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5 Experiencing the Dead

In chapters 2–4, I discussed how grief involves a dynamic disturbance of one's experiential world or life structure. So far, the emphasis has been on what has happened to the bereaved. Given this, much of what I have said also applies to the phenomenology of loss more generally. However, I will now turn to the specifically *interpersonal* dimensions of grief—how those who are grieving experience and relate to both the living and the dead. When we grieve over a death, the sense of loss does not just concern our own life structure but also the person who has died; it is not exhausted by "what I have lost."[1] Furthermore, the extent to which an experiential world is disrupted by bereavement is to be distinguished from the personal aspects of loss, as caring deeply for someone need not involve substantial integration of that person into one's current projects, habits, and pastimes. Nevertheless, the two aspects of grief remain interdependent. For instance, I will suggest that how we experience and relate to the dead contributes to how we experience and negotiate indeterminacy. In addition, various different ways of remaining *connected* to the deceased depend to a large extent on how we experience and relate to a larger social world.

The task of this chapter is to identify a distinctive way in which those who are bereaved often continue to experience the *presence* of the deceased. I will approach this through a consideration of experiences that are sometimes referred to as *bereavement hallucinations*. That will set the scene for chapters 6–8, which consider ways in which we continue to relate to the dead, how our emotional lives are interpersonally regulated, and how interpersonal and social factors are relevant to distinctions that have been proposed between typical and pathological forms of grief.

Bereavement hallucinations, defined as perceptual or perception-like experiences of the deceased, are widely reported. Although some consist

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of sensory experiences in particular modalities, as when seeing, hearing, or being touched by the deceased, the most common form of experience involves a nonspecific sense or feeling of presence. I will suggest that this does not depend on a sensory experience of more specific properties that serve to identify the person. Instead, it involves a feeling of what we might call that person's unique "style," consisting in her characteristic ways of interacting with the social world and, more specifically, affecting oneself. This experience of style is not attributable to a determinate representation of the person, perceptual or otherwise. Rather, a sense of being with that particular person essentially incorporates the potential to be affected by her in ways that are not fully anticipated. I will elucidate this contrast through a discussion of C. S. Lewis's memoir, *A Grief Observed*.

5.1 Bereavement Hallucinations

The term "bereavement hallucination" refers to a perceptual or perception-like experience of someone who has died, usually a partner, family member, or close friend. These experiences are sometimes described in terms of specific sensory modalities: one might see the person, hear them, or feel their touch. However, the most common form of experience is a nonspecific *sense* or *feeling* of presence. Conceptualizing these phenomena might seem straightforward enough; they are experiences in one or more sensory modalities, which resemble—to varying degrees—perceptual experiences of a particular individual. In other words, they conform to an orthodox conception of hallucination: an experience that is similar or even identical to a veridical experience of *p* but occurs in the absence of *p*.

Perhaps this captures some of the relevant phenomena. Nevertheless, it remains unclear what a nonspecific feeling or sense of presence consists of. We are faced with a puzzle. If first-person accounts are taken at face value, the content of the experience is quite specific: the presence of a particular person. But this does not originate in more concrete sensory contents, such as hearing or seeing that person. What, then, does it involve? Of course, one could insist that there is in fact a sensory content, which is either sufficient to specify a given individual or at least disposes us to infer the presence of that individual. It could be added that people do not report this aspect of the experience because they either lack reflective access to it or find it hard to describe. However, I will adopt a different approach, by showing how

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it is indeed possible to experience a particular person in a way that does not depend on sensory contents such as visual images, sounds, smells, or tactual feelings. There is instead a distinctive way of being *affected*, which amounts to the sense of being with that person and can be further analyzed in terms of experienced possibilities. Although I acknowledge that not all perception-like experiences of the deceased take this form, it is plausible that some of them do. Furthermore, other experiences that do involve specific sensory contents may also incorporate the nonspecific sense of presence described here.

Bereavement hallucinations are reported to be commonplace and, in most instances, benign. An early and widely cited study by Rees (1971) involved 227 widows and 66 widowers in Wales. Nearly half of those interviewed reported experiencing the deceased. The most frequent experience involved simply "feeling the presence of the dead spouse" and was reported by 39 percent of respondents. This was followed by visual hallucinations (14 percent), auditory verbal hallucinations (13.3 percent), and then tactile hallucinations (2.7 percent). Rees regards the majority of these occurrences as "normal and helpful accompaniments of widowhood" (1971, 37). More recent studies report similar findings (e.g., Bennett and Bennett 2000; Keen, Murray, and Payne 2013; Castelnovo et al. 2015). There are consistent references in the empirical literature to a *sense* or *feeling* of proximity that does not originate in a more specific sensory content, at least not one that is readily identified. For example, Keen, Murray, and Payne (2013, 390) describe the most common type of experience as "a sense or feeling that the deceased person is close by without experiencing them in any sensory modality," while Longman, Lindstrom, and Clark (1988, 44) write that "an overwhelming sense of presence was often expressed indicating that the subjects felt they were not alone." Similarly, Steffen and Coyle (2012, 35) state that "people report that they can somehow sense or feel the physical proximity of the deceased loved one." However, descriptions of the relevant experience tend to be cursory, and it is far from clear what it actually consists of (Castelnovo et al. 2015, 271).

