Being Through Loss: A Queer Performative Reckoning With Grief

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no unreferenced ideas or materials previously written and/or published by other authors, and contains no material accepted for any other degrees in any other institution with the exception of what is covered in the agreement between Central European University PU and Utrecht University.

Abstract

This dissertation presents a queer performative framework for 'being through loss' that contributes to current debates on grief and scholarship on loss and death via engagement with contemporary discourse and literature that depict the loss of a loved one, namely, a body of scientific research literature on grief as psychiatric diagnosis and two autobiographical accounts of loss. 'Being through loss' reconfigures the conditions of engagement with grief by identifying the "ontogeny" that subtends and locks debates in questions about grief's right and wrong definitions and sets out to illustrate how grief has more to teach us about the world and an experienced sense of being in it. Through close readings of bodies of text that occupy prominent positions in contemporary debate in Denmark and the US specifically, and in Western Europe and North America at large, this dissertation shows how an experienced sense of being in the world takes and alters shape through loss.

Upon closely reading the biomedical research literature on grief as psychiatric diagnosis, the dissertation moves to autobiographical accounts of loss by first engaging with *When Death Takes Something From You Give It Back: Carl's Book* by Danish author and poet Naja Marie Aidt and then with American author and journalist Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Taken together this dissertation's chapters foreground the relevance of feminist poststructuralist and queer uptakes of psychoanalytic theory for contemporary scholarship on mourning, and they contribute in particular to the newly emerging field of queer death studies. In unfolding its queer performative framework for 'being through loss' through sustained engagement with contemporary grief literature and discourse, this dissertation not only reframes our understanding of grief. It also provides us with a poetic impression of the organic and entangled qualities of the world and an experienced sense of being in it.

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Since I came to Budapest in 2015 to start my master degree in critical gender studies, CEU has remained a vitalizing academic base and Hyaesin, my main supervisor for seven years, a source of such inspiration, encouragement and stability. This project started and it also ends with Hyasein's commitment to it, and so it would simply not have *been* without the guiding example you set as a teacher and pedagogue, as a scholar and a supervisor. I am so grateful to you Hyaesin, for all your invaluable insights, for your moving capacity to listen to others, and for believing I could really do this. At CEU I also wish to thank Andrea whose calm presence and lucid guidance through multiple writing processes has been indispensible.

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[1] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *A Dialogue on Love* (Beacon Boston Press, 1999), 12.

your knowledge in abundance; for being my friend. Müriel, Sedgwick again will have to put into words how "[t]hen it seems a modest / word that makes no claim / to anything but—wanting / to be happier / and [needing], it's true, someone else to shoulder […] agency in the matter […]."[2]

Sometimes you meet people that stop you in your tracks. Lieks and Ewa, each in your irreplaceable way, you are those presences "who", as Donika Kelly writes, "alter […] / the orbit of my life, pull […] me with the density / of light toward [them] / the draw thinner / when [they are] farther away, as [they are] now."[3] Ewa, since we met you have insisted that you feel home with me, and I find there is no better way to describe the pull I feel in your direction. I find myself in the love, presence, patience and creativity that *is* you—and nothing less than magnificent. Lieks, we crossed ways and enfolded. Thus, life stretches through you to ground me across time and space in Budapest, in Utrecht and further still. Apart at this moment, yet, your curious smile, your sharp thought and your shoulder on mine at work, on a sofa, or going somewhere together seem to be always with me.

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[2] Ibid., 1.

[3] "In the Chapel of St. Mary's" by Donika Kelly altered from first person to third person singular ("Poetry Unbound," accessed September 25, 2022, https://onbeing.org/programs/donika-kelly-in-the-chapel-of-st-marys/).

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Vignette

I first came to grief literature via my mother who, in the wake of my friend Joachim's death at the age of 18, lent me her copy of American author Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking.* I had just turned 19. Attached to my mother's gesture was the comment that reading it had offered her, for the first time since her parents died when she was a child, a genuine sense of recognition. This roundabout invitation to learn about my mother's experience of loss—which, while I always knew, remains hidden—certainly spurred my interest in the book. *The Year,* as I hope chapter 4 illustrates if only a fragment of, holds much potency beyond this initial intrigue. Yet, as I finalize this research project, it stands equally as a forceful personal reminder of the feminist dictum that subjective and embodied experiences are valid sources of knowledge and terrains for its production.

More to the point, however, I want to note that my connection to *The Year* and its presence in this dissertation to me illustrates how scientific inquiry is capable at picking up on and creating avenues into experience whose impacts have not yet formed at a conscious level. To have inherited trans-generationally the lesson that love and attachment run such close lines with those of loss and the fears that flank it, in other words, means that—as singular an event as is Joachim's life and continued being—once I actually experienced the death of a loved one, it constituted a confirmation of a familiar and embodied knowledge that the world unravels, falls apart. This point, I feel, matters in order that I myself and those who encounter this dissertation understand how, at first, the framework it offers for 'being through loss' took shape in embodied and in many ways unconscious ways and, as it is presented here, continues to insist on the importance of these connections.[4]

This dissertation is through Joachim. And it is for my mother.

[4] Many significant lessons learnt about transgenerational trauma from Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

1 Introduction

In grief, the phenomenon of being reveals its queerness by displaying its performative capacity to shift and alter. This is the hypothesis that grounds this dissertation, which presents a framework for 'being through loss,' via three encounters with bodies of contemporary literature that depict experience of losing a loved other. This introduction elaborates how 'being through loss' reconfigures our understanding of and engagement with grief as well as it provides us with a poetic sense of the entangled quality of being as phenomenon. To this end, I enact an onto-epistemological framework that understands the world as a *doing* rather than as a host of objects that reflect a static core or essence.[5] As a consequence, I conceptualize being as an 'experienced sense' that takes shape and alters in entanglement with the world, and I set out on a queer performative line of inquiry, enacting grief as prism to explore *how, and with what contingencies and implications, an experienced sense of being in the world takes shape through loss?*

This dissertation's primary materials comprise a body of scientific research literature supporting the recent formation of grief as psychiatric diagnosis and two autobiographical accounts of grief by Danish author and poet Naja Marie Aidt and American author and journalist Joan Didion.[6] In general terms, these bodies of literature are exemplary of how grief is currently delineated in expert and vernacular discourse in North America and Western Europe, and so they situate this project in this context. Yet, they are also the main source of inspiration for the original queer performative approach to grief my project advances. To illustrate, toward the end of Joan Didion's 2005 publication, *The Year of Magical Thinking,* which details the death of her husband John Dunne and the life threatening illness of their daughter Quintana Roo, Didion writes:

[5] I elaborate an onto-epistemological perspective via Karen Barad's notion of "intra-activity" in section 1.1.

[6] Naja Marie Aidt, *When Death Takes Something From You Give It Back: Carl's Book,* trans. Denise Newman (Quercus Editions, 2019) hereafter *Carl's Book* and Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (Vintage International, 2007) hereafter *The Year*.

> Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it. We anticipate (we know) that someone close to us could die […]. We might expect if the death is sudden to feel shock. We do not expect this shock to be obliterative, dislocating to both body and mind. […] Nor can we know ahead of the fact (and here lies the heart of the difference between grief as we imagine it and grief as it is) the unending absence that follows, the void, the very opposite of meaning, the relentless succession of moments during which we will confront the experience of meaninglessness itself.[7]

At first encounter, Didion's description of grief as "obliterative" makes the experience of loss appear as if emptied of meaning. Yet, the invocation of dislocation, signalling action and dynamism, introduces a different perspective—one that is not devoid of meaning but one in which the structures that usually hold signification in one place are altered, even obliterated. Grief sends meaning into flux. It is in this sense that I argue for a queer performative approach to grief. By dislodging things from their known and trusted connotations, grief illustrates how a phenomenon of being is not static but rather organic and mutable. Being *does* rather than it simply is.[8]

Didion is not alone in expressing what I suggest to be grief's 'queer performative' quality. In her account of the loss of her adult child Carl, Danish author Naja Marie Aidt writes: "It's his [Carl's] spirit I can feel now. He is like a huge bird or, no–his presence is heavy and strong. And also light and springy. Yes, springy."[9] In Aidt's description that attends to the being of a lost other she echoes Didion by highlighting how grief disrupts a fixed sense of what their being is. Thus, learning from grief literature how a phenomenon of being—both of self and of others—does not reflect a static core, this dissertation explores

[7] Didion, *The Year*, 188-9.

[8] I elaborate my queer performative approach below. Suffice it for now to say that, I draw a concept of performativity from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's queer intervention, which dislodges the assumed connection between gender and sex by asking what, if any, knowable relation one has to the other. In so doing, Sedgwick challenges a Western philosophical perspective that relies on duality for a sense of ontological coherence (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California Press 1990), 22, 29)). Sedgwick's queer performative intervention consequently shifts away from ontogenetic inquiry that asks to know what something in essence means or is for an approach to the world as a doing. Sedgwick formulates this shift methodologically on more occasions but for the first time, in the context of her now seminal contribution to queer theory, in the following way: "Repeatedly to ask how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially *mean*, has been my principal strategy." (*Epistemology*, 27).

[9] Aidt, *Carl's Book*, 46.

how an experienced sense of it unfolds through loss, ultimately also examining the usefulness of approaching being from a perspective of its radical entanglement with the world.

Each in their specific way, Aidt, Didion, and the selection of authors of the literature on grief as psychiatric diagnosis shed light on the current moment wherein conceptions of grief are undergoing significant reformulation.[10] In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) added "prolonged grief disorder" (PGD) to the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-11), and PGD became part of the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) recent 2022-edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5-TR).[11] From the moment the notion of grief as psychiatric diagnosis was introduced in the 2013-edition of the DSM-5, it has been subject to rather pervasive scrutiny from experts, journalists, and laypeople, illustrated by headlines such as the following recently featured in the *New York Times*: "How Long Should It Take to Grieve? Psychiatry Has Come Up with an Answer."[12]

The *Times'* headline articulates a concern shared by experts related to the fields of psychiatry and medicine, who posit that grief's formation as pathology amounts to over-diagnosing and so exhibits an unfortunate cultural trend in Western societies that extends beyond grief to a broader realm of mental illness.[13] Experts in these domains are not alone in the worry and criticism they express with this trend and the formation of PGD specifically. In recent decades, a significant counter discourse voicing resonant criticisms has also taken

[10] As noted by a team of Danish researchers, Anders Petersen and Svend Brinkman, *Menneskets Sorg: et vilkår i forandring* (Klim, 2021), 10.

[11] The body of literature this dissertation's second chapter examines comprises empirical research articles pertaining to and producing PGD. E.g., Naomi M. Simon et al., "Informing the symptom profile of complicated grief," *Depression and Anxiety*, 28, no. 2 (2011), 118-126; Katherine M. Shear et al., "Bereavement and complicated grief," *Current psychiatry reports*, 15, no. 11 (2013), 103-117; Anna Castelnovo et al., "Post-bereavement hallucinatory experiences: A critical overview of population and clinical studies," *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 186 (2015), 266-274.

[12] Ellen Barry, "How Long Should It Take to Grieve? Psychiatry Has Come Up with an Answer," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/18/health/prolonged-grief-disorder.html.

[13] I elaborate how grief became a psychiatric diagnosis in chapter 2.

shape in public and artistic circles and the personal accounts of grief by Didion and Aidt mark nodal points here.

Both personal and expert critique of grief as psychiatric diagnosis has brought significant reflection on the causes and effects of overpathologizing to the cultural mainstream and public debate. Critique of PGD thus finds points of productive resonance with existing scholarship that describes late capitalist neoliberal subjectivity as being shaped by norms of physical and mental well-being.[14] With the onset of the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, a concept of loss has furthermore been elaborated with its increasing utilization as a critical hermeneutic to reckon with the structures that maintain unequal distribution of illness and death across shared existential vulnerability and mortality.[15] This line of thinking resembles the ways bio- and necropolitical scholarship conceptualizes and addresses death's intentional and systematic nature.[16]

Critical interventions such as those briefly outlined above have managed to influence the discourse on grief as psychiatric diagnosis as formulated in scientific research.[17] Yet, this dissertation wants to highlight the limitations of the oppositional composition of the debate around grief that has taken shape as a result of personal or subjective perspectives responding to a generalizing or, allegedly, objective psychiatric approach to grief.[18] As a consequence of this oppositional composition, debate predominantly plays out around the question of how to accurately define and, hence, respond to grief. This focus, I propose, in turn reveals the

[14] E.g. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, (Duke University Press, 2010); Allan V. Horwitz and Jerome C. Wakefield, *The Loss of Sadness: How Psychiatry Transformed Normal Sorrow into Depressive Disorder* (Oxford University press, 2007).

[15] E.g., Steven W. Thrasher. *The Viral Underclass: The Human Toll When Inequality and Disease Collide*. (Celadon Books, 2022); Nicola Twilley, "When a Virus is the Cure," *The New Yorker*, December 14, 2020.

[16] Achille Mbembé, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15, no. 1 (2003) and 11-40; Lauren Berlant, " Slow Death (Obesity, Sovereignty, Lateral Agency)," *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 95-120.

[17] As example, I note in chapter 2 how the research literature on grief as psychiatric diagnosis on more than one occasion makes reference to Didion's account of grief.

[18] See section 1.2 for an elaboration of this composition of the debate.

limitations of the perspective that subtends contemporary debate around grief, which finds its roots in a broader Western habit of representationalism.

In making this observation, my project follows Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's dislodgement of inquiry from what she names an "onto-genic" line of questioning toward a queer performative mode of address. According to Sedgwick, ontogenetic questions ask what something *is* because they are rooted in the belief that things are in essence and can therefore be known in finite terms.[19] The consequence of this underlying premise, I therefore argue, is that whether grief is articulated in the context of medicine and psychiatry, personal experience, or as a cultural phenomenon, the debate is generally locked in an ontogenetic impasse that returns grief to itself, that is, to its alleged core and consequently forecloses other ways of exploring and learning through loss.

This dissertation's approach to 'being through loss' sets out to challenge this impasse and by dislodging from the ontogeny that subtends and locks contemporary debate in a predominant focus on how to correctly define the phenomenon and hence respond to it, this framework alters the conditions of engagement with grief. My reconfiguration of grief consequently also entails a reframing of the historic moment we are witnessing with grief's formation as psychiatric diagnosis and the anti-psychiatric or personal accounts that move to counter this generalizing model. Instead of asking what grief is, my queer performative reframing asks what grief brings into being, that is, what it wants to tell us about the entangled quality of an experienced sense of being in the world.

A framework for 'being through loss' thus enables alternative questions such as the following that correspond to this dissertation's three analytic chapters: What do psychiatric definitions of the bereaved subject and the deceased tell us about life and death and the roles

[19] Sedgwick names this line of inquiry "onto-genic" (*Epistemology*, "ontogeny," 40). Sedgwick stresses how an ontogenetic model of inquiry is rooted in a belief that an object can be known and thus, implicitly, exist in some essential form (ibid., 22). Throughout this dissertation I use the terms "ontogenetic" and "ontogeny" to refer to this proposition and perspective.

they play in this context? What ethics of loss follow from expanding the relational model of mourning to include the lost other? If loss is reconfigured from a state of exception or a stage on the route to recovery into the operational mode of the world, what might we learn from an embodied sense of being in the world? As they set out to examine these questions, my three analytic chapters additionally illustrate the relevance of feminist poststructuralist and queer anti-sovereign uses of psychoanalysis to contemporary research on mourning and in particular to the field of queer death studies by showing how these conceptual frameworks expand our understanding of and exchange with contemporary psychiatry as well as the models of mourning and loss that are currently available in expert and vernacular discourse.

1.1 Being through loss: A queer performative approach to grief

'Being through loss' is the response this dissertation develops to the hypothesis I initially drew from grief literature, namely, that, by dislodging things from their usual places, grief displays, what Sedgwick calls, the "ontological tenuousness" of phenomena.[20] As an alternative to the ontogeny that I noted above frames contemporary debate on grief, I follow Sedgwick who foregrounds a queer performative line of inquiry, which this dissertation operationalizes to explore how an experienced sense of being in the world takes and alters shape through grief as rendered in three bodies of contemporary grief literature.[21] The framework this dissertation develops for 'being through loss' thus entails two main conceptual conditions that pertain to loss and being, and a central methodological proposition "*not to know*" what grief is.[22] I elaborate these in the following.

The first conceptual condition relates to a concept of being, which is to be understood through a queer performative perspective and against a Western

[20] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, (Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

[21] I elaborate how I enact a performative line of inquiry through Sedgwick's concept of texture in section 1.3.

[22] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 12.

representationalist habit of assuming that phenomena simply *are*.[23] Drawing on Karen Barad's onto-epistemological alternative, it entails that ontology is inseparable from epistemology and that phenomena cannot be assumed to exist prior to their specific renderings and must therefore be understood and examined in relation to the conditions that bring them into being.[24] Barad formulates this in their queer posthumanist approach to performativity:

> The idea that beings exist as individuals with inherent attributes, anterior to their representation, is a metaphysical presupposition that underlies the belief in political, linguistic, and epistemological forms of representationalism. [...] That is, there are assumed to be two distinct and independent kind of entities—representations and entities to be represented.[25]

Barad here highlights a distinction between representations (epistemology) and entities to be represented (ontology) that informs a belief that lives in both a Western tradition of knowledge production and vernacular consciousness, namely, that objects exist in the world prior to their representation. As one example of this ontology that, according to Barad, understands "beings [to] exist as individuals with inherent attributes, anterior to their representation", Martin Heidegger frames the question of being as one of ultimate ground: "Since the beginning of philosophy and with that beginning, the Being of beings […] has shown itself as the ground […], has been considered as ground. The ground is that from which beings as such are what they are in their becoming, perishing, and persisting."[26]

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[23] I do want to note here that a relational perspective, that challenges human/non-human and nature/culture binaries, does not belong only to Western feminist perspectives such as Ettinger, Barad and Haraway. As I note in chapter 3 with reference to the work Kim Tallbear, indigenous scholarship provides a relational perspective that is grounded in indigenous cosmology that in the case of TallBear's work rejects Eurocentric life and human hierarchies foregrounding instead "an everyday Dakota understanding of existence that focuses on "being in good relation." […] Thinking in terms of being in relation, I propose an explicitly spatial narrative of caretaking relations—both human and other-than-human—as an alternative to the temporally progressive settler-colonial American Dreaming that is ever co-constituted with deadly hierarchies of life." ("Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming," *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies*, 6, no. 1 (2019), 24.

[24] I thus rely on the work of Karen Barad here who enacts an onto-epistemological approach to all phenomena and reality as such ("Posthumanist performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28, no. 3 (2003), 801-831. I elaborate this below.

[25] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 804.

[26] Heidegger's *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* as quoted in Kas Saghafi "The World After the End of the World," *The Oxford Literary Review*, 39, no. 2 (2017), 273.

In Heidegger's formulation of being, as the ultimate ground from where "beings as such" emanate, echoes the representationalist idea that beings express an individual and inherent ontological core that exists prior to or regardless of representation. Barad's critique of the representationalist severing of ontology from epistemology comes with an alternative perspective, namely, an onto-epistemological approach. In resonance with Sedgwick's dislodgement from ontogenetic inquiry (i.e., questions that ask what something *is*) Barad holds instead that being is "a doing".[27] Starting from the perspective of quantum ontology, they emphasize how "what we're talking about here is not simply some object *reacting* differently to different probings but *being* differently."[28] Barad, in other words, recasts the concept of being from a reflection of core and inert properties to an "intra-active" understanding of phenomena that come into being in entanglement with the world.[29]

I invoke this onto-epistemological framing when I qualify a concept of being as 'experienced sense'. This formulation thus recalls how being is not an expression of a static core and, following Sedgwick's queer performative mode of inquiry, it forefronts how examining it entails experiencing it. This is the methodological proposition made by 'being through loss'. If, in other words, we aim to explore being from an intra-active perspective, we must not ask what a phenomenon *is*, but instead how it "impinges" itself on those who, in response to its impacts, provide definitions of it.[30] This dissertation thus enacts grief as prism

[27] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 802.

[28] Karen Barad, "What is the Measure of Nothingness: Infinity, Virtuality, Justice: 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 099," *Kassel, Germany: Hatje Cantz* (2012), 7.

[29] Barad writes: "A quantum ontology [i.e., their onto-epistemological point of departure] deconstructs the classical one: there are no pre-existing individual objects with determinate boundaries and properties that precede some interaction, not are there any concepts with determinate meanings that could be used to describe their behavior; rather, determinate boundaries and properties of objects-within *phenomena,* and determinate contingent meanings, are enacted through specific intra-actions, where phenomena are the ontological inseparability of intra-acing agencies." (Ibid., 6-7)

[30] I lift the term "impinge" from Sedgwick's methodological formulation of performativity through "texture": "To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does *it* impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?" (*Touching*, 13).

to explore how being *does,* that is, how it impresses and impinges itself on those bodies of contemporary literature I take as my main site of inquiry.[31]

My approach thus centres the methodological mainstay that Sedgwick highlights as a commitment "*not to know*".[32] In alignment with Sedgwick's formulation of queer performative inquiry, I then elaborate my main research questions as follows: *How, and with what contingencies and implications, does an experienced sense of being take shape through grief*? And *how does a queer performative approach expand contemporary scholarship on mourning and debate on grief?* By enacting feminist poststructuralist and queer uses of psychoanalysis, my chapters' analyses respond to the second tier of my main question and, in so doing, together make a case for these frameworks' continued relevance to scholarship on mourning and in particular to the field of queer death studies. The consistent enactment of feminist poststructuralist and queer uses of psychoanalysis are therefore central to the contribution this dissertation aims to make to scholarship on mourning and they also bring me to the second conceptual condition that follows from a framework of 'being through loss'.

While this dissertation leads with an onto-epistemological approach to the phenomenon of being, it operates throughout with a concept of loss that refers to a human loved one specifically. This focus is based on those materials I enact as my primary analytic prisms, which comprise perspectives that are defined by human relationality between a bereaved and a deceased.[33] My choice of primary materials that focus on the loss of a loved one further reflects my route to and investment in the topic of grief. My personal experience

[31] See my reflection on Sedgwick's concept of "texture" in section 1.3 on methodology.
[32] Sedgwick, *Epistemology,* 12.
[33] As noted, I lift the term "impinge" from Sedgwick's formulation of queer performative inquiry, which I elaborate below. Suffice to say that Sedgwick, as a consequence of her dislodgement from an onto-genetic line of inquiry asks not what a phenomenon *is* but what it *does* to her, *how* it impresses itself on her, *how* it impinges.

of loss has been a driving force in the development of this dissertation's framework and remains a source of conceptual intuition and analytic drive.[34] Consequently, I embed myself as a queer researcher and this project in a feminist methodological tradition that foregrounds a "situated" approach to research rather than assuming an objective or neutral position.[35] This deserves some elaborating.

All my analytic chapters enact feminist poststructuralist and queer uses of psychoanalysis to explore how an experienced sense of being takes shape and impinges itself through grief as rendered in contemporary literature. The routes of inquiry, and the arguments I build through such, however, do not simply lift theoretical problems from these frameworks. Rather, my choice of theory *responds* in one way or other to questions that first took shape in my personal experience of loss. I take inspiration from the work of Nina Lykke here who emphasizes the relevance of personal experience to research as a way to make use of a feminist methodological perspective of "situatedness" and to elaborate the basic yet intricate feminist dictum that the "personal is political."[36]

I do not as Lykke employ autophenomenography as my method, but I find it paramount to highlight the centrality of my personal experience of loss as a means of accountability, to clarify its overall methodological and analytic resourcefulness to this project, and to help me parse out the contribution this dissertation, via its enactment of feminist poststructuralist and queer uses of psychoanalysis, aims to make in contemporary scholarship on mourning and to the field of queer death studies in particular. To illustrate,

[34] For this reason, I have found much support in feminist scholarship that foregrounds the hermeneutic and critical importance of affect. Rita Felski's leads with a "affective hermeneutics" (*The Limits of Critique*, (University of Chicago Press 2015), 173-5, 180), which she elaborates as the mood that informs encounters with nonhuman textual actors, a great resource according to Felski and not, she argues, as the method of critique oftentimes cautions it: as an unsound or non-objective approach. She writes: "mood is what allows certain things to matter to us and to matter in specific ways [it] accompanies and modulates thought; it affects how we find ourselves in relation to a particular object" (ibid., 21).

[35] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599.

[36] Nina Lykke, *Vibrant Death: A Posthuman Phenomenology of Mourning* (Bloomsbury, 2021), 20-1. In particular, Lykke foregrounds autoethnography and autophenomenography that use "the researcher's lived experience and autobiographical accounts as research material" (Ibid., 20).

chapter 2's analysis turns to Leo Bersani because with him I have found conceptual language and analytic insights to examine an impression that initially formed in therapy following the death of my friend Joachim. As chapter 2 will detail, Bersani's anti-sovereign recasting of homophobia from a normative correction of an unacceptable (i.e., gay) way of living to a correction of life as such, inspires my argument that in a psychiatric model's aim to recover the bereaved subject to a state of normalcy we can notice a desire to contain being.

Correspondingly, chapter 3's engagement with Aidt's experience of the loss of her adult child concerns questions of the possibility and ethical implications of acknowledging the lost other as a being. This interest too initially took shape in my impression that Joachim's being for me did not end with his death but, as I explore through Bracha L. Ettinger's feminist relational perspective, calls for other modes of engagement with being than those made available by conventional models of mourning. Lastly, via Didion's account of grief chapter 4 tests a hypothesis that also arose in the personal, namely, that grief points to how the world operates *as* loss. Aided by Hélène Cixous's deconstructive use of loss I enact grief as an embodied perspective that offers existential-methodological lessons to help maneuver, what Barad calls, "in/determinacy" and, in so doing, this chapter challenges the popular and expert notion of grief as an emotional and psychological state of exception.[37]

The analytic insights my chapters bring about via these frameworks together make a case for their continued relevance. This comes at a moment where psychoanalytic theory is increasingly marginalized from the conventional fields of psychiatry and psychology and in relatively marginal use in critical and feminist research. As chapter 2 notes, the historic and contemporary relevance of psychoanalytic theory is largely undermined by the dominance of a biomedical perspective in psychiatry. Psychoanalysis thus stands currently as an out-dated

[37] Barad, "What is the Measure," 7. Although I set out in chapter 4 to explore the onto-epistemological implications Didion's notion of *world without end* has on a concept of being, I do take inspiration for my dislodgement of grief from a framework of mental illness from Ann Cvetkovich's re-signification of depression from individual psychiatric pathology to a public and political feeling (*Depression: A Public Feeling* (Duke University Press, 2012).

and somewhat far-reached theory of the mind that is allegedly accurately grasped through a largely neuro-scientific framework.[38] By introducing Leo Bersani's queer use of a Freudian concept of life as libidinal drive I illustrate psychoanalytic theory's continued resourcefulness, indeed, its capacity to expand our understanding of and reckoning with contemporary psychiatry.[39]

Likewise, in the domain of critical research psychoanalytic theory also more often occupies a position of historic relevance to the development of feminist and queer genealogies or a site of critique, than it represents a framework in active use.[40] Illustratively, the field of queer death studies in which I situate my research project is largely testament to the richness and usefulness of frameworks such as the new materialisms and posthumanisms, theories of bio- and necropolitics, as well as postcolonial and black perspectives on loss.[41] This dissertation's chapter 3 thus illustrates how a feminist psychoanalytically informed relational perspective expands the ethic of loss beyond the limits set by contemporary models of mourning.

Chapter 4 provides further that in feminist poststructuralist critique of a psychoanalytic theory of mourning and its consequent deconstructive use of loss we find

[38] See chapter 2.

[39] My use of queer psychoanalytic theory here highlights an alternative concept of life to the one, I argue, a psychiatric model relies on. Contrary to a Western dualist severing of life and death, Bersani entangles the two in the concept of drive. Notably, Bersani observes how indecisive Freud is on his writing on the death drive returning to it over and again. This suggests that Freud's conceptual severing and opposing of the two is not as finite as it might seem, or at the least Bersani makes use of a concept of drive that entangles life with death and I follow him here ("Is the rectum a grave?." *October*, 43 (1987), 217).

[40] To make an argument for the relevance of feminist and queer uses of psychoanalysis for contemporary research on loss and death is of course not to say that psychoanalytic theory should not be subject to critical scrutiny. I want to highlight here the work of Ranjana Khanna who argues that psychoanalytic theory occupied a crucial role in the formulation and legitimization of a European colonial project. Khanna writes: "The development of psychoanalysis brought into existence a new way of being in the world for men and women across the globe in its rendition of modern national selfhood. Just as some were spoken into existence through the discipline, others were created, or worlded, as its underside, rendered as the earth, or as primitive beings against which the modern European self, in need of psychoanalysis, was situated." (*Dark continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, (Duke University Press, 2003), 2-3. Where Khanna provides one example of the usefulness of psychoanalysis—by way of producing a critique of it— I take the work of Eva Hayward as an example of a more affirmative use of psychoanalytic theory for contemporary queer and trans scholarship (e.g., "Painted Camera, "Her"," *E-flux Journal*, 117, (2021), 1-11).

[41] E.g., Marietta, Radomska, Tara Mehrabi, and Nina Lykke. "Queer death studies: Death, dying and mourning from a queerfeminist perspective," *Australian Feminist Studies* 35, no. 104 (2020), 81-100. I count myself fortunate to have taken part in the *Queer Death Studies Network* nearly since its formation.

existential-methodological lessons that complement onto-epistemology and address some of the questions and challenges that accompany this framework. In summary, against the backdrop of the general waning of the presence of psychoanalytic theory, this dissertation highlights the genealogical importance of psychoanalytic theory for the development of feminist poststructuralist writing on mourning and the emergence of the domain of queer theory as such. [42] By placing feminist and queer uses of psychoanalysis in dialogue with contemporary grief discourse, my chapters thus forge conceptual and analytic connections that illustrate the relevance and place of these frameworks in contemporary scholarship on mourning and the field of studies on queer death in particular.

This section has elaborated how 'being through loss' alters the terms of engagement with grief by way of a queer performative approach that foregrounds an onto-epistemological conceptualization of being. In accounting further for how this framework conceptualizes loss, this section has spelled out the contribution this dissertation's use of feminist poststructuralist and queer psychoanalytic theory aims to make in contemporary scholarship on mourning and the field of queer death studies in particular. Before I elaborate my methodology, the following section delineates some characteristics of the current debates around grief to situate my primary materials and crystalize some of the developments and context that give shape to them.

1.2 Ontogenetic impasse: Grief in contemporary debate and scholarship

Opening this chapter, I highlighted how the debate around grief has expanded to include an increasing range of voices and perspective since, in 2013, the American Psychiatric

[42] Where feminist poststructuralist writing on loss is concerned, works come to mind such as Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7, no.1, (1981), 41-55; Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, (Columbia University Press, 1980); Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, (University of Chicago Press, 2003). To begin to list some of the scholarship that foregrounds the formative connection between psychoanalytic theory and queer theory in the bio-/necropolitical landscape of HIV/AIDS and the activism of mourning it generated: Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, (Stanford University Press, 1997); Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *October*, 51, (1989) 3-18; Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Duke University Press 2004) and, as noted, Bersani "Is the Rectum"; and Sedgwick, *Epistemology*.

Association (the APA) first introduced the idea of grief as psychiatric diagnosis into medical and psychiatric as well as public consciousness. In what follows, I will elaborate on the contents and stakes of the conversations that have evolved around grief in order to give a broader sense of the debate and to identify the positions of my primary materials within it. On the base of this I will highlight how the debate generally assumes a distinction between general/personal and objective/subjective positions on grief across which an ontogenetic line of inquiry into grief is rehashed. Despite of the variety of positions that now inform the debate, I argue, this distinction creates an impasse that cannot seem to get past the question of how to accurately define and respond to grief. This section, in other words, adds substance to the proposition on which I base my queer performative reframing of grief, namely, that the ontogeny that subtends contemporary debate around grief limits what can be learned through this phenomenon.

The texts this dissertation examines vary significantly in terms of genre as well as in the perspective and positionality of their authorship. Yet, broadly speaking, the body of research literature on grief as psychiatric diagnosis and the autobiographical accounts of loss by Aidt and Didion are embedded and circulated in the contexts of North America and Western Europe. Here, they take part in fleshing out a moment wherein conceptions of grief are undergoing significant reformulation.[43] As I will elaborate in detail in chapter 2, the idea of grief as diagnosis appeared in the context of research on psychiatry and medicine decades prior to its entry into public discourse and consciousness when, in 2013, the APA announced that it was considering including grief in its upcoming edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (the DSM-5-TR).[44]

[43] See footnote 10.

[44] See chapter 2 for an elaboration of these events and their connections. Important to note here is, however, that the DSM is published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and so mainly (but not exclusively) applies to a US context. The ICD, although devised by the World's Health Organisation (WHO) and intended to apply globally, is used in the broader context of Europe as the equivalent official register over psychiatric pathology to the DSM. As example, the ICD is the main register referenced in the context of

Grief as psychiatric diagnosis has been a reality for practitioners as well as for clients and other actors in the domains of psychiatry and medicine since 2018, when "prolonged grief disorder" (PGD) was eventually added to the ICD-11. PGD's entry only recently followed suit with the 2022-edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM-5-TR).[45] The concept of grief as pathology or illness did not, however, emerge with PGD but was already present in the realm of conventional psychology prior to the official entry and pending entries of PGD in the ICD-11 and DSM-5-TR respectively. The arch of recovery in the widely known and applied Kübler-Ross model delineates different stages of grief—from denial and anger through bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance—and relies indirectly on a distinction between negative or detrimental emotions and those rendered more agreeable.[46]

A pathological understanding of grief also appears in psychoanalysis and is embodied in Sigmund Freud's distinction of "melancholia" from a healthy process of "mourning" on the claim that the melancholic's inability to accept that the object is irreversibly lost ultimately expresses an already existing pathological disposition on part of the subject.[47] From each of their distinct epistemological vantage points, these models reference a more common sensibility, namely, that the period following loss is unusual and painful.[48] What generally sets apart medical models from other models of grief is the effort, as above

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Denmark as it applies here, stirring more attention from experts and the public because of its direct consequences to practitioners, clients, and other actors related to the field of psychiatry and psychiatric pathology.

[45] As chapter 2 will elaborate, what initially propelled the debate around grief beyond the domain of research was the removal of the, so-called, "bereavement exclusion" (the BE) from the DSM-5. The BE functioned in the DSM as a measure of exclusion accompanying the diagnosis of "major depressive episodes" (MDE) and it was thus meant to halt practitioners from diagnosing a person with MDE if they had experienced loss within a period of six months prior to presenting with symptoms (Sidney Zisook et al., "The Bereavement Exclusion and the DSM-5," *Depression and Anxiety*, 29, no. 5 (2012), 425-443).

[46] Charles A. Corr, "Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and the "Five Stages" Model in a Sampling of Recent American Textbooks," *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 82, no. 2 (2020), 294-322.

[47] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Essential Papers on Object Loss*, ed. Rita V. Frankiel (New York University Press, 1994). I elaborate on his theory of mourning in chapter 3.

[48] Thomas W. Laqueur emphasizes this point in his longue durée review of Western history's relations to death (*The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*, (Princeton University Press, 2015)); Ida Hillerup Hansen, "While the Dead Labour for the Living," review of *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*, by Thomas W. Laqueur, *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*, 28, no. 3-4 (2019), 122-124.

exemplified, to reduce or move away from what are understood to be 'negative' and 'problematic' emotional and psychological experiences.

