

Grief, Trauma, and Magic: A Memoir

by

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Introduction

This is a study of the anthropological and psychological research on grief and bereavement. The anthropological and ethnographic examples of grief highlight the experience of bereavement at a cultural and individual basis. From a psychological perspective, the work of Sigmund Freud and the discipline of psychoanalysis are intertwined within the cultural examples of the manifestations of grief. Through combining anthropology and psychology, this is a detailed exploration of the various modalities and affective nature of the experience of losing a loved one. The first chapter is an extensive literature review which provides various cultural examples and explications of the experience of grief. The literature review is divided into separate relevant themes that have been identified and explored by anthropologists and psychoanalysts alike. The second and final chapter is an autoethnography of my own experience of losing my mother, Leslie, and the prevailing themes that have shaped my grief and mourning process.

Autoethnography is more than a qualitative research tool; it is a creation that is produced through the process of self-introspection and self-expression. This autoethnography stands as a memoir and product of my grief, as well as an object or bridge that binds life to death and allows my mother to resurface in the present. I will draw upon the research on grief and the uncanny, dreams, and the fluctuating, impactful nature of trauma and memory through autoethnography, storytelling, poetry and other stylistic writing forms.

Autoethnographic methods can be used to reveal the complexities of loss, the nature of trauma, and various ways of grieving and healing. These anthropologists use autoethnography to heal themselves and others, as well as to reveal the experience of grief from a personal perspective. This autoethnography is aimed to be in line with the work of these anthropologists

and to contribute to research on grief and bereavement that considers the insertion of the anthropologist through autoethnographic method and memoir.

Methods

For this project, I conducted research on grief and bereavement using literary, ethnographic, qualitative and psychological data. Within the literature review, I have compiled a set of examples of the experiences of grief and the way in which bereavement can be studied in both anthropology and psychology. Over the course of this year, I collected various texts and data on the study of grief and bereavement, including scholarly and popular sources.

The autoethnography is inspired by and aimed to be aligned with past anthropologists who have utilized and inserted their own experiences within anthropological research. As a member of the bereaved, I believe the experience of grief can only be understood until one goes through the devastation of losing a loved one. Through my own lens, I intend to create a vulnerable and safe space of healing, reflecting and mourning my mother. In a sense, the creation of this autoethnography stands as a production of my own grief and love for my mother. It has also been a way in which I can continue to grieve, remember and document the details of the loss and life of my mother.

Anthropologists draw upon literature and stylistic forms of writing to convey the affective nature and lived realness of the human experience. The production of this autoethnography was inspired by the literary and popular sources that document the personal experience of grief. I have utilized these sources to deeply engage with my own grief as well as to demonstrate the impactful and complicated nature of losing a loved one. While the anthropological, ethnographic and psychological data provides a repertoire of the manifestations of bereavement, the autoethnography stands as a personal narrative into the world of losing a loved one.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

In studies of death and mourning, anthropological research has most often focused on the importance of ritual. While many forms of ritual form and shape the mourning process, it is crucial to recognize the ways in which ritual influences the everyday experience and trajectory of grieving. Autoethnographic research within studies on grief and bereavement highlight the significance of the everyday, individual experience of losing a loved one and coping with grief. As both a researcher and a subject, anthropologist Renato Rosaldo speaks from his own experience in his semi-autoethnographic essay, *Grief and a Headhunter's Rage*.

Anthropologists Renato and Michelle Rosaldo conducted fieldwork with the Ilongot tribe in the Philippines and studied the cultural practice of headhunting during the early 90s. When a member of this tribe died, it is customary for young men to ambush and behead a fellow citizen, tossing away the head as a symbolic gesture of ridding themselves of the burdens of grieving, including the rage in their grief (Rosaldo, 1993). Initially he wonders what justifies the act of headhunting and whether Ilongot people seek to behead someone perhaps as a way of exchanging one lost person for another. Most Ilongot members would regard grief, rage and headhunting as things that “go together” and that you either understand it, or you can’t (Rosaldo, 1993, 167). Rosaldo introduces the cultural force of emotions to identify and define the ways in which culture and community influences the intensity and manifestation of specific emotional reactions and behaviors. Culture shapes behavior and what is agreed to be culturally appropriate or normative ways of coping and expressing emotions. The force of a death is not about its event but rather, an individual’s relation to a permanent rupture. It is the feelings and affective nature of learning that the child just run over by the car is one’s own and not a stranger’s (Rosaldo, 1993, 167). It is the sudden identification of the vast emotional intensities and reactions shaped

by one's culture; it is coming to contact with an unwavering force. Rosaldo uses this concept to understand and encapsulate the intense rage within the Ilongot tribe that manifested publicly celebrated through the act of headhunting. By considering the cultural force of emotions within this tribe, the relationship between grief, rage and headhunting is revealed and can be further understood.

In their primary fieldwork, Michelle and Renato Rosaldo spoke to Ilongot members who had converted to Christianity in their grief. In 1972, Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and there were rumors about potential punishments for the act of headhunting; the Ilongot feared legal action. The indigenous, cultural practice of headhunting and the Christian religion represented different pathways of coping with grief. The rise and introduction of Christianity granted Ilongot people with another outlet for their grief; however, it was difficult for Ilongot people to disentangle their grief from their urge to headhunt.

Renato Rosaldo recounts his initial inability to understand the cultural force of rage when he was asked to share a saved audio recording of a headhunting celebration from a few years prior. Upon hearing the voices of their lost loved ones, one Ilongot member remarks, "It would be better if I had accepted God, but I still am Ilongot at heart...my heart aches as it does when I must look upon unfinished bachelors whom I know that I will never lead to take a head."(Rosaldo, 1993, 169). Under new religious beliefs and within an alternative outlet for grief, the nostalgia and urge to headhunt signifies the cultural significance of ritual. Hearing the recorded voice of a lost loved one reignited feelings of grief and rage which then culminate into a desire to return to Ilongot roots, to headhunt. While Christianity may have been an alternative outlet for some people, others may have experienced a form of anxiety out of an inability to perform ritual. The presence of Christianity with the Ilongot tribe did not negate the cultural

force of emotions, and the repeated desire to headhunt, or perform ritual, signifies this unsevered bond between culture, emotion and behavior.

It was only until the most unfortunate circumstances that Renato Rosaldo's position as an anthropologist dramatically shifted. During their fieldwork with the Ilongot, Michelle Rosaldo unfortunately fell off a cliff and died. It was through his devastating loss that Rosaldo's thoughts and observations of the Ilongot began to change. In his own grief-ridden rage and anger, he understands why Ilongot men describe their anger as fueling their desire to headhunt. In the event of her death his rage blocked his tears; he describes it as a nightmare while his perception of the world began to falter. He is reminded of the loss of his brother, and the feelings that can be aroused by ritual and most often, unexpected reminders, like the recording of the dead man's voice (Rosaldo, 1993). He reconsiders the ritual of headhunting not as an event, but as a public expression of the rage and anger that is experienced in grief and is fueled by the cultural force of emotions. Unlike other anthropologists, he reconstructs the ritual as a place to engage in social processes rather than an event that occurs in time. Rituals can serve as vehicles, or busy intersections for social processes that shape the everyday experience of grieving a loved one (Rosaldo, 1993). The concepts of ritual and unexpected reminders can be used as tools to study the everyday experience of grieving.

His position as an anthropologist intertwined with his newly found status as a member of the bereaved, and transforms into auto-ethnography. Rosaldo reflects on how his grief both inhibited and enabled his capabilities as a researcher. Autoethnography is a powerful methodological tool that allows the anthropologist to build a deeper understanding of humans through a reflection and analysis of the self. As a griever, he could empathize with Ilongot men because he had experienced his own cultural force of emotions; however, he also acknowledges

that his grief is not identical to theirs and differs in cultural tone and form. Rosaldo had experienced the unwavering force of emotions that follow losing a loved one. While Ilongot men publicly celebrated their grief through headhunting, Rosaldo's autoethnography constitutes a public expression and analysis of his own grief. Rosaldo uses autoethnography to both align and distance himself from the cultural force of emotions within Ilongot culture.

Autoethnographic methods produce a sense of empathy as the anthropologist connects himself to the other through self-disclosure and shared or similar life experience. The intersections of self and other can be explored through autoethnographic methods. Anthropologist Marcus Weaver-Hightower (2012) uses autoethnographic methods such as reflective memoing and participant-observation in a bereavement support group in *Waltzing Matilda: An Autoethnography of a Father's Stillbirth*. As an anthropologist and a bereaved father, he relies on his experience of a stillbirth to draw attention to relevant sociocultural phenomena on grief, masculinity and fatherhood (Weaver-Hightower, 2012).

He uses both analytic and evocative autoethnography; in an analytic framework, he is most reflective about his position as a bereaved father and an anthropologist within the social sciences. Analytic autoethnography aligns the social scientist with relevant literature and his duality as a bereaved individual and a researcher is explicit. Through an analytic lens, Weaver-Hightower (2012) focuses on specific points within his experience to connect himself with larger discussions and phenomena on stillbirth, grief, and fathers. He references Worth (1997) to outline his interactive events of becoming a father: anticipating her arrival, learning of her death, recognizing the need to heal and maintain memories (Weaver-Highower, 2012). He uses story and narrative technique through evocative autoethnography, which offers a greater understanding of the reality and intensity of his bereavement. Evocative and artistic presentation access a

different tier of human comprehension and provide the conditions through which empathy can emerge (Weaver-Hightower, 2012). These different autoethnographic techniques connect his subjective experience to the societal structures that silence the experiences and prevalence of stillbirth. While commenting on the community of bereaved parents, Weaver-Hightower intimately reveals his experience through both analytic and evocative writing techniques.

Renato Rosaldo and Marcus Weaver-Hightower used autoethnographic methods as an empathetic tool through immersing themselves within their research. The subjective experience of these anthropologists culminates into an objective depiction of the lived, everyday experience of losing a loved one and living in their absence. It is only until Rosaldo loses his wife that he resonates with the blinding rage that fueled the practice of headhunting in the Ilongot tribe. While his grief differs in cultural context and form, the emotion of rage is validated and recognized as an overlooked and key feature of the initial reactions in grief. The connection between the cultural significance of rage within the Ilongot and Rosaldo's rage in his grief highlights the potential for the universality of emotions. Similarly, it is only until Weaver-Hightower discloses his own experience as a male member of the bereaved, that the complexities of grief, masculinity and parenthood can be further understood within larger sociocultural contexts. Using both evocative and analytical ethnography, Weaver-Hightower analyzes his experience alongside relevant literature on grief and stillbirth and tells his own story of loss and love through narrative and stylistic technique.

Autoethnographic methods can be used to reveal the complexities of loss and the nature of trauma and various ways of grieving and healing. These anthropologists use autoethnography to heal themselves and others and to reveal the experience of grief from a personal perspective. Social anthropologist Fiona Stirling (2014) recalls the loss of her best friend and partner, Sarah,

and positions her autoethnography as a time portal into her memories. She focuses on time and the concept of mental time travel to reflect upon her memories of Sarah, and the way in which trauma, grief and memory are intertwined. While Stirling recalls and reflects upon her life with Sarah and returns to the past, she is also creating new memories and dimensions of time through autoethnographic method. When discussing the past, present and future, Stirling's narrative style creates a sense of "real time"; she depicts her lived sensory experience of her life with Sarah and her devastating loss. Similarly to Weaver-Hightower, she creates a form of evocative autoethnography through using the concept of time travel to return to the trauma of loss and heal within the present, and future.

