Second incentive reflects the decisive first step in enacting an "affective hermeneutics" (Felski 2015: 173). That is, engaging the textual material, which initially allowed me the space to explore my personal experience of loss and eventually enabled the formulation of the theoretical and analytic questions that move this research, within this intellectual undertaking.

In this chapter I have accounted for the origin and direction of the research question that guides this work onward; "what does grief *do*?" Through a review of my theoretical and methodological framework I have accounted for the slight move this question makes away from a concern with fixating experience of loss in epistemological terms and toward a perceptive and

phenomenological approach to grief²⁶. I will now move on to enact my methodology for *reading "textures" of grief*. First, in chapter III's close reading and analysis of Joan Didion's autobiographical text *Blue Nights* (Didion 2011) and second, in chapter IV's reflection on the relation of my own experience of *living in proximity to death* to developing and deploying this framework. My tentative assertion is that *reading "textures" of grief* provides a compassionate and affectively entangled approach to the heterogeneity and specificity of experience; that it offers theoretical and analytical sensitivity to the particularities of losses²⁷ and, that it (re-)ontologises experience of loss from a pathological discourse on bereavement to a site for alternative knowledge production and recounting of concepts of living beyond a vitalist ideology but, as experiences of *living in proximity to death*.

²⁶ As this chapter initially noted, this move is indebted to Sedgwick's shift in emphasis from a "fixation on epistemology [...] to questions about phenomenology and affect (Sedgwick 2003: 17).

²⁷ My hope beyond the current materialisation of this work is to develop the scope of *reading "textures" of grief* this means also, that its application may not be limited to the event of death in 'a strict' sense.

Chapter III: reading *Blue Nights*

By composing a framework for *reading "textures" of grief* chapter II moved this work toward its main interest in exploring experience of loss as sites of alternative knowledge production and points of resistance to the increasing biopolitical intervention on the 'bereaved subject'. Chapter III moves forward by staging an anti-essentialising and affectively entangled encounter with Joan Didion's autobiographical text, *Blue Nights* (Didion 2011) about the loss of her daughter Quintana Roo.

Chapter I developed a notion of *living in proximity to death* against the backdrop of the biopolitical interventions on the "bereaved subject" which corrects presentation of self-perception and bodily and temporal boundaries along able-ist norms. By drawing conceptual framework from a strategy for interpreting life narrative (Smith and Watson 2001) present chapter takes the concepts of subjectivity and temporality as focal points for its close reading and analyses of the affective and bodily experiences around loss. The theoretical proposition that guides and informs chapter III's analysis remains that grief cannot be epistemically pre-determined rather, given affects contingent qualities, experiences of loss need be explored in their local organisations (Sedgwick 2003). This proposition further holds that given their contingency affects - and here the affective experiences around loss – provide sites for a critical reflection and recounting of the norms that denote experience of existence beyond a vocabulary of vitality and positivity and instead along a graduated and contingent spectrum of being alive.

Beside the introduction, this chapter comprises two overall sections. By deploying the terminology provided by a methodology for interpreting life narrative first section interests how experiences of subjectivity are mediated, engaged and stylised by the auto-biographical subject. I

then move through Sedgwick's perceptive approach to "texture" (Sedgwick 2003) to analytical reflections on subject (com)position in the inter-relational dynamism of textual voices. This move embodies a tentative shift from a linguistically based discussion of subject-constitution toward a "textural"/material emphasis. It thus initiates a reflection that lies beyond this chapter and will be taken up in chapter IV in reflection on my experience of *living in proximity to death* as an embodied research practice. Chapter III's second section and readings focus on a concept of temporality. With an interest in exploring experiences of living *in time with* loss as points of reflection on and intervention into the normative narratives produced along conventional or transcendental time, I initiate this section in the provided literary terminology for interpreting life narratives and move to explore temporal representations of loss as alternative [queer] experience of time (Sedgwick 1990 and 2003; Moffat in Herman et al. 2012).

1 Subjectivity: the auto-biographical "I" and the voice of the lost other

"In certain latitudes there comes a span of time approaching and following the summer solstice, some weeks in all, when the twilights turn long and blue. This period of the blue nights does not occur in subtropical California, where I lived for much of the time I will be talking about here and where the end of daylight is fast and lost in the blaze of the dropping sun, but it does occur in New York, where I now live" (Didion 2011: 3).

In opening *Blue Nights* Didion provides historical and geographical indication for a reader to make the initial and most basic relations of the auto-biographical "I". A reader acquainted with Didion's biography may recognise the "subtropical California" where the narrating "I"²⁸ informs

²⁸ A common narratological term for discussing author and narrator relations is "implied author". "Implied author" is the term for an invisible agent who cannot be the "real" author but performs the functions of her in editing, shaping and arranging the narrated "I"'s in relation to the narrating "I". Relying on Smith and Watson's rationale for leaving an "implied author" out of their discussion, because the positions of the narrated and narrating "I"'s are temporally too interlinked and involved in the process of interpreting and vocalising the narrative, I will also leave out

she used to live, and soon specifies as "the house in Brentwood Park in which we lived from 1978 until 1988" (ibid.: 7), coincides with the known geographical location of the authorial Didion during this period in time. Having established the relation between the "real" or historical "I", that is the authorial "I" whose name appears on the title page and whose existence is evident in other historical records *and* the narrating "I", that is, the persona the authorial "I" makes available to tell the autobiographical narrative to a reader (Smith and Watson 2001: 72) this passage makes further complications of the narrating "I" necessary. An immediate reading may incline a reader to make two distinctions within this position adhering to the temporal cues the passage provides. Such would situate a narrating "I" in a present time New York, where she now lives and a narrated "I" in the afore mentioned subtropical California (Didion 2011: 3). While this distinction does serve to delineate the two predominant temporal and geographical landscapes of the text, it fails to recognise and inquire into the heteroglossia (Bakhtin in Smith and Watson 2001: 81), that is, the multiple voices and dynamisms the narrating "I" is a composite of and dialogically engages through these landscapes (ibid.: 74, 76).

While I will not open a generic discussion of this text, one way of reflecting on the many issues it thematises is through the mention of a few of the multiple voices the narrating "I" speaks as/ vocalises; a young and unexperienced mother to a five year old ["I had so exhausted my aptitude for improvisational caretaking[...] I had lost my authority" (ibid.: 33)]; a formal mother of a bride ["Mr. And Mrs. John Gregory Dunne request the honor of your presence at the marriage of their daughter Quintana Roo[...]"] (ibid.: 7)]; a young employee at Vogue (ibid.: 80); an ill health ["I can tell you the hour when it overtook me" (ibid.: 173)] widowed mother to a deceased daughter.

discussion of an "implied author". Instead, I follow their emphasis on an, in my opinion, more important point, that is, exploring the dynamism of the relations between narrating and narrated "I"'s. (Smith and Watson 2001: 75-6).

To mention a few of many voices of the narrating "I" is also to open up questions on how their fragmentation and heterogeneity compose and implicate the narrating "I". A reader may go on to assume the present time narrating "I" to invoke a voice of experience on the past tense narrated "I"'s and find textual material for such an argument in passages where a narrating "I" reflects on herself as a young mother who could "never afford to see [her daughter as] already a person" (ibid.: 41), could never "bear to contemplate the death or the illness or even the aging of the other" (ibid.: 53) (Smith and Watson 2001: 80). However, read as such the self-reflection²⁹ the narrating "I" exhibits would collapse under a developmental narrative's hierarchical dynamic of a self-reflective narrating "I"'s advising a less experienced narrated "I" ["I had lost my authority" (ibid.: 33), "I could never afford to see that" (ibid.: 41)]. Instead, if not the reflectiveness of the narrating "I" is attributed to mature experience what other dynamism may it be responsive to? To explore this proposition, let me return, through Sedgwick, to an alternative reading of the quoted passage.

In proposing a perceptive approach, Sedgwick advises a reader that because of its contingency affect cannot be epistemically pre-fixed but need be explored through its specific and local attachments to an array of perceptive phenomena, that is, "textures" (Sedgwick 2003: 16-7).

With this, Sedgwick introduces two implications on a perceiving subject first, to read for affect at the level of "texture", that is, to perceive "texture" is to "be immersed in a field of active narrative hypothesizing, testing, and re-understanding of how physical properties act and are acted upon over time" (ibid.: 13). Second, to perceive "texture" unsettles a dualistic hierarchy

²⁹ [To be] reflective: relating to or characterized by deep thought; thoughtful. '*a quiet, reflective, astute man*' (notice, for the sake of my in text point, the aged and gendered characterisations of this ability). Online Oxford Dictionary <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/reflective>.

between active and passive; between the subject who touches and the object touched in that to perceive of "texture" is to have already been touched or *moved* to test a "textural" hypothesis (ibid.: 14).