What is further discernible from this brief overview of grief's relationship to the pathological frameworks that operate in medical and psychological approaches to grief is that the introduction of PGD into the ICD-11, and pending entry in the DSM-5-TR, does not constitute an unprecedented coupling of grief and pathology. That said, it is worth noticing the specifics of the coupling that is taking place between pathology and grief in the context of psychiatry currently, and in particular the fact that PGD has made treatment with anti-depressant psychopharmacology possible. PGD's formal definition effectively means that people who suffer from "persistent" acute grief symptoms can be diagnosed so and receive treatment accordingly, either through therapeutic methods or with psychopharmacology.[49]

As chapter 2 will more extensively elaborate, PGD has been subject to much critique coming from the side of experts from within the fields of psychiatry and medicine. The critique varies but in general repeats the point that PGD amounts to over-pathologization, which is a concern that is not limited to the question of grief but extends to the proliferation of psychiatric diagnosis in general.[50] However, this point of critique on over-pathologization has in many ways propelled the debate about grief beyond the domains of psychiatry and into public consciousness and conversation, and personal accounts have been crucial players in the fleshing out of what might, from this perspective, be identified as an anti-psychiatry and anti-pathology push back. Didion and Aidt's accounts of grief are seemingly not written with the formation of grief as psychiatric diagnosis as their primary target. Still, as chapters 3 and 4

[49] Stressing that there is little solid research data to rely on, Bui et al. nevertheless suggest that when it comes to psychopharmacology PGD seems best treated with antidepressants (Erik Bui et al., "Pharmacological Approaches to the Treatment of Complicated Grief: Rationale and a Brief Review of the Literature," *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* (2022), 149).

[50] I want to note here how, across the literature on grief as psychiatric diagnosis, one can find an increasing tolerance for and acknowledgement of the intensity and difficulty grief causes. Notably, this acknowledgement still backs an argument for grief as diagnosis (see my reflection in chapter 2 on Engelbrecht, *Center for Sorg*) rather than a thorough scrutiny of the usefulness of a model that ultimately renders the experience of loss exceptional.

highlight, they both utilize personal experiences as vehicles to address the problematics and limitations of understanding and treating grief as pathology.[51]

The intervention, which personal accounts of grief have helped carve into the psychiatric model, has been driven by anti-pathology sentiments but it has also emphasized the lack of experiential range and the need for an expanded vocabulary to express grief and loss.[52] As I observe closely in chapter 3, Aidt's account of the death of her child Carl was generally met with an overwhelmingly positive and compassionate response. Here, I note specifically on the gratefulness one reviewer expresses toward Aidt, thanking her for "having given the horror [of grief] a language."[53] This expression of appreciation captures how personal accounts of grief and loss are generally perceived to offer an alternative way of speaking about grief.[54] Indirectly, "Thank you for having given the horror a language" thus articulates the sentiment that there is a different—indeed more accurate—way to represent grief. One that foregrounds the horror rather than tries to make it go away, as is the strategy of a psychiatric model.

[51] The autobiographical accounts of Didion and Aidt figure within public and expert debate with their own kind of authority. Both authors stand acknowledged and rewarded in their respective geographical contexts as well as internationally. It is also worth noting that Didion is quoted in the literature on grief as psychiatric diagnosis as a way, as I understand it, to convey a sensibility toward a growing public awareness of the difficulty of grief experience and the accompanying critique (as I highlighted in opening) that the psychiatric model does not manage such sensibility. That Didion is referenced in the psychiatric literature, I believe, attests to the form of power personal accounts of struggle with illness and death have achieved as well as to the forcefulness imbued in the genre of self-revelation and, as Joan Scott argues, the productive relationship counter-discourse has with dominant discourse ("The evidence of experience," *Critical Inquiry*, 17, no. 4, (1991), 773-797). Scott takes inspiration from Michel Foucault's observation on the genre of confession or self-revelation and the enabling relation it holds to master or dominant discourse. Without a dominant discourse, Foucault writes, "to bind coercion, pleasure and truth according to some indefinite spiral" (Foucault in Scott, ibid., 786), the possibility, or necessity even, for a different claim to experience had not been (made) possible.

[52] This recent wave in autobiographical literature on grief and death—which G. Thomas Couser suggests should be generically identified as *"*autothanatography"—may well compliment an already existing body of literature on illness and death and add to its critical conceptual vocabulary. (*Memoir: An Introduction,* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 43) For literature on illness and death see inter alia Anne Boyer, *The Undying* (Allen Lane, 2019). See also Jackie Stacey, *Teratologies: A Cultural Study of Cancer* (Routledge, 1997); Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (Penguin Random House, 2020).

[53] Karen Syberg, "Tak for at rædslen har fået et sprog," *Information*, March 25, 2017, https://www.information.dk/kultur/anmeldelse/2017/03/tak-raedslen-faaet-sprog?lst_cntrb.

[54] I note on a similar tendency in chapter 4 when, in support of my anti-autobiographical reframing of *The Year*, I propose that Didion's account of loss is generally read through the limiting lens of a personal account that promises to tell readers something about her as a person.

With the elaboration of anti-pathology critique through the medium of personal accounts of loss, we can see how the question that initially emerged in the context of psychiatry about how to accurately define grief (i.e., "is grief an illness?"),[55] begins to reveal the representationalist or ontogenetic nature of the debate about grief: What runs underneath both the general/objective and personal/subjective positions on grief is some form of the conviction that there is an accurate or, at the very least, a better way to describe grief than what some other position's rendering manages to offer. This underlying conviction results in an impasse that manifests itself in the manner in which the debate about grief seems not to be able to get past the question of what grief *is*.

To further illustrate this point, once PGD's entry into the ICD-11 became official a number of panels on grief were curated at a Danish political festival in which representatives from different institutions were asked to share their perspectives on grief.[56] *The National Center for Grief (Det Nationale Center for Sorg)* hosted one panel debating "If one can get sick from grief? How do we help people who get sick from grief? Do we need a diagnosis for "complicated grief"?"[57] The line of thinking here is clearly in favour of a psychiatric or pathological approach.[58] One might therefore credit the psychiatric or medical perspective that subtends this line of inquiry for the absence of reflection on the limiting premise of the questions themselves. The point to stress here is not, however, from which perspective (medical or not) one choses to answer this line of inquiry, but instead how these questions are framed to respond to the ontogenetic question of what grief *is*.

[55] See chapter 2 (George L. Engel, "Is Grief a Disease? A Challenge for Medical Research," *Psychosomatic Medicine,* 23 (1961), 18-22).

[56] I highlight this context because chapter 3 engages with it through the works of Aidt, who—although she lives in New York—is originally published here but also because, being from Denmark myself, I have been able to access and have a unique understanding of the cultural and socio-political context in which the debate about grief plays out, that is, compared to other national contexts.

[57] My translation of the panel focus as summarized on the webpage of the center ("Debat om sorg på Folkemødet en success," Det Nationale Sorg Center, accessed August 16, 2022, https://sorgcenter.dk/2017/06/22/debat-om-sorg-paa-folkemoedet-en-succes/.

[58] Indeed, the quoted summary continues: "We asked experts and citizens about this. Few individual opinions and reservations did not overshadow the widespread agreement in the panel that a grief diagnosis for complicated grief is the way forward." (ibidem.)

To give another example, a group of Danish researchers recently published an anthology, compiling the findings of a project they have run since 2017. The stated aim of the anthology is to provide an overview of the different representations of grief that are currently available and to decipher their causes and effects through the disciplinary lenses of culture studies and sociology.[59] As they claim to provide an overview of contemporary representations of grief, the authors of this anthology indirectly adopt an ontogenetic mode of inquiry. Not by themselves asserting ownership of a specific rendering of grief, but by asking what this approach and what that approach say grief *is*. Ultimately, however, framing grief, so as to make sense out of all its available representations, from a cultural and sociological perspective, also implies that the phenomenon *is* best understood from such perspectives.[60]

This latter proposition necessarily returns me to my own claim that the chapters of this dissertation together build an argument for a queer performative approach to grief. One could propose in return that, with this announcement, I make a similar maneuver to those ontogenetic framings and modes of inquiry I identify in the above examples. Yet, as I highlight above with reference to Sedgwick's approach to queer performativity, a methodological mainstay of this dissertation is "*not to know*" what grief is. As I shall elaborate in the following, the particular gain but also, in equal measure, the particular difficulty of a queer performative approach is that it formulates a challenge to dispense with a conventional ontogenetic way of knowing. With this departure follow other complications, which the following section on methodology will account for.

Before I move on to elaborate this further, let me summarize the main points the present section has wanted to establish: Opinions about grief change across cultural contexts

[59] Anders Petersen and Svend Brinkman, *Menneskets sorg: Et vilkår i forandring* (Klim, 2021), 12-3.

[60] In the anthology introduction Brinkman and Petersen write: "we understand grief as a fundamental human emotion whose unfolding, practices and reactions tell is something fundamental about what it means to be human in the society we live in. with this we simultaneously say that the conditions on which individual grief unfolds, is practiced and reacted to evolve with, are constituted by and embedded in society's overall – cultural, political, financial and social – development and that this transformation must be understood if one has an interest in what it means to be human in our current time." (ibid., 9-10, my translation)

and throughout history. The differing interjections that I have highlighted above, which are currently voiced from the sides of expert, public and personal actors in response to the psychiatric model that defines grief with significant authority, add crucial critical nuance to this matter. For one, the criticism of over/pathologizing that is being elaborated through the debate about grief currently has helped to further highlight the normative and neoliberal nature of a concept of well-being. My point to highlight, however, is that differences in how grief is represented do not do away with the representationalist conviction that subtends the debate on grief, namely, that representation (i.e., how to describe grief in what is argued to be its more or less accurate or fitting terms) is the primary, if not the only, plane on which grief raises questions.[61] This is the conviction and the condition of engagement with grief, which this dissertation challenges when it sets out on a queer performative reframing of and line of inquiry into grief.[62]

1.3 There is something queer about grief: Methodology

This section elaborates the usefulness of queer performativity for this project's onto-epistemological reckonings with grief by grounding my choice of methodology in a reflection on how a concept of performativity is informed by developments in queer and feminist scholarly debates. This discussion reflects a productive exchange between different strains of feminist and queer thought, ultimately foregrounding the importance of Sedgwick's concept

[61] The subtending ontogenetic conviction I identify here keeps in place the separation between epistemology and ontology, which I highlighted in my earlier reflection on Barad's critique of representationalism. The issue thus framed, as a consequence, becomes a matter of distinguishing difference *from* rather than, as Barad puts it, approaching it in terms of "exteriority within" ("Posthumanist Performativity," 803). I want to highlight here that on this issue, Barad explicitly draws from Trinh T. Minh-ha whose work articulates the problematics of difference as an ultimate or inherent difference from as a critique of the colonial construction of 'the other' (Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Not you/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," *Cultural Politics,* 11 (1997), 415-419)

[62] "Onto-genic" questions, as Sedgwick names them and reminds us, rest on the assumption that the only line of inquiry is 'what is x?' when in fact one might also ask along a queer performative line 'what does x do?'. Articulating this shift in the context of her writing on paranoid modes of reading, Sedgwick elaborates how this "seemed to open a space for moving from the rather fixated question Is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we know? to the further questions: What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows?" ("Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You," in *Touching,* 124).

of queer performativity that, to my understanding, operationalizes what Barad names, the world's "ontological in/determinacy"[63] as a methodology of *not knowing*.[64] In so doing, this section spells out how these approaches influence how I engage with my primary materials.

Broadly speaking, Barad's onto-epistemology denotes a departure from a classical ontology of discrete entities. It approaches the world instead in relational, "entangled" terms.[65] Onto-epistemology, a Baradian expression, is prevalent across contemporary feminist relational ontology, new materialist and posthumanist scholarship, but I pertain here mainly to the work of Karen Barad and Vicki Kirby.[66] Both, in their specific way, challenge a nature/culture binary and highlight how the dominant element of that split enables and naturalizes an account of reality as the brute material that grounds ontology.[67] Barad foregrounds the function of a Cartesian subject/object split to Western representationalism's habit of making sense of the world by imagining reality as a host of discrete, ontologically coherent objects and, as above outlined, they propose as alternative to such a posthumanist performative approach. In a more deconstructive line of address that highlights a poststructuralist attention to the world's texturality or the fleshiness of text,[68] Kirby proposes that a nature/culture binary is reconfigured along reflections on "the Derridean axiom, 'there is no outside text' as 'there is no outside nature.'" "What if," Kirby thus asks, "nature has always been literate, numerate, social?'"[69]

Each in their way Barad and Kirby challenge the scientific and vernacular conviction that there exists an inherent distinction between doing (epistemology) and being (ontology)

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[63] Barad, "What is the Measure," 7.

[64] Reminded, "*not to know*", is how Sedgwick formulates the aim of her queer performative intervention (*Epistemology*, 12).

[65] "Posthuman Performativity," 810.

[66] I am not suggesting that these scholars would so self-identify but highlighting how the fields of the new materialism and posthumanism take inspiration from their work.

[67] E.g., Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*, (Routledge, 2014).

[68] In *Telling Flesh* Kirby highlights Derrida's formulation of the world's textual play as a way to push back against the severing of text and world or epistemology and ontology (ibid., 90).

[69] Vicki Kirby, "Matter Out of Place: "New Materialism" in Review," *What if Culture was Nature All Along*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 1.

and with that distinction the possibility of an objective truth.[70] With their agential realist ontology, Barad provides useful conceptual vocabulary for approaching the "intra-active" quality of phenomena, which, they hold, are not "individuals with inherent attributes, anterior to their representation"[71] but instead come into being in continuous "material-discursive" entanglement.[72] Following Kirby, one could say that what is at stake in onto-epistemology is a destabilization of the nature/culture binary through a reconfiguration of matter altogether. Kirby indeed stresses how onto-epistemology does not task one with rectifying matter, and she highlights in this vein how the framing of the new materialisms as a new turn to materiality risks indirectly reinstating an epistemology/ontology divide where it repeatedly asserts its agenda against a deconstructive "obsession with discourse and language [that] has hijacked our ability to engage reality."[73] The task of onto-epistemology is therefore not to properly represent reality, but to accept that there is no matter or object before, or, better even, that the object of inquiry comes into being *through* its formulation.[74]

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[70] Kirby adds to this observation: "There once was a time, a time that includes the present, when scientific observation was equated with objectivity, when perception was thought to be a transparent and neutral act, and when the identification of mind and reason as incorporeal and transcendent over nature was pre-requisite to the determination of truth. Although a plethora of research in the sciences actually contests such ill-informed assertions, this cartoon representation of science fundamentals is widely held." (Ibidem.). Kirby continues:" It is precisely here that the difference that separates the humanities and social sciences from the sciences may seem like no difference at all. Both perspectives conflate representation, reproducibility (often re-theorized as performativity in social analysis) with the materiality of the real world. 'It just is!'" (ibid.,, 4)

[71] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 804.

[72] Ibid., 810. Part of the world or phenomena's entangled becoming is measurement, that is, shorthand for scientific method that is conventionally understood to objectively register and document the object of research, but measurement can be extended to denote the presence and impact of human and non human agents as such in those phenomena they, as Barad consequently reformulates it, "intra-act" with. They write: "Measurements are agential practices, which are not simply revelatory but performative: they help constitute and are a constitutive part of what is being measured. […] In other words, measurements are intra-actions (not interactions): the agencies of observation are inseparable from that which is observed. Measurements are world-making: matter and meaning do not preexist, but rather are co-constituted via measurement *intra-actions*." ("What Is the Measure," 6)

[73] Kirby, "Matter Out," 8. See also Ahmed on a similar point that highlights the reductive effects such framing gestures have on a long history of feminist engagement with questions of materiality, biology and nature (Sarah Ahmed, "Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the New Materialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 15, no. 1, (2008), 23-39.).

[74] Barad thus offers the concept of "apparatus" to denote how observation or representation is not outside or after the object of inquiry, but is part of the practice or act that constitutes it ("Posthumanist Performativity, 816). By subjectifying the object (by destabilising the notion of what the subject is) they unsettle the ontological status of the object and the object world, collapsing the subject/object divide that grounds representationalism. Kirby elaborates: "something counter-intuitive and quite threatening to humanism and human exceptionalism begins to make its appearance if we suggest that the object is also the subject 'who'

I appreciate and follow Kirby and Barad's invitations to destabilize nature/culture, matter/discourse dichotomies by going about inquiry onto-epistemologically for two main reasons. Firstly, it helps me extend my queer performative framework to my materials. With contemporary grief literature as my main sites of inquiry, I follow Kirby's concept of "corporeography,"[75] which denotes how, in the words of Kirby, "reality is not subject to language—it is language."[76] Through her radical reading of Jacques Derrida's proposition that "there is no outside of text," Kirby reveals how the subject/object divide, which Barad argues enables the representationalist severing of ontology from epistemology, informs a conventional understanding of text as severed from the real world it evidently seeks to describe.[77]

A "corporeographic" approach to text thus unsettles nature/culture or matter/discourse dichotomies as they pertain to and inform engagement with text. Following Kirby, I do not consider the bodies of literature I engage with in my chapters to be detached documentations of an external or real reality.[78] Rather, in line with my overall queer performative framework, I approach text as part of the world's playful unfolding in difference.[79] I, in other words, approach my materials in the understanding that what takes shape in text is no less real than what takes shape in, what is conventionally perceived as, external reality. The second reason I appreciate and follow Kirby and Barad's destabilization of the nature/culture, matter/discourse dichotomy is because their consequent turn to an onto-epistemological

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interprets, which in turn implies that authorship of the model/interpretation is an involvement wherein epistemology was always inherently ontological." ("Matter Out," 10).

[75] Kirby, *Telling Flesh*, 32.

[76] ibid., 89.

[77] One way in which this perception is expressed is in a method of close reading that, as it was originally envisioned, encourages interpretation to start in the impressions a text generates and to primarily stay within its bounds instead of turning to external structures of interpretation (Andrew DuBois, "Close Reading: An Introduction," in *Close Reading: The Reader*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Andrew DuBois, (2003) 2-3.)

[78] Peggy Phelan uses the terminology of "real real" to challenge the presupposition that there is "reality" proper and then representations of it (*Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, (Routledge, 2003), 3).

[79] My formulation riffs on Kirby who notes about Derrida how he "refuses the linguisticism that confines the play of difference to language in the narrow sense" (Kirby, *Telling Flesh*, 90).

perspective connects with, what I consider to be, a crucial methodological emphasis made in performativity's early queer formulation and in the work of Sedgwick in particular.

Sedgwick highlights this insight in her seminal publication, *Epistemology of the Closet,* when she formulates its queer intervention as a commitment "*not to know*."[80] Prior to and rooted in this commitment, Sedgwick has troubled a sex/gender dichotomy by asking if there exists any knowable connection between the two terms (i.e., sex and gender).[81] In striking resonance with Kirby and Barad's address of nature/culture and matter/discourse, Sedgwick at once points out how Western ontology relies on dualism and simultaneously dislodges her inquiry from it.[82] Sedgwick's queer intervention is in effect performative because the alternative line of inquiry it delineates dislodges from ontogenetic questions that, as Sedgwick stresses, inquire to know what something *is* and in so doing exhibits, what Barad calls, a representationalist belief in the ontological dominance of the object.

I hear Sedgwick's invitation via queer performativity, to foremost let go of a certain way of knowing (i.e., what is this object) and, indeed, to abstain from the belief that objects exist and can be *known,* echo throughout Barad's re-formulation of the world's entangled quality. Yet, this methodological dictum easily gets lost in the framing formulations that Kirby identifies and cautions across new materialist scholarship and that Barad, in my opinion, too closely references in moments when they posit that a poststructuralist and queer focus on language and the social allegedly "cheat[s] matter out of the fullness of its

[80] Sedgwick, *Epistemology,* 12
[81] ibid., 22.
[82] Although Sedgwick's focus is on how a sex/gender binary informs the formation of hetero- and homosexuality, at the heart of the framing of her early queer intervention is the dislodgement of duality as the principal ontological model of Western ontology. By dislodging the sex/gender binary in the context of its expression through a modern hetero/homosexual dyad, Sedgwick challenges Western ontology's reliance on dualism (ibid., 29). It is worth highlighting here how Sedgwick extends her critique of duality to its replication in a feminist conceptual distinction of sex from gender and the debates that have followed across, and to parse out, the relations between this biological/construction divide (ibidem.). What I find so striking about Sedgwick's critique of the limitations of this feminist debate is the manner in which a biological/construction divide echoes the nature/culture divide that Kirby and Barad also highlight *and* how Sedgwick offers a queer performative line of inquiry as a way out of the ontogenetic impasse this division creates, much like Barad years later formulates a posthumanist performative alternative to representationalism.

capacity."[83] Without intending to, what formulations like these that announce that matter matters before setting out to explore *how* or *if* it does, in other words, easily relay is that onto-epistemological inquiry, should or could set out with a predefined object in mind (e.g., matter).[84]

In a later reflection on how a concept of "texture" helps us grasp and methodologically operationalize a queer performative commitment to "not knowing," Sedgwick provides a formulation that has become paramount to my project, which I highlighted in opening and will elaborate further here. She writes: "To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does *it* impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?"[85] Following Sedgwick, the central challenge a queer performative or onto-epistemological perspective introduces is methodological. How, in other words, does one go about exploring a world that *does* without circumscribing inquiry in pre-defined ways of knowing and knowledge object/ives?[86]

Following Kirby and Barad, I conceptualize being in onto-epistemological terms as something that *does*, something that assumes different shapes in entanglement with the world.[87] As Sedgwick's methodological reflection on texture highlights, performativity is above all an exercise in not knowing or in leaning into, what Barad calls, the world's "in/determinacy." This methodological emphasis complements my project that sets out to

[83] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 810. I have highlighted in my discussion of Kirby and Barad how Barad in fact does not—as Kirby suggests framing gestures of the new materialisms risk—re-instate nature or matter as ontology. By subjectifying the object (i.e., rendering it capable of interpretation as this is the process that brings it into being) Barad unsettles the concept of subject, which the inferior rendering of object relies on.

[84] On the contrary, Kirby and Barad both highlight how the object comes into being through inquiry rather than it exists before it.

[85] Sedgwick, *Touching*, 13.

[86] With a caricature of Butler and Derrida, Sedgwick exemplifies such methodological complication in the context of a poststructuralist and queer anti-essentialist project where performativity has brought about ironically totalising formulations such as "all language is performative" (Ibid., 6). The question, however, is how to go from here and not end in an equally totalizing answer? The totalizing or essentializing effect Sedgwick highlights here is, in other words, the formulation of the implications of performativity that includes "all language" (Ibidem.).

[87] Barad "Posthumanist Performativity," 810.

explore how grief shapes an experienced sense of being in the world. A queer performative or onto-epistemological framing of being thus requires that one suspends any predefined notions of what grief *is* in order to examine how it comes into being through the bodies of literature examined. The first part of Sedgwick's methodological formulation (i.e., What is it like? [and] How does *it* impinge on *me*?) thus resonates with the intention of my dissertation's overall research question that asks *How, and with what contingencies and implications, does an experienced sense of being in the world take shape through loss*?

As Sedgwick goes on to stress through "texture," a performative line of inquiry does not end (not here, not anywhere) but continues to unfold and unravel the possibility of a finite answer when it asks further how being came to present a given way and what one might do with it (i.e., "How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?"). This second line of inquiry resonates with the analytical and conceptual work my chapters do, as each of them chart different exploration *through* grief and in that manner seek to resist an ontogenetic line of inquiry (i.e., asking what grief is). Following Sedgwick's formulation of queer performative inquiry, my chapters ask what (else) they can *do* with the movements of being that each of the bodies of grief literature I examine offer.

1.4 Dissertation overview

As I have repeatedly argued throughout this introduction, the main aim of this dissertation is to explore how an experienced sense of being in the world takes shape through loss. This aim derives from the hypothesis that in grief the phenomenon of being reveals its queerness by displaying its performative capacity to shift and alter. As a consequence, I approach being onto-epistemologically, that is, as a phenomenon that is entangled and thus unfolds with the world rather than as a reflection of static, individual entity. The framework of 'being through loss' that this chapter has introduced thus entails a methodological reconfiguration of grief that aims to challenge the ontogenetic premise of the contemporary grief debate and,

furthermore, to contribute to contemporary scholarship and the field of queer death studies in particular by illustrating the conceptual resourcefulness and analytic relevance of feminist poststructuralist and queer psychoanalytic theory.

Following this introduction, chapter 2, "Biomedicine's Stakes in Life: Grief as Psychiatric Diagnosis," focuses on the research literature and formal, institutional frameworks for grief as psychiatric diagnosis. Here, I argue that the formation of "prolonged grief disorder" (PGD) constitutes an effort to re-stabilize the sovereign humanist definition of life, which the psychiatric model relies on in order to propose that the problem it responds to is "psychobiological" in nature.[88] The chapter opens with an analysis of how PGD came into existence in official registers of psychiatric pathology (the ICD-11 and the forthcoming DSM-5-TR). I advance this reading by arguing that the establishment of PGD's symptom profile is made possible by the causal biomedical bind that already exists in the field of psychiatric pathology as part of the framework that affords symptomatology clinical validity by connecting it to biological cause.

Moving from here to Leo Bersani's queer uptake and use of Freudian psychoanalysis, I dislodge from a conventional critical framing and reading of biomedicine and propose that we reconsider the presence and impacts of the deceased in this literature. I foreground how the deceased is rendered a "hallucination" of being whose impacts are perceived as negative and sought remedied via efforts to return the bereaved to its 'normal' ways of living. Based on these observations and aided by Bersani, I argue that the bereaved constitutes an anti-sovereign life form that brings a psychiatric model to gate-keep, by way of defining grief as pathology, what life is. This chapter thus highlights the limitations of the critical frameworks

[88] Katherine M. Shear et al., "Complicated Grief and Related Bereavement Issues for DSM-5," *Depression and Anxiety*, 28, no. 2 (2011), 106, my emphasis. For use of similar terminology see for example Prigerson et al., "Validation," 96; Sophia E. Kakarala et al., "The Neurobiological Reward System in Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD): A Systematic Review," *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging, 303,* no. (2020).

that are available for engaging with biomedicine and illustrates (queer) psychoanalysis' unique capacity to expand our understanding of and reckoning with contemporary psychiatry.

Chapter 2's argument that the deceased's capacity to disturb a sovereign, humanist definition of life signals to the open-ended and entangled qualities of being and thus it analytically grounds the proposition that informs this dissertation at large, namely, that grief has a lot to tell us about being and the ways it shapes and alters in entanglement with the world. Departing from this opening, chapter 3's pursuit to explore what implications follow from acknowledging the lost loved other as being picks up where a psychiatric model shuts down. Chapter 3, "An Ethics of the Lost Other's Being: *Carl's Book*" thereby continues this exploration in Naja Marie Aidt's account of the death of her adult son Carl.

Based on engagement with Danish media and journalism I propose that the reception of *Carl's Book* in this context, and in particular its homogenous show of compassion toward Aidt, reveals the inability of available models of mourning to acknowledge and reckon with the being of the lost other. I name the cause of this inability a 'schema of the real' and identify it as a metaphysical presupposition, which I trace from a psychoanalytic approach through to a contemporary psychiatric model of mourning. Based on these two analytic observations I propose that Aidt's style of expressing her grief activates a 'schema of the real', in turn leaving reviewers and journalists unable to consider how a scene of loss asks of us to expand our understanding of being and develop alternative strategies for reckoning with is. Aided by Ettinger's relational perspective on existence as a condition of "matrixial carriance,"[89] I then turn to Aidt once more to explore what tools she provides for acknowledging and reckoning with Carl's being and, in so doing, I reflect on the ethical implications that follow from expanding the relational model of mourning beyond the mourning subject.

[89] Birgit Kaiser, and Kathrin Thiele, "If You Do Well, Carry! The Difference of the Humane: An Interview with Bracha L. Ettinger," *PhiloSOPHIA*, 8, no. 1 (2018), 105.

In the fourth and final chapter, "A World that Operates *as* Loss: *The Year of Magical Thinking*," I introduce an anti-autobiographical reading of *The Year*, arguing that Joan Didion, through her experience of losing her husband John, points to how the world operates *as* loss, a perspective she names *world without end.* To elaborate the implications of this perspective, I turn to Hélène Cixous' critique of a psychoanalytic model of mourning as incorporation and her deconstructive use of a concept of loss. Aided by Cixous, I stress how Didion's notion of *world without end* allows us to see how a seemingly natural world is in fact constructed for the end of protecting a specific model of living or being in it. Cixous identifies this model as a war-like strategy in which an oppositional or dualist structure functions for the end at feeling in control of a world that operates in the absence of logic and structure (i.e., *world without end*).

By situating my reading of *world without end* in the context of poststructuralist deconstruction (pointing to its resonance with Jacques Derrida's notion of "the end of the world"), I clarify my interest in exploring what, from the embodied perspective of the mourning subject, we might learn from being in a world that operates in complete indifference to individual attachment and needs and in absence of structure and logic. Based on Didion's extensive rumination on her tendency towards control I thus push Cixous' analysis of this concept beyond a masculinist desire toward power. In ending I derive the basic yet crucial existential-methodological lesson about un/certainty, from Didion's movement between a desire to know, by way of controlling, the world and her embodied acknowledgement of its impossibility performatively offers us, that our emotional attachments hold critical value. The value here lies in the friction that emerges between the emotional and material attachments that ground and even keep us stuck in the world and the "in/determinacy", according to Barad, or "ontological tenuousness", according to Sedgwick,

that also defines being, because it is in this space of movement in un/certainty that we might begin to experience and respond to things differently.

Taken together, the analytic chapters of this dissertation offer three open-ended explorations into the entangled ways being takes and alters shape through loss when approached from a queer performative perspective. *Being Through Loss: A Queer Performative Reckoning With Grief,* it is my hope, contributes to extending the conditions of engagement with grief beyond the ontogenetic impasse of contemporary both vernacular and expert debate exhibited, as I have illustrated above, in variations over a predominant focus on accurately defining grief. Further, I hope this project's general indebtedness to a framework of queer performativity and its use of feminist poststructuralist and queer uses of psychoanalytic theory will contribute to re-contextualizing and highlighting the continued relevance of these frameworks to contemporary scholarship on loss and mourning and inspire the field of queer death studies.

2 Biomedicine's Stakes in Life: Grief as Psychiatric Diagnosis

As my introduction observes, the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Issues* (ICD-11) added "prolonged grief disorder" (PGD) to its list of officially recognized psychiatric diagnosis in 2019. PGD's entry only recently followed suit with the 2022-edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM-5-TR). The formal enshrinement of PGD in these official registers of psychiatric pathology is long awaited, in fact since 2013, when the American Psychiatric Association, who publishes the DSM, first announced that it considered adding grief to its list of diagnoses. Well in advance of PGD's institutionalization, experts in the fields of psychiatry and medicine as well as public opinion, the media and scholars have been voicing criticism towards grief as psychiatric diagnosis.

Criticism takes different aims but often notes concerns with a broader Western societal and cultural tendency toward over-diagnosis and treatment. A number of recent news articles spotlight this matter as it relates to grief specifically and quote Allen Frances who observes how, with PGD, "[w]e run a risk of stigmatizing the grieving, reducing their dignity and medicalizing the natural process."[90] Within psychiatric and medical expert discourse critics of PGD do not explicitly refuse the idea of grief as psychiatric diagnosis, but rather address its empirical foundations, which has resulted in the relevant research literature often voicing a concern that, so called, normal grief might mistakenly be medicalized.[91]

This chapter undertakes an exploration of grief's formation as psychiatric diagnosis looking closely at its formal diagnostic definition as PGD in the ICD-11 and the DSM-5-TR,

[90] Jelena Kecmanovic, "Prolonged Grief Disorder Recognized as Official Diagnosis. Here's What To Know About Chronic Mourning," *The Washington Post,* October 21, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/10/21/prolonged-grief-disorder-diagnosis-dsm-5/. Frances is Professor and Chairman Emeritus of Duke University School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

[91] E.g., Margaret Stroebe et al., "On the Classification and Diagnosis of Pathological Grief," *Clinical Psychology Review,* 20, no. 1, (2000), 57-75 and Jerome C. Wakefield, "Should Prolonged Grief Be Reclassified as a Mental Disorder in DSM-5? Reconsidering the Empirical and Conceptual Arguments for Complicated Grief Disorder," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease,* 200, no 6 (2012), 499-511.

as well as in the research literature that provides empirical support for these official registers of psychiatric pathology. According to their own claims, the research literature on grief as diagnosis and official registers of psychiatric pathology aim with their definition of PGD to resolve the "psychobiological dysfunction", which, they hold, is the cause of grief's pathological prolonging.[92] The first half of this chapter develops an analysis that foregrounds the central role biomedicine and more specifically a neuroscientific approach to mental illness plays in envisioning PGD as the expression of an underlying psychobiological cause. This reading aligns with existing scholarship that understands medicine and psychiatry as part of advancing technologies to shape neoliberal subjectivity.[93]

The second half of this chapter then proceeds with an alternative route of inquiry that dislodges from my critical unpacking of PGD thus far as a site of normative correction of the bereaved subject. Moving from an analysis that is predominantly supported by critical scholarship on biomedicine and neuroscience, I turn here to a queer psychoanalytic framework, as it enables an entirely different perspective on the stakes and impacts of PGD. I draw on Leo Bersani's queer anti-sovereign reading of Freud's concept of life drive, which Bersani perceives as an entanglement between a drive to life and a drive toward death. Thus theoretically embedded and contextualized in the US HIV/AIDS epidemic, Bersani reframes homophobia from a correction of a, so-called, gay style of living to a correction of life as such.

Inspired by Bersani, I proceed to develop an argument for perceiving of PGD as an effort to re-stabilize the sovereign humanist definition of life, which, I hold, the psychiatric model of grief relies on to assert that the problem it responds to is merely "psychobiological"

[92] Katherine M. Shear et al., "Complicated Grief," 106. See section 2.2 for an analytic elaboration of this terminology.

[93] The use of the term 'technology' here denotes Michel Foucault's conceptualization of a biopolitical power that operates discursively by taking 'life itself' as its site of execution ("Lecture 17 March 1976," in *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at Collége de France 1975-1976* (Picador, 2003), 239-264). Scholars such as Paul B. Preciado have elaborated a concept of technology to better account for the entanglement of nature and culture and the material and discursive manner in which power works and unfolds ("Haraway's Prosthesis: Sex Technologies," in *Countersexual Manifesto* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 120-139.

in nature. I focus my analysis onward on how the figure of the bereaved is made to embody a "hallucination" of being and its impacts on the bereaved are rendered in negative terms. I propose that, in these corrective efforts, we can recognize the bereaved as an anti-sovereign life form that brings a psychiatric model of grief to gate-keep, by way of defining PGD, what life *is*.

Next to illustrating how a queer psychoanalytic framework broadens the terms of engagement with normative phenomena such as a Western societal tendency toward pathologizing, this chapter's shift in analytic inquiry also amounts to a re-signification of, what has now been historicized as, the moment in which Western societies shifted to perceiving of grief's prolonged impacts through the lens of psychiatric pathology and diagnosis. In so doing, chapter 2 takes the first step to unfold this dissertation's hypothesis that in grief being displays its queer performative capacity to move and alter. It does so by illustrating how PGD indirectly articulates a concern about life's boundaries. Indeed, in tracing biomedicine's labor to stabilize being in the context of contemporary psychiatry, I suggest, PGD amounts to an anxious response, and thus a testament, to being's porous boundaries.

2.1 "Sadness related to missing the deceased": Making prolonged grief disorder

The World's Health Organization (WHO) and the American Psychiatric Association (APA) publish the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM) and the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Issues* respectively. These registers contain all officially recognized diagnoses in psychiatric pathology to date and function more broadly as the guidelines that practitioners are advised to follow as they encounter individuals presenting with clinically relevant symptoms. While the ICD and DSM provide formal diagnostic criteria and guidelines, their utilization is advice based, which means that the registers themselves hold no legal authority. Legal binds arise, however, in the

context of treatment in public and private healthcare systems where institutions are obliged to confer their diagnostic hypotheses and assessments with official definitions (as provided by these registers).[94]

PGD's official entry in the DSM comes years after the ICD's with the 2022-publication of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM-5-TR). Yet grief's route to its formal status as psychiatric diagnosis originates and to a large extend has taken shape in the context of the US where the APA was the first to announce that grief was being considered seriously for entry in the DSM-5-TR. Only years later did the WHO follow suit to announce PGD's addition to the ICD-11.[95] Research on grief as pathology dates back decades, with the first noticeable wave in research output rising around the removal of the "bereavement exclusion" (BE) from the DSM-5 and the consequent expert discussion that followed (as discussed below). As early as 1961, George L. Engel published an article, which captured the query that has since animated research on this matter in its title "Is grief a disease?: A challenge for medical research."[96]

Neither Engel's question about the possibility that grief amounts to an illness, nor the later evolvement of this question into debate about grief's status as individual diagnosis arise out of the blue. In my understanding, they speak each in their own way to the fact that grief existed already in the DSM at the time of Engel's publication as an exception to the diagnosis of "major depressive episodes" (MDE). Until its removal from the 2013 edition of the DSM (DSM-5), the BE provided that practitioners "negate the diagnosis of MDE" in cases where loss had occurred within a timeframe of about 2–3 months prior to an individual presenting

[94] "DSM", Psychology Today, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/dsm.