Given this lack of clarity, there is the methodological worry that studies may be using the same terms to address different phenomena, without making those differences explicit (Datson and Marwit 1997, 133). Conversely, where different terms are used, it is not always clear whether they have a common or overlapping referent. For instance, Dannenbaum and Kinnier

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(2009) address what they call "imaginal relationships" with the dead, rather than hallucinations or sensed-presence experiences. Such relationships may encompass some bereavement hallucinations (those that involve an experience of connection) but not others (which are more detached). There are also issues concerning the nature and extent of cultural variability. According to Keen, Murray, and Payne (2013), up to 90 percent of bereaved spouses in some cultures experience the presence of the deceased, but prevalence varies considerably. Furthermore, differing cultural attitudes influence how people interpret and respond to their own and others' experiences, in ways that may well affect how those experiences unfold. For instance, whether or not a sensed-presence experience is evaluated positively and proves to be ultimately beneficial may hinge, to a large extent, on whether it conforms to cultural norms and whether it is interpreted in accordance with culturally accepted practices (Steffen and Coyle 2012). In light of this potential variation, it is debatable whether a core, underlying experience can be identified cross-culturally and, if it can, what that experience involves.[2]

Differing interpretive frameworks are also explicitly or implicitly adopted by researchers. Consider the term "hallucination," which suggests a discrete experiential content that is aberrant in failing to track what is actually the case. For example, Castelnovo et al. (2015, 266) define what they term "post-bereavement hallucinatory experiences" as "abnormal sensory experiences that are frequently reported by bereaved individuals without a history of mental disorder." However, this is in tension with first-person interpretations, which often regard the experience as valuable and/or as a source of knowledge, integrating it into a wider-ranging account of the world. Moreover, it is not always clear what the criteria are for deeming an experience normal or abnormal. A nonveridical experience might well be a normal reaction to certain events, meaning a reaction that is not only commonplace but also situationally appropriate according to one or another set of criteria. One option is to construe abnormality in specifically epistemic terms: a type of experience is abnormal when it is invariably misleading. However, matters are not so straightforward, as an experience with nonveridical elements could still serve to reveal truths about oneself, one's relationships, and one's values.[3]

An alternative way of conceptualizing these phenomena is suggested by *continuing bonds* approaches (which I will return to in chapter 6). The common theme here is that grief does not culminate in letting go and severing

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one's ties with the deceased. Instead, most people in most cultures continue to relate to the deceased in some way. Relationships are reorganized rather than altogether lost and may continue to play important roles in people's lives (e.g., Klass, Silverman, and Nickman 1996; Klass and Steffen 2018). Which perspective is adopted will have a bearing on how sensed-presence experiences are conceived of, including whether or not they are deemed aberrant or pathological (Sanger 2009). In particular, I want to emphasize the difference between a hallucination (construed as a perceptual experience of *p* that arises in the absence of *p*) and a sense of connection (where the emphasis is on relating to someone rather than just experiencing their presence).[4] I will suggest that we can better understand what certain sensed-presence experiences involve by attending to their relational phenomenology, rather than seeking to identify some elusive component of the experience that adds up to the sense of someone's presence.

I will adopt a provisional distinction between two broad and overlapping forms of experience: those with contents traceable to one or more sensory modalities and those involving a nonspecific sense or feeling of presence.[5] However, interpretive caution is required here, given the likelihood that experiences of the latter kind are sometimes described in sensory terms as well. More generally, terms such as "see," "hear," and "touch" are used in various ways that do not refer to sensory phenomena: "let's return to the point you just touched on"; "I hear you loud and clear"; "I see what you mean." It could well be that people also resort to such terms when attempting to understand and convey an unfamiliar form of experience (one that does not appear to originate in a particular sensory modality) in more familiar ways. Here, I am concerned with those experiences that *do* consist, partly or wholly, in a nonspecific sense of presence, regardless of how they might be described.

5.2 Personal Presence

In contemplating the nature of sensed-presence experiences, it is important to make clear what is meant by "presence" in this context. Presence could be thought of as a straightforward matter of spatiotemporal coincidence, as suggested by descriptions such as "feeling that the deceased person is close." Thus, several other people would be *present to me* when we are all doing our shopping in the same supermarket at the same time. However, what counts as sufficient proximity for presence depends on the

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situation. “We were both present at the concert in Wembley Stadium” allows for greater spatial distance between two parties than “we were both present at the job interview.” In both cases, presence seems to be more a matter of having access to a common object of perception or attention, such as an interviewee or a concert, than of spatiotemporal proximity. So, one could talk equally of those who were present at an online meeting. The requirement of shared access to something is even more evident in examples such as “twenty people, who were present at the scene of the accident, have provided statements,” where the point is not just that they were there but also that they witnessed something. Active engagement with something can also be a relevant factor. For example, “she was present at the exam” suggests participation in the exam. Standing just inside the door of the exam room for two minutes does not suffice. Being present can further involve acting in accordance with certain norms, as in “his presence at the event was required.” Other uses of the term relate to more diffuse ways of interacting with and influencing one’s social surroundings, as in “his presence was toxic in every way.” The presence of something can also involve being *affected* by it in some way or somehow *relating* to it, as when someone feels “overwhelmed by the presence of God.”

“Presence” thus takes on a range of different connotations, and geographical proximity is not always sufficient or even necessary. It not sufficient when someone stands at the door of an exam room, and it is not necessary when someone is present at an online meeting. Hence, where someone is said to *experience the presence of the deceased*, it cannot be assumed that close physical proximity is most central to the experience in question. Instead, I will emphasize the sense of relatedness or connection.

It is important to note that what is experienced as present is not just any person but *that particular person*. Encountering someone in a distinctively personal way involves an essential particularity that is lacking in our encounters with other types of entities. Suppose you somehow sense the presence of a coffee cup. Perhaps it is a particular coffee cup—the one your grandmother gave you. On the other hand, the question “Which coffee cup did you experience?” may not have an answer. It could just be any old coffee cup. The question “Which coffee cup?” might be met with bemusement, as might “Which sausage roll?” “Which brick?” “Which tadpole?” “Which coaster?” and “Which paving stone?” One could respond that perception invariably involves experiencing particulars. But my point is that it seldom *matters*

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whether a currently experienced entity happens to be this one or that one. Although one might experience a unique coffee cup, this need not involve experiencing it *as* a unique coffee cup, as standing out in any way from other coffee cups. In the case of a person, however, there is always the further question of *who* that person is. Granted, there are many cases where the question "Which *x*?" is also appropriate for an impersonal entity; it matters which house we are heading to, which plate we are eating from, and which car we own. Nevertheless, this applies only to certain specific members of those kinds. Where other people are concerned, there is invariably the potential to engage with someone as a particular person. And, when we relate to someone in a distinctively *personal* manner, there is always a sense of that person's particularity, of their being not just a *what* but a *who*.

