

3 Grief and the Body

In chapter 2, I set out an account of the two-sidedness and process structure of grief. According to that account, grief involves recognizing and responding to a disturbance of the experiential world, something that can also be described in terms of life structure or a sense of *who* one is. A grief process is cohesive to the extent that it engages with patterns of implication that are integral to a life structure and to disturbances of that structure. Given this, one might be tempted to think of grief in broadly cognitive terms, as a matter of thoughts, judgments, evaluations, and the like. However, in this chapter, I instead emphasize the felt, bodily nature of grief, by (a) rejecting a distinction between bodily feeling and world experience, (b) reflecting on the anticipatory character of certain feelings, (c) showing how other people can contribute to the structure of experience in a similar way to one's own body, and (d) comparing the pain of grief to that of bodily injury.

The chapter begins by addressing the nature and role of emotional feeling. The feeling body, I maintain, is not merely an object of experience; it is also that *through which* we experience our surroundings as imbued with significant possibilities, as mattering to us in various ways. Hence, there is more to the comprehension of loss than the updating of relevant propositions; it also includes a felt sense of how things matter. The feelings in question are not to be thought of as fleeting qualitative feels or "qualia." Rather, they consist in dynamic experiences of anticipation, fulfilment, tension, and negation. This is illustrated by the experience of something "sinking in" emotionally, a process whereby it comes to *feel real*. I suggest that conceiving of feeling in this way enables us to better understand various experiences of absence and lack that arise during the course of grief.

Following this, I provide a detailed critical discussion of Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2012) comparison between experiences of grief and phantom limbs,

according to which both involve retention of a habitual world in the face of loss. This makes clear how a sense of one's own bodily capacities and of relational possibilities involving another person together contribute to what matters, how things matter, and what appears achievable. They do so in ways that are structurally similar and also inseparable. The comparison between bereavement and loss of a limb makes it natural to think of grief in terms of an injury to the self. The chapter concludes by suggesting that this provides us with a way of understanding the *pain* of grief.

3.1 Emotional Feeling

Is the two-sided, dynamic structure of emotion a matter of cognition or, alternatively, feeling? In chapter 2, I identified a conflict between explicit, propositional belief and a form of conviction integral to how the world as a whole is experienced. One way of construing this is to pit cognition, on one side, against feeling, on the other. But the world-side of emotion includes more than just feeling. For instance, what conflicts with propositional belief can also include habitual patterns of linguistic thought that are associated with ways of experiencing and interacting with one's surroundings. Hence, one could instead argue that this aspect of experience is a matter of cognitive judgment. According to Robert Solomon, not all judgments are propositional in nature; emotional judgments consist in ways of experiencing and actively engaging with the world. An emotion, he suggests, is a "way of cognitively *grappling* with the world" (Solomon 2004a, 77). For Solomon, emotions are also *constitutive* judgments. In other words, they contribute to the structure of the experiential world, rather than being intentional states that arise within an already established world (Solomon 1976/1993). One might quibble over whether and to what extent emotions are *active*; grief more plausibly involves a blend of passive reception and active engagement. Nevertheless, Solomon's emphasis on interconnected, constitutive judgments is consistent with my account of an organized experiential world that incorporates patterns of implication and also with the dynamic structure of grief.

However, such a position can be endorsed without relegating bodily experience to a mere accompanying role. It is arguable that contrasts between the feeling aspect of emotion and its world-directed intentionality are misplaced. Many bodily feelings are themselves intentional and their objects are not restricted to one's own bodily states; it is *through our feeling bodies* that we

experience things emotionally. This is analogous to the manner in which we perceive, via touch, entities that are external to our bodies and sometimes even at a distance from them, as when a cane is used to navigate or a texture is felt through a glove (Ratcliffe 2005, 2008, 2015).¹ If this is accepted, then specifically *emotional* judgments can be identified with emotional feelings or, at least, with certain types of emotional feelings.

First-person accounts of grief often indicate that bodily feeling is seamlessly entwined with a disturbance of one's relationship with the world: "When it strikes, the raw intensity of the feeling comes as a surprise. Life is rolled on its head, and we find ourselves off balance" (Whybrow 1998, 2). Perhaps, then, the terms "judgment" and "feeling" amount to different emphases, rather than identifying two closely associated but distinct components of emotion. That depends, though, on what is meant by "judgment," a term that Solomon (e.g., 2003, 2004a) came to understand in an increasingly broad way. Emotional judgments, he proposes, include *bodily* judgments via which one engages with the world. These can involve what others describe in terms of "arousal," "action readiness," and the like.² For that reason, as I have argued elsewhere, Solomon's later position turns out to be largely consistent with the seemingly contrasting view of William James (1884), who maintains that emotions are feelings of bodily changes (Ratcliffe 2008). This is evident when we take some of James's other writings into account, rather than restricting ourselves to his 1884 essay. In brief, emotions, for James, are neither nonintentional bodily feelings nor intentional feelings directed solely at the body. Rather, it is through our feelings that we experience our surroundings as mattering in various different ways. Furthermore, our most fundamental sense of the world and our relationship with it consists, for James, in a kind of pervasive, intra- and interpersonally variable *feeling* (Ratcliffe 2008, 2017). There is thus a risk of descending into a largely terminological dispute here, which distracts from the task of understanding other important aspects of emotional experience.³

Rejecting straightforward distinctions between feelings and cognitive judgments, evaluations, or appraisals is only a first step. In identifying an aspect of experience that can be described in terms of both, we arrive at something that is necessary for emotional experience but not *sufficient*. There are two reasons for this, both illustrated by the case of grief. First of all, it is plausible to maintain that every experience we have of every situation involves evaluations of a kind that could be described in terms

of world-directed feeling, evaluative judgment, or—to introduce a third option—affectively charged perceptual experience. For instance, my computer keyboard and the pile of notes sitting next to it are currently experienced as significant, as mattering to me in certain ways relative to the ongoing project of writing this book. Nevertheless, I am not “emotionally” engaged with my surroundings, at least not in a way that could be contrasted with an “unemotional” frame of mind. So, if the difference between emotional and unemotional experiences is qualitative in nature (and I will suggest that it is), rather than being only a matter of degree, then it is something that appeals to judgment and feeling both fail to capture. Approaches that instead regard emotions as *perceptions* will face the same challenge; they must be able to distinguish something that is integral to all perceptual experience from what is more specifically emotional.⁴

All human experience may well be riddled with one or another kind of “affective intentionality” or “intentional feeling.” But I am not concerned with something that is common to grief experiences and mundane experiences. For current purposes, it is more fruitful to adopt a contrastive approach, which emphasizes how emotional episodes and processes stand out: they engage with anticipated or actual *disruptions* of the mundane. This involves a distinctive type of intentionality, concerned with the implications of events for the experiential world within which those events occur. It can be described in terms of both feeling and cognitive evaluation. What matters is not which term we employ but whether or not we succeed in identifying the distinctive, dynamic structure of emotional experience.

A second shortcoming of the appeal to feeling is that the nature of characteristically *emotional* feelings requires further clarification. Once the possibility of intentional feeling or affective intentionality is acknowledged, there remains much to say about *how* the feeling body is involved in recognizing and navigating world disturbances. Importantly, the kinds of feelings central to grief are not synchronic *qualia* that somehow manage to incorporate cognition as well. Instead, they have a temporal structure, involving anticipation, fulfillment, tension, and negation. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, there is a tendency to think of emotions as brief episodes with localized objects, such as being afraid of the dog or happy about scoring a goal. Grief, however, is a temporally extended, dynamic, variably cohesive process. Consistent with this, feeling in grief is not only dynamic but also experienced *as* dynamic. Martha Nussbaum recognizes this, although

she conceives of the relevant phenomenology in terms of judgment. Grief, for Nussbaum, is an “upheaval” of thought, something that impacts on one’s “whole cognitive organization” (Nussbaum 2001, 80). The view that grief is a cognitive process does not imply that it involves what we might call *cold* or *detached* cognition. Nussbaum (2001, 45) suggests that reason itself is “dynamic”; it “moves, embraces, refuses.” The emotional upheaval, the movement, is itself the recognition of something. This is not a matter of forming propositional attitudes with circumscribed contents, at least not in a way that could be contrasted with a disturbance of our habitual, bodily immersion in the world. For Nussbaum, it is as whole organisms that we experience grief and other emotions:

Certainly we are not left with a choice between regarding emotions as ghostly spiritual energies and taking them to be obtuse nonseeing bodily movements, such as a leap of the heart, or the boiling of the blood. Living bodies are capable of intelligence and intentionality. (Nussbaum 2001, 25)

All of this could just as well be couched in terms of feeling. For instance, Furtak (2018, 70) echoes Nussbaum’s acknowledgment that “the upheaval of grief *is* this recognition,” while emphasizing the “felt recognition” of significance. Without this *feeling*, he maintains, we could not fully appreciate that someone we care for deeply has died. Hence, what matters is not so much whether emotions consist of one or another ingredient but how they involve a complex, dynamic process of recognizing and engaging with a life situation.⁵ Reflecting on her own experience of grief, Nussbaum (2001, 80) describes the cognitive disruption and reorganization brought about by her mother’s death:

When I receive the knowledge of my mother’s death, the wrenching character of that knowledge comes in part from the fact that it violently tears the fabric of hope, planning, and expectation that I have built up around her all my life. But when the knowledge of her death has been with me for a long time, I reorganize my other beliefs about the present and future to accord with it.

