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Melancholy and The Loss of Self:  
A Nomadic Inquiry

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## Abstract

I'm sitting across from my client, S, wishing I could escape the crushing gravity of the black sun (Kristeva 1989). Its dark rays render our bodies inert, and each utterance becomes too frail to carry meaning. Yet, every so often, in our melancholic stupor, we are seduced by the radiance of a desperate and beautiful sadness that returns us to loss, and the impossibility of mourning.

Through wandering and wondering (Tamas 2010) I find myself on nightly walks or wading through memories of my mother's death. I attempt to step into the contradictions where deadness meets desire. I wish I could untether and dissolve into nothingness. Here I find a melancholic fantasy which I call 'the loss of self'.

Ever the diligent practitioner, I turn to Freud, Kristeva, and Lacan for some support. Their different voices offer me layered perspectives on melancholia, from hallucinating the lost loved object (Freud 1917), to elaborately mourning the loss of something that is available, but no longer desired (Žižek 2000). Yet something of their thinking constrains me, their ideas too focused on a specific relationality to the lost object.

Enter Deleuze and Guattari. They help me think about what else melancholic bodies can do, and how you and I might become differently through melancholia. Unavoidably, there is an ontological clash between Deleuze and Guattari and my psychoanalytic companions. Through this clash, I begin to consider the importance of desire, wondering if we can think of melancholia as a way of relating through loss.

## Preface

I don't know who I am without you holding the pieces of me together.

In the bleak of my dreams, I see your lifeless eyes stare back at me. Far away, in the deep reaches of memory, I recall the smell of you, and I am a baby's hand reaching for mother. I fear you, hate you, and the vigour of hate, love, gratitude, and envy (Klein 1997) returns a vibrancy to me that I had thought lost. Yet, that original injury and primal loss, Das Ding (Schuster 2016), I preserve. Loss was once my keepsake of you, but now I have turned it into my own. My melancholy.

Sick of mourning, I wish to untether and dissolve into the nothingness that harmonises in accordance with all things. Is it a desire for transcendence, perhaps, or death? No, I do not wish to join you in death. Though I know that when I am finally undone, I lose you twice, and lose the possibility to lose you again. So, I desire this, loss.

Melancholy meets desire, and this is where my inquiry takes flight.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Preface .....	5
S.....	7
The Frame .....	9
Ontological tensions .....	16
Nomadism.....	22
Melancholic Ethic.....	33
Alone together in the presence of the lost object.....	43
S.....	51
Melancholia.....	60
Pivoting to Freud.....	63
Freud and the unbearableness of falling out of love.....	66
From Freud to Klein .....	74
S.....	85
Lacan and Desire .....	90
Lacaneutarri .....	96
The time I saw Jesus in a Hostel.....	103
S.....	108
From dyad to dad, men, and gender melancholy.....	110
Sons and Fathers.....	117
S.....	133
The Cemetery.....	138
S.....	146
References .....	150

## S

It's Friday afternoon and I'm early. I need the extra time in the room to settle and prepare for my hour with client S. I do some drunken yoga poses, arms swinging at my sides, rocking gently left to right. It's soothing, a necessary gesture that helps me feel I can survive the hour. Within the frame of psychodynamic counselling practice, I wonder who or what else needs soothing and how S, in turn, resists such gestures of care with a violence difficult to stomach. She, too, is surviving something in our hour.

It's quiet, save the traffic from two streets away. I listen to the occasional birds' song and take a deep breath to let everyday tensions wash over me, letting them fade, for now, into obscurity. In doing so my work with S moves to the fore. Images diffuse, like kicking up mud by wading through a pond. Our work together puts me in touch with a grief and loss of my own and I see glimpses of funerals and childhood wishes. As they surface, I attempt to separate what is mine from what is hers from what has become ours. Always I return to the impossibility of disentanglement. I steady myself for a deadness that seeps into me during our sessions, one that I desperately wish to escape. Yet, I suspect it is in this deadness that S has taken up a safe but lonely residence. I can't help but feel enmeshed in her grief. It's dark yet eerily familiar, as though a part of me longs to be there, lamenting with her. Maybe lamentation is only a façade of melancholy that belies an insatiable need for loss. Maybe it is to live in some liminal space between having once possessed something never had and losing it through an onset of mourning that always begins anew. Losing and undoing, loss as a way of relating. How I wish to lose myself—arms still rocking at my sides.

S came to counselling struggling with feelings of emptiness and suicidal ideations. We have since ventured into the territory of childhood experiences of ambivalent care and absences. These have left

a trail of voices folded into her. I think here of Fairbairn, and how it is better to be a sinner in a world ruled by God (Fairbairn 1974). I sometimes catch myself with a sudden awareness that my eyes are welling up listening to her. Yet, any noticeable expression of my sorrow or empathy is responded to with firm disapproval. Similar to Margaret Warner's use of fragile process (Mearns and Thorne 2000), empathy itself becomes impinging, as though something of 'self' is threatened with annihilation. What happens when you suddenly recognise the weight of an absence? Surely, she has taught me that both absence and emptiness can be heavy. Care is resisted, foreclosed, but then foreclosure seldom lets the unconscious rest undisturbed.

Deadness, loss, neglect, and suicidal ideations bring us to that territory of fantasy that speaks to desire. Despite a desire for death, S also articulates a wish to desire again, 'I want to want things again'. Desire appears muddled, conflated between loss and lack (Žižek 2000), and this conflation of desire has begun to inform my thinking throughout this melancholic process.

## The Frame

It's not like I'm over here and I've lost you over there. Having lost you, *'I have gone missing as well'* (Butler 2003, 12). Judith Butler tells us intersubjectivity is inscribed with a melancholic ethic through which this speaking 'I' is inextricably constituted through the loss of that other (Butler 2003). Here we can easily trace the Freudian edict that not only does object loss turn to ego loss (Freud 1917), but that loss of that 'other' is inscribed in us from the very beginning. It is that which allows for the formation of the ego (Freud 1914). Perhaps this is why Dorteë Bonnigal-Katz writes that 'something un-mournable seems to preside over human subjectivity from the outset' (Bonnigal-Katz 2017, 145). Loss lingers as its own vague imprint. A footprint in the sand at once hollowed out, laying bare its empty contours, yet overflowing with form, empty but affect-laden. Loss is anguishing just as it can be beautiful in what it reveals; it takes me to a precious sadness, just as it confronts me with that affectless abyss where you and I find no traction, contact, or warmth—already dead. It is from this vantage point that I write about the loss of self in conjunction with melancholy. It is not the loss of a cohesive and locatable entity of 'self'. Instead, the loss of self designates an ambiguity that I relate to my own melancholic desire. It is a desire to dissolve into nothingness. For Kristeva, melancholic loss is one of words and meaning, a gradual march into the nothingness of asymbolia, when our words for our 'abyssal suffering' betray us. Words become lost, and in 'having lost meaning, loses life' (Kristeva 1989, 189). Yet what, if anything, has been lost?

This question of loss touches on the central Freudian thought that the melancholic might know who they have lost, but not 'what they have lost in them' (Freud 1917, 46). Freud observed that the melancholic, unable to tolerate their ambivalence toward the lost (loved) object, disavows that loss. In doing so, the melancholic devours, swallows, and installs the lost object on the ego (Freud 1917). For this reason, Kristeva writes of the melancholic's intolerability of loss (Kristeva 1989) and that Derek

Hook (2017)—while predominantly focused on Lacan—argues that Freudian melancholy might better be understood through the economy of presence as opposed to loss. The loved (lost) object is, after all, hallucinated into being. The self-effacing and self-punishing acts that Freud saw as characteristic of the melancholic, are less directed toward the self and more so toward the lost object; *'I love hating you because you are still here'* (Sheils and Walsh 2017, 6). Subsequently, Freud distinguished mourning as an emptying of the world, where the mourner gradually finds a substitute for the lost object as colour and vibrancy return. In melancholia, however, we are confronted with the 'impoverishment of the ego itself', a lost object implanted as a tyranny on a dwindling ego (Freud 1917, 47).

Impoverishment returns me to that affectless state that once consumed me, that consumes S. It's hard to describe this nothingness as a sensation, as affect(less), because it felt as though there was no 'I' from which to utter speech. Still, over time, this nothingness slowly turned into a precious sadness, the shrapnel of disavowed losses, an ungrievable grief. Here something of Freud's outline of melancholy inhibits my thinking. For me, Freud, as well as Hook (though for different reasons), appear to imply that the (lost) object does not change in melancholy, but remains there, swallowed, installed upon the ego and forever unchanged (Freud 1917). Even if I hold that some losses cannot be mourned, I am not so sure this lost object remains there unchanged. While it is possible to work with Hook's emphasis on the presence of the (lost) object, I would argue that this very presence is contradictory, ambiguous, and present only through its absences and distortions, inevitably related to loss.

Therefore, lost objects are unclear and distorted, much in the way that melancholia disfigures and (de)territorialises (Deleuze and Guattari 2013) how presence can be felt through absence. Hence, we might think of a melancholic who, desperate not to lose the lost object, swallows it to retain its presence. Equally, however, we can think of someone who, through the very gesture of losing and mourning the lost-loved object, conjures them into being. This subtle difference points towards the

importance of relationality to loss, and the qualities accompanying the lost object. This is alluded to by Kristeva (1989), who writes of melancholia through the metaphor of the black sun. We can appreciate the blackness and gravity of the black sun that crushes the melancholic into an inert state. We get a real sense of what Freud meant by the impoverishment of the ego. Yet the black sun is also radiant. It is precisely this radiance of melancholy that is rarely foregrounded. Here I find an implicit connection to desire and how this intersects with loss. As Kristeva writes, it is where sadness becomes a most 'precious possession' (Kristeva 1989). Following this thought, this thesis inverts (though certainly does not dismiss) the notion that the melancholic finds loss intolerable and, instead, looks at how this intolerable loss may become desired, needed, enacted, again and again, as a way of relating. It follows both the rays of the black sun as well as its crushing gravity. What else might melancholic bodies look like? How else might we conceive of the lost object?

Here, Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian take on Melancholia further draws on this distortion and rethinking of loss and the lost object. In Žižek's reading of Lacan, melancholia is not grounded in a loss that is necessarily tied to an external event (Žižek 2000). He remarks that objects might be readily available to the melancholic, though through a very distortion and conflation between lack and loss, objects are no longer desired. Curiously, as desire is often a symptomatologic afterthought of melancholia, Žižek homes in on desire. Throughout this thesis, desire will eventually take us to the loss of the primordial Thing, the omnipotent and eternal maternal unity which never was. The melancholic, Žižek argues, conflates this primordial Thing which is fundamentally lacking, as though it were 'once possessed and then lost' (Žižek 2000, 659). He continues, 'Melancholy is not just the attachment to the lost object, but the very original gesture of its loss' (Žižek 2000, 660). It is from this vantage point that I introduce the notion of relating through loss (though, as Hook might argue, a loss which never occurs). Considering the consequence of this way of relating, I find myself in the throes of an evacuative effort,

a gesture of disembowelment and loss through which I keep alive a treasured and obscure sadness. Through this evacuative effort, I desire a 'loss of self', to dissolve into nothingness.

My intention in this thesis is not to locate a 'better' conceptualisation of melancholia but instead to offer movement around what else melancholic bodies might do. The very question is drawn from Deleuzo-Guattarian (2013) thought and is used throughout this thesis to tease out, dislodge, and trouble the psychoanalytic approach to melancholia. Here Deleuzo-Guattarian desiring machines collide with psychoanalytic lack. A combination rarely explored or appreciated, perhaps because of their radically oppositional approaches to desire. Yet, I agree with Schuster (2016), who argues that both approaches are more often too close for comfort. Both encourage dream and reverie, to rethink and open otherwise foreclosed spaces. Within this thesis, I especially home in on the tension between the 'dialectical intersubjectivity' of Lacan and the 'non-dialectical interobjectivity' of Deleuze and Guattari (Schuster 2016, 133). Through this tension and collision of both approaches, I find different ways of relating to melancholic bodies.

In contrast to psychoanalysis, I find a tangible dimension to melancholia in Deleuze and Guattari. There is a shift from the intersubjective and the lost object, to assemblages: a nightly walk, a lump of rock, a broken string (Matviyenko and Roof 2018). The non-dialectical of interobjectivity does not so much speak the language of lost objects, instead, loss is itself imminent to 'becoming' (May 2005). It asks how melancholic bodies become differently, how, and what they produce in their collision with other objects, both in their creative and destructive, *de-territorialising* capacity. Moving beyond the subject, the melancholic is a folding-in and carving out of unforeseen linkages. Could we conceive of bleakness without winter landscapes, madness without Van Gogh's earlobe, or the sterile, lifeless offices of those institutions meant to nurse us back to health? I'm thinking of the non-dialectical of mourning and melancholia through the sound of solemn footsteps in a church, the stench of roses on my mother's

casket, the purple blotches of her decaying skin imprinted on mine. It is precisely my endeavour to relate between Lacan and Deleuze where I come to engage with what Nedoh and Zevnik call a 'disjunctive synthesis' called 'Lacanzuze' (Nedoh and Zevnik 2017). Before arriving there, however, let's land on the question: What does this thesis do?

This thesis considers what happens when desire is foregrounded in relation to melancholia. As a nomadic inquiry, it wonders and wades through memories, theory, and affect, to see what they conjure and what movements they produce in relation to melancholy. Through rhizomatic movements between memories, affects, or musings on Lacanian and Deleuzian theory, the thesis begins to ask what happens when loss becomes a way of relating, and where the therapeutic relationship might go—where I, you, or S might imagine going—in the face of an ungrievable grief. Here too, I encourage the reader to dream alongside me, to see what movements close or open up in that dejected melancholic space. Without denying melancholy its bleakness and unbearable grief, I write about a distorted desire for loss that both sustains and diminishes the melancholic. In doing so, I arrive at a disjunctive synthesis between Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Schuster 2016), I find a most precious possession that never was; a melancholic who mourns the loss of something that never was and so possesses it. I trace this affect further, this desire for loss for self-loss, and the perpetual mourning of available objects. I agonise over the not-quite-rightness of it all. I attempt, frustratingly, to give these movements a place in my clinical work with S.

In short, I want the thesis to create openings for the reader to relate and become differently with melancholy. It asks, *'Where does it take you? What becomes in you?'* Through the different layers and approaches to the lost object, melancholia. Through Deleuze and Guattari, I notice the absence of desire and consider what happens when we rekindle its connection with melancholia. It puts me in touch with a precious sadness, one that at once detaches me, yearns to dissolve into nothingness, as

much as it yearns to stay with this very gesture of loss that is beyond words, beyond my ability to mourn.

Like Julia Kristeva in *black sun: Depression and Melancholia*, I ask how I can write of melancholia, and how else could it have meaning, if the writing did not come from that melancholic abyss (Kristeva 1989)? With her words in mind, I enquire into melancholy and the 'loss of self' in much the same way a client explores what ails in the counselling room. Engaging with experience near research (Bondi and Fewell 2016), the nomadic process wanders and wonders (Tamas 2010). Reminiscent of Ogden's writing on thinking, being, and dreaming, I look to engage with those unconscious processes and symbolism that appear through the writing. In this way, the reader will encounter different threads of life stories, memories and affects to see what territories they bring to awareness. I subsequently ground my inquiry through the tensions created by psychoanalytic voices and post-modern ontologies. As a practitioner, I attempt to use these schools of thought to reflect 'from and about' affect, imagery, reveries, and experience. In doing so I draw from Froggett et al's notion of thinking 'from and about experience' (Froggett, Ramvi and Davies 2015) and Karren Serra's notion of contextual and opaque reflexivity (Undurraga 2021). Especially Serra's opaque reflexivity touches on the ambiguous and abstract movements that, within the clinical setting, are rarely made sense of or clarified. I cannot assume to relay a transparent or unproblematic, coherent meaning. Though, affect and messiness can be digested and sensed in messy ways.

As aforementioned, I tie melancholy to the 'loss of self', which positions me as a researcher. The words 'loss of self' echoed through me since my mother's death and my father's subsequent illness. In response to these losses in my early teens, I wrote a short booklet called 'the loss of an illusion', which was about the disillusionment of a cohesive 'self' bound by a maternal spell. Unable to feel a sense of vibrancy between 'self and other', deadness pervaded. It was as though I had lost a self, which was

never there in the first place. Perhaps this very same notion of ‘losing something that never was’ is itself a melancholic creation. The therapist in me, however, regards the ‘loss of self’ as a fantasy for disinhibition. It once spoke to my recurrent fantasy of dissolving into nothingness, to untether and become ether. I consider the ‘loss of self’ first as a paradoxical desire that seeks to untether from the very relational tensions that bring ‘self’ into being. It straddles between a desire for self-loss that promises the ecstasy of divine union with the ‘other’ as much as it evokes a dread of losing a sense of I-ness. Is there not something melancholic within the liminal space of life and death? Is loss not also that existential pinch to let us know life is still real, or real in its nightmarishness? Throughout my writing I remain unsure whether this speaks to a desire for death, loss, or pre-oedipal unity.