At first reading, the initial excerpt may suggest blue nights as some form of the darkness that follows "the blaze of the dropping sun" (Didion 2011: 3) and as delineating the present of the narrating "I" to reside in, what a reader later learns is, the time following Didion's loss of her daughter ["[g]o back into the blue" (ibid.: 188)]. Blue, in this reading, would metaphorise a time after loss; a place absent of Quintana Roo. Yet metaphor, first of all, does not get this reader closer to inquire into the affective reverberations ending same passage "I found my mind turning increasingly to illness, to the end of promise, the dwindling of the days, the inevitability of the fading, the dying of the brightness" (ibid: 4). Second, a metaphoric reading of blue nights may foreclose such affective inquiry by indexing the narrating "I"'s experience in the historic-material catalogues blue evokes; 'having them' or 'singing the blues'³⁰. These are just two metaphors for depression. Taking instead the first hypothesising cue from Sedgwick, What if in the phenomenon of blue nights there is offered a sensory experience rather than a temporal metaphor? The narrating Didion herself concludes the introductory chapter by writing "[b]lue nights are the opposite of the dying of the brightness, but they are also its warning" (ibidem.). Thus, a reader learns, blue nights do not conform to a day/night; past/present cycle ["the opposite

³⁰ **1** (Often the blues) [*treated as singular or plural*] Melancholic music of black American folk origin, typically in a twelve-bar sequence. It developed in the rural southern US towards the end of the 19th century, finding a wider audience in the 1940s, as blacks migrated to the cities. This urban blues gave rise to rhythm and blues and rock and roll. '*blues has always had a strong following in Australia*' as modifier '*a blues singer*'; **1.1** [*treated as singular*] A piece of blues music. '*a blues in C*'; **2** (the blues) *informal* Feelings of melancholy, sadness, or depression. '*she's got the blues*'.

Oxford Living Dictionaries <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/blues>, accessed May 16, 2017.

of the dying of the brightness"], they do however offer something else by evoking a sense of unrest or anxiousness [hence, warning]. Now, remind yourself of the possible bodily sensations of those affects.

In ending her introductory chapter, the narrating "I" associates blue with swimming and the reverberations of "gloaming, [...]glimmer, [...]glitter, [...]glisten, [...]glamour" (ibid.: 3-4). These crackling and flickering metonymic drifts suggest perceptive alertness to the slipperiness and movement of form. A reader in perceptive inquiry follows the slipperiness to immerse herself in the textures of swimming, recalls sensations of her body immersed in water and the silent effects from the totality of its surrounding volume on the slow lightness of limbs pushing round. What is offered in this sensory register? Instead of resolving a phenomenon of blue nights to an experienced narrating "I"'s metaphorisation of a current in absence of her daughter, the narrating "I"'s reflectiveness may be responsive to sensory experiences of slipperiness and swimming in loosened sense of form? Returning to my theoretical discussion of voices and the initial interpretation along their relational dynamics and hierarchies³¹, the sensory register of blue may offer an alternative voice of a narrating "I"? That is, not (only) one of experienced authorial self-assertion but a site of self-scrutiny, of reflective instability and undoing (Smith and Watson 2001: 33-4)? What is more, a perceptive reading opens a space in which the narrating "I"'s reflectiveness can be explored as dynamisms not exclusive to the voice of her but, in touch with or touched by someone else. Who is this other and what does their voice *do*?

³¹ I.e. between an experienced narrating "I" and the unexperienced narrated "I"'s.

1.1 Inter-subjective reflectiveness and the impact of the lost other

Among the rich and famous, the friends and family whose voices mostly inhabit the subtropical California life the narrative oscillates in and out of, the most pronounced "external voice", other than the narrating "I"'s husband John Gregory Dunne, is that of their daughter Quintana Roo. Her presence is not merely evident in the frequent invocation of her voice as a commentary on the narrating "I"'s recollection of experience; "[l]et's do it, she whispered" (ibid.: 5); *"let me just be in the ground, she had kept sobbing"* (ibid.: 49); "[d]o *that* baby" (ibid.: 56); *"[w]hat if you hadn't answered the phone when Dr. Watson called?, she would suddenly say"* (ibid.: 63). It is evident, rather, in the effects these invocations have on the narrating "I"'s narrativising of and reflection on her subjective experiences. Hence, my phrasing of the question concerning the voice of an other performatively, in that, placing an emphasis not merely on who this voice *is* but what it *does*. Moreover, phrasing the question as such is a commentary on the methodological terminology of "external voice" (Smith and Watson 2001: 80-1) that I used to enter Quintana Roo into reflection on the, so called, "internal" auto-biographical voices the narrating "I" is a composite of (ibidem.). This terminology derives from a much enabling narratological turn to the heteroglossia and dialogism of text (Bahktin in Smith and Watson 2001: 81), that is, an approach to text as conjunctions of interiority and exteriority in speech or language. While a concept of dialogism provides vocabulary for a theoretical discussion of subjectivity as linguistically and continuously constituted it deals in language/discourse only. What I want to suggest here, as with the proposition that ended a reflection on the phenomenon of blue nights, is a re-organisatory intervention on the distance and hierarchy the binary terminology of ["internal" /"external"] voice prefaces an inquiry into the relation between the narrating "I" and Quintana Roo. Instead, provided Sedgwick's second insight of a perceptive approach to affect, I suggest to consider the

impact of the voice of Quintana Roo as profoundly intimate and decisive of the narrating "I"'s experience of subjectivity. In other words, though they are arguably indicative of authorial, editorial choices, I want to consider that the narrating "I"'s affective movements through self-reflection and self-unfolding scrutiny can be read as responsive to, as brought about by the voice of Quintana Roo.

"Let's do it, she [Quintana Roo] whispered" (ibid.: 5) moves the narrating "I" into "[h]er choices, all. Sentimental choices, things she remembered. I remembered them too" (ibid.: 6). Time passes. Memory fades, memory adjusts, memory conforms to what you think you remember" (ibid.: 13); "*Let me just be in the ground*, she [Quintana Roo] had kept sobbing" (ibid.: 49) moves the narrating "I" into "[h]ow could we have so misunderstood one another? Had she chosen to write a novel because we wrote novels? Had it been one more obligation pressed on her? Had she felt it as fear? Had we? (ibid.: 51); "[d]o *that* baby" (ibid.: 56) moves the narrating "I" into "[w]hen we think about adopting a child [...w]e omit the instant of the sudden chill, the "what if," the free fall into certain failure. *What if I fail to take care of this baby? What if this baby fails to thrive, what if this baby fails to love me?[...] what if I fail to love this baby?* (ibid.: 58); "[w]hat if you *hadn't answered the phone when Dr. Watson called?*, she [Quintana Roo] would suddenly say" (ibid.: 63) moving the narrating "I" from "if someone "chose" you what does that tell you? Doesn't it tell you that you are available to be "chosen"? (ibid.: 60-1).

My use of the term *move* is decisive here why dealing in language inevitably creates some logocentric bind, and while I am in no way imagining its escape, I *am* making a subtle but crucial emphasis when I argue Quintana Roo's voice has an impact on the narrating "I". This emphasis embodies a move from a notion of impact that relies on the force of language alone and instead

insists on a strong dependency on the materiality or the "textures" voice carries. Sedgwick provides an enabling observation on a similar move when she charges some anti-essentialist projects³² with having driven an originally limited group of performative utterances to the paradoxically essentialising ability of *all* language to bring about 'reality' (Sedgwick 2003: 3-5). Not diminishing the importance of these theoretical works, Sedgwick suggests attending to "texture" as one way to specify and inquire into the effects of particular bits of language (ibid.: 6). I underline the referentiality in Sedgwick's use of a vocabulary of performativity to shift the emphasis from language bringing about, so called, material 'realities' to language being wholly implicated in them, merely slipping between and chasing them around. Returning to my proposition that the reflectiveness of the narrating voice is intimately dependent on or brought about by Quintana Roo's, I do acknowledge an overt performative relation at a linguistic level between the referents "she"/"her" /"me"/ "child"/"baby" and their respective speech-acts ["Let's do it"; "*Let me just be in the ground*"; "[d]o *that* baby"] (Parker and Sedgwick 1995: 2-3). More importantly however, I suggest the *voice* of Quintana Roo, rather than conveying meaning through language, *moves* the narrating "I" through sensory confrontations with specific "textures"; "fades[...], adjusts[...], conforms[...], ground[...], sobbing[...], pressed[...], felt[...], sudden chill[...], fall[...], *thrive*[...], chose[...], chosen" (Didion 2011: 13, 49, 51, 56, 58, 60-1)³³. Continuing to think *with* Sedgwick, this is to say, the narrating "I"s move-ments are detectible at

³² - and emphasises the trajectories of deconstruction and gender theory extending through the works of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler (Sedgwick 2003: 3-5).