This passage conveys the manner in which emotional comprehension is both dynamic and bodily—the knowing is something that *tears* and *wrenches*. Furthermore, the full import of what has happened is not grasped immediately; it takes time to become integrated into one’s life. However, Nussbaum does not draw an explicit distinction between two importantly different forms of cognition that are at work here: propositional belief and

an experiential world with which it fails to accord. Referring indiscriminately to “belief” obscures the movement between qualitatively different types of conviction, either of which could be termed “judgment” or “belief.” An important aspect of this movement is the sense of anticipation. Although the full significance of an event might not be recognized immediately, one’s current experience can still include a variably determinate sense of *what is to come*, contributing to how the unfolding of emotion is itself experienced. This aspect of our emotional life is sometimes described in terms of things “sinking in” over time.⁶ There is an awareness of one’s current comprehension as inadequate, of having not yet fully grasped the import of what has happened. The experience points toward a reorganization that is yet to come, an emotional path to be followed.⁷

The acknowledgment “I have not yet comprehended that *p*” appears paradoxical, insofar as it implies an understanding of what one claims not to understand. However, the experience of something “sinking in” involves an experiential content that is initially inchoate. It is progressively resolved in a manner consistent with, but more specific than, what was earlier anticipated. Feelings of this kind are more generally familiar to us. For example, suppose that I am struck—while absorbed in the writing of this book—by a vague feeling of wrongness, followed by a more specific sense of having forgotten something, then of having forgotten a meeting, and, finally, of having become distracted and forgotten to join a scheduled, online meeting with a particular person. The initial experience of wrongness unfolds over time, as the nature of what has happened becomes progressively clearer. Yet the propositional content that I eventually arrive at and the kind of significance it has for me remain consistent with the initial feeling.⁸ Furthermore, that feeling points toward the process of recollection and clarification that ensues. In the case of grief, an initial proposition, “that person is dead,” is not integrated into one’s experiential world, but there may be a sense of it is *as* something still to be integrated. The experienced dynamism of the process consists not merely in movement but in a sense of what is coming, something that changes over time as things *sink in*.

The notion of “sinking in” is closely related to that of emotional “depth.” Some emotions are said to be deeper or more profound than others. Furthermore, they may be experienced *as* deep or profound. Depth is often associated with the recognition that something has yet to sink in, that it will take time, that there is further upheaval to come. So, greater depth

tends to involve longer duration, at least where an emotion concerns something that has actually happened, rather than something momentous that is anticipated for a short while but never occurs. How should we think of “depth”? A helpful account is developed by David Pugmire, who associates the depth or profundity of an emotion with the extent to which its object impacts on one’s concerns.⁹ As we saw in chapter 2, those concerns are structured; some are more fundamental than others, and there are multilayered relationships of dependence. So, a human life ordinarily has what Pugmire (2005, 40) calls an “architecture,” a structure that can be disrupted by circumstances to differing degrees and in different ways. Emotional depth reflects how integrated a person’s concerns or values are and the extent to which an object of emotion affects them. It can thus be distinguished from intensity. The emotional experience elicited by riding on an extreme roller-coaster may well be intense, but it does not imply a change in life structure, unlike—say—receiving tragic news. Pugmire adds that, for an emotion to be genuinely deep, the experienced significance of events must match their actual significance.¹⁰ Hence, the actual depth of an emotion is determined in part by factors external to the relevant experience.¹¹

For current purposes, I am concerned with the experience *of* depth, regardless of whether that experience corresponds to the realities of one’s situation. This, I suggest, is an aspect of emotional feeling. It does not require a complex system of judgments, tracing out the implications of an event for one’s life. The emotional feeling only has to point to something; it need not contain a comprehensive grasp of it. What it points to are patterns of unraveling and, in some instances, their potential avoidance. Sometimes, even the initial experience of depth takes time to set in. On other occasions, though, there is an immediate recognition that something will have profound repercussions, that the habitual patterns of a world will unravel, that the process has begun. The feeling itself has a two-sided structure. It is not only directed at a specific object of emotion but also toward the world within which that object is encountered. What I currently *feel* is not fully captured by the content of a given moment—the feeling points beyond that. It is more like a sign toward something than a map of it, a sign that can be more or less accurate.¹²

Granted, explicit, conceptual evaluation and reevaluation have roles to play as well. But they are not essential to the feeling of depth or profundity, to the sense that one’s current experience of an event or situation impacts

upon its context in ways that signal the onset of a prolonged emotional process. A current emotional experience can incorporate a sense of its being inadequate to the moment, something to be transformed, surpassed. With this, the procession of feelings is experienced *as* a singular process, an unfolding pattern of anticipation and realization. Thus, emotional feeling in grief is not a matter of static phenomenal qualities but of direction and loss of direction, of things resolving progressively or failing to do so, and of being receptive to initially inchoate possibilities.

3.2 Presence and Absence

I have suggested that felt anticipation contributes to how a grief process is *itself* experienced. However, the dynamic, anticipatory structure of feeling is also integral to how we experience the *surrounding world* during grief. In particular, various experiences of absence and lack (which may be localized or wide-ranging, enduring or ephemeral) arise when patterns of felt, bodily anticipation are negated or remain unfulfilled. Such experiences further illustrate why a distinction between feeling and cognition is unhelpful here. A felt experience can incorporate a sense of something or other as lacking or absent. Given this, it could equally be described in terms of a judgment concerning what is or is not the case. Consider, for instance, the all-enveloping sense of a particular person's absence. A set of habitual, bodily expectations involving that person persists to some extent after his death. These include the expectation of encountering him in particular locations or situations, such as when entering a certain room or participating in activities that involved him. When those expectations are negated, the resultant experience is comparable to Sartre's well-known description of waiting to meet Pierre in a café, where Pierre fails to arrive (Sartre 1943/1989, 9–11). When someone else enters and is encountered as "not Pierre," the absence of Pierre is experienced in a localized way, in the guise of negated expectation. However, it is also experienced in a more diffuse manner. How the café as a whole appears is shaped by the continuing expectation of meeting Pierre; one's surroundings appear significant insofar as they point to that prospect. The whole scene thus takes on the form of a background to an absent foreground, akin to a picture frame without a picture. When that background endures, Pierre's absence is itself present. Even though one might explicitly endorse the proposition "Pierre will not come to the café" with

complete confidence, the café persists as background. A system of anticipation remains in place, while more specifically directed expectations, with contents approximating the likes of “Pierre is coming through the door right now” and “one of those people over there might be Pierre,” arise fleetingly and are then negated.

A grief process can similarly include frequent realizations that *she is not here* and, occasionally, *this is not her*, some momentary and others more enduring. These might be more pronounced at certain times and in certain places. However, it could be that one’s experiential world is shaped by the person to such an extent that there is a continuous interplay of anticipation and disappointment, with one’s surroundings constantly pointing to possibilities that can no longer be actualized. It is often remarked that those who are grieving engage in “searching” behavior (e.g., Bowlby 1980/1998; Parkes 1998, chap. 4). The term “searching” may well encompass a range of different experiences, thoughts, and activities. Even so, many of these plausibly involve habitual, bodily patterns of anticipation that are integrated into one’s activities, rather than propositional attitudes that motivate behavior (such as “I desire to see A” and “I believe there to be some chance of encountering A if I do p”). First-person descriptions such as the following suggest a dynamic interplay between prereflective, habitual anticipation and negation, rather than acting on the basis of explicit beliefs or desires:

My daughter has a key to my flat and when she uses it my heart still jumps as though it’s my husband coming home. Lots of times I have turned to say something to him and have been upset that he’s not there. (#41)

Every time there is a creak on the stairs or a car in the drive, I expected it to be him. (#71)

I always expected my husband to come home every day: that expectation drained me daily. In the end I had to move to a new house because that’s the only way I could stop that feeling. I frequently reach out in bed for his hand: I set the table for two people and I still subconsciously cook for two people. (#82)

Where episodic, localized experiences of negation are frequent and arise in a wide range of circumstances, they can also add up to a more pervasive sense of absence and lack. As C. S. Lewis (1961/1966, 41) writes, “I think I am beginning to understand why grief feels like suspense. It comes from the frustration of so many impulses that had become habitual.” The surrounding world continues to be experienced as a setting for someone’s

appearance. Specific expectations are disappointed one after another, but a larger framework of anticipation persists, comparable to Sartre's café. One's surroundings thus appear *lacking*, in a way that also constitutes the sense of a particular person's *absence*.