The following chapter takes the reader through my justification using Deleuze and Nomadism in conjunction with psychoanalysis. Here I write about the subtle parallels and departures between nomadic writing, counselling, and psychotherapy. In much the same way that I contract with clients by outlining the ethical boundaries and limitations of the work, I also consider what ethics my grappling with melancholy espouses for this thesis. Subsequently, ambiguity permeates, and what ensues—what is already and always ongoing—is a nomadic movement to and fro. For this reason, my literature review does not have a separate section but is woven into the rest of this thesis precisely because not doing so would suggest linearity and that a clear narrative can be followed. The reader can therefore expect sudden pauses and shifts in prose and style. The chapters here serve only as a point of reference which the reader may choose to follow. Each chapter is part of an assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 2013) of melancholy that can be turned around, palpated, or put on its head to see whether it works for you, and what it elicits. In line with psychoanalytic thought, I aim to bring awareness to contradictions, foreclosures, reversals, and moments I avoid. It is precisely these processes that speak to how I, as a researcher, undoubtedly shape and bend what knowledge is produced as I am produced by it.

## Ontological tensions

Radden (2002) tells us that a recurring motif of melancholia throughout history is that it is an affliction of misery without apparent cause. Ambiguity permeates, and Freud similarly observed that we cannot see what absorbs the melancholic so or what has truly been lost (Freud 1917). For this reason, I wanted to utilise an ontological and methodological approach that could incorporate ambiguity into its very praxis. How I come to know about melancholy becomes less about ontological discoveries and more about an interchange of processual but context-sensitive movements. Life events, affects, or theories—in research as in counselling practice—are continuously returned to, though never in the self-same way (Barad 2014). In this regard, making sense turns into sense-making (Linck 2008). Within a Deleuzian frame, this encompasses a tactile dimension which Aaron Schuster refers to as Deleuze’s ‘non-dialectical interobjectivity’ (Schuster 2016). For me, this term foregrounds how the client and I find, palpate, and turn over various objects (objects relations, thoughts, fantasies, literal objects) in the dark, only to find something has changed. We have ‘become’ differently. In contrast, the ‘dialectical intersubjectivity’ (Schuster 2016) of Lacan—though I draw more prominently on Winnicott and Klein specifically within counselling practice—evokes the ambiguity of relational processes through dialogue, symbolism, and experience to see what insights emerge, what they foreclose or enable. Despite the differences between Deleuze and Lacan, I see a running thread in their endeavour of unsettling thought that has been foreclosed to allow again for movement and to offer us different ways of relating.

Therefore, Deleuze and Guattari<sup>1</sup> offer an approach to ontology well suited to this thesis. Where discovery is so often characterised by finding underlying structures, Deleuze turns ontology on its

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<sup>1</sup> I draw primarily from the joint works of Deleuze and Guattari. Despite this, Deleuze can be seen to hold a more prominent presence, as he often does in scholarly work. Though my ontological movements are informed by what may be more recognised as ‘Deleuzian philosophy’, I want to honour their joint works as a writing assemblage. Consequently, I often use their names interchangeably or refer to them as D&G.

head, looking instead at what can be created (May 2005). Creation is their *modus operandi*, though not creation in the fictive sense. Instead, their approach is grounded in a materialist movement seeking (dis)connections between objects and part objects which puts forward their Spinozist question: *what else can bodies do?* (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). Their philosophy is one of palpating and seeing where affects and lines of flight take us. I am curious about what the reader might sense, what works for you, which connections take you somewhere, and which do not. Can something be created in the intersection between desire, loss of self, and melancholy? I am not looking to answer such a question, but instead to leave the inquiry ongoing. I appreciate Todd May's insight when he states that 'Being is not a puzzle to be solved...but a problem to be engaged' (May 2005). Matthew Link adds to this insight that problems are not conceptually separate entities to be overcome, but are instead constitutive elements of being (Linck 2008).

Subsequently, I ground my inquiry in Deleuze and Guattari's use of 'difference' (Deleuze 2004). 'Difference' does not point toward dissimilarity or opposition. Instead, it asks what else might be possible in the liminal space of ontological categories, such as melancholy (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). As Linck (2008) clarifies, being is synonymous with difference. In other words, difference is not subjugated to identity but constitutive of it. Ontological formations are themselves multiplicities and rhizomatic structures (May 2005), meaning that melancholia can be mapped along multiple roots and off-shoots. When I am writing about melancholia or when you, the reader, let your eyes glide over these words, difference is imminent to this process. There are cracks and fissures in the letters, and we cannot hope to abstract from them a meaning that is placed elsewhere. Rather, through the imminent differences in writing, thinking, and witnessing, I ask, how does difference create the melancholic body, and how do I, S, or you as the reader, become with it? This latter point is also visible in Foucault, who encourages us to 'think otherwise' (Denzin and Lincoln 2017), or within a psychotherapeutic frame, to 'relate otherwise'.

Subsequently, my interest in difference is aimed at relational tension. Deleuze and Guattari become an unsettling nuisance. Throughout these chapters they intrude on Freud's approach to melancholia, or Lacan's thinking around desire and the anxious gaze. For example, in my chapter on Freud, I use 'difference' by using a topographical reading of mourning and melancholia based on Michael Eigen's work (Eigen 2004). A topographical approach does not look for meaning but instead looks at the surface use of Freud's words and textual devices and contextual positioning of the writer and considers what alternatives this offers. It foregrounds the textual qualities and what they emphasise about the intensity of mourning (Eigen 2004). What might be produced between these divergent accounts from a more accepted reading of Freud? Alternatively, I use 'difference' to obscure the oppositional accounts of Desire that Lacan and Deleuze to create a Lacaneuzian offshoot. It further mystifies this distinction between desire and lack or as forces that create to consider the de-territorialising, emptying forces that create lack and melancholic desire.

This leads me to my use of 'assemblage' through which desiring machines come to produce and animate bodies (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). Assemblage is how different forces and objects collide to create something. For example, when black clothes meet the cemetery, it tends to create a mourning assemblage. The significance of this is how Deleuze problematises the intersubjective frame of psychoanalysis, bringing mourning and melancholia outside internalised 'human' bodies. In this way we get a more pointed glimpse of how melancholia can live on surfaces. The 'internal' is nothing other than external surfaces folded inward. Crucially, it is the collision of surfaces that produces and does something which Deleuze regards as desire, which he often uses in conjunction with the word 'machine' (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). Rather than something mechanic, the desiring machine point toward the production of bodies and what these set in motion as they assemble.

Karen Serra (2022) further encourages thinking about how assemblages produce certain ways of relating. It is important to note, however, that assemblages do not denote an idealistic or unitary functionality. Again, difference is constitutive of becoming. Even though some composites come together, they may do so in discordant ways that might not work. For example, in my writing of melancholic assemblages takes me into the territory of gender. Through a psychoanalytic engagement with Butler (1995) and Nancy Chodorow (2011), I look at the foreclosed and disavowed movements between my experiences of fathers and sons. I grapple with a distorted masculinity that seems to thrive on what it repudiates; my gendered body cannot find traction with a grief out of sight and memory. The psychoanalytic verbiage of foreclosure and disavowal dialogues with what is (dis)assembled and I see a young boy unsure of what he needs from his father and confused about what he might offer the world in his fathered image.

*Wait.... Something's not quite right. What about that dreadful inertia? What movement is there in melancholic deadness? Inert and pinned to my bed, a red-eyed insomniac. Time slows to a halt, then glitches. Heavy, why do I feel so heavy? Are assemblages and desiring machines not too life-affirming in the face of melancholic abyss? Doesn't Aaron Schuster (2016) warn us that for Deleuze especially, 'desire is not impeded by any melancholic impasse'?*

If we are to take literally that *'desire is not impeded by any melancholic impasse'*, then for Deleuze and Guattari, melancholy would appear to manifest as an ontological injury. Cut off from desire, such a body appears placed in a glass vitrine where it mourns the place it once inhabited the world (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). If this is so, the melancholic would appear incapable of 'becoming' (becoming differently or becoming through assemblage) due to its separation with the imminence of the desiring machine. Yet, this departure from imminence is at odds with Deleuze. As a consequence, melancholy becomes the very transcendental exception that proves the rule. We come to find a melancholic body

that is truly inert, not just affectively or spiritually, but totally and utterly immovable. Maybe this speaks into something true about melancholia, though it would appear the melancholic is more dead than alive. Too dead, beyond dead. Misery lives, and so does agony, and I recall how empty, dead, and miserable I felt. Affect is alive, and I think there is an argument to be made that melancholy does not impede desire. Something else is happening, we just don't know what yet.

In keeping Guattarian ontology alive, I do not accept the notion that relationality and desire have altogether ceased in melancholia, as though melancholic objects (or subjects) are suddenly positioned outside or beyond the ontological frame imminence that D&G put forward (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). In doing so, however, I must occasionally attempt to theoretically justify bringing Guattarian desire as positivity into a psychoanalytically tinged frame of negativity. How can melancholic desire be a Guattarian force of becoming when it is something that empties out, and brings bodies into negativity? This is a difficult question, since D&G's approach to desire is often seen as a creative force. For psychoanalysis, it is precisely this 'positive and creative force' that fails to describe why desire so often brings us pain and misery.

This sense of unbecoming, or desire as a movement toward a 0 point, its exhaustion, and ruptures, is also grounded in the psychoanalytic notion of desire as lack (Schuster 2016). Deleuze and Guattari's (1972) *Anti-Oedipus*, of course, is a critique of lack, accusing psychoanalysis of not being able to look at desire beyond the intersubjective and the Oedipal configurations upon which much of psychoanalytic thinking is grounded (Horrocks 1997). For this reason, existing literature typically separates the two. Lines are drawn, and sides are taken.

However, if I pose the question again, *how can melancholic desire be a Guattarian force of becoming when it is also something that empties out and brings bodies into negativity?* Schuster (2016) entertains the possibility of understanding assemblage itself as creating lack rather than conceiving of lack as innate to desire within the Lacanian thesis. This is also apparent in the work of Nedoh and Zevnik (2017) who similarly write about the encounter between Deleuze and Lacan they call Lacanuze. Both authors argue that the difference between these two schools of thought are much more subtle. In keeping Deleuzian ontology in its problematic relationship with melancholy, my emphasis on desire finds slightly different notes, looking for the off-beat. Where Deleuze writes of desire as a process of becoming, I lay the emphasis on desire related to unbecoming and unravelling. Where Deleuze writes of assemblage, I emphasise de-territorialisation as also being assemblage. This slight inversion, however, (as I think Deleuze would argue also) is just another way of becoming differently.

Why is this important for this thesis? Because Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) notion of desire troubles Lacan, Kristeva, and Freud's approach to the lost object and the relational undercurrents of melancholic affect. Inert bodies, lost bodies, much like lost objects, are never solely themselves. Thinking with assemblage dislodges how the lost object is conceived as something located specifically within an intersubjective dynamism. Where Psychoanalysis notices the absences and presences of the lost object, Deleuze and Guattari insist this does something. Merely seeing melancholy as a failure to mourn forecloses our thinking about what this might offer and enact in the therapeutic relationship. As a therapist, it allows me to approach the melancholy with a softer gaze, no longer being too concerned by bringing the client to a place of truly losing or killing the lost other, or repositioning within the symbolic order (Lacan), or re-introjecting and tolerating those good qualities and ambivalences within a fragmented object relation (Klein). Instead, Deleuze and Guattari steer straight into the lostness of it all, wanting to embody the relationality it produces.

When S and I sit down for our session, a draft in the room gives me chills. It pronounces a distance I feel from S. It becomes us. The words S speaks that ricochet off the walls and fall on the floor do so not just because of S, but because of its assemblage with the counselling machine that demands we speak inside these four walls that hold our secrets. Is there not something melancholy, then, about counselling? This brings me to nomadism as my method of inquiry, which, not unlike counselling, journeys messily across terrains.

### Nomadism

This leads me to my use of nomadism as a tool for inquiry. Echoing Sophie Tamas, nomadism evokes a process of wondering and wandering (Tamas 2010). To align with my ontological approach, I wanted my methodology to be able to engage with its own ruptures and contradictions, as opposed to a methodology that locates itself outside of its subject matter. In other words, to find a methodology that is imminent to its relationship with what it is writing about. It is here that I found nomadism as an approach that allows the researcher and reader to engage in their own free associative process to see how relational qualities emerge through the writing. Like the melancholic fantasy of the loss of self, I wanted my methodology to be able to lose itself to a melancholic stupor. In this light, nomadism is less a methodology and more a practice which fragments its own boundaries. Sometimes it dozes off in a sleepy corner when, suddenly, writing about gender creates an awkward moment at the urinal. In what follows, I present two examples of how nomadism has been used within research literature. I then take an abrupt turn into how I use nomadism as a form of free association borne out of necessity. Wandering is fraught with peril, and it is easy to get lost wondering.

I approach nomadism as Deleuzian ontology at work. This is most apparent in Gale and Wyatt (2009) and St. Pierre (1997), whom I foreground because they similarly dissolve the divide between the object of research and the subject, no longer seeing methodology as outside or framing the research. It gives a sense of how nomadism is itself something embodied by (and with) what it is writing about. Drawing

from Deleuze, they write of the constant shifts between striated spaces—which are spaces that are defined, coded, and translated (Deleuze and Guattari 1980 in St Pierre 1997)—and smooth spaces in which boundaries are transgressed, and objects move freely but without autonomy or clear coordinates. Both authors attempt nomadism by traversing smooth spaces. St. Pierre (1997) is quick to warn us, however, that such spaces are not inherently liberatory. This is echoed by Gale and Wyatt in a more embodied sense when they write about nomadically stuttering into being. Stuttering because the sudden de-territorialisation of self-representational voice has a confounding effect, leaving their conjoined writing both entangled and vulnerable. Nomad thought traverses through territories but in doing so, does not occupy space, but rather seeks to de-territorialise, to prepare spaces for different connections (St. Pierre 1997).

St. Pierre's nomad homes in on a capacity for thought that can be free of itself. I read her 1997 paper *smooth spaces of the field* as an ethical proposal as a way of engaging with data. Ethical because there appears an imperative to *think otherwise* based on the Foucauldian notion of 'getting free of oneself'. In other words, she is looking to unsettle the structures that implicate systems that restrict. For example, in her research on women in her hometown, she writes and revisits familiar discourses, motifs, and desires that have produced particular subjectivities. In doing so, she puts a finger on the striated spaces of patriarchal devices embedded in speech and context and begins to sense for openings of smooth spaces (St. Pierre 1997). Again, rather than looking for an inherently liberatory movement within these smooth spaces, she finds instead painful moments of de-subjectification which, tentatively, offer some opportunities to erode and break down such patriarchal structures that are often returned to. This point is perhaps best expressed when St. Pierre writes, 'If language no longer reflects the truth, then such subjects are free to rethink and redescribe the world' (St. Pierre 1997, 406). While this echo's a potential ethic the 'loss of self' can offer in line with Foucault's notion

of 'getting free of oneself', I would imagine the depth, dread and ecstasy of psychic work needed to become such free subjects.

Subsequently, St. Pierre pushes further this notion of nomadism as rethinking language in relation to what she calls transgressive data (St. Pierre 2003). She argues for broadening the scope of data in qualitative work to include dream data, emotional and sensual data (St. Pierre 2003). This does not only advocate for a wider use and validity of how other types of data (often relegated and dismissed by institutions) can bring us closer to areas of inquiry. The nomad, however, might use transgressive data to cause ruptures or to flatten boundaries and foreground failures in establishing connections. It is a nomad attempting to become free of forces that constrain thought. For this reason, St. Pierre also holds that 'reason' or intelligible thought itself is not to be privileged. Instead, she argues that the unexpected and smooth spaces are likely found by writing into unintelligibility (St. Pierre 2003).