Mourning and Melancholia

This study will draw largely upon anthropological and ethnographic research; however, psychological research, specifically the work and thoughts of psychologist Sigmund Freud will be included and discussed. Many anthropologists, such as Jennifer Sime and Charles Briggs, have applied and explored the concepts introduced within Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* and *The Uncanny* in research on grief and bereavement. *Mourning and Melancholia* is one of the first psychoanalytic pieces on grief and bereavement which provides Freud's most explicit definitions and understanding of grief and the mourning process. These definitions provide a clear and explicit description of the experience of grief and the ongoing trajectory of the mourning.

The differentiation between mourning and melancholia is subtle yet incredibly crucial as it relates to the individual experience of grief. It is within the circumstances of melancholia or melancholic mourning, that the relationship between grief and the uncanny is revealed. While Freud's *The Uncanny* was not specifically written on grief and bereavement, the underlying

concepts of consciousness, and what is personally recognized to be familiar or unfamiliar coincides with an individual's experience of grief. The use of magic, the significance of objects and the experience of dreams will be used to outline the connection between grief and the uncanny. Before this connection can be explored, the definitions of mourning and melancholia must be explained.

Mourning and Melancholia was first published in the early 1900s and was based on Freud's work with mentally ill patients and their experiences of grief and bereavement. The correlation between the mourning and melancholia seems justified; we may even consider the circumstances or environmental influences to be the same for both. Mourning is defined as a reaction to the loss of a loved person or an abstraction of love, such as one's liberty or pride in one's country (Freud, 1917). In mourning, the object of loss is known and recognized by the individual. Due to overlapping and mutual stimuli, the two conditions may occur at once or separately. Freud refers to mourning as a "normal" condition that can be overcome, rather than melancholia which is referred to as "pathological." Melancholia is a type of loss; however, it is not always as a result of death. Melancholia is the loss of an object that was once loved, or an unconscious loss of a part of oneself. It differs from mourning because the object of loss is unknown or unidentifiable; the intensity or engagement in melancholia is dependent on a level of consciousness. When melancholic, one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost and thus, Freud determines it as pathological because it is ongoing and prevents the work of mourning.

Melancholia, Creativity and Grief Work

Melancholic mourning is the intersection of both conditions; one can recognize the loss of an individual while still struggling to identify the losses within oneself. The role of consciousness influences the likelihood and potentialities of these conditions. In mourning, it is

the full consciousness of loss that contributes to feelings of immense pain and suffering (Freud, 1917). However, knowing the object of loss allows for an individual to go through the mourning process. In melancholia, grief-work and the mourning process is halted as the individual struggles to identify what exactly has been lost.

Grief-work can most readily occur in the condition of mourning. The consequences of mourning as established by Freud are a loss of general interest in one's life and thus, an internal focus on one's ego. Freud suggests that the same occurs in melancholia however the substance, or object of loss preoccupying the ego is unknown. The work of mourning, or grief-work, is essentially an individual's behavior and emotional reactions through the process or stages of grieving. Freud (1997) identifies reality-testing as one of the first features of grief-work; reality-testing has shown that the loved object or person no longer exists and thus, demands a withdrawal from the attachment to that object, which can never be fully abandoned. In other words, even when the loss is known there is forever an attachment to this object that no longer exists within present reality. Freud defines this attachment as an internal libido, or fixation with an object; Charles Briggs uses Freud's terms libido and hyper-cathexis interchangeably. Freud suggests that due to this opposition between the existing libido and reality-testing, one might eventually turn away from reality and attempt to reformulate a connection to this object. Reality-testing is something that is carried out bit by bit, at a great expense of time, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged (Freud, 1997).

The work of mourning is entangled within the general interest and livelihood in one's world whereas melancholic individual suffers from a lack of interest and may indulge in deteriorative qualities of the ego. A melancholic individual make regard themselves as incapable or inferior simply because they are unable to identify the object of their loss. Freud suggests that

these feelings arise as secondary to the intended and unidentifiable grief-work that would help to restore or aid the ego. Or, the self-directed blame and self-accusations could be statements that can be applied to the object that was once loved. He gives one example of a wife who blames herself for not being able to meet the needs of her husband; Freud believes that she is not pitying herself but rather accusing her husband of being incapable as well. He believed that the most intense self-accusations could also be properly directed to the person or object in question. The work of mourning is inaccessible to melancholic individuals. Without the knowledge of what is loss, the work of mourning loses its definitiveness and can be recreated through creative and magical expressions. Anthropological research has explored the connection between melancholia and creativity, suggesting that melancholia may be related to more creative, individualistic and unconventional modes of grieving. Charles Briggs responds to the terminology and ideas put forth in Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* in his own ethnography within Venezuela.

Briggs draws upon Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* in reference to the fieldwork he conducted as a medical anthropologist in Venezuela. He responds to Freud's theories by demonstrating how lamentations of grieving Venezuelans fit into a unique mourning process and exemplify the contradictory nature of mourning. According to Briggs (2014), the work of mourning includes hyper-cathexis, or recovering and reinternalizing the image of a lost loved one, creating a fantasy world in which we allow ourselves to believe that the person never really died or will return. The concept of reality-testing is contradictory to hyper-cathexis; it involves testing one's attachment to a loved one within the present reality in which one is met with the finality of death. Reality testing involves the reconciliation and repression of memory; it is the moments in which one might forget their lost one is dead due to the expectations withheld through hyper-cathexis. Freud concludes that this contradictory nature of hyper-cathexis, or

maintenance of libido, and reality-testing characterizes the process as an extremely emotionally painful series of compromises. Briggs (2014) rhetorically asks Freud, how to resolve the question of moving between clinging to and reimagining the object and reality-testing.

He conducted his fieldwork in the mid-80s, a time where disease, epidemic health issues, and a lack of medical resources were extremely prevalent in Muaina, Venezuela. He participated in Muaina rituals surrounding death, which included grieving family members and local citizens who publicly lamented and collectively mourned the loss of a victim of disease. Briggs includes commentary on later work from Freud, "Trauer und Melancholie" which suggests that the temporality of grieving and the mourning process is nonlinear and gradual; moments of mourning are described as attempting to obey to the orders of reality. Briggs suggest that the linguistics of the lamentations of Venezuelans demonstrate the incorporation of multiple temporalities through the use of past and present tenses as well as multiple attempts of coming to terms with or confronting the finality of death.

Briggs (2014) described the contradictory element of lamentation through Freud; suggesting that the prolonged psychic existence of a loved one is enacted through the words and acoustics of lamentations. Lamentations included musical, poetic and magical elements, in which peoples remember the life of the deceased individual and reimagine both the present reality and anticipated futures. The contradiction is within the present and past-tense markers used by people lamenting, in which Briggs believed lamenters were struggling with a "temporal rupture." While the deceased individual is reimaged by the consequences of death: within afterlife or an infinite reality, he is also reimaged within the reality of the present which includes the unfinished, lingering pasts and imagined opportunities for a future that cannot be lived by the deceased

individual. Overall, these lamentations reiterate the nonlinear, progressive process of mourning, which enacts and acknowledges the existence and often finality of multiple temporalities.

The Uncanny

Freud's *The Uncanny* defines and identifies the uncanny through past literature and the linguistic expressions of its meaning. The Uncanny refers to a realm of things or experiences that are familiar to oneself yet not known and can be frightening or strange in the present. The subject of the uncanny is undoubtedly related to what is frightening and it tends to coincide with things that excite fear in general (Freud, 1997). Freud references Daniel Sander, Jentsch and Schelling's interpretations of the uncanny to outline how it has been studied and previously defined. According to Freud, the uncanny can be studied through a history of the meanings that have been attached to it, or through the things, people and properties that arouse feelings of uncanniness. Freud (1997) believed that both modes of studying lead to the same result: the uncanny is class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.

Attempting to identify the meaning of the uncanny, Freud uses the German words "*heimlich*" and "*unheimlich*" to represent the familiar and unfamiliar. The most direct translation of "*heimlich*" means home or something that is familiar while the word "*unheimlich*" represents the strange or unfamiliar. However, analogous to the efforts to define the uncanny, Freud lists the multiple definitions and meanings attached to *heimlich* and *unheimlich* to demonstrate how the familiar and unfamiliar can become intertwined or difficult to establish. Freud (1997) references the shortcomings of Jentsch's analysis of the uncanny, noting that he ascribes the essential factor of the feelings of uncanniness to intellectual uncertainty. Freud believed Jentsch's definition was incomplete and tries to proceed beyond the assumption that the uncanny only equates to what is recognized as unfamiliar due to a lack of intellectual capability. He turns to the

multiple definitions and translations of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* to demonstrate the relationship between the familiar and unfamiliar; as well as the production and occurrence of the uncanny. Through using Sander's work, Freud demonstrates how the meaning of "*heimlich*" often transforms into "*unheimlich*" through its various definitions and linguistic expressions. One phrase, "Oh, we call it "*unheimlich*"; you call it, "*heimlich*" (Freud, 1997) demonstrates the way in which things that are familiar have to be agreed upon. "*Heimlich*" can refer to things that are agreeable and familiar but also to actions and things that are concealed or kept out of sight.

Freud (1997) includes the phrases, "*heimlich* pleasure at someone's discomfiture"; a *heimlich* action may include things that are deceitful or secretive; or *heimlich* spaces such as places of worship, where a set of customary behaviors or moral codes is required and enacted. While Sanders did identify two meanings of *heimlich*, Freud regards to *heimlich* as carrying both definitions of something that is familiar and agreeable, and behaviors or things that are hidden or concealed. Like Sanders, Schelling also did not identify two definitions or categories of *Heimlich*, instead, he claimed that everything that is *unheimlich* ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light (Freud, 1997). In other words, Schelling believed that the process of establishing things are *heimlich* is ill-defined and ambiguous since the definition of what is familiar can vary. Freud (1997) concludes that *heimlich* eventually coincides with its opposite, or subspecies, *unheimlich*.

The uncanny emerges within this establishment of what is familiar or strange, *heimlich* or *unheimlich*; however, what is familiar can become something that is also not known. The establishment of what is familiar (*heimlich*) can be established through what is strange, or unknown (*unheimlich*). The production of the uncanny is most often due to something that is inherently familiar yet also unknown, or bears mythical knowledge or possibility. In regard to

grief and bereavement, feelings of uncanniness may arise within the process of mourning and overall trajectory in grief. The relationship with a loved one is familiar, and yet in death, the relationship changes and may become unfamiliar or not known. While the uncanny remains as inherently frightening and shocking, uncanny experiences may also provide a sense of comfort for bereaved individuals. Anthropologist Jennifer Sime and Douglas Hollan draw upon Freud's *The Uncanny* within their anthropological research. Sime examines the concept of the uncanny in relation to exhumed bodies of Spanish civil war victims in her ethnography *Exhumations: The Search for the Dead and the Resurgence of the Uncanny in Contemporary Spain*. While Hollan describes the approachable or comforting aspects of the uncanny, Sime describes the way in which the uncanny emerges through the search for dead bodies and resurfacing of memory.

The Uncanny, Trauma, and Memory

Sime conducted fieldwork during the early 2000s on the aftermath of the Spanish civil war, through ethnography of the exhumations of mass graves filled with thousands of anonymous victims. This ethnographic essay focuses on the concepts of trauma, memory, and memorialization in relation to what Sime determines as Spain's effort to engage in a national act of grieving or recovery from a countrywide trauma. Sime (2013) notes the uncanniness that emerges through exhumations which include recovery of memory and reimagining the ways in which we interact with the dead.