[95] "World Health Assembly Update, 25 May 2019," World Health Organization, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.who.int/news/item/25-05-2019-world-health-assembly-update.

[96] George L. Engel, "Is Grief a Disease? A Challenge for Medical Research," *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 23 (1961), 18-22.

with symptoms of depression.[97] Grief's presence in the DSM as an exception to the MDE diagnosing thus illustrates how close its characteristics are to those of depression.

While the BE removal was met with outrage from critics who understood this as a first fatal step en route to grief's formulation as individual diagnosis, I understand grief's existence prior to this moment, in the form of an exception to MDE, as that which cleared the way for its later diagnostic definition.[98] From this perspective, the issue that PGD sheds light on is a tendency, starting in the 20th century and continuing onward, to perceive of sadness in terms of illness. As Allan Horwitz and Jerome Wakefield point out in their comprehensive response to the formation of depression as a diagnosis, it points to a broader and increasing Western culture of perceiving of emotional and mental struggle in terms of disorder.[99] Knowing that grief's original presence in the DSM is due to its symptomatic likeness to MDE, it is worth considering that grief related sadness, which was identified in grief's original entry as a cause of possible confusion with the MDE diagnosis, constituted already the next frontier this tendency to diagnose and treat sadness would reach. We can explore this possibility in the following way:

The removal of the BE from the DSM-5, and the APA's accompanying announcement that it was considering adding PGD to the DSM-5-TR, was met with sustained critical pushback. The possibility that grief as individual diagnosis would eventually grow out of the BE-removal was thus omitted from the qualification that followed the DSM-5, wherein the APA framed its decision to remove the BE as a necessary step toward evolving the diagnostic competence of MDE. In the script that accompanied the DSM-5, the APA thus highlights how the removal of the BE aims to give way for a finer distinction between MDE and prolonged

[97] Sidney Zisook et al., "The Bereavement Exclusion and the DSM-5," *Depression and Anxiety*, 29, no. 5 (2012), 426. Much controversy exists around this removal and the APA has received and responded to critique and concerns related to its consequences from public opinion, news media but also and notably from clinicians. See for example Sabin et al. 2017, etc.

[98] Ida Hillerup Hansen, "Reading Textures of Grief: Developing an Anti-essentialising and Affectively Entangled Framework for Exploring Grief," (MA-diss., Central European University, 2017), 8-17.

[99] Allan V. Horwitz and Jerome C. Wakefield, *The Loss of Sadness: How Psychiatry Transformed Normal Sorrow into Depressive Disorder* (Oxford University press, 2007).

grief "to enable people to benefit from the most appropriate treatment."[100] Given that the choice to remove the BE was met with significant negative attention, it is no surprise that the APA sought to frame its decision, and thereby reroute attention, toward an already heightening concern with depression and its related suicide rates.[101]

However, as researchers on PGD themselves observe, research on grief as diagnosis started before and grew around the BE removal, suggesting that the groundwork needed to establish PGD as an individual diagnosis was already happening before the BE removal.[102] In moving focus to MDE, the APA seemingly hoped to soften or distract the blow from critiques such as those that Gary Greenberg and Nikolas Rose have leveraged towards the DSM, when arguing that the growing number of diagnoses this and other registers exhibit is indicative of a proliferating trend. Rose elaborates how this trend is caused by a triangulation of science, pharmacology, and biomedicine whose aim together is to capitalize on "life itself."[103]

According to Rose, the proliferation in diagnosis, which we can count PGD a part of, should, in other words, be understood as an expression of how psychiatry has become increasingly involved in related domains, such as biomedical science and psychopharmacology, that profit off of illness.[104] By framing the removal of BE as an intentional step in the direction of fine-tuning the diagnostic competence of MDE, the APA not only seemingly sought to distract from, what it might have known was, the impending formation of PGD. It also made use of a political momentum around depression and related

[100] "Major Depressive Disorder and the "Bereavement Exclusion"," American Psychiatric Association, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Practice/DSM/APA_DSM-5-Depression-Bereavement-Exclusion.pdf.

[101] In 2006 Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose projected a rising "belief, underscored by the World Health Organization and accepted by international health management agencies, that by 2020 depression will have become the second largest cause of morbidity in both the developed and less developed world, second only to ischaemic heart disease." ("Biopower Today," *BioSocieties,* 1 (2006), 214.)

[102] As Zisook et al. highlight, there was an increase in research output focused on grief in the period leading up to and following the BE removal from the DSM-5. Confer "Table 1 Overview of studies published 2007-2011," in Zisook et al., "The Bereavement Exclusion", 429.

[103] Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 6.

[104] Gary Greenberg, *The Book of Woe: The DSM and the Unmaking of Psychiatry* (Penguin, 2013).

suicide rates to bolsters the legitimacy of a psychiatric approach to mental health and illness at a moment when this approach was increasingly becoming subject to growing criticism.

As noted above, prior to the APA's removal of the BE from the DSM-5, there was already a detectable investment on part of the research literature in producing empirical data that would support grief as an individual psychiatric diagnosis. Notable to this point and to the argument I develop in the following section that biomedicine plays a central role in the formation of PGD, the research that is done in the period leading up to and around the BE removal foregrounds a distinctively biomedical perspective.[105] Above I proposed that the BE removal does not constitute a point of no return on route to PDG's formation. Based on the increase in research output around the removal we can, however, say that it did open a window in which researchers found themselves tasked with the burden of proving that grief differs sufficiently from MDE for the former to deserve formal diagnostic acknowledgement. This burden, I would argue, was resolved in two predominant ways.

The task that fell on researchers to distinguish grief from MDE was resolved, first, by formulating grief's symptom profile with a clear emphasis on the role of the deceased to the pathological prolonging of grief's impacts, and, secondly, by producing empirical data in support of such a distinction between MDE and grief. In wrapping up this first section I will therefore attend to how grief's symptom profile is distinguished from MDE's, which will lead me to reintroduce and consider Horwitz and Wakefield's question in the context of grief, namely by asking: what made it possible to perceive of grief as "prolonged grief disorder" (PGD)?[106] As part of the effort to distinguish grief-related sadness from sadness related to depression, a group of researchers lead by Katherine M. Shear—a leading figure who has published widely on grief and been key to the development and testing of the therapeutic

[105] See footnote 154.
[106] Engel, "Is Grief a Disease?".

framework titled "Prolonged Grief Disorder Treatment"—produced a schematic comparison of grief and MDE symptomatology respectively:[107]

"Sadness related to missing the deceased" compares with "pervasive sad mood"; "strong interest in the deceased maintained" compares with "loss of interest or pleasure in most activities"; "guilt related to the death or deceased" compares with "pervasive sense of guilt"; "self-criticism only related to the loss" compares with "low self-esteem"; "suicidal thoughts focused on not wanting to live without the deceased or a wish to rejoin the deceased" compares with "suicidal thoughts related to a range of negative emotions and cognitions"; "avoidance of situations and people related to reminders of the loss" is "*not seen in depression*"; "intense yearning for the person who died" is "*not seen in depression.*"[108]

I highlight the final two elements of grief listed above that Shear et al. argue are incomparable with and thereby distinguish it from MDE.[109] The official entry on PGD in the ICD-11 confirms this distinction when, in the sub-section listing PGD's "Boundaries with Other Disorders and Conditions (Differential Diagnosis)," it holds:

> Some common symptoms of Prolonged Grief Disorder are similar to those observed in a Depressive Episode […]. However, Prolonged Grief Disorder is differentiated from Depressive Episode because symptoms are specifically focused on the loss of a loved one, whereas depressive thoughts and emotional reactions typically encompass multiple areas of life.[110]

The distinction Shear et al. and the ICD-11 entry on PGD both highlight is supported in the research literature on grief by way of confirming a statistical prevalence of the bereaved

[107] Shear is psychiatrist, internist, and professor of psychiatry. ("M. Katherine Shear," Columbia School of Social Work, Faculty profile, accessed August 16, 2022, https://socialwork.columbia.edu/faculty-research/faculty/full-time/m-katherine-shear/.

[108] Katherine M. Shear et al., "Bereavement and Complicated Grief," *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 15, no. 11 (2013), 13. My emphasis added.

[109] For the DSM-5-TR entry on prolonged grief disorder the same aspects are highlighted as the first and necessary criteria for diagnosis: "B. Since the death, there has been a grief response characterized by one or both of the following, to a clinically significant decree, nearly every day or more often for at least the last month: 1. Intense yearning/longing for the deceased person 2. Preoccupation with thoughts or memories of the deceased person (in children and adolescent, preoccupation may focus on the circumstances of the death)" (Prigerson, et al., "Validation," 97).

[110] "6B42 Prolonged grief disorder," ICD-11 Mortality and Morbidity Statistics, accessed August 16, 2022, https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http://id.who.int/icd/entity/1183832314.

individual's distinctive "focus […] on the loss of a loved one".[111] The "Inventory of Complicated Grief" (ICD) was originally designed with the aim of screening bereaved individuals, and an updated version followed the BE-removal in the form of the "PGD-13-Revised" scale (PG-13-R).[112] According to its authors Prigerson et al., the PGD-13-Revised was "introduced in the process of developing PGD diagnostic criteria proposed for inclusion in the DSM-5 and ICD-11."[113] It serves, in other words, to test for PGD based on the statistical prevalence of symptoms.

Notably, ten out of thirteen questions in this scale focus on the deceased and the role they play in relation to the emotional, physical and psychological experience of the bereaved. The PG-13-R entails thirteen questions that the bereaved individual is asked to respond to along a scale ranging from "not at all" to "overwhelmingly."[114] As an example: "Q3. Do you feel yourself longing or yearning for the person who died?"[115] The scale for measuring PGD is, in other words, based almost entirely on the two points that, according to Shear et al. above distinguishes grief from MDE, which is to say that, in screening individuals for PGD, this schema also serves as a tool to *produce* the conviction that PGD is indeed distinct from MDE and therefore exists. I will elaborate on this proposition by returning to Simon et al.'s study.

Simon et al.'s study collected data based on 782 bereaved individuals who completed the 19-item "Inventory of Complicated Grief".[116] Reviewing all 782 questionnaires for the purpose of establishing the statistical prevalence of PGD symptoms, Simon et al. explain how "based on counts" they devise "different rules" for evaluation, which means that the value of each question in this study is considered individually but also across the answers an

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[111] Ibidem.

[112] Holly G. Prigerson, et al., "Complicated Grief and Bereavement-related Depression as Distinct Disorders: Preliminary Empirical Validation in Elderly Bereaved Spouses," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 152, no. 1 (1995), 96, 98 confer Figure 1 for "Prolonged Grief Disorders (PG-13-Revised).

[113] Prigerson et al., "Complicated Grief," 97.

[114] ibid., 98.

[115] Ibidem.

[116] Naomi M. Simon et al., "Informing the Symptom Profile of Complicated Grief," *Depression and Anxiety*, 28, no. 2 (2011), 121.

individual has provided. Out of 782 bereaved individuals, Simon et al. found that 288 individuals were "confirmed" to be cases of complicated grief.[117] The aim of this early study was to first establish the prevalence of pathological grief and from thereon to validate PGD's symptom clusters via factor, specificity, and sensitivity analyses.[118] In the words of Simon et al., they were indeed looking to derive "distinct clinically meaningful dimensions"[119] to define PGD.

The "symptoms or symptom clusters" that resulted from Simon et al.'s counting across answers bereaved individuals provided to the questions in the PG-13-R scale are now detectable in the DSM-5-TR and the ICD-11's overview of grief's diagnostic criteria. Simon et al. summarize the criteria in their study as follows: "1) [Y]earning and preoccupation with the deceased, 2) anger and bitterness [connected to the loss], 3) shock and disbelief, 4) estrangement from others, 5) hallucinations of the deceased, and 6) behavior change, including avoidance and proximity seeking".[120] With only minor deviations, this symptom profile corresponds with those enshrined in the ICD-11 and the DSM-5-TR.[121]

Based on the 288 confirmed cases that initially provided statistical grounds to bolster PGD's symptomatic characteristics, Simon et al. were able to argue that pathological grief requires treatment and, to this end, an individual diagnosis.[122] Simon et al. were not alone in making this argument, but I have offered their study as an illustration of how this argument that PGD exists is built in the research literature. The distinction of grief from MDE based on the fact that the former connects specifically to the loss of a loved one seems obvious, yet neither on its own nor with statistical prevalence to support it does this distinction answer

[117] Ibidem.
[118] Ibid., 118.
[119] Ibid., 123.
[120] Ibid., 119. Confer this with the ICD's "Diagnostic Requirements" footnote 111.
[121] See Prigerson et al., "Validation," 97 Table 1 consists of a reprint of the American Psychiatric Association's suggested "DSM-5-TR Criteria for Prolonged Grief Disorder." See also George A. Bonanno et al., "Trajectories of Grief: Comparing Symptoms from the DSM-5 and ICD-11 Diagnoses," *Depression and Anxiety*, 37, no. 1 (2020), 17-25.
[122] Simon et al., "Informing," 124: "In conclusion, these data add an important perspective to existing suggestions for DSM[-]5 criteria for CG [Complicated Grief]."

how it has become possible to perceive of grief as a psychiatric diagnosis. The question PGD's enshrinement in the ICD-11 and the pending DSM-5-TR raises is therefore: what currently counts as proof of psychiatric pathology? To probe into this question, I elaborate in the following section on the tendency Horwitz and Wakefield note in the context of depression—namely, to perceive of emotional and mental struggle as illness—through the influence biomedicine has achieved in contemporary psychiatry.

2.2 "An underlying psychobiological dysfunction": Biomedical causality

Looking closely at the ICD-11 definition and the research literature in support of grief as psychiatric diagnosis, this section illustrates how PGD in large part is enabled by what Nikolas Rose calls a biomedical "style of thought"[123] and, more specifically, a neuroscientific approach to mental illness. What I, in other words, argue makes it possible to perceive of grief in terms of psychiatric pathology, is a biomedical model of causality, which the following analysis of PGD proposes, exists already in the field of psychiatry to give clinical validity to grief's alleged behavioral and psychological symptomatology by connecting such to a biological cause. While the following close reading focuses on ICD-11's diagnostic definition of PGD, it is important to note that the recently published DSM-5-TR includes a diagnostic entry that corresponds to the ICD.[124]

PGD is indexed in the ICD-11 under the overarching rubric of "mental, behavioral or neurodevelopmental disorders"[125] and further sub-categorized under "disorders specifically

[123] Rose, *The Politics,* 12.
[124] See footnote 110.
[125] "06 Mental, behavioural or neurodevelopmental disorders," ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics," accessed August 16, 2022, https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http%3a%2f%2fid.who.int%2ficd%2fentity%2f334423054.

associated with stress."[126] Within this overarching rubric, the following description is included:

> Mental, behavioral and neurodevelopmental disorders are syndromes characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes that underlie mental and behavioral functioning.[127]

In medical terminology syndrome denotes "a combination of symptoms resulting from a single cause or, alternatively, so commonly occurring together as to constitute a distinct clinical picture."[128] In the context of the ICD's overall rubric of disorders related to neurodevelopment, behavior, and mentality, "syndrome" points to the presence of a set of identified characteristics such as those relevant to PGD that are listed in the ICD as its "diagnostic requirements":[129]

> [L]onging for the deceased or persistent preoccupation with the deceased accompanied by intense emotional pain. This may be manifested by experiences such as sadness, guilt, anger, denial, blame, difficulty accepting the death, feeling one has lost a part of one's self, an inability to experience positive mood, emotional numbness, and difficulty in engaging with social or other activities.[130]

Although the concept of "syndrome" may mean that a single "cause" is not fully identified its existence is nonetheless trusted and still connected as a "clinical picture" of those effects that find symptomatic expression.[131] Indeed, in the rubric under which PGD figures, symptoms are coupled with "the psychological, biological, or developmental processes that underlie mental and behavioral functioning."[132] The concept of "syndrome" thus signals to a causal understanding at the heart of this category of the relationship between

[126] "Disorders Specifically Associated with Stress," ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics," accessed August 16, 2022, https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http%3a%2f%2fid.who.int%2ficd%2fentity%2f991786158.

[127] ICD-11, "06 Mental," accessed August 16, 2022, https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http%3a%2f%2fid.who.int%2ficd%2fentity%2f334423054.

[128] "Syndrome," The Medical Dictionary Online, accessed August 16, 2022, https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/syndrome.

[129] Note how these correspond to the "distinct clinically meaningful dimensions" Simon et al. delineate above.

[130] ICD-11, "6B42 Prolonged."

[131] The Medical Dictionary, "Syndrome."

[132] ICD-11, "06 Mental."

symptomatic presentation and "psychological, biological, or developmental" origin. Causality is not novel to this body of research literature. It exists across the board of modern sciences, and among them the broad field of biomedicine, as an explanatory model to probe the relationship between effects, their origins and impacts.[133]

Broadly speaking, biomedicine denotes Western conventional or mainstream modern medicine that encompasses areas and disciplines such as biochemistry, genetics, neuroscience, immunology, physiology, embryology, and so on. According to Dr. Cathy Lloyd a biomedical model is "an integral part of western cultures and the way health and healthcare are perceived [… it] gives a physical or biological explanation for health, and offers physical/biological methods for 'repairing' bodies when they are not working correctly."[134] Nikolas Rose elaborates the foundations of this model against the clinical gaze of the nineteenth century that preceded it, which imagined bodies "at the scale of limbs, organs, tissues, flows of blood, hormones and so forth [t]his is the visible, tangible body […] as a systemic whole […].[135]

Rose continues that biomedicine has since "supplemented, if not supplanted" this with a gaze where "life is now understood, and acted upon, at the molecular level [… that is, in] the link between functional properties […] and their molecular topography."[136] Signaled in the context of PGD through "syndrome" terminology, the presence of biomedical causality in the ICD is significant because it reflects how conventional psychiatry has moved away from earlier more dispersed approaches to the mind and has instead centrally incorporated biomedical causation and, more specifically, a neuroscientific approach that connects the mind and mental processes to dys/functional activity in the biological brain.

[133] Mario Bunge, *Causality and Modern Science* (Routledge, 2017).

[134] "Dr. Cathy Lloyd, Faculty profile," The Open University, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.open.ac.uk/people/cel27.

[135] Rose, *The Politics,* 11. Rose notes that, although a paradigmatic shift to biomedicine's molecular lens has taken place, it coexists with other approaches to health.

[136] Ibid., 12.

As it appears in the ICD, biomedical causality connects PGD symptoms to not only biological but also psychological and developmental factors. ICD's more inclusive formulation relating "syndromes" broadly to "the psychological, biological, or developmental processes that underlie mental and behavioral functioning"[137] thus holds open space for factors that are not strictly biological to play a role in the cause of PGD and its course of development. The ICD entry on PGD indeed entails elaboration of developmental, psychological, and cultural features where, for example, it details the characteristics in childhood, adolescent, and adult responses to grief as well as "additional clinical features" such as "difficulty trusting others, social withdrawal, and the feeling that life is meaningless."[138]

The research literature on grief as diagnosis likewise makes sure to include cultural and religious factors, with the effect that an air of sensibility to difference surrounds a more categorical and rigid diagnostic definition. Where Shear et al. highlight how "[c]ultural and religious factors need to be taken into consideration when making a diagnosis of CG,"[139] Castelnovo et al., in their review of research on post-bereavement hallucinatory experience, highlight "cultural/geographical differences" in how PGD manifests.[140] This is to say that time and energy are spent in the research literature and the diagnostic entries on specifying other-than-biological factors of relevance to PGD.

Yet, as I will now move to illustrate, the biological factors that are included in this range of causes to PGD are conceptualized and valorized differently from social, cultural, and psychological factors, which effectively renders the latter circumstantial and the former essential. This differentiated valorization thus suggests that biological factors take

[137] ICD-11, "06 Mental."

[138] ICD-11, "6B42 Prolonged."

[139] Anna Castelnovo et al., "Post-bereavement Hallucinatory Experiences: A Critical Overview of Population and Clinical Studies," *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 186 (2015), 186: 269.

[140] They conclude: "grief hallucinations seem to occur irrespective of ethnicity, creed, or domicile." (Ibidem.)

precedence, indeed that they are conceptualized to play an inherent role in the effects that are registered as PGD. In turn, this suggests that the causal relationship that biomedicine establishes in the context of psychiatry between the mind and a molecularly granulated biological base (i.e., the brain) indeed has had a "flattening" effect that, as Rose argues, is given expression in the sentiment that "[m]ind is simply what the brain does."[141]

Where PGD is indexed in the ICD's overarching category of "mental, behavioral or neurodevelopmental disorders," the connection that is established here between pathological symptomatic presentation and its causes is formulated as follows: "psychological, biological, or developmental processes […] *underlie* mental and behavioral functioning."[142] This formulation notably locates cause underneath the external, symptomatic expression that behavioral and mental dys/function takes; this structure is repeated in the research literature where, for example, Shear et al. highlight how PGD "reflects an *underlying* psychobiological dysfunction."[143]

Although "cause" here is opened to potentially involve other than biological factors, it is important to notice what the architecture of this formulation implies. The use of "underlying" reflects an internal/external model wherein the mind, as Rose stresses, is the outward expression of the inner workings of the brain. Importantly, internality in this context denotes a mechanistic or functional relationship between brain and mind and so differs from a model of depth, i.e., internality such as is characteristic of a psychoanalytic perspective in which the mind is understood as always once removed and ultimately unknowable, operating

[141] Rose, *The Politics*, 192. Biomedicine, Rose explains, denotes a broader shift that has taken place in Western medicine with technological and scientific advancements during the twentieth century: "The psychiatric gaze is no longer molar but molecular [i.e., biomedical]. And behind this molecular classification of disorders lies another image of the brain—that of contemporary neuroscience—and of therapeutic intervention—that of psychopharmacology." (ibid., 199) For an example of this mind to brain causal bind at work see Henry Marsh. *Do No Harm: Stories of Life, Death and Brain Surgery.* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2014).

[142] ICD-11, "06 Mental."

[143] Shear et al., "Complicated,"), 106, *my emphasis*. For use of similar terminology see for example Prigerson et al., "Validation," 96; Sophia E. Kakarala et al., "The Neurobiological Reward System in Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD): A Systematic Review," *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging, 303,* no. (2020).

in a dispersed rather than a causal manner.[144]Adding to this architectural quality, PGD is defined as a "dysfunction" that, given its articulation in the context of a diagnostic register, warrants corrective intervention either through therapy or treatment with psychopharmacology. In other words, "dysfunction" further supports the mechanistic or functional relationship I highlight above between brain and mind.[145]

Taken together, the architectural and mechanical/functional qualities that PGD bellies when formulated as an effect of an "underlying dysfunction" echoes Rose's observation that biomedicine has impacted psychiatry so that "mental pathology is [understood as] simply the behavioral consequences of an identifiable, and potentially correctable, error or anomaly in some of those elements now identified as aspects of the organic brain."[146] What further distinguishes the biological from social, cultural, and psychological factors that are understood to cause PGD is a repeated foregrounding of biology and physiology in the research literature. The following two examples will illustrate how biology and physiology are rendered placeholders of empirical weight and, each in their own way, made associative to the organic brain whose dys/function is allegedly expressed in mental, behavioral, and psychological terms.

In an effort to push back against some of the criticism PGD has been subject to when accused of manifesting a trend toward over-diagnosis and -treatment, Shear et al. invoke a wound analogy to assert the benign and evidentiary nature of intervention where PGD is concerned.[147] They write: "George Engel […] conceived of grief as analogous to infection or

[144] As example, a psychoanalytic notion of internalization constitutes a psychic mechanism that obscures the inner world of the subject, making it anything but a directly translatable or transparent phenomenon. Rose notes how a neuroscientific approach has largely displaced older approaches to the mind—central among them psychoanalysis (Rose, *The Politics*, 194).

[145] Chapter 3 notes on the difference between how psychoanalysis and psychiatry conceptualize and respond to symptomatology in the context of the approaches they develop to mourning and grief.

[146] Ibidem.

[147] Understandably starting out on the defensive, Shear et al. write: "Some say grief should not be pathologized, as though clinicians would choose to create pathology when our whole purpose is to relieve it. Inflammation is the painful, universal response to exposure to certain bacteria, yet we do not debate whether a

injury, and we agree […]. For some bereaved individuals, the natural healing process is interfered with by various complications, just as a wound does not heal properly when it becomes infected."[148] Following the analogy, grief is equated to a wound, whereas injury and infection denote a disturbed or prolonged healing process—hence "prolonged grief." While "infection" is arguably not the same as dysfunctional, neurochemical activity, what is pivotal in the use of this analogy is the story it tells about how injury (i.e., "wound") and its prolonged healing (i.e., "infection") have a, notably, physical cause—one that can and, indeed, should be healed.

Interestingly, although Shear et al. add that "the natural healing process is interfered with by *various complications,*"[149] their explanatory use of an analogy that foregrounds infection brings to mind how the medical field of infectious disease, in which the science and practice of wound treatment belongs, often involves prescription of antibiotics.[150] This analogy does not just foreground physiology and biology as explanatory model and sites of intervention and hence resolve. By giving covert priority to a pharmacological form of treatment, it once more associatively conjures up brain neurochemistry via the fact that PGD has made grief's treatment with psychopharmacology possible.[151]

Shear et al. offer a second example when, to substantiate their argument that empirical evidence exists to back the "underlying" biology that causes PGD, they make reference to a "brain imaging study [that] showed the activation of the nucleus accumbens on exposure to

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clinician is pathologizing a natural human experience by diagnosing and treating it." (Shear et al., "Bereavement," 2.)

[148] Ibid., 4.

[149] Ibidem, *my emphasis.*

[150] The field of infectious diseases is historically associated with epidemiology and clinical microbiology, all of which fall under the overarching category of biomedicine. Infections are often treated with antibiotics.

[151] Although results are ambiguous where psychopharmacological treatment is concerned it is an accepted method of treatment of PGD alongside other therapies (Alexander H. Jordan et al., "Prolonged Grief Disorder: Diagnostic, Assessment, and Treatment Considerations," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice,* 45, no. 3 (2014), 183.

cues of the deceased in complicated but not normal grievers."[152] By connecting activity in the biological brain to *the* distinguishing feature of PGD's diagnostic profile—namely, the deceased—this line of argumentation illustrates one of the primary means by which a neuroscientific approach to mental illness has won terrain not only in the field of conventional psychiatry but in popular consciousness too. According to Joseph Dumit, a neuroscientific approach to mental illness has been popularized in recent decades through, for example, the advancement of imaging technologies such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), Positron Emission Tomography (PET), and Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) that provide convincing proof of and broad appeal to a neuroscientific concept of the organic brain.[153] The advancement of these technologies have played a paramount part in popularizing the conviction that, as Rose puts it, "mind is what brain does,"—offering an image of activity in the organic brain as proof.[154]

To conclude, the reason a set of symptom clusters (such as those this chapter's first section identified in Simon et al.'s efforts to distinguish PGD from MDE) can move from statistical prevalence to the main diagnostic criteria of PGD is that a causal model is already

[152] Shear et al., "Bereavement," 2. For other research that foregrounds an explicitly biomedical perspective, that is, they probe mental illness through its biological and physiological correlates, see for example Elizabeth Mostofsky et al., "Risk of acute myocardial infarction after the death of a significant person in one's life: the Determinants of Myocardial Infarction Onset Study," *Circulation*, 125, no. 3 (2012), 491-496; Riyad Khanfer et al., "Neutrophil Function and Cortisol: DHEAS Ratio in Bereaved Older Adults," *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 25, no. 6 (2011), 1182-1186; Thomas Buckley et al., "Inflammatory and Thrombotic Changes in Early Bereavement: A Prospective Evaluation," *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology*, 19, no. 5 (2012), 1145-1152.

[153] Rose writes: "Most accounts that make use of these technologies [i.e., Positron Emission Tomography (PET), Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) […] and then Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)] write as if we can now visualise the interior of the living human brain and observe its activity in real time as it thinks, perceives, emotes, and desires—we can see the "mind" in the activities of the living brain." (*The Politics*, 196). On the influence of brain imaging on both public and expert perception of the mind see also Joseph Dumit, *Picturing Personhood: Brain Scans and Biomedical Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2004); Martyn Pickersgill, "The Social Life of the Brain: Neuroscience in Society," *Current Sociology*, 61, no 3 (2013), 322-340; Fernando Vidal, "Brainhood, Anthropological Figure of Modernity," *History of the Human Sciences*, 22, no. 1 (2009), 5-36.

[154] Rose, *The Politics*, 192. The connection these technologies represent is according to Rose, Dumit, and other critics, however, at best highly overstated and at worst damaging in its misrepresentation and usage. Citing Beaulieu and Dumit, Rose thus summarises: "Of course, the reality is much more complicated than its popular representation: brain scans produce digital data that is mapped pixel by pixel into a standard representation of brain space to produce these simulacra of the "real brain" (Ibid., 196).

in place in psychiatric pathology to afford clinical validity to the relationship between symptomatic behavior and an "internal" or "underlying" "dysfunction." This framework, I have argued, is biomedical and prevalent in the context of psychiatry more specifically as a neuroscientific approach to mental illness. Biomedical causality's presence and impact in psychiatry is further noticeable in how "psychobiology" and "biology" are differently conceptualized and valorized from other social and cultural causes of PGD. The effect of this valorization is not only evident in the repeated reference to psychobiology but also in associative strategies to index the organic brain and physiology (e.g., wound analogy) as explanatory models for PGD.

2.3 "Other candidates for diagnostic criteria": Shifting perspectives

Throughout my engagement with PGD thus far, I have emphasized how research literature grants priority to turning out empirical leverage in support of grief's diagnostic distinctiveness from its likeness to MDE, specifically, and into an individual diagnosis. Coming into being, PGD had thus to present in terms of clinically valid "symptoms and symptom clusters," which, as the above section demonstrated, required researchers to configure a statistically prevalent, grief-related experience through a biomedical model of causality that, I proposed, is already in place and working in conventional psychiatry. Having thus answered how it became possible to perceive of grief as a psychiatric diagnosis, the following sections will circle back to re-examine an observation made in this connection—namely, the central positioning of the deceased amongst PGD's now formalized diagnostic criteria.

This position is interesting because, as researchers themselves note, the phenomenon of the deceased as such lacks the empirical support that is otherwise required of those items that are included in grief's symptom profile. In lieu of such empirics, this and the following sections ask what the function of the deceased is here? This question will lead me beyond the

critical approach to biomedicine I have utilized thus far to unpack grief's formation as psychiatric diagnosis and into Leo Bersani's anti-sovereign or anti-social thesis.[155] Enfolded in this turn to queer psychoanalysis is my reflection on the limitations of Rose's representative framework for critical engagement with biomedicine in that I observe how, although for different reasons, he relies indirectly on a sovereign, humanist concept of life just as the biomedical literature itself does.

The first two sections foregrounded how researchers ultimately agree that what distinguishes grief from MDE is its connection to loss, and as a consequence the role of the deceased is highlighted in the range of experiences rendered characteristic of grief—or, in cases where its persistence is prolonged, symptomatic of PGD. As earlier noted, the two elements of grief that Shear et al. stress are incomparable with the symptomatology of "major depressive disorder" (MDE) are "avoidance of situations and people related to reminders of the loss" and "intense yearning for the person who died". These features too are foregrounded in PGD's official entry in the ICD-11 and the forthcoming DSM-5-TR.[156]

There is a curious quality to PGD's argued distinctiveness, which derives from the obvious or the self-explanatory fact that grief in this context *must* relate to the loss of a loved one. This logic, however, does not in itself suffice as grounds to conclude that grief requires individual diagnostic acknowledgement; hence, the need to establish its empirical validity via biomedical causality. I would add, however, that there is an additional source of the

[155] Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman identify the, so called, "anti-social thesis" or the "anti-sovereign" strain of queer theory in the work of Bersani ("Reading, Sex, and the Unbearable: A Response to Tim Dean," *American Literary History*, 27, no. 3 (2015), 627. Edelman's work too is exemplary of this strain of queer theory (*No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004).

[156] In the sub-section listing, PGD's "Boundaries with Other Disorders and Conditions (Differential Diagnosis)", the ICD entry holds: "Some common symptoms of Prolonged Grief Disorder are similar to those observed in a Depressive Episode […]. However, Prolonged Grief Disorder is differentiated from Depressive Episode because symptoms are specifically focused on the loss of a loved one, whereas depressive thoughts and emotional reactions typically encompass multiple areas of life." (ICD-11, "6B42 Prolonged"). For the DSM-5-TR entry on prolonged grief disorder, the same aspects are highlighted as first and necessary criteria for diagnosis: "B. Since the death, there has been a grief response characterized by one or both of the following, to a clinically significant decree, nearly every day or more often for at least the last month: 1. Intense yearning/longing for the deceased person 2. Preoccupation with thoughts or memories of the deceased person (in children and adolescent, preoccupation may focus on the circumstances of the death)" (Prigerson et al., "Validation," 97).

deceased's curious character, which becomes clearer where, in the research literature's pursuit to clarify its status, the deceased is specified as "hallucination." In its recommendation of diagnoses for further study that accompanied the removal of the BE from the DSM-5, the APA highlighted some "[a]ssociated features supporting diagnosis [such as] hallucination of the deceased's presence (e.g., seeing the deceased sitting in his or her favorite chair)."[157]

This feature is included not only in the APA's recommendation but highlighted too in the research literature, inter alia where Simon et al. observe how hallucination achieves a "highly specific" symptom scoring "the highest levels of CG [Complicated Grief] in the IRT analysis."[158] In their following recommendation that "hallucination of the deceased" is considered a clinically significant "symptom cluster," Simon et al. reference Boelen et al. for proposing "that these symptoms be candidates for diagnostic criteria."[159] Furthermore, in a pursuit to bolster the relevance of their review of existing studies on "grief hallucinatory phenomena", Castelnovo et al. highlight a gap in the research literature where hallucination is concerned when pointing out how such "have been poorly systematically investigated to date," and adding that much uncertainty remains around the prevalence and definition of the phenomenon.[160]

The aim of Castelnovo et al.'s review is evidently to make up for the lacking empirics, yet its framing instead highlights how the inclusion of the deceased as hallucination in the literature—and the related recommendations that surround PGD—deviates from the requirement (as described in the previous section) for empirical evidence to bolster PGD's clinical validity. One can certainly read the APA's recommendation and similar gestures in

[157] Simon et al., "Informing," 123; Paul A. Boelen et al., "An Item Response Theory Analysis of a Measure of Complicated Grief," *Death Studies*, 33, no. 2 (2009), 102. For a Summary of the APA's DSM-5 recommendations for further study in which hallucination is listed as a potential "associated feature" or symptom see "Navigating the Unknown: Conditions for Further Study From the DSM-V," Concordia University, St. Paul, Resource Center, accessed August 16, 2022, https://online.csp.edu/resources/article/conditions-for-further-study-from-dsmv/.

[158] Simon et al., "Informing,", 123.

[159] Ibid., 118.

[160] Castelnovo et al., "Post-bereavement," 267.

the research literature that foreground hallucination as an e/affective strategy to amp up a sense of urgency around PGD's formation, which seemingly draws leverage from hallucination's longstanding history in clinical psychology and psychiatry as a marker of a compromised perception of reality.[161]

Based on the absence of the empirical support otherwise required of those criteria that now figure centrally in PGD's formal diagnostic definitions, I, however, want to propose that the central position of and focus granted to the deceased and its embodiment as hallucination in particular, can be read as a signal of the deceased's capacity to ignite a fear that rumbles under a biomedically poised field of psychiatry—a fear that in turn warrants a response, which momentarily suspends the empirical rule of inclusion that usually applies. I am, in other words, proposing that the deceased's (empirically speaking) unfounded figuration amidst PGD's diagnostic criteria can be read as a response to and thus signal of the destabilizing effects it has on the assumption that grounds biomedicine—namely, that the life form it, according to Rose, capitalizes on is human.