The nomad of Gale and Wyatt (2009) moves more so through gestures of writing. Their nomadizing foregrounds how their writing produces one another, shifting unexpected boundaries that are laid bare throughout their exchanges. There is a nomad that is mapping out desiring intensities that emerge through collaboration (Gale and Wyatt 2009). They use the notion of 'haecceity', which draws out the different and unique use of voice, which does something to the writing in the way it conjoins and separates. Gale and Wyatt (2009) foreground how my writing is never done in isolation but coagulates or ruptures the different parts of myself I monologue with in my thesis, which are always inseparable from that 'other'. Such a monologue does not map any internal territory but is an inextricable part of exterior assemblages. Again, I think of my enmeshment with S, and the impossibility of disentangling the various selves, cultural, and ideological movements that rip together-apart (Barad 2014). Gale and Wyatt's (2009) nomadism and writing reminds me perhaps more so of the Lacanian notion that *I* do not *speak* but that *I* am spoken, just as when I write, *I am*

*written*, meaning that my active use of voice does not stem from any autonomous or locatable speaker but erupts from the unconscious. Deleuze and Guattari would most likely such an unconscious as folds and creases of exterior forces.

However, there are some differences in how I approach nomadism. For me, my nomadic inquiry is particularly tied to a necessity. Here specifically, I am thinking about the necessity that nomadism itself elicits. A delightful daydream, wandering from a trail, or free association, are not themselves free. Thought does not decide where it wants to go; there are confrontations with images and feelings, and there is little to do but to traverse its landscape or attempt to snap out of such stream of (un)consciousness thinking. In my use of nomadism, I make use of divergent pieces of literature not only because I feel drawn to them, but because I cannot help myself. There is a violence that underpins this nomad that helplessly oscillates between striated and smooth spaces and can scarce hold on. If St. Pierre (1997) points toward the idea that the nomad does not inhabit space, but becomes with space, I consider how this is both terrifying and euphoric. Here again I touch on this elusive notion of 'self-loss' in conjunction with melancholia. It seems to evoke a sense of untethering, unbecoming, or conversely becoming in unison with the 'other' as the boundaries of self dissipate. This perhaps makes light of what Deleuze means by the artificial division between subject and being (Deleuze and Guattari 2013).

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I invoke the dinkus (\*). There is a cut on the page, a rupture without necessarily signalling a digression. It is a little mound on which to pivot and the opportunity for me to change my presence and voice through the writing. Such an abrupt intrusion also allows me to shift in how I engage with you, the reader. The dinkus allows disjointed responses or divergent thoughts to find their way into the writing.

This feels important because something of the writing has felt too linear. Of course, such cohesion is also to be expected in the opening pages. I am still setting out the frame, and I am still contracting with you by laying out what I intend to do, and where we might go. We are still going over those tricky bits of consent, not knowing what either of us will find. Going straight into the thickets of melancholy, loss, and desire, feels untenable. Yet, there are too many constraints on where the writing wants to go.

It's stormy out. From where I sit, I can hear the wind's billowing lift the wooden frames of the windowsill. Like a brittle rib cage, the frame creaks and splinters, unable to contain the torrent of air barely holding together the large sheets of single-pane glass. Peering outside, beads of water are now dancing like little black pebbles on the concrete below. It's hypnotic though the violent jerk of wind doesn't let me fully lose myself to the ripples and currents. The curtains flutter, and I pull my blanket over me. I'm unsure how to proceed with the writing. I'm on my third cup of tea, and I feel too impatient to continue gazing through the window. When I can't write, I need to walk. However, it's too miserable today. Again, more constraints, impingements on movement, and a fear of stagnation. Walking is how I process. I settle for pacing in my room.

Walking as a deliberate process was once a nightly ritual I began when my mother was first diagnosed with cancer. It became a nocturnal walking habit that stuck well into my mid 20's. For some reason, the dark of night, and the sparse twinkling of rural lights or stars offered me permission and a small allowance of movement. When most were asleep and the traces of everyday noise had snuffed out, I would walk downstairs. I remember my mother's laboured breath from the hospital bed we had placed in the living room. I'd carefully slip out the kitchen door and walk from the grassy fields from my house into the forest. It was addictive to be alone in the dark, a stillness that somehow held so much vibrancy.

Sometime after my mother passed and my father became ill, my life ground to a halt. During the day, my body was pinned to the bed, rendering it completely inert. Only in the dead of night was this inertia seemingly lifted, sometimes having to wait until one in the morning until I was allowed to move once again. I'd cross the bridge into a long and narrow farm road. After some time, I would arrive at a large steel gate, unlatch its lever, and walk where no artificial light shone (hard enough to find such a place in the Netherlands). Nomadism was the necessity that brought me there, it was the deadness of it all that was teeming with life, it was the breath I could take before I plunged back into decay.

What nomadism becomes through melancholy and nightly walks is perhaps best portrayed by Derek Hook (2017). For him, melancholy is partly characterised by an intolerability of the symbolic. Through a brief analysis of the film *Into the Wild*, he outlines how the supposed melancholic protagonist Mr McCandless becomes a literal nomad by shedding his symbolic ties. He burns his books and bridges with family and friends and leaves behind his own name to become 'Supertramp' as he ventures into the wilderness. In a sense, McCandless de-territorialise the societal markings that oblige or impose rules on relating. Hook (2017) attempts to demonstrate how everyday obligations that pin McCandless to the symbolic have become intolerable for him. It denotes a desire to become unbound and undone as even his assumed name, 'Supertramp', is less a name and more a descriptor. It is from this perspective that the loss of self (self as symbolic?) is most powerfully connected with melancholia, and my own wish to dissolve into nothingness on my own nightly walks. Much like the protagonist in the film, I see a parallel with my own coming-to-life at night, a time when there is a disruption or distortion of the symbolic. I had that same yearning to become with the night, though I knew I never could.

Is there a likeness between nomadism and melancholia when St. Pierre (2003) encourages us to write into 'unintelligibility'? For me, this creates an intriguing parallel with Derek Hook (2017) and how nomadism disrupts the symbolic order. Again, we can recall here how Kristeva (1987) similarly writes of asymbolia in the melancholic and how words betray and abandon the speaker. Nevertheless, an important difference from St. Pierre is that her nomad does not write into unintelligibility for the sake of burning bridges and becoming an untethered, solitary wanderer. Yet, thinking with Deleuze and Guattari I do not want to lose sight of what such symbolic disruption does or creates. There is something about nightly walks and bodies that become suddenly animated at one in the morning, whereas during the day, they remain pinned by the gravity of the black sun, perhaps rendered immobile from what has become intolerable as being a part of the symbolic, the obligation to family, to work, to being a well-adjusted citizen.

I am suspicious, however, of the absence of desire. I resonate with what Hook and Kristeva show us around the apparent asymbolia and the destruction of the symbolic of the melancholic. Yet it very much emphasises again an intolerability for the 'too muchness' of a traumatic lost object. As Hook himself observes in *McCandless*, I ask, can I not also see in that young boy that I was, walking in the dead of night, a desperate affirmation of life? Is there not also something of desire omitted from the process of melancholy? We are not quite there yet; some bits of nomadism and ethics remain to be shared. We return to walking shortly.

Hence, within the confines of this dinkus, I have put to use St. Pierre's (2003) notion of transgressive data, though with a literal twist. The dinkus can be thought of through Deleuze's use of 'difference' as a transgression of what ordinarily coaxes both writer and reader into a false sense of cohesion. I am not thinking, as St. Pierre does, of dream or movement data, but that transgression itself produces something. It is how I understand what Braidotti refers to as perspectivism (Braidotti 2017). For this

thesis, such plurality of perspectives is important in how they foreground different layers in approaching melancholy, loss, desire, and lost objects. Such perspectives are not simply a consequence of theoretical differences. Getting closer to melancholy is not just about getting the differences between Klein, Lacan, or Freud. Transgressive data is how reading Klein in the cemetery can suddenly bring out something unexpected. Ken Gale (2018) reminds us that our use of methodology, despite its attempts to bracket and mould, is imbued with the 'madness' of the researcher. Though here, in a Deleuzian way, I try to trouble this distinction between subject and methodology. Nomadism and melancholy are a worrisome pair. They bring out the distortions in one another.

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Ken Gale writes about nomadism as a 'methodogenesis' as opposed to a methodology which forms 'bodies as established categories' (Gale 2018, 17). He bases his conceptualisation of methodogenesis on Manning's use of the term ontogenesis, describing bodies as always in the process of becoming and producing through other forces. The writing is evocative of 'madness'. It's as though he asks his readers to nomadically search for the tears in fabric, getting as close to madness as we can allow ourselves to see differently. Again, Gale similarly bases his writing on the Deleuzo-Spinozist question, what else a body can do. Here, I also resonate with Joughin's use of the word 'délirer, which describes 'going off the rails and to wonder in imagination and thought' (Deleuze 1995, 186). For me, this mirrors the 'loss of self' as a sense of ontological derailment. This is why I regard methodogenesis as a philosophy of becoming, proposing an ethical and creative way of relating through research. Simply put, if I ask how my reader comes to 'know' about melancholy and the loss of self, methodogenesis would say we know through becoming. This connects with what Barad refers to as onto-ethico-epistemology. In this way, the research, writing, and subject mutually produce one another. There is no inter-action, as in, one interacts as a singularity with another as singularity and subsequently

coalesce. Rather, there is 'intra-action' in how all particles are already in a relational process with one another (Barad 2014).

Alternatively, it would also have been possible for me to draw on Barad toward a new materialist perspective of the loss of self. This is because their use of 'entanglement' and 'intra-action' (Barad 2014) map on well with the inextricable and co-created ways that intersubjectivity comes into being. Baradian thought also emanates something of the 'loss of self' as a move away from the subject toward a more ecological and post-human view of melancholia and mourning. However, it is precisely the felt and affective qualities of loss that would become too obscure in relation to the lived experience of mourning. It would, for that reason, also have been more difficult to find a synthesis between Barad and psychoanalysis for the purposes of this research. Here I feel Guattari especially allows me to move closer to sense and the tactile. Simo Køppe and Tobias-Renstrøm argue against the Baradian notion of intra-action primarily because it is at odds with the phenomenological sense of me-ness (Tobias-Renstrøm and Køppe 2020). For them, part of the subject is lost in the process (Tobias-Renstrøm and Køppe 2020). This argument may also apply to Deleuze and Guattari, who are less interested in 'selves' and experience. However, their emphasis on intensity and assemblage speaks more readily into desire and its potential intersection with loss, which I write about in conjunction with the notion of de-territorialization. Nevertheless, Barad's insight into the co-constitutive onto-ethico-epistemological forces remains valuable as a way to consider how the choices in this paper, the writer/audience, and the ethical frame have produced one another.

There is madness in the method and the researcher, just as there is madness to psychotherapy. Much like Gale argues, it is not a madness that needs to be foreclosed or stigmatised. Much of madness may not even come to awareness, only to be discovered later through the cracks and fissures of surfaces that have always been porous. Nomadism lends itself well to the therapeutic encounter, which takes

on nomadic qualities as client and therapist find themselves in different territories, intensities and affects. In a Lacanian sense, I may have some autonomy to speak, but I am mostly spoken. For me the unconscious is formed from those many experiences and affects folded into us, that like a wave, spills some of its deep dark back onto the sand from whence it came.

Melancholy has been well established in a range of different voices in psychoanalysis. However, few offer clinical vignettes foreground the melancholy of the practitioner. It is here that this thesis takes an experience-near stance. I share my own experiences of melancholy because I am also curious about yours. Alas I can't know, but for this reason I nonetheless felt it was crucial that in thinking with melancholy that I also write about my own clinical work with my client S. This would also give a more embodied, context-dependent account of how melancholy and the 'loss of self' intersect in the therapeutic space. Both in the way it puts theory into practice, but also because it allows me to work through ontological knots between Deleuze and different psychoanalytic voices in a more pointed and visceral way. It is not so much putting theory into practice as acknowledging there is theory everywhere; there is an element of ethical practice of how it is present in the therapeutic relationship.

This seems the most appropriate time to let you know that my client S, is an imaginal client (Fang 2020). She is the amalgamation of my work as a counsellor as much as she is drawn from my own life experiences. Only retrospectively do I recognise how she came into being—or more viscerally stitched into being—through my writing. Through her, I dialogue with parts of my mother and equally myself in my early twenties I was pinned to my bed grief-stricken. Her gender, (which I write about in the section on gender melancholy) has surprisingly contained those unconscious parts of me I was not aware of. It is partially through her that I explore the loss of self and melancholy.

My use of imaginal clients for research is principally inspired by the work of Nini Fang (Fang 2020), which offers fertile grounds for an encounter with loss of self and melancholy at an affective and experiential depth. Fang (2020) argues that imaginal dialogue is engaged with that relational 'other' in a way that is socially motivated, where nomadic writing itself can come to embody a more dialogical and intersubjective, as opposed to a monological frame (Fang 2020). By using a Fairbairnian model, Fang looks to liberate the internalised Freudian tripartite object structure from its internal rigidity. While I rely heavily on Klein in my own work, I write in agreement with Fang toward an object relating that is more psychosocially oriented. Perhaps most crucially, Imaginal dialogue can give a voice to those object relations that sometimes elude us in the unconscious (Fang 2020). Fang makes a note of those self-critical or praising voices that are deeply nestled in the unconscious and 'require some help' to bring them out into internal dialogue (Fang 2020). For me, this has come in the form of 'S' who helps me do just that, to bring out those different object relations that stretch between the loss of my mother, the deadness I felt, but also those complicated social events between gender and institutional mourning that run implicitly through everyday exchanges. This, too, becomes a part of nomadizing and fits well with St. Pierre's notion of transgressive data (St. Pierre 2003).

Having already introduced you to S, you may already have a sense of my practice. For the remainder of the thesis, I make no clear distinction between psychodynamic or psychoanalytic, both so enmeshed and respectively fragmented through specific theoretical voices. It also feels important for you to know that S will show up unexpectedly; the work we do is always present. This is also because the thesis, the writing, data gathering, and its ontology, are grounded in how I conceive of the therapeutic process. There is no knowing where a session will go. There are ideas and fantasies, intuitions, as much as there are affects to follow, flee, sit with, or make sense of. However, any clear direction defies being imposed. Ambiguity is pervasive, and I wonder what encounters become possible in that strange intersection between loss, desire, and melancholy.

## Melancholic Ethic

It is easy for me to get ahead of myself in the obscurity of it all without considering how this is always imbued with an ethic. Through nomadism, you and I might find ourselves becoming specific political agents. Following Deleuze once again, such an ethic does not frame this thesis in a way that it stands outside of it. Rather, it is imminently produced when melancholic bodies congregate (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). Their collision with the political machine not only produces a relationality, but it moves and impacts. Ethics happen, and what kind do melancholic bodies espouse?

In writing about the coexistence of melancholy, Timothy Morton (2018) writes: 'Trying to get rid of ecologically induced depression could be a violence that risks reproducing the very conditions that imperil coexistence' (Matviyenko and Roof 2018). So, what is melancholy telling us? Within the context of this discussion, I prefer the term melancholy not only because it is less territorialised by the vernacular of medical models (Fang 2016), but also because I feel it can tell a unique story about the impossibility of mourning and its embeddedness in ethics. Yes, melancholia has something to say. However, I also want to ask what melancholic bodies do when faced with an ethical dilemma. It feels important to this thesis in the way I hope to foster an awareness of its potential ramifications. Though such inquiry into ethics is too great to fully appreciate here, it is nonetheless possible for you and me to get a sense of where we might find ourselves in relation to such ethics. My intention is to map my awareness of its presence and my uncertainty in it.

Gender, race, and class relations contend with disavowal and ongoing violence the historical scale of which questions the very gesture, possibility, and ethics of mourning. It foregrounds a collective melancholy that strikes at the heart of an ethical dilemma that calls for social action sometimes portrayed in opposition to—as though it is separate from—a more passive response of lamentation

and endless mourning. From traumatic silences, and the silence of trauma, appears a moral imperative to give injustices a voice. Perhaps such listening is the very gesture which allows collective mourning to take place. Still, the wounds are deep, the repetition of violence and trauma seemingly endless. I can't help but feel that something between political bodies is irrevocably lost, always imbued with a sense of being estranged, always aware of the potential for violence. My frustration is that I can't put my finger on it, though it compels me into a sadness that doesn't feel outwardly politically active. I don't join protests. I sulk.