There are good reasons for thinking that such experiences are not, first and foremost, a matter of propositional cognition—of believing that p and then remembering that *not* p . First of all, there is often a disconnection between what is taken to be the case propositionally and what is anticipated. Second, the relevant phenomenology is consistent with a much wider range of experiences, which plausibly involve a bodily, felt sense of disappointed expectation. For instance, I experience the items on my desk as offering various interconnected, significant possibilities, which complement my current projects and activities. But suppose I reach for my cup of coffee, only to find that my hand grasps thin air, that I knock the cup over, or that the coffee has gone cold. In all three scenarios, there is the recognition that something has failed to match my expectations. But this does not imply that those expectations were precise. Numerous different events can accord or conflict with the same indeterminate set of expectations. As a car drives along the road outside, as I hear the sound of passing conversation, as a bird flies past the window, and as an email appears in my inbox, I do not anticipate those specific events occurring at those particular times, but there is no surprise. All are consistent with a more diffuse set of expectations, which unfold—for the most part—in a harmonious fashion. In contrast, a camel walking past would appear immediately incongruous.

It would be implausible to insist that all instances of anticipation, fulfillment, and disappointment involve propositional attitudes. Given that our experiences have an anticipatory structure that spans a vast range of different scenarios, this would end up implicating an infinite number of propositional attitudes. Instead, as proposed in chapter 2, we experience our surroundings as imbued with various different kinds of *possibilities*. Many of these take the more specific form of *anticipation*, something that is inextricable from felt, bodily tendencies. When reaching for a cup that is absent, we *feel* the surprise. And, as we set eyes on the camel, we are immediately struck by its incongruity, in a way that is inseparable from our bodily engagement with the situation—we are drawn to it in a certain way.

Another important aspect of grief that can be understood in these terms is the experience of a gulf between one's own world and that of other

people. For many or all of *them*, the world carries on in the way it always has, but one is somehow detached from it all: “Planes still landed, cars still drove, people still shopped and talked and worked. None of these things made any sense at all” (Macdonald 2014, 15). This form of experience is not specific to bereavement; it also arises in other cases where an actual or anticipated event has a profound impact on one’s own life, while being of little or no consequence for the lives of most others. For example, here is how Aleksandar Hemon describes experiences of driving to the hospital in order to be with his terminally ill daughter:

It took me about fifteen minutes to get to the hospital, through traffic that existed in an entirely different space-time, where people did not rush crossing the streets and no infant life was in danger, where everything turned away quite leisurely from the disaster. . . . I had an intensely physical sensation of being inside an aquarium: I could see outside, the people outside could see me inside (if they somehow chose to pay attention), but we lived and breathed in entirely different environments. Isabel’s illness and our experience had little connection to, and even less impact on, the world outside. (Hemon 2013, 190, 201–202)

There is a marked disconnection here between Hemon’s own concerns and those of other people, amounting to an experience of distance or contrast where previously there was commonality.¹³ This sense of being somehow apart from the shared world is a prominent and consistent theme in first-person accounts of grief. There are frequent reports of being confronted by a gulf between one’s own world and the world of others. Their world just carries on regardless, in a manner that one struggles to comprehend:

I feel overwhelmed sometimes with how the surrounding world just carries on like nothing has happened. (#20)

The world carried on turning, I was a mere part of the audience not a participant, I felt. (#51)

It’s like I’m looking in from the outside. (#55)

When you lose someone, you wonder how the world can carry on spinning. Everyone is carrying on with their lives but, my husband isn’t in this world anymore. (#59)

I felt like the world was carrying on and leaving me behind as my world felt like it was standing still. (#110)

It feels as if you are in a glass bowl, with everything going on normally around you, but you’re not participating. (#239)

Felt anticipation is central to experiences of this kind. In chapter 2, I described tensions between propositional recognition and an enduring experiential world. But, even in the very early stages of grief, one's world is not *wholly* undisturbed in the face of what has happened. Certain significant possibilities cease to be experienced, while others are experienced *as negated*, *as* no longer applicable. Ordinarily, we experience many kinds of possibilities as accessible not just to ourselves but to others as well. The path is encountered as something *we* can walk on, the bench as something for *us* in general sit on, and so forth. When one's own life is disrupted, possibility *p* need not be experienced as altogether gone, as negated outright. Instead, what was once a possibility for *us* might be experienced as a possibility *for them* but no longer *for me*. This would not apply in the case of a public bench or walkway, which are unlikely to implicate the deceased in any particular way. However, there are many other cases where something is experienced as available in a certain way to *us*, in virtue of other possibilities that are specific to *me* or to *you*. For instance, a shared workspace may be accessible to us in virtue of our distinct roles. Similarly, a bar may appear as a place that offers the same opportunities for all who are there but only due to their separate groups of friends. More generally, a social or professional environment can be experienced as offering something to *us*, rather than just to *me* or *them*, but in a way that depends on projects and associated possibilities that are person-specific and highly varied. So, where one's own life structure is bound up with that of a particular person, bereavement can involve a widespread loss of possibilities for participating in larger social situations.

It is thus an oversimplification to state that some possibilities are experienced as *mine*, others as *yours*, and others as *ours*. What is experienced as negated might be a possibility of *mine* but one that also opened up other possibilities that were *ours*. Given this, the negation of habitual patterns of anticipation can amount to a sense of being cut off from social life. This schism between one's own world and that of others is not always experienced in quite the same way. It could be that one's own loss is at the forefront of the experience and that the public world appears of little consequence: "the lives of others are trivial" (#87); "the surrounding world felt pretty unimportant" (#144). Alternatively, one's exclusion from that world might itself be a salient and distressing aspect of grief. One is still drawn to its possibilities but unable to engage with them due to loss of life structure.

This experience is often described in terms of feeling or being “lonely”: “everything goes on as normal and you feel detached from it, isolated and lonely even in a crowd” (#47). Sometimes, the sense of estrangement is accompanied by feelings of anger, jealousy, or resentment, directed at those who have not endured comparable losses: “I felt and sometimes still do feel at a distance from it all. Occasionally I still get angry, or not angry but jealous, when I see retired couples together” (#85). However, what is common to all cases is a pervasive sense that one’s own possibilities for participating in social situations have been lost, while the possibilities of others continue to unfold.

A different but closely related phenomenon is the *fragmentation* of one’s world. A grief process involves numerous experiences of tension. While some of these involve propositional beliefs coming into conflict with experience, there are also instances where certain aspects of the world accommodate the death while others still do not. Consider how we experience artifacts that were once integrated into the life of the deceased, such as clothes and tools. In some cases, an object may continue pointing to possibilities *for* that person, but we experience those possibilities *as* negated, *as* past; it *used to be* significant in those ways. At the same time, however, other situations or configurations of artifacts may continue to offer live possibilities involving that person. Consider this passage from Simone de Beauvoir (1964/1965, 98), concerning a time shortly after her mother’s death:

As we looked at her straw bag, filled with balls of wool and an unfinished piece of knitting, and at her blotting-pad, her scissors, her thimble, emotion rose up and drowned us. Everyone knows the power of things: life is solidified in them, more immediately present than in any one of its instants. They lay there on my table, orphaned, useless, waiting to turn into rubbish or to find another identity.

The knitting materials appear as a coherent system of salient practical possibilities, together implying the actual or potential presence of Beauvoir’s mother. But it no longer fits into a larger world from which her mother is absent; the possibilities that it points to conflict with that wider context. Its significance is not yet experienced as past; it does not accommodate the death in the way that certain other things do.

Through these various examples, we can thus see how grief involves a complicated interplay between possibilities and their negation, something that involves felt, bodily anticipation more so than the formation and subsequent rejection of explicit propositional beliefs.

3.3 Losing a Limb

The role of bodily anticipation in grief is not limited to experiences of *negation*, *absence*, and *lack* that arise in coming to recognize the implications of what has happened. To the extent that patterns of anticipation persist, they also constitute a sense of the deceased as somehow still *present* (although this is not the only form taken by sensed-presence experiences in grief, as we will see in chapter 5). Aspects of the world endure in ways that continue to specify the actual or potential presence of the deceased. In chapter 2, I identified this as the source of tension between the unequivocal propositional belief, “A is dead,” and a more diffuse form of conviction, amounting to “A is still here.” What I want to do now is show how the relevant experience is structurally similar to and also inextricable from experience of one’s own body. To do so, I will explore in depth some of the similarities and differences between experiences of grief and of phantom limbs.

First-person accounts of bereavement often state that it is somehow like losing a part of oneself: “still feel as though part of me has died” (#30); “losing my husband feels like I’ve lost part of myself” (#71). Some also make more specific comparisons between bereavement and losing a limb. Bereavement is like amputation, and grief is like learning to live without an arm or a leg. The following interview excerpts, from Valentine (2008, 100), are representative:

It’s as though I have to live without my arms or something like that—without something, but I can’t put a finger on it because it’s not visible. . . . I have to try and learn to live without this vital you know like my sight or something, because that’s how integral my dad was.