³³ Here, I have had to leave out of the current scope of this analysis and entire discussion around a concept of voice in the context of feminist and woman of colour critique of representation (Trinh 1991; Phelan 1993). This, for not left out, strain of thought largely informs and speaks to a central preoccupation of this work to utilise the relation between the subject and the lost other as a site for discussing the difficulties and complexities in representation. I hope to engage and develop this aspect of my work further beyond its current materialisation.

the level of language but, more profoundly reflect her affective and bodily responsiveness to the particular "textures" Quintana Roo inhabits and evokes.

Chapter I made it clear, that my critique of the effects and the ontological standing of death is not catering to a vitalist discourse. In formulating this critique I am thus adamant in utilising it as an awareness to the subtle ways in which the ideological and symbolic order which dominates a Western dualist metaphysics [life/death] may inform, not merely the discursive production of death as absence and negativity but, any inquiry into the possible modes and forms of impact a lost other may have on a subject. With this, I caution opening a discussion around the relation between a subject and a lost other without recounting the ideological binary structure which assumes the impact of the not (meta-)physically present to be perceived and expressed in the terms of the secondary or negative of those binary elements. Instead; "'I wanna dance," she would *croon* back to the eight-track" (ibid.: 68); "I have not yet located the season in which I do not *hear* her *crooning* back to the eight-track. I still *hear* her *crooning* back to the eight-track. *I wanna dance*. [...]I still *see* the stephanotis in her braid [...]something else I still *see*" (ibid.: 69, my emphasis). What I am emphasising in these textual instances is an affective impact [*I wanna dance*] emerging in a relation of perceptive registration [hearing, seeing] and the "textural" elements of season, crooning, stephanotis, braid. Repeated, reading at the level of "texture" for the affective associations and attachments the narrating "I" makes is a way of reading for the impact the lost other may have on the subject beyond this ideological binary. I have offered the dynamism between Quintana Roo and the narrating "I" as an initial site to explore and challenge the hierarchies and causations that may conventionally preface this inquiry.

This section's analysis has opened a discussion around how the lost other may impact the subject. This discussion has questioned some limitations on conventional interpretive terminology that enters analysis of experience of subjectivity through a binary structure, that is, as "internal" and "external" voices. By focusing on the "textures" the narrating "I" provides, I have explored a possible interpretation of some affective and bodily experiences of loss. Interested in exploring the implications loss may have on an experience of subjectivity, I have started recounting a concept of impact beyond a structure of presence/absence and instead *through* the affective reactions and responsiveness the narrating "I" registers through the voice of Quintana Roo. In that, I have pushed a discussion around subject constitution and the performative effect of language toward a theoretical emphasis on "textures", that is, the material specificities of experience.

2 Temporality: loss and a sense(/ation) of time

While the primary focus of the preceding section was on exploring experiences of subjectivity in loss, I implied a notion of temporality along two lines. First, by outlining a basic temporal pattern (Smith and Watson 2001: 92-3) in the positions of a narrating "I" and narrated "I"s and their locations in the two dominant temporal and geographical landscapes of the text, a present time New York and a Subtropical California (Didion 2011: 3-4). Through a discussion of the dialogism of text I suggested a complication of the present/past scheme implied in this basic temporal structure and thus a re-negotiation of the hierarchy it may ascribe through a developmental narrative and linear time in the relational dynamics of the narrating and the narrated "I"s. I complicated this dual temporal structure further by arguing for a profound

presence and impact of an "external voice" on the subjective experience of the narrating "I" thus adding to my critique of a linear narrative time, an intervention into a related dualist representational ideology of internality/externality. This section develops a focus on temporality by inquiring into how time is expressed, related to and used by the autobiographical "I" through the combined conceptual vocabulary provided by a methodology for interpreting life narrative (Smith and Watson 2001) and Sedgwick's anti-essentialising approach to interpreting narrative (Sedgwick 2003; Moffat in Herman et al.: 2012).

While a concept of temporality can be employed as a strategy for reading narrative plots and patterns Smith and Watson further offer that representations of time, notwithstanding their textual simulations of cultural and historic temporal conventions, are inevitably a narrativised *sense* and *experience* [of time] (Smith and Watson 2001: 92, 202-3). As such, a reader may approach temporality not only as plotted structures the narrating "I"'s and others are inserted into and navigate but, as narrative modes they emerge, experience and express themselves through. Different interventions have been made into this critical and enabling relationship between time and narrative making a self-referential genre of auto-biography a significant and rich site for exploring time as a subjective expression of material circumstantial experience (ibid.: 204-6).

Sedgwick articulates time as a narrative issue and in doing so she cautions a tendency of anti-essentialist projects to assume "methodological doctrines" of their own by collapsing an ideological imperative for reading forth queer experience over a "full array of "narrative consequences"" (Moffat in Herman et al. 2012: 211, 213-4)³⁴. Continuing this emphasis,

³⁴ For her particular sites and fields of interest, this collapse is exemplified as the possible consequence of a dogmatic reading emerging from a desire for *the* queer narrative to emerge.

Sedgwick advises a shift from the "topos of depth or hiddenness" that animate the deconstructive drama of exposing what lies *behind* and *beneath* to the planar preposition *beside* that "permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualist thinking" (Sedgwick 2003: 8.)³⁵. Importantly, *besides* does not prepose a "fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or (...) pacific relations" (ibid.: 8) it rather proliferates a range of relational qualifiers of cohabitation /-existence³⁶. In other words, this conceptual proliferation of temporality opens up multiple possibilities for interpreting narrative. What this (and other) queer theoretical interventions into transcendental time provide is a charging of the relation between time and the (for Sedgwick narrativised) circumstances of lived experience.

Throughout *Blue Nights* the narrating "I" repeatedly invokes the expression "[t]ime passes" (Didion 2011: 13, 16-7, 66). The brevity and seeming self-evidentiality of these textual instances left them unnoticed or unattended to in my initial reflection on the primary temporal structure of the text as merely cliché commentary on conventional time. However, the pattern their repetition presents offers incentive to quire into the narrative relations their commentary make. The repeated invocation of a sentence may serve the textual expression of an experience of repetition or a habitual insignificance but, it may also hold a less direct performative effect³⁷ and instead convey the ambiguity or failure to bring about what this generic expression stipulates. Other textual passages, I have suggested, have offered cause to notice the ambiguity and complexity in

³⁵ Sedgwick makes a methodological move that enables a deconstructive project that, while it is informed by a Foucauldian concept of power, seeks to is not get caught in the drama of exposure (Sedgwick 2003: 8, 10). This means, she is adamant in not reducing a deconstructive project of tracing dominant and normative narratives to a motif of 'resolving' a dualist pseudo-dichotomy of prohibition/repression (ibidem.).

³⁶ "*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping and other relations" (ibidem.).