Where melancholic ethics takes me toward sulking about irreconcilability and loss, Morton (2018) instead observes that we are increasingly confronted by a series of global shifts that will themselves demand an ethic. Morton refers to this as hyperobjects. These can be understood as global movements such as climate change or social inequality which themselves increasingly dictate how we coexist (Morton 2018). Morton emphasises how these ongoing movements themselves evidence coexistence by regarding hyperobjects through the lens of a melancholy that is inextricably ecological and interdependent. Melancholy, he writes, is object-like in how they leave imprints of their appearance, lingering on an event horizon that can never be grasped, yet its very imprint moves with all other objects (Morton 2018). I find his exposition of hyperobjects aligns itself well with the imminence of Deleuze and how race, gender, or sexed assemblages themselves produce an ethic. Still, I find myself wanting Morton to say more about what melancholic coexistence would look like and why he regards it as an ethic. I can't help but look at the climate crises as something that shows the farcical nature of coexistence as that imminent relationality that will drive us into catastrophe. We can all rejoice in our coexistence as we watch each other burn.

A helpful parallel is evident in the ending of Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* which sees the planet 'Melancholia' hurtling toward Earth; a literal object of destruction which takes on the physical

proportions of Morton's hyper-objects which, for me, represents the inevitability of climate change. Out of all the characters that witness their oncoming death, it is curiously Justine—the lead character who suffers from melancholy and depression—that faces death with a strange serenity as the massive planet crashes into Earth. Slavoj Žižek has since observed in an interview with Big Think (2012) that Justine's serenity is not a passive indifference captured by the thought '*the world is ending, so why bother*'. He claims it is her acceptance of death that denotes an almost spiritual attitude that strengthens ethical activity. Why or how, he does not say. In contrast, I don't think the audience can know or transparently interpret why Justine embraced her death as she did.

However, I find something pointed in this example. It reminds me how S, much like some of my other clients, talk of climate change, social inequality, or global collapse, as though it is an apocalypse which has already happened; '*it's already too late, we're beyond the point of return*'. Yet, much like Žižek observes, their utterances rarely indicate indifference or an attempt to condone nihilistic hedonism through the shrugging gesture, '*we might as well*'. There remains, despite that something is felt to be already lost, an elusive ethic at play, an odd determination of bodies remaining bound, perhaps even dutiful, to a world that appears increasingly lost. I find through my clients a melancholic response which maybe speaks to what Morton alludes to about coexistence. Through these losses, we still find something dutiful or magically bound to that lost other that lives in us.

My clients help bring an awareness of a melancholy that I will later in this thesis refer to as a way of relating through loss. In this case, it is relating through a loss that has not (yet) happened, or potentially, the loss of which we cannot conceive. Again, I'm uncertain. I can't fully see what ethic this proposes. I can only find myself uncomfortably in a place of a pensive sadness and inertia that, in some sense, feels duty bound to the other, and equally, suspiciously inert, and uninvolved. I feel like the

discussion, the politics of it, my immanence as a political agent, is too big and complicated. Like a child, I'm attempting to pull my head through an oversized jumper, but I can't seem to find the way through.

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It's the last few days of my mother's life. Her death is imminent, and somehow out of mind. I live in some liminal space where she is in a perpetual state of dying, unaware that at some point she will no longer be there. Time is sporadic, unpredictable, and sometimes doesn't move. Comatose, she too seems to be in a liminal space of dying, and not being dead enough, though she smells sour and musty. The gurgle, crack, and wheezing of her breath make it hard for me to breathe. I will myself to stay at her bedside a bit longer until I sprint upstairs toward my room in the attic. At least I can feel the vitality of youth in my legs and lungs, and I can shake off her deathly sick.

In response to the presence of her dying, my father, sister, and I stop eating meals together. A daily family ritual is temporarily discontinued. My sister and I pass in and out of the house like ghosts. My father remains at work until the summer nights grow cooler. We live a separate life under the same roof as we had always done. Each of us withdrew as a symbiotic response. The only trace of coexistence is her death, which lingers as an imprint on each of us.

I instinctively want to make sense of why we—my father, sister, and I—became so disconnected. Perhaps it was just too much. Perhaps it was my mother's insistence that death was not talked about. She was stoic that way, she had no use for emotions. Perhaps we couldn't speak about it because each of us had such a different relationship with her and each would have been too confronted with the sudden alterity and strangeness of the other's account; Did I really know you? It could be all these things, but I can't know. There is, of course, that affect that becomes further obscured. The feeling of

disconnection that is hard to stay with seems so contrary to coexistence that Morton talks of. It highlights the very ambiguity that Freud speaks of, that the melancholic doesn't know, can't know, what they have lost, or what they are losing.

It is strange for me to think of a melancholy ethic. This short excerpt only shares the beginning of what becomes a long string of mourning alone. Solemnity became a safe refuge. Like Justine, I was calm and serene in the face of my mother's death, as though I could really accept the end, as though I could conceive of what the loss of her would do to my father, sister, and me. I'm not sure this is an ethic of choice, whether this is an ethic at all.

Some of the authors I have cited, Butler, Morton, Gale, and Wyatt, are tapping me on my shoulder to remind me that coexistence does not imply similarity or sameness, just as a singular body is not ever ontologically singular. Maybe it is something I need to hear, that this strange but comforting solemnity is alone and isn't at the same time. The feeling was just out of reach, not entirely held in conscious thought, that throughout my aloneness, I was accompanied by so many things. As Gale and Wyatt (2009) might say, it was through ambiguity and loss that I stuttered-on-becoming. Maybe there is coexistence after all, as the three of us became like islands, drifting in space.

Here I arrive at a melancholic ethic that presents itself as a coexistent contradiction. In many ways, it emphasises the ambiguity of what it is that has been lost, and the ambivalence toward the affect that it produces. Luran Berlant (2016) writes of the importance of ambivalence while also refraining from 'positivising' it. Berlant might consider how the disruptions, silences, and distances between my father, sister and I are ambivalences that do not have to be resolved, because they already offer the very foundation for relationality. I find this a challenging thought because nothing about that time felt

relational. What do melancholic bodies produce? Here you have it: *miserable melancholics*. Illness, deadness, hate, and love settled between us, violently jerking us around. Of course, Berlant, much like the therapist in me, would encourage me to sit with ambivalence, as though misery has no more story to share of its own, as if misery is just itself.

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For Berlant (2016), the importance of melancholic ambivalence is centrally a political ethic. She argues that insecurity is often redistributed and that 'the commons' are expected to find a way of positivising such ambivalence to smooth out the 'irregular conditions of fairness' (Berlant 2016). We are expected, coaxed, and deluded into explaining and clarifying growing differences and antagonisms between political bodies. If she were a therapist, it seems the last thing she would want her clients to do is to 'make sense' and smooth out ambiguities. Berlant sees this vanquishing of ambivalence precisely as the wrong step, arguing instead that the messiness of shame, guilt, envy, or disgust, becomes the very point where we find equality (Berlant 2016). Similarly, Judith Butler argues that a melancholic self-other loss can offer a communal and relational frame from which to rethink structures (Butler 2003). They argue that what has been lost in the 'other', being beyond symbolisation, is a loss inscribed beyond the subject, a loss that is 'neither myself nor you' but a tie by which those terms are related. It offers an ethic which attempts to move beyond narcissism into that murky territory of relationality beyond our (human) selves.

What this proposes for my thesis is perhaps quite simple. The melancholic ethic merely asks us to stay with the uncertainty of what has been lost, and the unknown of what I have lost in you that somehow lives in me. It points towards coexistence, but in ways that do not attempt to resolve the contradictory or even oppositional stances bodies can take. I feel such an approach encourages thought and being

in contrast to action. I wonder where it takes you, the reader, and whether such an ethic is palatable when so much needs to shift and change. Here we may locate a gap in my thinking. This is most apparent in that my exposition of a melancholic ethic seems to diminish other aspects of Freud's account. I seem to have foregrounded the unknown of what is lost in the lost object, the ambiguity of it, but not the relationship to perpetually mourning the lost object itself. Again, I return to the illusive question of what melancholic bodies produce.

A critique of my thinking of melancholic ethics can be found in Slavoj Žižek (2004) as well as Anastasios Gaitanidis (2017). Both arguments are predicated on a closer Freudian reading of melancholy, emphasising the retention of the lost object. A melancholic ethic, for them, would reinstate the lost objects. Therefore, despite a capacity for ambivalence, the lost object resurfaces again, which means the melancholic always yearns for those same structures they also attempt to be free from. Endless mourning, Gaitanidis (2017) writes, problematises not only the possibility for something different to emerge, but also disrupts a capacity for joy. Against Butler, he argues that a melancholic ethic would turn mourning into a permanent process, making the world 'frighteningly inhospitable', making it impossible to find anything new that could bring mourning to an end. His major critique of the postmodern and Butlerian melancholic, then, is that in their perpetual state of mourning the lost object, they seek refuge in 'becoming' everything, and so risk losing nothing, and so the melancholic ends up 'losing the world' and themselves (Gaitanidis 2017, 266).

Gaitanidis touches on a fear I have for my thesis. Is my writing about what melancholic ethics produce not an extension of wanting to become everything? Arguing along similar lines as Gaitanidis, Žižek (2004) might go so far as to say that the Deleuzo-Guattarian language that I employ in this thesis, with its fluxes, flows, and fluidities, evidences a constant need to reinvent identities. He criticises such language as the pure embodiment of capitalism, which continually reinvents itself, and always

transgresses (de/reterritorialises) its own limits. Deleuzo-Guattarian theory, with its rhizomatic networks of bodies, can plug into and connect with all sorts of commodities and affects, precisely underlies contemporary capitalism (Vandenberghe 2008). From this perspective, what melancholic bodies produce are commodities, and the melancholic ethic is one which reinvents capitalist structures that are in a constant state of being lost and reinvented. Herein lies my fear of repetition, that this thesis is nothing more than a hallucination of the lost object.

Though I partly resonate with Gaitanidis's (2017) reading of mourning, I find his engagement with melancholia to be rigidly pessimistic. Gaitanidis sees mourning as lifelong, though something which is nevertheless accomplished. He argues that what becomes central to the mourning is that ambiguity becomes tolerated, and gradually the lost object is pried loose, accepted as incomplete, as other connections are allowed to be established. In a sense, something remains unknown in what we have lost in the other, though it becomes bearable over time. I am sceptical, however, in the way this is placed within the frame of a political choice or duty, which is presented, in effect, as a duty to joy as well as a collective effort to mourn. This could be problematic within a political context in the way Gaitanidis may be undermining the magnitude of foreclosure. Again, certain losses may well be unmournable. What appears pessimistic, then, is the implicit argument put forward that the melancholic mourns perpetually in the self-same way. This apparent ontological fixity is also one that is often applied to the 'lost object', which appears (perhaps true to a Freudian reading) to maintain the same rigid properties over time. Again, this position attempts to clarify and crystallise a specific and universal way in which melancholic bodies relate. In a sense, it is an attempt to make melancholic bodies unambiguous, which I feel is contrary at least to the interests of psychotherapy, where so much is often obscured, and while this obscurity might remain, one's relating to it might not. Of course, Gaitanidis might rightly ask whether I am trying to fashion a melancholic that can become everything.

I resonate with Kharkina, who argues that the lost object is obscure and never 'simply itself' (Sheils and Walsh 2017). It is from within such ambiguity that I locate a melancholic ethic. Here I consider how the melancholic, hallucinating the lost object back into being, does not always know precisely what is being wishfully hallucinated (Freud 1917). Again, the image of a loved one, or a lost loved cultural artefact, is never simply itself. What the melancholic returns to at the onset of mourning is opaque for the mourner as it is for the witnessing other.

Here a melancholic ethic shifts toward an ethic of who-ness (Cavarero 2013), one that asks, 'Who sitting across from me?' and concerns itself with their account and life's story. The nomadic subject of Deleuze and Braidotti grow restless of 'who'. In contrast, Adriana Cavarero writes about an ethical concern for someone's story (Cavarero 2013). This brings the ethical scope into the room with me, something I can more easily embody. Not unlike Butler, for Cavarero we come to know of ourselves retrospectively, through the narration that we desire to know, but can only be satisfied through the 'other'. It is a desire for the story to come together. This is because memory is full of gaps and so this 'lost unity' can only be made whole through the mouth of another (Cavarero 2013). Perhaps the tragedy is that the 'who' of any story loses themselves in the telling of it, always retrospectively uncovering disunity. Again, it is perhaps as Butler writes, 'if I have no you to address, I have lost myself' (Butler 2005, 32). Cavarero teases out a melancholic element of psychotherapy through the narration of the client's account, where the therapeutic relationship, again and again, touches on disunity. We are confronted with the disunity of our account, the primal losses that are beyond our telling and beyond our recollection. Loss brings us together, but perhaps I want to stay with loss for too long. Perhaps this melancholic ethic should be partial in how it aims to foreground ambiguity and coexistence through loss, what kinds of relating and care this evokes, but to what extent? I wonder what you make of it.

There is more to write. Ethics will follow the different chapters as a presence in the background, occasionally becoming painfully apparent. Though the question, '*What do melancholic bodies produce?*' (Deleuze and Guattari 2013) will continue to imbibe this thesis with an ethics of relationality, one that is always finding its messy cadence in my sessions with S. I share our story, as I hope to share the who-ness of her account. Then again, S is not a 'who', nor is she given a name. Here too, something is imbued with something incomplete, an ethical choice I felt compelled to make, maybe for the sake of anonymity (Hers? My own?), or perhaps because she becomes too real, and I would then truly have to risk losing her.

## Alone together in the presence of the lost object

I can't sleep. Shimming out of bed, I hear my wife's sleepy voice ask me if I'm okay. Trying to sound reassuring, I tell her I'm just a little restless, that I'll be out for a short loop and won't be long. I can tell she's unsettled, but by the time I've put on my trousers, she's already falling back to sleep. I shut the door behind me as I have done so often, making sure the lock clicks gently.

I'm surprised at how mild the midnight air feels. Edinburgh is usually windier. I take my regular route past Grange cemetery, toward the train tracks and into Blackford Hill. I found, and still find, comfort in being alone together with the sounds and shapes of the dark. The night offers a kind of maternal mirroring (Winnicott 1965). A duck nestles her beak between her feathers, and a restfulness and solemnity wash over me. Neither of us seem to mind the other's presence. I walk, as I once did for many years, gravitating toward grief-filled echoes. I return to a world of black and grey shapes that once brought me back to life; death was often on my mind.

Derek Hook (2018) writes of his client's melancholic fantasies of twilight scenes. Such melancholic fantasies, he writes, are inundated with thoughts of death and suicide. Darian Leader writes along similar lines, observing that the melancholic is caught between the world of the dead and the living (Leader 2009). Hook argues that such melancholic fantasies of suicide, however, can have a consoling function. He contends that the very presence of death is what enabled his client to live (Hook 2018, 469). The reason, he argues, is found in melancholic's intolerance for being located, situated, or tied to the symbolic order. He encourages the reader to consider how suicidal ideations could hint at something different from wanting physical death or, more precisely, from killing one's 'bad' object that has become so insufferable. Rather, he connects such fantasies to Lacan's notion of the death

drive as a 'desperate affirmation of life' (Lacan 1992 in Hook 2018). Such a death drive is about life in excess of life or that which lies beyond life to which we are attached. While this may sound abstract, the way I understand this in relation to melancholy is that the death drive puts to death something of the symbolic order, wishing to go beyond it, to continue in excess of it. As Hook puts it, we as practitioners might benefit from being aware of a 'higher order of death', which frees the subject from the 'constraints of symbolic fixity' (Hook 2018, 479).

This line of thought about a higher order of death and melancholic reverie takes me closer to 'the loss of self'. Considering Hook's outline, the 'loss of self' becomes a fantasy of symbolic suicide. Wishing to dissolve into the nightly ether, between waking and dreaming, my body, a body, nightly bodies, conjoined with the tactile and sensual movements of the dark overflowing with life. Where the day was filled with reveries of death and the insufferable grip of inertia, it is perhaps not so surprising for Hook that my pull toward the night obscured my coordinates in the symbolic. There, in the dead of night, nothing pinned me down. No obligation, name, or recognition of any sort. All I dreamt of was to dissolve. Perhaps, if I were to follow Hook's Lacanian thinking, I might say that with the rising of the sun (son), I would once again be located with the 'Name-of-the-father'. This Lacanian term designates the dual symbolic function (anchoring signifier) of the 'transmission of cultural norms and laws and prohibitions typically associated with the father' and that which makes language operate (Lacan 1993 in Hook 2018). Perhaps these thoughts and reveries of death were just that, a desire of sorts to move beyond the symbolic order.