Something I’ve kept in mind is that I really feel like I’ve had an amputation and I can’t see which limb has gone and that it’s not a visible limb, but it most certainly is an amputation—there’s no other way I can describe it.

Similar comparisons can be found in published autobiographical accounts of bereavement. For example, Adri van der Heijden (2015, 286) writes, “What else is your child but an external enclave of your own flesh and blood? . . . A part of me has been amputated, so how will I ever be able to say I feel at home with my body?”¹⁴ In addition to describing the predicament of bereavement as like that of *having lost* a limb, first-person accounts also compare the pain or suffering of loss in the two cases: “It was like

having a limb amputated. I felt like my skin was turned inside out and my nerves were all exposed" (#66).

Comparing bereavement to loss of a limb serves at least to emphasize the profundity and painfulness of loss. Valentine (2008, 100) thus takes the comparison with amputation to convey both the "extreme nature of the pain of loss" and the "extent of the loss." However, there is more to it than this. What we have here is not just a set of culturally established metaphors and analogies that people draw upon in order to stress how important somebody was to them and how much they have been affected by bereavement. The two experiences can also be structurally similar in more specific and philosophically informative ways (which is not to suggest that this is *always* so; both admit considerable diversity and we should be wary of overgeneralizing). In elucidating these similarities, my principal aim is to elaborate on the analysis in chapter 2, by showing how another person can play much the same role in shaping experience, thought, and activity as one's own bodily capacities and habitual dispositions. Moreover, a clear line cannot be drawn between the phenomenological role of one's own body and the roles played by interpersonal relationships; the two are inseparable. Phenomenologically speaking, the boundary between subjectivity and intersubjectivity is indeterminate, as is the boundary between one's own bodily *feelings* and the sense of being with a particular person. Given this, bodily experience should not be thought of as a discrete ingredient of grief, to be set apart from its cognitive and interpersonal dimensions.

We have already seen that experiences of significance or mattering are not atomistic; they amount to an organized, cohesive structure. The sustenance of that structure depends on a combination of four factors, which together specify whether and how features of our surroundings matter to us:

1. **The body:** Our bodily capacities and dispositions specify what we are able to do, as well as the kinds of bodily performances required. Thus, changes in bodily capacities and dispositions, if accurately reflected in how we experience our surroundings, affect what appears significant and how.
2. **Projects and values:** How things matter to us reflects a backdrop of inter-related projects and values. Insofar as our projects and values are cohesively organized, so too are our experiences of significance. Long-term projects in which we are heavily invested involve goals and aspirations

that stretch far into the future. They also encompass numerous subprojects, which relate to one another in ways that are largely consistent.

3. **Other people:** Sustaining a coherent set of concerns and projects requires certain ways of relating to other people (specific individuals and others in general). What we are able to accomplish is not just a matter of our own abilities; it is also reliant on the abilities and intentions of others. Often, it is *we* who are committed to a project, where that project would be unmanageable, unintelligible, or bereft of worth as a solitary pursuit. Things also matter to us insofar as our projects and wider concerns incorporate care *for* others and obligations toward them.
4. **Norms, society, and culture:** Although the significance of our surroundings is in some respects idiosyncratic, much of it is shared. Social and cultural norms of various kinds, including artifact functions, norms of performance and etiquette, and moral norms, give the world an enduring, shared structure, which our projects ordinarily presuppose.

These four factors contribute to experiences of significance in ways that are inextricable. For example, suppose I am browsing in an antiquarian bookshop and find myself drawn toward a particular book that I had been seeking for research purposes (one that could not be obtained online). How I experience the book is symptomatic of (1) bodily capacities that enable me to read it, (2) my commitment to a research career and more specific projects that stem from this, (3) interpersonal and social relations that render my life as a researcher viable, and (4) shared norms concerning walking into shops, buying things, and so forth. Only with all of this in place does the book appear significant in a certain way. Disturbance of any one of these factors could, potentially, disrupt my world in such a manner that relevant projects and associated possibilities become unsustainable. Social or cultural upheaval, the loss of a particular person, a voluntary or involuntary vocational change, or a loss of bodily capacities could all bring about a temporally extended adjustment process, involving tensions between propositional beliefs and world experience, moments of disbelief, a sense of absence and lack, and the gradual *sinking in* of something. We thus experience our surroundings through our felt bodily dispositions, but we do so in ways that equally reflect our relationships with others, our projects, and situational norms.

It should be added, however, that the phenomenological role of the body is not restricted to its being a *medium* through which we experience

and engage with our surroundings. Grief can also profoundly affect the body as an *object* of experience. After writing that the absence of his wife is “not local at all” but all-enveloping, C. S. Lewis then corrects himself:

But no, that is not quite accurate. There is one place where her absence comes locally home to me, and it is a place I can't avoid. I mean my own body. It had such a different importance while it was the body of H's lover. Now it's like an empty house. (1961/1966, 12)

As well as encountering significant possibilities through the body, we experience our bodies themselves as having significant possibilities. And, for Lewis, these included being the body of his wife's lover. With his wife's death, his body is experienced as lacking, as pointing to an absence. The body is comparable in this respect to how various possessions might appear. But it is also distinctive, given that only one's own body is simultaneously a subject of experience, an object of one's own experience, and a former object of someone else's experience. This is why, for Lewis, the absence is inescapable and enduring, rather than being something that waxes and wanes with changing situations. One's own body is the only worldly object that one cannot escape from. Furthermore, it may be the object that is, above all others, infused with another person's potential presence. However, in the remainder of this section, I will focus instead on experience of the body as *subject*, as a system of felt dispositions through which one experiences and engages with a significant environment. This will aid us in seeing the structural similarities between bereavement and bodily injury.

In a 1975 study, Colin Murray Parkes explores, in depth, the similarities and differences between grief and reactions to the loss of a limb. He concludes that the two have much in common and that they also tend to follow a similar course over time:

This included an initial period of numbness, soon followed by restless pining with preoccupation with thoughts of the loss, a clear visual memory of the lost object and a sense of its presence. Defensive processes, reflected in difficulty in believing in the loss and avoidance of reminders, were also evident. (Parkes 1975, 204)

Both responses, Parkes suggests, centrally involve a “psycho-social transition,” an adjustment process whereby one worldview (construed not merely as a conceptual representation of the world but also a way of relating to and interacting with the surrounding environment) is replaced by another.

Although there were some differences in responses to bereavement and amputation, Parkes notes that these had all but disappeared after the first thirteen months. The only exception was a “sense of the presence of the lost object”; while 56 percent of amputees continued to have phantom limb experiences, only 14 percent of bereaved subjects had comparable experiences of the deceased as present (Parkes 1975, 207). Interestingly, twelve of the interviewees had experienced both amputation and bereavement, and they further emphasized the phenomenological similarities.

Parkes’s comparison between phantom limbs and the felt presence of the deceased is dismissed outright by Ramachandran and Hirstein (1998, 1623–1624). A phantom limb, they maintain, is to be accounted for in principally neurobiological terms rather than in terms of psychosocial adjustment processes of the kind seen in grief. Hence, the claim that a phantom limb experience is analogous to a situation where someone is “unable to believe that her husband has died” and “has a strong sense of his presence” should not be taken seriously. In fact, this appraisal is rather unfair. Parkes explicitly acknowledges the obvious neurobiological differences between the two. Indeed, he attributes the higher relative frequency of phantom limbs to the fact that bereavement is a matter of psychological adjustment, whereas both physiology and psychology contribute to the generation of a phantom limb. However, I will suggest in what follows that even this is to concede too much. The similarities to be addressed here are not limited to phenomenological structure; the physiological effects of bereavement can also be similar in certain respects to the effects of losing a limb.

In comparing phantom limbs to the felt presence of the deceased, it is important to acknowledge that neither experience is adequately characterized in terms of a localized entity seeming to be present when it is actually absent. As we have seen, there are different *ways* of experiencing absence, an observation that applies equally to presence. To illustrate this, I will turn to Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of grief and phantom limbs in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the two have a common structure, involving a kind of presence quite different from that of a perceived entity situated in an already given world. In contrast to Parkes, Merleau-Ponty rejects *additive* models that attempt to account for phantom limbs in terms of distinct physiological and psychological components. Instead, he suggests, they should be conceived of in a unitary way, in terms of the “movement of being in and toward the world” (1945/2012, 80). To

explain, when we think of a phenomenon in terms of physiological and/or psychological processes, we take for granted that the organism already finds itself in a world, where it then relates to features of its surrounding environment in one or the other way. However, as we saw in chapter 2, the sense of being situated in a world is itself a phenomenological achievement, one that tends to be overlooked by scientific conceptions of cognition.