³⁷ The direct performative relation would be that "time passes" serves to effectuate the textual expression of that exactly.

the narrating "I"'s experience of time. That is, not merely as she oscillates in and out the dominant temporal-geographic landscapes in sensory and affective reflectiveness but the ways in which such inter-subjectivity emerges through and is composite of different temporalities. ["I wanna dance," she would *croon* back to the eight-track" (ibid.: 68); "I have not yet located the season in which I do not *hear* her *crooning* back to the eight-track. I still *hear* her *crooning* back to the eight-track. *I wanna dance*. [...]I still *see* the stephanotis in her braid [...]something else I still *see*" (ibid.: 69, my emphasis)]. These textual move-ments obscure strict temporal distinction between present/past; presence/absence by making direct and mutually responsive relations between passed time scenarios and current perceptive experience ["I still hear"; "I still see" - "*I wanna dance*". "*Time passes*" (ibid.: 16) the narrating "I" observes and continues;

"Yes, agreed, a banality, of course time passes. Then why do I say it, why have I already said it more than once? Have I been saying it the same way I say I have lived most of my life in California? Have I been saying it without hearing what I say? Could it be that I heard it more this way: *Time passes, but not so aggressively that anyone notices?* Or even: *Time passes, but not for me?* Could it be that I did not figure in either the general nature or the permanence of the slowing, the irreversible changes in mind and body, the way in which you wake one summer morning less resilient than you were and by Christmas find your ability to mobilize gone, atrophied, no longer extant? The way in which you live most of your life in California, and then you don't? The way in which your awareness of this passing time--this permanent slowing, this vanishing resilience--multiplies, metastasizes, becomes your very life? *Time passes*. Could it be that I never believed it? Did I believe the blue nights would last forever?" (ibid.: 17)

Through its repetitive invocation, "time passes" moves from a generic observation to a mode of scrutiny and reflection on the relations between experience of time and a narrative of a particular kind of life [in California (ibidem.)]. That is, the narrating "I" is not out to contest the passing of time because, "a banality of course time passes" (ibidem.) rather, she moves from the question of *what* time may have meant and what time may now *feel* like. "Have I been saying it without hearing what I say?" (ibidem.) seems to notice the habitual relationship a generic sense of time

produces to the relations and elements that make up a particular experience of time [that experience of time is the narrative of "a life in California" (ibidem)]. What is questioned or renegotiated in this textual passage is a habitual sense of safety in time which the generic experience of 'the everyday' produces *as* stable relations to the contingent and precarious relations and elements that comprise it. "Time passes" may before have denoted a form of trust in time to gently move forward the status quo. That is, until all of a sudden time does not ["until you don't" (ibidem.)]. These textual moments ["until"/""and then you don't"] provide a sense of abruptness or a tear in the ruminating, elongated sentences that precede them. Spell them out; not "and then you *do not*" but, "then you *don't*" (ibidem.), abruptness, a sudden realisation. But what follows this sudden abruptness in a generic and coherent sense of time is not an absolute shift to incoherence and obscurity but rather, I proposed above, a reflective and sensory mode that registers; "permanence [...]slowing [...]irreversible changes [...]less resilient [...] ability [...] mobilize [...]atrophied, no longer extant? [...Y]our awareness of this passing time--this *permanent slowing, this vanishing resilience--multiplies, metastasizes*" (ibidem., my emphasis). Sensory registrations of the proliferate and organic modalities of living *in* time; the slowness of time, the fragmentation and acceleration [multiplies, metastasizes] and most importantly the sensation that, not only is time moving and organic, its relations are un-fixatable and possibly lost.

When I stress the distinction between a momentary abruptness and an absolute shift or rupture, I am enacting Sedgwick's caution on reading, not to conclude the illusiveness of generic time but, to explore the possibilities this textual passage opens up for exploring relations between experience of existence and time. It may seem convenient to assume an abruptness to bring about

the total circumvention of a status quo and to read as well as narrativise this as the textual representation of the 'moment when everything changed'. However, the sensory registrations of temporal modalities seem to convey less a watershed change and more one of relational contingency. To be sure, I read this passage not merely as reflections on relations between aging and time but, as reflections on and experiences of time that are related to loss. "Could it be that I never believed it? Did I believe the blue nights would last forever?" (ibidem.). Blue nights, I provided in the first section, may convey a sense of warning, an anxiousness around the changing and swimming of form, the impossibility of fixation that follows loss and reverberates into sensory registrations. In other words, this passage conveys a sense of awareness to the mortal risks and precarities the narrating "I" could never bear to imagine in relation to her daughter, could never "bear to contemplate [as] the death or the illness or even the aging of the other" (ibid.: 53). It may be that loss obscures a sense of trust in time meaning that time used to pass unnoticed or in assumed benign and safe relation to the "textures" that made up a sense a daily life [a "life in California" (ibid.: 17)]. The interference of loss is sudden yet, the narrativisation of the effects of loss does not relay a complete shift but, a sensory awareness to the multiple modalities of time "*permanent slowing, this vanishing resilience—multiplies, metastasizes*" (ibidem, my emphasis)³⁸. This is also to say that, with the intimacy I have

³⁸ A note on approaching representations of abruption and loss; while change may happen with sudden and abrupt effects, I intentionally do not implement theories of rupture in exploring what precedes or follows such moments. That is, because they invoke a preconception of 'trauma' and thus risk ignoring or failing to really inquire into the specificities and relations that make up specific experience. Rather than marking the moment of total change, of a total loss of a particular time (Subtropical California or, the times when some one was alive), abruption may proliferate a sense of existence in time, a sense of non-fixation and precarity to relations and experiences over, across, between and *in time*.

Some post-colonial (and) trauma studies, Freudian psychoanalysis, may be examples of theories that structure their theoretical interventions and analytic machinery around the notion of rupture risking the pre-fixation of what and how some experiences (trauma) may materialise differently.

suggested the narrating "I" relays with her daughter through passages of inter-subjective reflectiveness, it may be possible to think about temporal experience in relation to loss not in terms of a clearly delineated boundary of before and after [loss]. Instead, the sensory registrations relayed by the narrating "I" in this passage open the possibility of reading temporal experience in loss as a profoundly un-linear experience of present and present and rather a proliferate experience of being *in* time. A being *in* time in which 'the present' becomes a space profoundly impacted, experienced and relayed through sensory registrations [related to or] of the lost other. In other words, I am trying to approach a way of reading for experience of 'the present' *through* the sensory registrations the narrating "I" conveys rather than from the moment in which she can be detected to be in a linearly structured time³⁹.

2.1 Being *in* time with the lost other

In taking the expression "time passes" as a contestation of transcendental time and a site for inquiring into the multiple experience of temporality in relation to loss, the former sub-section observed a generic effect in the relation between time ["passes"] and a particular kind of life ["in California"]. This California life, a reader is informed, makes up a family of "3 people" (ibid.: 38-9), Joan Didion, her husband John Gregory Dunne and their daughter Quintana Roo. In the following I move to a reading that explores this composition of "3 people" as a site in which is produced a sense of safety through a hetero-normative structure and narrative which the narrating "I" decisively moves to contest and re-negotiate *through* her daughter's voice. Why

³⁹ What I have not been able to fully think through (and what then lies beyond the current scope of this work) is how thinking or reading time through "texture" or "textural" perception impacts a concept of 'context' and its seeming ability to determine a particular position/alinity in time and space.

does the narrating "I" make this intervention, I am interested in exploring and, what may it offer in relation to experience of loss and an exploration of a sense of *living in proximity to death*?

Where invoking a terminology of hetero-normativity often accompanies an argument for or critique of its pervasiveness, and while I am neither disputing this dynamism in general nor in the relevant scenario, I want to emphasise the fragility the narrative labour around this composition also signals. That is, while the family does signify an exclusivity in belonging through narrative and practical gestures of containment of its agreed members, it equally indicates an internal conflict. The conflict is internal because the evasion of the insecurity in belonging, the inherent threat of dissolution, depends on the continuous production of a narrative of a shared history, a production of a 'time of the family'⁴⁰. It is worth noticing that the narrative that animates this family of "3 people" (ibid.: 39) is re-produced by John, "the father of the bride" (ibid.: 15), in the toast he gives at the day of Quintana Roo's wedding. What is particularly striking is the circular structure and quality of re-affirmation and legitimacy this narrative provides to the family around the figure of the child. This circularity is reproductive in that a father uses the imagery of his little girl to project the future of his newlywed daughter through his own family narrative. This, by imagining his daughter's husband in his own place watching her beauty as he himself used to watch her as a little girl "walk[ing] up this steep hill" to go to school (ibid.: 29). Moreover, the re-affirmative quality of this gesture - the narrative solidification of the family through its re-telling/-production - is afforded further credence and pervasiveness when John includes the narrated "I"; "[s]o I said to Joan, "You got to see this, babe." [...]and when she

⁴⁰ Such narrative labour may or may not be experienced as even the more crucial when materialising around having or being an adopted child (ibid.: 126-33). I have only briefly indicated the text's thematic preoccupation with adoption and this through the narrating "I"'s reflective ruminations on her ability to take care of and love her child. The further exploration of the relations of this thematic lies beyond the current materialisation of this project.

saw Q disappear down that hill she began to cry" (ibidem.). What I want to underline here is the sense of naturalness and, through that, safety the figure of the child offers for the narrativisation of the 'time of the family'. Not only does it provide a point around which relations of belonging to the family may be established and re-affirmed in affective terms, it also provides a prism through which this kind of naturalness and safety of living *in* the 'time of the family' may be passed to and re-affirmatively circulated between others alike.