The echoes of my footfalls reassure me that I'm alone, until they become muffled by the forest floor as I arrive at a clearing of trees. Looking up at the stars, I whisper, 'Hey mom'. I wait. Sensing no response, nudge, or whisper, my body falls forward. I feel her silence like a sigh, breathing out that great indifference that pervades the cosmos. The child in me is perhaps more afraid of the indifference

from a parent who doesn't respond. That young boy might not have cared as much about his indeterminate constitution in the face of a possible meaningless existence and might still be looking for an 'other' willing to endure this emptiness with him. Absence appears to foreground presence. Though I'm not sure if this absent presence is my mother or whether it is some other lost (idealised?) 'other'. I just feel that pinch of lingering sadness. I feel strangely drawn to it, tinged with a loss of something I cannot see or touch.

For Hook, the death drive's 'life in excess of life' also points toward the too-muchness of an object in melancholia. He talks of the over-proximity of a traumatic object which haunts the melancholic. Quoting Griggs, he writes that it is like the 'grimace of a skull behind a beautiful face' (Griggs 2015 in Hook 2018, 475). Noteworthy, however, is that the object Griggs refers to is not an object-relation or an ego-supporting object (throughout this thesis, however, I refer primarily to objects in line with Klein and Deleuze) but an object that escapes the symbolic and is instead situated in the '*real*' (Hook 2018). To avoid any confusion of terminology, this traumatic 'real' object can be understood as an object that not only fails to be mediated through language (verbal, non-verbal, imaginal and so on) but is also one that the subject fails to repress. Simply put, the melancholic appears unable to use the primary defence mechanisms of denial, projection, or projective identification, which Hook sees as characteristic of Neurosis. For this reason, he argues that melancholia could be located within psychosis. Such objects seem to assume a tyrannical reign over the subject. There is no hiding.

However, it is important to note that Hook approaches such traumatic objects as paradoxical and multifaceted. He observes how Grigg (2015), for example, argues that the presence of an object is a better model for understanding Freud's melancholia. To reiterate, here the traumatic object is present, hallucinated, and the melancholic's self-harming speech appears clearly directed toward this over-proximal and present object. In contrast, Hook regards such traumatic objects are merely

different vantage points and levels from which to think about melancholia (Hook 2018). This point is also crucial to my thesis because I aim to think differently about loss and the lost object in relation to melancholia. Hook is attempting to argue that an emphasis on the loss of an ego-supporting object (Freud) or an object relation (Klein) is not fully apart from the presence of this traumatic 'real' object that we find in Lacan, and that they might be one and the same. Most of all, I wish to convey how I experience all these different theoretical voices emphasise different notes and rhythms in relation to the (lost) object. For me, it is the qualities and (dis)harmonies such objects evoke that are important in thinking about what kinds of relating melancholy engenders, as opposed to apprehending a specific nature or structure of (lost) objects.

Unlike Hook and Griggs's (2018) notion of the over-proximity of the traumatising object that haunts the melancholic, I yearn for a lost object to accompany me on my walk. I am alone together in the presence of some unnameable grief which behaves like sediment in the way that I find it in the cracks of all things. I can't help but feel a sense of companionship to that illusive affect. Again, I return to Kristeva's notion that for the narcissistic melancholic, sadness itself becomes precious and irreplaceable with any 'other' to whom the melancholic might become attached (Kristeva 1989). Though much of what she says here appears shrouded and unclear as to how or why. I can't describe it just yet, I don't have the words, I must inquire on.

I round the bend, and after passing a narrow corridor of trees, I walk up a gentle slope. My nightly walk is Deleuzian in the sense that I am palpating objects in the dark (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). Todd May frames this approach as embodying a philosophy of 'what there is while acknowledging that what there is cannot be identified' (May 2005). All I can do is to walk alone in the presence of object loss and inquire until something lands. At night I find it easier to let my mind drift, I don't have to stare directly at any object or any thought. Staring directly at something runs the risk of scaring it off.

I think Deleuze and Guattari (2013) would think similarly of the paradoxical qualities of absences and presences but strike a different chord in relation to the 'lost object'. Their objects could be the stuff of fantasy (thinking of Klein), just as they think with tangible and sensual objects. In contrast to thinking about presences and absences, they might consider how de-territorialisation is merely a way of becoming differently. Sadness and solemnity, they might say, is happening when this walking body encounters the night-duck-walking assemblage. Not only is this affect-laden, but they may each point out that the night de-territorialises everyday objects; it becomes and transforms. I think they would merely encourage me to ask how it works. How do melancholic bodies find become in the night, what do they do, where do they take you?

When I say that I am—in that Winnicottian sense—alone in the presence of an 'other' (Winnicott 1965), a Guattarian is not bound to look for such capacity solely within the vicinity of 'good enough' infantile experiences. Instead, something of the duck's nestling, as well as her patient indifference (I think), may well elicit a similar sort of holding that allows for the experience of being alone in the presence of someone. In that same way, the groans of an oak tree, the sound of my footsteps in the dark, are a harmony of separate and solemn sighs, each to their own rhythm. Morton writes, 'When in a state of depression I feel like an inert lump, a stone, a fallen tree...with thousands of picking beetles on my surface'(Matviyenko and Roof 2018, 203). I think Morton is trying to say that existence is open, as inert objects can be. A strange and symbiotic desire nonetheless carries on existing as difference, like little insects on a surface, maps out a strange and distorted desire (Matviyenko and Roof 2018). The 'lost object'—if there could be such an object for Deleuze—would always be more than itself (May 2005). No object is dead enough not to have insects crawling over it.

And what of that fantasy of the 'loss of self'? How would they respond to the notion that the melancholic yearns for that 'higher order of suicide' to be free from the symbolic? I'm not sure they would put so much stake into Lacan's emphasis on the symbolic. I think they would rather inquire further. *'Tell us more!'*, *'Where does it take you?'*, they ask. I think they would encourage me to regard the 'loss of self' and the desire to dissolve into the ether to join these nightly scenes as just that, a desire. Though, along similar lines to Lacan, we might also come to recognise desire as that which is in excess of objects. Here the 'loss of self' as fantasy desires the conjoining and merging of bodies which are more than themselves. The loss of self evokes an almost sublime notion of union. However, I can't help but feel that if I were to dissolve into the night (my wife, of course, horrified I have not returned from my walk), I would also rid myself of the very relational tension that brings me into being. Here D&G and Lacan approach 'relational tensions' from different vantage points, but each might point out there is something I desire, much like I violently resist, something of relational tension that leaves me at a loss. The dimensions are off, and tensions are distorted.

Somewhere a twig snaps, and my blood starts pumping, a different kind of alone, confronted with a different 'other'. What of the endurance and longevity of good objects? They appear at once nestled in the vicinity of the psyche, yet so easily disrupted.

My mother's body was like a twig. I remember how she was coughing up soft tissue, or the way her eyes rolled in her sockets during a seizure, and the gradual disintegration of fat and muscle, leaving her hollowed out. It was the distortion of the body that was, in our family dynamic, foreclosed. Dying induced silence, but it was everywhere. I remember carrying her to the toilet. I could feel cartilage, sinew, and decay. She was on her way to becoming a skeleton. The guilt I felt at finding her body scary, my death suddenly and forever so imminent.

I think of my father and the unpredictable mood swings from despair to manic laughter. From singing at the top of his lungs to calling me at five in the morning saying he was unable to walk, unsure whether he wanted to continue if the noise in his head would never stop. I recall that affectless state, lying on my bed in some twilight state. I was a body absent of itself. What does that mean, *a body absent of itself*? Freud writes of the melancholic that in their despair, they nonetheless see something true that few can see; 'We only wonder why a [melancholic] has to be ill before accessing the truth of this kind...that this person should give a correct description of their psychological situation' (Freud 1917). However, for a body to be absent of itself just sounds like distortion.

Lars Von Trier's 2011 film *Melancholia* foregrounds distortion concerning the experience of depression. The audience is caught in a contradiction between the film's progression of time, and the way *Justine* experiences time as moving glacially, then sporadically, as she appears in different spaces outside of the proportions of what seems possible. It speaks to a common distortion of weight and gravity and how much effort is required to move each limb. I remember my body pressed through the mattress. The unsettling of time and space occurs on those dimensions that Justine is here, and neither here nor there. I find this very distortion in this piece of writing, a distortion of time and place, between walking, writing, then, and now. I think with St. Pierre (1997) in that my writing does not function as a retrospective but produces its own affect. Perhaps the writing, most of all, confronts me with a sense of displacement, unsure of where I am with my thoughts.

I wish I could untether, unravel, dissolve, become one with... I am unsure, however, whether in doing so, I unravel from the very relational forces that brings me into being. I might lose that sadness that has accompanied me on my walk. I want to be with the empty contours carved out by nightly noises,

that hollow affect that an echo in the dark offers. Or maybe I simply yearn for the grimace of death that disrupted my obligation to the symbolic order; death and loss as a 'desperate affirmation of life' (Lacan 1955).

I breathe in the cold air once more before going back inside. The smell of woodfire brings comfort.

S drops her bag at the nook of the door and makes her way to a pair of Ikea sofa chairs that face slightly outward. The room is framed by a mantelpiece that has, since winter, amassed a small jungle. To my slight annoyance, the building owner likes to switch out plants in different rooms. Most clients don't notice, but a few become noticeably anxious. S, however, often notices but seems indifferent. A moment passes as we sit. She sighs, looks at me, and shakes her head. In turn, I shake my head, mirroring her movement. She smiles faintly but already begins to stare vacantly into space.

'A headshake and a sigh,' I observe, perhaps too playfully, when I suddenly see the gravity written on her face.

'I just....' She begins....and falls back into a stare. I hold the silence through presence. I make a humming sound.

'I've..., 'I don't know...I just really don't...'. Another twenty seconds go by.

'You don't know... somethings not quite coming together', I say, as I respond to the parts of her that cannot seem to articulate, that stutter into the session (Gale and Wyatt 2009).

She nods. She looks at me and whispers, 'yeah', and moves her head back on the chair, gazing up at the ceiling.

'You look a bit lost, S'. I consider my words, surprised at my own need to speak. Nothing about that reflection seemed particularly relevant. I sense the importance of presence here, one I just disrupted for a need of dialogical exchange. With S, I find it hard to be curious, sometimes aware of self-punishment, as though I'm not holding S in quite the right way (Winnicott 1965). I find it difficult to stay with today's stuttering silences.

'Aaaah...' she says frustrated. 'Don't have words today', she responds. From looking up at the ceiling she shifts her gaze to meet my eyes, then smiles sarcastically.

'It's just not happening', I say in return...

She closes her eyes, pauses, and breathes in as though she's just emerged from underwater.

'He didn't show, I knew my parents wouldn't'.... but I thought he would...

'Hmmm...', in an even softer tone. I am finding my feet, I wasn't expecting this sudden twist, and I am still wondering who S is at a loss. The energy seems to be shifting.

'Yeh... disappointing...' She finishes.

Despite saying the words, she does not look or feel disappointed. It's as though the words she used are emptied of affect.

'I don't know what's worse, that I can't get myself to care...or.... She sits upright. 'He's not there. I'm not entirely there, either'.

I am aware of the sudden parallel in what might be happening between us, and between her and her partner. I wonder If I can meet her in the felt sense of not quite meeting and the disconnection between us. That feeling she describes of something feeling neither here nor there. 'You wish you cared more...neither of you are entirely there....'.

'Uhu, she nods and shrugs.'

'What is it like for you to not entirely be there?' – the reflection feels phatic, if a bit clichéd.

'I don't...I can't get myself to. I want to... I'm just...'

Words fail her again.

'I just don't know if I want this anymore', She says.

'Him? ... Relationships?'

'No... 'life'

'life'

She nods.

'I feel so...I just can't quite seem to touch it, you know... nothing feels warm.'

'Like you're not in it, part of it, the world.... Or like it's dead to the touch.' I slowly rub my hands together to mimic or gesture something tactile and warm.

'But that's the thing...', She said while leaning forward. 'I can do all the daily things I did before... dinner parties with friends, work, relationships, it's just all lost what made it good... all of it so empty. I feel I've lost traction with life, or life has lost traction with me, I don't know. I ....'

'Like nothing matters...like .... something's been lost, you've lost something, and maybe we're looking for it together.

As I say the words, something feels off. She shifts in her chair and nods over to the far side of the wall where three Ikea paintings hang. 'Those are awful by the way', she says.

'Hmmm, what's happening here, S.'

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At times, S can articulate her process with such depth. It is as though she has found all the right notes, but they have somehow lost their music. I can imagine how she's unsure whether she's lost traction with the world or the world with her. I notice, in turn, how I feel full of emptiness. What this is doing in the therapeutic relationship, however, feels difficult to bring into awareness. Maybe something of her, of us, feels slippery, without coordinates. Looking back at our session, I can see how challenging it was for me to stay with that affective lack of traction that has undoubtedly found its way between us. Perhaps my reflection about looking for 'lostness together' was too on the nose. I wonder whether it puts S in a position of having to risk becoming aware of a lack of traction within the therapeutic relationship. Instead, I may have veiled my own experience of emptiness in the countertransference, which could be rich territory for S and I to encounter one another. I have plenty to sit with for our next session. As always, it is tricky to strike that balance of the too-muchness or littleness of relational tension, thinking always about when to offer something to the client, and what to hold.

I was also curious when S was at a loss for words at the start of the session. It was almost as though her lostness for words mirrored some breakdown of her situatedness in the symbolic. Moreover, this

also appeared to collide with the affective experience of ‘losing traction’. Again, I think of Kristeva and how melancholy is a process of ‘asymbolia’ where words lose meaning, and so ‘loses life’ (Kristeva 1989, 189). Here Hook (2018) might similarly point out, as previously discussed, that something of the symbolic order is depleted. I wish we could have stayed closer to that sensation of words not coming together. Were words lost to her? Or did they escape her? Or did words not come to mind? I wonder how these qualities might speak differently into that affective sense of ‘losing traction’ and what ways of relating this might produce or foreclose for S. Moreover, I felt there was something pointed about this breakdown of speech and language, which makes me think of the Lacanian ‘real’, and that she was experiencing something of the ineffability of being located. I can imagine that being an unsettling experience for her.

However, here I have a confession to make. I have a part to play in unsettling the symbolic, not as a therapist but as a writer. I am complicit in how you, my reader, can come to know of S, and what of her I have already unsettled. You may already be aware of S’s namelessness. How do you—how can you—locate and relate to S when I have not disclosed her name? To whom is this happening? Alternatively, the word ‘disclose’ might not be entirely accurate. I don’t know whether she has a name or whether she would even recognise one. For me, this obscures her presence in the writing, and because of it, something of S (something about us all?) remains beyond reach.

S’s name has been an ongoing dilemma throughout this thesis. I initially wanted to share her name as a gesture of care and recognition. This would also give her a more embodied presence. I feel this would have allowed you and me to imagine ‘more’ of her. Yet, I couldn’t give her a name, and as time passed, I didn’t want to. Nor did she give me a name to give to you. I’m not sure why. However, the absence of a name further displaces her coordinates in the symbolic. Unintentionally and curiously, this relates back to how Hook talks about the melancholic gesture of McCandless, who sheds his name to become

*Supertramp*, less a name than a description (Hook 2018). Consequently, the absence of a name provokes a loss of selfhood. Maybe S is similarly a description that symbolises Self, Symbol, Sadness, or simply She. Though this too reminds me of this fantasy of the ‘loss of self’, and that possibly S also desires to dissolve, as I once did, into the ether, and to lose herself in that most divine and disturbing way. Yet, this would be only conjecture. That conversation is yet to be had.

Subsequently, this unavoidably brings me to the frame of ethics. If naming S falls within my purview and autonomy, I wonder whether I have denied her a sense of selfhood. This has less to do with fantasy which I relate to the ‘loss of self’, and more to do with Cavarero’s ethic of who-ness (Cavarero 2013). Of course, I want to share the account of S just as I want you to imagine being alongside the both of us. This does not negate that S is also stitched together from my experiences, just as she is the various parts of clients I have worked with, as well as mother, father, and sister. Yet, (Deleuze would be the first to point out) she is more than their presence. I believe Cavarero (2013) would consider how S—despite that she is imaginal—takes on a life of her own. Cavarero, like Judith Butler (2005), could regard S as that ‘other’ through which I, the writer of this thesis, is inextricably constituted. Likewise, through the telling and retelling of her account, she takes on shapes and sounds of her own that can never be properly located or owned. Her account is different from mine, and all the ‘others’. Possibly, Cavarero might argue that by not giving her a name, I have denied her recognition (Cavarero 2013). She might say that I want to write an ethic of ‘who-ness’ without attributing that account to someone who can be witnessed. For Butler (2006), perhaps, I have denied the gendered ‘other’ that I am. I’m uncomfortable with how this can be seen as an enactment of power of a male therapist through the writing, and how this has meddled with S’s presence on the page.