The efforts of the exhumations were to grant grieving families with the ability to bury their loved one, as well as the further hope of aiding the trauma experienced by bereaved individuals and families, and within Spain as a country. In a post-Franco era, Spain's transition to a democratic state was lengthy and did not fully acknowledge the consequences of Franco until these exhumations occurred. In December 2000, the ARMH (Association for the Recovery

of Memory) facilitated exhumations of mass graves throughout Spain; through these exhumations, families could openly mourn and properly bury their dead. The ARMH bears its name to the repressed history of violence brought on during the civil war and throughout Franco's dictatorship (Sime, 2013). The national recovery of memory is linked to the violence and damages of Franco's regime; however, for bereaved families, the trauma of their loss resides in the private and public realms of Spain. Excavations literalize the bringing of memory of trauma to light for both the bereaved individual and nation; this movement allowed for citizens to speak the horrifying truth of their past under Franco era (Sime, 2013).

The recovery of memory is inherently linked to both the nation's and individual's trauma and loss. In discourses on trauma, memory is most often regarded as an object that has been hidden away and is immune to the passage of time (Sime, 2013). Through exhumations, the recovery of memory is directly associated to the return of the bodies, almost a literal return of the dead (Sime, 2013). Sime uses Freud's definition of the uncanny as something that is familiar yet has been estranged through repression. She claims that the uncanny is bound to the recovery of memory and yet, is also disruptive of attempts to grieve and cope with trauma.

Sime cites a graveside interview conducted by anthropologist Francisco Ferrandiz during the exhumations, with an elderly woman. The woman tells a story from her childhood, of visiting a cemetery and returning with feelings of death and imaging herself as "soot" or covered in black. She spoke with hesitation, her testimony was fragmented, locked or marked by silence, ellipsed in the transcription (Sime, 2013). This story represented the uncanny through its enmeshment in the plurality and recovery of multiple memories. Her story signals something of the mimetic quality of trauma, and the uncanny emerges through the language and images that are resurfaced during exhumations and graveside interview. Thus, the uncanny in relation to

trauma and memory is rather unsettling and reignites memories and feelings that have been hidden away or repressed. The establishment of what is familiar is constituted through the search for these known yet lost and hidden bodies. Within this ethnographic essay, the uncanny is outlined through the search for bodies, resurfacing of memory, and trauma at an individual and national level.

While Sime discusses the uncanny and its relation to memory as an object, anthropologist Douglas Hollan explores the uncanny and its relation to dreams in *To the Afterworld and Back: Mourning and Dreams of the Dead among the Toraja*. Hollan was interested in the nature of grieving and grief-work, as well as the existing cultural models surrounding grief and bereavement within the Toraja tribe in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Hollan suggests that specific ways of grieving are influenced by cultural values and expectations but more notably, that grief can be studied through the ways in which people may or may not utilize these cultural models in their bereavement.

The Uncanny: Dreams and Objects

The majority of the Toraja identified as Christian; however, some middle-aged and older peoples remain apart of the traditional religion, Alukta, which is based on the worship of various spirits and deceased ancestors (Hollan, 1995). Both religions regarded death as the event of an individual being taken and believed in the existence of an afterlife: heaven or Puya, for Alukta adherents. Christians may believe this individual was taken by God whereas Alukta members believe this individual was taken by ancestors. All Toraja funerals were elaborate ceremonies that were often held weeks or even months after an individual died. Since funerals required a lot of expensive or rare resources, such as pigs and water buffalo, it was customary for funerals to take place at a later or auspicious date (Hollan, 1995). In the meantime, the body resides within

the vicinity of the village and it is believed that the soul remains until the funeral ceremony is completed. In between death and funeral, bereaved Toraja members are encouraged to wait until the funeral ceremony to properly grieve: cry, wail, publicly express and acknowledge their sorrow.

Unlike Western culture, dreams about a lost loved one were deeply valued within Toraja culture and follow particular cultural models. Especially within the traditional religion, Alukta, dreams were believed to serve as a form of communication and partially constituted a newly found relationship with a loved one. Hollan (1995) notes that this experience connection between the living and the dead is the most dramatic difference between grieving in Toraja and grieving in Western cultures. During funeral songs, the message is communicated that the soul continues to exist and can provide survivors with blessings and spiritual protection (Hollan, 1995). This belief directly relates to the cultural models surrounding dreams, such that many people have dreams of their dead relatives bringing them gifts, offering advice, and the ability to foretell or alter their present, everyday lives. Dreams are culturally and emotionally salient as they come to form a connection with the dead that can alter the present.

Hollan turns to his informant, To Minaa Sattu, to exemplify the ways in which he deviates from the cultural model within his experience of grief and dreams. To Minaa Sattu lost his parents at the age of ten, and still grieves for them as a thirty-five year old Torajan man. He recounts a dream of his parents, in which he visited Puya, the land of the dead. When he asked to see his parents, he was denied access; he was told that if he wanted to see them, he was going to die. Instead, he asked to see the water buffalo that were sacrificed in ritual after his parents' death. In a separate dream, he visited the land again and visited his father who told him to "go home" and take care of his children in his own present reality. The notion of visiting the dead

was certainly taboo, as it is unusual for Toraja people to seek pursuit of the dead, especially to travel to Puya, the afterworld (Hollan, 1995). Hollan suggests that To Minaa Sattu is an example of how dreams can be interpreted in various ways based on personal needs or desires within their own bereavement, rather than focusing on specific cultural models.

Psychoanalyst Otto Kernberg discusses mourning as a long-term and permanent process through interviews with people who had lost a spouse and had remarried. Kernberg revisits his informants five years after they had been previously interviewed and was interested in discovering further changes within the trajectory grieving for a lost spouse. He was also interested in how the bereaved spouses dealt with their grief within their new marriages. Overall, he observed generally changed attitude of these persons toward the potential of serious illness or death; informants reported a reduced fear of death and dying and revealed a sense of being accompanied by their lost loved one (Kernberg, 2016).

Some informants imagined reencountering their loved one in the event of their own death, or fantasies of being reunited with their lost spouse after death. Kernberg (2016) notes that these ways of reimagining a relationship allow the bereaved to tolerate their mortality and consequences of their own death. Imagination and desired fantasies of reuniting with a lost spouse decrease the fear or anxiety around death. Informants' tolerant attitude toward death also extended to their attitude toward conflict, and the capability to forgive people within their present-day lives. While some of these changes may be attributed to emotional maturation, Kernberg (2016) refers to them as related to the ongoing and subtle process of long-term mourning. The degree of tolerance is expressed through fantasies, reimagining the encounter as positive may suggest normal mourning whereas rejecting the encounter or dreading it may be relative to aspects of melancholia.

In this second round of interviews, Kernberg (2016) notes that many informants discussed and reflected upon previous losses in their lives, particularly the loss of a parent in the manifestations and content of dreams. People described themselves as both a child and as their present-day self within their dreams of their lost parent. The uncanniness of their dreams is through this peculiar perspective of time and multiple realities; the vivid repetition of the past within the context of the present is condensed into the dream experience (Kernberg, 2016). Most people described dreams about their lost spouse as a very realistic experience, followed by feelings of emotional distress after waking up.

Another informant described his experience of grief as residing within two realities: present-day life and with his “dream-world”. Within “dream-world”, he imagines his lost wife within his present reality, linked to his everyday experiences and network of close relationships (Kernberg, 2016). This informant experiences his grief as a sector of his dreams or awakened fantasies of his wife as alive and present. In addition to the concept of “dreamworld” Kernberg (2016) also explains how unexpected reactions to objects are also a feature of long-term mourning processes. Objects that belonged to the deceased, as well as jewelry, art or literature gained meaningfulness and can trigger brief but deep mourning reactions. Tangible, stable, and often unexpected objects acquire a greater sense of meaning and thus trigger deeper and ongoing processes of mourning. They seem like “memory rocks”, stable reminders in an ever-changing sea of reality (Kernberg, 2016, 92).

Grief and Magical Systems

Anthropologist Vibeke Steffen conducted fieldwork in Denmark on the historical underpinnings of fantasy and magic in relation to the contemporary practice of clairvoyance. Clairvoyance is characterized by a heightened sense of sensitivity, in which clairvoyant peoples

are often some of the most empathetic and emotionally-laden individuals. In Denmark, most citizens claim to believe in the existence of ghosts and the ability of clairvoyants to communicate with the departed (Steffen, 2016). Steffen conducted fieldwork with spiritualist mediums, as well as clairvoyant counselors and their clients; she was most interested in how clairvoyance functions as a therapeutic endeavor and how feelings and emotions are experienced and transmitted. She incorporates psychoanalytic concepts such as projective identification, transference and countertransference to depict how the roles of the clairvoyant and client are often reversed through private sessions, or “sittings.”

A clairvoyant sitting is confidential thus, documenting it is not an easy task (Steffen, 2016). Steffen invited a clairvoyant to her home for a “home-party” with a few other social scientists conducting research on spiritual phenomena. The clairvoyant agreed to an initial platform demonstration to call upon spirits followed by individual sessions. Throughout the platform demonstration, the clairvoyant was calling upon lingering spirits and describing their appearances and behaviorisms to the group of social scientists. The clairvoyant described a few spirits, such as an elderly man with a wheelbarrow and a woman squatting down; however, no one identified these spirits or felt as if they had enough detailed information to do so (Steffen, 2016). As the next spirit arrived and was described by the clairvoyant, one of Steffen’s colleagues identified the spirit as her mother-in law. All skepticism or feelings of doubt escaped as this emotional engagement unraveled between the social scientist and clairvoyant; the tipping point of the session was this unexpected clear identification and emotional content of the story being conjured (Steffen, 2016).

The work of the clairvoyant is to project her visions and sensations into the room through mimetic performance, and that they need to resonate with memories of personal experiences in

order to be confirmed (Steffen, 2016) The clairvoyant have a heightened sensitivity to emotional experiences and works to revive repressed memories through mimesis. Relative to psychological counseling, clairvoyants also operate in private individual spaces; however, the roles of a clairvoyant and psychotherapist are in opposition to each other. Clairvoyance is almost antithetical to the work of a contemporary psychotherapist who is expected to listen to clients, and often frame a client's issues or problems in a way that helps him improve his life or understand the origin of his difficulties. Instead, clairvoyants' function to display or project images of a spirit, or the feelings of their client until their client recognizes the clairvoyant's experiences as their own. The clairvoyant talks as the client listens and asks questions; the clairvoyant speaks for the client and puts into her mouth answers that correspond to the interpretation of her condition (Steffen, 2016). Steffen uses the psychoanalytic term, projective identification, to illustrate this process in which the clairvoyant projects and the client identifies with the stories, images or feelings that are resonant and often very emotionally intense. Projective identification was a term developed by psychologist Melanie Klein, and it refers to a subject's split part of their identity and the projection of the self into an object or a person (Steffen, 2016). Through clairvoyant sessions, statements and suggestions are offered or projected onto a client in order to be identified or otherwise, refuted.