With this proposition I am also highlighting the limits of the available critical frameworks for engaging with PGD, as they do not themselves consider or provide conceptual tools to consider that grief as psychiatric diagnosis (contrary to its own claim that it is resolving pathology) could be responding to a challenge that is not (only) psychobiological in quality. Rose's critical perspective on biomedicine has been crucial thus far for my analytic elaboration of how it became possible to perceive of grief as a psychiatric diagnosis. Aided by Rose, the argument my first two sections developed—namely, that biomedical causality plays a paramount role in the formation of PGD—notably distinguishes my engagement with grief as diagnosis here from other critical scholarship on the phenomenon.

[161] I have found much inspiration in general and for my thinking about hallucinatory phenomena specifically in the work of Lisa Blackman. See, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (Sage, 2012) and in particular chapter 3 "Mental Touch: Media Technologies and the Problem of Telepathy", 54-76.

In the critical literature that currently exists on PGD, biomedicine is understood to play only a marginal role in its formation. To illustrate, Petersen et al., a group of Danish researchers, end their article on grief as diagnosis by concluding the following:

> As described by David Huron […] biomedically oriented research does occur in the domain of research on grief, for example in the form of heart rhythm. But whether heart rhythm is a valid surrogate outcome to predict grief related illness and death is not known. For the time being we are thus not able to define Prolonged Grief Disorder as illness from a biomedical perspective.[162]

A point to notice here is how the concept of biomedicine Petersen et al. operationalize is confined to denoting an isolated scientific method to estimate causal connection. Rose, however, approaches biomedicine as a "style of thought"—that is, "a particular way of thinking, seeing and practicing […]. A style of thought is not just about a certain form of explanation, about what *it is* to explain, it is also about what *there is* to explain. That is to say, it shapes and establishes the very object of explanation […]."[163] My analysis of Simon et al. above illustrated this point when elaborating how affective experience related to grief morph into empirically supported symptom categories and, in so doing, act as proof that the phenomenon of PGD exists. Based on this "style of thought" approach, Rose argues that biomedicine, via an expanding technological and commodity apparatus, not only invests in but it *produces* the very "vitality at the level of the organism" that it capitalizes on.[164]

With a concept of "vitality" Rose expands on life in a manner so that it breaches human and non-human divides, which he exemplifies with reference to biomedicine's

[162] Anders Petersen et al., "Sorgdiagnosen på (over)arbejde, in *Menneskets Sorg: Et vilkår i forandring,* ed. Anders Petersen and Svend Brinkmann (Klim, 2021), 377, my translation. Having rendered biomedicine in such terms, Petersen et al. reference George W. Engel as exemplary of the "broader psychobiological model of illness" they hold has brought grief as diagnosis into being (ibidem.). It is interesting to notice that, while Petersen et al. align Engel with a broader psychobiological or non-biomedical model, I have shown in section 2.2 how Shear et al., in their efforts to bring home an unequivocally biomedical point that mental dysfunction is caused by brain or neurochemical activity, rely on Engel's analogy to do so. For the reference to Engel in Huron see David Huron, "On the Functions of Sadness and Grief," in *The Functions of Emotions: Why and When Emotions Help Us,* (Springer, 2018), 59-91.

[163] Rose, *The Politics*, 12.

[164] Ibid., 49.

capitalization on "embryoid bodies".[165] Beyond his specific use of the term, vitality is prevalent across disciplines of philosophy and biology where it denotes an understanding of life qua its organic capacity for life.[166] Rose's framework is therefore not only paramount to understanding how grief has morphed into PGD in part due to the biomedical causality that, I proposed above, operates as an enabling model in conventional psychiatry. His critical perspective on biomedicine highlights further how the quality biomedicine is foremost after, and therefore in effect responds to, is life.[167] And, not only human life, but, according to Rose, a vitality that is defined by an organism's biological will to live.

I would argue that what necessarily follows from Rose's observation is that, although the effects of biomedicine may take shape as various normative renderings of contemporary subjectivity, biomedicine's motivation and aim are not necessarily geared toward normativity. This proposition effectively opens up PGD beyond providing only a site to identify changes in societal and cultural attitudes and practices around grief and the expression such take in contemporary norms of living and subjecthood, which is the focus of Petersen et al. above. Based on Rose's expanded concept of life we can instead move to consider if the formation of PGD gives expression to desires that do not have normativity as their aim. If, in other words, biomedicine responds to and is after vitality, one must ask: what other vital agents beyond the bereaved subject could PGD be reacting to?

Where Rose's inference of a concept of vitality points out an alternative route of inquiry, he stops short of fully following through when he chooses to focus his engagement with biomedicine on its effects on 20th century subjectivity.[168] Rose's focus, in other words,

[165] According to Rose, the aim of the triangulation he identifies between science, pharmacology, and biomedicine is ultimately to capitalize on "life itself" (ibidem.).

[166] Freud's concept of drive is one example of this and, Rose argues, biomedicine's "new vitalism" is another (ibidem.).

[167] Ibid., 6, 16. On biomedicine's expansive technologies to manage life see ibid., 52.

[168] Rose justifies his decision to retain subjecthood as his site of analysis with reference inter alia to feminist immanence philosophies that devise an expanded concept of life to undermine or submerge the human subject in it (ibid., 49). Rose is partially attentive to this fact, he points out, when he distinguishes the concept of vitalism that he argues biomedicine invests in from the posthuman vitality seen in scholarship inspired by

indirectly assumes that biomedicine's motivation and aim are normativity. Although he justifies this analytic focus with an urgency to understand the accelerating nature of biomedical technologies, it effectively enacts a foreclosure on his expansive perspective on life by not exploring what, other than human subjectivity, registers as the vitality, which he argues, a biomedical regime responds to. In this manner, his conceptual and analytic framework is as unequipped as is the research literature on PGD itself when it comes to examining what biomedicine is reacting to, inter alia, where the formation of grief as psychiatric diagnosis is concerned.

What I want to entertain in the following is therefore the possibility that, although it effectively takes the shape of a normative recovery of the bereaved subject (i.e., to its regular way of living as per contemporary norms of health and well-being), a biomedical regime is ignited by the non-human vitality or, better still, the anti-social capacity of the deceased, which disrupts the sovereign, humanist concept of life that PGD relies on. In what follows, I turn to Leo Bersani's anti-sovereign concept of life or drive, which resonates conceptually with Rose's use of vitalism in that it elaborates life beyond a humanist concept. Differing from Rose, however, Bersani provides through this concept of drive an alternative reading of homophobia, which, like PGD, seemingly has the normative correction of the subject in mind, but, in fact, Bersani argues, it does not.

Bersani's anti-sovereign configuration of life as drive, in other words, charges a route that allows me to develop an analytic argument for reading PGD as an effort not merely at solving a problem that, as the research literature alleges, is psychobiological in quality, but, I instead propose, an attempt at defining what life is by way of containing it in the sovereign, humanist formula of the bereaved. This closing analysis of PGD in turn illustrates how grief,

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Deleuzian immanence or new materialist feminist philosophy (e.g., Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).). Rose accounts for this difference as a methodological preference, yet the effect of this preference nevertheless is that he does not follow through the line his concept of vitality opens, namely, by considering what other than the human subject biomedicine—being responsive to life forms beyond it—is reacting to.

as my dissertation's approach to 'being through loss' at large argues, illustrates the queer performative capacity of being to alter shape rather than it reflects a static entity with ontologically inherent properties.[169] By undertaking this analytic gesture of release of being from its containment as a sovereign, humanist concept of life, this chapter enables the following chapters 3 and 4 to continue exploring how being takes and alters shape through loss.

2.4 "Hallucination of the deceased's presence": Biomedicine's non-normative desire

I proposed above that Rose's choice of analytic focus on the effects biomedicine has on subjectivity re-enacts a foreclosure on the concept of life that he opens, through vitalism, beyond its human form. Bersani's analysis of homophobia, as it operates in and responds to the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, manages to charge a different route through the queer use it finds in Freud's concept of drive. By foregrounding how Freud's concept of drive entails both pulls toward life and death, Bersani provides an alternative analysis of what is seemingly the normative aim homophobia takes when it directs its aggressions at a gay style of living. Bersani opens his seminal text "Is the Rectum a Grave?" by positing that the homophobic correction, which unfold in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic reflect a dislike for sex. "There is," he writes, "a big secret about sex: most people don't like it."[170]

To make sense of Bersani's use of "dislike", we must first observe how he operates with a psychoanalytic framework that conceptualizes sex not as sexual orientation or practice but as libidinal drive (echoing Rose's use of vitalism), that is, an organistic drive toward life

[169] I loosely reference Barad's formulation of representationalism's belief in ontological determinacy here. See my introduction chapter section 1.3.

[170] Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," *October*, 43 (1987), 197). Bersani comes to this insight about sex via anti-pornographic feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine McKinnon who, he holds, "have given us the reasons why pornography must be multiplied and not abandoned, and, more profoundly, the reason for defending, for cherishing the very sex they find so hateful." Bersani continues their "indictment of sex—their refusal to prettify it, to romanticize it, to maintain that fucking has anything to do with community or love—has had the immensely desirable effect of publicizing, of lucidly laying out for us, the inestimable value of sex as—at least in a certain of its ineradicable aspects—anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving." (ibid., 215).

but, importantly, Bersani highlights, also toward death. With his opening proposition Bersani reframes the issue of sex and sexuality as it has been taken up through the prism of HIV/AIDS and circled through homophobic ideation of the kind of sex—and anal in particular—that has come to embody a gay lifestyle that warrants society-wide condemnation and even lethal retaliation.[171] Having thus rerouted a more conventional analysis of homophobia from a moralizing discourse about sexuality, Bersani argues that sex unleashes violence because it agitates an existential fear that subtends the very structure that allows a phallogocentric societal or symbolic order to reproduce itself. This is the "dislike" sex generates.

According to Bersani, homosexual sex is, in other words, not subject to homophobic correction because it does not adapt to societal norms of sexuality. It is subject to such because sex in its non-reproductive, "insatiable, unstoppable" form defies a phallogocentric order that symbolically and literally reproduces itself by eradicating life drive into a human form—namely, what Bersani calls a "proud subject."[172] Bersani holds further that the mistake a reading of homophobia as normative correction makes is in its failure to grasp how what is at stake in the societal attack on sex is actually life and, in that, a concern over what it *is*. As an initial observation, this is immensely useful for my reading of PGD and my proposition that, if we follow through with an expanded concept of life or the vitality Rose argues biomedicine responds to, then we must consider that the aim of its efforts to resolve PGD may not (only) be the bereaved subject's return to a normal way of living.

Bersani moves on to provide an alternative definition of sex as "the value of powerlessness in both men and women. I don't mean the value of gentleness, or

[171] Although Bersani contests the assumption in both societal attacks on a "gay lifestyle" as well as in emancipatory activist and scholarly push-back against such, that the aim of homophobia is the correction of the "abomination" normative society has made homosexuality out to be, he does acknowledge still the necessity to take some form of position on the violent implications of sex being rendered in terms of 'gay' sexuality given the historic and, at the time, contemporary role this imaginary plays in prevailing structures of power (ibid., 216).

[172] ibid., 222.

nonaggressiveness, or even of passivity, but rather of a more radical disintegration and humiliation of the self."[173] He goes then to elaborate this value of sex in the Freudian sense of jouissance, libidinal drive. Sex, and specifically its non-reproductive variations (e.g., gay and particularly anal sex) denotes, according to Bersani, life where such reaches thresholds of intensities that have "the organization of the self […] momentarily disturbed by sensations or affective processes."[174] Bersani adds (in passing with reference to Freud's "reluctant speculation" on sexual pleasure) that life thus configured is informed as much or foremost by a drive to death.[175] A concept of death here should be understood as an anti-sovereign or anti-social force that is basically always at odds with or undoes the "proud subject", which Bersani highlights is the reproductive formulation of life on which a phallogocentric order relies.[176]

When Bersani entangles life and death in the concept of drive he ultimately challenges the life/death divide that grants the concept of the human subject its authority to define what life is.[177] Embodying, as Bersani writes, "the terrifying appeal of a loss of the ego, of a self-debasement,"[178] death denotes an anti-social force of life that undoes the proud, that is, sovereign subject a phallogocentric order demands it to assume. This entanglement of death with life *as* drive is, in other words, the force a "phallogocentric" order foremost labors to contain, and even erase, when it insists that a sovereign, humanist subject denotes what life *is*. As noted, Bersani and Rose briefly overlap where they invoke vitalism as an expansive alternative register to a humanist concept of life—Bersani with reference to Freud's drive

[173] Ibid., 216–7.
[174] Ibid., 217.
[175] Ibid., 220.
[176] Bersani writes: "Freud keeps returning to a line of speculation in which the opposition between pleasure and pain becomes irrelevant, in which the sexual emerges as the jouissance of exploded limits, as the ecstatic suffering into which the human organism momentarily plunges when it is 'pressed' beyond a certain threshold of endurance." (ibid., 217)
[177] By entangling a drive for life with one toward death, Bersani therefore not only challenges a sovereign, humanist concept of life but also renders drive a force that does not align with, indeed it collapses, the dualist figuration of death against which a western, humanist life is conventionally defined.
[178] Ibid., 220. According to Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, Leo Bersani's work is exemplary of what they identify as the "anti-social thesis" or the "anti-sovereign" strain of queer theory. ("Reading, Sex," 627). Berlant and Edelman summarize anti-sovereignty as: "[t]he claim that animated Bersani's text [which] viewed the widespread 'dislike' of sex, by which he meant a visceral aversion to it, as an identity-based defense against what he characterized as 'self-dismissal' or the 'self-shattering' of *jouissance*." (ibid., 626)).

concept, and Rose when he formulates biomedicine's investment in a "new vitalism" on the basis of a longer vitalist tradition.[179]

As above noted, Rose's analysis of biomedicine's investment in life, however, stops short at following through on this expansive perspective due to his interest in mooring biomedicine's normative effects on 21st century subjectivity. As I delineate above Bersani's analysis of homophobia instead takes a scene of normative correction to suggest that such [correction] may be expressing a different non-normative or anti-social desire.[180] I take inspiration from the conceptual and analytic shifts Bersani makes here to evolve my engagement with PGD beyond a more conventional critical analysis of its normative effects on subjectivity, which in this case takes the form of the bereaved subject as a site to examine the advancing technologies of power.[181] Aided by Bersani, I will in closing elaborate how PGD can be seen instead as ignited by, and thus as testament to, the non-sovereign or anti-social capacity of the deceased.

Despite lack of empirics to support its inclusion, the deceased is located centrally in PGD's symptom profile. I will elaborate my reading of *why* by focusing on two principal ways in which the research literature on PGD and its official definitions attempt to contain or even erase the deceased. First, by way of a negative rendering of the deceased's anti-sovereign form of life, that is, where it appears as hallucination, and, secondly, its related capacity to unravel life beyond its sovereign form, that is, where the deceased appears as a cause of undesirable effects detected and corrected on the bereaved subject respectively. The attempt to inhibit its anti-sovereign life form is evident where the deceased is rendered as hallucination in arguments *for* its inclusion in the clinical criteria of PGD. As above detailed,

[179] *The Politics*, 49.
[180] See footnote 179.
[181] You might say that rather than undertaking an analysis of biopower, that is, of how power takes it hold in and works through life, my analysis onwards touches the trapdoor of biopower, that is, it notes on how in order to becomes subject to normative correction, life has to take a form that invites/enables such normative correction.

the APA's recommendation that accompanied the removal of BE from the DSM-5 highlighted a number of symptomatic features that would support PGD, one among them "hallucination of the deceased's presence (i.e., seeing the deceased sitting in his or her favourite chair)."[182] Hallucination here denotes a sensory experience of the presence of the deceased, such as seeing or feeling them.

The deceased's presence in the form of hallucination thus differs from the bereaved subject's attachment to the deceased that is otherwise described in the literature and official definitions of PGD, that is, as a strong longing or yearning for them.[183] Notably, therefore, in their overview of studies on "post-bereavement hallucinatory experiences", Castelnovo et al. observe how available research makes it "plausible to hypothesize that a proportion of true hallucinations in the early phases of bereavement actually fall into the diagnostic category of 'depressive episode with psychotic symptoms.'"[184] Although Castelnovo et al. are out to make a specific point about diagnostic categorization their observation is helpful first of all for clarifying how hallucination as a phenomenon is clinically associated with psychosis. In fact, hallucination is the primary diagnostic criteria of psychosis, defined in the DSM as "impaired reality testing."[185] In this manner hallucination's presence in the context of PGD makes a clear evaluation of the phenomenon of the deceased as not real. The sensory experience of the deceased (e.g., "seeing the deceased sitting in his or her favourite chair")[186] is, in other words, understood as fantasized or imagined.

Bersani's concept of death constitutes an anti-sovereign force that collapses the life/death divide against which human life is conventionally defined. Departing from here we can approach the literature on PGD's efforts to render the deceased as hallucination, that is, as

[182] See footnote 158.
[183] See above.
[184] Castelnovo et al., "Post-bereavement," 269.
[185] David B. Arciniegas, "Psychosis, Continuum: Lifelong Learning in Neurology," *Behavioral Neurology and Neuropsychiatry*, 21, no. 3 (2015), 716.
[186] See footnote 158.

fantasized and not real, as a policing of the life/death divide the experienced presence of the deceased obscures. In a sub-section of their review titled “Gender and age difference” Castelnovo et al. highlight how, despite “contradictory results,” several studies have found a correlation between women, and in particular elderly widows, and the occurrence of hallucination.[187] This connection of hallucination to women and in particular elderly women seems to draw indirect leverage from gendered and ageist notions of over-emotionality to render hallucination of the deceased a signal of an impaired reality concept and a distorted ability to separate what *is* from what is not.

The implication here is that if only the felt and sensed experience of the deceased were subject to rational and empirical testing then this phenomenon would be correctly understood and evaluated by the bereaved subject as imagined and not real. Based on the activity the deceased as hallucination stirs in the literature on PGD, we might reevaluate its inclusion in the symptomatic profile of PGD despite of lacking empirical support. The policing the biomedically poised psychiatric model of grief undertakes of the boundary between the real and the unreal is activated by the anti-sovereign capacity of the deceased as hallucination to disturb the life/death divide, which, Bersani helps us to see, a sovereign, humanist concept of life relies on.

Having acknowledged the deceased’s capacity to destabilize a sovereign concept of life we can notice further how the literature on PGD seeks to re-stabilize it by way of rendering the deceased’s effects on the bereaved subject as negative with the aim of eradicating such. This is to say that the anti-sovereign capacity of the deceased does not end at the disturbance it causes to the life/death divide, which gives the humanist, sovereign subject authority to define life. Prigerson et al. relay how the DSM-5-TR entry on PGD highlights the primary and necessary criteria for a diagnosis as, inter alia, “intense

[187] Castelnovo et al., "Post-bereavement,” 269.

yearning/longing for the deceased person" and "[p]reoccupation with thoughts or memories of the deceased person".[188] While the negative quality of this is not immediately evident here, the deceased is rendered as the direct cause of a list of undesirable effects on the bereaved subject.

The reparative rationale that PGD must be resolved in order for the bereaved to return to a normal and functioning way of living, however, emerges in this connection between the deceased and undesirable or prolonged consequences of grief, which is to say that its negative quality is indirectly signaled in the alleged necessary detachment of the bereaved from a connection to the deceased who causes such effects. This rationale is amplified where the research literature on grief as diagnosis highlights potential consequences associated with mortality,[189] and Boelen et al. further stress the importance of resolving these impacts when they write that "[r]ecovery hinges on [the bereaved's] ability to incorporate their loss into a positive view of self and life and to continue (or restore) activities that are satisfying and meaningful."[190]

In addition to framing "recovery" from grief as more of a necessity than an option, this formulation also makes tangible a primary concern in the research literature with how a continued attachment to the deceased will leave the bereaved suffering from negative or lowered "feeling states."[191] ICD-11's entry on PGD too centralizes this issue when it highlights how: "intense emotional pain […] sadness, guild, anger, denial, blame, […] an

[188] Prigerson et al., "Validation," 97.

[189] Shear et al. for example stress how "Another study assessed cardiovascular and immune functioning at 2 weeks and 6 months post-loss in bereaved relatives (average age 65) of patients who died in an ICU. The authors found changes in blood pressure, heart rate, sleep, neuroendocrine and immune functioning […]. Bereavement also appears to increase risk for mortality in the early period after the event. In a large primary care database in the United Kingdom, bereavement was associated with increased hazard of mortality […]." (Shear et al., "Bereavement," 3). Others likewise note how the bereaved subject's proximity seeking to the deceased effectuates an "estrangement from others" (Simon et al., "Informing," 119) and even "wishes to die or suicidal behaviour." (Shear et al., "Complicated," 105-6)

[190] Boelen et al., "Personal Goals and Prolonged Grief Disorder Symptoms," *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy,* 18, no. 6 (2011), 439. The main goal of this study is "to enhance knowledge about future directed thinking in grief by examining goals (i.e., positive states that the person wishes to accomplish or attain or negative states he or she wishes to avoid […]) of bereaved people and their associations with PGD symptom severity." (ibidem)

[191] Ibid., 443.

inability to experience positive mood, emotional numbness, and difficulty engaging with social or other activities" [192] are met with anxiety and viewed as a threat to the "positive view of […] life" Boelen et al. put in place as the horizon of recovery.[193]

Boelen et al. in particular stress how successful recovery is contingent on getting the bereaved to connect to positive feelings and to identify and aim toward a future framed in positive or successful terms when related to "work/education and close relationships […] goals."[194] My analysis of hallucination above foregrounded the deceased's anti-sovereign capacity to destabilize the life/death divide that a sovereign, humanist concept of life relies on. Based on the connection I highlighted in that context between life/death and real/unreal (as crystalized by PGD's response to and rendering of the deceased as hallucination) we can notice how positive feelings are utilized in connection to a recovery rationale in a manner that hinges a concept of futurity on an accurate understanding of what is real, as against a delusional or imagined connection to the deceased that allegedly sources negative emotions in the bereaved subject, which indirectly therefore signal the absence of future.[195]

Having learnt from Bersani that the question of what life *is* is at stake in the normative correction of ways of living, we can appreciate how a correction of negative emotion in the bereaved amounts to an effort at bolstering the sovereign boundaries of life it is expected to embody. This effort illustrates how the deceased's anti-sovereign capacity continues to manifest, here on the bereaved in how it slips and slides from what is considered a normal level of life energy, signaled by the focus in the literature and definitions of PGD on keeping the bereaved on track for a positive future and safely connecting to those elements, which

[192] ICD-11, "6B42 Prolonged."
[193] "Personal Goals," 439.
[194] Ibid, 443.
[195] The futurity I point to here is one that seeks to reinforce a metaphysical divide between life and death by hinging the very possibility of life, as it envisions it through said divide, onto linear progressive time ahead of the present. By comparison, this concept of future stands distinguished from the version of the term José Esteban Muñoz operationalizes as a way to open up the here and now in resolutely queer gestures that challenge those norms that limit what can be in and be done with the present (José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, (New York University Press, 2009.).

Boelen et al. delineate as "work/education and close relationships […] goals",[196] that keep the bereaved leveled at a 'normal' amount of energy.

When the literature on PGD renders the continued connection between the deceased and the bereaved in negative terms and tries to correct its alleged negative effects by delineating the bereaved's route of recovery in the direction of positive, that is, real horizons and attachments, it not only reveals the, perhaps unsurprising, fact that normalcy is normalized as a positive outlook and attitude.[197] A biomedically poised psychiatric model of grief further reveals its reliance on a humanist, sovereign subject. What, in other words, enables and supports PGD's insistence that the problem it is out to solve is solely psychobiological in nature is the humanist, sovereign concept of life it, as I have sought to illustrate, labors hard to stabilize and bolster in the face of the destabilizing effects of the anti-sovereign capacity of the deceased.

The deceased's rendering in negative terms, that is, as hallucination that equates the non-real and as undesirable effects detected on the bereaved subject respectively, thus illustrate the anti-sovereign capacity of the deceased and how it shows us that a humanist concept of life is an afterthought, indeed, as Bersani suggests, a model to contain a life drive that is always more than or different from its sovereign figuration. To Bersani, however, anti-sovereignty is illustrated in sex's excessiveness (i.e., its "insatiable, unstoppable" quality),[198] which he utilizes as an explosive destructiveness that he aims at normative society so as to ultimately redress the lethal aggression it directs at people living with and dying from HIV and AIDS.

If, however, we follow their formulations of the 'problem' of PGD, the research literature and the official definitions of grief as diagnosis add that life need not be excessive to

[196] Ibid, 443.

[197] In introduction, I highlight critical feminist scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Ann Cvetkovich and Lauren Berlant who each in their distinct ways identify the function of happiness and wellbeing in Western late capitalist imaginaries of living and the good life.

[198] "Is the Rectum," 222.

be deemed unacceptable and thus to ignite corrective response. Where the deceased's anti-sovereign capacity is made to manifest as negative effects on the bereaved, who drifts and slips from under its 'normal' or 'healthy' level of life energy, we might add that the problem of life, as seen from the perspective of the psychiatric model of grief, is not that it is too much (i.e., excessive as in Bersani's argument) but that it is too little, insufficient and too vague.

Conclusion

Within the structure of the dissertation as a whole, this chapter plays a central role by being the first to conceptually ground and analytically elaborate my main hypothesis that in grief the phenomenon of being displays its queer performative ability to shift and alter shape. I invoke a psychoanalytic framework to this end and more specifically Bersani's queer use of a Freudian concept of drive, which brings my engagement with the research literature and formal definitions of PGD beyond a more critically dismissive or punitive engagement with the broader Western tendency toward pathologizing. This tendency manifests in the context of grief where, as I originally argue, the formation of PGD is enabled by a causal biomedical bind that exists already in the field of conventional psychiatric pathology to afford symptomatology clinical validity by connecting it to biological cause.

The primary intention of this chapter, however, has been to foreground what else we might learn from PGD besides how those biomedical and neuroscientific technologies that extend through it add grief as psychiatric diagnosis to the pile of existing sites at which normative figurations of subjecthood take form. This point has been significantly and extensively highlighted by critical scholars that pertain in other contexts to similar connections to those that characterize PGD, namely, the subject as an embodiment of late capitalist ideations of wellbeing and happiness. Dislodging from this mode of engagement via Bersani's framework of anti-sovereignty, I have foregrounded how the phenomenon of the

deceased illustrates to us that a biomedically poised psychiatric model of grief amounts to an effort at containing life in a sovereign, humanist form.

In so doing, my analysis has illustrated the continued relevance and usefulness of psychoanalysis at a moment when, as this chapter highlights, this perspective is marginalized from the field of psychiatry by an increasingly prevalent biomedical style of thought and where the kind of analytic potency Bersani showcases is also absent from currently available critical frameworks for reckoning with biomedicine. What Bersani's use of a Freudian concept of drive, in other words, offers is an extended frame through which to probe the formation of grief as diagnosis and, based on my analysis I can tentatively project, to examine reparative activities within a broader biomedically informed domain of psychiatry.

By shifting to and following through on an open-ended concept of life, a queer framework of anti-sovereignty, in other words, allows us to notice how normative corrective efforts may not have normativity as their aim. This shift has aided my argument that a biomedically poised psychiatric model of grief's reparative rationale reveals its dependency on a sovereign and humanist definition of life. Along this line, and more intriguingly, we can acknowledge that efforts to restore the bereaved subject to its alleged normal way of living express a range of anxieties about what life is; about where it begins and where it ends; about how to deal with its existential and ontological openness that is illustrated in my analysis of the deceased's rendering as hallucination and PGD's response to its effects on the bereaved subject.

Finally, this chapter's engagement with PGD illustrates how a framework of 'being through loss' allows us to do more with a tendency to pathologize and the reparative rationale that follows, in the case of PGD in the form of biomedical causality, to afford it legitimacy. 'Being through loss' teaches us important things about the open and organic qualities of being as well as it sharpens our understanding of how and why strategies of containment and

erasure (of such qualities) emerge in logics of repair and may present like solutions to a problem that, I have argued here, is not only psychobiological in character. Resting on this chapter's conceptual and analytic opening of life, the following chapters will launch into autobiographical literature in a continued pursuit to explore how being takes and alters shape through loss.

3 An Ethics of the Lost Other's Being: *Carl's Book*

When Death Takes Something From You Give It Back: Carl's Book (*Har døden taget noget fra dig så giv det tilbage: Carls bog*)[199] was published in 2017. Danish author and poet Naja Marie Aidt's autobiographical and poetic text details the death of her adult son Carl and her following experience of grief. *Carl's Book* received a great amount of public and media attention and praise even before it was officially released. Some of this attention likely connects to Aidt's well-established and prolific presence in Danish literature, debuting in 1991 with a collection of poetry entitled *Så længe jeg er ung (As long as I am young*).[200] Aidt's work is mandatory reading in Danish high school where I too read her 2006-essay collection *Bavian* (*Baboon*), serving as a lesson in the use of minimalist style and a thematic focus on the quotidian in early 2000s Danish literature.[201]

Aidt's oeuvre exhibits a commitment to subjective poetics and intimate experience,[202] which resonates with the highly personal character of *Carl's Book.* Her account of loss, however, was engulfed in public attention even before its release in large part due to its forceful thematic resonance with the debate about grief that was growing in Denmark at the time in anticipation of grief's entry as diagnosis into the ICD-11.[203] Thus surfacing amidst the cultural production this debate generated Aidt is, according to literary scholar and critic Erik Skyum-Nielsen, centrally located in—if not an initiator of—"a wave of grief literature [that] has in the last years rolled over us."[204] This body of grief literature appeared and grew in the

[199] Naja Marie Aidt, *When Death Takes Something From You Give It Back: Carl's Book,* trans. Denise Newman (Quercus Editions, 2019). Hereafter *Carl's Book.*

[200] Naja Marie Aidt, *Så længe jeg er ung,* (Gyldendal, 1991).

[201] Naja Marie Aidt. *Baboon*, trans. Denise Newman (Two Lines Press, 2014).

[202] Aidt is widely credited with an ability to "portray human fates in the space of tension between individual emotion and social relations". ("Forfatter: Naja Marie Aidt," Litteratursiden, accessed August 15, 2022, https://litteratursiden.dk/forfattere/naja-marie-aidt).

[203] In 2015 *The National Center for Grief (Det Nationale Sorgcenter)* announced that "complicated grief" was expected to enter the forthcoming ICD-11. "Børn, Unge og Sorg "Forbered Danmark på sorg som diagnose"," Det Nationale Sorg Center, accessed August 15, 2022, https://sorgcenter.dk/2015/08/28/boern-unge-sorg-forbered-danmark-paa-sorg-som-diagnose/.

[204] Erik Skyum-Nielsen, "I 2017 tog Naja Marie Aidt hul på sorglitteraturen og satte ord på undtagelsestilstanden, hvor intet almindeligt giver genlyd," *Information,* December 23, 2019,

context of the institutionalization of grief as psychiatric diagnosis in Danish society. An institutionalization, that is partly visible with the presence and increasing participation in public debate of organizations such as *The National Center for Grief* (*Det Nationale Center for Sorg*) whose slogan reads "Grief should not ruin life: We are part of the solution when illness or grief is ruining life."[205]

This tagline mirrors the reparative logic I highlight in chapter 2, where grief as psychiatric diagnosis projects a healthy and happy subject through a route of recovery from PGD. It also offers a glimpse into a fast-eroding welfare state's socioeconomic investment in the wellbeing of its citizens. In response to a psychiatric model of grief, literary critics, reviewers, journalists, and other public actors have gone to great lengths to emphasize the importance of accounts such as Aidt's that acknowledge and *stay with* the emotional and psychological morass of loss rather than subscribe to a logic of overcoming.[206] As journalist and author Karen Syberg summarizes in her article for the national Danish newspaper *Information*: "[t]he first thing one wants to say, when one has read Naja Marie Aidt's book, is thank you! Thank you for having given the horror a language."[207] The environment in which *Carl's Book* was published was, in other words, welcoming of and receptive to personal accounts of loss, seeing them as offering a challenge, even antidote, to a generalizing medical approach.

This chapter is foremost rooted in my understanding that, with *Carl's Book,* Aidt makes a forceful argument for the continued existence of her child after the moment of his death. However, as my analytic engagement with the reception of *Carl's Book* in Danish

https://www.information.dk/kultur/2019/12/2017-tog-naja-marie-aidt-hul-paa-sorglitteraturen-satte-ord-paa-undtagelsestilstanden-intet-almindeligt-giver-genlyd.

[205] "Sorg må ikke ødelægge livet: Vi er en del af løsningen, når sygdom og sorg risikerer at ødelægge livet," Det Nationale Sorgcenter, accessed August 15, 2022, https://sorgcenter.dk.

[206] I am riffing on Donna Haraway's notion of "staying with the trouble", which denotes a feminist theoretical, methodological and political commitment to living and dying together with companion species as a way to build more livable futures on a damaged earth. Haraway, Donna, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016).

[207] Karen Syberg, "Tak for at rædslen har fået et sprog," *Information*, March 25, 2017, https://www.information.dk/kultur/anmeldelse/2017/03/tak-raedslen-faaet-sprog?lst_cntrb.

media and review commentary shall illustrate, Aidt's account of loss has mostly managed to raise questions about the author herself —about what grief does to a mother and how a poet would depict such an experience. By ultimately arguing that Aidt's mode of relating to Carl otherwise urges us to devise tools to acknowledge the lost other's being, this chapter identifies and challenges the metaphysical presupposition I propose subtends both vernacular and expert models of relating to loss and, in so doing, illustrates how loss asks us to alter and widen the frameworks that informs our ethics, that is, the kind of concerns grief raises and the subjects they take as their aim.

I open this chapter by making broader observations on the contents and structure of *Carl's Book* and then hone in on the literary style that Aidt utilizes to express her personal experience of grief. Based on this reading, I propose that Aidt's account of loss, and in particular her enactment of emotional and bodily intensities to express her grief experience, raises important questions about the unintentional or indirect consequences of relaying traumatic experience as well as the in/ability of available expert and mainstream models of grief to respond to such [experience]. I then move to situate and examine these questions in the context of the reception of *Carl's Book* in Danish media, proposing that Aidt's style of expression activates a metaphysical presupposition that informs both expert and vernacular responses to a scene of loss, resulting in a focus on and concern for the mourning subject only.

Through analytical engagement with Freud's psychoanalytic approach to mourning and the contemporary psychiatric model of grief, I identify this metaphysical presupposition as a 'schema of the real' that reproduces an already existing equation between life/death and real/unreal in the relationship between the mourning subject and the lost object—rendering the latter un-real and, as a consequence, undeserving of the kind of concerns extended to the mourning subject. This observation returns me to Aidt's writing to explore how we might

begin to acknowledge the lost other as a being and what consequences this would have for imagining an alternative ethic of loss.

In enacting a feminist relational perspective, and Bracha L. Ettinger's notion of the "feminine matrixial" specifically, I thus argue that, if acknowledged, the lost other's being widens and complicates the ethical concerns loss unearths beyond a focus on how to respond to the bereaved subject.[208] Where chapter 2 argued that a biomedically poised psychiatric model tries to contain the anti-sovereign capacity of the deceased in the sovereign, humanist form of life its reparative logic, through these anxious efforts, reveals its reliance on, chapter 3 picks up at the conceptual and analytic opening of being my use of queer psychoanalysis enabled by setting out to examine the ethical consequences that follow from acknowledging being beyond a sovereign, humanist model.

3.1 "I carry him again inside my body": Expressing loss

As she opens *Carl's Book,* Aidt also immediately suspends readers in an air of anticipation, warning that something is about to happen, yet, keeping what that something is out of view:

> I raise my glass to my eldest son. His pregnant wife and their daughter are sleeping above us. Outside, the March night is cold and clear. 'To life!' I say as the glasses clink with a delicate and pleasing sound. My mother says something to the dog. Then the phone rings. We don't answer. *Who would be calling so late on a Saturday evening?*[209]

This is a scene of absolute domestic bliss; a late evening family get-together, glasses touch, calmness prevails as a mother and children sleep upstairs and a dog is instructed to find rest. There is no worry in sight. Readers are introduced to the mother of the "narrating I"[210], and they learn, too, that the latter has more sons than the adult one whose wife and children

[208] Birgit Kaiser, and Kathrin Thiele, "If You Do Well, Carry! The Difference of the Humane: An Interview with Bracha L. Ettinger," *PhiloSOPHIA,* 8, no. 1 (2018).