One might think that experiencing someone as a particular person just amounts to having an experience with a sensory content specific enough to identify that individual or, at least, a sensory content that is reliably associated with her. This raises philosophical issues concerning the nature and scope of sensory perceptual content. Perhaps that content is itself rich enough to constitute the experience of being in someone's presence. Alternatively, an initial sensory perceptual experience might be supplemented by inference or interpretation. Another option is to conceive of sensory experience in more dynamic terms; a rich interpersonal experience *crystallizes* out of an initial experience with a less determinate content, rather than being an inference or interpretation that follows a sensory episode.

These alternatives are all consistent with the assumption that either sensory content alone or sensory content supplemented by something else suffices to identify a given individual. However, I suggest instead that the sense of personal presence has a relational structure, which can amount to the sense of being with a particular person. This structure does not depend upon sensory experience. The relevant phenomenology is consequently obscured by the term "hallucination," insofar as it suggests a nonveridical, sensory experience of something or other.

But how could we experience the presence of a particular person if the experience does not originate in sensory experiences of more specific properties? To answer that question, I want to emphasize the distinction between a sense of being in close proximity to the deceased and a sense of being *with* that person. The latter is not exhausted by the experience of a certain entity occupying a certain location. What, then, does it consist

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of? First of all, it should be noted that superficially similar descriptions of feeling or sensing the presence of the deceased can refer to experiences of quite different kinds. In chapter 3, we saw how a sense of presence can take the form of an experiential world that incorporates possibilities involving a person. However, first-person accounts often describe localized perceptual experiences, as distinct from diffuse ways of experiencing and relating to the world as a whole: "I felt him beside me in bed a few times—as if he were getting into bed and settling down to sleep" (#19); "I heard him tell me he loved me and I saw his head on the pillow by mine when that happened" (#48).

How might experiences of this latter kind arise? One influential approach to sensed-presence experiences and bereavement hallucinations emphasizes the role of *searching behavior*. There is a kind of yearning or longing on the part of the bereaved, which leads them to look for the deceased, despite knowing that the person will never return. This also disposes them to interpret sensory stimuli in certain ways, generating nonveridical sensory experiences of the deceased (e.g., Parkes 1970). We can think of at least some of these "searching" behaviors in terms of cohesive patterns of anticipation that are integral to perceptual and practical activities—habitual expectations that are yet to be revised. (Hence, they are also compatible with a more pervasive sense of presence, of the kind addressed in chapter 3.) Rather than *hallucinating* something that is not there at all, some experiences will involve perceiving something that is currently present, but in an illusory way, as when someone fleetingly looks like the deceased. Other experiences will involve simple acts of misrecognition. It is not always clear, on the basis of first-person reports, which of these categories an experience falls into: "I often think I see my Dad when I am out in the places where we used to go or where I would see him" (#11); "every now and again I would see someone who looked like her and my heart would jump but then I would remember she was dead" (#144). Indeed, it is doubtful that neat, categorical distinctions between "hallucination," "illusion," and "misrecognition" apply to the variety of perceptual and perception-like experiences generated by patterns of habitual anticipation, which instead resemble one another to varying degrees.

Some such experiences may be comparable to the effects of sensory deprivation. Hoffman (2007) offers an account of auditory verbal hallucinations in schizophrenia, appealing to the concept of "social deafferentation." Certain hallucinations, he suggests, are functionally similar to phantom

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limbs; both occur due to sensory deprivation. In the case of phantom limbs, the experience of continuing presence arises partly because of deafferentation (loss of sensory input). Similar experiences are associated with sensory deprivation more generally. For example, if a person is prevented from seeing for a day or two, complex visual phenomena usually start to appear. Hoffman suggests that we are similarly reliant on sensory stimulation from the interpersonal domain and that people with schizophrenia diagnoses are often socially isolated. So, their hallucinations sometimes occur in the same way: "High levels of social withdrawal/isolation in vulnerable individuals prompt social cognition programs to produce spurious social meaning." These experiences thus involve the "repopulating" of a "barren interpersonal world" (Hoffman 2007, 1066–1067).

Although Hoffman is concerned specifically with schizophrenia, his position is, if anything, more plausible when it comes to bereavement hallucinations. Bereavement can involve losing someone who was integrated into one's activities over many years, in predictable, patterned ways that involve numerous sensory expectations. It can lead to an experience of interpersonal privation that is more sudden, extreme, specifically focused, and structured than what Hoffman refers to, disposing the bereaved person toward various nonveridical experiences involving the deceased. These could occur alongside the more diffuse sense of presence described in chapter 3. Thus, although localized sensory experiences are distinct from the retention of an experiential world implicating the deceased, the two can be closely related.

Experiences of both these kinds need to be distinguished from something else, which could equally be described in terms of someone's presence. What I have in mind here is subtle, difficult to pin down, and—consequently—easy to misinterpret or miss altogether. It is also of central importance in understanding what it is to experience and relate to the deceased in a specifically *personal* way. The experience in question involves a nonlocalized sense of personal presence that is *not* attributable to retention of a habitual world. Consider descriptions such as the following: "feeling the deceased is standing close by"; "feeling the deceased is walking alongside"; "feeling the deceased is around" (Steffen and Coyle 2011, 586). These, one might suggest, do not involve engaging in some activity *plus* experiencing the deceased nearby, but engaging in activities and experiencing one's surroundings in ways that one did when with that person. So, the person is not simply *there*, as a discrete object of perception, but implicated in a nonlocalized way by

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what is there. To account for this, it will not suffice to appeal to retention of a habitual world. That does not capture the way in which the presence of the deceased is itself a conspicuous part of one's experience. Feeling that someone is *walking alongside* involves something more. It is not merely that, as one walks, the surrounding world offers possibilities that presuppose the person. Her presence is itself a salient part of the experience, amounting to more than the forgetting of absence. Crucially, the experience of walking with someone is also dynamic and changeable. As one walks, the ongoing relationship shapes how one's surroundings appear, in ways that vary from moment to moment. Sensed-presence experiences of this kind can also involve an experience of ongoing "communication" and "mutuality" (Steffen and Coyle 2011, 589). They are thus importantly different from a project that remains frozen in time after someone's death. A companion with whom one walks can imbue the surrounding world with new and changing possibilities; things seem more alive with her than when alone. This is sometimes what is meant when we talk of enjoying someone's company.