Clairvoyance is most obviously intertwined with the uncanny, and the process of projective identification may interact with magical or spiritual ways of grieving. A griever may identify with a clairvoyant to the extent that they wish to project feelings of bereavement onto another in the hopes of learning about their relationship with a deceased individual. This is an example of the entanglements of psychology and anthropology, mostly focused on treatment methods and how clairvoyants operate similarly and dissimilar to psychotherapists. The

applicability and use of psychoanalysis within ethnography enhances the understanding of the functions of clairvoyant practices. Hollan comments on Steffen and other anthropologists that have used psychoanalysis in *Psychoanalysis & Ethnography*.

Combining Psychological and Anthropological Methods and Theories

Psychoanalytic terms most often prescribe certain ways of thinking or aim to define means of behavior and human thought. As an anthropologist, Hollan (2016) suggests that it is possible to loosen the rigidity of psychoanalytic concepts by using them as a vehicle for questioning types of thought and behavior, rather than using them to narrowly define a culture. In this bridge between psychology and anthropology, psychoanalytic concepts can enhance ethnographic accounts as well as provide some clear explanations about the multiple interpretations that can be withheld about a culture.

Hollan acknowledges the anthropologist's difficulty in deciding which psychoanalytic concepts are applicable to fieldwork at the risk of assuming behaviors or exercising a bias toward the given psychoanalytic definition. He discusses the work of the anthropologist Irving Hallowell and his ideas about the role of the local behavioral environment, or what is referred to as a prominent context in which people are motivated to think and feel (Hollan, 2016). Situating the content of the local behavioral environment of a culture was believed to be a useful tool in selecting appropriate and applicable psychoanalytic concepts. Hollan (2016) notes that Hallowell's approach was to understand how the local behavioral environment influences or informs behavior, rather than using psychoanalytic theory to pathologize or mischaracterize behavior which is otherwise normal. One example given by Hollan is the psychoanalytic concept, projection, which can be defined as the process in which a person attributes qualities of their emotional or mental states onto another individual. Hollan uses his own ethnographic account of

dreams of the deceased within the Toraja culture in Indonesia to explain how projection or identification of the self through the deceased constitutes a part of the local behavioral environment.

The Toraja culture believes in the existence of ancestral spirits which makes the idea or practice of projection something that is recognizable or more comprehensible as a common behavior. In this way, psychoanalytic concepts can be used to discuss how certain behaviors are valued or discouraged based on local behavioral environment, and how they come to be represented within a culture (Hollan, 2016).

Overall, Hollan advocates for anthropologists to use psychoanalytic concepts with diligence, noting the ways in which the terms may tend to generalize or mischaracterize certain behaviors or practices. Hollan comments on Steffen's work with Danish clairvoyants to illustrate how psychoanalytic concepts can go beyond defining or explaining a type of behavior. Steffen uses the term projective identification to explain how Danish clairvoyants may project assumptions or certain things for client to identify or resonate with as a means of spiritual connection. Steffen notes that she felt a sense of fluidity and ease within a session with a clairvoyant and four other clients, in which the process of projective identification felt somewhat familiar or normalized through the professionalization of Danish clairvoyants. Hollan (2016) questions why Steffen attributes professionalization as a change in the local behavior environment and whether a clairvoyant's power to project varies within group or individual sessions. Hollan uses the term of projective identification to question the psychic intensity of clairvoyant sessions, as well as the roles of both the clairvoyant and client within changing local behavioral environments. He points out how these terms can be used to inform ethnographic

accounts and how psychoanalysis must be used diligently to avoid the possibility of mischaracterizing or pathologizing behavior.

Anthropologist Michelle Stephen applies also psychoanalytic theory to explore the relationship between grief and magic systems: witchcraft and sorcery. Stephen uses applies psychoanalytic terminology such as Freud's ambivalence of emotions and Klein's "mother imago" to examine the relationship between grief and witchcraft. Stephen (2000) focuses on two ethnographic cases, Balinese witchcraft and Mekeo sorcery to discuss how hostility expressed through these magical systems are analogous to feelings aroused in the initial stages of grieving.

Klein's idea of the mother imago intertwines with Freud's description of the ambivalence of emotions, which refers to the unconscious hatred and desires in any deep attachment to a person, which are finally realized when in fact, that person dies (Stephen, 2000). According to Freud, the bereaved individual may feel guilty, or wish to rid himself of guilt as a result of these unconscious and ambivalent desires. This is relative to the ambivalence described by Klein, between an infant and the first love object, the mother. Kleinian theory proposes that an infant develops "good" and "bad" internal representations of the mother. Stephen (2000) proposes that witchcraft and the cultural symbol of the witch emerges out the negative emotions attached to the mother imago that are reactivated in adulthood when a loved person dies.

Balinese witchcraft is centered around the mythological demoness, Rangda, the "widow-witch", who represents death itself and is believed to have cannibalistic desires. "Leyaks" are people believed to be witches or followers of Rangda, who also have similar cannibalistic tendencies and to have obtained powers to shapeshift from Rangda (Stephen, 2000). When someone died, Balinese peoples often believed it was due to the work of a Leyak and during seances, the bereaved were given the chance to identify the witch responsible for the death.

People are advised to leave action to the spirits of the dead, and keep to not act upon feelings of vengeance or rage. In Balinese culture, women were believed to be more capable of witchcraft, or to have a natural affinity or expertise for witchcraft. Randga is also a widow, and thus, women that accused of witchcraft are indeed the bereaved (Stephen, 2000). The bereaved individual becomes aligned with the mythic symbol of Rangda, as someone to blame or take responsibility for the event and consequences of death. Feelings of shame and the notion that death is a consequence of one's actions also aligns to the nature of the initial stages of grieving that invoke similar emotional responses.

Mekeo sorcery in Papua New Guinea has a similar figure to the Balinese widow witch, "ugauga" or the man of sorrow. The ugauga is believed to bear grief itself and usually appears as a widower himself; again, the bereaved individual is marked as responsible or a cause of a loved one's death. The Mekeo ugauga is publicly identified and acknowledged as someone who can inflict the harm of bereavement. The leyak is a figure generated out of gossip or suspicion. In both Balinese witchcraft and Mekeo sorcery, grief, rage and guilt fuel the desire to seek blame or identify a culprit that is responsible for the death itself through "defending the ego" or negating the unconscious fantasies as explained by Stephen and Klein.

Anthropologist Stephen Leavitt conducted fieldwork with the Bumbita peoples of Papua New Guinea and examines the themes between repeated mourning experiences and the religious oriented belief in cargo. Cargo beliefs are more often discussed through religious movements or "cargo cults"; however, Leavitt (2000) focuses on how cargo beliefs offer a cultural frame for exploring parental loss. Aminguh recounts the death of his father through the event of his death, dreams and hopes to eventually reunite with his father. Certain cultural beliefs, such that children steal parents' growth as they age, and death-as-betrayal are represented through Aminguh's

experience of loss and inability full acquire the knowledge or “strengths” of his father. He struggles to find a woman to marry, and attributes this to the loss of his father which he believes robbed him of the opportunity to learn from his father about martial relations.

All death within Bumbita culture is believed to be murder and as a potential consequence of a sorcerer’s attack. Sorcerers were believed to imitate ill individuals and steal their lives; ill and sick peoples were always watched closely out of fear of an untimely death. Aminguh discusses the event of his father’s death and the guilt he experienced when his father asked him to walk away; he says his father may have tricked him or was under the influence of sorcery powers. Amiguh’s “grief-work” is seen through these maintained cultural beliefs surrounding death and the relationship between parent and child.

Leavitt connects grief and bereavement to the cultural significance and meaning of gifts and cargo secrets. Besides cargo cults, Leavitt encourage the perspective of cargo as gifts, or Western influences in Bumbita culture. This includes the arrival of new items such as clothing, and the introduction of Christianity and the ability to maintain communication with the dead. Cargo beliefs also shape the conception of The West, white people and Leavitt himself as having the ability to bear “cargo secrets.” Amiguh reimagines meeting his father and being granted with some type of gifts: shorts, shoes, and rice. He seeks both the reunion with his father and potentiality of the gift promotes feelings of reassurance. The types of gifts are relative to thoughts about cargo, or the arrival of new novel items. Gifts and cargo are also represented through Amiguh’s dreams of his father. He dreamed of his father coming back from East Britain in sharp clothing and he refuses to give him his shoes, saying that they belong to white men. Leavitt interprets this as the possibility of Amiguh imagining their relationship as a mediation between his relationship with his father. Amiguh also dreams of Leavitt, and whether he will

grant him with gifts which suggests that their relationship is about gift-giving and the potential of revealing “cargo-secrets.” Leavitt becomes a secondary source of reassurance, or a representation of the desires and questions that Amiguh has for his lost father.

Stephen and Leavitt discuss how the experience of grief and bereavement is shaped by cultural and magical systems like witchcraft and the belief in cargo. Both systems guide the trajectories and natures of grieving. Balinese witchcraft and Mekeo sorcery as well as the history of cargo within Bumbita culture serve as outlets for grief and shape the way in which the bereaved experience and cope with their loss. For Balinese individuals, they may attribute death to the act of a witch and seek to combat their desire for revenge. Within Bumbita culture, Leavitt believes that the culture’s history and myths surrounding cargo are analogous to the beliefs and desires that arise within grief. These systems are both influencing the experience of grief and serve as places in which traditional and new forms of mourning can be exercised.

Social media is a new and ever-evolving cultural system that connects the world online. In grief, researchers have studied how people approach death online and the norms of behavior that are continuing to be established by the bereaved individuals that use social media in their grief. Social scientists have studied online language (Gibbs, Meese, Arnold, Nansen & Carter, 2015), post-mortem profiles (Brubaker, Hayes & Dourish, 2013), and digital in-memoriam communities (Haverinen, 2015) as ways of establishing how grief and mourning manifest digitally, and through the use and pressures of social media.

Grieving Online

Brubaker, Hayes and Dourish (2013) were interested in the ways in which grief-related practices are used on Facebook, and how these online practices connect to conventional forms of

grief and mourning. They interviewed 16 people who had either discovered the death of a friend through Facebook or dealt with the management of the profiles belonging to the deceased.

Brubaker et al. (2013) focus on the experience of discovering a friend's death through the use of SNS (social networking sites), the management of postmortem profiles and how these profiles function as temporal, social and spatial expansions of mourning processes. Postmortem profiles are the profiles of the deceased individual that become managed and symbolically owned by grieving individuals, often close family members (Brubaker et al., 2013).

The immediacy of information on Facebook and ability for grieving users to reflect on the past, present and future within this digital medium creates an additional or alternative temporality in mourning. In their findings, these researchers focus on the way in which people approach death online and postmortem identities, as well as the unexpected encounters with death on social networking sites. Since social media is such an integrated part of modern everyday life, the way in which one uses social networking sites generally will affect how one chooses to approach death and grief online. One informant, Anna, described her uncertainty about the appropriateness of addressing the death of her college friend on Facebook. She felt as if the website was too casual of a medium for expressing grief or, "a cheap way of celebrating someone's life" (Brubaker et al., 2013, 156). However, another informant, Nina, described feeling connected and comforted by people who shared casual memorial posts on Facebook when her cousin passed away. Brubaker et al. (2013) note that while Facebook may be perceived as too casual for grieving, it also provides a space for people to engage with the dead in ways that would otherwise be unlikely. The casual, everydayness of Facebook allows for grief and mourning practices to expand beyond ritual and be incorporated into other aspects of life.