[209] Aidt, *Carl's Book,* 11.

[210] I use the terminology Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson provide for reading autobiography or life narrative, that is, genres defined by the so-called "narrating I" being the author of the book. Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 8.

are sleeping upstairs. Later, Aidt confirms: "*Frederik, Carl Emil, Johan, Zakarias. /* I have four sons. / Do you have four sons? / Yes."[211] This scene not only opens but also closes *Carl's Book* after many returns, each of which further unravels it from blissful domesticity to a panicky car racing on the highway, to the hospital, and lastly to the room where Aidt's adult child Carl is declared brain dead and respiratory machines are turned off.

One reviewer at an online Danish literary site (*Litteratursiden*) fittingly observes that the structure of *Carl's Book,* its "movement like the mode of thinking […] is circular."[212] What this reviewer does not note, however, is how a specific literary style begins to take shape in this unravelling circularity, wherein Aidt enacts emotional and bodily intensities as means to express an inexpressible event of loss and experience of grief.[213] Illustratively, when the phone is eventually answered in the second return of the opening scene confusion and panic ensue alongside further basic introductions: *"I say: What are you saying? What is it you're saying? I become furious. I don't recognize the voice. I ask: Who's speaking? He says: It is Martin, your ex-husband. His voice is cold, mechanical. My eldest son begins to cry, he gets up and the chair tips over. I scream WHAT IS IT YOU'RE SAYING? WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? […] Martin says: It's Carl. / He's fallen out of the window."*[214]

Aidt's ex-husband, Martin, is the parent of Carl and Frederik, and he calls here to relay how *"Carl has fallen out of the window."* Before this phone call takes place, readers have also learned that on this clear cold night in March, Aidt and Martin's son Carl has jumped out of his apartment window and will eventually die from injuries sustained from the fall. Days before its release, the national *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* (*Danmarks*

[211] Aidt, *Carl's Book,* 15. Carl Emil is Carl's full name, but Aidt predominantly uses Carl throughout the text and therefore so do I.

[212] Lise Vandborg, "Har døden taget noget fra dig så giv det tilbage af Naja Marie Aidt," *Litteratursiden*, 24 March 2017, http://litteratursiden.dk/anmeldelser/har-doden-taget-noget-fra-dig-sa-giv-det-tilbage-af-naja-marie-aidt. This passage returns each time extended on p. 12, 23, 40, 58-9, 71, 78, 90, 112, 120, 134, 154.

[213] I use the term "style" in accordance with its definition as "a distinctive manner of expression (as in writing or speech)," Merriam Webster, accessed August 15, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/style.

[214] Aidt, *Carl's Book*, 38-9.

Radio) added to an already aired radio feature on *Carl's book* a brief article in its online news section titled "Carl jumped into death from the fourth floor— now his mother creates poetry about the loss and the grief."[215] Later in this news segment, Aidt gets to recount in her own words how "Carl took mushrooms and had a so-called bad trip. He became psychotic and jumped out of the window from the fourth floor, still naked after having taken a shower."[216]

The lethal outcome of this event is first made apparent at the level of the text when a "*young body in the coffin*" emerges through a row of oppositions to Aidt's own "warm, living mouth" that "kissed your hand, and your hand was so cold that the coldness crept up into my face, my head, my skull. Nothing colder exists in the world. Not ice, snow."[217] Aidt here curates a situation in which readers are tasked with facing the impossible fact with which she herself had to grapple—gathering from fragmented conversation with people in shock and, in this scene, from the bodily parts that are traced into view, that this "colder" than "ice, snow" body, this "nothing colder in the world" hand belong to "*my second eldest son.*"[218] The textual unfolding of this confrontation generates a sense of proximity to deeply personal events that quickly feels characteristic of *Carl's Book.*

Where the phone call with Martin presses itself on readers by using all capitals to produce a visual expression that corresponds to its high emotional intensity, *Carl's Book* as a whole assumes an imposing and immersive quality that feels intentionally confronting. Aidt, in other words, appears to want the experience of loss to crash onto readers with the mercilessness and relentlessness it does on her, and she brings about this sense of proximity and intensity by continuously foregrounding emotion and bodily sensation. This literary style of expression also takes the form of a waning and indeed, at times, complete absence of a

[215] Diana Bach, "Carl sprang i døden fra fjerde sal - nu skaber hans mor poesi om tabet og sorgen." *Danmarks Radio Bøger*, March 21, 2017, https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/kultur/boeger/carl-sprang-i-doeden-fra-fjerde-sal-nu-skaber-hans-mor-poesi-om-tabet-og.

[216] Ibidem., my translation.

[217] Aidt, *Carl's Book,* 17-18.

[218] Ibid., 14.

conventional narrative thread, as the text slips in an out of linguistic coherence where for example Aidt writes:

> I THINK WITH CONTEMPT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO WRITE ABOUT DEATH AS THOUGH FLIRTING WITH DEATH PAINTING DEATH DEATH WALKS BESIDE US IT IS REAL IT IS NOT CALLIGRAPHY NOT A FUCKING IMAGINED SUFFERING IT IS REAL IT IS A WALL IT MAKES ME FURIOUS MY SORROW MAKES ME FURIOUS FUL OF HATE I AM FUROUS OVER BEING ISOLATED IN MY SORROW I HATE ART I HATE EVERYTHING I'VE WRITTEN ABOUT DEATH IN THE PAST OFTEN I STAY IN THE APARTMENT THE WHOLE DAY I SIT IN THE DARK I SIT IN THE DARK I DON'T READ I DON'T WRITE I DON'T LISTEN TO MUSIC.[219]

Here, Aidt describes grief as isolating, infuriating, incapacitating, and hate-inducing not only where it takes the shape as contempt for others who are "FLIRTING WITH DEATH", but also when it turns on herself: "I HATE ART I HATE EVERYTHING I'VE WRITTEN." Aidt employs the visual presentation of text as much as she does syntax to express the intensity of her grief, and together these techniques literally shout and cascade her experience onto readers. All capitals and no breaks, among other things, convey shock and catastrophic magnitude, which, alongside what this passage explicitly articulates, relay entirely overwhelming emotional and bodily experiences. Utilizing this style of expression, Aidt highlights a particular point of focus in *Carl's Book* that she also foregrounds in conversation about it. In a talk, set in the context of the Danish *Louisiana Museum of Modern Art,* Aidt elaborates:

> For a long time [after Carl's death] I couldn't do anything. And I certainly couldn't write. […] Something happens to you when you experience great trauma. […] Something happens cognitively with the brain's ability to function. […] I couldn't read. […] And I thought that everything I read was shit. I became so aggressive from reading. I flung books to the floor. You're enraged in your grief.[220]

[219] Ibid., 39-40.

[220] "Naja Marie Aidt Interview: What You Don't Want to Hear," Louisiana Channel: Videos on the arts, featuring the artists, accessed August 15, 2022, https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/naja-marie-aidt-what-you-dont-want-hear.

Aidt here stresses trauma's incapacitating then infuriating effects. In so doing, she highlights the place of rage and despair in grief and, importantly, how they become alternative tools to convey this experience, which she also stresses is taxing, indeed, at times impossible to comprehend and communicate.

What takes shape in these passages that seek to narrate grief is a literary style whose reliance on emotional and bodily intensities as means of expression marks the crisis loss creates in representation by trying to express the inexpressible as it signals insistently, even aggressively, across the cleft grief places between traumatic experience and its articulation. Aidt highlights this crisis in *Carl's Book* in inherently contradictory formulations such as "I cannot form a sentence / My language is all dried up."[221] The point to stress about Aidt's literary style is that, while I do not doubt that it attempts in earnest to convey Aidt's experience, it also brings about other effects than the explicit intention to forcefully relay her grief experience to readers. One scene stands for me as most illustrative of such effects. It unfolds as follows:

> It is a very physical feeling: / He is inside me. / He is inside my body. / I bear his spirit in my body. / I bear him again inside my body. / As when he was in my womb. / But now I bear *his entire life*. / I bear your entire life.[222]

What takes place here is a gesture of incorporation to momentarily suggest that Carl is best protected in the womb of his mother. Not despite but because Aidt is moved to act through love, this gesture is surrounded by an air of punishment and it suggests further that in grief a delayed preventive response can appear whose urge to care and surge to protect can take the form of a scolding of even raging against the deceased: 'why did you not take better care; how could you let this happen to yourself?,' this gesture seems to plead. As if put on house arrest to ponder some misbehavior, Carl is returned to the place where Aidt trusts him

[221] Aidt, *Carl's Book*, 14.

[222] ibid., 135. My direct translation from Danish: It is a very physical feeling: / He is inside me. / He is inside my body. / I carry his being in my body. / I carry him again inside my body. / Like when he was in my womb. / But now it is his entire life, I carry. / I carry your entire life.

to be safe: the womb. I relate personally to the delayed desire to protect I read in Aidt's return of Carl to her womb, and also to the desperation and rage that speak both to helplessness and shock over a singular event of death. Perhaps, this is why, since first encountering this scene, I have still felt unease with the womb-scape Aidt evokes.

Initially, this unease seemed to have to do with how Aidt, in understandable delayed fear response and protection, seemingly encapsulates and so holds Carl captive inside of her. A womb, however, is not an impenetrable container and neither is a body sealed. On the contrary, as Sophie Lewis writes in her feminist communist account of reproduction: "the active cells of pregnancy 'rampage' (unless aggressively contained) through every tissue they touch. […] Rather than simply interfacing with the gestator's biology through a limited filter, or contenting itself with freely proffered secretions, this placenta 'digests' its way into its host's arteries, securing full access to most tissues."[223]

Following Lewis, one should rather say that a womb-scape is exemplary of how bodies permeate each other in varying degrees of aggression that pose multiple threats to both child and gestator. From this perspective of mutual permeability, the question Aidt's gesture of incorporation invites us to consider is not so much who rightfully permeates or encapsulates whom on the basis of potential threats. Aidt's gesture of incorporation, I suggest, should be read as illustrative of how love and care complicate rather than simplify relationality. Aidt acknowledges this difficulty when, on a number of occasions, she troubles the convention that mothering a child is per definition a setup devoid of harm:

> I am / hard on / myself / I torment / myself / it's your / mother / speaking, was / I hard / on you / did I / torment / you? […] I torment my- / self with blame / and fling myself / to the floor / screaming / I spit on astrology / but torment / myself with blame / fling myself / to the floor / screaming / I force myself to read your [Carl's] horoscope torment myself with your horoscope I want to talk to you about my guilt ask you if I've been hard on you […].[224]

[223] Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family* (Verso 2019), 2. Indeed, as Lewis also writes, pregnancy appears most like a "ghastly fluke" (ibidem).

[224] Aidt, *Carl's Book*, 35-6.

Aidt's feelings of guilt, rage and her fears that she "was / […] hard / on" Carl, acknowledge the challenge entailed in relating to others, in particular where affection and intimacy are involved.[225] Moved in grief by love and a sense of motherly responsibility, Aidt's protective gesture raises the question of what consequences follow from our modes of relating to others, and in this case a *lost loved other* specifically, with whom we are deeply entangled. In resonance with Jacques Derrida's reflections on mourning and alterity,[226] but refracted in this chapter through a feminist relational perspective, I want to propose then that grief requires of us that we scrutinize the less explicit or unintentional impacts our methods of relating have on those they address.

What complicates Aidt's gesture of incorporation is therefore not, as I initially assumed, incorporation itself in so far as it denotes a gesture that effectuates enclosure. With this womb-scape, Aidt foregrounds how relating to Carl in grief "is a very physical sensation," a physicality she further emphasizes with reference to her "body," her "uterus." Accompanying this centralisation of her bodily experience is a pressure on her emotional connection to Carl. What complicates this womb-scape is, instead, how Aidt's love for and sense of responsibility toward Carl have her rely on a literary style of expression that in some manner swallows up or undermines Carl's being. To illustrate this point I turn in the following to examine how reviewers and journalists' response to Aidt's literary style of expression reveals the inability of available expert and vernacular modes of mourning to relate to, indeed, to even *acknowledge* the lost other as being.

[225] In observing here on the complexity of relating at all and through care specifically, I am relying on insights from feminist ethics and in particular the work of Maria de Puig De la BellaCasa, "Thinking with Care." In *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 69-93.

[226] Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning* (University of Chicago Press, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, 2003).

3.2 "Thank you for having given the horror a language": A mother's grief

With the broad view it provided into *Carl's Book,* the opening section of this chapter identified in Aidt's account of the loss of her child her tendency to utilize emotional and physical intensity as a style to express her experience of grief, which I connected to a crisis in representation caused by trauma and an effort, nevertheless, to try to express grief's inexpressibility. I, in other words, take Aidt's use of emotional and bodily intensities as an earnest expression of her experience and a poetic and artistic commitment to relaying it. Yet, as noted in connection to her gesture of protective incorporation, I stressed simultaneously how Aidt's literary style swallows Carl up and, in so doing, articulates significant ethical questions about the unintentional or indirect consequences this mode of relating has on Carl's being, which I understand *Carl's Book* to make a forceful and even aggressive argument for.

This section takes a closer look at these consequences by honing in on the response Aidt's style of expression has generated in reviews and journalist commentary on *Carl's Book*. In a similar manner to how, I highlighted above, Aidt uses capital letters as a visual technique to accentuate experience in passages that are already devoid of punctuation (and therefore feel racing and imposing as a consequence), she envelops still other passages in an urgent, near aggressive air that is hard not to feel impacted by:

> *I could hardly contain myself* / no language possible language died with my child could not be artistic could not be art did not want to be fucking art I vomit over art over syntax write like a child main clauses searching everything I write is a declaration I hate writing don't want to write any more I'm writing burning hate my anger is useless a howling cry *I'm loaded with bullets, no one should come to me with their soft shit*.[227]

This unbroken stream of "fucking […] vomit […] hate […] howling cry […] shit" gives further expression to feelings of anger and despair, which, as I noted above, in turn respond to the shock of loss. As I also noted, anger and hatred seem to function here as means to breach the cleft trauma places between experience and its representation. Like the loudness

[227] Ibid., 30.

detectable in passages that communicate by the use of all capitals, the intensity of emotions, such as anger, signal some sort of felt distance between the deeply immersive and all-consuming experience of grief and the rest of the world. At once this passage communicates how no one can reach Aidt here—a sentiment that takes the shape of a threat to stop anyone from trying: "*I carry bullets no one should come to me with their soft shit"*—while its loudness also screams to be heard, found, and reached for on the other side of the cleft across which it so urgently and frantically signals.

Aidt's aggressive bulldozing through a line of tangentially abject bodily and emotional extremities manages to communicate her experience bluntly at the same time as it illustrates how generally useful bodily and emotional registers are as tools to impress the urgency, intensity, and authenticity of experience.[228] What I mean to say is that embodiment and affect are not simply foregrounded here as essential parts of lived experience (as feminist scholars have highlighted them as valid sources of knowledge).[229] They also function as rhetorical and poetic tools to make a case for Aidt's particular experience. While Aidt is genuinely communicating her experience the means she utilizes to do so, in other words, *work* effectively and so they also generate impacts beyond her immediate experience when they hail and interpellate others.

The effects of Aidt's confronting and at the same time immersive style of writing is recounted across the journalist and review commentary that *Carl's Book* brought about once published. This is captured exemplarily by one reviewer for the national Danish newspaper *The Christian Daily (Kristeligt Dagblad)* as follows: "This is unbearable reading that shoves

[228] As it means to convey one of grief's emotional clusters, possibly in the way it was originally written, this style of expression is also not unfamiliar to Aidt who, in the introductory short story "Bulberg" from her 2006 publication *Baboon* (*Bavian*), conveys emotional and psychological tension (i.e., when a woman realizes her husband is having an affair) through the concrete physicality of a wound her son has incurred in a bike accident. Naja Marie Aidt, *Baboon*, trans. Denise Newman (Two Lines Press, 2014).

[229] E.g., Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body*, (Columbia University Press, 1998); Patricia Clough, "The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social An Introduction" in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Clough and Jean Halley (Duke University Press, 2007), 1–33. For a more poetic exploration see Olivia Laing, *Everybody: A Book About Freedom*, (Picador, 2021).

all your worst woken nightmares directly into your face at the same time as you are shamefully aware that your experience of reading—[that] that grief you experience while reading—frankly is not your own."[230] Reviewers across the board feel and decipher the impact of Aidt's style of expression at a personal level and, more specifically, through a parental lens. This lens alternates between feeling compassion for Aidt and imagining, with some dose of relief, that something like this *could* but, thankfully, has not happened to them.

Carl's Book indeed then allows reviewers and journalists to momentarily live "all [their] worst woken nightmares" through an experience of grief that "is not [their] own." Several reviewers note the ambiguity that follows from this immersive effect such as when, elaborating on her initial characterization, the journalist from *The Christian Daily* writes: "Aidt's book […] is one of the most painful and paradoxically most beautiful books I have read […] it feels in a way wrong to talk about beauty when we talk about […this] very beautiful book."[231] In an ambiguous space that mixes compassion and relief, some reviewers respond to the effectiveness and impact of Aidt's literary style by mimicking its confronting expression and explicitness, such as when another reviewer recounts how Aidt's account of grief is a "smack […] straight up into your face."[232]

Others still engage in heavy citational practice as is the case with the editor-in-chief of the literature section of the national Danish daily newspaper *Information,* when he lifts Aidt's formulation in *Carl's Book* for his own headline—"Grief is an enormous fucking monster that ruins everything"—and then goes on to cite her at length:

> *I'm screaming in the backseat. I smoke a cigarette. My mother says: There, there, my sweetheart, oh, my little friend. My body lashes around the backseat. My brain is on fire. There are no other cars on the highway. My father drivies too fast. / […] I'ts as if I'm dreaming. I'm freezing, I'm shaking. I's as if all the life is draining out of me. Then I begin screaming again, as though it's coming from a*

[230] Mai Misfeldt, "Naja Marie Aidt skriver ubærligt og smukt om at miste en søn," *Kristeligt Dagblad,* 24 March, 2017, https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kultur/en-personlig-kaerlighedshandling-og-et-stort-kunstvaerk.

[231] Ibidem.

[232] ibidem.

> *deep, primitive state, it's not my voice and the voice I hear scares the hell out of me. The sound nearly can't come out, I can hardly breathe. I've become someone else*.[233]

This quote recaps the second return of the scene that opens *Carl's Book* and repeats to elaborate the event of Carl's death. Citation, as the editor-in-chief here exemplifies, is not in itself novel—in fact, it may be integral to a genre that is expected to note explicitly on the content under review. However, in this case, alongside outright mimicry of Aidt's style of writing by himself and the aforementioned journalist, this citation is more of a testament to the impact Aidt's style of expression leaves on reviewers and journalists and so becomes significant for understanding their response. Heavy citational practice is thus intriguing in this context exactly because it is *not* noteworthy. In a nearly undetectable manner, citation reproduces and amplifies the emotional intensity of Aidt's style of expression throughout the textual extensions that reviews and media coverage create off *Carl's Book.*

By replicating Aidt's style, a heavy citational practice together with outright mimicry, in some regard, helps shield or protect her experience from scrutiny and challenge. Illustratively, another reviewer recounts how the "beauty" of this account of loss is partly to do with how "unbearable […] almost cathartic", and so she leaves it be with no further scrutiny.[234] While they ultimately aim for a different point, it is worth recalling here how Judith Butler conceptualizes grievability as an expression of the (ontological as well as political) value that a life is granted in the first place.[235] This is to say that the response or lack of response that a death or an experience of loss receives is telling of the differentiating value granted to lost lives and, I want to highlight here, to those who are left to grieve them. Notably, looking across these reviews and journalistic output, Aidt's loss conjures up notions

[233] Peter Nielsen, "Naja Marie Aidt: Sorgen er et kæmpe fucking monster, der ødelægger alting," *Information,* March 18, 2017, https://www.information.dk/mofo/naja-marie-aidt-sorgen-kaempe-fucking-monster-oedelaegger-alting. The article is in Danish and quotes Aidt's original text, so I lift the same passage from Newman's translation. Aidt, *Carl's Book,* 53-4.

[234] Vandborg, "Har døden."

[235] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2009).

of cathartic beauty, parental heartbreak and a general mood of compassion for such and, importantly, not much else. There is, in other words, a lot to gather from the kind of response Aidt's account of loss generates.

While reviewers and journalists comment on Aidt's grief they seem mostly responsive to the normative conventions that surround her position as a mother and to how her literary style of expression affectively amplifies such [conventions]. The, according to the reviewer of *The Christian Daily*, nightmarish circumstance of this loss is recounted without exception in every commentary on *Carl's Book*—noting how Aidt's "son, intoxicated by mushrooms, fell or threw himself out of a fourth floor window."[236] The horror and outrageousness of this scene and the fact that reviewers and journalists are painfully aware that they access and encounter it through a mother's eyes, in fact appears to make them all but less aware of the effects of its constant repetition. The repetitive circulation of the image of a psychotic, naked body falling to the ground, abstracts this event from its context and in so doing exhausts its specificity by rendering this image a placeholder for the fears of others (i.e., reviewers and journalists) that they might loose someone they love and, possibly as a cautionary tale about the potentially catastrophic effects of doing hallucinatory drugs.[237]

When in this section I foreground Aidt's literary style—evoking bodily and emotional intensity, and her use of capital letter and no breaks to visually amplify such, and the response it generates in reviewers and journalists that pick it up, repeat, and even mimic it—I mean to highlight how this style brings about a strong focus, indeed, a fixation on Aidt herself. This fixation also paradoxically dislodges Aidt's experience of loss from her self, when it primarily attaches and relates to grief through the normative conventions indexed by her

[236] Skyum-Nielsen, "I 2017."

[237] For this line of thinking I am indebted to José Esteban Muñoz's piece on the "afterburn" of Cuban performance artist, painter, video artist, and sculptor Ana Mendieta. What interests me about the repeated descriptions of Mendieta's death are how shocking details of a similarly harrowing fall of an, in this case almost, naked body from up high makes this image and event a placeholder for or carrier of other stories that, importantly, is Munoz's point, have little to do with Mendieta, her life and work (José Esteban Muñoz, "Vitalism's Afterburn: The Sense of Ana Mendieta," *Women and Performance* 21, no. 2 (2011)).

position as a mother. In a mix of heightened compassion and ambiguous relief, reviewers and journalists thus attach and respond to the thought of how awful loss is for a mother (generalised) or for parents, perhaps like themselves (subjective).[238]

With this said, the central point to note about Aidt's style of expression—which becomes clearer in how reviewers and journalists (do not) respond to Carl— is that the fixation on Aidt her account of grief generates in reviewers and journalists reveals their inability to register and consider that there are other beings in this scene of loss that demand and deserve attention—indeed, that there are other beings in this scene, period. As above highlighted, not only does the repetition of Carl's fall abstract it from its relationship to Aidt, Carl too is abstracted from himself when rendered a symbol of the kind of fears and horrors the majority of these reviewers and journalists rehearse through him as symbol of a tragedy and suppose are shared by all of us: namely, that we could lose a loved one and worst of all a child.

Although they are expressed in normative conventions around motherhood and parental loss, I want to propose that Carl's abstraction into a symbol and the overwhelming responsiveness of reviewers and journalists to Aidt only originate elsewhere, namely, in the fact that Carl does not in the first place register as a *being* in the manner Aidt does. What subtends and informs these modes of response to loss is, I argue, a metaphysical presupposition that the following section will identify as a 'schema of the real' and trace across different theoretical and practiced models of mourning. In so doing, it will show how this schema enable reviewers and journalists to register being only when it appears in the

[238] The impact Aidt's account has left on journalists and reviewers is in itself a writerly feat, which has been rewarded with her receiving in 2020 The Danish Academy's Grand Price (The Danske Akademis Store Pris), in 2022 The Swedish Academy's Nordic Price, also called The Minor Nobel Price and in 2019 becoming the first Danish author to ever be nominated for the American literary price The National Book Award ("Det Svenske Akademis Nordiske pris til Naja Marie Aidt," Vejle Bibliotekerne, accessed August 15, 2022, https://vejlebib.dk/nyheder/litteratur/svenske-akademis-nordiske-pris-naja-marie-aidt). This is to say that the style of expression I have traced across the board of reviews and journalistic commentary is acknowledged and rewarded by high-ranking, international literary institutions. I am not suggesting that Aidt is not deserving of this praise, but I want to stress the pervasive and institutionalized nature of this response.

form of physical presence and in the time of the present[239] and so limits their modes of relating to grief.

3.3 "Deference for reality gains the day": Metaphysical presuppositions

In his seminal work "Mourning and Melancholia" from 1917, Sigmund Freud holds that mourning is the painful yet necessary labor in the wake of loss that is required for the ego to successfully detach its libidinal investments from the lost object.[240] This labor, he holds further, is one that some individuals fail to complete or even initiate, and as a consequence he casts the melancholic internalization of the lost object as an expression of an already existing pathological disposition on part of those egos.[241] To Freud, melancholia is thus symptomatic of an issue that is elsewhere located and therefore exists already before an event of loss, but is given expression in pathological mourning. Melancholia reveals, in other words, a problem with the ego's formation, that is, its skewed perception of reality and consequent inability to adjust its inner or psychic world accordingly (reflected in the subject's refusal to accept that the object is irrevocably lost and thence let go of it).

It is important to note in this connection that Freud does not operate with a straightforward positivist or dualist concept of reality. Jacques Lacan makes this clearer with his elaboration of Freud's theoretical vocabulary. Reality or, in Lacanian terminology according to Bruce Fink, "Real2" is the reality the subject has access to by virtue of it being the reality that is mediated through the symbolic or language, which also shapes the subject (ego).[242] "Real1" in contrast is reality 'proper,' that is, the reality that is unmediated by

[239] Section 3.4 will elaborate on Derrida's definition of metaphysics of presence. Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, (Routledge 2012); *Speech and phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, (Northwestern University Press, 1973).

[240] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Essential Papers on Object Loss*, ed. Rita V. Frankiel, (New York University Press, 1994), 39.

[241] Ibid., 45-6.

[242] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, (Princeton University Press, 1995), 27. Fink elaborates: "Cancelling out the real, the symbolic creates "reality", reality as that which is named by language and can thus be thought and talked about." (ibid., 27) For a critical use of a Lacanian conceptual

language and therefore exists inaccessible to the subject whose conception of reality (i.e., "Real2") is mediated by language or veiled by the symbolic. It is worth noticing here also how Freud and Lacan both replicate the representationalism I highlight via Barad in my introductory chapter that subscribes to a distinction between being (ontology) and representations of it (epistemology), which can approximate but never truly capture alleged ontological purity.

What is interesting about Freud's place in a tradition of positivism and its accompanying belief in objective truth is that his conceptualization of reality, understood as always inevitably mediated by the symbolic (which Lacan clarifies with his distinction of "Real1" from "Real2") at least in theory does away with the illusion that guides a positivist search for objective truth, namely, that accessing it is possible. That said, the distinction of a symbolically mediated reality still holds out some kind of hope (or at least Lacan does on behalf of Freud) that somewhere, although inaccessibly so, exists a real or unmediated reality.[243] This being said, Freud's theory of mourning makes clear that this more elastic concept of reality (i.e., "Real2") must ultimately yield to the ontological dominance of reality 'proper'. In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud thus specifies:

> The testing of reality, having showed that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from this object. Against this demand a struggle of course arises—it may be universally observed that man never willingly abandons a libido-position, not even when a substitute is already beckoning to him. This struggle can be so intense that a turning away from reality ensues, the object being clung to through the medium of a hallucinatory wish-psychosis. The normal outcome is that deference for reality gains the day.[244]

distinction of realities to diagnose the existential-socioeconomic predicament of late capitalist realism, see also Mark Fisher *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero Books, 2009), 18.

[243] I am certainly not proposing, based on this distinction, that Freud is not informed by positivism, but I do find that his conceptualization of reality as a veiled or mediated phenomenon—and in particular his elaboration of the world through it via psychic enfoldments such as fantasy—have made space and also added value to a world that has since been elaborated in more radical terms. What I mean to emphasize here is the indebtedness of critical theory to psychoanalytic theory. I point to this lineage in my introduction's section 1.2 but the link I make between contemporary feminist onto-epistemology and queer queer theory is best exemplified or most clearly identifiable in the work of Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford University Press, 1997).

[244] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 39.

With a concept of pathology based on the perception that the melancholic is unable to comprehend that an object of affection is really gone,[245] Freud reveals how his concept of reality relies on dualist life/death divide where the latter marks reality's finite boundaries. This reliance becomes apparent in the quote above where what is dead is considered a no longer viable, indeed, a no longer *real* object of attachment. Queer scholars have noted how Freud's writing on the topic of mourning amounts to a theory of its pathological form only,[246] and in agreement with them I would add that his definition of pathology on the base of a continued object attachment despite its alleged futility is as much, indirectly, a theory of reality. Reality, theorized in dualist metaphysical terms whereby physically present aliveness equates the real and death, captured as physical absence, marks the unreal.

Departing from this perception of reality, Freud's focus on the mourning subject, that is, his concern with how to respond to it does appear common sense—and this is the crux of my point here. Because of the equation that exists already between death and the unreal, the status of the object (or rather the question of how to relate to it in ways other than by accepting that it is irrevocably lost) is 'naturally' never raised. Following a Freudian psychoanalytic model, the lost object is absented from consideration not because it does not matter in a psychic sense. On the contrary, the object plays a crucial role in understanding the psychic turbulence in the subject who is dealing with loss or, more accurately, in diagnosing their mal-perception of reality. The lost object is left out of the consideration that is 'naturally' extended to the subject because the object is understood as unreal, as non-existent, metaphysically speaking.

[245] Although Freud focuses on mourning related to human loss, he also highlights how loss of other objects can provoke a similarly melancholic scenario (ibid., 125).

[246] I am with Douglas Crimp when he highlights through Michael Moon's critique of the exclusionary concept of "normalcy", which Freud puts in place as the horizon of recovery, which, so called, successful mourning aims at, that ""Mourning and Melancholia", as Crimp writes, "is not a theory of mourning as such, but of pathological mourning, that is, of melancholia. Moon is therefore right when he says that Freud's view of mourning only repeats conventional wisdom; it purports to do no more than describe mourning's dynamic process." (Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *October,* 51 (1981), 7).

The lost object's status as unreal prevails in a contemporary psychiatric approach to grief where it figures under the name of the deceased. This, chapter 2 showed, is evident in the fact that the phenomenon of the deceased is rendered as "hallucination," which I noted in this context is formally a symptom of psychosis and stands in a longer history of psychiatry as a clear marker of a compromised or jeopardized reality concept. In this more recent, psychiatric model of mourning the deceased thus continues to denote the opposite of what is considered real. However, differing from a psychoanalytic theory of mourning, biomedicine, as I also note in chapter 2, operates with a concept of pathology that denotes a "dysfunction" in the "psychobiological" factors that "underlie" mental experience (i.e., the brain).[247]

In psychoanalysis, pathology signals to a set of problems that in theory stretch the concept of reality (i.e., "Real2") beyond its positivist rendering—yet, Freud fails to make use of the potential in this elasticity when his more therapeutic motivations prioritize the subject's respect for and adjustment to reality 'proper' (i.e., "Real1").[248] In contrast, pathology in biomedicine charts a direct route to either therapeutic or psychopharmacological intervention. Nowhere in a biomedically informed psychiatric model does the question therefore emerge of whether a relation to the deceased is viable in any form, and even less so of whether its presence (as "hallucination") has something to tell us about reality.

Freud's verdict on the melancholic constitutes a symptomatic reading of the psychic boundaries and the problems created by a reality that takes shape after a symbolic system (i.e., language). In this, he acknowledges the *constructed* nature of, at least, the reality concept that

[247] See my discussion of biomedicine's influence on the field of conventional psychiatry in chapter 2.

[248] I am in agreement with Sedgwick here who holds that psychoanalysis, as a theoretical terrain, entails a lot of potency and elasticity that is, however, reduced to sleek categories. Sedgwick writes: "Psychoanalytic theory, if only through the almost astrologically lush plurality of its overlapping taxonomies of physical zones, developmental stages, representational mechanisms, and levels of consciousness, seemed t promise to introduce a certain becoming amplitude into discussions of what different people are like—only to turn, in its streamlined trajectory across so many institutional boundaries, into the sveltest of metatheoretical disciplines, sleeked down to such elegant operational entities as *the* mother, *the* father, *the* preoedipal, *the* oedipal, *the* other or Other." (*Epistemology*, 23-4).

informs the subject's perception of what is real before he shuts it down.[249] A biomedical model of grief approaches symptomatology differently when it assumes that a real/unreal divide is inherently recognizable to the brain.[250] The biomedical brain to mind causality, which chapter 2 identified at work in the research literature on grief as psychiatric diagnosis, thus locates or submerges dualist metaphysics *in* the subject when it renders the deceased (i.e., their felt and experienced realness) symptomatic, and so interprets it as an expression, of a "psychobiological dysfunction" that could warrant correction at the level of the brain.

Up to here, I have offered a reading of Freud's conceptualization of melancholia as an indirect theory of reality in that, by declaring the lost object a symptomatically useful but futile attachment to the mourning subject, this approach to mourning re-enacts a metaphysical divisive equation between alive/dead and real/unreal, which contours in turn the boundaries of reality accordingly. This equation thus constitutes a 'schema of the real' that is not only enforced via the relational model a psychoanalytic approach to mourning establishes between the mourning subject and the lost object, but continues through to a biomedically poised psychiatric model of grief.

I have devoted this energy to specialised discourse on mourning to identify and flesh out the metaphysical presupposition I proposed above informs reviewers and journalists' modes of response to grief in the context of *Carl's Book* and, secondly, to illustrate the pervasiveness of this 'schema' in that its rendering of the lost object as unreal is taken as common sense or 'natural' across both expert and vernacular discourse. I am not, in other

[249] Using Lacan's terminology to clarify, what I mean to stress is that with Real2 Freud both acknowledges the constructed nature of a reality concept and widens the space of maneuvering according to it, yet, as I noted above, his theory of mourning ultimately clarifies how this elasticity (i.e., Real2) must yield to a dualist reality concept (i.e., Real1).

[250] I ultimately aim this reading to illuminate the metaphysical presupposition that inform the models of relationality that are made available where grief is concerned. This said, I want to note how my reading here of a neuroscientific approach to the brain as a vehicle, ultimately, to re-instates and bolster the ontological authority of a dualist reality concept holds relevance to critical scholarly debate about how neuroscience constitutes a site where, as Fernando Vidal argues, new imaginaries of personhood take shape ("Brainhood, anthropological figure of modernity" (2009): 5-36). My reading here would add that next to claims about how the brain (rather than, prior to it, the mind) constitutes the seat of the self, the highly advanced technology in the neurosciences lend significant authority to other truth claims, namely, about what counts as real and not.

words, building toward an argument that reviewers and journalists are wrongly reading and interpreting *Carl's Book.* My interest is simply with the cause and the make-up of their disregard for Carl's being. Before I return to Aidt's writing on grief to explore how and with what consequences the lost other's being may be acknowledged, I therefore want to briefly clarify how a 'schema of the real' operates in the context of *Carl's Book* and its reception.

Although their circumstances differ in significant ways, the modes of response to grief both expert models of mourning and grief and public and media responses to *Carl's Book* exhibit share in the assumption that the subject is the only being in a scene of loss who calls for attention and consideration indeed that it is the only being, period. What a 'schema of the real' allows us to recognize is that the cause of the attention and focus that is solely on the mourning subject derives from this 'schema's re-enactment of an equation of alive/dead with real/unreal through the relational model it establishes between the mourning subject and the lost object. Incorporation—as it appears in the context of psychoanalysis and momentarily in *Carl's Book* where Aidt places Carl inside of her—reflects very clearly the consequent assumption that the lost object is simply open to be done with in the manner the mourning subject desires.

These gestures are not therefore the effect of some malicious intent or callous oversight, but rather follow 'naturally' from the lost object's schematic rendering as no being, as not real. This assumption plays out most lucidly where the lost object is literally reduced to a symptomatic function that signals to a (psychoanalytic) therapist if the subject's reaction to loss is pathological or not. Carl's momentary placement in Aidt's womb elaborates incorporation beyond functionality strictly speaking because it, as I noted in opening, highlights how love, care and an understandable desire to protect from hurt complicate relationality. What I also noted then is how care and love bring Aidt into deep pain and despair, which she signals time and again and, in the context of the womb-scape she evokes,

by way of a literary style that uses emotional and bodily intensities as tools to convey her experience. This style in itself catches the attention of reviewers and journalists and animates in them an ambiguous sense of compassion as, I admit, it caught my attention and empathy as a reader.