When I emphasise that the hetero-normative narrative is fragile, I mean simply to call attention to the affective labour it entails to represent its structure as natural. An affective labour that vanishes under the socio-political structures which acknowledge and adorn both narrative and composition of the family. In inferring both his wife, the narrated "I" and their daughter in the reproductive and re-affirmative narrativisation of their belonging together through the imagery of the beautiful child, John has them all emerge in a shared 'time of the family'. The narrative establishment of the affective structure of this time is then projected into and thus affirmed through the future; "[w]e toasted Gerry and Quintana again. We wished them happiness, we wished them health, we wished them love and luck and beautiful children [...]"ordinary blessings"" (ibidem.). The "ordinary blessings" indicate the expectations this [family] composition has to its existence in time as "happiness [...], health[...], love and luck and beautiful children" (ibidem.) but, in being articulated as wishes or blessings, they also indicate what cannot be explicated, namely, the risk that these may not materialise or that they do but fail to remain within their expected composition. It is interesting then to notice John's anxious need to emphasise the credence of their family by invoking the *affective* response a crying mother provides to the beautiful spectacle of their little girl. The anxious reassurance of their happy and

beautiful child may indicate how the narrative that emerges through this figure in effect circumscribes or outright ignores the precarity of the family composition, and of its members, by imagining its time as a future devoid of risks and as a temporal space through which its members can emerge together as ordinary, as natural and, as safe. Thus, this narrative undermines other experiences or rather, it circumvents the multiply cohabitating affective attachments and associations around and within the family⁴¹. That is, until it turns a site of contestations and renegotiation.

When Quintana Roo was alive, the narrating "I" could never "bear to contemplate the death or the illness or even the aging of the other" (ibid.: 53). It is possible that the suspension of the contemplation of the risks of loss in attachment were in part made possible by the narrative reaffirmation of the naturalness and the ordinariness of the families' blessings but, what the narrating "I" implies here is an awareness to the impossibility of totally evading the risks and dreads that these anticipations may fail to materialise. John's narrative of the family in fact managed to undermine the signals of its own failure to materialise a sense of safety. The narrating "I" admits this when she recalls how Quintana Roo's continuous "frantic efforts to avoid abandonment" (ibid.: 49). The narrating "I" offers this alternative voice to the dominant narrative when she presents a school poem written by Quintana Roo from the time "when [she] was a little girl" (ibid.: 27).

*"The world
Has nothing
But morning*

⁴¹ Here reminded of the earlier mention of Sedgwick's planar preposition *besides*, section 2 chapter III.

*And night
It has no
Day or lunch
So this world
Is poor and desertid⁴².*

*This is some
Kind of an
Island with
Only three
Houses on it
In these
Families are
2, 1, 2 people
In each house
So 2, 1, 2 make
Only 5 people
On this
Island.*

(Didion 2011: 38).

While the scenario of a parent presenting the produce accomplished by their children may evoke a(/this) reader's fears of an all too familiar habit of parental parading⁴³, in presenting the full length of Quintana Roo's primary school poem, the narrating "I" offers something beyond this affective convention. "The World", the narrating "I" herself admits presents an interruption into

⁴² Didion prefaces "The World": "Since the choices may or may not have meaning, I give you the text of "The World" with her spacing, her single misspelling:" (ibid.: 37).

⁴³ Not unlike the wedding speech I have tried to unpack to explore its covert affective and anxious labour in establishing or reaffirming its *remaining* legitimacy and naturalness.

her own narrative "in our own [family] I would have said that there were not "2, 1, 2, people" but "3 people". Possibly Quintana saw our personal "some Kind of an Island" differently. Possibly she had reason to" (ibid.: 39). Moved, as I have suggested in an earlier section, by the voice of Quintana Roo, the narrating "I" continues the reflection of this discrepancy in narratives throughout passages recounting Quintana Roo's mock-commentaries on their "their suburbia house in Brentwood" (ibid.: 7, 12) and into moments with Quintana Roo in suicidal despair wishing "*Let me just be in the ground [...] Let me just be in the ground and go to sleep*" (ibid.: 49).

Presenting the entirety of this poetic intervention into a dominant narrative is a way of giving it space, not merely relative space in the length of a text but, space in the sense of acknowledging a voice and even, perhaps, as opposed to the space afforded the voices of others. Rather than arguing it undermines the normative narrative that Didion's husband and Quintana Roo's father John provides, "The World" offers a moment to realise the co-presence of different temporal experience and its decisive placement may signify a *resonance* with the narrating "I"'s experience of time⁴⁴. As such, it not merely provides an intervention into the dominant narrative but, it also disrupts the affective structure that temporal narrative relies its safety on. That is, the safety that comes from a trust in the linear and re-productive continuation of the composition of the family from 'the present' into 'the future'.

In invoking "The World" the narrating "I" re-emerges, not as the crying mother concurring with the beauty of her child (and, hence the safety and the happiness of the family but), *through* and *with* her daughter's experience of unsafety, of despair and anxiety around a sense of belonging to

⁴⁴ as discussed in the above sub-sections.

the family. With this re-emergence, the narrating "I" moves in reflections through her daughter's narrative which co-exists in chronological time with the narrative of the beautiful little girl John produces, and thus turns the 'time of the family' into a site of contestation. Most importantly, with this re-emergence the narrating "I" offers a site to explore experience of *living in proximity to death* in temporal terms. It is possible to read the narrating "I"'s confrontation with Quintana Roo's narrative and experience post mortem, less as an expression of remorse over having been unable to realise her daughter's experience of anxiety and unrest when she was alive and, rather as a site to explore how the narrating "I" emerges temporally in resonance with Quintana Roo's experience. In other words, this re-emergence relays how the narrating "I" is *with* Quintana Roo⁴⁵, a confrontation or sensations so intense that it makes her willing (or unable not) to jeopardize their happy family narrative. Jeopardizing the family narrative, the narrating "I" herself admits, was impossible at the time her daughter was alive [could never "bear to contemplate the death or the illness or even the aging of the other" (ibid.: 53)]. This where recounting their family composition from "3 people" to "2, 1, 2, people" (ibid.: 39) may seem an insignificant and tedious technicality⁴⁶ it may also be read as an indication of the narrating "I"'s emotional and cognitive confrontations with her daughter's experience. An indication of the extent to which she registers and feels her daughter's experience and in that recounts her own sense of safety *through* Quintana Roo's "2, 1, 2, people" which seemingly implied a sense of feeling alone or not bound by the narrative safety of the family (ibid.: 49-50). Not only is the narrating "I"'s recounting of the entirety of this poetic interruption an act of listening to her

⁴⁵ I have tried to formulate and explore this sense of being *with* [the lost other] both in temporal terms (above sub-section) but also in the first section of this chapter as a being *through* the affective and bodily registrations of the "textures" inhabited by the lost other.

⁴⁶ - especially when invoked by an author whose work is known and renowned for its analytic sensitivity and poetics.

daughter's voice, it also presents a temporal and affective (re-)alignment with this voice and experience. A sense of temporal resonance through a being *in* 'time with the lost other' or, a *living in proximity to death* in which 'the present' is profoundly impacted and experienced through the affective and sensory registrations of who or what is lost.

Sedgwick offers that "texture" differs over scale such as time and distance (Sedgwick 2003: 16) which in effect means that difference in scale may have an effect on affective and sensory perception but also, that it may not. This proposition unsettles conventions of perceptive experience which may assume that intensity of impact correlates in exponential relation to time and metaphysical presence. Here Sedgwick intervenes with caution in interpretive engagements with affective perception and offers how "texture", rather than fading over time and distance, may be perceived in amplified terms (*ibidem.*). This insight on scale allows an interesting intervention into a temporal norm which undergirds the discourse on bereavement. That is, with time and distance the impact of the deceased (if not 'naturally' then through intervention) should fade. The second section of this chapter has tried to interrupt this temporal norm and the structures it produces (present/past; presence/absence) for interpreting relations of impact. The first sub-section intervened into a linear perception of 'present time' through a reading that perceived of experience of time *as* the sensory registrations of multiple temporal modalities in relation to the lost other. Through a reading and analysis of "The World", the second sub-section proposed to approach the narrating "I"'s need and efforts to recount her daughter's experience of being in "The World" as a textual moment to explore an experience of being *in* time with the lost other. In that, I have explored the experience of loss as a space in which normative time may be recounted and contested *through* the sensory and affective registrations of the lost other.