A late or unexpected discovery of the death of a loved one exemplifies the atypical or nonsynchronous temporal nature of social media platforms and challenges the notions of public and private forms of grief. Some informants described receiving Facebook notifications about a friend, only to discover they had died weeks or months prior. This digital temporality may exacerbate the shock and subsequent reactions in learning about the death of a friend or loved one. The immediacy of information and temporal structure of Facebook is suggested to challenge or disrupt a form of personal agency over when and how to grieve (Brubaker et al., 2013). In addition to a sense of shock, informants discussed their opinions about the content of posts made by grieving individuals, often through feelings of unease and discomfort. Grief-related posts serve as alternative forms of eulogizing the deceased and transgress the assumption of mourning as a personal experience that is to be confined to sacred and private spaces. One informant noted, “I’m seeing her personal grief...personal communications with her and her sister and I felt like I shouldn’t be privy to those” (Brubaker et al., 2013, 157). Other people may feel jolted by public expressions of private feelings of grief; the researchers note that informants often apologized for thinking this behavior is inappropriate, and for expressing feelings of discomfort. The unexpected nature of death online is public and challenges the norms of behavior and perceived appropriateness of sharing private feelings in a digital and public forum.

Facebook’s “reconnect” tool, notifies users of friends that are inactive or have not logged on in a while and in certain uncanny circumstances, reconnects the living to the dead. Brubaker et. al (2013) comment that Facebook and other digitized memorial spaces become a form of techno-spiritualism, in which the life of the deceased is interweaved within the everyday and may even be marked as active through these unexpected notifications. It was not until 2009 that Facebook invented the memorialization tool, which transforms the profile of a deceased

individual into a digital and interactive, postmortem memorial site. The memorialization tool freezes a postmortem profile, disabling the “reconnect” tool and other features while still allowing the friends of the deceased to share posts, and continue mourning in digital spaces. With the introduction of the memorialization tool, postmortem profiles were created and now serve as spaces for memories to be shared by multiple people, often at far distances both geographically and in time (Brubaker et al., 2013). These digital spaces allow for the congregation of a newly formed community of fellow bereaved members across space and time. Anna Haverinen, a Finnish anthropological and communications based researcher, draws upon the notion of community and Victor Turner’s concept of existential or spontaneous *communitas* in her ethnography of grieving on Facebook: *Facebook, Ritual and Community – Memorializing in Social Media*.

Unexpected Online Communities

Haverinen (2015) applies Turner’s concept of existential or spontaneous *communitas*, which is defined as the ways in which people cultivate a sense of togetherness and experience the being of other through belonging to a shared, online grieving community. She uses this concept to examine how online grieving practices create an existential or spontaneous community at a time of loss, and enhance a sense of togetherness for bereaved individuals. Haverinen’s research is based on online surveys and interviews, as well as ethnographic and auto-ethnographic observations within six Finnish and five American Facebook memorials. Online mourning rituals are defined as posting biblical quotes or poems, announcement of a death through an “RIP” status, or uploading photos or videos or links of or relative to the lost individual (Haverinen, 2015). Analogous to Brubaker et al. (2013), Haverinen discusses online memorials or postmortem profiles, as the spaces in which the bereaved can make memorial posts, share media,

and connect with fellow bereaved members. Haverinen turns to the concepts of co-presence, immediacy and accessibility to draw upon how online grief practices differ from the offline experience of grief. Online memorials are documented digitally and can be accessed instantly and shared across geographic boundaries; an assumption of “co-presence” or an active online space for grieving is always present and existent (Haverinen, 2015). These features of online *communitas* contribute to how grief is experienced, and the feeling of togetherness allows bereaved individuals to feel as if they are sharing their loss and mourning process with others alike.

Haverinen also differentiates between types of online grief posts, specifically, how media sources, such as a photo, video or link demonstrate authenticity. She notes that emotional words, biblical quotes, or the typical condolence “I’m so sorry for your loss” may come off as corny or impersonal due to their typical repetitiveness or lack of personal meaning to the lost individual. Instead, sharing a piece of media sources, illustrates distinctive features of the lost loved one, such as a literal picture of them or a link to their favorite song. Media can be used to appropriate a memorial space to be more personalized and characteristic of the lost individual. This contributes to an overall may contribute to a heightened sense of authenticity for bereaved individuals as a lost individual becomes memorialized and remembered through relevant media sources (Haverinen, 2015).

Drawing from larger surveyed questions, most people found a sense of comfort or acceptance of online grieving the more they encountered it within their daily online lives. Initially, informants often described their relationship to online grieving as “alien” or “strange” which exemplifies the ways in which a familiar online database is appropriated and challenges by online grief practices. Haverinen (2015) suggests that the extent of togetherness and the

effectiveness of an online grieving practices are dependent on this experience of unfamiliarity or sense of “alien-ness” as griever appropriate the space and build a sense of community and togetherness. The online memorial is not definitive or static place, instead, it is changing by how griever choose to use it, and experience a sense of copresence. Other researchers (Gibbs, Meese, Arnold, Nansen & Carter, 2014) have also examined the concept of “presence” through online grief practices on other social media sites, such as Instagram.

#Funeral on Instagram

Gibbs, Meese, Arnold, Nansen, & Carter (2014) draw upon qualitative data, specifically the use of the hashtag, “#funeral” on Instagram to explore how photos, captions, and the post itself contributes to creative forms of mourning, designated to online spaces. On Instagram, grief-related posts are confined to an individual’s personal profile and can be extended into public networks through the using hashtags. These researchers focus on the emergence of selfies and group photos tagged #funeral, as well as the platform vernacular used by bereaved individuals. Platform vernacular refers to the ways in which people interact on different social media sites and serves as a type of genre of online speech and behavior. The type of speech and words used within online grief posts connects the self to their lost loved one, and repositions the experience of grief and the event of a funeral within the present moment, often accompanied by visual and media evidence (Gibbs et al., 2014).

After examining about 500 Instagram posts under #funeral, there were three apparent types of posts: selfies, group photos and material representations of the funeral such as a memorial or service card. The text used in most Instagram selfie images was to reflect on or engage with the funeral subsequent to its event. Group photos, like selfies, also appeared to be after the funeral, such as bereaved family members gathering at a wake or other events following

initial funeral services (Gibbs et al., 2014). These types of photos signify the funeral as a social event and the associated hashtags and comments left by users suggest a sense of togetherness and shared grieving. Other photos included featured material aspects of the funeral, indexing the duration of the funeral and highlighting it as a ritualized event (Gibbs et al., 2014). In addition, some photos included the location or landscape of the funeral; these photos document the event of the funeral and repositions the funeral within the present online world of Instagram.

Gibbs et al. (2014) use the term “presencing” to refer to the way in which making a grief-related post is a form of communication and repositions the ritualistic funeral experience to be shared with others the everydayness of social media. Selfies, group photos as well as photographs of family members and the event of the funeral document the experience of loss and serve as preserving a form of memory. Instagram, used most notably for posting photos and other media becomes appropriated through the use of #funeral and bereaved individuals are able to document and share their experience digitally.

Bereaved and non-bereaved individuals may wonder how the public nature of social media intertwines with the private nature of grief based on the public and immediate access of information online. Through posting a photo on Instagram, or sharing a link on a postmortem profile, bereaved individuals find a new online community and get to remember their lost one in a digitally permanent manner. The concept of “presencing” illustrates the connection between ritual and the everyday, and the process of mourning which involves repurposing the loss within an everyday framework. Using social media preserves both the representation of the lost individual and the bereaved individual’s memories, thoughts, feelings at and after the time of loss. Online grief practices continued to be established by bereaved people who create memorial and other grief-related posts.

Popular and Literary Representations of Grief

Social media is so incredibly accessible and has become a familiar, everyday part of everyday life. The public and immediate nature of social media creates pressure and challenges the appropriateness of online behavior; however, it is also a place in which grieving individuals can establish and create the norms of loss in the digital world. Australian musician, Nick Cave, serves as an example of an innovator in spaces for online grief practices through his website, theredhandfiles.com. After losing his teenage son, Arthur, in an unexpected and tragic accident in 2015, Cave has begun this website recently to share his own grief and to connect with fans of his who are also bereaved individuals.

This website functions as an online series of newsletters and as a diary of interactive posts between fans of Nick Cave inquiring about his music and hobbies but more so, about their own questions and experiences in their own loss and bereavement. Cynthia, in Issue #6 on theredhandfiles.com, discusses the loss of her father, sister and first love and the dreams she has experienced in her grief. She asks Cave whether he experiences communication with his lost son, Arthur. Cave's response is poetic and spoken from a place of empathy, he notes, "Grief and love are forever intertwined...like love, grief is non-negotiable...ghosts and spirits and dream visitations...these are precious gifts that are as valid and as real as we need them to be." Aligning with the previous anthropological research on grief and dreams, Cave shares a sense of direct communication and the existence and maintenance of a relationship with his son in his grief. Writer Paula Mejia comments on her reaction to reading Cave's empathetic and tender natured responses to fans in an article in *The New Yorker*, "The Brutality and Tenderness of Nick Cave's Newsletters" ; "After reading Cave's letter about grief, a friend and I spoke at length about the gnarled experience of losing someone close to you...it's grounding to remember,

through these newsletters, that grief is an intangible entity...” Although it is not as large of a network as popular social media sites like Facebook and Instagram, theredhandfiles.com is a small online community of Nick Cave fans who may be able to connect with him through their own experiences in grief. Cave is creating a new space and form of online grief practices through this website, and through his heartfelt, empathetic and authentic responses to bereaved individuals alike.

While online grieving practices continued to be developed, the pressures and anxieties around the public and accessible nature of social media and grief can also create tension for bereaved individuals. As appropriateness of online grief behavior is evolving, some bereaved individuals experience a greater sense of loss when it comes to sharing their private feelings in an online, digital space. Kate Branch, writer for *Vogue* magazine, discusses her own anxieties and questions around posting on Instagram on the anniversary of her father’s death. She references recent literature, and the commentary of the notable five phases of grieving. Branch notes that anxiety is a feature of the mourning process and that modernized, technological and media drive world, this anxiety is only exacerbated further. Public displays of grief and bereavement may create a sense of anxiety for a bereaved individual in regard to how to approach or create online grief practices.

Branch references author Joan Didion who once wrote, “we tell our stories in order to live.” In her own hesitation and anxiety, Branch questions how we tell our autobiographies in “real time”, more specifically, in the digitized and immediate world of social media. Branch notes the importance and powerful impact of online displays of grieving, such as a post made by the COO of Facebook about the loss of her father and the jazz album her sister created in his remembrance. She includes the work of writer-photographer Brandon Stanton, who documents

people's most intimate and personal stories through *Humans Of New York*; these serve as examples of the sense of togetherness that is formed in online displays of grief and storytelling. She also notes the recent celebrity deaths of as Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain, and how many fans made posts in honor of their lives and as a message for suicide prevention. Since these celebrities' lives are public and accessible to general individuals, Branch wonders whether people may feel as if these types of posts are considered to be more appropriate than posts about an individual, private loss. While she does not reveal if she ever made a post, Branch questions the norms and practices of online grief behavior and validates the powerful nature of creating a sense of togetherness and shared experience in grief on social media platforms. Branch, like other authors and writers, was inspired by the work of novelist Joan Didion, who documents the loss of her spouse in her 2005 novel, *The Year of Magical Thinking* and the loss of her daughter in her subsequent 2011 novel, *Blue Nights*.