However, I might ask where S’s agency is in that? Again, perhaps S would prefer anonymity. When I close my eyes, I try to imagine our sessions and asking her to remind me of her name. I don’t get an

answer. The imaginal dialogue is cut off somehow, as though she's left. I could take this as a gesture of refusal, or perhaps the question is moot, because a decision has already been made. However, an alternative possibility has occurred to me only recently, now that I am close to submitting this thesis.

Maybe by not giving S a name, there is less of her I can lose. A single letter remains shadowy, and perhaps this is necessary. Such obscurity, at first face, seems a reluctance of attachment. If it were Sophie or Sarah, it would make my connection with her as 'other' more lucid. Her departure would be given clearer contours. I wonder how S might conceive of this. Maybe I'll ask in our next session. However, my reading of Guattari also reminds me how melancholy here is present in the very gesture of counselling. Who in their right mind cultivates the therapeutic relationship, with its intensities and affection, knowing it must come to an end? Doesn't counselling involve, on the part of the therapist, a return to loss and mourning for our ending with clients and the unique qualities they brought to the work? Maybe not giving S a name, makes the burden of losing her a little easier.

Alternatively, losing less of S also reminds me of Gaitanidis's (2017) notion of the postmodern melancholic. He might argue that because S is shadowy, she and I can also become anything. S might have the power to assume different names and descriptions, and I, in turn, risk not having to lose who she might otherwise become. I don't have to lose that person sitting across from me that I recognise by that incessant symbol called a name. Gaitanidis might argue that because I have denied S a sense of selfhood or personhood, I don't have to risk losing her, but in doing so I lose the very depth and affection that therapeutic relationship itself offers. This is why he argues that melancholics end up 'losing the world' (Gaitanidis 2017), because in becoming everything, there appears very little commitment to holding, recognizing, and having a responsibility for a particular someone to commit to. I imagine he argues that only through the commitment to becoming a recognisable someone, can

we meaningfully relate to what this 'other' can offer, just as we are confronted by the possibility of it becoming lost, no longer available.

However, I wonder if Gaintanidis is undermining how 'losing the world'—much like S and I find ourselves without traction in the therapeutic relationship—could become the very gesture of loss that brings to life relationality. Perhaps he is yet to take such loss further by asking the Deleuzian (2013) question, *what does such 'losing of the world' do? How do we become through loss?* Does it not, as Judith Butler precisely purports, fashion something of that world through the very gesture of loss? Does that not also confront us with a commitment to that 'other' which is at the centre of Butler's melancholic ethic? Perhaps this begins to articulate the beginning of a melancholic way of relating through loss, even if such a loss has never occurred. Presences are felt through absences, which, in turn, might need to be fashioned. It is possible that S and I begin to sense our way through the contours of this loss and what it might create. This foregrounds the possible contradictions that are happening affectively in the relationship. I feel full of emptiness, as S feels she has lost traction with that 'other' in a way that brings her closer to the real and that ineffable quality of what she has lost.

Consequently—and I must admit that this was a completely unintended consequence—that in not giving S a name, I have inadvertently emphasised for the reader, and for myself, this Freudian melancholic question of *what* in S would I lose? In disrupting the who-ness of S, I have no place to turn but to consider the ambiguity of who she is, and the unknown of what I will lose in her once I finish my writing and our sessions come to an inevitable end. In turn, I deny you, the reader, a chance to land and build a more solid relationship with S, perhaps leaving you to wonder what you have lost in the absence of her name. Here Darian Leader (2009) emphasises that melancholia touches most painfully on the agony of not knowing what we have lost in a relationship. Unless I turn to indifference, or I suddenly deny the presence of S in my writing, and as long as I attempt to hold the ethical frame

of our imaginal connection, there appears still a semblance of loss, the loss of which is unknown but produces something.

It is time to leave this section of writing. I am turning my attention now more fully toward loss in my own life and what Freud, Kristeva, and Lacan offer through their writing on melancholia. As always, Deleuze and Guattari will, at various points, challenge or find spaces to think alongside. Though Deleuze and Lacan are often polarised, we might already begin to see from my thinking with S that they are bound to collide. Is this chaotic intersection between the breakdown of the symbolic and the affective not where Deleuze and Lacan can meet? I believe this is evident both in the absence of words or the meaninglessness of gestures, just as this accompanies the affect of losing traction with the world. Lacan, Deleuze, and Guattari, all point toward a sense through which 'becoming' is uncoordinated. Might this not evoke something of how we become otherwise through loss, that loss transforms, and that because of it?

## Melancholia

I find myself on a bleak January afternoon—during what looks to be the tail end of the pandemic—with death’s presence. The branches of the trees outside my flat look like rusted nails, and the wind nips at my bones from behind the window where I sit gazing into the cemetery. A cultural mode of being takes over, one that has been habitually folded into me, the Protestant remnants of my Dutch heritage. There is something about death’s performativity (Butler 2006); I wear black and feel blue and instinctively share in hard down-cast stares and sentimental silences. I hear the echoes of solemn footsteps in the church, the scent of flowers that will forever remind me of death and that you are dead. I was taught to respect the dead, but never how to relate to death. I was permitted to miss you, though I was never encouraged to have a relationship with you after your passing. What does it mean to have a relationship with the dead? I experience a soberness to the memory of your funeral, a sense of grieving between the lines. What else could grief have looked like, other than coming to grips with the reality you are gone? In this regard, grief lacked dimensions. A community of voices conjure all too readily the familiar tune of moving on, letting go, and finding acceptance. What about the courage to hold on (Wyatt 2021), and to stay with the unshakable presence of loss and death as part of life? What of my own voice, and what would I write now of how I mourned you?

*I carried so much of you after you died, Mom. Not out of choice, not a remnant of what was or what should have been. I just needed the presence of you. But after a while, I was no longer sure it was you I was carrying.*

In reference to holding on, Darian Leader warns of the perils when loss goes ungrieved as much as he warns about an insistent closeness with the deceased (Leader 2009). While Leader holds that loss is never fully worked through, he considers how we might live with loss through the process of

mourning. The principal idea put forth, influenced by Lacan and Klein, is that mourning involves the creation of a symbolic space through which the mourner can kill the lost loved object. This symbolic 'killing' of the lost object allows the mourner to 'lay the dead to rest', functioning as a way for the mourner to re-introject their relationship with the deceased *as* lost object (Leader 2009). In the Lacanian sense, this allows the mourner to have a different relationship with the lost object than before. For this to happen, the mourner works through different representations of their connection to the deceased. Leader talks of this process as a gradual shift towards seeing the strangeness or otherness in the deceased, thereby dislodging their image from the place and role they occupied in our lives; did I *really* know them? Was I loved? Who was I to them? The Symbolic killing of the lost object also draws on guilt, ambivalence, and hatred that becomes dislodged. This often accompanies periods of intense anger or acting out against the deceased. For Leader, this process is crucial because it amounts to a loosening of one's relationship with the lost object, which allows for a freeing up of the mourner's capacity for a relationship with the living. This process is characterised, then, by the maxim that 'the mourner has a choice of killing the dead or dying with them' (Leader 2009).

*I see your lifeless eyes stare back at me. Far away, in the deep reaches of memory I recall the smell of you, and I am a baby's hand reaching for mother. I fear you, hate you and the vigour of hate, love, gratitude, and envy (Klein 1997) returns a vibrancy to me that was lost. Did I kill the corpse that haunted me? Surely, I do not wish to join you in death.*

Leader's Lacano-Kleinian conception of mourning, however, does deviate from Klein's own approach to object-loss (Leader 2009). Klein conceptualises the lost object as one that is inextricably linked between a person, place, or experience. It is the loss of those qualities in a relationship we have internalised and imbued with fantasy which shapes and moulds the psyche. For Lacan, however, the process of mourning constitutes or creates this very lost object. He does not draw a linear causal link

with objects as persons or events that are present and, in their death or absence, become lost. For Lacan, we project into the (lost) other what we lack in ourselves. Hence, when we lose a loved object, we lose a part of ourselves. This self-loss, for Lacan, comes with the recognition that what we loved in the other was 'always lost' (Leader 2009). According to Lacan, this becomes more pronounced as we come to grips with the alterity of the lost object. Lacan provokes thinking around how we constitute the object in their absence, in how we come to imagine them in their absence and how much of our relationship was driven by this imagining (Leader 2009). Hence, we come to constitute the lost object in our imagining of whom we have lost. This dawning alterity of the other, of the lost object, of course, points to something ungraspable, as sure as it points to an ungraspable lack in ourselves.

*I don't know who I am without you holding the pieces of me together.*

What becomes clear, for Leader, in both Klein and Lacan's account of the lost object is that 'we are the ones we mourn' (Leader 2009, 136). The 'other' is inextricably linked to the scaffolding of the 'internal' lifeworld of the subject. Loss accompanies an affective sense of self-loss. For Lacan, mourning implies being able to separate our image of the lost object—from lack—as that ungraspable place they occupied. This points to a crucial point that Lacan makes, in that mourning is about restoring links to the lost object not only *as lost*, but also *as 'impossible'* (Leader 2009, 134). My understanding of this impossibility is that it points towards that which cannot be named or brought into language. This fits the Lacanian view of seeing the subject as beyond objectivation and ineffable. So how are we to understand restoring one's links to an object as lost and as impossible? In a Lacanian approach, I see the impossibility of mourning as the inability to symbolise the other because they lie beyond reach. It is as though Lacan is saying that through the process of mourning, we come close to the 'real', as unravelling and becoming undone; there is a return to an emptiness or 'object a', that is the object cause of desire, inseparable from the dimensions of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real (Schuster

2016). This inscribes, however, a mourning that appears there from the very beginning in that there is an empty space that can never be filled or articulated nor satisfied with the love or desire of that other; no matter how much I love you, I can never fully be in union with you, nor can I ever fully express my love or desire through this lack.

*I think as time passed, loss lingered, but you weren't a part of it. You faded, and instead, sadness remained for its own sake. I gravitated to it. In moments of my life, the bit of loss that I latched onto felt like the only real thing I was left with. It imbued me with life as surely as it emptied me of it.*

Melancholia is often characterised as a perpetual state of mourning. Yet so often, the lost object and our relatedness to such loss seem fixed in melancholia, despite that the authors and analysts I have brought into this thesis each write about how loss (self-other loss) changes the subject (where this thesis would say, changes relationality). The italicised writing that I dedicate to the process of mourning my mother reminds me that something of this unmournable process nevertheless seems to move beyond my mother.

### Pivoting to Freud

There is an evident chronological distortion in my thesis. Most papers on psychoanalysis and melancholy (and for a good reason) will begin with Freud and subsequently progress toward alternative theorists. This is the very arboreal structure of working from the ground up. Of course, any psychoanalytic discussion on mourning and melancholia is indebted to Freud. I appreciate, therefore, that the reader may find themselves disoriented and looking for some secure theoretical footing from which to move through the text. You have already come across dense theory from a range of

theoretical voices without the support of an evolutionary account of melancholia. However, such an arboreal approach would have been at odds with my ontology. A linear structure also rarely occurs in the therapeutic setting. Disorientation is quite common in the way that fantasies, memories, narratives, don't have a clear beginning. It is the very arboreal structure that adds to the illusion of coherence that Deleuze and Guattari find so mind-numbing. Moreover, I considered that beginning with Freud would have taken me away from the experience-near account of death, loss, and the qualities these might evoke. It has been my hope that the rhizomatic text has taken your thinking with melancholia to places that are not immediately tied down to any one specific theoretical thought.

Furthermore, Karen Serra reminds me how my reflexive engagements with Freud—which in a Deleuzian frame is always part of an assemblage—produce ways of relating (Undurraga 2020). With her words in mind, I recognise that, despite my deep fascination with Freudian theory, I tend to become more formal and analytic in my approaches when I sit with him for too long. For therapy and research purposes, I run the risk of closing down different ways of engaging with my writing. The academic in me struggles much more with Deleuze and Guattari and finds much more ease in the classical notes found in Freud or Klein. Nevertheless, the latter allows me to withdraw from the text, which again, would detract from the very experience-near (Bondi and Fewell 2016) approach that feels important to counselling research. Here, the very presence of Deleuze (2004) enacts 'difference' in the way that nomadically approaching Freud challenges that arboreal and potentially linear approach to mourning and melancholia.

Freud and Klein's writing on melancholia, which we now turn to, remains crucial and rich in what it offers. Undoubtedly, this next section will be more familiar to the reader in its academic format. I consider first the ideas set forth by Freud's 1917 *Mourning and Melancholia*, which laid the foundation for later writing and Klein's subsequent theory of object relations. Then, I trace the evolution of

Freud's theories toward Klein. I trace two emergent ways of thinking about melancholy that nonetheless emphasise the failure to mourn. In Freud, I think of the melancholic as having devoured the object of loss, a shadow which has fallen on the ego and leaves the melancholic unable to detach and find another love object. For Klein, who is more concerned with the relational quality of the lost object, sees the melancholic as unable to re-introject the lost qualities of the lost object.

My initial exposition of Freud will stay true to his original reading. Here I agree with Nini Fang in her observation that both Freudian and Kleinian theory are central to understanding how past and current conceptualisation of melancholy and depression have formed, but that their theoretical use is hampered by drive theory (Fang 2016). For this reason, Nini moves toward a Fairbairnian understanding which proposes a 'relational structural model' through which there is a constant interchange between the 'internal world and external relationships' (Fang 2016).

However, I subsequently deviate from a typical reading of Freud and deliberately use a more topographical approach, as seen in the work of Michael Eigen (2004). He focuses not only on the mechanistic elements of theory but also examines the surface of Freud's text to offer alternative insights to his writing on death and deadness. I believe Eigen manages to liberate Freud and Klein from the constraints of drive theory to the extent that it foregrounds the textual and contextual account of their work. For example, Eigen observes that Freud's use of words often emphasises mobility between anxiety and destruction and the 'too-muchness or littleness' of psychic life and deadness (Eigen 2004). Consequently, I utilise Eigen's approach to my Deleuzo-Gauntarian ends to similarly palpate the surface of Freud's text in *Mourning and melancholia* to see what such *difference* may produce. In doing so, I arrive at an alternative understanding of melancholia, one which touches on the intolerability of no longer desiring the lost loved object, or in other words, falling out of love. While this perspective is

not central to this thesis, it touches on the important intersection of desire and melancholy as a way of relating through loss.

### Freud and the unbearable of falling out of love.

In *Mourning and melancholia*, Freud writes of the mourner (as opposed to the melancholic) that they inhabit a world that has become 'poor and empty' (Freud 1917, 47). He sees in mourning the painful process of withdrawing libidinal attachment from the lost object (Freud 1917). This encompasses both reality testing as well as employing a wishful psychosis of hallucinating and so bringing back that which has been lost. As Freud writes: 'People never willingly give up a libidinal position', not even when a new object is 'beckoning them' (Freud 1917, 45). Through reality testing, the mourner comes to find both absences within and without, and gradually libidinal attachment to each 'memory and expectation' is 'hypercathected' (1917). In other words, faced with the loss of the loved object, the mourner goes through the painful process of reliving memories and experiences, both in an attempt to bring back the lost object, as well as to detach libidinal energies. Gradually the recognition dawns that the lost object is truly lost. In this way, the mourner slowly becomes able to 'adopt' a new love object and become free and uninhibited (Freud 1917).

It is important to bear in mind that the lost object for Freud is not the person or thing that has been lost. Instead, it is the 'subject's internal connection with their object' (Roth 2009, 68). Roth tells us how important this distinction is and how the loss of a loved 'other' can be so devastating precisely because this accompanies the loss of a sense of self. The 'internal attachment' to the loved object that sustains and nourishes the ego-structure comes under threat (Roth 2009). However, Freud did not articulate this as clearly and explicitly as Roth did. Within Freud's libidinal orientation, oscillating between the psychosocial and psychosexual drives, the qualities of object loss can appear one-sided

(Fang 2016). Reading *Mourning and melancholia*, the words used to describe this lost object seem to still question why the mourner resides in a bleak and empty world in relation to their libido. It was Klein who articulated and introduced us to object-relations (forever changing the way we now look and understand Freud), as those introjected good and bad qualities of relationships that sustain a sense of safety and cohesion. Hence, to what extent we can be sure that this was Freud's understanding of the lost object is unsure, though, throughout his writing, he appears to distinguish between the loved person and the lost object. Therefore, by addressing Freud and his use of the lost object, I am unavoidably also drawing on Klein.