A 'schema of the real', however, urges us to look again at the attention this style generates and its effects. Exemplarily, Aidt's use of all capitals demands urgent attention to her experience *now* and, using her body as another vehicle to express grief, she further bolsters its immediacy. Emphasizing the urgency of her experience in the now or present and using physicality to do so, Aidt's literary style of expression indirectly confirms the metaphysics of presence, which this section has shown subtends and is continued through a 'schema of the real'. In communicating her grief Aidt, in other words, unintentionally *activates* the metaphysical presupposition that subtends a 'schema of the real' with the effect—as is evident in reviewers and journalists' disregard of Carl's being—of undermining or cancelling out other ways in which being makes itself known.

By extension, we can note how the relational model between the mourning subject and the lost object, which informs both expert and vernacular modes of response to grief and mourning, does not simply assume that the lost object does not count as a being. The attention and consideration that is extended to the mourning subject is thus entangled in, indeed, one could say it relies on an erasure of the lost other's being. This attentiveness and consideration takes different expression in reviewers and journalists' homogenous show of compassion toward Aidt than it does in therapeutic and psychiatric preoccupations with how best to respond to the mourning or bereaved subject. What these responses share, however, is a care for the mourning subject (as I noted above there is even a sense in which the compassion shown to Aidt avoids a (critical) engagement with her grief beyond what conventions of motherhood makes available) and efforts to not disrupt the alleged process of healing.

Based on this consideration we can thus appreciate how, although they are delivered in more therapeutic and normative tones, these different responses to the mourning subject relay concerns that are ethical in nature.[251] We might therefore notice further how these modes of response to mourning indirectly delineate an ethics of loss that is rooted in a metaphysically poised attentiveness to the bereaved subject. If a 'schema of the real' limits the ethics of loss to the mourning subject, then it follows that acknowledging the lost other as being would stretch ethics not only to pertain to the lost other. It might too have the potential to alter the *kind* of ethical concerns loss raises. The following section will pursue this potential by turning in a final move to Aidt's insistence on Carl's continued existence after the moment of death, foregrounding the alternative tools Aidt devises for feeling and sensing Carl's being.

3.4 "He is like a huge bird": Feeling the being of the lost other

The wreckage Carl's death creates in a familiar world is a force of textual movement that oscillates in and out of more and less shock-ridden musings on the topic of his existence over the course of *Carl's Book*, such as when Aidt writes: "I wrote in my journal: / Monday, 1 May 1989 – a sunny day – I found out that, in the winter, I will give birth to another child. Little winter's child, it's so strange that you exist. I do not feel you yet and understand with my entire body not yet that you exist."[252] Prior to its iteration here, this passage appears in the early pages of *Carl's Book* where it provides some additional instructions about the world

[251] I am inspired by Maria Puig de La BellaCasa's formulation of ethics through the prism of care as a practice of attending to or, indeed, caring for the relation condition of existence. She writes: "Standing by the vital necessity of care means standing for sustainable and flourishing relations, not merely survivalist or instrumental ones. Continuing to hold together a triptych vision of care doings-practice/affectivity/ethics-politics helps to resist to ground care as an ethico-affective everyday doing that is vital to engage with the inescapable troubles of interdependent existences." ("Thinking with Care." In *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 70). Puig de La BellaCasa's formulation of care-ethics as it relates to interdependent existence will grow in resonance with my argument for an alternative ethics of mourning once this chapter reaches my discussion of the method Aidt develops to acknowledge and reckon with Carl's existence, which I ground in Bracha L. Ettinger's relational framework.

[252] Aidt, *Carl's Book,* 11. The quote in text is my translation from the original Danish text, which is the version of the book I first read and where my following analysis originated. I will go by my own translation onward because of how it reads in Danish and the associations it brings and meanings it carries to me as a Danish native speaker. Newman's translation goes as follows: "I wrote in my journal: / Monday, 1 May 1989 – a sunny day – I found out that, in the winter, I will give birth to another child. Little winter's child, it's so strange that you exist. I still can't feel you; my body still can't understand that you exist."

Carl is born into as the second child of a young mother. Via these instructions, Aidt offers a glimpse of the emotional connectedness that begins to take shape with what is, in her own words, her "secret" because Carl's existence is still an unknown fact to the surrounding world until he is eventually "[b]orn 21 November, 1989 at 2.32 pm."[253]

In her first journal notation, Aidt observes how: "I do not feel you yet and understand with my entire body not yet that you exist [...]".[254] This initial reflection notes on the beginning of an existence that is accepted as fact but not yet understood. Within its apprehensive acknowledgement of Carl's being, a concept of comprehension is reconfigured from a tool of positivist fact checking and rationalization, which serves well and conventionally to verify being according to the 'schema of the real' that the last section identified. Alternative registers emerge instead to flesh out how comprehension is also a matter of feeling and sensing; "I do not *feel* you yet and *understand* with my entire *body* not yet that you exist [...]".[255]

A concept of being thus moves from empirical fact—assuming that the fact of pregnancy is at this point verified in either urinal or blood testing—to also involve an embodied sense that someone exists. With her initial reflection, Aidt shows how she must feel Carl's being in order to comprehend it. Her diary notations thus provide an alternative methodology for probing into being, and with Carl's being begins to move and make itself known. Shortly after the scene I foreground in this chapter's first section, where readers learn of Carl's death by encountering his body in a coffin—"I kissed your hand, and your hand was so cold, that the cold crept up into my face, my head, my skull. There exists nothing colder in the world. Not ice, snow"—[256]Aidt offers an altered version of her initial reflections on Carl's

[253] Ibidem.
[254] Ibidem.
[255] My emphases.
[256] Ibid., 17.

being. She writes: "So strange you do not exist, I feel you still / I understand with my entire body not that you do not exist."[257]

As above noted in relation to Aidt's first diary notation, being does not only come down to empirical factuality but also involves embodied comprehension: "I do not *feel* you yet and *understand* with my entire *body* not yet that you exist."[258] This alternative mode of probing that, in Aidt's first diary notation, elaborates a concept of comprehension to include feeling and sensation consequently sharpens and foregrounds the variation that appears in Aidt's second notation on Carl's being, namely: "I feel you still." The amplification of this formulation in turn offers a lens through which to interrogate the double-negation that initially marks Aidt's second diary entry, so that "not […] not"[259] becomes a way of re-articulating how being is not merely a matter of positivist verifiability and cognitive acceptance, but is also felt and experienced. Aidt's second journal notation is therefore not a straightforward statement on Carl's nonexistence: "I understand with my entire body not that you do not exist"[260] implies instead how, if "I" and "my body" do not "feel" "that you do not exist," and feeling is part of my method for understanding being, then "you" do exist. In other words, the negation (i.e., "not […] not") implicitly re-iterates how: "I understand with my entire body ~~not~~ that you do ~~not~~ exist."[261]

This alternative reading of what initially appears to be a confirmation of Carl's non-existence is strengthened further by how these lines read in Danish: "Så mærkeligt at du ikke findes, jeg mærker dig endnu / Jeg forstår med hele min krop ikke, at du ikke findes".[262] Literally or directly translated, the word "strange" alternates with the Danish adverb

[257] Ibid., 11. Newman's translation goes: "So strange that you don't exist, I still feel you / My body still can't understand that you don't exist."

[258] My emphases.

[259] I abstract "not […] not" from the full formulation that goes: "So strange you do *not* exist, I feel you still / I understand with my entire body *not* that you do *not* exist."

[260] Ibidem., my emphases.

[261] Ibidem.

[262] This is the original formulation in Danish from Naja Marie Aidt, *Har døden taget noget fra dig så giv det tilbage: Carl's bog* (Gyldendal, 2017), 16.

"mærkeligt," whereas its noun-form "mærker" translates to "feel." In Danish, the syntax of Aidt's second reflection on being thus generates a visual and a linguistic seam between "mærkeligt" and "mærker," which effectively makes the former (i.e., "mærkeligt") stand out less as a different word and more as a variation of the root form or noun "mærke(r)". It thus appears as "mærke-ligt," which in turn reads something like "feel-able." Continuing a literal translation, I read "[s]o strange that you do not exist" from the first part of Aidt's original Danish formulation: "Så mærkeligt at du ikke findes."[263] In Danish, the word "findes" reads as if it articulates the capacity to find something, or for someone to be found and verified in a straightforward or conventional manner.

As this reflection thus sounds out something like "so strange that you cannot be found," what this second diary notation may alternatively express is an alteration or a calibration that takes place in how Aidt has, until his death, been used to knowing and finding Carl's being.[264] The concern these two reflections on being together formulate is therefore not simply whether Carl exists or not. Rather, the question is to do with how to reckon with his existence now that it no longer takes shape, as it used to, as physical presence in the present time. Aidt's musings on Carl's continued being after the moment of death can thus also be read to echo, what with Jacques Derrida we can think of as, a deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence. According to Derrida, Western dualist metaphysics of presence is haunted by all those beings that do not present physically and in present time. On the "specter," which is all that *is* but is not acknowledged as such, Derrida writes:

> […] one does not know what it *is*, what it is presently. *It is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or

[263] Ibidem.

[264] Derrida writes: "One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge." (Jacques Derrida. *Specters*, 6). See also Jacques Derrida, *Speech*, 5-7.

> departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge.[265]

Having suspended a metaphysics of presence for an open-ended musing on the "specter", Derrida observes how the difficulty or challenge of being (i.e., what *is*) is that it is not as readily know-able as it is made out to be by conventions of knowing and knowledge that depend on an idea of "essence". Recalling my introductory chapter, Barad specifies—in resonance with Derrida's notion of "essence"—how Western representationalism operates on the illusion that phenomena (i.e., what is understood to *be*) reflect an inert core, and this conviction is captured in the idea of the object. By re-casting "what […] *is*" Derrida gives space for the "non-object" as being that does not correspond to an "essence" and therefore is not demanded to present in knowable terms. According to Derrida, the impairment dualist metaphysics suffers is, in other words, expressed in its inability to reckon with being outside of what is understood to *be* presently.[266]

Following Derrida's notion of "non-object," Aidt does not check Carl's being against physical presence in present time. By devising a method for feeling and sensing the lost other's being, she disrupts its rendering, via a 'schema of the real', as non-being, as well as the limited ethics that, above section showed, expert and vernacular modes of response to grief re-enact through their attentiveness to and concern for the mourning subject only. To illustrate how an acknowledgement of the lost other's being expands the kind of ethical concerns loss raises, I move to a feminist relational perspective, invoking Ettinger's notion of "feminine maternal-matrixial carriance" specifically. I propose that a relational perspective helps us appreciate our intra-relational connectedness with others and to consider the impacts

[265] Derrida, *Specters*, 6.

[266] A note on methodology: According to Grace M. Cho the "ghost" and other spectral phenomena tend to be "subjugated, erased, and generated through [dominant] knowledge production [as] the undocumented, illegible, and irrational." (*Haunting*, 32.) If, Cho continues, they are afforded the attention they deserve spectral phenomena will not only point to scientific and perceptual limitations, but also provide different ways of reckoning with being (ibid., 33). My thinking here is also highly inspired by Lisa Blackman's work on voice hearing (*Immaterial Bodies*, xii-xiii).

of our actions from this perspective.[267] Embedded in psychoanalytic theory and her art practice, Ettinger foregrounds being as never an individual matter, but as a phenomenon that arises and unfolds through connections with others. About this relational perspective she writes:

"To rethink the human subject as impregnated by an *I and non-I* transjectivity, and thus to recognize the human subject as nestling, co-inhabiting, co-emerging, and co-arising with-and-inside-and-outside of an other is to recognize the importance of our net of strings to the structuring of each individual self."[268] Ettinger thus proposes that rather than assuming that an "individual self" is proof of ontology of essence,[269] we take the "human subject" as an expression of the entangled condition of being. Ettinger's formulation of the subject or the "I" as always "impregnated" by "an other" relocates ethical pressure from individuality to the connectivity Aidt relays throughout *Carl's Book* and, as I have noted on extensively above, in those diary entries where she enfolds Carl's being in the sensory and emotional impressions it leaves on her. Ettinger's notion of "matrixiality" therefore does more than add theoretical leverage to support Aidt in her insistence that her felt and sensed experience of Carl can indeed act as an alternative method to probe his being. Via its enfoldment of a seemingly individual being with others, "matrixiality" alters an ethics of loss by dispersing the focus that is otherwise entirely on the mourning subject.

[267] Ettinger in Birgit Kaiser, and Kathrin Thiele, "If You Do Well, Carry!," 105. I have chosen to rely on Ettinger here but want to acknowledge how relational perspectives do not belong only to Western perspectives such as Ettinger, Barad and Haraway (confer my introduction). Indigenous scholarship, as one example, provides relational perspectives that are grounded in indigenous cosmology. Rejecting Eurocentric life and human hierarchies, Kim TallBear thus elaborates how she "foreground an everyday Dakota understanding of existence that focuses on "being in good relation." […] Thinking in terms of being in relation, I propose an explicitly spatial narrative of caretaking relations—both human and other-than-human—as an alternative to the temporally progressive settler-colonial American Dreaming that is ever co-constituted with deadly hierarchies of life." ("Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming," *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies*, 6, no. 1 (2019), 24.

[268] Ibidem. Ettinger elaborates how "the sublimation into culture of the matrixial corporeality imprinted in us by each one's singular mother-as subject" (Ettinger in Kaiser and Thiele, "If You Do Well, Carry!," 107-8) and she understands the "female matrixial" as "imprints from the female body [that] can enter subjectivity regardless of gender," which thus "involves symbolic carrying of the non-I" (Ibid., 107).

[269] Here I am referring in combination to Derrida and Barad's critiques of Western metaphysics and representationalism respectively as, noted above, perspectives that dislodge from the belief that phenomena reflect an individual and inherent core.

From this perspective, the behaviours and actions of the mourning subject do not so much call for attention to the individual's well-being (as I have illustrated expert and public discourse assume) as it attunes us to those others that bring this subject to act, those others that animate its sense of being. Where, according to Ettinger, classical ethics "locate[s] man's free choice and God's instruction in the abstract demand of 'doing good' [consequently] postponing the ethical moment […]",[270] a relational or "matrixial" perspective locates the ethical imperative in the question of whether one acknowledges the ethico-existential condition of "carriance" (that denotes how one's being has always been and will continuously be carried). Starting from her reading of Genesis 4:7 and its "divine ethical instruction in the word *ShETH"* Ettinger thus asserts:

> *ShETH* […] is understood as *lift,* as in *lift your head high* or *lift the sacrifice to God,* or *lift the subject's spirit* as the sacrifice was accepted by God. However, if this is what the word meant, then there would be no ethical instruction, no ethical choice here, and the first ethical instruction (as well as choice) will appear only afterwards. Why then—I ask myself—would the word of choice, that is "if" […], appear twice and especially at the very beginning of the passage, already before the sentence makes its demand upon its addressee?[271]

Ettinger holds in contrast that the ""if" is related to the ShETH. So, the "doing good" is not open but rendered precise. The literal and figurative meaning of *ShETH* […] is to bear, to tolerate, to lift, to suffer. But to begin with: *to carry* […] *"If you will be doing what is good: carry."*[…] You have *this* choice, your freedom is here: *if* […] *you carry!*"[272] To be "free" in an ethical sense, in other words, is to be responsive to a shared condition of "matrixial carriance." "Carriance" thus reformulates ethics from an imperative to carry others when one is so required, to the acknowledgement that one simply *is* not without "carriance."[273] If anything, a relational perspective thus complicates ethics by asking us to

[270] Ibid., 113

[271] In the Genesis, Ettinger elaborates, "God gives what seems to me to be the first divine ethical instruction in the word *ShETH.* […], but this kind of suggestion is omitted from the common interpretations and translations of this passage. […] *HALO IM TEITIV ShETH* […] commonly translated as, "If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up?" or as, "If you are doing what is good, shouldn't you hold your head high?" (Ibid., 112)

[272] Ibidem.

[273] In the words of Ettinger: "I care-carry *ergo sum*." (Ibid., 107).

acknowledge relationality as existential condition and, most significantly, by demanding that we pertain to how, regardless of abstract moral standards and individual intentions, our actions impact others.

By devising a method for sensing and feeling Carl's being, Aidt offers us tools to begin to acknowledge the other's being as it, in Ettinger's words, nestles, co-inhabits, co-emerges, and co-arises with-and-inside-and-outside of us, but she also shows us how difficult this task is. As I argue above, Aidt's literary style that enacts bodily and emotional intensities as means of expression activates a 'schema of the real' that subtends expert discourse on mourning but tellingly also makes reviewers and journalists unable to recognize Carl's being, as is evident in their fixation on Aidt's experience of grief only. Importantly, the consequent unintentional undermining of Carl's being does not only play out externally to *Carl's Book*. It amounts to a tension within it or, more accurately, a fine balance that Aidt constantly has to manoeuver as she examines new ways of responding to Carl's being.

I have proposed that Aidt devises an alternative method to feel and sense the impacts of Carl's being, which disrupts the designation of the lost object as unreal by approaching him as a "non-object" in the Derridean sense, that is, as a being that cannot be known in the terms Western metaphysics demands. Aidt's alternative approach does not so much seek to capture what Carl, as Derrida highlights, in "essence" *is,* but instead leans into a felt sense of him. Rather than a quest to know in finite terms, Aidt's methodological musings on how she *feels* Carl—e.g., "I feel you still"—denote a growing sensibility and an open-ended responsiveness to the changing ways in which Carl's being takes shape and impresses itself on her. Aidt provides the following formulation toward the end of *Carl's Book*: "It's his [Carl's] spirit I can feel now. He is like a huge bird or, no–his presence is heavy and strong. And also light

and springy. Yes, springy. He is standing behind me, he puts his arms around me, his long hair and bare chest."[274]

On another occasion Aidt writes: "I wrote in my journal: / 10 November 2015. / Carl is very much alive, very close to me. He is like a wheat field. The stalks blowing in the wind. Golden, strong and ripe."[275] These passages illustrate a growing attentiveness on Aidt's part to the ways Carl's being moves and changes. Aidt's method clearly explicates the deeply personal position from which she tries out different formulations of the impressions Carl's being leaves on her, which in turn affirms how none of the examples she provides of such—"a big bird," "heavy and strong," "light and bouncy"—are exhaustive.[276] Her method is, in other words, highly suggestive in nature and its probing of being does not seek to accurately or, as Derrida formulates it, in "essence" capture Carl, but rather records the impressions he leaves on her while abstaining from laying claim, as again Derrida articulates it, to "what [he] *is*." The moving and changing quality of Carl's being, however, simultaneously remains a source of struggle for Aidt in that it continues to test those boundaries of acceptable distance and risk of injury her attachment—in deep love and a sense of responsibility—to him animate in her.

One such testing occasion is in the scene on which I have noted at length, where Aidt momentarily incorporates Carl in a delayed effort to shield him from harm, to stop him from moving into situations where she feels she cannot protect him. That scene, as I also problematized in the context of reviewers and journalists' response by showing how Aidt's literary style of expression undermines Carl, clearly highlights how gestures of care can have unintentionally detrimental consequences. Another scene elaborates the *complicated*

[274] Ibid., 46.
[275] Ibid., 45.
[276] Here I am lightly referencing Donna Haraway's concept of "situatedness", which denotes a feminist methodological practice of accounting for one's positionality that also implies how objectivity, as it denotes the quest for universal truth, is an illusion ("Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, *Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 3 (1988), 975-99). I note more extensively on "situatedness" in chapter 4.

balancing act, which a relational or "matrixial" perspective on "carriance" foregrounds, and here once more it plays out between recognizing Carl's being and finding ways to respond to it that do not undermine it. Aidt writes:

> I think about my dead child; his time and his life are folded into me. I gave birth to him. I must hold his death. I will continue to fight like a lioness for him. No one should do him wrong. No one should forget him. Not as long as I am alive. I still protect him, I know him just as well as I know my living children.[277]

This passage foregrounds the conviction that Aidt "knows" Carl (i.e., who or what he *is*) and how what follows from this "knowledge" is a sense of responsibility to shield him from others that would do him wrong. As Aidt externalizes a potential threat by imagining how *others* could hurt Carl (i.e., "[n]o one shall do him wrong"), this mode of knowing not only momentarily side-lines the possibility that a mother's loving gestures could "do […] wrong". It also reveals another risk at undermining Carl's being in its somewhat possessive claim to knowing "him just as well as I know my living children", that is, in the implication that Aidt knows him correctly or more than others; that she knows him, as Derrida cautions against, in "essence". Aidt, in other words, fails here in a manner that attachment makes inevitable, but then does not stop trying to respond to, so as to illustrate to us, how Carl's being moves. In so doing she trots the balancing act between acknowledging being and not laying claim to it and begins to chart another more complicated ethics of loss than what is managed by those expert and vernacular discourses this chapter has explored.

Conclusion

This chapter has ultimately wanted to illustrate how a feminist relational perspective alters an ethics of loss. As I conclude this chapter with a reflection on the complicated balancing act a perspective of "matrixial carriance" opens—demanding, as it does of the mourning subject, that they consider the impacts their actions have on others through the prism of their

[277] Aidt, *Carl's Book,* 135.

entanglement with them—this chapter has noted at length on the inability of vernacular and expert models of grief to respond to the lost other, indeed, to even acknowledge its being. These observations have taken shape through analytic engagement with the reception of *Carl's Book* in the Danish media and public commentary it generated prior to but mostly after its publication.

Based on this engagement I have argued that while the homogenous compassion of reviewers and journalist Aidt alongside their rendering of Carl into a symbol of the tragedy of parental loss illustrate their inability to acknowledge the lost other as being, this is not a sign of some callous oversight or intent. In tracing and identifying a 'schema of the real' across psychoanalytic and contemporary psychiatric models of grief, I have shown how a disregard for Carl's being derives instead from a metaphysical presupposition whose rendering of the lost object as non-being is taken as common sense and 'natural'. This rendering, I argued, stems from the divisive equation of alive/dead and real/unreal that these expert approaches to grief enact through the relation they model between the bereaved subject and the lost object.

In highlighting how Aidt's literary style of expressing grief activates this 'schema of the real', I have wanted to stress how the consequent rendering of the deceased as non-being limits an ethics of loss to a concern with how best to respond to the mourning subject. Suggesting that Aidt, in her continued relating to Carl after the moment of death, offers us tools to begin to acknowledge the lost other as being, my analytic discussion of the response her literary style of expression generates has also stressed how the problem of relating to the lost other does not simply play out externally to *Carl's Book,* but amounts to a tension within it. As such, I have identified and troubled what Ettinger singles out as a classical ethics based on individualism as it surfaces across expert and vernacular discourse as well as in Aidt's more explicitly protective gestures that, in a different way (by sliding in and out of a model of

knowing “essence”), too implies that there is a ‘right’ ethical posture to strike, here, vis-à-vis the lost loved other.

Drawing on Ettinger’s ethico-existential notion of “carriance”, this chapter has highlighted how there is in this sense no ethically speaking “right” or safe position to take on the matter of grief. Indeed, Ettinger’s suggestion that the ethical imperative lies foremost in acknowledging our entangled condition of existence and secondly in responding to it indicates that relationality is where trouble starts. This renders ethics a continued and specific balancing rather than an abstract and fixed guideline. By following Ettinger’s imperative to “carry” as a precise rather than as a general dictum, this chapter’s engagement with Aidt thus ended with a reflection on how relating to the lost other entails an on-going responsiveness to their being that will inevitably struggle to abstain from laying essentializing claim to it [being].

This is to say that, based on a feminist relational acknowledgement of the lost other as being, a framework for ‘being through loss’ requires us to attune to our relational existence and to fine-tune our tools to reckon with the impacts our actions and behaviors have on others in this widened perspective. Chapter 3 has thus followed this dissertation’s second chapter’s conceptual opening of life beyond a sovereign, humanist definition by exploring what is gained and what is challenged by acknowledging the lost other as being. The next and final chapter will conclude this dissertation’s exploration of ‘being through loss’ by examining the embodied perspective Joan Didion offers through her experience of grief on a world that operates *as* loss.

4 A World That Operates *as* Loss: *The Year of Magical Thinking*

The Year of Magical Thinking was published in 2005 by renowned author and journalist Joan Didion whose oeuvre spans across decades and involves a vast scope of journalistic commentary and fiction on American popular and political history.[278] The many remarks made by other authors and literary critics on her life and work following her death on December 23, 2021 are a testament to Didion's standing as a celebrated author. She is, according to Hilton Als, "the voice of America."[279] *The Year* received the National Book Award for Nonfiction in 2005,[280] and has been subject to much praise, such as exemplified in the lines captured on the cover page of the paperback copy I own, where Michiko Kakutani, reviewing for *The New York Times,* extols: "Stunning candor and piercing details…. An indelible portrait of loss and grief."[281]

Generally speaking, reviews of *The Year* like Kakutani's emphasize the piercingly intimate quality of Didion's depiction of grief and in this highlight the bravery it took to give account to such traumatic, personal experience.[282] I have no objection per se to this appreciation that has, I believe, to do with the genre within which Didion writes. *The Year* invites reviewers and readers to receive and decipher Didion's writing through a prism of autobiography and more specifically as a potentially helpful set of instructions on how to endure personal struggle and tragedy.[283] Indeed, Didion herself observes how her grief experience, whether written or not, is subject to normative societal expectations of coping and

[278] Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (Vintage International, 2007). Hereafter *The Year*. As example of Didion's extensive commentary, *The White Album* (Simon and Schuster, 1979) explores key tendencies, events and figures in the 1970's US, such as, Charles Manson and the Black Panthers and in doing so she probes public and personal spiritual and mental confusion.

[279] Hilton Als, "Joan Didion and the Voice of America," *The New Yorker,* December 29, 2021.

[280] "2005 Winners," National Book Foundation, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.nationalbook.org/awards-prizes/national-book-awards-2005/.

[281] Joan Didion, *The Year*, front cover page.

[282] According to Lev Grossman writing for *Time* Didion's is "[a]n act of consummate literary bravery." (Didion, *The Year,* back cover page).

[283] The complications that might arise from this perspective are ultimately the theoretical and analytical foci of this dissertation's chapter 3.

healing similar to personal accounts of illness.[284] Feminist writer Anne Boyer has highlighted similar points in her account of her breast cancer diagnosis and treatment, where she notes in particular on the pervasiveness of survivor narratives and normative expectations around recovery.[285]

In a similar manner to Boyer, Didion—with her critical commentary on the normative assumptions that impose on her as a widow—delivers with *The Year* a forceful case for the significance of utilizing personal experience as a lens to decipher and challenge norms around illness, dying, and loss. Didion offers this at once critical and affirmative lens with an account of grief that, as reviewers highlight, is deeply moving, intimate, and emotionally piercing. Indeed, the majority of reviewers seem to read *The Year* as a rare chance to, through the baring experience of grief, catch a glimpse of Didion's more intimate person. I, however, argue that this reading misses a crucial insight, namely, the way that Didion uses grief to point beyond her self and to a world that operates *as* loss.

With this reframing, chapter 4 aims to illustrate how grief literature entails more than accounts of personal tragedy and endurance, and it does so by asking through Didion what we might gain from the embodied perspective she offers on being in a world that operates *as* loss? To reach and explore this question, in what follows I begin by introducing *The Year*—noting on its general structure and narrative as well as the unfamiliarly intimate encounter it establishes with Didion through her experience of grief. I connect this unfamiliar intimacy of *The Year* to the general appreciation by reviewers of how personal and exposing this book is,

[284] In response to the treatment therapy for "established pathological mourners" developed by a professor of psychiatry at University of Virginia and his team of researchers, Didion writes: "But from where exactly did Dr. Volkan and his team in Charlottesville derive their unique understanding of "the psychodynamics involved in the patient's need to keep the other alive," their special ability to "explain and interpret the relationship that had existed between the patient and the one who died"? […] Where you with me and "the one who died" […] / *Were you there?* / *No.* / *You might have been useful with a thermometer but you were not there.* / *I don't need to "review the circumstances of the death." I was there.* / *I didn't get "the news," I didn't view the body. I was there.* / I catch myself, I stop. (Didion, *The Year*, 55-56).

[285] Anne Boyer, *The Undying* (Allen Lane, 2019). See also Jackie Stacey, *Teratologies: A Cultural Study of Cancer* (Routledge, 1997); Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (Penguin Random House, 2020).

which is juxtaposed by a longer tendency to characterize Didion via her distant and cool style as an author.

The book's genre together with its topic, I thus suggest, give readers reason to assume that *The Year* should be read above all through a lens that focuses on the personal. This brings me to an anti-autobiographical reframing of *The Year* that, as I stress, does not constitute a move from the subjective to the objective but rather, in a situated manner, points beyond the personal as an interpretive lens. With this reframing I show how Didion through her grief experience gestures to a world that operates *as* loss— that is, in absence of structure and logic and in complete indifference to individual attachment and needs—a perspective she names *"world without end."*[286] In order to elaborate the implications of this perspective, I turn next to Hélène Cixous' writing on mourning.

Aided by Cixous, I stress how Didion's *world without end* allows us to see how a seemingly natural world is in fact constructed for the end of protecting a specific model of living in it. Cixous identifies this model as a war-like strategy where, in order to feel safe and in control, man forces a structure of oppositions onto a world that operates in absence of such (i.e., *world without end*).[287] With a brief comparative reflection, I highlight how Cixous' critique of opposition carries onto-epistemological leverage that is similar to Barad's observation that dualism shapes a conventional Western imaginary of reality.[288] Starting from Didion's proposition that the world operates *as* loss, this chapter moves to explore, through her embodied experience, what existential-methodological lessons on un/certainty we might learn from being in *world without end*. Lessons, I return for a final reflection on the onto-epistemological perspective that frames this dissertation at large.

[286] Didion, *The Year*, 190.

[287] Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7, no. 1 (1981), 54.

[288] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 804.

4.1 "No eye was on the sparrow": An anti-autobiographical reframing

Didion begins *The Year* by summarizing those two events that make up its main narrative structures:

> In outline. / It is now, as I begin to write this, the afternoon of October 4, 2004. / Nine months and five days ago, at approximately nine o'clock on the evening of December 30, 2003, my husband, John Gregory Dunne, appeared to (or did) experience [...] a sudden massive coronary event that caused his death. Our only child, Quintana, had been for the previous five nights unconscious in an intensive care unit at Beth Israel Medical Center's Singer Division [...] where what had seemed a case of December flu severe enough to take her to an emergency room on Christmas morning had exploded into pneumonia and septic shock.[289]

Where Quintana's eventual death lies beyond the scope of *The Year,*[290] the elongated event of her life-threatening illness and John's sudden passing coincide temporally in *The Year* and turn out to shore up a great deal of thematic similarity. Questions of loss, vulnerability, and dependency emerge as frequently in the scenes that detail Quintana's hospitalization, recovery, and re-hospitalization as in those that pertain to John's death. Thus, in Didion's own words:

> This [book] is my attempt to make sense of the period that followed, weeks and months that cut loose any fixed idea I had ever had about death, about illness, about probability and luck, about good fortune and bad, about marriage and children and memory, about grief, about the ways in which people do and do not deal with the fact that life ends, about the shallowness of sanity, about life itself.[291]

Loyal to above summary, *The Year* brings readers into the deeply personal and unfiltered emotion that mark the period that follows John's death and, in that, unfamiliarly close to Didion. This closeness is unfamiliar because of the composure and distance that is generally perceived to define Didion's public persona and her way of writing. This perception of Didion that took shape already early in her career is underlined in the

[289] Didion, *The Year*, 6-7.
[290] Didion writes about Quintana's illness and death in *Blue Nights* (Knopf, 2011).
[291] Didion, *The Year*, 7.

commentary that surrounds Didion's recent passing and by Veronica Horwell's obituary of Didion for *The Guardian* specifically. Horwell writes:

> Didion characterized some of her essays, with their first-person viewpoint and fiction-like fine details, as "Personals," but in fact they were about the world as seen by a social and political conservative from the last American generation to identify with adults. A tiny, unnerved and unnerving figure behind vast dark glasses, she was derisive of lax language and dismissive of unformed thought on both the left and right.[292]

The juxtaposition of Didion's self-identified personal style of writing (i.e., "Personals") with terms such as "conservative" and "adults" creates associations with strict composure, even a cold and distanced demeanor—a person seemingly unforgiving of uncontrolled language or loose thought. With this description, Horwell underscores her headline caption, which characterizes Didion as a "[d]etached observer of American society and political life."[293] Although it is covertly dismissive and condescending in tone, a simultaneous acknowledgement of and admiration for Didion's accomplishments as a writer runs throughout Horwell's piece. The author had a "reputation for cool," Howell notes, referencing the writer Caitlin Flanagan in her observation that "Didion "had fans–not the way writers have fans, but the way musicians and actors have fans–and almost all of them were females."[294] Thus, Horwell's characterization is rather exemplary of how Didion's person is routinely described.[295]

[292] Veronica Horwell, "Joan Didion Obituary," *The Guardian,* December 23, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/dec/23/joan-didion-obituary.

[293] Ibidem.

[294] Ibidem. Caitlin Flanagan is an American author and journalist and a staff writer at *The Atlantic*. "Caitlin Flanagan Staff Profile," The Atlantic, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/author/caitlin-flanagan/.

[295] E.g., Molly Fisher, "Why Loving Joan Didion Is a Trap," *The Cut,* accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.thecut.com/2015/01/loving-joan-didion-is-a-trap.html. Maggie Nelson too offers a rather unflattering evaluation of Didion in *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (W. W. Norton Company, 2011). Nelson writes: "I wander out of the bookstore wondering, Is honesty paired with brutality a more winning, or at least a more marketable, combination? And why has self-pity become the spectre to be avoided at all costs, in order to earn artistic seriousness, moral rectitude, and, perhaps, that all-important commodity, readers? ("How to avoid self-pity," Joan Didion chastens herself at the outset of her bestselling grief memoir, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a book a friend of mine recently designated, without rancor, as "widow porn." (ibid., 150) More than actually engaging with what Didion might mean with "self-pity," I find Nelson's account here to echo a longer lasting impression of Didion as cold and conservative and, perhaps, even worse—as Nelson implies in a reflection following (but framing) her explicit comment on *The Year*—an anti-feminist (ibid., 194).

When coupled with characterization, such as Horwell's, of Didion's "detached" poise behind those iconic "vast dark glasses," coolness, nevertheless, reads more frosty and aloof than a warming attitude.[296] Indeed, in *The Year* Didion has her own remarks on these assumptions around and depictions of her attitude. About an exchange with a social worker at the hospital where her husband John is taken after suffering a cardiac arrest at their dinner table, Didion writes:

> When the social worker reappeared [… h]e had with him a man he introduced as "your husband's doctor." There was a silence. "He's dead, isn't he," I heard myself say to the doctor. The doctor looked at the social worker. 'It's okay,' the social worker said. "She's a pretty cool customer."[297]

There is humor in the near-mechanical quality to Didion's description of the exchange that unfolds between herself, the social workers, the doctor, a priest, and other hospital staff concerning the practicalities related to John's death, as for example when she recalls the social worker asking: "Do you have money for the fare," […] "I said I did, the cool customer."[298] As if Didion knows how available is this line of interpreting her "coolness" as reflecting a near-frighteningly emotional composure, she gives readers permission to explore it. That is, until she writes:

> When I walked into the apartment and saw John's jacket and scarf still lying on the chair where he had dropped them when we came in from seeing Quintana at Beth Israel North (the red cashmere scarf, the Patagonia windbreaker that had been the crew jacket on *Up Close & Personal*) I wondered what an uncool customer would be allowed to do. Break down? Require sedation? Scream?[299]

In a delayed and roundabout manner of sharing her response by way of suggesting scenarios that could have revealed some of her emotions (shock?, hysteria?, rage?) that were

[296] What I mean to stress here is that so much traction and popularity is infused in this connection between Didion's style – in writing and appearance – and imagination and representation of her as a "cool," even slightly, cold person that the brand Céline knew to capitalize on it when, for the second time, it made Didion its "poster girl" wearing those iconic sunglasses. (Alessandra Codinha, "Céline Unveils Its Latest Poster Girl: Joan Didion," *Vogue*, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.vogue.com/article/joan-didion-celine-ad-campaign.