The Year of Magical Thinking is an intimate and literary representation of the experience of grief in the everyday. Didion recounts the loss of her husband, John, and the unexpected event of his death. She describes this as a sudden and instantaneous moment that transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. She addresses the ordinary instant in which life as she had known it had completely vanished and transformed into the birth of her grief. At the time of John's death, their daughter, Quintana had been in the hospital for five nights with what became pneumonia and septic shock. As she experiences the loss of her husband, she also makes connections and worries for her daughter's life, which she discusses in further detail in *Blue Nights*.

Didion references psychological research on grief; including Freud, Klein, C.S Lewis and other scholars to explain her experience in more logical or concrete terms. However, her personal

narrative, writing style and autobiography is what makes this a literary representation of grief. The title itself addresses the role of magic within grieving; Didion shares her most vulnerable self and creates her personal narrative alongside the psychological research on the documented, known and typical reactions and behaviors in grief. Through disclosing her life with John, Didion exposes the very real, unexpected nature of grieving that cannot be fully encapsulated by psychological research alone. Within the first year following John's death, Didion acknowledges the certainty of his death yet maintained the persistent belief that his death remained reversible; this is what she addresses as the start of her magical thinking. Didion creates her own terminology in her grief, such as her experience of "the vortex effect" or moments in which she felt deeply immersed in her grief and overwhelmed with many memories.

The first time Didion experienced the vortex she was sitting in a hospital room with her daughter, weeks after John had passed. As she watches the East River from her hospital window, many memories begin to resurface, and she describes herself as immersed within all her memories of John at once. As she attempts to distract herself with a copy of the magazine, *Doctor's Hospital*, she is reminded with her previous affiliation with the magazine when she was completing her novel. The vortex places her within the time and space of that memory; she is reminded of Quintana as a three year old, and the lake they had visited with her father. The vortex is an unexpected temporal shift in the present; the multiple memories that flood her mind dating her to numerous dates within an instant. Didion's description of the vortex aligns to Freud's theories of grief-work and melancholia; the vortexes demonstrate the presence and maintenance of losses that are both known and unknown.

Didion discusses John's medical history and previous cardiac issues and surgeries; while his death was sudden, Didion creates another term, what she refers to as "omens". These omens

are reflections are what are believed to be signs or symbols of his oncoming and unexpected death. She reflects upon memories of conversations with John that she had previously forgotten about concerning his own mortality and worries over his cardiac health. It is only within her grief that she had now remembered these omens, or moments that may be representative of John's death. She speaks about one doctor who jokingly calls a cardiac episode, "a widowmaker"; she doesn't think much of it at the time and now feels a sense of guilt in her grief. Didion comments on how she keeps John's shoes out, hoping and believing that he may come back one day. The shoes, similar to omens, represent a sign and symbol of not only John's death but Didion's desire to live her life beside him again. Vortexes and omens are almost opposite or correlative to each other; discovering an omen might be intertwined within a vortex.

The title of Didion's subsequent novel, *Blue Nights* was inspired by the existence of omens, and the trauma of loss is represented through the description of a blue night. Didion describes the early summer breezes that accompany late April and May in New York; the way in which the sky is lit in beautiful blues. As night approaches, the teal and aqua tinted skies fade into deeper shades of navy and indigo; Didion relies on the French phrase, "l'heure bleue", "the gloaming" to describe the glittering and dimming blue nights. By the end of the summer, time begins to shorten and the days go from light to black; blue nights refers to the essence of the beginning of a beautiful and painful ending – one that glistens with memories and love. She remarks, "blue nights are the opposite of the dying of the brightness, but they are also its warning."

Blue nights represent both the overwhelming love and memory of Quintana and the experience of knowing her life was ending; it may also stand as a description of the initial pain of loss, "never knowing when the day would end." Similar to the writing style used in *The Year of*

Magical Thinking, Didion recounts the images and memories of Quintana that she reimagines within grief. In addition, she shares the story of the adoption of Quintana, as well as her own anxieties throughout motherhood and as she ages. Didion again uses her magical thinking, omens and vortexes to index and describe the loss of her daughter.

One image, Quintana's wedding, is a recurrent and sharp memory that introduces Didion's relationship with her daughter. Her wedding took place at the beginning of 2003, shortly before John's death and Quintana's oncoming health struggles. This particular memory represents one of the last moments Didion recalls fondly with both her husband and daughter; it is also the warning of the beginning of an end. The scene begins with the carefully selected and sentimental wedding amenities: cucumber and watercress sandwiches, barefoot flower girls, a stephanotis flower. At St. John the Divine's cathedral in upper Manhattan, Didion reimagines the way Quintana's hair was braided and the wedding party from a perspective outside of herself. She comments, "could you have seen, if you had caught sight of the bridal party, how utterly unprepared the mother of the bride was to accept what would happen at the end of the year, 2003?" Didion questions her own place within the memory of Quintana's wedding, wondering if there was some type of sign or omen of her health declining and eventual death.

Within this image of the wedding, Didion jumps further back into memories of her life as parent with John as they raised their daughter, and specifically, her daughter's adoption. Didion and her husband John picked up Quintana from a hospital in California in 1966; she attributes her adoption of Quintana to her late friend, Diana who had helped Didion arrange the adoption. As a child, Quintana inquired about the story of her adoption, pleading to her parents, "What if you hadn't answered the doctor's phone call, what if you hadn't been home? What would happen to me then?" Didion did and does not have any answers for Quintana, who lived with and

reconsidered these questions throughout her life; she suggests feeling guilty, for not being able to rid Quintana of these questions she herself did not have to live with. Memories, for Didion, are more than things to hold on to or carry, but things that cannot be forgotten and resurface in painful and glittering blue seas of vortexes.

Conclusion

The extensive research on grief and bereavement reveals the personal and intense nature of losing a loved one. Through anthropological research, the cross cultural explorations of bereavement stand as examples of the various ways in which death and grief is experienced and tolerated. The experience of grief varies at an individual and cultural basis; anthropologists such as Hollan (1995), Stephen (2000) and Leavitt (1995) provide examples of the importance of magic, dreams and mortality. The cultural norms of grieving varies and the influence of certain cultural features such as magic, shapes the experience and longevity of bereavement. Through qualitative and ethnographic data, anthropologists have compiled a growing genre of the personal experience and consequences of losing a loved one by focusing on cultural differences, individual experience, and ways in which bereaved peoples establish their own ways of mourning.

Combining anthropological and psychological methods, psychoanalysts and anthropologists utilize psychological theory to enhance and enrich ethnographic data. In the efforts of providing a full encapsulation of the experience of bereavement, the work of Sigmund Freud has influenced many anthropologists such as Briggs (2014), Stephen (2000), Sime (2013), and many other researchers alike. Freud's theories and understanding of mourning, melancholia, and the uncanny have been aligned with ethnographic examples to explain and validate the many identifiable and unidentifiable losses that accompany bereavement. Psychoanalysis and

psychological theory guide and inform the anthropologist in making conclusive points based on gathered ethnographic and anthropological data. Both anthropological and psychological methods and theories can be combined to depict the experience of grief on a cultural, individual and psychoanalytic level.

Autoethnography, literary and popular representations of grief and bereavement further explicate the intricate and personal features of loss. Through the insertion of their own experiences of grief, the work of Rosaldo (1995), Stirling (2014) and Weaver-Hightower (2012) represents the power of autoethnography, storytelling and shared experience. Through self-expression and emotional disclosure, the lives and voices of these anthropologists are acknowledged alongside the relevant research. Autoethnographic and stylistic forms of writing offer a different, often more approachable view to the experience and livelihood of grief.

Literary, popular and media representations of grief symbolize the everydayness and longevity of grief; they also provide a detailed and individualized glimpse into the experience of bereavement. In the effort of incorporating as many perspectives on grief, trauma and magic, these sources have been used to fully encapsulate the delicate and complex nature of losing a loved one.

The following chapter and last chapter is the autoethnography of the life and loss of my mother, Leslie. It should be considered as a production of my grief and love for my mother, as well as an object that allows her to resurface in the present. It is also a way in which I have continued to grieve my mother, and document my own way of mourning and healing. This autoethnography is structured by relevant themes in my grief and mourning process and was inspired by the work of several anthropologists and other literary representations of bereavement.

Chapter 2: *But know I am with you in spirit + thoughts: An Autoethnography of the Loss and Life of My Mom*

In the beginning of this project, I was fascinated with the research on grief and bereavement and inspired by anthropologists who sought to discover the ways in which grief can manifest and be affected by one's culture and personal beliefs. The way in which grief is experienced is so largely dependent on culture and varies at an individual basis. Through my research, I resonated with the individual voices of peoples assumed to be so different from ourselves based on various cultural differences. As I continued to research, I became so invested within the anthropological details and contexts that I often forgot my own position as a researcher and member of the bereaved. While researching provided me with a sense of comfort and repertoire of the manifestations of grief, it was also a subconscious process of defamiliarizing myself from my own experience.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research tool in which personal reflections and autobiographical details are included alongside the relevant anthropological research and sociocultural manifestations of grief and bereavement. This autoethnography is my attempt to return to my own experience of grief, which is the story of the life and loss of my mother. It is the story of the life I have lived, and continue to live with and without my mother; it is complicated, and it is not supposed to be sad. In retelling and revealing my loss, I am emotionally open with the intention of creating a narrative space of healing, and depicting the lived and unexpected features of grief. For me, grief has been so much more than the unquestionable sadness and devastation, it is also the jolting discovery of the unconditional limitations of love and the power of memory.

This autoethnography is structured by the themes that have prevailed and influenced my grief and mourning process. My experience of grief is captured within small narrative themes,

relevant to the extended literature on bereavement and overall, my own experience of losing my mother. In her absence, love and memories intertwine with magic in a series of symbolic connections. Due to the traumatic nature of loss, I have chosen to present my memories nonchronologically. Each theme encapsulates the kaleidoscopic nature of my memories; the ways in which objects, dreams, and time influences the recall of thousands of memories in one instant. The following pages should also be considered as detailed vignettes, short stories, glimpses and snapshots into the life and loss of my mother, Leslie.

Creating Permanence

They say that the mourning process is one year. “They” are the people who view grief in phases, stages; as if it is a task to be checked off a list, or something that can be overcome. When I realized the anniversary of her death was approaching, I desired for something else besides her death to remain permanent. I did not tell a soul the idea that popped into my head, suddenly, I knew what I wanted to do. I grabbed the card she gave me in August, three months before she died. In August, I was on my way home from a therapeutic program in North Carolina. My mom couldn’t be there to pick me up, so she asked my father to bring me her card instead.

“I look forward to seeing you very soon, my darling, + wish I could be there, but know I am know I am in spirit + thoughts – I love you very much xoxo Mom” (August, 2013)

I chose to identify with an invisible community by making a piece of my mother physically visible, here on my right forearm. It’s not like I’m wearing my *entire* heart on my sleeve, it is surely a large part of it. It is now December 27, 2014: it has been 361 days without my mother. Time is winning and has already won; time is invincible. Time is leading to the emergence of this day I have never experienced before; this ritual that I dreaded. The first anniversary of the death of my mother. It has been 361 days and I am angry because grief still

feels unimaginable and unreal. If I live one year without my mother, can I live 5 years without her? 10? How many years will it take to blunt my pain? What will time do to us next?

It is still day 361, I'm downtown, just off St Marks Place and my deposit is in. I'm alone, and I'm okay with that. I sit down at a small black chair, adjacent to a woman lying down on her stomach and raising her shins to be worked on. The beads of sweat on my face provoked the burly man facing me to ask,

“Have you had something to eat within the past hour?”