Merleau-Ponty suggests that phantom limb experiences occur when the habitual world is preserved despite changes in bodily capacities. After the loss of an arm, things continue to appear salient, significant, and accessible in the ways they did before. Although one sees that the arm is no longer there and knows—in a reflective, propositional way—that it is gone, the surrounding world says otherwise: “To have a phantom limb is to remain open to all of the actions of which the arm alone is capable and to stay within the practical field that one had prior to the mutilation” (1945/2012, 84). According to Merleau-Ponty, anosognosia (denial of illness and, in the type of case he is concerned with, paralysis) can be understood in the same way; a person is unable to move one side of her body, but her practical field remains intact. Its retention requires avoiding situations that would draw attention to the loss, a point that also applies to grief:

We only understand the absence or the death of a friend in the moment in which we expect a response from him and feel [*éprouver*] that there will no longer be one. At first we avoid asking the question in order not to have to perceive this silence and we turn away from regions of our life where we could encounter this nothingness, but this is to say that we discern them. The anosognosic patient likewise puts his paralyzed arm out of play in order not to have to sense its degeneration, but this is to say that he has a preconscious knowledge of it. (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012, 82–83)

Here, I will focus specifically on phantom limbs and will not consider the phenomenology of anosognosia any further. (Even if it turns out that the analysis does not apply to anosognosia, I do think it offers valuable insights into phantom limb experiences.) In the cases of both bereavement and limb loss, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the correlate of an enduring system of practical meanings is a continuing sense of presence. This does not involve an entity appearing to be *here, now* when it is actually not. Instead, it consists in a variably specific set of practical dispositions, which are experienced as possibilities inherent in one’s surroundings. One’s experience continues to include possibilities that depend on having specific

bodily capacities or on being able to relate to and interact with a particular individual:

The amputee senses his leg, as I can sense vividly the existence of a friend who is, nevertheless, not here before my eyes. He has not lost his leg because he continues to allow for it, just as Proust can certainly recognize the death of his grandmother without yet losing her to the extent that he keeps her on the horizon of his life. The phantom arm is not a representation of the arm, but rather the ambivalent presence of an arm. (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012, 83)

Merleau-Ponty also characterizes these experiences in temporal terms. They involve, he says, a “previous present that cannot commit to becoming past” (1945/2012, 88). In other words, possibilities continue to take the form “*p* is currently significant in these ways” and thus to specify associated patterns of activity, rather than being experienced as extinguished, as past. His discussion sometimes reads as though phantom limbs and sensed-presence experiences originate in intention or choice; one actively strives to preserve a lost world, in a manner resembling psychoanalytic repression. However, Merleau-Ponty also emphasizes that both phenomena involve an aspect of experience that operates *below* the level of intention (conscious or otherwise). They are integral to the structure of a world within which we act and within which we form intentions of one or another kind. Even so, they are not merely mechanistic in nature and involve a kind of bodily purposiveness.

Of course, neither grief nor phantom limbs can be understood exclusively in terms of striving to *preserve* an impossible world. As I have emphasized, the habitual world also changes over time. The speed, extent, and nature of adjustment vary considerably, and explicit, effortful choices plausibly have some role to play as well. Consider an essay by Oliver Sacks (2005) on experiences of losing sight, which emphasizes how people adapt in quite different ways. In a case of “deep blindness,” one eventually forgets what it was like to see. One even loses visual imagination, coming to inhabit a world bereft of the possibilities offered by sight. In contrast, some people actively, willfully preserve visual imagery and even continue to utilize it in goal-directed activities. Merleau-Ponty makes some complementary, albeit briefer, remarks on differing experiences of blindness, acknowledging that the practical field can be preserved to varying degrees and reconfigured in different ways (1945/2012, 81). Similarly, what is experienced following a significant bereavement or the loss of a limb is not merely “arrested

time." There is interaction between the worlds of before and after, involving change.

Merleau-Ponty is right, I think, to maintain that phantom limbs and certain experiences of the deceased as present share a common structure. The limb and the person are present in an indeterminate, diffuse way; they are implicated in situations rather than being perceived constituents of situations. It is this sense of presence, with its recalcitrance to change, that conflicts with the propositional belief that someone is dead. How can the person be dead, when the world in which I entertain that thought runs contrary to it? Nevertheless, the account is incomplete, and there remains a great deal more to say about experiences of both kinds. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between image-like experiences (or, if you like, representations) of the body and the phenomenological role of the body as that *through which* we experience our surroundings. In other words, he distinguishes the body "image" from the body "schema," from how the body structures practically engaged perception.¹⁵ Phantom limbs, he maintains, are to be understood in terms of the latter; they involve retention of habitual dispositions that appear in the guise of one's surroundings. Contrary to this, first-person reports of phantom limbs indicate that they can and often do have image qualities. For a 1997 exhibition entitled *After Image*, Alexa Wright interviewed amputees and then produced photographic images of what their phantoms *looked like*.¹⁶ These images included quite specific characteristics, such as reduced diameter, partial retraction, or being frozen in a certain position. Of course, the relevant experiences are not themselves visual, but the point is that there can be a proprioceptive awareness of the limb that is sufficiently image-like for it to be described in fairly precise spatial terms. This is difficult to reconcile with the proposal that phantoms consist only of diffuse, ambiguous experiences of presence.

However, phantom limb experiences are multifaceted and diverse. Hence, it could be that Merleau-Ponty's analysis captures some of them or, at least, an important aspect of some of them. According to Ramachandran and Hirstein (1998), all phantoms involve a vivid sense of presence, but this core experience accommodates considerable variety. While between 90 percent and 98 percent of those who lose a limb experience a phantom almost immediately afterward, this sense of presence may fade within days or persist indefinitely. When phantoms do fade, they sometimes become shorter and/or change shape. Phantoms can also involve pain or cramping. For some,

the limb remains rigid, perhaps stuck in an uncomfortable position, while others report experiences of voluntary movement. Others describe habitual, unthinking responses to situations, such as reaching out with a phantom arm to shake somebody's hand. To further complicate matters, phantoms are not specific to limbs; they can also occur after the loss of a breast, part of the face, or the penis.

Contrary to Merleau-Ponty's account, it is doubtful that a habitual world, preserved despite injury, can account for a limb that is frozen in position or a hand that is vividly experienced as protruding from a shoulder. Aplasic phantoms, which arise despite the congenital absence of a limb, pose a further challenge. If phantoms involve the retention of bodily capacities, which are to some degree innate but also habitually entrained, how can we account for the appearance of a phantom where no such capacities were ever present? It could be that aplasic phantoms are different in kind from others. For instance, Gallagher (2005, 92) suggests that they may not concern the body "schema" at all, whether innate or habitual. Instead, they are image-like phenomena. Consistent with this, aplasic phantoms often have a late onset, unlike post-amputation phantoms. In addition, they do not involve experiences of forgetting that a limb is missing, such as trying to walk with a missing leg. Even so, Gallagher also allows for the possibility that observing and interacting with other people somehow activates innate components of the body schema. Given this, it need not be assumed that even aplasic phantoms consist *exclusively* of image-like bodily experiences.

It could also be argued that phenomena such as phantom breasts and penises are principally image-based phenomena, given that breasts and penises are not integrated into "motor programs." However, that is questionable. Although one does not use a breast to act in the way that one uses an arm or leg, it is still integrated into habitual activities in all sorts of ways, shaping a sense of one's capacities for action as well as one's interactions with other people. The body as a locus of habitual dispositions amounts to a unified whole, rather than an assortment of motor capacities that are stuck together alongside inactive components. Consider a more mundane experience, which is analogous in relevant respects. Most of the time during the day, I wear glasses. When I take them off, I often forget shortly afterward that I have done so, where forgetting takes the form of pressing the bridge of my nose with my index finger, so as to adjust my glasses. It is not that I first form an explicit image of the glasses resting on my nose.

Rather, they are integrated into my activities and habitually taken account of. So, even artifacts can be incorporated into patterns of bodily anticipation and experienced as present when absent, an observation that is consistent with reports of wedding rings on phantom fingers and watches on phantom wrists (Ramachandran and Hirstein 1998, 1607). If this much is conceded, then there are insufficient grounds for excluding body parts that are not directly involved in motor action from a schema-based account of phantoms.

Hence, I suggest that, although Merleau-Ponty does not provide a comprehensive account of phantoms, he does succeed in identifying an important *aspect* of many such experiences. Indeed, influential work on phantom limbs by Marianne Simmel in the 1950s identifies the body schematic component as most central:

We regard the phantom as the symptom and result of a discrepancy between the schema and physical reality. Reality can change—a leg may be lost in an accident—but the schema persists, and the phantom is the experiential representation of this persistence. (Simmel 1958, 493)

Some phantoms clearly do involve retention of the practical field, as when the absence of a limb is forgotten during the course of habitual action: “The patient may ‘forget’ and reach out with the missing hand to grasp something, or to steady himself, or he may step on the phantom foot and fall” (Simmel 1958, 492). Retention of the practical field is also consistent with findings concerning the influence of prosthetic limbs on phantoms. Those who use them tend to experience more frequent phantoms than those who do not, suggesting that continuing use of the limb and consequent retention of practice are somehow implicated (Fraser et al. 2001). Furthermore, it has been observed that gradual loss of a limb and gradual loss of use prior to amputation are less likely to be followed by a phantom than sudden loss of a functional limb, again suggesting that the experience has something to do with the retention of practical dispositions (Ramachandran and Hirstein 1998, 1625). Where adjustment proceeds gradually, there is no sharp contrast between experience of a wholly intact practical field and recognition of its loss.