[297] Didion, *The Year*, 16.

[298] Ibidem. In fact, I would say, humor and self-deprecation reverberate through a lot the writing of Didion that I have read.

[299] Ibidem.

not immediately shared, Didion challenges the social worker's reading of her "coolness" and, in so doing, creates space in her own experience of grief for others too to fill in the blanks. Behind this suspension of response—this more generally speaking withholding that Horwell notes on—is Didion's razor sharp and sensitive observatory skill, which, in my understanding, insists on creating and holding space for expansion and complexity rather than it expresses detachment.[300]Against the backdrop of this lasting characterization of Didion as a somewhat cold and detached commentator, one can only imagine the allure of a publication such as *The Year*. Its topic matter promises to offer an unmediated and intimate look into Didion's life and, with this, to peel back and perhaps even dissolve the composure and control that has come to so define her persona in media and public imagination.

Personal accounts, in other words, hold the promise that they will offer a raw view on the "real" person, on the one who, in this case notably, seems to be hiding behind those "vast dark glasses" and a veneer of technical writerly skill. Couched in this appeal and promise of personal accounts—and especially in the details of intimate and traumatic events—there is, I believe, a remnant of the metaphysics of the transcendental subject that subtends autobiography as a genre. Indeed, according to Julia Watson, the autobiographical subject that has been historically privileged in the "bios" in autobiography "epitomizes the metaphysical aspiration of Western culture."[301] The autobiographical subject, in other words, indexes a belief in the "transcendent metaphysical subject" that in turn keeps alive the illusion that the true or core character of a person is representable and accessible in this genre and, indeed, that it exists as such.[302]

[300] This is to say that, rather than reading Didion's style as conservative and detached (e.g., section that ends with footnote 295), I side more with the kind of reading Hilton Als offers when he sees an accommodating sensibility and an analytic sharpness in Didion's writerly technique and composure (Als, "Joan Didion").

[301] Julia Watson, "Toward an Anti-Metaphysics of Autobiography." In *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation.* (Stanford University Press, 1993), 59.

[302] This historical and metaphysical foundation of the genre is first pointed out and challenged by theorists of the, so called, new model of autobiography such as Georges Gusdorf who argues that an autobiographical account cannot be a pure record of existence (*Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* (Princeton University Press 1956), 42).

Not all allure stems from the traction of this metaphysical conviction, certainly, much of *The Year's* popularity and critical acclaim derive from the fact that, at the time of publication, it marked the latest item on a string of remarkable publications throughout Didion's career.[303] The point to stress from the lasting representation (as exemplified by Horwell's obituary) of Didion as a cool, composed, and distant person is, however, that part of *The Year's* appeal may very well reside in its implicit promise to offer an unprecedented glimpse at the real person that is Didion. Representatively, Robert Pinsky emphasizes for *The New York Times Book Review* how *The Year* is: "An *exact*, *candid*, and *penetrating* account of *personal* terror and bereavement . . . sometimes quite funny because it dares to tell the truth."[304] The honestly and intimately piercing punches do just keep rolling throughout *The Year*, which supports Pinsky's representative characterization of the book as above all personal. As example of this, *The Year* shares the following insight:

> People who have recently lost someone have a certain look, recognizable maybe only to those who have seen that look on their faces. I have noticed it on my face, and I notice it now on others. The look is one of extreme vulnerability, nakedness, openness. It is like the look of someone who walks from the ophthalmologist's office into the bright daylight with dilated eyes, or of someone who wears glasses and is suddenly made to take them off. The people who have lost someone look naked because they think themselves invisible. I myself felt invisible for a period of time, incorporeal.[305]

Against the backdrop of imaginations about Didion's distanced coolness, what stands out here is how she uses a "look" on her face to express and share feelings of "extreme vulnerability, nakedness, openness." Further, she uses this "look" to also forge a connection with others through a deep sense of exposure and vulnerability via its, alleged, recognizability to anyone who has themself experienced loss. From the perspective of the text itself and its general reception there is in, other words, no obvious reason not to read *The Year* as a deeply

[303] E.g., Joan Didion, *A Book of Common Prayer* (Simon and Schuster, 1977), and *Play It As It Lays* (Simon and Schuster, 1971) as well as screenplays such as *The Panic In Needle Park* (Dominick Dunne 1971) and various journalism (e.g., *Sloughing Towards Bethlehem* (Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1968).

[304] As quoted on the back cover of Joan Didion *The Year* (First Vintage International edition, 2007), my emphases.

[305] Didion, *The Year*, 74-5.

personal account whose qualities are exactly concentrated in the fact that Didion, true to the promise of the genre, does seem to bare it all. I, however, want to argue that *The Year* should be approached anti-biographically.

To grasp what I mean by anti-biographical, we can think along the lines of feminist methodology and Donna Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" specifically. This approach dispenses with the illusion that any scientific perspective is objective; indeed, it all together challenges the conviction that objectivity is possible.[306] Haraway holds instead that all perception and representation is subjective or situated somewhere, which resonates with the feminist line of theorizing I sketched through Julia Watson above that troubles the historic connection of the genre of autobiography to metaphysical truth and critically reconfigures the act of narrating lives.[307] If we start from the premise of situatedness—that is, that no perspective is objective—*The Year* should be read anti-biographically not despite, but in large part, because of its deeply personal character. In other words, like any other perspective, the experience this book relays is situated.

An anti-biographical approach thus aims to de-sensationalize *The Year's* personal character, not to take away from the specificity of Didion's experience but to foreground what this book's framing (as a deeply personal story that will reveal something essential about the person Didion) misses. If we exchange an autobiographical framing of *The Year* for a situated perspective then, I propose, we can begin to notice how Didion uses her experience of loss to offer a perspective on the world. Importantly, this re-framing then differs from Horwell's re-casting of Didion's self-identification of her essays as "Personals".[308] Horwell assumes that a cool and composed style equates 'detachment' in the manner Haraway identifies its

[306] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 575-599.

[307] Waves of theorizing have influenced how the genre of autobiography is perceived, how self-representation is conceptualised and methodologically approached. Performativity in this context resonates with Judith Butler's conceptualization where the act of narrating lives is understood to constitute an act or enactment. See for example Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Cornell University Press, 1999) and Sidonie Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," *a/b Auto/Biography studies*, 10, no. 1 (1995): 17-33.

[308] Horwell, "Joan Didion Obituary".

methodological manifestation as objectivity. Reading *The Year* anti-biographically does not propose a move away from the personal or subjective toward the general or objective. An anti-biographical shift appreciates the situated and embodied quality of *The Year* but dislodges from the personal as the sole interpretive lens.

As a consequence and to illustrate the implications of this shift, I move focus onto Didion's formulation of *world without end,* which first appears toward the end *The Year* and is repeated in its closing pages.[309] A sense of climax therefore surrounds this perspective, which makes it all the more noticeable and intriguing how absent analysis or simply observation of it is from commentary on the book. Though perhaps unconscious, those who engage with Didion's account of loss insistently ignore *world without end.*[310] Section 4.3's reflection on the place of fear and the function of control in *world without end* returns to remark on the possible reasons for this avoidance, but suffice it for now to say that the perspective Didion introduces with this phrase is entirely vast and overwhelming and, in that sense, not easy to tackle.

As noted above, what I take from a *world without end* is that Didion provides a formulation of the world *as* loss. Chapter 4's main question emerges from and focuses on this formulation when it asks: if we start from the premise that the world operates *as* loss, what lessons might Didion's embodied experience of being in *world without end* hold? As a first step in exploring this question, I turn to Hélène Cixous' writing on loss, and her concept of a "feminine textual body" specifically, to unpack Didion's formulation of the world *as* loss and to examine its implications. The following engagement with *world without end* thus also illustrates the analytic usefulness of feminist poststructuralist writing on loss and, in so doing, it makes an argument for an onto-epistemological reading of Cixous's critique of a

[309] Didion, *The Year,* 188-9 and 226-7.

[310] This is so in reviews etc. but scholarship on the book tends to be more drawn to her notion of "magical thinking" (e.g., Roger Luckhurst, "Reflections on Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking," New Formations,* 67, no. 67 (2009), 93; Sandra M. Gilbert, "The Year of Magical Thinking," *Literature and Medicine,* 25, no. 2 (2006), 553-557).

"masculine economy"—which I suggest does not merely constitute a critique of the power of discourse but a theory of how the world is shaped.[311]

4.2 "*World without end*": Deconstructing opposition

Toward the end of *The Year,* Didion recounts how in "grief […] we will confront the experience of meaninglessness itself."[312] Shortly after, when relating meaninglessness directly to her description of grief, she further connects it to *world without end,* which she describes as follows:

> As a child I thought a great deal about meaninglessness, which seemed at the time the most prominent negative feature on the horizon. After a few years of failing to find meaning in the more commonly recommended venues I learned that I could find it in geology, so I did. This in turn enabled me to find meaning in the Episcopal litany, most acutely in the words *as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end,* which I interpreted as a literal description of the constant changing of the earth, the unending erosion of the shores and mountains, the inexorable shifting of the geological structure that could throw up mountains and islands and could just as reliably take them away. I found earthquakes, even when I was in them, deeply satisfying, abruptly revealed evidence of the scheme in action. That the scheme could destroy the works of man might be a personal regret but remained, in the larger picture I had come to recognize, a matter of abiding indifference. No eye was on the sparrow. No one was watching me. *As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.*[313]

World without end points out a "meaninglessness" that should not be understood as a nihilist outlook on a "horizon" whose main feature is negative.[314] Didion's description reveals that while it may have started in childhood as a negative feeling *about* the world, it since developed into a more affirmative or even meaningful appreciation for how the world operates in "abiding indifference" to "the works of man." A shift in perspective occurs here that resonates with my anti-autobiographical invitation to approach *The Year* as a situated

[311] In Cixous' own words, "culture […], the whole conglomeration of symbolic systems […] everything that seizes us, everything that acts on us […] it is all ordered around hierarchical oppositions that come back to the man/woman opposition." ("Castration,", 44).

[312] Didion, *The Year*, 188-9.

[313] ibidem. Emphasis as in original.

[314] Negativity as attitude might be captured in the philosophical and political position of nihilism. ("Nihilism," Merriam Webster Online, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nihilism).

account of the world instead of a lens that will reveal something essential about Didion as a person.[315] *World without end* is the name Didion gives a world, which, her experience of loss reminds her, is in constant movement. She illustrates this with reference to geological "changing […] erosion […] shifting."[316] It is a world that operates *as* loss in the manner that its unending unfolding gives life as much as it takes it away. Didion writes, indeed, how "the inexorable shifting of the geological structure […] could just as reliably take them away."[317] The meaninglessness Didion highlights in *world without end* denotes the absence of the kind of meaning "man" would like to ascribe to it, or it speaks to how, from the perspective of "the works of man," this world does not make sense.

There is something disarming about the way Didion notes on the limitation of a human perspective,[318] yet, I want to propose that the connection she makes between "man" and the world holds potential for a more radical critique. In order to crystalize this critique, we can turn to Cixous' writing on mourning and loss, where she delineates the significant difference in outcome from how we chose to respond to this meaninglessness. In "Castration and Decapitation?" Cixous ultimately utilizes loss as a theoretical and poetic tool of deconstruction.[319] In a gesture of distinction, she writes out a form of mourning that differs from loss in a deconstructive sense: "Man cannot live without resigning himself to loss. He has to mourn. It's his way of withstanding castration. He goes through castration, that is, and

[315] As noted above, this shift does not move from a subjective to an objective approach to grief, but dislodges instead from a focus on what loss tells us about an individual towards a focus on what loss tells us about the world.

[316] Didion, *The Year*, 189.

[317] Ibidem.

[318] Disarming in the fact that the gendered use of "man" to seemingly point to human as such couches a humanism, which black feminist critique highlights is not a universal name for humanity but instead grounded in a deeply exclusive and notably racial hierarchy of humanity. The seemingly generic or universal notion of human, Sylvia Wynter corrects, is a specific and exclusivist genre of the human that overrepresents one particular mode of existence, namely, that of Man, as if it were the human itself ("Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *The New Centennial Review*, 3, no. 3 (2003), 260.

[319] "A feminine textual body" thus resonates with the mode of writing by and for women Cixous introduces as "écriture feminine" in "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs*, 1, no. 4, (1976), 875-893.

by sublimation incorporates the lost object. Mourning, resigning oneself to loss, means not losing."[320]

Cixous highlights here how a certain form of mourning (i.e., man's) amounts to a resignation to loss whose aim is to *avoid* "losing." We might call this form of mourning individual in that, as Cixous stresses, it urges man in singular "to mourn" (i.e., "he has to") by way of incorporating "the lost object."[321] According to Cixous, incorporation of the lost object amounts to a strategy of avoidance, in that, by rendering loss concrete (i.e., "the lost object) and individual (i.e., "incorporation"), it dodges another form of losing (i.e., "mourning […] means *not* losing").[322] Why the need to avoid this other form of losing; what kind of threat does it pose? Cixous responds by paralleling the function of incorporation with that of castration, or, the "castration complex". This complex seeks to resolve a condition of "not knowing" or, in Cixous' words, a "mystery that leads man to keep overcoming, dominating, subduing, putting his manhood to the test, against the mystery he has to keep forcing back."[323]

Along this line of thinking, Cixous alternates "mystery" for a "feminine textual body" that she describes as "always *endless, without ending*: there's no closure, it doesn't stop."[324] "Mystery" and a "feminine textual body" both resonate with Didion's notion of *world without end* in that they signal to a world that operates *as* loss, that is, a world that takes as easily as it gives and it does so in "abiding indifference" to "the works of man",[325] or, as Cixous above observes, in a mysterious manner. What is given expression across these different terms is a world that does not care for individual attachment and human scripts of meaning making: a world that operates *as* loss or, following Cixous, a world that operates in a mysterious and unknowable way. This is, she continues, the form of loss (i.e., "mourning […] means *not*

[320] Cixous, *"Castration,"* 54.

[321] Incorporation here should be understood along its Freudian conceptualization, namely, along the lines I highlight in chapter 3, as a mechanism by which the mourning subject, or rather the melancholic, exhibits its refusal to accept that the lost object is irretrievably lost or, rather, gone.

[322] Cixous, *"Castration,"* 54, my emphasis.

[323] Ibid., 48-9.

[324] Ibid., 53, my emphases.

[325] Didion, *The Year*, 188-9.

losing")[326] that man finds threatening. Man, in other words, fears living in uncertainty, living "not knowing" or, if we follow Didion, living in *world without end.*

Having likened it to the "mystery" man labors to force back, Cixous poses a "feminine textual body" as a mode of resistance to a "masculine economy," which is to say that she uses this body's mode of "overflow[ing], disgorge[ing], vomiting"[327] to say something about said economy.[328]According to Cixous, a "masculine economy" expresses man's "desire" for control and, in that, his fear of mystery by way of rendering the world knowable through an oppositional or dualist script. This script, Cixous writes, is given expression in "culture […], the whole conglomeration of symbolic systems […] everything that seizes us, everything that acts on us […] it is all ordered around hierarchical oppositions that come back to the man/woman opposition".[329] Opposition returns us to the "castration complex," which we can now see is ultimately a scheme designed to create a sense of control, comparable to the process Cixous delineates through individualized mourning as a means to render loss concrete and individual.

By rendering woman the embodiment of a particular lack (i.e., the lack of "phallus"),[330] the "castration complex," according to Cixous, configures an abstract lack (i.e., of logic, structure, that is, the "mystery" that defines the world) into a concrete and tangible lack (i.e., of phallus). She thus shows us how, by devising a structure of opposition, man distinguishes him self from a world of others who he renders "passive" against his own "activeness."[331]

[326] Cixous, *"Castration,"* 54, my emphasis.
[327] ibidem.
[328] This is, in my understanding Cixous' deconstructive use of loss, which is not an end in itself but rather points somewhere, hence, my formulation above that she 'says something' else with it.
[329] Ibid., 44.
[330] Ibidem.
[331] Ibidem. Note that Cixous elaborates how the man/woman dyad amounts to an oppositional schema that is hierarchical in quality and that entails a set of other enactments, including "great/small, superior/inferior […] activity and passivity" (ibidem.). Although Cixous focuses her analysis through the man/woman dyad, she points to the racializing character of otherness: "Women have it in them to organize this regeneration, this vitalization of the other, of otherness in its entirety. They have it in them to affirm the difference, *their* difference, such that nothing can destroy that difference, rather that it might be affirmed, affirmed to the point of strangeness. So much so that when sexual difference, when the preservation or dissolution of sexual difference,

And, she stresses how its reference to a seemingly biologically inherent and unquestionable sexual difference gives opposition absolute ontological authority.[332] Cixous thus shows us how the model of living man devises to make himself feel in control gets to pose as the representational(ist) model of the world. If this sounds like Barad's critique of representationalism, it is because I read it so.

Cixous' critique of a masculine economy's man/woman: active/passive opposition resonates intriguingly with Barad's observation that a subject/object dichotomy grounds a representationalist imagination of the world as a host of passive objects that exist in inherent ontological coherence, which leaves it for the subject to bring about their inter-*action* (such as through interpretation and representation).[333] This resonance offers in turn that Cixous' observation, on how a masculine economy shapes "everything that seizes us,"[334] is not simply an analysis of the discursive impact language has on culture. Noting on the ontological authority dualism draws from its connection to biological sex as nature, Cixous sounds strikingly like Barad and Kirby when they challenge a nature/culture binary.[335] To briefly elaborate, we can refer to Cixous' conceptualization of the textuality of a "feminine textual body" in terms of flesh. She writes: "feminine texts […] are very close to the voice, very close to the flesh of language."[336]

is touched on, the whole problem of destroying the strange, destroying all the forms of racism, all the exclusions, all those instances of outlaw and genocide that recur through History, is also touched on. (ibid., 50).

[332] Ibid., 46. Cixous writes: "everything that seizes us, everything that acts on us—it is all ordered around hierarchical oppositions that come back to the man/woman opposition, an opposition that can only be sustained by means of difference posed by cultural discourse as "natural", the difference between activity and passivity." (Ibid., 44) Cixous stresses further how "the body is not sexed, does not recognize itself as, say, female or male without having gone through the castration complex." (Ibid., 46).

[333] Confer with my methodological reflection on Vicki Kirby and Karen Barad in introduction chapter section 1.3.

[334] Cixous, *"Castration,"* 44.

[335] This is not the time to undertake a comparative analysis, but I find that Cixous' formulation of the fleshiness of text in effect approximates Vicki Kirby's notion of "corporeaography". Confer this with the introduction section 1.3's discussion on methodology.

[336] Ibid., 54.

The fleshiness of a feminine textual body thus unravels (reminded, it "overflows, disgorges, vomit[s]")[337] the "Nature/History" opposition that, Cixous argues, extends through the man/woman dichotomy that grounds man's imagination of the world as a phenomenon that follows a dualist structure.[338] I highlight this resonance to foreground the general insight that in representationalism too echoes a desire for control over the world (also taking the form of a claim to know) that is similar to the desire Cixous singles out in a masculine economy. With this, we can discern more specific insights and an analytic route into control onward by returning Cixous's analysis to Didion. Embodied in a "feminine textual body" Cixous uses loss as a deconstructive tool, showing us how the model of living man devises to make himself feel in control gets to pose as an accurate representation of the world (i.e., as ontology). She shows us how mourning as incorporation, like the "castration complex", renders loss an individual and concrete event to overcome and how, in so doing, it erases loss (or loosing) as an abstract, existential condition.

If we take this insight to bear on my initial anti-autobiographical reframing of *The Year,* we can appreciate how the autobiographical lens through which this book has been predominantly perceived makes a similar maneuver to incorporation. It renders Didion's experience of loss through a high-contrast lens that focuses on how she, as an individual, deals with a specific loss and, in so doing, it ignores the situated and embodied perspective *The Year* provides on the world *as* loss. The great irony of the "castration complex" is, however, that in order to not lose or surrender to an endless world, man creates a model of living, a "battle […] strategy" that, as Cixous stresses, resigns itself to loss by having to constantly push its mystery back.[339]

[337] ibidem.

[338] Ibid., 44. I want to highlight, as Cixous herself does, how a man/woman opposition uses sexual difference to naturalize dualism and so gives is ontological authority. Cixous' use of man denotes, in other words, an attitude to the world that aims to control it, and not recourse to biological essentialism.

[339] To underscore the irony of the system the castration complex sets up, Cixous refers to this scheme of avoidance as war and battle: "It's always clearly a question of war, of battle. If there is no battle, its replaced by

On the basis of this insight, Cixous' observation that "man cannot live without resigning himself to loss"[340] is as ironic as it is sad or melancholic.[341] Where man cannot imagine or bear to live in a world without feeling in control of it, a "feminine textual body", however, can and so its "overflow[ing], disgorge[ing], vomiting"[342] gestures in a deconstructive sense to a mode of living that embodies *world without end*, a world that operates *as* loss in the manner that it unfolds, as Didion highlights, in a giving and taking.[343] Cixous thus aids further in highlighting how the connection Didion forges between *world without end* and the "works of man," and more specifically the fact that said world operates in indifference to a human perspective, not only challenges a/man's model of living that imagines itself in control of the world and the world as controllable.

Because Cixous' use of loss is deconstructive, it is not an end itself but instead points somewhere, which she leaves rather open to exploration. A "feminine textual body" thus points beyond to a possibility of being in *world without end* differently. Didion's notion of *world without end* therefore not only challenges man's model of being, but also gestures toward an alternative world.[344] In what follows, I therefore look again to Didion to consider what lessons her embodied experience of being in *world without end* might have to offer us.

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the stake of a battle: strategy. Man is strategy, is reckoning . . . "how to win" with the least possible loss, at the lowest possible cost." (Ibid., 47).

[340] Ibid., 54.

[341] Here, I do not use melancholy to denote Freud's pathological concept of the subject that cannot accept that the lost other is irreversibly gone (I attend to this model in chapter 3). I refer to melancholy in the sense Butler elaborates as a sedimentation of gendered aspects of being that are omitted from taking expression in the reality the symbolic has created where, as Butler argues, homosexuality is unaccepted ("Melancholy Gender—Refused Identification," in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, (Stanford University Press, 1997). By extension of this line of thinking, the melancholy that surrounds Cixous' "man" is a gendered or, in the words of Cixous, "sexed" ("Castration," 46) refusal to admit his vulnerability to the world

[342] Ibid., 54.

[343] A feminine textual body, unlike (what Cixous names) a masculine economy, does not have victory as its aim. Instead of trying to prevent or fight the world's operating *as* loss it follows the flow of endlessness that characterizes it Cixous writes: "Woman, though, does not mourn, does not resign herself to loss. She basically *takes up the challenge of loss* in order to go on living: she lives it, gives it live, is capable of unsparing loss." (Ibid., 54)

[344] Through her writing on loss and mourning, Cixous delineates two models of living in, which is to say, of responding to *world without end*: one that, with incorporation, seeks to erase this existential condition (i.e., a "masculine economy) and one that embodies the world's unraveling as loss (i.e., feminine textual body). As I use the notion of 'being' in my exploration of Didion's embodied experience of *being* in *world without end* onward, I am connecting or making reference to Cixous' concept of living (as in "man cannot live without resigning himself to loss" (ibid., 64).

In accepting the premise that the world operates *as* loss and seeing that control echoes in a conventional representationalist conviction of knowing the world, we might, however, want to reconsider the role control plays here beyond its identification by Cixous as an expression of a masculinist desire for power. My focus in the following sections on Didion's tendency in grief toward control thus takes such a conceptual elaboration as one of its main aims.

4.3 "They made me feel less helpless": The function of control

When I utilize Cixous' writing on loss above, I ultimately foreground a deconstructive reading of Didion's notion of *world without end.* To discern my analytic use of and intention with *world without end* onward, I briefly situate it within poststructuralist deconstruction where Jacques Derrida offers a resonant notion of "the end of the world" that connects to his thinking about the death of the other, notably in his 2002 publication *The Work of Mourning.*[345] Kas Saghafi thus notes of Derrida's formulation how it entails that: "[d]eath is not, as we customarily think, the end of *a* world, 'the end of someone or something *in the world,'* the end of one world among other, but the absolute end of the one and only world."[346] What Derrida, according to Saghafi, offers instead is that the death of the other forces us to realize how there is no world before or beyond them. This proposition amounts to a deconstruction of a universal concept of "the One world," projected as an anterior futurity, a "horizon against which everything is supposed to occur", as Saghafi summarizes.[347]

[345] See Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning,* (Chicago University Press, 2003). In his reflection on Derrida's notion of the end of the world, Kas Saghafi notes how "[i]n speaking about the end of the world, I am following a path, which may by now be considered well-trodden, a trail already expertly blazed by the remarkable analyses of Michael Naas, Rodolphe Gasché, Ginette Michaud, Geoffrey Bennington, J. Hillis Miller, and Peggy Kamuf" (Kas Saghafi, "The World after the End of the World," *The Oxford Literary Review,* 39, no. 2, (2017), 268).

[346] Saghafi, "The World," 267.

[347] Saghafi writes: "There is no such thing as the One universal world that is shared by all; the world is not that within which all beings live or what they inhabit, the intersubjective accomplishment of a transcendental ego or *the* horizon against which everything is supposed to occur; death marks every time the absolute end of the world: the death of the other entails the disappearance of *the* world, marking, every time, each time singularly, the absolute end of the one and only world, *the end of the world.*" (Ibid., 266)

If there is no world without the lost other, if they are *the world*, then, Saghafi continues, the end of the other prompts us to think about the world through them.[348] In the absence of the anteriority a universal world provides, we carry the other as a world within us. In this sense, I would say, carrying the other entails carrying the deconstructive insight that there is no universal world. Similar to Derrida's deconstruction, I use Cixous' writing on loss to stress how *world without end* reveals a naturalized world to be constructed and thus in service of protecting a specific model of living: one that imagines the world as controllable and itself in control of it. Thus far in alignment, I, however, dislodge from a deconstructive use of *world without end* from this point onward when I move to consider what lessons Didion offers with her embodied experience of being in an endless world. I thus distinguish my use of *world without* end from Derrida's formulation of "the end of the world" both by shifting my analytic focus onto the bereaved subject and onto embodiment.

The above section noted extensively on how Cixous identifies man's efforts to avoid losing (i.e., surrendering) to an endless world, which is to say that his efforts to create a sense of control are fueled by fear of the existential condition of "not knowing".[349] According to Cixous, this fear therefore constantly urges man "to keep overcoming, dominating, subduing, putting his manhood to the test, against the mystery he has to keep forcing back."[350] Cixous here connects man's urge for control and dominance over the world to a desire for power, yet at the root of it is fear. As further noted, Cixous offers a "feminine textual body" as a mode of resistance to man's dualism and thus as an alternative mode of living to his strategy of control. Having thus connected control to man's model of living, Cixous implies that to live

[348] If the other is *the world* then their death is the death of the world, and this prompts Derrida to ask how we carry this world within us. Partly paraphrasing Derrida, Saghafi writes: "But mourning does not wait for death, its implacable temporality of the future anterior dictates that one of us will have been 'dedicated' […] to carry the other, to carry 'the world after the end of the world'." (Ibid., 267).

[349] As Cixous writes when she connects man's desire to know with a desire to control: "not knowing is threatening" ("Castration," 48-9). According to Cixous, this fear therefore constantly urges man "to keep overcoming, dominating, subduing, putting his manhood to the test, against the mystery he has to keep forcing back." (ibidem.)

[350] ibidem.

in acceptance of *world without end,* one must let go of a desire for control, or, that a desire for control will seize once one has surrendered to *world without end.* Cixous notes in this context how women mimic man's model and will therefore need to unlearn his script, which is to say that the route out of dualism is neither direct nor easy, yet the implication that control will eventually be done away with remains.

My brief comparative reflection above on Barad and Cixous aimed to highlight how Cixous' critique of a masculine economy carries onto-epistemological leverage that is similar to Barad's observation that dualism shapes a conventional Western imaginary of the world. I highlighted then *from* Cixous *in* Barad's critique how representationalism too desires a sense of control through the conviction that it knows what the world *is*. This is to say that, beyond an explicit model of mastery, control plays a crucial function in how the world is conventionally imagined and so it deserves further conceptual elaboration. I suggest we move to Didion's embodied account of being in *world without end* to explore what else or more control has to tell us than its alleged desire for power. Following the death of her husband the winter prior Didion writes:

> There came a time in the summer when I began feeling fragile, unstable. A sandal would catch on a sidewalk, and I would need to run a few steps to avoid the fall. What if I didn't? What if I fell? What would break, who would see the blood streaming down my leg, who would get the taxi, who would be with me in the emergency room? Who would be with me once I came home? / I stopped wearing sandals. I bought two pairs of Puma sneaker and wore them exclusively. I started leaving lights on through the night. If the house was dark, I could not get up to make a note or look for a book or check to make sure I had turned off the stove. If the house was dark, I would lie there immobilized, entertaining visions of household peril, the books that could slide from the shelf and knock me down, the rug that could slip in the hallway, the washing machine hose that could have flooded the kitchen unseen in the dark, the better to electrocute whoever turned on a light to check the stove.[351]

Didion offers this passage as one out of several descriptions of what grief does to her sense of being in the world. In effect, this passage traces some of the embodied experiences

[351] Didion, *The Year*, 167-8.

of *world without end* that Didion points to through her personal loss of John. In terms of mood or emotional attitude, the passage conveys frailty and fear. Both stem from Didion's embodied sense that things, including her self, unravel and fall apart. The world has radically altered with the event of loss, showing how far away from passive or stable it is. Remembering Cixous' observation that man's sense of control in/of the world relies on his rendering of it as passive objects, Didion now *lives* (in the sense of the term Cixous explicates) the world's capacity for mutability and its unrelenting unfolding. The event of her husband's loss has, in other words, confronted Didion with *world without end.* Try as she might there is no way to calm the world or the sense it engenders in her that things fall apart, that the world, and she with it, unravel.

This sense of unraveling finds expression in nightmarish scenarios where things fall down from walls and knock her over and where rugs loosen and make her trip and fall. Not only do objects break loose from their usual and trusted locations, they also alter in shape and quality; a concrete floor turns more indefinite like the feeling of a body of water and what was before graspable through sight is now veiled in darkness and, as a consequence, becomes impenetrable and indistinguishable. This sense of the world's mutability, its capacity for change, also finds embodied expression: that is, it takes hold of Didion's sensate experience of being in her body-mind.[352] Thought patterns such as "*who* would be with me in the emergency room? *Who* would be with me once I came home?",[353] sound out the necessity that others come to her rescue or offer her help in the specific event that something were to happen—something like a broken limb or a bleeding knee.

These thought patterns, however, also express a far less concrete, yet increasingly present, embodied awareness of her vulnerability to injury and death and with that a waning

[352] I connect body and mind here—as body-mind—to signal the inseparability of these terms. In this way I follow feminist scholarship on embodiment that seeks to dislodge a mind/body dualism. See Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, "Introduction: Dermographies," in *Thinking Through the Skin*, ed. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (Routledge 2001), 1-15.

[353] Didion, *The Year*, 167-8, my emphases.

trust in an ability to keep herself safe from harm. Didion's embodied sense of vulnerability submerges her in the flow of a world of other objects that, grief reminds her, as it displays its queer performative capacity, are not passive but organic and active. Recalling Cixous' insights on the function of the "castration complex", like mourning as incorporation, to distinguish man from a world he renders as passive objects, grief unravels the distinctiveness of Didion (as subject) from it and with that an illusion of safety. In absence of structure and stability, the world impresses on Didion the existential premise that all that is brought into being can also be altered and taken away—it lets her know how it operates *as* loss.

The thing to note in connection to my interest in the concept of control is how, for Didion, being in *world without end* is a deeply destabilizing and unnerving experience. Becoming increasingly aware of, by way of embodying, the knowledge that loss has instilled in her understandably makes Didion apprehensive, cautious, and fearful. Didion names this unravelling, destabilizing mode of the world "the vortex effect,"[354] and she notes its shear forcefulness where it "sideswipe[s]" and "suck[s]" her in.[355] This mode then makes an afterthought of, indeed it obliterates volition—e.g., "I could see the vortex coming but could not deflect it"—[356] and Didion in response finds herself devising strategies to avoid its forceful whirls. During Quintana's extended hospitalization at UCLA (caused by post-emergency brain surgery following a relapse in her recovery from pneumonia that turned into septic shock), Didion writes: "I saw immediately in Los Angeles that its potential for triggering this vortex effect could be *controlled* only by avoiding any venue I might associate with either Quintana or John."[357]

[354] Ibid., 107.
[355] Ibid., 112.
[356] Ibid., 132.
[357] Ibid., 113, my emphasis.

Notably, this avoidance takes the form of controlling, which, Didion notes, requires both "ingenuity"[358] and "plotting."[359] Next to observing how Didion strategizes in order to avoid the overwhelming and scary feeling of being sucked up and swallowed by the world, we understand here how the "vortex effect" connects intimately with John and Quintana. John's death and Quintana's life-threatening illness, in other words, pull (i.e., vortex effect) Didion into loss in the existential sense, that is, besides their specificity these events above all confront Didion with the ways mortality is connected to the risk of death a world that operates *as* loss always holds out.[360] The loss of a sense of reliable structure in the world is scary, overwhelming, and unnerving but in fact not new to Didion who knows where to search to find tools to respond: "[i]n time of trouble," she writes, "I had been trained since childhood, read, learn, work it up, go to literature. Information was control."[361]

The literature Didion looks to in grief is predominantly medical and psychiatric scientific research articles. Where at times she rages at the limitations of, in particular, the scientific literature on grief, it also allows her to track "details" and fret over all the different "errors" that could have possibly happened or might have been overlooked in the events that surrounded her and John's daughter Quintana's sudden, life-threatening illness—as well as in the months, days, and eventually hours and minutes that lead up to John's death. Her fretting over possible errors and lost details—and, notably, her turn to scientific sources that embody rational and logic avenues to do so—amounts to a strategy that utilizes control to cope with the too overwhelming fact that things like

[358] Ibidem.
[359] Ibid., 117.
[360] The form of precariousness Didion articulates is different from the one foregrounded by scholarship on necropolitics, where death is conceptualized as a systemic and deliberate function of the nation state (see Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture,* 15, no 1, (2003), 11-40).
[361] Ibid., 44.

illness and loss can happen and that one is often helpless before them.[362] Didion admits that her efforts "did not endear me to the young men and women who made up the [hospital] staff ('If you want to manage this case I'm signing off,' one finally said) but they made me feel less helpless."[363] And, this is exactly the point: ironically, control amounts to a strategy for coping with what lies beyond its reach.

Realizing that there is nothing she can do, Didion still continues to devise mechanisms to piece things back together. Central to these ultimately futile efforts to control and, through that, restore an imagined sense of safety is a feeling of responsibility: "*You're safe,* I remember whispering to Quintana when I first saw her in the ICU at UCLA. *I'm here. You're going to be all right. […] I'm here. Everything's fine."*[364] This mantra-like reassurance confronts Didion with the limitation of control where it functions as a mechanism for coping. Didion identifies this limitation in her need for Quintana to be "all right," in her repetition that "everything is fine," when in fact everything is not fine and there is no knowing if things will be all right. She finds herself in the realm of things that are positively uncontrollable. This refrain nevertheless repeats, and, in so doing, it reveals how a desire to be in control of things expresses a sense of responsibility toward her child and equally or more so Didion's own deep dependency on Quintana.[365]

Didion observes this dependency in the implicitly punitive composition of her repetitive fretting over details and errors and her sense of responsibility toward both

[362] To this point Didion notes, when observing this tendency to try to control in other people affiliated with patients: "I had myself for most of my life shared the same core belief in my ability to control events" and she connects this belief with fearfulness: "Yet I had at some level apprehended, because I was born fearful, that some events in life would remain beyond my ability to control or manage them. Some events would just happen. This was one of those events." (Ibid., 98).

[363] Ibid., 128.

[364] Ibid., 96.