3 Theoretical and methodological reflections

The theoretical proposition that guides this chapter's analyses is the conceptual distinction and analytical usefulness Sedgwick underlines in theorising affects rather than drives. Sedgwick derives this distinction from Tomkins' analogue model that perceives of affects as with "a structural potential not enjoyed by the drive system: in contrast to the instrumentality of drives and their direct orientation toward an aim different from themselves, the affects can be autotelic" (Sedgwick 2003: 19). This structural potential enables the reorganisatory intervention I have proposed Sedgwick theorises with "texture" and employs in her (re)reading of Henri James' anal obsessions. This chapter has thus utilised a concept of "texture" along these orientations both as a conceptual approach to a method of close reading and which enables analytic engagement with affective experience. One example is the reading I have offered on the phenomenon of blue [nights] and the associated elements of water and swimming. In present chapter I thus proposed a reading of grief through a perceptive approach to the affective attachments and associations the narrating "I" provides through "texture". In that, I articulated a resistance to rely my interpretation on symbolic or metaphoric language for the limitations the readily available association between the colour blue and the cultural, symbolic references that index depression ['having the' or 'singing them blues'] imposes on the range of affective associations and attachments, in other words organisations, possible for these elements⁴⁷. Moreover, I founded my resistance to a symbolic reading on my understanding that it approximates what chapter I characterised as the logic that permits a psychobiological discourse to collapse the experience of grief under a classificatory category of depression by association of emotional, cognitive, affective negativity.

⁴⁷ These elements or, to be sure, the "textures" of blue nights, water, swimming.

By deploying a perceptive approach to what the narrating "I" provides as her experience of loss, I have enacted an integral aspect of my methodology for *reading "textures" of grief*. That is, by realising and using the organisatory potential⁴⁸ of affects, I have explored the textual instances of blue [nights], water, swimming as possibly conveying sensory and affective registrations of inter-relations and inter-dependencies along experiences of intimacy, immersion, closeness⁴⁹. As such, this analysis is manifest to how *reading "textures" of grief* enables a resistance to essentialising discursive claims, not by mounting counter claims or postures but, by wrestling open the collapses these claims make on experience and thus enabling their further exploration.

I have drawn this quality of my work from Sedgwick's anti-essentialising approach which moves efforts of critique away from a concern with epistemic revelations and toward questions of phenomenology (Sedgwick 2003: 17). In relation to her development of a perceptive approach to affect contingency, Sedgwick specifies these stakes in her anti-essentialising efforts through her appeal that a reader *listens* to what is being conveyed rather than filter the experiences of others through preconceived notions or, through "epistemic privilege" (ibid.: 54). As chapter II provided, wanting to compose a theoretical and methodological framework to explore experiences of loss and grief clearly reflects my own sense of being utterly misunderstood in, or unable to convey, my experience of loss. This is also to say that my intellectual efforts of *listening* to experience derive from my own need to be listened to. This has made the process of close reading and analysing someone else's experience of loss an oscillating movement in and

⁴⁸ In other words, the possible associations and attachments affects may make to "things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects" (Sedgwick 2003: 19).

⁴⁹ Confer chapter, sections 1 and 1.1.

out of my own experience and thus a constant balance with the risk in imposing it [my experience] on others. Chapter IV will continue a reflection on this delicate balance.

Another way I have sought to make use and aware of affect's structural potential and freedom is in the discussion this chapter's second section opens around a concept of temporality. Through this concept I have sought to explore an notion of *living in proximity to death* as an experience of living *in* multiple times through the sensory and affective registrations of different modalities of time. The primary interest of my analytic reflections around a concept of temporality has been in challenging the conventional structure of present/past; presence/absence that may inform a normative understanding of a 'present time' without the lost other and thus foreclose exploration of the impact an individual may register and express in relation to the lost other by pre-fixating the lost in structure of absence and negativity. While I have accounted for the textual cue that allowed me to initiate and unfold part of my discussion around temporal experience related to loss⁵⁰ in the context of the family, I am aware of my inclination to read this textual moment rather than others. I use Sedgwick's approach to time as an issue of narrative (Herman et al.: 2012: 211, 213-4) to critically charge the effects a normative and generic 'time of the family' may have on the acknowledgement of alternative narratives while I invoke the structural potential Sedgwick endows affects with as an entry to discuss Didion's invocation of "The World" as a re-negotiation of her position in the affective structure of their family. While these theoretical insights provide entry points into my analytic discussion, I am aware that I have already been moved by my own experience of loss to insist on initiating this discussion at the crux of these

⁵⁰ That is, when I use John's anxious invocation of the narrated "I"'s affective reaffirmation of the beauty of their familial belonging to enter my analysis of temporality into a discussion of the relations between time and narrative provided by a queer theoretical framework.

textual moments. Long into an adamant insistence on connecting experience of loss through death to a sense of loss of trust in conventional or normative narratives (using as site of my analysis the narrative production of sentiments of belonging and safety the family may nurture) I realise how I am also clearly hearing [/listening to] my own voice. In other words, my inclination to connect these losses in an analytic discussion echoes the self-absorbed attack I launched at my hitherto ability to find safety and trust (in other words, reassurance of the unlikelihood of loss) in the sense of belonging some structures, like the family, provided. I am reflecting on my implication here both to address a bias of my interpretation but, also to stress Sedgwick's maxim for perception which holds that experience is impossibly pre-fixated. This means that, for someone else and under different circumstances, the re-organisation that happened in relation to my experience of loss between the family and a cluster of affects related to a sense of safety, may appear nonsensical. In this passage I now hear my own voice and anxious sense of betrayal when I take Didion's invocation of "the World" as a textual act of recounting the hopeful blessings that only happiness, health and luck may come my/our way. In the throws of reflecting on Didion's invocation of Quintana Roo's poetic interruption in a conventional family narrative, I (again) realise how am already moved by my own loss to read a connection between the anxiety of abandonment and loss Quintana Roo relays, as part of her affective experience in relation to her family, as a site in which Didion confronts her own mortal awareness and anxiety over loss in the wake of the loss of her daughter. Other than encountering theoretical questions these analytical passages expose my affected and implicated process of reading and how I did not come to this text un-affected or in objective position. I have been adamant in composing a methodological framework that would acknowledge how these analytic efforts neither initiate

nor advance in the clear distinct relation between reader and text but, manifest rather a reflexive and embodied hermeneutics intimately entangled, not merely with my experience of loss but, in the interplays between this text and others through it (Felski 2015: 175-6). I will explore this further in the following and final chapter.

The analytic reflections that follow my close readings around subjective and temporal experience in loss have been moved by a clear intention to push theoretical questions to confront and challenge the limits of what can be readily understood as present and presence in a binary Western ideological structure informed by a metaphysical divide of life/death; animate/inanimate. While these theoretical reflections have been central to this chapter's analyses they derive from my main aspiration to initiate and explore an anti-essentialising approach to the experiences of loss and grief. By utilising chapter I's preliminary articulation of *living in proximity to death* as an entry into a decisively entangled engagement with the affective experiences that emerge around loss I have sought to explore subjective and temporal experience as sites of reflective and alternative articulations of experience of grief. As such, this chapter's anti-essentialising approach to loss manifests a resistance to the negative and reparative vocabulary currently cultivated in a psychobiological discourse on bereavement not by mounting an opposing posture or a counter claim to the 'real' experience of grief but, by offering experiences of loss as sites in which to recount the norms surrounding and implicating concepts of subjectivity and temporality in a pathologising discourse.

Chapter IV: living in proximity to death

"If you are listening to what people are saying," remarks Latour, "they will explain *how* and *why* they are deeply attached, moved, affected by[what] makes them feel things" (Felski 2015: 179)⁵¹.

The following pages conclude this thesis in an opening reflection on the implications of developing and deploying a framework for *reading "textures" of grief*. I thus continue where chapter III ended its theoretical and methodological reflections on my close reading and analysis of *Blue Nights* (Didion 2011). These reflections indicated an intersection which my theoretical and analytic questions have continued to encounter and challenge as the limitations an ideological and metaphysical divide of presence/absence imposes on an exploration of what experience of loss may feel like and, specifically, on the impact the lost other may have. Exploring these questions further, I move them closer to my own experience of *living in proximity to death* and through reflections on the affectively entangled position I have occupied throughout this work and mediated through my two main theoretical frameworks, namely, Sedgwick's anti-essentialising approach to affect (Sedgwick 2003) and Felski's "postcritical reading" (Felski 2015: 172-3).