Comparable points apply to grief. A grief process is certainly not to be understood exclusively in terms of what happens to the “practical field” (as I will further emphasize in chapters 5–7, when considering the distinctively *interpersonal* aspects of grief). Nevertheless, this is an important aspect of

grief. In the cases of both grief and loss of bodily capacities, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the preservation of a world that is no longer possible:

The passage of time does not carry away impossible projects, nor does it seal off the traumatic experience. The subject still remains open to the same impossible future, if not in his explicit thoughts, then at least in his actual being. . . . New perceptions replace previous ones, and even new emotions replace those that came before, but this renewal only has to do with the content of our experience and not with its structure. Impersonal time continues to flow, but personal time is arrested. (1945/2012, 85)

Where grief is concerned, this description best captures certain predicaments associated with labels such as “complicated” and “prolonged” grief, which involve an inability to form new practical meanings and an associated failure to fully acknowledge the death (Neimeyer 2006). With this, a habitual world is preserved in the face of loss, albeit in a way that is lacking. (I will return to the topic of pathological grief in chapter 8.) Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty’s account oversimplifies matters or, at least, does not tell the whole story. Although grief involves times when habitual patterns are maintained, these are not simply to be contrasted with times when one’s loss is acknowledged. Comprehending and adjusting to loss also involves dynamic interaction between the two. As Stroebe and Schut (1999, 2010) put it, we “oscillate” between confronting and avoiding the implications of loss. So, what Merleau-Ponty describes is in fact part of a larger process of reconciling one’s life structure with the implications of the death over a period of time.

Grief thus involves dynamic relationships between the retention and revision of practical meanings; the two are not mutually exclusive. Although some of these relationships involve a kind of *presence*, it need not be constant and unwavering, taking the form of an unchanging but impossible system of meaning. It might be more pronounced in some situations than others, and it might be conflicted, as when some aspects of a situation imply presence while others imply absence. Experiences of presence are also localized to differing degrees. A system of meanings that shapes one’s world as a whole may presuppose the deceased in a diffuse, nonlocalized way, but other experiences more closely approximate a sense that the person is *right here, right now*. For instance, when walking into someone’s office, where papers and unopened letters still lie on the table, there might be a sense of presence involving fairly specific patterns of anticipated activity and interaction. So, to reiterate, felt-presence experiences such as these are not simply a matter of experiencing

something as there when it is not there. There is a less determinate sense of actually or potentially relating to a particular person, which is constituted by variably diffuse and sometimes conflicting systems of practical meanings. These experiences are equivocal, ambiguous, and quite unlike mundane perceptual experiences of entities occupying specific locations within an already given world. Consequently, they are difficult both to comprehend and to convey to others.

Similar complications arise when interpreting phantom limb experiences. Although many different kinds of phantoms have been identified and distinguished, the empirical literature remains lacking in an important respect. For the most part, it is maintained that a phantom appears as *present* or as *vividly present*, but nothing more is said about what this sense of presence actually amounts to. It is just taken for granted that we have a sufficient grasp of what it is to experience something as present. However, it is clear that certain experiences, which might be described in terms of felt presence, are quite unlike perceiving a particular entity in a particular location. Phantom limb experiences are diverse, involving varying degrees of localization, specificity, conflict, and ambiguity. It does not suffice to observe that a limb seems to be present; too many questions remain. Simmel (1958, 492) states that a person may be “more aware of the phantom extremity—even though painless—than of the contralateral intact limb.” But what does this increased awareness involve? Is the person aware of the limb in the same way but to a heightened degree? Alternatively, is it experienced as present in a qualitatively different manner to the intact limb? Without more discerning phenomenological analyses, it is unclear what an experience of presence or heightened presence actually amounts to in any given case.

Even so, it is evident that not all phantoms are primarily a matter of retaining a practical field. Some are more image-like, more like encountering an entity perceptually. This, it could be added, distinguishes them from the experienced presence of the deceased. Again, though, comparable observations apply to bereavement. As I will discuss in chapter 5, some sensed-presence experiences are quite different from what Merleau-Ponty describes, closer to the experience of perceiving a person through a particular sensory modality. Others lack “image” qualities and involve a more diffuse sense of presence but are not to be accounted for in terms of retaining a practical field. Hence, in comparing grief and phantom limb experiences, we find that both can involve different *kinds*, rather than just different

degrees, of presence. In order to appreciate the phenomenology of grief and, more specifically, its two-sided structure, it is important to acknowledge these differences. Otherwise, the tensions between different kinds of presence, and between different forms of conviction, will be misinterpreted or pass unnoticed.

Cursorily descriptions of experiencing something or someone as present cannot succeed in distinguishing a perception-like experience of something or someone from the kind of experience described by Merleau-Ponty. To complicate matters, it may be that, in some instances, the two are better regarded as complementary aspects of a unified experience of presence—the room suddenly takes on the air of significance it used to have when she had just walked in and, in conjunction with this, one also senses her presence in a particular location. In fact, I doubt that the *phenomenological* distinction between image- and schema-based experiences is clear-cut. A practical configuration of the environment could be so specific as to imply a person's presence in a particular place. The experience has a gestalt structure. Her presence is not merely implied by what appears salient and significant; she is also part of the scene, integral to how it is organized. When such configurations arise fleetingly, it may be like briefly *seeing* a silhouette or shadow of the person. Alternatively, such an experience could involve a kind of presence *in* absence. Reminiscent of Sartre's café, the room appears like a frame without a picture, a system of expectations in the context of which someone is set to appear in a certain manner. Yet he fails to do so. Perhaps, on occasion, experiences of this latter kind are also communicated in terms of someone's presence. The current significance of one's surroundings implies his actual presence, in a way that conflicts with his visible absence.

3.4 A Part of Oneself

Although experiences of bereavement and losing a limb can be similar in several respects, one might think that some of the similarities remain fairly superficial. Even if it is admitted that there are perception-like experiences of the deceased and perception-like experiences of missing limbs, this need not be illuminating. We have all sorts of perceptual and perception-like experiences in all sorts of different situations. Furthermore, the fact that phantom limbs are largely explicable in neurobiological terms, while grief is not, could be taken to indicate that they are importantly different. A

partial explanation of phantom limbs offered by Ramachandran and Hirstein (1998, 1608–1609) appeals to “plasticity in the somatosensory system” and processes of “remapping.” Parts of the cortex associated with the missing limb are taken over by sensory input from elsewhere in the body, making it seem as though the limb is still present.¹⁷ However, the comparison between grief and phantom limbs is not limited to their phenomenology; there are also physiological similarities. Of course, the sensorimotor processes involved in generating a phantom limb will be anatomically distinct from whatever processes are at work during grief. Nevertheless, there are functional commonalities between the roles played by other people and by our own bodily capacities in shaping experiences of significance.

I have suggested that we experience our surroundings as practically significant in light of projects and values that depend both on our bodily capacities and on our relations with particular people. Certain things matter to me in the ways they do only because of my concern for *you*. In conjunction with this, certain activities are only intelligible or only of value to me in light of that concern. Furthermore, what appears achievable reflects not just my own bodily and intellectual abilities but also what I can do in cooperation with you, what we can achieve together. Interpersonal relationships and bodily capacities can thus play similar roles in shaping world experience. That said, there are also differences. Losing a limb involves losing some very specific abilities and requires equally specific forms of adjustment. Loss of a person is likely to have a less selective, more diffuse impact on the experiential world. Even so, it is doubtful that this contrast applies in all cases. For a professional musician or sportsperson, whose life structure depends upon fairly specific bodily abilities, loss of a limb could amount to a pervasive loss of meaning from the world as a whole. And someone whose life revolved around a particular project involving another person, such as playing in a band or running a business together, could experience the loss of quite specific abilities with bereavement. One might object that similar points could apply to losing an accountant or a bank manager (at least where one has become exceptionally dependent on that person’s services), without the relevant experience adding up to one of personal grief. Hence, it is important to reiterate that grief over the death of a person also involves certain additional, distinctively *interpersonal* types of concern; one cares *for* the other person in ways that one does not ordinarily care for one’s bank manager. This aspect of grief will be discussed further in chapters 5–8.