[365] To this point Didion observes a similar line of thinking in herself on the occasion of Quintana's first hospitalization: "This was when the ICU doctor said it: We're still not sure which way this is going." / *The way this is going is up,* I remember thinking. / The ICU doctor was still talking. "She's really very sick," he was saying. / I recognized this as a coded way of saying that she was expected to die but I persisted: *The way this is going is up. It's going up because it has to go up."* (Ibid., 69)

Quintana and John.[366] In the medical literature Didion turns to for a sense of control, she thus notices a "punitive correlative, the message that if death catches us we have only ourselves to blame."[367] Connecting this observation to Cixous' distinction of mourning as a mode of incorporation (i.e., masculine economy) and one of unraveling (i.e., feminine textual body), we can see how Didion gestures at how those sources that are made available for people facing the uncontrollable, in the context of illness and death, not only give authority to an incorporation or control-like model of response. A pressure on people's individual agency and responsibility to manage their own and others' health and well-being reveals itself as a penal Catch-22 with the implication that because the knowledge is there to understand and solve a medical problem, illness and death can be prevented.[368] The main point to highlight from Didion's maneuverings of her embodied sense of frailty and responsibility toward and dependency on others is how she begins to elaborate the function of control beyond its configuration in Cixous as a desire for power and instead in a way that map out her deepest emotional and physical attachments.

4.4 "Let them go in the water": Existential-methodological lessons in un/certainty

There is something quite humbling about Cixous' observation that fear is at the root of man's desire for control; that uncertainty fuels his efforts to master the world. However, when Cixous as noted invokes a "feminine textual body" as an alternative model of being to man's strategy of mastery she implies that to live in acceptance of *world without end* means letting

[366] On one of many occasions Didion notes: "I knew that John was taking Coumadin, a far more powerful anticoagulant. Yet I was seized nonetheless by the possible folly of having overlooked low-dose aspirin. I fretted similarly over a study done by UC-San Diego and Tuft showing a 4.65 percent increase in cardiac death over the fourteen-day period of Christmas and New Year's. I fretted over a study from Vanderbilt demonstrating that erythromycin quintupled the risk of cardiac arrest if taken in conjunction with common heart medications. I fretted over a study on statins, and the 30 to 40 percent jump in the risk of heart attacks for patients who stopped taking them." (Ibid., 206)

[367] Ibidem.

[368] Interestingly, this observation resonates with the function of a biomedically informed psychiatric logic of reparation I highlighted in chapter 2.

go of a desire for control or, more accurately, that a desire for control will seize once one has surrendered to *world without end.* Based on Cixous' gesture alone, but further supported by my engagement above with Didion's elaboration of the function control serves for her, we might observe that the structure of opposition (i.e., dualism) that Cixous identifies for the end of her deconstructive reading reaches the limits of it analytical usefulness here.

Moving us beyond a more hierarchical and, indeed, dualist analysis of power, Didion's extended musings prompt us to see how control amounts to a response to the uncontrollable and how, as a mechanism for coping, it expresses how significant her felt responsibility toward others and her dependency on them is to how she maneuvers in *world without end*. Control, in other words, may have something very important to say about the role the stability and reliability of our attachments continue to play regardless of the world's, as Didion points out, "abiding indifference" toward them.[369] In ending I want to discern the importance of what Didion offers here by bringing her insights on control into dialogue with the onto-epistemological framework that enables this dissertation to make an argument for approaching grief in queer performative terms.

In setting out to explore how an experienced sense of being takes shape through loss, I have dislodged from an ontogenetic framing of grief and, more broadly, from the conviction that informs it, namely, that phenomenon can be known in finite terms because they exist in inherent ontological coherence prior to engagement with them. An onto-epistemological framework has thus allowed my three main chapters to enact grief as prisms to explore being's queer performative capacity to move and alter. By centering Didion's existential insights on the place of fear and the function of control in *world without end,* I want to add some closing existential-methodological remarks on this framework.[370] The former section highlighted how Didion's embodied and cognitive responses to *world without end* attest to its

[369] Didion, *The Year*, 188-189.

[370] For inspiration for this existential-methodological reflection, I am indebted to Douglas Crimp's reflection on mourning as practice (see Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy").

destabilizing effects because, when submerged in a world in absence of structure, a world that is instead characterized by uncertainty and unreliability, confronting one's own being and the being of others becomes as much an encounter with not being.

According to Barad, when we encounter being from an entangled perspective—that is, from a "quantum ontology" or "agential realist ontology" perspective—then we also encounter the question of nothingness. Nothingness, however, is not, as it is conventionally and collegially configured, the opposite or absence of being but instead, Barad writes, "the very question of being" as it shape-shifts in ontological "in/determinacy". Barad elaborates:

> In/determinacy is not the state of a thing, but an unending dynamism. The play of in/determinacy accounts for the un/doings of no/thingness. From the point of view of classical physics, the vacuum has no matter and no energy. But the quantum principle of ontological indeterminacy calls the existence of such a zero-energy, zero-matter state into question, or rather, makes it into a question with no decidable answer.[371]

When gauged through my comparative reading above of Cixous and Barad's critiques of dualism's ontological authority, the entangled concept of being we are dealing with from a perspective of *world without end* is effectively "in/determinacy". When we encounter being from this perspective, and in this chapter through Didion's situated and embodied perspective as a mourning subject who, in grief, confronts her own and others' entanglement with a world that operates *as* loss, we are dealing with the inherently uncertain condition of existence. We are, as Cixous reminds us, reckoning with the world and our being in it from a position of "not knowing."[372]

The immediate lesson we learn from Didion is thus that a world devoid of structure, that is, a world we cannot know nor trust because it unfolds in an inherently illogical and unreliable manner, is entirely overwhelming and frightening—and that control, in the form of efforts at securing the attachments that stabilize us, turns out to be a strategy to create a sense

[371] Barad, "What is the measure," 7.

[372] As in section 4.2 noted, "not knowing" or the mystical is the condition man tries to force back and he uses dualism to this end.

of stability; a strategy for coping with the uncontrollable.[373] Therefore, if we follow Didion's reflections on her own tendency toward control, logical thinking, and rationalizing in *world without end* these are not, as Cixous in the end implies, remnants of a masculinist habit en route to its complete unlearning. Control and its means of attaining such are instead, and according to Didion, a part of what being in *world without end* feels and looks like from an embodied perspective and so hold crucial existential-methodological insights whose stakes I will elaborate in the following by adding my reading of Didion alongside and, in so doing, distinguishing it from another reading of Didion.

In *Vibrant Death: A Posthuman Phenomenology of Mourning* Nina Lykke reads Didion's desire for control and rationality as a sign of a tension that plays out between a dualist, mechanistic worldview and the alternative ontology Lykke too understands that Didion provides, here focusing analysis on Didion's notion of "magical thinking".[374] According to Lykke, Didion's continuous returns to rational thinking and control thus reflect a back and forth between two different worldviews and a limitation on part of Didion to move her alternative or magical perspective beyond a, so called, "split-world-thinking".[375] Lykke's reading generates a forceful poetic-methodological reflection on the resilience of Western dualist ontology and how she in her personal experience of loss moves beyond it.[376]

By comparison, my anti-personal reframing of *The Year* has made an argument *for* the absolute centrality of the alternative ontology Didion offers with *world without end* and, with that, *for* Didion's own commitment to it. I therefore read the movement we see in Didion

[373] Faced with John's death at the height of uncertainty over whether Quintana will survive, Didion observes her need for stability and reliability: This was when the ICU doctor said it: "We're still not sure which way this is going." / *The way this is going is up,* I remember thinking. / The ICU doctor was still talking. "She's really very sick," he was saying. / I recognized this as a coded way of saying that she was expected to die but I persisted: *The way this is going is up. It's going up because it has to go up."* (Didion *The Year*, 69).

[374] For Lykke's reading of Didion, see *Vibrant Death: A Posthuman Phenomenology of Mourning,* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 117. I cannot stress enough how inspiring and helpful my ongoing exchange with Nina Lykke has been, on the topic of Didion's writing, for my reading of *Carl's Book* and for the development of my project as a whole.

[375] Ibid., 119.

[376] Ibid., 118-119 and, as Lykke notes, chapters 5 and 6 of *Vibrant Death* elaborate how she moves beyond a dualist, mechanistic ontology.

between accepting a world whose operating *as* loss effectively submerges her being and that of others' in its relentless giving and taking, *and* her continued efforts nevertheless to establish a sense of structure and safety, as an inevitable consequence of this alternative ontology. In highlighting control's continued place and function, I thus propose that Didion articulates a tension not *between* differing worldviews, but *within* the alternative ontology she offers. This proposition makes Didion's persistent efforts at creating reliability and stability through control not something to overcome, as Cixous implies, by moving beyond dualism, but something we must reckon with as part of our enactment of and/or living through a perspective that entangles being, as Barad holds, in "in/determinacy".

If, as I propose, we understand Didion's tendency toward control as a consequence and therefore as part of being in *world without end* what might we make of her movements back and forth besides, as Lykke suggests, them reflecting a split-world-thinking or, as Cixous implies, a remnant of a masculinist desire for power?[377] Rather than reading this movement in literal terms, that is, as if it reflects a shifting between different positions on reality or stages on the route from one reality to another respectively, I suggest we read it *performatively*. If we read Didion's movement so, it highlights how being in *world without end* amounts to a practice. Didion formulates her mode of being as practice in several reflections on how she struggles with letting go of the dead or giving into a *world without end:*

> I know why we try to keep the dead alive: We try to keep them alive in order to keep them with us. I also know that if we are to live ourselves there comes a point at which we must relinquish the dead, let them go, keep them dead. / Let them become the photograph on the table. / Let them become the name on the trust accounts. / Let go of them in the water. Knowing this does not make it any easier to let go of him [John] in the water.[378]

In characteristic fashion, Didion at first encounter seems to deliver a straightforward, rationalized point about death's finitude and the consequent need to move past it. Notably,

[377] In placing Lykke and Cixous next to each other I am not insinuating that they are the same, but rather lining up the different options they provide in terms of analysis.

[378] Didion, *The Year*, 225-6.

however, this passage's repetition of "let them go" and "let them become" places pressure, not on what death might mean or what the dead are not, but on "letting go" of whatever the dead are: on letting them *become*. What they are given over to is therefore not exactly nothingness in the classical sense that Barad dislodges from with their notion of "in/determinacy", but a becoming, which Didion, admittedly, does not know what amounts to. Letting the dead go may mean letting them *become* whatever they are. In placing pressure on letting the dead become Didion renders being a practice of "letting go".

Importantly, Didion stresses the difficulty of letting go (i.e., "I know why we try to keep the dead alive: We try to keep them alive in order to keep them with us"),[379] a difficulty she also highlights in her continued attachment to control and stability. In facing loss Didion could have offered us a new perspective that would provide a sense of resolve, such as a horizon of negativity, which, by her own account, is not what *world without end* amounts to.[380] Yet, she does not. Instead her continued movement between a desire for control and an embodied acknowledgement that this is impossible, holds open a space in which a loss of knowing what being is, which we learn from Cixous amounts to a model of living as such, is not immediately replaced by another conviction (in the service of a sense of safety) that one can know it differently or know nothing at all.[381]

What might we take from being as practice? Simply put, Didion's movements highlight how letting go or giving into *world without end* is not in and of itself a solution. In noting this, I am gesturing at how, when an onto-epistemological framework provides an opening to move beyond dualist structures—which Barad and Cixous are not alone in taking to task for their violent consequences—there is a sense in which this opening is at risk of posing as an

[379] Ibidem.

[380] Here, Didion highlights how the "meaninglessness" she encounters in grief is not the absence of meaning in a dualist sense (Didion, *The Year*, 188-189).

[381] By this formulation of a position of knowing nothing, I am referencing the distinction Barad makes above that moving away from a representationalist concept of being also necessarily entails dislodging from the idea of nothingness, which, paradoxically perhaps, offers another position of safety with the conviction that nothingness is the only trustable thing that remains.

end in itself.[382] This risk has been noted by many scholars and Axelle Karerra as example highlights how relational ontologies of becoming and entanglement, such as the one this dissertation enacts as part of its overall framework, risk ignoring or are altogether unequipped at reckoning with the ways in which material structures, that adopt their hierarchies according to notions of class, gender and most notably race, are centrally defining of how someone's being is positioned and experienced in the world.[383]

Returning to the notion, I suggest Didion offers us, of being as practice, we can repose this critique in an affirmative or productive manner by asking through her reflections on control what we do well in remembering as we reckon with being's "in/determinacy"—either when we are confronted with it through loss or in other ways moved by its existential-methodological promises—that helps us notice how differently we are positioned in the world. Where Karrera rightly points out the criticality of not glossing over how, inter alia, racializing differentiation brings about structures that systematically dispossess people, Didion's formulation of being as practice reminds us how crucial a role our emotional and embodied attachments play in defining our space of maneuvering in the world.

Didion's movement between a desire to control and her embodied acknowledgement of its impossibility performatively offers us that our emotional attachments hold critical value

[382] I want here to note on a longer tradition of scholarly reckoning with the constitutive position of the racialized other to the Western concept of the human subject (e.g., Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Larence Grossberg (Basingstronke: MacMillan Education, 1988); Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Not you/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," *Cultural Politics*, 11 (1997), 415-419) and black feminist scholarship that foregrounds the constitutive position of blackness to a Western concept of human being (e.g., Wynter, "Unsettling" and Denise Ferreira da Silva 1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ − ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value," *E-flux Journal*, 79 (2017), 1-11.

[383] Karrera delivers this important point when she argues that "the new regimes of Anthropocenean consciousness" are ill equipped or altogether unable to account for the different forms of suffering racially antagonistic structures and systems of power produce ("Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics" *Critical Philosophy of Race*, (2019), 7, no. 1, 32-34). The point to note here is the potentially flattening effects of leading with frameworks of entanglement is in the risk of ignoring how systems of oppression continue to differentiate being according to race, class, gender etc., regardless of how relational prisms undo classical hierarchies of difference. I agree with this critique of the analytical limitations onto-epistemology is at risk of suffering. The insight I try to formulate here, however, aims to relate productively to the *methodological* challenges that accompany an onto-epistemological perspective and more specifically to offer some closing reflections on my queer performative approach to grief. That is to say, I do not make an argument against, but rather highlight what we do well in remembering as we enact, an onto-epistemological perspective.

for showing us what holds us stable, indeed, what may make us feel stuck in the world.[384] She shows us further that there is critical value in the movement or even friction that emerges between the emotional and material attachments that ground and make us feel certain in/about the world and the "in/determinacy", according to Barad, or "ontological tenuousness", according to Sedgwick, that also defines being, because it is here, in this space of movement in un/certainty, that we might begin to experience and respond to things differently.[385]

Conclusion

By ending with a sustained reflection on the existential-methodological lessons, I argue, Didion offers with her embodied maneuvering in *world without end,* this chapter's introduction of an anti-autobiographical approach to *The Year* that lead us here, has wanted to highlight how much a personal account of grief has to offer, beyond its (possibly misguiding or, at least, distracting) promise to reveal a person through the intimately baring experience of loss. In turning to Cixous' critique of a psychoanalytic model of mourning as incorporation, this chapter has illustrated further how a feminist poststructuralist deconstructive use of the concept of loss enriches an anti-autobiographical reading, firstly, by revealing the world's constructedness and how its formulation serves the sustenance of a specific model of being in the world and, secondly, by pointing to a world beyond dualism.

In starting with an anti-autobiographical reading of *The Year* this chapter has thus highlighted how, through her personal experience of grief, Didion shifts the focus from herself onto a world that operates *as* loss. With an analysis of how control for Didion seemingly amounts to a mechanism for coping with the uncontrollable, I have offered a

[384] What I am suggesting Didion adds is therefore not just a reminder of how emotional attachments ground us and define our position in the world and our space of maneuvering but also how her movement opens a space for critique that, next to focusing on what limits and forecloses, also asks what might be possible. This line echoes Sedgwick's more affirmative line of performative inquiry, which she formulates through a concept of texture when she writes: "To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does *it* impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?" (*Touching*, 13).

[385] Ibid., 3.

situated and embodied perspective on the main question this chapter posed, namely, what we might learn from Didion's experience of being in *world without end.* With this analysis, I illustrated an alternative, indeed, embodied analytic engagement with a deconstructive notion of the world's endlessness, as illustrated by Cixous and Derrida. An analytic avenue, that in turn allowed me to conceptually elaborate on the function of control in *world without end* and to draw existential-methodological lessons from this that help me reflect on the challenges that accompany the onto-epistemological framework that frames this dissertation at large.

Through its various engagements with Didion's notion on *world without end*, this chapter has thus provided a situated and embodied perspective on 'being through loss'. By ending on a reflection on the difficulty entailed in letting go of a particular model of being in—which is also of *knowing* the world—this embodied perspective has foregrounded the critical value in not knowing or, rather, in moving between a desire to know and an acknowledgement of its impossibility.[386] 'Being through loss', as gauged in this chapter through the embodied perspective of the mourning subject, has thus highlighted how there is critical value not simply in giving into an endless world. Rather, Didion points us to a space of movement in un/certainty that is created between "in/determinacy", according to Barad, and "ontological tenuousness", according to Sedgwick, and a desire or need to know (as a means of creating a sense of stability in or reliability to the world and an experienced sense of being in it).

That critical value lies here is based on my proposition, through Didion, that, in movement between a desire to control by way of knowing and an acknowledgement that she cannot know what the world and being in it is, we might find that, things begin to look and feel different. And, more importantly, in un/certainty we in turn may start to respond

[386] I am referring loosely here both to Cixous' use of "not knowing" in reference to how threatening this is to man or to a model of being that gains a sense of safety through its claim to know the world ("Castration," 48-9) as well as to how, in my introduction, I delineated a central methodological pillar of this dissertation through Sedgwick's queer performative invitation "*to not know*" (*Epistemology,* 12)

differently to them. Ending on this reflection, chapter 4 ultimately returns us to the question this dissertation's framework of 'being through loss' set out to explore. Namely, if we cannot know what grief *is* what *does* a queer performative reckoning with it have to offer us? Crystalizing the answer to this question remains a task for this dissertation's conclusion.

Conclusion

As it now concludes, this dissertation's inquiry into grief has been guided by a belief that much is gained from unfixing our gaze and diverging our critical focus away from what contemporary discourse tells us grief *is*.[387] Chapter 4's closing reflections on the existential-methodological lessons in un/certainty that Didion offers through her notion of *world without end* highlighted the methodological proposition that grounds this dissertation at large, namely, borrowing Sedgwick's framing, *"not to know"* what grief is.[388] This conclusion sets out to respond to the question that has propelled the framework this dissertation developed for 'being through loss', namely, if we cannot know what grief *is* what *does* a queer performative reckoning with this phenomenon have to teach us?

To reach a discussion of my chapters' findings and their potential contributions, I will move through a broader reflection on the value of a queer performative approach to grief. As noted in the introductory chapter, Sedgwick formulates her queer intervention and advances her performative line of inquiry in the context of the US HIV/AIDS crisis (launching it then as "anti-homophobic analysis").[389] Thus writing largely in response to the lethal material-discursive field of the HIV/AIDS crisis, Sedgwick nevertheless insists that, while we might feel urgently compelled to respond directly to claims we perceive as untruthful or to have detrimental outcomes, we must ask ourselves what we get out of such a line of inquiry beyond confirming that something is or is not true.[390] Indeed, noting on how a "hermeneutics of suspicion" implicitly limits her inquiry, Sedgwick later reflects: "Supposing we were ever so

[387] From the perspective of a queer performative approach, looking straight at grief, in a critically confronting manner, risks confirming the representationalist conviction this dissertation sets out to challenge, namely, that there *is* something to look straight at.

[388] Sedgwick, *Epistemology,* 12.

[389] See Introduction chapter.

[390] Sedgwick speaks directly to a sense that claims made about the origins of HIV/AIDS might reveal a conspiracy or intentionality on part of a normative, heterosexist and homophobic society to basically will the death of some people ("Paranoid Reading," 123).

sure of all those things—what would we know then [from our inquiry] that we don't already know?"[391]

In no way am I suggesting a direct comparison between the largely bio-political terrain where my research project is situated and the necro-political landscape that Sedgwick speaks to.[392] Neither am I suggesting that we altogether sideline direct critical forms of engagement that would aim at revealing the potential causes of the immediate and tangible effects we see in grief related discourse.[393] What I am, however, highlighting in a somewhat comparative manner is the *effect* of the intensity of discursive claims that cluster around the two historic moments of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the formation of grief as psychiatric diagnosis that, each in their way, notably, are marked by loss and mourning.

Since the idea of grief as psychiatric diagnosis was initially introduced into expert and public discourse, the topic of grief as such has managed to build striking momentum in contemporary debate, with an impressive range of expert and civil actors eager to offer their perspectives on grief.[394] A certain kind of discursive intensity cuts across proponents and opponents to the psychiatric model of grief, stemming, in my view, largely from the historic and epistemic magnitude of the claim that originally spurred debate, namely, the formation of

[391] This is Sedgwick reflecting on the limitations set by a "hermeneutics of suspicion" to her inquiry in "Paranoid Reading," 124.

[392] My rough separation here of these historic moments is based on a conceptual distinction of necropolitics from biopolitics. For scholarship that advances Michel Foucault's original concept of biopower—as a power that, in a productive manner, takes hold of and works through life—so as to involve death as a mechanism within the biopolitical logic and machinery of the nation state, see Joseph-Achille Mbembé, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15, no. 1 (2003), 11-40. As Mbembé also stresses when he argues that at the center of biopolitics is a lethal or necropolitical mechanism, the distinction between these modes of power is not so easily made. Hence, Rosi Braidotti's Mbembé inspired formulation of necro- and bio-politics as each a side of the same coin (*The Posthuman, 9*).

[393] What I am highlighting here is form of critical or suspicious engagement, which Sedgwick names "paranoid" and whose aim/conclusion, she holds, is already identified before it is addressed/engaged with. The purpose of engagement thus becomes to reveal the underlying cause of a detectible effect rather than to ask what else could be 'true' about a given situation, phenomenon etc. (Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading"). I do not mean to pose these as mutually exclusive options. Indeed, chapter 2 illustrates how an, in the words of Sedgwick "paranoid" and "reparative" reading may be combinable.

[394] See section 1.2 in my Introduction chapter.

grief as psychiatric diagnosis.[395] The debate has since expanded and is currently vast and varied, yet it is still primarily informed (in the manner Sedgwick points out) or even consumed by a responsive mode to the highly generative implication of its originating claim, namely, that *now* is the time to make huge counter/strides in our understanding of what grief *is*.[396]

This is not to say that contemporary grief debate has not managed to raise numerous important and immediate issues that require our critical attention. One of which is the broader Western cultural tendency to pathologize and diagnose. I addressed this tendency in chapter 2, arguing that we are witnessing an already powerful and technologically accelerating biomedically poised psychiatric apparatus expand through the formation of "prolonged grief disorder" (PGD). As chapter 2 further noted, this extensive biopolitical apparatus constitutes a site where normative and able-ist ideations of subjectivity manifest and reproduce their claims to normalcy. Moreover, along the lines of Rosi Braidotti's observation through Joseph-Achille Mbembé that necro- and biopolitics constitute each one side of the same coin, I add now that, with its exclusivist investment in the bereaved subject's recovery, PGD also sustains and reinforces a tandem necropolitical reality where other lives are systematically deprived and omitted.[397]

This being said, in setting out on a queer performative inquiry that asked not what grief *is* but what it brings into being (i.e., what it *does*), and more specifically how an experienced sense of being takes and alters shape through loss, this dissertation dislodged from the conditions of engagement contemporary debate implicitly sets out for inquiry into

[395] In my introduction I lean on Joan Scott to parse out this dynamic. Scott relies in turn on Foucault's observation that the emergence, and to some extend success, of a counter discourse depends on the presence of a dominant discourse ("The evidence").

[396] As also noted in my introduction chapter, this is how this 'moment' is formulated by a team of Danish researchers who, notably, work on a nation-wide and heavily funded research project that sets out to examine grief as a cultural and societal phenomenon (see footnote 60).

[397] See footnote 399.

grief, as above outlined.[398] Resting on the hypothesis that in grief being displays its queer performative capacity to shift and alter, the hope that infused a framework for 'being through loss' is therefore that we might attune to what, beside its immediate and tangible outcomes, a specific rendering of grief brings into being.[399]

A queer performative reconfiguration of grief thus entailed that the analytic insights my chapters have compounded do not only fall squarely within the topical realm of grief. It has spoken also in broader terms about the conditions that enable an experienced sense of being to take shape and what we can learn from its [being's] movements, which this dissertation has traced. The following discussion fleshes out how my chapters' conceptual interventions touch on debates beyond grief, stretching across critical scholarship on biomedicine and psychiatry, feminist approaches to autobiography and studies on affect, emotion and neoliberal subject-formation. Throughout, this discussion highlights the usefulness of poststructuralist feminist and queer psychoanalytic theories to my analyses and their consequent conceptual interventions and, with that, these theoretical frameworks' relevance to research on loss and mourning.

A brief summary of the conceptual interventions of my three analytic chapters fleshes out how a framework for 'being through loss': 1) provides an expanded frame of engagement with a contemporary tendency to pathologize and repair and, in so doing, attunes us to how existential fears and abstract uncertainties take shape as concrete and tangible 'problems' of our ways of being, 2) prompts us to lean into the relational condition of existence and offers tools in return to reckon with the impacts our actions and behaviors have on others beyond the limits set by dualist metaphysics 3) provides an embodied perspective on being whose

[398] In the introduction chapter I identify the limitation of contemporary debate *as* an ontogenetic impasse that is given expression in the oppositional composition that is present even when not explicated where exchange unfolds across a general/objective and personal/subjective divide (see section 1.2).

[399] I loosely refer to Sedgwick's methodological reflection on the usefulness of positioning oneself "beside" whatever one is examining. *"Beside",* she writes, is an interesting preposition also because there is nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them." (*Touching*, 8)

movement between a desire to control by way of knowing *and* an acknowledgement that one cannot know what the world and being in it is, highlights a critical value in un/certainty, in that, here things may begin to look and feel different and, more importantly, we in turn might start to respond differently to them.

Chapter 2, "Biomedicine's Stakes in Life: Grief as Psychiatric Diagnosis," traced how PGD came into being in research literature and official registers of psychiatric pathology (the ICD-11 and the DSM-5-TR). In showing how a causal biomedical bind exists already in the field of psychiatric pathology as part of the framework that affords symptomatology clinical validity by way of connecting it to biological cause, this chapter contributes to critical scholarship on biomedicine and psychiatry. It does so by illustrating, through its analytic engagement with PGD, the influence that scholars argue biomedicine and, more specifically, a neuroscientific approach to mental illness has gained in contemporary psychiatry.[400] This chapter's argument weighs further on scholarship that looks at grief as psychiatric diagnosis specifically, by challenging the assumption in a largely sociological and cultural approach, that biomedicine plays only a marginal role in the formation of PGD.[401]

Chapter 2 enacted Leo Bersani's queer anti-sovereign concept of drive, which understands life as an open-ended force, to illustrate that a biomedically poised psychiatric model of grief's reparative rationale and efforts reveal its reliance on a humanist, sovereign containment of a life. By expanding the frame of engagement with contemporary psychiatry, my main argument made a case for the relevance and usefulness of queer psychoanalysis. In thus attuning us to the non-normative desires that motivate efforts to repair, this chapter's conceptual elaboration of the existential features of reparation hopes to contribute to debate in

[400] The scholarly terrain I weigh in on here involves inter alia the work of Nikolas Rose (*The Politics*) and Joseph Dumit (*Picturing Personhood*), both of which I engage with in chapter 2.

[401] E.g., Petersen et al., "Sorgdiagnosen", see footnote 162.

affect studies by asking if a critical normative framing of phenomena, based on their clearly normative effects, adequately addresses what motivates their corrective efforts.[402]

This chapter's non-normative or existential take on reparation further adds a focused study on PGD to debate that takes place in the domain of critical disability studies, highlighting the fears and anxieties that inform imaginaries of bodily and psychological anomaly.[403] Lastly, by approaching biomedical research literature through methodology that originates in critical theory and the humanities broadly, this chapter provides an example of a generative research design for interdisciplinary fields such as the medical humanities. It does so by illustrating how one might read empirical research data by applying a method of close reading and a literary attentiveness to narrative construction.

Building on chapter 2's conceptual opening of being beyond the humanist, sovereign form on which, I argued, a biomedically informed psychiatric model of grief relies, chapter 3 "An Ethics of the Lost Other's Being: *Carl's Book*" examined Naja Marie Aidt's account of the death of her adult child Carl. This chapter made an argument for an extended ethics of loss based on an identification of and dislodgement from the metaphysical presupposition that subtends public and expert models of response to grief combined with a feminist relational perspective and Bracha L. Ettinger's notion of "matrixial carriance" specifically.[404] This proposition charted a potential route of intervention into a tendency in both expert and public discourse to assume that we do right, morally and ethically speaking, by adopting a homogenous and uncritically compassionate posture toward the mourning subject.

Along this line of thinking, chapter 2 weighs in on both public and scholarly debate concerning the liberal progressive idea that we are making radical strides by extending the

[402] What I articulate here is an interest in engaging with critical perspectives on the nature and effect of a happiness culture as critically described by Sarah Ahmed (*The Promise*) and more broadly with scholarship in affect studies (e.g., Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression).*

[403] I am thinking here specifically of the work of Margrit Shildrick (*Dangerous Discourses: Subjectivity, Sexuality and Disability*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)—but also to some extend Alison Kafer ("Introduction: Imagined Futures," in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Indiana University Press, 2013)—that highlight the existential fears that subtend and motivate othering and exclusion.

[404] Ettinger in Kaiser and Thiele, "If You Do Well, Carry!," 107.

time and space of *exception* that we offer people in pain.[405] This idea took shape in the context of grief debate, first, in personal accounts of loss, but has since won terrain in medical and psychiatric discourse. Contrary to such an approach, this chapter's relational perspective, which involved a challenge to dualist metaphysics, suggested that we are missing the mark by temporally expanding the understanding and compassion we offer an already exceptionalized state of mourning. As such, chapter 3 makes a relational, anti-metaphysical contribution to debate in feminist scholarship on the ethics of care[406] as well as to scholarship that addresses the function of linear progressive time to neoliberal, normative figurations of subjecthood.[407]

The potential contributions of this chapter extend further, and like chapter 2, to the domain of critical scholarship on biomedicine and neurosciences.[408] They do so by illustrating how a psychiatric model of grief renders the brain of the bereaved subject a site to reproduce and generate evidence of Western dualist ontology. With this insight, chapter 2 gestures to how a feminist relational ethics could expand debate that already takes place in anthropological and sociological scholarship about the consequences of a neuroscientific figuration of the brain as a new placeholder for older imaginaries about the mind as the seat of the soul or site of pursuit to identify the essence of existence.[409]

Lastly, this dissertation ended its exploration of how being takes and alters shape through loss with chapter 4 "A World That Operates *as* Loss: *The Year of Magical Thinking*". Via its engagement with Joan Didion's account of the loss of her husband and the life-

[405] In the Introduction chapter I highlight how Didion figures in the research literature on grief and I suggest here that her presence attests to the form of 'authority' personal accounts and subjective perspectives have gained in the debate on grief but also beyond it (see footnote 51 and also my discussion of Scott in this context). I am, in other words, gesturing to how this chapter's insights build toward an intervention in public debate about grief, which is very much makes part of its analysis of *Carl's Book.*

[406] In this manner I am suggesting that this chapter provides an extended toolkit for reflecting on the implications of gestures of care and concern that has the potential for further dialogue with feminist debate on the ethics of care such as provided by Maria Puig de La Bellacasa in *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

[407] E.g., Margrit Shildrick, "Living on; Not Getting Better," *Feminist Review* 111, no. 1 (2015): 10–24; Sarah Lochlann Jain, "Living in Prognosis: Toward an Elegiac Politics," *Representations* 98, no. 1 (2007): 77–92.

[408] E.g., Vidal, "Brainhood," and Dumit, *Picturing Personhood*.

[409] See Vidal ("Brainhood") for an elaboration of this line of thinking.

threatening illness of her daughter, this chapter offered an embodied and situated examination of the onto-epistemological approach that, at large, framed this dissertation's queer performative inquiry into grief. To get to this point, chapter four opened with an anti-autobiographical reframing of *The Year* that ultimately lead to a performative reading of Didion's embodied and cognitive maneuvering in a world, which, I argued, she shows us operates *as* loss. Didion names this perspective *world without end*.

An anti-autobiographical reframing entailed a critical reflection on the tendency to interpret *The Year* as a point of access into Didion's intimate or true person, and so this chapter locates its intervention along feminist critique of the genre of autobiography or, more accurately, the limitations of the popular interpretive options that follow its generic framing. In so doing, fourth chapter illustrates how an anti-autobiographical approach can weigh productively on debate about the pitfalls of personal narratives especially in the context of a growing body of grief literature.[410] What followed in this chapter from an anti-autobiographical reframing was a performative reading of Didion's movements in a world beyond duality (i.e., *world without end*). This reading further specifies this chapter's contribution to critical scholarship on autobiography along the genre's performative theorizing.[411]

With its analysis of Didion's experience of being in *world without end,* chapter 4 tracked an alternative analytic avenue through embodiment and, in so doing, it offers to elaborate the uses of a poststructuralist figuration of loss as deconstructive tool.[412] This chapter ended by noting how Didion's attachment to others delineates a strategy to cope with

[410] I imagine this potentially generative intersection from connecting Julia Watson's feminist critique of how the bios in autobiography holds out the promise of a transcendental subject ("Toward an Anti-Metaphysics of Autobiography," in The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation, (Standford University Press, 1993) with public receptions of narratives of loss and death, that is the growing body of literature Thomas Couser describes as "autothanatography" (*Memoir: An Introduction,* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 43).

[411] E.g., Paul John Eakin, "How Our Lives Become Stories," in *How Our Lives Become Stories,* (Cornell University Press, 1999); Sidonie Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 10, no. 1 (1995): 17–33.

[412] E.g., Derrida *The Work*; Saghafi, "The World"; Cixous "Castration" and Kristeva *Black Sun*.

the uncontrollable or the uncertain. In so doing, it illustrated how, in Didion's embodied experience, we find methodological-existential lessons or resourceful tools for maneuvering, what Barad names, "in/determinacy", and Sedgwick, the "ontological openness" of a world beyond dualism. As such, this chapter's argument for the critical value in un/certainty weighs in productively on the critical debates that take place around onto-epistemology and relational ontology.[413]

In conclusion, to set out in queer performative inquiry into grief on the insistence *"not to know"* what it *is*, is not the same as saying that nothing is gained or nothing can be learned from grief.[414] On the contrary, as I hope this discussion has illustrated, this dissertation's framework for 'being through loss' that enabled exploration of how an experienced sense of being takes and alters shape through loss has managed to show how much may be gained from looking slightly to the side of what we think we know or what we are told is there to know about a phenomenon. As wide across public and scholarly debate as the insights of my three analytic chapters reach, they have also generated focused conceptual interventions that circle around notions of repair, relationality and un/certainty.

My chapters' conceptual interventions all formed in response to my main research question, which asked how an experienced sense of being takes and alters shape through loss. In ending, I thus want to recall how, in my introduction, I elaborated a notion of being as 'experienced sense' based on an understanding of its organic and entangled quality. Following Sedgwick's queer performative mode of inquiry, I thence highlighted how examining being from an onto-epistemological perspective entails *experiencing* it. These conceptual concentrations on repair, relationality and un/certainty thus offer an in-exhaustive

[413] E.g. Karrera "Blackness and the Pitfalls"; Sarah Ahmed "Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of The New Materialism'." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 23–39. This thought is not finished, but I also imagine that my reflection here on the critical value of uncertainty – drawing on Sedgwick's critique of "hermeneutics of suspicion"—may generate interesting dialogue with affective and postcritical reading methods (e.g., Felski, *The Limits*).

[414] Sedgwick, *Epistemology,* 12.

map of how being has managed to "impinge" or impress itself on the bodies of literature this dissertation explored.[415] Together, the analytic and conceptual movements of my chapters, in other words, illustrate how, as I propose, grief has a lot to tell us about an experienced sense of being in the world. A lot, yet, I sustain, nothing finite.

[415] In my introduction I state that this dissertation's explorations of how an experienced sense of being takes and alters shape through loss together amount to an examination of what may be gained from approaching being from a perspective of its radical entanglement with the world (see introduction chapter pp. 3-4).

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