“Yea!” I lied.

He placed the words from her card on my bare right forearm. The stencil aligns to her text exactly as she had written it, down to her squiggly, and signature “m”. The needle pierces my skin and my face begins to widen and I laugh because smiling had never felt stranger. It hurt and tickled and I felt like I had been out of the body for the past 361 days. My mother, and her words were becoming a part of my body. I sat in the chair for seven minutes; however, it was like I gained a year of my life back. I felt happy, for the first time, because I found myself in my grief. I recreated a piece of my mother, and it is now permanent. For a moment, I tell myself that it's stupid and cheesy. But in the next moments, I feel my mom laughing with me. I feel her smile through mine.

Fast forward and pause in the present. It has now been five and a half years. Over 2,000 days without my mother. Even though I have lived it, it still feels unimaginable. Missing my mother is a part of my daily life; so is loving her even though she isn't here. I believe that in some very special and magical ways, my mother remains with me. She is written on my forearm. She is visible in the present, which invites questions, comments and responses like:

“What a beautiful tattoo”

“Are you and your mother close?”

“Does your mother love it?”

“You have any others?”

“Thank you”

“Yes, we are”

“She does”

“This is my only one.”

The best comment I have ever received from a new acquaintance was a small gesture and yet, it has stayed with me. He said it gently, with pause and paced breath:

“I really like your tattoo. It seems like it is very special to you.”

“It is. I lost my mother a few years ago.”

“...I had a feeling, and I’m sorry and I think it is a beautiful tattoo”

It occurred to me that maybe there is just an acquired awareness to the complexities and subtleties of grief. The way in which he instinctively knew my mother had passed, the pause in his voice, the tears that formed in the corners of his eyes afterwards. In the four and half years since I’ve had my mother on my forearm, his comment was the most validating. He didn’t ask about my mom, he asked about the tattoo itself. He asked about the recreation of my mother, which is what remains in the present. He allowed me to tell my story. He saw me, and my mom. He has become one of my very best friends.

Time: At First

Grief, in all its glory, propels my body and mind into a world of other worlds; the afterlife seems inadequate to me but rather, the life that continues in other unknown timelines. At least, I desire for these timelines to exist; for my mother to continue to exist in a physical plane. I know she doesn't because I also know that with my mother, I remain 18 years old. I guess that's what I mean by timelines: the way in which time stopped so abruptly. The timeline where my mother didn't die and she's alive, happy and I talked to her last night. The timeline where I saw her yesterday, the timeline where we finally made it to the beach for the summer, the timeline where I can hold her.

Our time together was robbed. And I was angry, and a part of me will always be angry at the way I could not control our time. Time stopped when she died; the passing hours seemed like days, but also minutes. Time meant nothing because it was the one thing we didn't have. Time meant everything; it was the only way I knew how to measure my grief. Time and its influence on magic, the way it allows for connections to be made. Time, the way it beat me to the finish line. Time ran out for me and my mom. No matter how much time has and will pass, I will always want to say that I'm sorry. I'm sorry time was not on our side, I'm more sorry that it wasn't on hers. She deserved so much more than time; she deserved the entire world and still deserves my unconditional love.

I remember the day it happened like a crystal clear frozen snapshot stuck inside of a snow globe. I remember the way I walked over to her apartment, the way I didn't know, the way my father opened the door and the way my sister sat crying on the chair in my mother's living room. I remember the way my father spoke, like molasses, dragging it out until he could not prevent the inevitable. I remember the way I stood up from my seat, the way I ripped my coat off, the sound

that came out of my body. I remember deleting the texts I had with my mother because I could not stand to look at them. I remember the two diners we went to that day. I had never known comfort food to be such a displeasure. I don't remember what I ate but I remember that I cried and I vomited after the first diner. We went to a different and second diner, the one closer to home, for dinner that cold December night. Fluorescent, bright and filled with noise: the three of us sat in a booth. We all silently cried. We held each other. We tried to keep our food down. When our waiter brought the check, he thought we were drunk and in a way, we were. We were completely intoxicated with the amount of grief and love we were grappling with. I don't remember much of the conversations we had that night but I do remember the love. I remember how after a while, I was crying because I was loved. I was crying because my mother is the epitome of my greatest experience of love. I cry because I love, we grieve because we have loved and will love unconditionally, forever.

I remember the weather; the early January absolute frigidness matched the intensity of my onset grief. Time froze and so did New York City. So did my heart, so did I. I remember feeling like I had to keep myself together. I remember saying the words, "I'm okay" and not meaning it, but not knowing how I felt. I felt numb. It was so cold.

I remember the funeral was about a week after she died, but I do not remember the days in between or the days that followed. I remember Riverside Memorial from when I was a kid, and attended the funerals for my great aunt and grandfather. I remember gripping onto my father as we entered the room again on January 5, 2014. We had seating for 350 people and the room was completely packed. I remember stepping up to the pew and seeing a room full of people I could barely recognize. I do not remember giving my eulogy, but I do remember that I did not cry until the last few lines. I remember my sister and the way she hugged me, the way she

whispered “I love you so much Charlie” I remember the ice at the gravesite. The gravesite which is literally just off a random highway in Queens. I remember my little cousin volunteering to come along. I remember how I did not realize we had to leave. I did not realize we had to bury my mother, and then, leave. I remember how I stood there, how I wished we did not have to go back to the car.

I remember counting. I counted the days until it seemed normal that my mother was dead. I’m still counting, and it will never be normal; time is irrelevant to the way I feel about my mother. Time has shaped my grief; however, it cannot explain the way I miss her and love her; I love my mother in every imagined timeline. Time cannot equate to love.

Midnight

Our time stopped at the most popular moment of the year to care about the passage of time. It’s like a practical joke, Mom; you left on this most magical day where everyone around us cares about the stroke of midnight. And it’s not Disney’s Cinderella magic, it’s the magic of the possibility of something new. Of a new life, a new goal, new opportunity to become your best self. At the stroke of midnight, where were you? At the moment we dream of sharing a kiss but most importantly, bringing those we love into the passing of a new year. We’re New Yorkers we don’t go to Times Square; we sit around in our living rooms, order in, and watch the ball drop. As a kid, I used to fall asleep before midnight and wake up, run into her room and just cry. My young self could not stay awake for that special moment. I missed the magic of the clock striking midnight welcoming the first day of the new year. I missed the moment where we are reminded of the promise of the possibility of change.

It's midnight, it's 2014, you were here 18 hours ago and now you are gone. What are my possibilities? Our time stopped when it really was only supposed to change; our time was robbed from us, Mom.

Time is still irrelevant to me, especially on New Year's Eve, when it is supposed to matter the most. Now my midnights feel as if it is a reminder of the only thing that feels bigger than time: magic. Time cannot defeat magic. Time didn't matter and I was left with the magic of midnight and New Year's Eve. Magic, the way I look at something and I think of you. Magic, the way I hear your voice through mine. Magic, the way she taught me how to love, and how to be fearlessly vulnerable. My mother left at this special moment where things are coming to an end based on the calendar; My mother left at this magical moment where we think of love and hope and our biggest dreams. My mother left at this moment where we think of the blessing that it is to be alive. My mother left me and us and this world on the most magical day of the year. And it is magical to me because it is a day where we focus on the past and veer into the future. It is magical because New Year's Eve is all about time; it's all about the present moment and counting down until time finally must change.

New Year's Eve and the ball begins to drop. We count down and think of the end and most importantly, the beginning. Midnight and we're somehow made new, we're jubilant and free of the past. Every midnight she will be gone and for every second that leads down to the ball dropping on this time that has never been known, I count my blessings. For my mother made my life extraordinary; she is everything I have come to know about magic. Midnight and we pray, midnight and we feel the magic of love. Midnight and she is not here and the confetti in Times Square still falls.

A Conversation with Joan Didion, Me, and My Mother

Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it.”

Nod. *Yes*. Flip page.

“The way you got side-swiped was by going back.”

Eyebrows furrow in the momentary yet existential fear of narcissism and failure.

Probably. What if I need to go back?

“You sit down to dinner and life as you know it, ends.”

Heart drops with the emergence of a distant yet vivid memory: *So much food*.

“Survivors look back and see omens, messages they missed.”

Heart rises and jumps as the memory solidifies in time and place.

No, I knew, I didn't miss anything, I knew it was a message. Please don't.

“Why do you always have to be right?”

Shit. Oh God, no.

Unexpected drops of liquified salt fall without warning. Silent and sentimental *and called the fuck out*. Grief is more than the limitations of words but in certain instances, words are scattered and varied diamonds in the rough. They glitter with the promise of the justification of recognition; the indescribable is captured for a mere instance.

“Life changes in an instant. An ordinary instant.”

Glittering with the hidden parasite of the unexpected, the resurrection of the memory that cannot accept suppression any longer. An ordinary instant recognized in its endlessness.

A stupid little instant. I was there.

Years ago, at the dinner table, she lifts her head and finds the extraordinary instant unfolding before the power of words. Years ago, the instant was marked by her immediate physical reaction, while the mind and heart froze in this transformation of ordinary to unthinkable.

Years ago, on the couch, her legs lifted her body before the power of words or recognition of an instant unfolding. Years ago, the instant was her immediate physical reaction, while the mind and heart tried to escape, to find resolution to the inevitable transformative instant of ordinary into unimaginable, active into passive, living into dead.

Years later, both instances, at dinner and on the couch, are recognized through their eternal repetition and reexperienced vividness within the present instant of words that are now glittering, pristine, crystal-clear, memorializing diamonds.

Years later and finally back to the present, I am within an inception of instances as these words are mined into my memory. Bombarded with emotion and criticism I render myself invisible as these words ring around my head: *Life changes within an instant, yea I got it –do I think I'm right about this whole grief thing? Survivors see omens? What missed messages? I didn't miss it, we were there, together, and suddenly I had tears in my eyes when I saw my face in the mirror. I didn't miss it, I just didn't know it was going to happen...Why can't I let go of the girl who knew what was going to happen next?*

New chapter. "I love you more than one more day."

Ugh. Wipes face.

A repeated memory appears that can be traced back to almost any day:

“I love you”

“I love you too”

“Well, I love you, more!”

Wipes face again. *I love you so much more.*

Familiar Objects

Her possessions have become mine; her jewelry, her accessories, her dutiful plethora of outerwear. All of the tchotchkes. The black chandelier earrings she wore to the Christmas party, the metal fish earrings I bought her on 81st and Columbus. The gold, rhinestone encrusted, blingy star and moon earrings that look like they’re clip-ons. The black bracelet that has a charm of a chili...? Her silver watch with gold accents; that gigantic watch repair store we had to visit semi-annually. The elegant and coveted Chanel necklace specifically tailored for V-cut dresses; the one she wore at my sister’s bat mitzvah; the one I wore on my 22nd birthday. The statement BCBG gold crewcut necklace with four brown, pink, and silver flowers decked out with silver and gold rhinestones; the one she wore to the star-studded wedding in Los Angeles. The heart-charmed choker she bought at 16 years old; the turtle studs she bought me, which remained in my ears for all of second grade. The matching seahorse necklaces we bought and wore during summers in Rhode Island. Her jewelry, and the jewelry she gave me sits in countless cardboard, plush and velvet boxes throughout my room. It decorates the windowsill and dresser in my bedroom; it is hidden under my father’s desk. Pieces of her, scattered and represented by the array of glittering sentimental objects I’m left to organize and reorganize, wear and misplace, find and cherish again.