Three different kinds of presence-experience can therefore be distinguished: (a) an experience of the surrounding world that continues to implicate the deceased; (b) a localized sensory experience of the deceased; and (c) a sense of currently relating to the deceased, in a way that cannot be fully accounted for in terms of (a) or (b). To understand the nature of (c), we need to retain an emphasis on the experience of significant possibilities. Central to the relevant experience, I suggest, is a dynamic, self-affecting sense of the possible, something that can at the same time comprise the sense of being with a particular person. Although there may also be sensory experiences associated with one or more externally directed sensory modalities, they are not primarily responsible for the sense of *being with that person*.

More generally, interpersonal experience is not just a matter of perceiving certain physical properties and inferring the presence of an internal mental life lurking behind them. At this point, it is informative to return to Merleau-Ponty's work, where a recurring theme is that we encounter the experiences of others as inherent in their expressions, gestures, and goal-directed actions. Merleau-Ponty suggests that we are able to do so because perceived movements always point to more than what is currently revealed to sensory experience. However, what they point to is not something currently hidden behind them, inside a head, which is causally responsible for what we do perceive. Consider the following passage, which emphasizes

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how the sense of another person's presence is not to be accounted for in terms of specific combinations of perceived properties or something distinct from those properties that is itself perceptually inaccessible:

> The other is never present face to face. Even when, in the heat of discussion, I directly confront my adversary, it is not in that violent face with its grimace, or even in that voice traveling toward me, that the intention which reaches me is to be found. The adversary is never quite localized; his voice, his gesticulations, his twitches, are only effects, a sort of stage effect, a ceremony. . . . One must believe that there was someone over there. But where? Not in that overstrained voice, not in that face lined like any well-worn object. Certainly not *behind* that setup: I know quite well that back there, there is only "darkness crammed with organs." (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 133)

Merleau-Ponty is consistently critical of a tendency among philosophers to construe interpersonal experience in terms of an encounter with observable behavior that leads us to postulate an internal mental life. As an alternative, he proposes that we experience the mental lives of others as inherent in their activities, in the guise of a cohesive and dynamic set of potentialities for expressions, gestures, activities, and relations. These possibilities are neither straightforwardly present nor absent:

> This is what *animalia* and men are: absolutely present beings who have a wake of the negative. A perceiving body that I see is also a certain absence that is hollowed out and tactfully dealt with behind that body by its behavior. But absence is itself rooted in presence; it is through his body that the other person's soul is in my eyes. "Negativities" also count in the sensible world, which is decidedly the universal one. (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 172)

Together, the unfolding possibilities constitute a temporally organized pattern, what Merleau-Ponty would call a "style" (1945/2012, 342). We saw in chapter 4 how the dynamic structure of world experience can be construed in terms of an overarching *style* of unfolding. Similarly, we might say that encountering someone in a *personal* way involves anticipating and experiencing a distinctively personal style.[6] This involves being *affected* by the other person, having the possibilities of one's own world somehow altered by an engagement with their possibilities:

> My gaze falls upon a living body performing an action and the objects that surround it immediately receive a new layer of signification: they are no longer merely what I could do with them, they are also what this behavior is about to do with them. A vortex forms around the perceived body into which my world is drawn and, so to speak, sucked in. (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012, 369)

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Similar themes feature in the work of various other phenomenologists, albeit expressed in different ways and with slightly different emphases. The best-known example is Sartre (1943/1989), who construes our most fundamental sense of "the Other" in terms of being affected by their presence in a prereflective, bodily manner. With this, the world is no longer organized in terms of one's own possibilities and one instead becomes an object for them. Beauvoir (1947/2018) also emphasizes the self-affecting experience of others' possibilities. But, in contrast to Sartre's account, she maintains that a sense of others' freedom is essential to sustaining one's own experience of an open future. We also find a complementary formulation in the work of Løgstrup (1956/1997), who suggests that we are unavoidably responsible for others, as any dealings we have with another person will always *affect* that person, so as to "determine the scope and hue of his or her world," making it "large or small, bright or drab, rich or dull, threatening or secure" (18). What he describes likewise involves shaping and reshaping one another's experiences of possibilities. Løgstrup goes so far as to suggest that relying exclusively on a determinate, image-like representation of a person, rather than letting that person "emerge through words, deeds, and conduct," amounts to a "denial of life" (14).[7]

Interpersonal encounters thus shape, in an ongoing and ordinarily subtle way, how we experience our surroundings. The effect is most pronounced in contexts of sustained interaction, where it encompasses not only world experience but also language and thought. As Merleau-Ponty observes, interactions of a certain quality have the potential to dislodge us from familiar ways of experiencing, acting, thinking, and speaking, in a manner that cannot be attributed merely to transmission of propositional contents between the two parties:

> Speaking and listening not only presuppose thought but—even more essential, for it is practically the foundation of thought—the capacity to allow oneself to be pulled down and rebuilt again by the other person before one, by others who may come along, and in principle by anyone. (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 19–20)