In its closing reflection the previous chapter noted in particular on how I was drawn to Sedgwick's anti-essentialising approach in part for its appeal that a reader *listens* to what is conveyed as a given experience. An appeal Sedgwick enacts by composing questions not from an aim at epistemological clarification but, from a willingness to explore [*listen to*] how and why something comes to be [experienced] in a particular way (Sedgwick 2003: 13) Sedgwick

⁵¹ Original in text quote specifies the object of attachment, move, affect as "the works of art" (ibidem.).

goes on to provide that listening is *one* possibility within a perceptive range that does not privilege vision or touch (ibid.: 15) as ways of knowing but rather foregrounds a humbling and patient approach by emphasising how perception as such makes epistemological pre-fixation of experience impossible (ibid.: 17). While I acknowledge there exist strategic and political impetuses for delineating some recognisable and fixated boundaries of loss and mourning⁵², enacting Sedgwick's perceptive approach throughout chapter III's analysis reflects a personal and intellectual resistance to reduce a critique of the essentialising tendencies in current medical and psychiatric discourse to an alternative claim to the 'real' experience or approach to grief. While this resistance has been difficult to materialise I have *aspired* toward a practice which approaches my aspiration to imagine and pursue a work of critique in non-reductive terms. In enacting Sedgwick's perceptive approach I have thus left the bulk of my critique of the pathologisation of bereavement to materialise through and as the contingent qualities of affective experience of loss my close reading and analysis have explored.

As previously noted, enacting a perceptive approach necessarily also means that, while I have explored some "textural" readings and interpretations of passages of *Blue Nights* (Didion 2011), other engagements with the same textual instances may at other specific times and places, or undertaken by someone else otherwise implicated, provide a different affective and cognitive

⁵² My review of the literature on mourning indicated some counter-political mobilisation around a concept and practice of mourning (Crimp 1987 1989; Bersani 1987) and, while I have nothing but respect and sympathy for the urgency and necessity of these academic and political endeavors, a main interest of my work has from the start been to think and move *with* the reflective potentiality I found in experience of grief and thus not to fixate it in counter-political postures. Along this line, I have been inspired and helped by the stakes in Sedgwick's concepts of "paranoid and reparative reading" (Sedgwick 2003: 123-51) and the insights offered by José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz first cautions the reaffirmation of a dominant discourse that is risked by the binary structure implied in mobilising cultural and political counter postures (Muñoz 1997). Muñoz moves beyond this binary through the strategic and tactical position of "terrorist drag" (ibidem.) and in later works continues to explore a similar potentiality along a notion of queer "horizons and utopias" (2009).

experience and interpretive expression. This observation does not push for an extreme relativism contrary, it reflects how I have incorporated and utilised a theorised contingency of affects as a dynamic effect integral to my research practice. Enacting Sedgwick's anti-essentialising approach to affect thus provides that my research practice embodies resistance to essentialising claims by itself unfolding as an entangled "affective hermeneutics" (Felski 2015: 180). I draw a central insight of Felski's "postcritical reading" to my own practice by acknowledging the inevitability of the affective entanglements that emerge between text and reader and welcoming their significance for a critical cognitive practice (ibid.: 178). Rather than excusing or correcting for my personal implications in and attachments to this work⁵³ I stress that the questions I have pursued are inextricably related to and dependent on my own experience of loss. In other words, without my affective entanglement in the textual passages I have explored I may have not been willing or able to *listen* for experiences of loss.

At this moment I imagine myself back in the scenario with which I initially introduced this thesis. Seated in a therapist office, my cheeks and feet are burning, I am feeling enraged by the therapist's consoling commentary on the loss I am experiencing ["you will get over this" or "you will get better/back to normal"]. I recognise how my general appearance appeals to her genuine intentions and expertise in counseling but, her efforts leave me feeling utterly misunderstood, feeling like I am not being heard or, like she speaks to something beyond me. I am unable to

⁵³ Felski makes this point beautifully when she urges that reader's "treat their experiences of engagement, wonder, or absorption not as signs of naivete but as clues to why we are drawn to art in the first place[...] To forge a language of attachment as robust and refined as our rhetoric of detachment" (ibid.: 180). Enacting affective engagement as a critical mode Felski also objects to the paradoxically uncritical *modus critique* may take when it corrects to assure for and claims to take an objective/neutral position (Felski 2015: 21-2, 178-80).

explain to her that I cannot, and do not want to, get over this loss. I cannot get her to explain what she means by 'better' and 'normal' and I eventually stop returning.

It is interesting for me to recall the therapist's intentionally consoling commentary and the affective response it evoked in me. While my anger momentarily produced a detachment from this encounter the same affective response morphed into the "mood" (Felski 2015: 20-1) which returned me to a critical recounting of this scene, much before but eventually, through chapter I's analytical review of some of the scientific literature on bereavement. Felski provides, "[m]ood accompanies and modulates thought; it affects how we find ourselves in relation to a particular object[...] mood[...] will influence how we position ourselves in relation to the text we encounter and what strikes us as most salient" (Felski 2015: 21). The intensity of my affective response and the conflict it put me in - aware of the therapist's kind and professional intentions to listen and help - prompted me to explore a critique that would not simply point at this discourse's obvious able-ist and normative corrective practices and effects. I wanted to inquire into my feeling that what I relayed could simply not be heard as such and I thus had to look for sources of an (even) more unintentional inability to comprehend my experience. My sense was that the therapist simply could not hear how I experienced I am *with* Joachim, that her narrative of my getting 'better' (implying that my relation to Joachim is negative because he is dead⁵⁴) foreclosed the possibility that I could have, and want to remain in, an array of affective relations to him that are not categorically negative⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ I have charged this tendency through the scientific discourse as the result of a causal relations between death – absence – negativity.

⁵⁵ They are more *like* contingent and organic combinations of rage – joy – love – sadness – and so on, in attachment to Joachim.

Another interesting way to reflect on how "mood" implicates the work of critique (ibidem.) is to explore the terms I develop to articulate the arguments I pursued through chapter I's analytical review. My notion of the *drifting subject* marks the relations of the biopolitical pathologisation of grief to a neo-liberal circuit of vitality. Simultaneously, the *drift* it visualises, which denotes my analysis of the biopolitical responsiveness to the subject's loosening vitalist grip, as much reflects my own sensation of being 'chased' by a vitalist narrative that wanted me to attach to the notion of getting 'better' by returning to 'normal'. Therefore, when I imagine the point of initiation of my critical engagement with the scientific articles on bereavement (chapter I), I do not visualise a composed position of a critical reader in front of her textual sources, I see myself in that chair, I am already *in* that affected space. "Mood" (ibidem.) not only precedes the moment of encountering a text, it brings a reader to it as well as it accompanies and unfolds beyond the textual confrontation. What in the first instance brought me to the scientific articles was not an aspiration to expose the representationalist failures of a larger medical and psychiatric discourse but, to trace the ways in which the assumptions of that discourse collapsed over the possibility that a person may live in continued affected relation to a lost other. In other words, what brought me to this discourse was a need to explore *how* it could affect me so much.