Subsequently, where the mourner's world is at first poor and empty, Freud regarded the melancholic as afflicted by a poverty of the 'ego itself' (Freud 1917). Melancholy appears as the failure to mourn. With the help of the Abrahamian notion of the cannibalistic instinct, Freud argued that the melancholic had consumed the lost object, which had become installed onto the ego. Such cannibalisation was the melancholic's disavowal and defence of their own ambivalence toward the lost object (Freud 1917). Such cannibalisation is also a refusal of loss in how the lost object is swallowed, cut up, and devoured, but not lost (Kristeva 1989). Freud contended that the melancholic further presented strong tendencies of self-abasement and self-punishment. The overarching argument here is that such self-punishment can be seen to be inflicted toward the lost object, which now fully inhabits the place of the melancholic's ego (Freud 1953). Hence, unable to contend with the ambivalence toward the lost object, the object is consumed, and this aggression is turned inward (Freud 1917). Object loss turns to ego-loss. Freud said of the melancholic that their loss is that of an object; according to what he says, the loss is one in themselves (Freud 1917, 51). This, then, can also be conceived of within the frame of 'loss of self'.

Again, I touch on Freud's pointed articulation that the melancholic might know who or what they have lost, but not 'what they have lost in them' (Freud 1917). Where melancholia and mourning both operate through the same 'system' of detaching the libido from the lost object, for the mourner this process is unhindered and moves from the preconscious to conscious. The mourner appears more capable and more aware of their loss. This is not so for the melancholic who defends against the 'assault' of an ambiguous lost object. Not only does this struggle occur fully within the unconscious, but Freud also contends that the type of loss suffered by the melancholic is of an ideal kind. Such loss does not have to relate directly to death, but that object loss in this way is also 'withdrawn from consciousness' (Freud 1917). There appears to be no insinuation that melancholy, like mourning, necessarily arises from bereavement. Instead, the qualities and descriptions of melancholic loss appear more mystifying. Freud himself later writes of our puzzlement at witnessing the melancholic, unable to see what absorbs them so (Freud 1917). I think here also of Pauline Boss's (1999) use of ambiguous loss, wondering instead (and against Freud) whether something of mourning may always be inscribed with something beyond telling and that we are more intimately familiar with melancholy than we let on.

Alternatively, while the above section touches on a common reading of Freud's Melancholia, Michael Eigen (2004) offers yet another dimension by employing a topographical approach. In his book *Psychic Deadness*, he analyses Freud's (as well as other theorists') textual and lexical choices to consider what else this might unearth in relation to deadness. In the following paragraphs, I make use of Eigen's topographical approach by traversing the surface of Freud's 1917 *mourning and melancholia*. In keeping with a Deleuzian ontology, however, I do not make any interpretative gestures about what Freud himself could have meant. Rather, I stay close to where Freud's text takes me which is also in keeping with Bondi and Fewell's notion of experience-near and descriptive accounts (Bondi and Fewell 2016). This foregrounds the relationality (as we might also find it in the therapeutic encounter) of how

two surfaces, that of Freud's text, and that of my own affective responses and writing, create something in the imminence of its encounter. I regard 'palpating' here as an analysis of Guattarian *difference* (May 2005) in the way that it turns over Freud's more rigid ontological movements to see what else might become possible.

From this vantage point, what begins as an analytical outline of the contrivances of mourning, becomes increasingly suffused with poetic prose as he moves toward melancholy. I think of Kristeva (1987) and how melancholy demands that writing is borne from an abyssal depth. Though *Mourning and Melancholia* begins by outlining the usual symptomatologic occurrences of 'loss of interest, inhibition, or dejection (Freud 1917, 44) seen in mourning, this gradually shifts to words which touch more closely on the lifeworld of the melancholic. I am particularly drawn to the phrase Freud uses in the opening pages describing a '*devotion to mourning*' (Freud 1917, 45).

The word devotion gives me pause. I had never considered mourning to be a type of devotion. It seems to stand out suddenly after re-reading the text so often. Devotion evokes in me a sense of servitude, a ritualistic serving that springs forth from love, reverence, or even hate. I consider the word so often in the context of spiritual practice and prayer toward an object or idol. It occurs to me that many idols that are shown devotion are themselves figures, events, and occurrences that have died or passed, yet remain firmly rooted in the everyday. But doesn't Leader warn us of the perils of devotion toward the lost object and the desire to join such objects in death? Yet, I feel devotion from how I carried much of my mother with me after she passed, much in the way she entered my dreams. Even if there were nightmares, there appeared a devotion not just in keeping her close to me, but to tend to her image. Devotion in the context of mourning reminds me of a yearning to tend to what was lost. Such yearning, in turn, reminds me of desire and I wonder whether Freud considered desire in its relationship to melancholia and, if so, why he wrote so little about it.

A devotion to mourning leads to the 'shadow of the lost object falling upon the ego' (Freud 1917, 51). This pivot from mourning into melancholia is a small assemblage of words that sound gripping, dramatic, and describing an epic tale or a poem rather than a scientific paper. A shadow falls upon the ego, or, we might say, a shadow falls upon the melancholic protagonist. It conjures a shadowy realm in which I once dwelled lifelessly, 'poor and empty'. It feels inevitable as it does helplessness in the way that Freud describes a capacity to witness the melancholic in their torment without having any sense of where, how, or why this shadow should have taken over. When I think of S, I think about how such shadows don't require light to form, and how they envelop us both. Though, the shadow is not dark enough to blind us, nor light enough to let us see things differently. Nor are we sitting in death's shadow. Freud clarifies that in contrast to mourning, the melancholic has not necessarily lost the object in death. Rather, it is deadness that ensues. However, what then does Freud mean when he writes that the melancholic might know 'who' they have lost but not 'what' they have lost in them? What appears lost? To this, he writes that in melancholia, the lost object is not necessarily dead but has been lost 'as an object of love' (Freud 1917, 46).

To lose an object of love brings me to the loss of desire. Where in mourning there is a devotion to the lost object, in melancholy, the lost object is lost as an object of love. Yet, love is rarely mentioned in papers on Freudian melancholy. It is not until we come across Lacan, and especially Žižek's Lacanian take, that mention is made that in melancholia, objects may be available, but they are simply no longer desired (Žižek 2017, 294). Of course, this still does not put any explicit emphasis on love, which Freud seems to name here briefly. Freud's sentence is so crucial precisely because it foregrounds desire which he clearly omits from his writing. He seems to be offering a description of melancholia by what isn't there, what is omitted and still so present in his account. Freud does not allude to desire or other similar words as yearning or longing that point toward the presence of such loss of an object which

was once 'loved' (Freud 1917). Hence, the melancholic poem seems to follow this melody where the shadow falls on the ego, and a once loved object is no longer desired, and this is the loss that is suffered.

In this light, the poem of the melancholic that lives on the surface of Freud's text is one that occurs to me as the tragedy of falling out of love. As Roth (2009) would remind us, it is not just the loss of a loved object, but also a love that once lived within, sustained through, and was formative of the melancholic. Such object loss is an ego-loss, or a loss of self. Of course, as Freud points out, the melancholic does not know what they have lost, and in a desperate struggle with the ambivalence, attachment, and detachment toward the lost loved object, it is swallowed and cannibalised. This leads me to think of melancholy as a refusal to fall out of love, unable to let the shadow pass through, to admit that it is merely a shadow and nothing more. Again, from this perspective, which is not completely aligned with Freud's account, the loss in melancholia is one of desire (a falling out of love), which fragments and risks losing the connection with the (un)loved object. The significance of this I further develop in relation to my thinking with Lacan and Deleuze, who are more adept in the language of affect and desire.

Nevertheless, unable to digest this falling out of love and unable to contend with the ambivalence they feel toward the lost object, the melancholic loses themselves in their 'devouring'. Here we palpate the visceral qualities that Freud alludes to on the surface of his text. In this tale, we move through the lethargy of an insufferable lamenter nagging you with their repetitive and 'obsessional self-reproaches', as much we are confronted with a melancholic that 'devours' and 'cannibalises' (Freud 1917). Thrown into poverty of both world and ego and caught in a cycle of self-abasement and punishment, it paints the melancholic as waging an ongoing war. Freud points at the 'too muchness' of violence directed toward the self, and the 'too littleness' of violence directed toward the object

relation (Eigen 2004). Throughout Freud's text, I remain curious as to the many different words he chooses to describe how the lost object comes to inhabit the ego; the object is devoured, incorporated, identified with, substituted, and it takes flight into the ego to escape extinction' (Freud 1917). All these different words, for me, conjure the contradiction between preservation and destruction. The melancholic cannot find any coordinates in this shadow that has fallen upon them, unable to locate themselves in relation to that 'other' whom they may no longer desire.

Here I find Kristeva's words insightful when she writes: 'Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested . . . than lost' (Kristeva 1987, 12). This, to me, is exactly what I feel Freud is implicitly writing about, possibly something that reveals more about his own process. *I'd rather cut myself than have this shadow fall between us, and to fall out of love with you.* This is written further in line with the notion of sadism that Freud positions closely with the melancholic. Curious is that he uses the word *enjoyment* in reference to self-abasement. It is almost as though self-flagellation tampers with the proximity of the lost object. The Deleuzian in me is quick to notice something of desire in the melancholic's self-inflicted pain. Does this sadism not conjure the lost loved object into being? Does the intensity of the pain keep something alive that the melancholic dreads is lost?

Subsequently, throughout the text, we find Freud's repeated use of the word 'inhibition', 'freedom', and 'cathexes'. This is most apparent on the account of how mourning and melancholia come to an end when the subject is truly de-cathected, free, and uninhibited from the lost object once a new object cathexis is found, and the incompleteness of the lost object becomes tolerable (Gaitanidis 2017). This stands in tension with his earlier propositions that mourning continues to happen, that different relationships continue to be formed. What appears to be missing in this tragic tale of the melancholic is any notion of what the relationship with the lost object looked like, its qualities and colours. Here we come full circle. Something of Freud's writing is imbued with a melancholy that

cannot find the words to describe what the relational quality of that loss looks like. I understand this less as a problem of finding the right words but rather as a certain impossibility in sensing the lost object. Returning to palpation and Deleuze, I imagine running my fingers along the crevices and cracks of loss as its qualities and sensations are permitted to awareness. For the melancholic, then, such sensing appears distorted.

Therefore, I consider that what Freud is describing is a process of relating through loss. However, such loss, as I have argued within this Freudian frame, is not so much the loss, death, or disappearance of the loved object, but can be approached as the loss of falling out of love with the object. Unknown of what has been lost, pain and anguish bring a sense of desire through which the melancholic can sense the lost object. It is at once a desire that is life-bringing, only insofar as it reveals the shadow of a dwindling love that empties out and perpetually brings the melancholic into that liminal space of mourning something beyond sense and sensation. When Freud (1917) writes of the 'open wound that draws on anticathetic energies...from all direction, emptying the ego', I do not think of an open wound that passively draws on energies that block psychosexual tensions. Such object relating, to me, conveniently does away with desire but also presumes an inevitability or a transcendental structure within the unconscious that functions in such a way. Instead, is it not more plausible that desire here plays a role in this emptying of the ego, and that this might be grounded in relating through loss? I might articulate my topographical reading of Freud as such:

*I have lost something, though I don't know what. A shadow falls on me, and I have fallen out of love, and the world has become poorer for it. Still, the shadow is a loss in myself, and I, too, lose traction with this poor and empty world. Then I think of what I have lost, and I am reminded again of that bit of warmth I once had, despite its contours being lost to me. I hate myself for it, berate myself, and I*

*would rather cut myself than endure this falling out of love which so clearly escapes me. I cannot bear this severing of ties.*

I will develop this line of thought which connects desire with loss and melancholy more fully in relation to Guattari and Lacan. Before doing so, however, I wish first to turn to Klein, who proposes a slightly different layering to thinking with objects and melancholia.

Freud, Klein, and Kristeva each write about the melancholics' intolerance for loss. Such intolerability is the very thing that also keeps the lost object alive. The account of Freud emphasises the territorialisation of the lost object onto the ego. It suggests an almost immediate schism takes place. Though on Freud's account, in which the lost object becomes implanted and fixed on the ego, there seems little relationality with the lost object. His account suggests that when we speak to the melancholic, we are addressing the lost object (Roth 2009). For all the internal violence, the subject and the evacuative movements of the ego leave little hope for relational movements. However, given the fixity of the lost object onto the ego, it would seem the melancholic has still lost the most important parts of the lost object; they are no longer there, out of awareness, and beyond any relationship or semblance of what once animated the subject or the ego as those relational qualities of ambivalence, love, or hate. What I find missing from Freud's account are precisely those relational qualities the melancholic might have with the lost object. It reminds me of an ungrievable grief or the impossibility of mourning.

#### From Freud to Klein

As discussed, an alternative reading of Freud sees the melancholic falling out of love with a lost object that is available but no longer desired (Žižek 2017). Unable to see what they have lost in them as a

loved object, and unable to bear the ambiguity now felt toward that loved object, this falling out of love is fiercely resisted. In an attempt to keep the spark alive and to get a glimmer of warmth that this object once radiated, its loss is perpetually mourned as though lost, and in doing so, this shadow of love is conjured back into close proximity. Such fragmentation of desire leads to an emptying out or disembowelment, bringing subjects and worlds into a liminal space that is poor and empty. It offers me a small window into my sessions with S and the odd movements of desire that seem to ebb from the room. There appears that same fragmentation of desire through which no traction is found, and we become bodies that are not dead enough. In those moments, it is deadness I wish to escape, while S seems to have found a place(lessness) in it.

Klein wrote about the dread of harbouring dead objects (Klein 1935). Deadness leads to a territory of stagnation, of root rot, bleached coral and the decrepit. Michael Eigen wrote of Winnicott that he fought against deadness in his writing and that he sought to keep it alive by imbuing theory with 'movement, process and paradox' (Eigen, 2004). Does this not also remind us of Freud and how Eigen notices that his writing on death appears inundated with words that emphasise movement? I come to a place where it is not quite accurate to think of the expression, 'I am dead inside'. Rather, there is deadness that spreads. It is not just a confrontation with my own deadness, but a deadness that implicates and infects the 'other'. I recognise the hollowing, colourless or numbing affect that S can induce, and that I once induced in the 'other'. Every bit of willpower is exhausted to escape inertia. Thinking of Winnicott, I ask myself how I can write about deadness without losing vibrancy or paradox? Again, these questions inevitably draw me back to melancholy, a territory so seemingly deprived of psychic material and colour at first glance.

Melanie Klein's object relations theory evolved from Freud's *mourning and melancholia*. While still closely tied to Freudian theory, Klein shifted psychoanalytic thinking from predominantly emphasising

psychobiological drives toward foregrounding interpersonal processes (Bronstein 2013). This difference is perhaps most clearly visible in how Freud conceptualises the lost object through the economics of psychosexual attachments to a particular person or experience. In contrast, Klein conceptualises the lost object as those internalised or introjected qualities tied to a person or experience that has become fragmented, ruptured, or changed. Contrary to Freud, where the mourner 'detaches' from the lost object, Kleinian mourning is centred on reclaiming what was once already there (Klein 1940). This is not, as Freud would put it, a 'wishful psychosis' (Freud 1917) to cling to the lost person or experience or to reinstate the object itself. Rather, it is precisely to reclaim those object relations, those introjected qualities that have become disrupted or injured through loss. Again, we can see that for Freud, the work of mourning is instead the gradual substitution of the lost object. In contrast to Lacan, then, mourning is not about the symbolic killing of the deceased, but rather the opposite, of proving one hasn't killed the lost object (Leader 2009) and finding a way for the lost object to return where it once was.