> A genuine conversation gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I *was* not capable of, and sometimes I feel myself *followed* in a route unknown to myself which my words, cast back by the other, are in the process of tracing out for me. (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 13)

The suggestion is not that another individual *possesses* the potential to affect us in some way. Rather, it is through patterns of interaction between

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people that new meanings are forged: "My words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion and are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator" (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012, 370). To this, it can be added that the anticipation of such interactions comprises an openness to the possibility of one's world being altered in subtle or more pronounced ways.[8]

In comparing bereavement to phantom limbs, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012, 82–83) writes that we only really understand that someone has died when we anticipate their response and "feel" its irrevocable absence. He adds that we avoid this form of recognition by steering away from situations that require us to confront our loss. However, as noted in chapter 4, the world that we preserve in this way is importantly lacking. Insulated from anything that might threaten its integrity, it is bereft of a more usual openness to certain kinds of future possibilities. What it lacks is a kind of *indeterminacy*, which is quite different from the kind identified in chapter 4. An openness to new possibilities does not erode the structure of one's world. On the contrary, it is an essential complement to that structure, constituting a sense that *this is not all there is*, that things could change for better or for worse in ways not fully specified by one's situation as currently experienced. This openness to possibilities is inseparable from certain kinds of interpersonal relations. Anticipated and actual relations with other people give the experienced world a degree and type of indeterminacy that is consistent both with having a life structure and with moving into an open future.[9]

Importantly, these points apply not only to the structure of interpersonal experience in general but also to relationships with specific individuals. Anticipated and actual relations with *particular people* enrich our lives in distinctive ways. Eugene Gendlin (1978/2003, 115) writes of friendship:

> We all know people with whom it is best not to share anything that matters to us. If we have experienced something exciting, and if we tell it to those people, it will seem almost dull. If we have a secret, we will keep it safe from those people, safe inside us, untold. That way it won't shrivel up and lose all the meaning it has for us. But if you are lucky, you know one person with whom it is the other way around. If you tell that person something exciting, it becomes more exciting. A great story will expand, you will find yourself telling it in more detail, finding the richness of all the elements, more than when you only thought about it alone. Whatever matters to you, you save it until you can tell it to that person.

To *know someone* is, in part, to experience and be affected by that person's distinctive style, by relational possibilities that are unique to her. Indeed,

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the integrity of one's world can come to depend, to varying degrees, on how one relates to that person and vice versa. Hence, with a bereavement, what can also be lost is the prospect of a particular style of relating, not just to the person who has died but to the world in general: "each experience is nice, but is diminished by not sharing it with her" (#40); "no wife to share experiences with. Even saying 'what a rubbish TV program, why did we watch it?'" (#101). What is lost is not something that was previously at the forefront of awareness. As Jacobson (2014, 107) observes, we generally experience the world in a manner that depends upon others but at the same time eclipses their contributions:

> This orientation to the world can, in fact, occlude our awareness of the interpersonal intimacy that is at its root, for we can come to take ourselves simply to be seeing the world as it is, on our own, without recognizing how much our experience is in fact made possible through the support of the other.

This point applies to the values, projects, pastimes, and commitments described in chapter 2, which together give the world a stable, enduring structure. But it applies equally to dynamic, changing patterns of significant possibilities that we find in our surroundings. One might take for granted that situations are imbued with this kind of openness, without recognizing its dependence on potential or actual relations with particular individuals and also people in general.

Now, it could be that, with a person's death, the capacity to be affected by her in such ways is altogether lost. That may well be the case sometimes, but not always. My suggestion is that certain so-called bereavement hallucinations involve a self-affecting experience of possibilities that constitutes the sense of being with a particular person. Furthermore, various other experiences, which would not be categorized as hallucinations, involve a less pronounced, longer-term sense of that person's continuing presence in one's life. For example, following Merleau-Ponty's sudden death in 1961, Jean-Paul Sartre writes in his memorial essay "Merleau-Ponty *vivant*" that "Merleau is still too much alive for anyone to be able to describe him." Their friendship, he suggests, somehow endures, in stark contrast to friendships with those still living that have ended. Sartre adds, "Perhaps he will be more easily approached—to my way of thinking, in any case—if I tell the story of that quarrel which never took place, our friendship" (1998, 565). Sartre's remarks can be interpreted in terms of what I have described. The potential to be affected in a certain distinctive way associated with

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Merleau-Ponty endures. This cannot be captured by any attempt to describe him in terms of determinate properties, regardless of how detailed and accurate that description might be. No such description could capture the sense of openness, potentiality, and spontaneity associated with *that particular person*. Sartre thus approaches the task of description obliquely, through the story of a friendship and the obstacles it faced. This, unlike a more direct account of a person's characteristics, evokes something of their unique style.[10]

So, there is a type or aspect of interpersonal experience that is neither exhausted by the contents of sensory experience nor obtained via inference or interpretation. This accounts not only for the experience of being with a person but also for that of being with a specific person. In short, things *look* different, depending on who we are currently with and what we are doing together. The sense of being with a person involves being affected by her unique style. A coffee cup, in contrast, is not self-affecting in a personal way and lacks this essential particularity. This explains why certain sensed-presence experiences are difficult to pin down and describe. There is little to be said about what is experienced, nothing specific or concrete to report; one just has the feeling of someone's presence. However, some cases will also involve more concrete sensory experiences. After all, it seems likely that an ongoing sense of relating to someone in a structured way will evoke sensory imaginings, as well as memories with sensory contents. Furthermore, these may be confused with current sensory experiences (by the subject of experience herself or by others who attempt to interpret her experiences), given their association with the sense of currently relating to someone. Regardless of what else it might involve, an experience of *being affected* by someone's style is always a bodily one. As discussed in chapter 3, how we experience the possibilities offered by our surroundings is inextricable from felt, bodily dispositions. Thus, in experiencing a person's style, we are affected in a bodily way that involves changing patterns of anticipation.[11]

5.3 The Grief of C. S. Lewis

If I am right that certain experiences of presence involve being affected by a person's *style*, then those experiences are quite different from determinate, perceptual representations of the person. In fact, there can be conflict between the two, given that an experience of style is essentially indeterminate. Suppose one somehow managed to concoct a perceptual and cognitive

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representation of the dead person that consisted in an exhaustive inventory of all those properties associated with her—absolutely nothing is left behind. This would altogether fail to accommodate her distinctive style. Doing so requires being open to possibilities that are not fully anticipated, to something that is not fully captured by the contents of one's own mental states.