I have wanted a framework for *reading "textures" of grief* to embody and enact a practice of *listening* to experience. Listening, however, is hard and has surfaced throughout my analysis as sobering and interesting points of struggle to not collapse my own experience - which both precedes this work and denotes critical affective points of entanglement throughout my practice - over the contingent range of possible experience around loss that I have wanted my readings to explore. Again, I am not trying to correct for my affective implication but, to confront some

ethical questions that emerge from efforts to *listen* to the losses of others and in that realising that, not only do I hear my own voice, I hear Joachim's in the way I have been *moved* to and am deeply entangled in exploring the losses of others. The question I have to reflect on in relation to my aspiration to listen to the experience of loss is therefore not merely *what* I am listening for but *who* I am listening for and *who* I may be able to hear? When in my analysis I use the term *move* to discuss the inter-subjective dynamics between Quintana Roo and the narrating Didion I do so in the effort to explore the particular [performative] force of the voice of the other in relation to specific "textures"⁵⁶. In this effort, I have also become increasingly aware that my use of the term *move* reflects my own sensations of being moved by Joachim. I have wanted my analysis on voice to challenge the conventions and possibilities of a discussion around a concept of impact why this discussion seems to be largely prefaced by a metaphysical scheme [of presence/absence] which has the effect of always already depriving the dead or the non-present of the ability to have any 'real' - meaning metaphysically real - impact. In chapter I, I observed one consequence of this convention implied through the terminology of 'normal bereavement' and 'natural healing' the psychobiological discourse on bereavement cultivates⁵⁷. Quite some scholarship invested in developing a form of ethics along a concept and practice of mourning the non-present has engaged a Derridean concept of "hauntology". This concept follows Derrida's linguistic concepts and deconstructive tools of trace and *différance* into a critical charging of the ways in which a given presence is always haunted by a past, in other words, as a way to realise the presence of the non-present (Derrida 1994). While this concept has huge traction I am wary of the ways in which its adaptations may come to imply a sense of half presence because – in

⁵⁶ I have already emphasised how Sedgwick offers "texture" as a way to further an inquiry into the relation between performative effects and specific aspects, or materialities if you will, of language.

⁵⁷ Confer with chapter I.

haunting – the lost or no longer metaphysically present is approached, and thus pre-positioned, in the 'beyond' this life. Repeated, with this hesitance I am not pushing for a vitalist discourse on the dead I am rather trying to recount the premise a presence/absence divide enables for a discussion of the ways in which the subject continues to be profoundly touched and moved by the lost other⁵⁸.

In an effort at approaching and recounting such a discussion I have referred to the conceptual vocabulary and potentiality of contingency Sedgwick offers through affect to read the impact of the lost other through the affective and sensory registrations the subject/narrating "I" expresses through "textures". Returning to the realisation that initiated this reflection, what has become increasingly evident throughout my writing process, and especially in the just discussed analytic passage, is how the writings that have resulted from my close reading of *Blue Nights* increasingly appear to me as evident of the kind of impact I am insisting on discussing. In other words, my analysis reflects the ways I have moved and been moved throughout this work and thus in itself offer site for further exploring a theoretical and analytical discussion on the impact of the other.

Felski asserts, the affective entanglements that happen between reader and text are the mood that *makes* the work and method of critique and enable a reader to treat "experiences of engagement, wonder, or absorption not as signs of naiveté or user error but as clues to why [they] are drawn to art in the first place" (Felski 2015: 180). In fact, Felski continues, mood not only complicates the conventional composition of interpretive practice in which a reader may claim objective or

⁵⁸ While I am wary that utilising a terminology that implies a 'haunting' presence may reproduce the position of the lost other in a realm of the beyond / absent, my effort in recounting a discussion around impact may be rather similar to the deconstructive gestures Derrida makes through his notion of the "specter" (ibidem.).

neutral position⁵⁹. It implicates a reader/subject in a circulation of "moods that have already been inhabited by others" (ibidem.) and, in that, unsettles a subject's privileged position as well as proliferates hermeneutics or interpretation to a "substance[...] a property of the world itself" (ibid.: 175). Sedgwick offers a slightly different articulation of a perceptive approach to "texture" that leads to a similar consequence. "[T]he sense of touch", Sedgwick advises, "makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself" (Sedgwick 2003: 114). As I revisit and reread the writings that have emerged from my close reading and analysis, I thus become increasingly aware of how their movements reflect my sensations of being touched by Joachim. Every instance in which I have reached for an analytic connection or followed a thought, I have manifested my own affective responsiveness to what scenario or relation a textual passage or moment may have relayed. In other words, I have moved with the touch of the other. As such, the entanglement continues from my affective responsiveness to a sense of Joachim's touch through textual passages, expressing the inter-actions and entanglement of others, to my reaching out to fondle, to grab, to touch Joachim in return and thus furthering my entanglement with the text[ual others].

A practice of *listening* thus materialised as a prism of multiple voices who have profoundly moved me but, whose experiences it has neither been my task or position to decipher nor to represent. I am not before them or on an endeavor to speak on behalf of them in fact, my writings

⁵⁹ Intervening in the binary between subject/object that enables neutrality as a possible position, Felski develops a concept of nonhuman actor as "anything that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference" (ibid.: 163).

exhibit the ways in which they have foremost moved me, how I am simply *with* them, *beside*⁶⁰ them. I am late to realise to what extend the current materialisation of my work in fact makes for a textual landscape on its own to further explore and discuss the kind of impact my analysis has been pursuing. In that, I now see my text as a form of topography of impact. A topography of the affective and cognitive "patterns and models, rhythms of rapprochement and distancing, relaxation and suspense, movement and hesitation" (Felski 2015: 176) the voices of the others have moved me to make. If approached as a textual landscape for the further exploration and discussion of the impact of the lost other, a topography can also appear as a form of horizon and as such the reflections here consider the accomplishments of this work while they equally embody the aspirations of its continuation.

⁶⁰ I am referencing Sedgwick's notion of *beside*, confer section 2 chapter III.

Conclusion

In the pages of my final chapter I confront my own voice as it surfaces throughout this research and most significantly in my close reading and analysis. At first, this makes me worry if my decisive efforts to develop and enact a research practice from an experience that is at once deeply personal and not mine alone has effectuated a spiraling into my own experience only. Circulating the edges of this question for a while I realise I am not alone here, I am deeply entangled in Joachim's voice and the voices of others whose losses I have explored. The writings that lead up to this concluding moment of my research thus embody a topography over the ways in which I have been *moved* as well as they indicate a reflexive and critical potentiality in *listening* to the voices of lost others. An affectively entangled practice of listening has thus moved beyond the immediate composition of the lost Other and I and morphed into a recounting of, and an exploration beyond, the ideological boundaries that define the living in opposition to the dead. I may be in a spiral but a very reflexive one and at this temporary edge of my project I am facing a dimensional and entangled horizon for the further exploration of experiences of *living in proximity to death*.

My initial question "what does grief do?" slightly shifted its orientation with my analytical review of the scientific literature on bereavement to a query into what is discursively enabled and constrained (Barad 2003: 815) as the subject's relation to *death*. Scrutinising this relation further permitted my recounting of the boundaries of a Western dualist metaphysical and ideological 'reality' in which death signifies the ultimate end and rupture and thus pathologises the 'bereaved subject's attachment to the deceased. Moving forward, I developed and enacted a framework for *reading "textures" of grief* to explore the affective and bodily experience of loss. This, to re-

imagine the points of biopolitical intervention on the 'bereaved subject' as focal points for an anti-essentialising (Sedgwick 2003) and entangled (Felski 2015) research practice which I enacted in a close reading and analysis of Joan Didion's autobiographical text *Blue Nights* (Didion 2011).

The questions that emerged from my perceptive approach to the "textural" (Sedgwick 2003) registrations and expressions through which the narrating "I" relays her experience of loss had my analyses recurrently challenge different ideological and theoretical representations of the boundaries of the metaphysically present. Increasingly, a question of "what grief does" became a project of reformulating the premise of the form of impact the lost other may have beyond a dualist ideological binary of presence/absence. Throughout my analyses, I have thus observed how 'stable' units of representation – which the discourse on bereavement utilise for the 'normal'-ising interventions on the subject's perception of 'self' and temporal and embodied experience - may unfold in increasing pace when experience of living is approached as a *living in proximity to death*. The narrating "I"'s representations of subjectivity turned into sites to explore the profoundly inter-relational quality of experience. When explored as a living *in* time with the lost other, temporal representations unfolded as unsettling interruptions into dominant narratives structured by linear time.

By enacting a practice of listening for what the narrating "I" registers and relays "texturally" in relation to the lost other, a framework for *reading "textures" of grief* has initiated an exploration of experience which not only pushes against and beyond the 'reality' defined according to the representationalist efforts of an ideology of metaphysical presence. It has initiated the refinement of a method of close reading to explore expression of meaning, not just beyond the immediate

surface of the text but, of what is collapsed under the discursive and narrative production of the immediately present and 'real'. Thus, by "texturally" recounting affective and bodily experience of loss, a framework for *reading "textures" of grief* has not stopped at a reconfiguration of the 'real' experience of grief. It has charged a line of ethical and political questions which challenge the parameters that define representation within a contemporary landscape of visibility politics (Phelan 1993). By exploring experience of *living in proximity to death* my project has begun a recharging of the lines of a recurring and central question within feminist and queer scholarship. This is a question of *what* counts as, and *how* to account for, the materiality of experience?

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