There is evidence to suggest that other people shape our experiences of salience and significance in ways that are not so different from the operations of our own bodies. What appears salient and how it is significant to us depend on whether we are with other people and on what those people are doing. Bayliss et al. (2007, 644) found that others' reactions to a shared environment influence one's own evaluations of it. Objects looked at with a happy expression by someone else are subsequently liked more than those looked at with disgust. A range of other empirical findings point to the conclusion that the value-properties of perceived entities are shaped by interpersonal experience and interaction:

Converging evidence from behavioural neuroscience and developmental psychology strongly suggests that objects falling under the gaze of others acquire properties that they would not display if not looked at. Specifically, observing another person gazing at an object enriches that object of motor, affective and status properties that go beyond its chemical or physical structure. (Becchio, Bertone, and Castiello 2008, 254)

It is not just that perceived entities are evaluated in certain ways when another person is present. Those properties can endure even after the person has left; they are experienced as inherent in objects. Similarly, the *practical possibilities* that things present us with depend not just on what our bodies are able to do but also on what can be achieved with others (Sebanz, Bekkering, and Knoblich 2006; Pacherie 2014). There is even evidence that anticipating the actions of others can shape our perceptual experiences in a similar way to initiating an action oneself. For instance, when one presses a button to generate a tone, it is perceived as less intense than when the tone is produced at random. The same attenuation effect occurs when another person is observed pressing the button (Sebanz and Knoblich 2009).

To speculate further, the presence and intensity of such effects surely depend more specifically on the kind of social situation we are in and who we are with. For instance, the appraisals of a partner in the context of sustained interaction are more likely to shape perception of one's surroundings than a brief glance at the expression of a stranger. And repeated exposure to consistent appraisals is more likely to forge enduring evaluations. Unlike watching a stranger press a button, interacting with a long-term partner involves elaborate and structured systems of anticipation that continue to influence evaluative experiences and practical dispositions even outside of one's interactions with her. To add to this, one's sense of what is salient and

how it is significant depends largely on projects, commitments, and concerns that are shared, many of which only make sense given the relationship. In many instances, projects are *ours* and, even when a project does not take this form, experience and activity continue to be shaped by concern *for* the partner. Furthermore, a sense of what is achievable integrates the anticipated presence and abilities of the partner in a stable, habitual way. Similar points apply to other relationships that involve a substantial degree of habitual, practical integration, such as relationships with parents, children, or siblings with whom we live.

It is important to distinguish these points from the observation that a close personal relationship can involve “we-intentionality,” where things are experienced as significant “for us” rather than just “for me” and where one has the sense that “we are doing this” or “we seek to achieve this.” It is debatable what the experience of “we experience/act” amounts to and how it relates to “I experience/act.”¹⁸ However, although I accept that a close relationship does involve “we-intentionality” and that the relevant experience requires further clarification, the point I am making here is broader in scope. Even when a situation appears as significant “for me,” and even when something appears achievable “for me,” another person can still be implicated in the relevant way. Certain things appear significant to me in light of projects and wider concerns that are *ours*; other things matter to me given my concern for you; and what appears achievable for me depends in part on what I habitually anticipate from you. Hence, what one experiences as *one’s own* perspective (in contrast to *our* perspective) can equally depend on one’s relationship with another person.

All of this points to the conclusion that another person can come to play a similar role to one’s own bodily capacities in shaping one’s habitual, experiential world.¹⁹ Moreover, there is no clear boundary between the experience-shaping contribution of bodily capacities and the contribution made by potential, anticipated, and actual relations with other people. What I take to be my own perspective on the surrounding world does not incorporate a clear distinction between how the world appears to *me* and how it appears to *us*; the line between intrapersonal and interpersonal is unclear. Given this, it is tempting to take utterances such as “it is like losing a part of myself” and “it feels like part of me has died” literally. What has been lost cannot be identified specifically, as when pointing to the loss of a limb. Nevertheless, the two kinds of loss share a common structure.

Something that was previously integral to one's ability to experience and engage with the world, to perceive things in structured ways that reflect a coherent system of projects, cares, concerns, and abilities, is now absent.²⁰

We can appeal to the term “mutual incorporation” here, as employed by Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009). The idea is that, just as we integrate various props into bodily activities, perceiving and acting upon the world through them as though they were parts of our own bodies, interactions with another agent can involve a blurring of phenomenological boundaries between the two parties. In sustained, structured interactions, there is a “reciprocal interaction of two agents in which each lived body reaches out to embody the other” (2009, 474). Fuchs and De Jaegher emphasize losses of interpersonal differentiation that occur during tightly coupled face-to-face interactions, where the two parties remain in close proximity to each other. But the point applies equally to *habitual* forms of incorporation, which develop within close, long-term relationships. In such cases, incorporation does not require ongoing interaction. Even when the other person is not physically present, the relationship continues to shape one's practically engaged perceptual experience. Hence, this kind of incorporation is more profound, pervasive, and enduring than the incorporation that characterizes one-off interpersonal interactions and episodic or habitual couplings with items of equipment.²¹

So, it is important to distinguish the kind of incorporation involved in feeling connected to someone at a given time from an interpersonal permeability that I have sought to make explicit. Suppose Person A interacts with Person B and feels connected to B, somehow in unison with B. Even in a case of mutual incorporation, A continues to distinguish—to some extent—the perspective through which she experiences B from B as an object of her experience. She thus experiences herself as relating to B, rather than as fused with B. At the same time, however, A's perspective may continue to be structured by her longer-term relationship with B, such that the boundaries between her own subjectivity and B's subjectivity are blurred from the outset. Two ways of experiencing B therefore occur simultaneously: a sense of relating to B and a more subtle way in which A's own attitude toward and experience of B is already permeated by her relationship with B. The latter continues to shape experience and activity even when B is not present, also feeding into A's interactions with other people. This serves to further illuminate the two-sided structure of grief, which involves a conflicted way of experiencing B as both present and absent. A's explicit recognition of B's irrevocable absence continues to presuppose the relationship.

I acknowledge that there remain important phenomenological and neurobiological differences between grief and losing a limb. Furthermore, experiences of both kinds are diverse and develop in a range of ways. Most importantly, *love* for another person is something that the comparison fails to fully capture. So, my claim is only that *some* central aspects of grief *can be* structurally similar to *some* central aspects of adjusting to the loss of a limb, not that the experiences can be mapped onto each other in their entirety. As Parkes writes,

“You can’t get an artificial Dad,” said one amputee who had also lost a father, and it was the irrevocable nature of the loss which was emphasized by another amputee, a woman whose husband had died six years previously, “If you lose a leg you can tell yourself you’re going to cope—but you never get a husband back.” (1975, 206)²²

Nevertheless, the similarities suffice to illustrate a point with much wider applicability: a sense of our own capacities, what matters to us, and what we might achieve can come to depend, in various ways and to varying degrees, on our relations with others. Comparisons between bereavement and losing part of one’s body are not mere analogies that convey the closeness of a relationship. The two phenomena are structurally similar in a number of important respects and, moreover, inseparable. We experience things as significant, as mattering, through our feeling bodies. However, the kinds of significance that we experience as inherent in things reflect not simply our bodily capabilities but the integration of those capacities with life structure, interpersonal relationships, and shared norms. Networks of projects, values, and habitual expectations can therefore be rendered unsustainable or unintelligible by a range of different circumstances, including bereavement, relationship breakdown, unemployment, serious injury, chronic illness, and social or cultural upheaval. Hence, various different experiences of loss share a common phenomenological structure.

3.5 The Pain of Grief

An appreciation of the phenomenological similarities and relationships between bodily and interpersonal experience also aids us in understanding the “pain” of grief. In considering whether and how grief’s pain resembles somatic or bodily pain, it should be kept in mind that bodily pain is multifaceted and phenomenologically diverse. So, it could be that grief resembles pains of type x , in virtue of property p , and/or that it resembles pains of

type y , in virtue of property q .²³ Distinctions have been drawn between the sensory, affective, and motivational components of somatic pain. As well as being variably prominent in different instances of pain, there is compelling evidence that they are fully dissociable. A condition called “pain asymbolia” is said to involve pain sensation but without any unpleasantness or motivation to avoid the pain. Conversely, feelings of unpleasantness and associated behavioral tendencies can occur without pain sensation (Grahek 2007; Corns 2014b). Moreover, the unpleasantness of pain is not reducible to an inclination to avoid or escape something. As observed by Bain (2013), the unpleasantness of pain “rationalizes” action, whereas behavioral tendencies do not, suggesting that the two are distinct. Consistent with that position, it is possible to dislike a pain experience without being motivated in any way to avoid or seek relief from it. According to Grahek (2007, 39), only pain asymbolia involves complete retention of pain sensation combined with complete loss of affective response and motivational tendencies. Other cases that are described in terms of “pain without unpleasantness” actually involve finding the pain disagreeable, while not feeling inclined to act upon this.

It is highly doubtful that any one ingredient is *sufficient* for pain. Grahek refers to sensation without affect or motivation as “pain without painfulness” and to affect and motivation without pain sensation as “painfulness without pain.” In line with this, one could maintain that sensation alone suffices for “pain.” However, it bears little resemblance to most of those experiences we refer to as “pain.” What remains without affect and motivation is just a “blunt, inert sensation, with no power to galvanize the mind and body for fight or flight” (Grahek 2007, 73). Perhaps pain sensation or some other component is at least *necessary*, but even that is doubtful. Corns (2015) considers what is sometimes called “social pain”: emotional distress that occurs due to a change in interpersonal circumstances, without any associated pain sensation. There are, she suggests, insufficient grounds for insisting that this really does amount to *pain*. After all, unpleasantness without pain sensation is not considered sufficient for pain in other circumstances. For instance, a horrible taste in the mouth is not literally painful. Radden (2009, 111), in contrast, does allow for “pain and suffering that is nonlocalized and nonsensory.” One way of resolving the issue is to endorse a pluralistic approach, according to which pains have various different components, none of which are necessary or sufficient. Indeed, Corns (2014a) advocates such an approach, while suggesting that there remain good reasons for excluding social pain. What it has in common with somatic pain is

its unpleasantness and, even on a liberal conception of pain, unpleasantness is not enough.