To make the contrast clearer, let us turn to an example. In his famous memoir, *A Grief Observed*, C. S. Lewis charts the grief he experienced following the death of his wife, Joy Davidman (referred to as "H"). He describes in detail the pain of losing her again by failing to retain her in memory. This is contrasted with a sense of her presence that later returns. What Lewis describes is not localized, episodic, or pronounced to the extent that some sensed-presence experiences are. Nevertheless, his account serves to illustrate the more general contrast between retaining a *sense* of a particular person and having an accurate *image* of that person, in the guise of a memory, imagining, or perceptual experience.

Lewis describes how, in his sorrow, he sought to preserve his wife in memory and not let her slip away. Yet, his doing so prevents him from experiencing anything of *her*. She ends up being replaced by something that appears to him as his own creation:

> I am thinking about her nearly always. Thinking of the H. facts—real words, looks, laughs, and actions of hers. But it is my own mind that selects and groups them. Already, less than a month after her death, I can feel the slow, insidious beginning of a process that will make the H. I think of into a more and more imaginary woman. Founded on fact, no doubt, I shall put in nothing fictitious (or I hope I shan't). But won't the composition inevitably become more and more my own? The reality is no longer there to check me, to pull me up short, as the real H. so often did, so unexpectedly, by being so thoroughly herself and not me.
>
> The most precious gift that marriage gave me was this constant impact of something very close and intimate yet all the time unmistakably other, resistant—in a word, real. (Lewis 1961/1966, 17)

What Lewis seems to be saying here is that, however many properties are held in memory, and however vividly a person's properties are imagined, this *kind* of recollection is ultimately self-defeating. It will always culminate in the eradication of a person's distinctiveness. To experience his wife, to be with her and feel connected to her, was to be affected in a certain way. It was to anticipate and experience a transcending of his own possibilities, including his own imaginative efforts. Without this, the sense of *her* is lost;

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what remains is experienced as originating in him. As Lewis writes, "The rough, sharp, cleansing tang of her otherness is gone. What pitiable cant to say 'She will live forever in my memory!' *Live?* That is exactly what she won't do" (18–19). What is lacking is her distinctive *style* of resistance to his own expectations and imaginings. To experience her is to feel her effect on his world. This essentially involves an openness to possibilities that are not of his own making. Hence, not knowing everything about her is not a contingent, epistemic shortcoming that might be overcome. To encounter someone in a personal way is always to experience that person as surpassing one's determinate representations. To know everything about her would be to cease experiencing and relating to her in that way.

Later, as Lewis's sorrow lessens, so does the intense "longing" associated with his self-defeating attempts to hold onto his wife in memory. With this, there is a renewed experience of connection, involving a different kind of presence:

> And suddenly at the very moment when, so far, I mourned H. least, I remembered her best. Indeed it was something (almost) better than memory; an instantaneous, unanswerable impression. To say it was like a meeting would be going too far. Yet there was that in it which tempts one to use those words. It was as if the lifting of the sorrow removed a barrier. (39)

This "impression" is something that Lewis contrasts with a determinate representation derived from memory, imagination, and/or sensory perceptual experience. His description is consistent with what Merleau-Ponty would call another person's *style* and its effect on one's sense of the possible. This need not be limited to a particular location, project, or pastime. A relationship with another person, living or dead, can pervade all aspects of one's life. And so, as Lewis ceases to worry about imposing a false memory and replacing his wife with his image of her, "she seems to meet me everywhere," not as an apparition with determinate properties, occupying a particular place, but as "a sort of unobtrusive but massive sense that she is, just as much as ever, a fact to be taken into account" (44).

As discussed earlier, some of those phenomena labeled as *bereavement hallucinations* may well be associated with "searching behavior" (broadly construed). However, Lewis's account points to something different. He finds his wife only after a certain kind of search is abandoned, one that involved, in his case, memory and imagination more so than perception. What he then discovers is not a nonveridical sensory image but a renewed

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connection. His description is reminiscent of the Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. As Orpheus returns from the Underworld with Eurydice, he must walk ahead and not look back. Yet he increasingly doubts her presence and eventually turns in order to acquire the determinate sensory experience that he currently lacks. As he does so, her shadow returns to the Underworld, this time irrevocably. Lewis's narrative runs the other way. The image of his wife eradicates what is distinctive about her and she is lost, returning only when he desists in his efforts to preserve her in memory. In both cases, the image not only fails to capture the other person; it is also what renders her inaccessible.

Interestingly, Lewis describes his grief as inseparable from his relationship with God. Loss of connection with his wife coincides with the loss of a faith that now strikes him as superficial and naive. Similarly, a renewed connection with his wife spells the rekindling of faith. The common theme here is inexhaustibility, something resisting all of one's efforts to conceptualize and somehow contain it: "Images of the Holy easily become holy images—sacrosanct. My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast" (55). In both cases, something is experienced as offering up possibilities that surpass one's own cognitions, affecting one in a dynamic, distinctive, *living* way.[12]

Lewis's grief was notably solitary. However, the presence of the deceased need not be something that is experienced in isolation from other people. As Kathleen Higgins (2013, 175) observes, stories that we tell one another about the dead or that we co-construct with others are not always aimed at preserving specific, determinate properties in memory. They can also play a role in sustaining a sense of someone's spontaneity, that person's ability to surpass any one narrative: "Narratives . . . symbolically reanimate the dead because they allow fresh insights, recalling something of the continual potential for surprise in an ongoing relationship. A story invites interpretation, and its meaning remains in flux as the interpreter reconsiders various features of it." Again, what we have here is an openness to possibilities involving the person, a sense of incompleteness, a sense that there will always be more to say. This is to be contrasted with the project of assembling a single, increasingly accurate account of the person.