The objects I watched her take care of: our home, 163 E 81st and everything in it. That apartment was huge, and nostalgia transforms these objects into symbols of my childhood. The campaign furniture that sat in our living room (which isn't campaign furniture, even though we have owned it for decades, no one in the family knows the proper name for it) The drawer (on the campaign furniture) that is now filled with hundreds of disposable-camera, Duane Reade developed photos, in no particular order. Tangible and literal snapshots ranging from the summer she was pregnant with me in Venice (where my sister fell into a Venetian canal at age 3), to our annual visit to cousins in Orlando (and Disney), to The Gates in Central Park (she thought she lost those photos and we only found them when we moved out of 163 E 81st).

The objects that remind me of our family home: the gold and black plated sundial that was a wedding gift from a beloved family friend, that sat on the windowsill (otherwise referred to as 'the porch') for all the 15 years we lived there. The infamous family inside joke, which was another one of our beloved friend's eccentric gifts: the Foghorn Leghorn cookie jar (which sat on top of our fridge, for almost 15 years). Foghorn Leghorn, a favorite and cherished cartoon character within our household sat on our fridge until the night I opened the freezer. Out of a nursery rhyme: Foghorn fell and lost his head and, in my mother's complete devastation, he became Headless Foghorn. Headless Foghorn stayed on top of the fridge until my mother, in her own mourning phases, purchased another Foghorn Leghorn cookie jar. In the last few years of our life at 163 E 81st, we fostered Headless Foghorn and welcomed Foghorn Leghorn 2.0. This cookie jar rarely stored cookies, most likely cat toys and the occasional bag of catnip. This cartoonish jar nearly haunted my mother and I; the first box we unpacked in her new apartment had no label – but inside, lay Headless Foghorn and Foghorn 2.0 nestled up together. We broke down into tears of laughter. Today, the sundial and Foghorn 2.0 reside at my sister's apartment

in Philadelphia. My father insisted these objects must belong to, and be shared with “young people.” The location of Headless Foghorn is unknown; I almost hope for him to resurface in another haunting way some day.

The thing about these objects is that I know that they are hers, they are expected because they are known and identifiable. They remind me of my childhood, our home, and reinforce the recall of memories that are somewhat easy to grapple with or be reminded of. During the first months of grieving, it felt like I was aware of every single object that was once hers. I held onto and hung up dozens of photographs, at each available corner of my bedroom. Stand in my room and spin in a circle, you’ll find her face at least twice. I wore your jewelry every day, I wore my name-plate necklace to sleep, I tried to fit her rings on my middle and pinky fingers. These objects are familiar and remind me of both the joy of my memories and pain of her absence and my grief. When I encounter or engage with these objects, I expect to also engage with my emotions and resurfacing memories. And yet, it is the encounter with unexpected objects that make me feel most comforted.

Unexpected & Uncanny Objects

It seems simple: without her presence, the occurrence of receiving any object is surely unexpected. That’s why the unexpected, for me, turns into what is most magical. Unexpected objects are unknown or forgotten; they are inherently uncanny. Freud tells us the uncanny is frightening, but I also think that it is beautiful.

My first unexpected object appeared to me not long after my mother died. I cannot remember if it was the day after she died. My father, sister and I slept in her apartment for a few days. I woke up and I heard my sister crying, and I didn’t remember why. Those first hours of loss are so vivid and appear like a black and white film in my head, the initial pain and shock

washed out all colors. Nothing was okay and nothing could fill this immense rupture that only seemed to be breaking further; my mother was gone, and I was hallow.

The lights are off in her bedroom as my sister opened the top drawer of my mother's dresser. I stood in the doorway, the light from the kitchen beating upon my sister's swollen and tired face. She did not look at me directly when she said, "I think mom was planning to give this to you..."

She handed me an opened, dark-blue plush box which held a silver necklace with my initials on it: CRC. And as I put the necklace on with tears in my eyes, as my father and sister watched with tears in theirs, I remember that my mother told me about this necklace. Mom could not decide – she struggled with the concept of decisions. My mom would order a burger and beg the waiter to come back to change her order to a salad; we needed a minimum of five minutes to decide whether to sit inside or outside at our favorite local restaurant; she is the reason I am so easy-going, and also, indecisive.

In typical Mom fashion, she could not decide on one necklace for my 18th birthday, but instead had two. My 18th Birthday, my last birthday with her. She gave me the gold-plated Charlotte necklace, and she had the other silver initial necklace in her drawer. And she never gave it to me. My sister found it, unexpectedly, during the most painful moments. She never gave it to me, but in other ways, she did. In the world where my mother did not die, she would have given it to me. Would have and could have become the world of magic as a series of symbolic connections are made between reality and the realms of potentialities and possibilities. I find that the series of unexpected objects I have encountered launch me into thinking about the existence of parallel or other dimensions in which my mother exists.

Like the emails. I guess my mother's old email accounts were hacked somehow after her death. Every so often, I would get a notification from my mother, in her absence. The first time it happened, it was simple: her email was hacked. The second time it happened I was a freshman in college. It was nearly dawn by the time I walked through the doors of my dorm one February morning. The second I closed my eyes and laid my head on my pillow, my phone buzzed. It was my mother. An email from my dead mom, that read, "Thank you! Leslie"

I laughed. I might have even rolled my eyes. It was as if she knew I had stayed up all night, as if she was emailing to say "Thank you!" and "Go to bed!". Of course, I knew it was only an email; an email that made no sense, so I felt like I had to make sense of it. I laughed because I didn't know how much I missed the things teenagers and kids complain about; the way she nagged me, and bothered me only because she cared about me so much. I didn't know you could miss arguing with your mother. I laughed and fell asleep with her on my mind.

In the beginning phases of my grief, I looked through all my email accounts for all the emails that ever existed between my mother and me. I have looked through these several accounts many times; I would return to them, hoping to find something new. One day I stopped looking. It was during my sophomore year of college; the dreaded year referred to as 2016. I think I was just searching because I missed her; I don't remember why I searched her name on my gmail account that day. When I did, our last email conversation popped up; she asked me if we wanted to get brunch tomorrow. I couldn't remember if we did. When I looked at the date of the email, it matched the date on the calendar in the bottom right corner of my laptop screen. September 13, 2013, the last email from my mother, and September 13, 2016, the day I found the last email from my mother.

I am feeling her laughter and her tears; I feel possessed by my mother in the most loving and mimetic way possible. It felt like magic, like I was meant to find it. I have stopped looking since that date. It was uncanny and comforting, scary and magical, insane and completely normal. The date had no relevance to me until I found this email, it is relevant and also arbitrary. It was the moment in which I realized the calendars aligned that I experienced what I would call magic. Now, September 13 is just a date that happens to be associated with my mother because it was the date I stopped looking through our emails; the brief alignment of past and present calendars made me feel whole again.

My mother used to say this line, “I miss all the dead people” when she spoke about her parents and other lost loved ones. She told my sister and I that they would haunt her; but it wasn’t scary or eerie; it was the moment in which she was reminded of the one person who understood the reference, got the joke, and can no longer be here. It was as if she was being haunted by love, haunted by the inherited features and quirks of her family, haunted by the impact of memory. I know what she meant by missing all the dead people; I know what she meant about being haunted because my mother haunts me in the most funny and interesting ways.

Her lifelong fear of cockroaches and all rodents developed due to her native New Yorker background. I grew up with cats because my mother could not stand to even think of the idea of a pest within her apartment. On the very unfortunate days, where one bug or mouse made its way into our home, my mother was probably the first person to find it. You knew there was a pest if you heard *the scream*. This is no typical, horror-movie scream; it is a crescendo of absolute disgust and raging contempt. *The scream* could be heard from all rooms of that apartment, like an early morning fire alarm. My sister and I teased her; we laughed because *the scream* was

impossible to imitate, and represented my mother's absolute, almost irrational fear and disgust of all pests.

Three weeks after my mother died, I cleaned my room. I felt productive and keeping my hands busy preoccupied me from my mind and broken heart. Out of the corner of my left eye, I spot a small and gray thing, scurrying along the edge of my bedframe. Without full consciousness, my body propelled itself into the next room and suddenly, I heard it. *The scream* came out of my body as I found myself on top of a table. The voice I heard was not my own: it was my mother's. I stood on my dining room table and called out to her, as if she was in the room with me, as if her spirit entered my body. The moment I remember the clearest was standing on top of the table without a clue as to how I got there. My mother carried me, and I heard *the scream* come out of my body; I was possessed by my mother in the most hilarious and lovingly annoying way possible. I can't do *the scream* on demand, but if I see an unwelcomed pest, my mother, and her scream, may show up again.

Dreams (of you are the only ones I can never forget)

If we turn to spirituality and magic; time loses some of its power. Other things can become more powerful when we stop thinking about time, but grief is inherently tied to the elements of time and temporality. I think time structures grief and loss into this rigid and repetitive calendar of dates, birthdays, holidays, anniversaries and celebrations. A calendar of events that are marked by the presence of absence. time heal, or make it worse, or both? Why surrender to the power of time? What are the other ways to measure grief? Dreams and dream-like states deprive time of its power.

It had been 11 months since my mother died when I first saw her again. Around the middle of November 2014, my mother appeared to me in a dream. We're at the cash register in a

large and crowded department store in Union Square; she's buying me outfits for college interviews. She's using her very displeased customer service voice and I beg her to stop as my cheeks redden yet, I couldn't move my body closer to her. I hear her voice but I was stuck behind the next person in line. "You, are going to college" she yells from across the room, and she's further and further away until I wake up, and she's gone again. Except that conversation was the only one I ever had with her about college, time did not grant us with that opportunity.

When I woke up it was as if she knew I that I had gone back to school six months after her death, as if she knew I was in the process of applying to college, as if she was in my present world.

The next dream I remember of my mother was uncanny and frightening. It was one week before my 21st birthday when I dreamed of my mother, myself and a childhood friend, Lily. In the dream, I saw my mother except she was ten years younger; when still wore her hair up with the small brown barrette. My mother and Lily sat in my second grade classroom while they attempted to FaceTime with me on an iPad. It was as if I was floating above them; as if I was a ghost and my mother and Lily were trying to contact me. When I pick up the FaceTime call, Lily answered and I asked to speak with my mother. Lily paused and responded, "I don't think she wants to speak with you right now." Suddenly my skin is pale and I am becoming translucent; my mother and Lily turn away from me with grim and dropped faces. In the dream, I am screaming, I feel sick, I know that I am sick and I know my mother doesn't want to talk to me. Why is she so young and why am I so sick? Why won't she talk to me? Why is Lily here?

I wake up. I cry. I cry more than I ever had after dreaming of her. I call my dad and my sister, I ask them "why wouldn't she want to talk to me?" I wonder if she's mad at me. I wonder

if she knows how guilty I feel about our last conversation. I wonder if I was dead in my dream and she was alive; I wonder why the woman who gave me life still doesn't have her own.

This dream still makes me wonder. I wonder if Lily was a liaison between my mother and I. I wonder if my mom appeared younger to me because I was actually manifesting a representation or reflection of myself. While this dream was frightening, it was also informative. I felt closer to her than I ever had. I cried the most because she didn't want to talk to me. When I told that to my sister, she said, "I wish I could dream of her."

I wish for her to visit me in my dreams. For every dream I have of my mother is a dream that I will never ever forget.

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