However, first-person accounts of grief suggest that the resemblance between grief's pain and at least some uncontroversial experiences of bodily pain is much closer than this. A problem with referring simply to "pain" in this context is that it encourages a tendency to look for some elusive quality that is common to grief and certain bodily experiences. It is then difficult to offer a clear statement of what that quality actually amounts to or how we might determine whether or not unpleasant quality p is the same as q , or at least sufficiently similar to be classified as the same type of experience. To identify and further clarify the phenomenological similarities between bodily pain and the pain of grief, I suggest that it is more illuminating to focus on the common theme of injury and the experience of being injured or hurt by something. This might seem natural, in light of my earlier discussion of the comparative phenomenology of bereavement and loss of a limb. Indeed, that comparison could be extended so as to include pain. Phantom pain is experienced by between 50 percent and 80 percent of amputees and can involve different qualities, such as "stabbing, throbbing, burning, or cramping" (Flor 2002, 182).²⁴ Thomas Fuchs proposes that we understand grief's pain in a similar way. Insofar as bodily experience "incorporates" relations with particular people, the pain of their loss is comparable to that of a lost limb:

The threads of mutual attachment and belonging are cut off, and the wound or pain that is now felt bears resemblance to an amputation of the "dyadic body" that one has formed with the other, and to the phantom pain that the amputee experiences. (Fuchs 2018, 47)

I want to focus instead on more general similarities between bereavement and the experiences of undergoing an injury, having been injured, and recovering from injury. Such comparisons are often drawn. For example, Parkes (1998, 6) writes,

On the whole, grief resembles a physical injury more closely than any other type of illness. The loss may be spoken of as a "blow." As in the case of a physical injury, the "wound" gradually heals; at least, it usually does.²⁵

First of all, though, it should be acknowledged that talk of "pain" during grief is not univocal. Many of those who are grieving also report unambiguously *bodily* feelings of pain, no different from kinds of bodily pains that are attributed to a variety of other causes or to causes unknown. One's body really does *hurt*:

My body also aches most of the time. (#21)

Sometimes the physical pain becomes unbearable. (#25)

I seem to suffer from more aches and pains than I did when my husband was alive. (#36)

More headaches. Trembly. Pain in chest. Feel nauseous. (#72)

I've had numerous aches and pains, stomach problems, musculoskeletal issues. (#74)

I've had tension in my neck and feel like a lead weight is sitting in my chest. (#89)

Feelings that are described as bodily or physical and as painful need not be experienced as *exclusively* bodily in nature. Even somatic pains of various kinds can amount to ways of experiencing and engaging with one's surroundings (Kusch and Ratcliffe 2018). To be in excruciating pain is, at the same time, to experience one's environment as imbued with certain kinds of significant possibilities and not others. Nevertheless, we can at least say that certain bodily pains are experienced as *accompaniments* to one's grief. Although they might also shape how one experiences and relates to the world, they are not integral to the felt recognition of loss. In contrast, other distinctively *bodily* feelings are phenomenologically inseparable from the experience of loss. Some survey respondents remarked on how their loss is or was literally experienced as a form of pain, often specifically located in the chest:

In the early days, weeks and months, I felt an overwhelming pain in my chest. I know now that it's normal to feel that pain. It was my heart breaking. I can still feel that pain as my heart will never heal, but I can manage that pain. (#20)

The pain of grief chokes my throat and my heart does hurt with the pain of loss. (#164)

Even the mental pain was somehow located—in the head and chest. (#171)

Your heart does literally ache. I didn't know that. (#172)

I'd suddenly find myself overwhelmed by waves of grief and sadness, and I'd just sit there sobbing for half an hour. And it hurt, physically hurt, with a dull ache in the chest. (#177)

What we have here is not just a bodily experience that accompanies loss. What is referred to as the pain *of* grief involves being hurt *by* loss. Furthermore, some say that this is the most terrible pain they have ever felt or that ever could be felt: "It is the worst pain I could ever experience" (#17); "incomparable; there is nothing like it" (#18); "there will never be anything else in my life that is as painful as losing my son" (#20). It is not just that

the bereavement *causes* terrible pain, as the pain also has intentionality. The bereavement is experienced *as* a source of immense hurt or injury; one finds *it* painful. As Solomon (2004b, 80) writes, “We suffer when we grieve, but it does not follow that we suffer *from* grief.” Rather, grief involves the experience of being hurt *by* something.

Similarly, many bodily experiences of pain involve not only *being in pain* but also *finding something painful*. I might just have a pain in my leg. Alternatively, it could be an experience of something acting upon my leg. Thus, in the cases of both grief and somatic pain, what is referred to as “pain” often has an intentional structure that includes occurrences and situations outside of one’s own body. The common theme is that of being acted upon in an injurious, painful way. Someone who is grieving might say that it feels “raw,” where “it” refers interchangeably to the pain, the grief, and the loss: “For the first couple of years, I can only describe my experience as feeling ‘raw’” (#85); “the pain is still very raw” (#175); “it’s still raw” (#45). What is wounded is not the corporeal body but something to which both bodily and interpersonal experience contribute. We can think of grief as involving an injury to one’s life structure, self, or world: “the impact that the bereavement has on you wounds you” (#42). What this has in common with unambiguously *bodily* pain is not one or another kind of abstract, felt *quality*. Instead, the experiences share a distinctive, bodily way of experiencing the unfolding of possibilities. We are acted upon by something, subjected to it:

For six weeks now, we have been living with a strangling loss. It is no idle metaphor. We have experienced, every single day, how a nagging absence can literally wrap its tentacles around your neck in a stranglehold. The scream stays stuck in your throat. Loss is a strangler who grants his victim no more protest than a hint of a gargle. (Van der Heijden 2015, 325)

Finding bereavement painful is not a matter of passively experiencing a simple bodily sensation. We experience the death as having a certain kind of significance, in a way that is inextricable from our bodily experience. It is something that runs contrary to our life structure, undermining our capacity for pursuing practically meaningful possibilities. Eugène Minkowski observes that the experience of somatic pain can have a similar form; there is a sense of being acted upon, in a manner that inhibits our engagement with the world:

Intrinsically bound up in pain is the feeling of some external force acting upon us to which we are compelled to submit. Seen in this light, pain evidently opposes

the expansive tendency of our personal impetus; we can no longer turn ourselves outward, nor do we try to leave our personal stamp on the external world. Instead, we let the world, in all its impetuosity, come to us, making us suffer. Thus, pain is also an attitude toward the environment. (Minkowski 1958, 134)

Grief, as we have seen, consists in a temporally extended process whereby the reality of what has happened “sinks in.” Hence, although the death has already happened, its significance is something that continues to be felt, to press in, to hurt. This is one of the key similarities between certain bodily pains and the pain of loss. The comparison also extends to the process of recovery from bereavement, which is sometimes described as like the slow, incomplete healing of a wound: “It’s a bit like breaking an ankle that doesn’t properly heal. When you dance, you dance funny, but that helps to make you the person you are now” (#42); “it may sound clichéd, but it is like a wound, it heals but the scars are always there” (#141).

Hence, regardless of which bodily sensations might be involved in grief’s *painfulness*, there remain important structural similarities between the pain of grief and somatic pain, involving a felt, bodily sense of the significance of what has happened or is happening. Once this is made clear, whether or not we then accept that the “pain” of loss really is pain comes down to a terminological choice: do we adopt a broad or narrow definition of pain by appealing exclusively to one or another set of criteria for identifying pain experiences? A more liberal approach would be to concede that different conceptions of pain are appropriate for different practical and intellectual purposes, and I have no objection to that. But, whatever the case, it is clear that the resemblance between grief and somatic pains extends far beyond their common unpleasantness.²⁶

To summarize, by reflecting on various aspects of bodily experience in grief, we can better see how the process described in chapter 2 is also a matter of *feeling*. The two-sided, dynamic structure of grief involves a nonpropositional, bodily sense of anticipation. This is central to various different experiences of presence, absence, tension, and negation. In addition, it contributes to the experience of grief *as a process*. However, as I will argue in chapter 4, grief is not *felt* in a manner that is to be contrasted with what is *thought*. In describing this same phenomenological structure, we could equally place the emphasis on linguistic thought. Doing so brings to light another important aspect of the experience: what I will refer to as a sense of *indeterminacy*.

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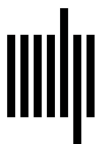
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