Returning to the theme of chapter 4, we can now see that grief involves an interplay between two importantly different *kinds* of indeterminacy.

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One of these, described in this chapter, enriches the structure of a human life, pointing to there being possibilities beyond the contents of one's current memories and imaginings The other, described in chapter 4, involves an erosion of life structure. A sense of continuing presence, whether pronounced and ephemeral or more subtle and enduring, can contribute to how we experience and respond to this erosion. It does so not by providing new structure to replace what has been lost but by sustaining the sense that certain kinds of possibilities remain, including the possibility of things coming to matter in new ways. In other words, it contributes to the sustenance of hope. The following description, for example, suggests an enduring sense of being affected by the person who died, in ways that continue to enrich and give direction to one's life:

> I can ALWAYS feel his presence—he is with me everywhere I go—he is part of me and always will be. I don't believe in afterlife or ghosts or anything like that, but I can really feel that he is here with me all the time. He was so much part of my life that I feel I have sort of become him in a way—his wonderful way of thinking, of seeing life clearly, his humanity, his kindness and generosity—he is still here in me. (#127)

Our relations with the living can similarly involve the kind of experience identified here: a distinctive way of being affected that also amounts to a dynamic sense of the possible. Hence, we should be careful not to overstate the importance of relations with the dead in sustaining the sense of an open future that incorporates the potential for positive development. Even so, as we will further see in chapter 6, whether and how we relate to the dead does have an important role to play.

5.4 Beyond Hallucination

For many philosophers of mind, a *perfect hallucination* is a nonveridical experience of *p* that is either identical to or at least indistinguishable from a veridical experience of *p* (Ratcliffe 2017, chap. 1). What I have identified here is quite different: a sense of current connection with a particular person that is not captured by any sensory perceptual content, however rich and detailed.[13] Although such an experience might seem strange and unfamiliar, what I have described is in fact ubiquitous, characterizing our relations with the living and the dead. How things appear significant and salient, how we interact with our surroundings, and the possibilities we entertain in thought

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are all influenced in subtle, prereflective ways by who we are with and who we anticipate being with. Sitting in a restaurant, going for a walk, strolling round a museum, or watching a film can be very different experiences, depending on who we are with and how we relate to them. Engaging with the distinctive styles of certain people may diminish the possibilities on offer, while others add novelty and dynamism to the world.

One might object that, even if what I described here warrants the term "sensed presence," it differs from the type of *feeling* or *sense* of presence that is sometimes classified as "hallucination." The latter is not a diffuse, nonlocalized experience of enduring connection, of the kind that C. S. Lewis eventually rediscovers. Rather, it is episodic and localized, involving an experience of someone as *right here, right now*. At the very least, this involves a more pronounced sense of presence, one that may also be different in kind. However, all that is required in order to accommodate it is some further refinement of the account. First of all, we should allow that a sense of connection can wax and wane, in ways that might be described in terms of a *feeling* of presence that comes and goes. Even so, what I have described remains less specific than the sense that *someone is currently present*. This is because the contrast between losing and retaining a sense of connection applies equally to memories, perceptions, and imaginings. When Lewis loses his wife for a second time, what is lacking is largely an ability to *remember* her in a certain way.

Under what conditions, then, does the experience of connection amount to a more specifically perceptual (or perception-like) presence? My suggestion is simply that certain ways of being affected relate more closely than others to real-time interaction with one's surroundings. How one sees this tree now, the possibilities that this painting embodies now, and the manner in which the significance of one's surroundings changes from moment to moment can all implicate one's relationship with a specific person. Depending on how one's possibilities are affected, there is a relational experience with a more or less specific structure. Given this, the extent to which the relevant phenomenology approximates that of perception will vary. Sometimes, it may be that possibilities ordinarily associated with perceptual experience and current activities combine with remembered and imagined possibilities. This would generate a sense of connection that straddles the boundaries between types of intentionality—a relationship with the deceased that is not experienced as unambiguously present or past, current or imagined.

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With this, the person would appear present but not fully present, or present in a way that differs from other aspects of one's surroundings. The sense of presence will also be diminished to the extent that possibilities associated with real-time interaction, such as those of affecting and interacting with someone, are lacking. Hence, even without the inclusion of sensory experiences with more specific contents, a sense of someone's style can involve varying degrees of specificity and, indeed, of presence. In addition, being affected in a distinctively personal way is compatible with various different emotional qualities, which depend on the kinds of relational possibilities that are salient. For instance, in contrast to a comforting sense of being with a particular person, one's experience could involve an air of inchoate menace or a personal form of threat (such as that of being undermined, blamed, or humiliated), which may or may not be attributable to a specific individual. My analysis can thus accommodate a wide range of experiences, many of which will not be associated specifically with bereavement.[14]

Throughout this chapter, I have adopted a fairly abstract level of description, which allows for considerable variation in how sensed-presence experiences are interpreted and integrated into a person's life, as well as how they are shaped by social and cultural contexts. Given this level of description, combined with the widespread acknowledgment that sensed-presence experiences in general are not culture-specific, there is every reason to think that the kinds of experiences described here occur cross-culturally. For example, Masahiro Morioka (2021, 117) addresses what seems to be the same type of experience, as it occurs in contemporary Japan. Morioka refers to the phenomenon of "conversing" but "without spoken language" and goes on to describe the phenomenon of an animate "persona," which is neither a hidden mind inferred from observable behavior nor something that is apprehended via specific sensory contents. Instead, it consists in a dynamic sense of a particular person, experienced in a self-affecting way through one's living body.

Interestingly, Morioka compares this to something described by Viktor Frankl in a very different context, that of his incarceration in Auschwitz. Frankl writes of how he was sustained by an experience of connection with his wife, despite not knowing whether she was alive or dead. Although he mentions experiencing his wife's "image" with an "uncanny acuteness," he also describes a vivid experience of "mental conversation" that was not exhausted by its sensory qualities. Love, he writes, "goes very far beyond

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the physical person of the beloved"; it involves a sense of "spiritual being," something that does not depend on "whether or not he is actually present, whether or not he is still alive at all." Again, we discover something that cannot be traced back to experiences with more determinate sensory contents. A way of being affected, sometimes involving reciprocity, serves to specify a particular person. Frankl refers to the vivid experience of an "image" or "look," but he adds that this was "more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise" (Frankl 2004, 48–50). This *luminosity*, I suggest, is better interpreted in terms of his being acutely affected by his wife's distinctive style, in a way that rekindles or sustains certain significant possibilities, than in terms of a vivid, perception-like image.

In their more subtle forms, experiences of the kind I have described are likely to be widespread among the bereaved. Some people will experience a consistent, and enduring sense of presence, whereas others will have experiences that are more pronounced and sporadic. Some will have perception-like experiences of the deceased. In other cases, though, it will be more a matter of remembering or imagining the person in a certain way. As I will discuss in chapter 6, all of this complements the view that the bereaved maintain a variety of "continuing bonds" with those who have died. It is important to add, however, that a person's style does not always remain accessible. It may fade or change over time, come and go, or be experienced only under certain conditions. Sometimes, it is lost altogether. This is more likely to occur in some circumstances than others. For instance, Køster (2020) describes a distressing sense of loss that can arise when a young child loses a parent and is later unable to summon a sense of what that person was like. That such distress is not more widespread among the bereaved could be taken to indicate that, more generally, we do tend to retain some sense of *who* a person was; we can remember them in a certain *way*.

Merleau-Ponty himself remarks briefly on two contrasting ways of remembering the dead. He does so in the first of three notes that follow his 1953 Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France. On the one hand, he writes, there is a questionable belief in our "closeness" to the dead, which involves being able to hold them in our imagination without their ever being able to place us "in question." On the other hand, there is a form of memory that "respects them," by retaining "the accent of their freedom in the incompleteness of their lives" (Merleau-Ponty 1988, 65). Some appreciation of this difference is perhaps associated with talk of "keeping

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someone's memory alive." The alternative to doing so is not simply "forgetting" but a disconnection between that memory and an openness to new possibilities. The contrast is conveyed vividly by the following passage, where Jacqueline Dooley describes how memories of her daughter are altered by a recognition that they no longer relate, in dynamic ways, to possibilities that continue to unfold:

> Memories are fragile too. Before Ana died, my memories of her bloomed, vivid. They lingered, then faded into new ones. I followed each year of her life as if it were a shining path to a certain future: prom, graduation, college, career, love, marriage, a family of her own. I anticipated Ana's lifetime, stretched in front of me, a certainty.
>
> What use were the old memories in the bright light of the new ones? Death claimed Ana's future. Now all I have are the old memories and I am holding onto them too tightly. They disintegrate under my scrutiny, slipping away like sand through my desperate fingers, showing me the truth whether I want to acknowledge it or not. (Dooley 2020)

The significance of memories relates to how they were, and continue to be, built upon. Memories of a person and of one's relationship with that person retain a degree of indeterminacy and malleability, insofar as the significance of the past remains open to revision in light of possibilities yet to be actualized. Where there are no new possibilities, those memories are frozen, in contrast to memories that remain alive, still pointing to new ways of relating to and being affected by the person. How we remember someone thus depends on whether, how, and when the possibilities we experience are shaped by that person's style, as well as by ongoing projects and other significant activities that continue to relate to the person in some way.

Similar contrasts apply to experiences of places and objects, such as possessions, a prominent example being photographs. Consider this passage from William Maxwell's semi-autobiographical novel, *So Long, See You Tomorrow*, where the narrator reflects on a photograph of his mother:

> This picture didn't satisfy my father either, and he got the photographer who had taken it to touch it up so she would look more like a mature woman. The result was something I was quite sure my mother had never looked like—vague and idealized and as if she might not even remember who we were. My mother sometimes got excited and flew off the handle, but not this woman, who died before her time, leaving a grief-stricken husband and three motherless children. The retouched photograph came between me and the face I remembered, and it got harder and harder to recall my mother as she really was. (1980/2012, 11–12)

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The problem that concerns Maxwell is not just that the image is inaccurate; it also interferes with a sense of *this particular person* that is different in kind. Of course, that is not always so with photographs, which can equally be consistent with or even evoke an experience of someone's style. And, where they are lacking, it will sometimes be for other reasons. Nevertheless, there remain cases where the determinate image is discrepant with and interferes with one's sense of the person, with their style.[15] Flaherty and Throop (2018, 162) suggest that something not unlike this can also be involved in seeing the body of the deceased and, more specifically, the face: "Palpably diminished, no longer looking like itself, no longer being itself, in death the face we once intimately 'knew' has vanished from view." Drawing on the work of Levinas, they propose that this experience of lack is not just a matter of altered appearance. Rather, it is about possibilities that were integral to one's experience of the living face, in virtue of which it "always exceeds the physical features made manifest through its corporeal configuration."

What I have sought to describe in this chapter is not just a way of *experiencing* the dead; it also involves a certain, distinctive way *of being affected*. By considering how the dead are experienced, we are thus led toward a wider consideration of self-affecting ways of *relating* to them. This is the topic of chapter 6, where I will also provide an account of the *object* of grief, what grief is directed *at*.

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Grief Worlds

A Study of Emotional Experience

By: Matthew Ratcliffe

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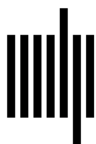

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