Despite having touched on object relations elsewhere, I return briefly to its origins within Kleinian thought and how this becomes pertinent to melancholy. Object relations as a concept is perhaps most accessible through the earliest stages of infancy, when the infant, having to cope with anxieties of hunger and fear of annihilation, utilises the most primitive defence mechanisms of splitting whereby experiences, people, or objects, are split between good and bad (Klein 1940). Splitting is also characteristic of what Klein called the paranoid-schizoid position, which underlies persecutory angst and splitting as the predominant mode of relating (Klein 1946). Splitting is first apparent through the relationship of the primary carer, who cannot yet be apprehended as a complex whole and autonomous being. Instead, the qualities of that relationship are split between what Klein called the good and bad breast (Klein 1946). The 'breast' (within classical Kleinian theory emphasises the role of the mother and breastfeeding in child rearing) is, therefore, a physical object that corresponds with

breastfeeding and comes to inhabit the world of phantasy (Klein 1946). Phantasy, then, as opposed to fantasy, comes to stand for those psychosomatic responses with the physical breast as warm, nourishing, and present, which come to inhabit the unconscious. Hence there is a physical as well as an unconscious breast, and this is the earliest development of an object relation. The split between the supportive and nourishing breast and the anxious and vengeful breast constitutes part of the infant's inner world. In the temporary absence of the mother's breast, the child attacks and expels its anxiety onto the bad breast and learns slowly to conjure and rely upon the phantasy of this good breast.

Subsequently, the infant gradually comes to realise the split between good and bad breast are one and the same (Grotstein 1981). Hence, the perfect and boundlessly nourishing loved breast is one and the same as the breast that was sadistically attacked and repulsed. This gives rise to the fear of having damaged the object, subsequently giving rise to guilt (Klein 1946). Guilt, for Klein, marks a milestone in the child's development and signals what Klein comes to call the depressive position. In contrast to the paranoid-schizoid position, the depressive position (not to be confused with depression itself) is characterised by ambivalence whereby the infant comes to grips with the more nuanced and complex whole of its relation to people, experiences, or events (Klein 1937). While the depressive position relies less on the defences of splitting, it nonetheless signals the loss of a perfect ideal 'good object'. Klein argued that the mechanisms of the depressive position, as well as the support of the maternal bond to help the infant through the depressive position, comes to aid us during loss later in life. Fang (2016) points out how Klein, in *notes on Schizoid mechanisms*, regarded the normal fluctuations between love and hate that characterise ways of relating through ambivalence through the depressive position. A neo-Kleinian understanding looks at the interplay between the paranoid-schizoid position and depressive position, and how both defences within these positions are necessary in overcoming anxiety and loss.

In relation to melancholy, Klein describes the formation of the depressive position as a ‘melancholia *in statu nascendi*’ (Klein 1940). Unfortunately, Klein does not further clarify what she means by this. Within the frame of this thesis, I take Klein to suggest that melancholy is a virtual presence in relation to the depressive position. This line of thought might be better expressed through Morton, who similarly suggests that ‘for mourning to exist, melancholy must exist as its condition of possibility’ (Morton in Matviyenko and Roof 2018). This appears to be what Klein is developing in her 1935 paper *Psychogenesis of Manic-depressive States*. She begins by describing the turmoil and sadistic impulses of the infant in their attempts to protect their good objects from the persecutory objects, which correspond to the infants’ sadistic attacks and projection on the presence of the real object (Klein 1935). Hence, Klein not only marks the depressive position as a special transition from partial to whole object, but it is not until this moment that the infant comes to the situation Klein calls ‘loss of the loved object’. She writes: ‘Not until the object is loved as a whole can its loss be felt as a whole’ (Klein 1935). It appears that what Klein is arguing is that this process begins similarly in melancholia. However, in contrast to being able to make generative use of the depressive position, persecutory objects prevail, and the melancholic fails to establish their good objects. This is partly due to the dread that the loved object should perish (Klein 1935). In melancholia, those internal objects attack one another. This is predicated on the notion of a superego which seeks to abide by the ‘strict demands’ of the good object which further leads to a hatred of the ‘id’. Klein describes objects attacking one another, and an uncertainty as to the ‘goodness’ of an object, yet, while the melancholic desperately attempts to save the loved objects from parts of themselves.

For Klein, the melancholic cannot keep apart good and bad objects through the defences of splitting. She seems to be describing a depressive position that has gone awry. The melancholic is desperate to keep alive their good objects but cannot integrate the goodness in them. They appear at a loss, in the

process of losing, unable to rekindle, through phantasy, a relation with a lost goodness. What follows is a further fragmentation of the ego. Klein observes the tendency of the 'disintegration of the ego' (Klein 1946) in reference to early infancy, grief, loss, but also loneliness. This is largely in line with Winnicott (1963). In reference to loss, she writes about 'a falling into bits'. I see before me a young Tim struggling to reintegrate the lost object and remnants of his mother while attempting to hold the absence of a father. Klein also writes about '*a weakening of the ego, with the feeling there is nothing to sustain it*' (Klein 1940).

Esther Sánchez-Pardo argues that both Klein and Freud regarded melancholia as a failure to mourn (Sánchez-Pardo 2003). Whereas Klein writes about a 'miscarriage' of introjection, again related to the notion that mourning is a reclamation of the lost object, Freud largely conceptualises melancholy as the 'instalment' of the lost object within the ego. In contrast to both Sánchez-Pardo and Leader, I do not read Kleinian melancholy as a failure to re-introject the lost object in the absolute sense. Though Klein does insinuate there is a failure to restore the 'wholeness' of the lost object, I see her work as outlining a fragmented process. This is to say that only parts of the lost object are introjected, though are themselves defended against by the ferocity of the super-ego. This is partly because a failure of introjection in any absolute sense would insinuate that object-relating would cease to operate. Not only would this undermine Kleinian theory, but it also does not correspond with her account of the intersection and conflict between persecutory objects and the superego in tension with a fear that the goodness of the lost object might perish. It is precisely object relating that, as Klein writes, leads to a deadness inside. What I find compelling about Leader and Sánchez-Pardo's argument, is how they both observe that melancholy involves a degree of fragmentation or corruption of introjection whereby good objects are expelled for fear of being annihilated (Sánchez-Pardo 2003).

This argument, however, brings with it a second problem. I am drawing particular attention to the positioning of the lost object. I have written so far of differences in texture and make-up of the lost object between Klein and Freud. What appears to be true in both, and this is also what Leader seems to insinuate, is that their theory seems to mandate some positioning of the lost loved object in relation to mourning and melancholia. Its location, whether installed within the ego, or fragmented through a failure of (re)introjection, seems suggestive of a lost object that maintains its respective psychic makeup over time. For Freud this is undoubtedly more psychosexual, whereas for Klein, this encompasses the quality and experiences of relationships within the realm of unconscious phantasy. Nevertheless, the question arises to what extent the lost object can be seen to change over time, or whether it maintains a degree of equilibrium within its psychic makeup over time. Moreover, aside from the locality or temporality of the lost object, it would be further difficult to disentangle different objects from one another. It is unclear from their accounts to what extent the lost loved object remains 'lost' in the same way throughout time. Though Leader does not make this argument explicitly, he seems to suggest that Lacan presents a more compelling understanding of the lost object, which is itself constituted and can be approached as a creation of the process of mourning.

Before turning to Lacan, however, I wish to briefly pause at this section of writing. Through Klein and Freud, I have taken you through the subtle differences in the way melancholy is conceived and how these two schools of thought have acted as an anchor in subsequent thinking with melancholy. By using Michael Eigen's topographical approach, I also offered an alternative approach to Freudian melancholia as the unbearableness of falling out of love. Through Klein, we come to grapple with the depressive position as a nascent state of melancholy. Thinking closer to these lines has allowed me to see melancholy as a spilling over, rather than a break or rupture, of the mourning process. In light of these theoretical developments, I wish to briefly turn to the earliest pieces of writing I did in this thesis, and what Freud and Klein might reveal by returning to these early excerpts. Here I return, or turn over

(Barad 2017), what I initially wrote about as the loss of my mother that turned into a loss that became my own. The loss of the loved objects that formed me, now becoming undone. Though in their undoing, it is almost as though the lost objects lost their traces of her, becoming a sadness of my own.

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My father told me she had died, and I had never known relief that way. She was finally gone, no longer suffering. I went downstairs and kissed her forehead though it was a warm summer, and by the time she was put in her wake, purple blotches had formed around her face. The decay set in faster than I had anticipated. I was a little scared of my dead mother. She was a little too dead for my liking, but now, at least, I could be sure. In that Freudian sense reality testing (Freud 1917) was already happening. Perhaps, as Lacan might offer, the 'too deadness' of my mother foreshadowed a second killing of the lost object, as all my dreams of her seemed to estrange me from her; *who is this corpse in my dreams?* Even now, on rare occasions, I find myself again standing next to her hospital bed in our living room, sharing our very last moment when she looked at me and smiled her last smile. It would be the last time I would feel the warmth of her touch. She wasn't ready.

Kristeva makes a brief entrance. She passes me a note which reads: 'Freudian theory detects everywhere the same impossible mourning for the maternal object.' (Kristeva 1989, 9).

The first several months passed quickly, and her absence moved from a superficial fact to something painfully real. Between putting four plates on the table instead of three or remembering what would have been if she were there, there was a cadence to missing her and what her memories and presence would dislodge. With each cycle, she became different, and my memories of her loosened. This is how I now look at Freud when he writes of the gradual dislodging of the libidinal attachment to the lost

object (Freud 1917), or Lacan, in how the lost loved object becomes very much like a stranger. I remember speaking to her at night, which is something I still do on rare occasions, not always sure who is talking with me. She feels familiar but different.

However, in line with my recent writing on Freud and Klein, I confess that the idea of thinking of melancholia as a falling out of love is a territory I would prefer to avoid. How could I admit to such a disruption of love for my mother? Isn't this eternal? I love and loved her. I cannot let this thesis take that away from me.

I remember lots of late nights with my father and sister reminiscing. We talked about her life, our connection with her, and all the things we loved and hated. Though, in hindsight, I find myself suspicious at the ease with which we talked of her. Not only that, (though this may be different for my father and sister), I lived those conversations in ways that were infused by sentiments of an elaborate display of mourning. We were so good at talking about what we lost in her. It seemed we collectively mourned all the things we yearned for but didn't receive; words left unspoken, love tinged with ambiguity, and all our grudges and resentments that found a place between us. For a family that hardly expressed grief, we were suddenly immersed in it. Though, for all the sentiments of loss and complaint which were nonetheless pointing at something real, I think it would have been more honest to say that I (that we) had fallen out of love with parts of her. Those are the words of grief and mourning that I couldn't articulate, that stuttered, grated, and defied being performed in a neat display of grieving the departed. In reviving her loss, we circled around her presence and the warmth she offered, which sat in conflicting ways within us. Maybe if we could grieve in this way, then she would have been the one departing from us. It makes sense. She died. She left us. However, if I had to admit falling out of love with her, I would be the one departing from her. The feeling cuts deep. It reminds me again of being a baby's hand reaching to her and how safe she made me feel at times. It's not that

I resist hating her because, after all, there was much to hate. Though that falling out of love puts a chasm between us. It feels relentless in the way it cuts through a primal bond.

This falling out of love can also be seen in conjunction with Klein and the re-introjection of the (lost loved) object. I put the words lost and loved in parentheses because whether these objects are lost or loved is not entirely clear. Those good objects that nonetheless suffered a loss as we witnessed the death of her nevertheless remained available, either through others or in the way that those objects might have already been secure or introjected. What, then, happens to re-introjecting a good object that is no longer desired in that same way?

Many years after her passing, I woke up to find life had gone empty. There was no taste or touch and my stomach had left me. I saw entrails and severed nerves. Disembowelment gives the impression of a hollowness, yet it wasn't quite like that. When I say life had gone empty, this was not an emptiness of absence or negation. Instead, I felt full of it. Its pervasiveness felt terrifying, and everything seemed altogether lost. It reminds me of Klein and the overflowing of the depressive position. If there was ever something precious about mourning my mother, or if just the loss of her conjured a semblance of pain, it was now gone. There was abject apathy. Maybe this is what Freud meant by a poverty of the ego (Freud 1917). I had little sense of 'who' life was happening to. I lost an embodied sense of desire, of an internal I-ness or me-ness that could want or do things or to whom things could be done to, of cause and effect. Suicide appeared equally meaningless. There was a joyless world, one where 'I' seemed pointless in it, a dead speck floating among an ocean of other particles that couldn't quite touch to produce a spark. Matter ceased to matter when its vibrancy appeared narcissistically lost. Of what is a body capable, Deleuze and Guattari ask. It would be misery and all-out nothingness—a spirituality of unitary numbness. Psychic deadness. No movement.

I don't know why it happened. I'm not even sure I can relate this deadness to my mother, as both Freud and Klein might say loss and objects are in abundance and that we cannot easily trace melancholia to a singular event. Though emptiness and deadness diminished, their imprint remains in my body, always sure to find me. If deadness once held traces of my mother, I think this too has dissipated. As the traces of her leave, and I leave her, I find myself also moving away from Klein and Freud. All that I am left with is an emptiness and sadness that washes over me. I think I share this with S, that sense of losing traction with life. Though, while she is watching something of life pass by (not knowing where she is, what territory we inhabit), I have the acute feeling of having lost something. I am not quite present, not quite touching, but aware still of having lost something. I carry with me something blue. Objects are already fading, maybe always have been in a state of dissipation. But in their fading, I find something precious. It is here again I am reminded of Kristeva's words of the narcissistic depressive, that sadness becomes precious over any other to whom they might become attached (Kristeva 1989). Not only does it bring me closer to a desire for mourning, but it takes me to that fantasy of the loss of self, and the wish to untether from it all.

S looks at me and there is a silence, the kind that plugs the ears. *'You've never got to want anything'*. I repeat her last sentence. Aware of the significance of her formulating her *'wants'*. *'And you want to die'*. I get the distinct feeling this should feel harder to say, but the words are coming out effortlessly.

*'It's not that...'* she takes another long pause. *'I am indifferent to whether I live or die.'*

*'Hmmm'*, I respond, while she stares blankly at the floor. I think to myself that something feels dead already. Silence lets the words suicide and indifference settle into the room. I sense an eerily familiar deadness followed by my own fear about how far I can go. She sags lifelessly into the chair. Instinctively I reach for the visceral qualities of suicide and anger, anything that staves off deadness. I'm not sure I can meet her in deadness. I'm unsettled, more so than I would like to admit.

Thinking of Bion, I begin to feel unsure how I am containing this deadness between us. I hate it. Still, I console myself by remembering Cartwright, who talks about the importance for the therapist to *'operate from a position of uncertainty'* (Cartwright 2013). It feels risky. Perhaps, thinking with Cartwright and Bion, I might consider that the survival of deadness itself becomes the containing function. Deadness reaches us both and weathering it within myself may ensure S that some of its force can indeed be survivable.

She speaks: *'I feel indifferent...I don't...'*, She returns to silence.

I respond: 'You could take it or leave it, like.... you could take or leave being alive...and yet,'. I stop and survey my words, wanting to stay as close as I can to S's process. For me, it is also a question of how I meet her in that dark place. When I say 'how', I don't merely mean the gesture of the encounter itself, but the quality, what emotions and gestures I bring to questions of death and deadness. She picks up the threads.

'I'm just... I don't care about any of it'.

I surprise myself when the words come out: 'You want to want, you still want to have a desire for life to begin with' The words come out clumsily. We sit for a while. I don't want to push further. She winces her face, as though it's not quite right, searching for words that fit and feel right. Her posture and eyes move from searching to slouching, a vitality that leaves her body. She shakes her head. My heart sinks a little.

I pluck up the courage: I've noticed some of the words you used.... indifferent, wanting to die, but also wanting to desire... It feels like there is still a wish for a spark somewhere. To me...like... a bit hopeful, but at the same time'. (I'm thinking to myself, 'Tim, where are you going with this?') I sigh, agitated with my ramblings. I try to get to the point.

'I think I've been holding this feeling for a while...I wonder if something feels dead already.'

Her nod was more vigorous this time.

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Bion observes how clients who suffer from psychic deadness potentially have lost correspondence between 'mental and physical domains.' Bion writes that clients who struggle with deadness potentially assume omnipotent control of their good objects and impose moral maxims through which such good objects 'ought' to occupy certain places (Eigen 2004). As a result, he argues, there ceases to be a capacity to tolerate tension or openness. Bion goes on to observe that this person oscillates between helplessness and omnipotence, and becomes obsessed with an evacuative activity, of ridding the self to 'be everything without tolerating anything' (Eigen 2004). In Bionian terms, such a process stultifies and therefore ties up emotional reality rather than 'contributing to its evolution'. Bion points out that such clients attempt to collude with their therapists at offering reassurances against 'lost meaning'. The task of the therapist would be to avoid 'spurious mastery' so that client and therapist can 'explore the unsuspected realm of 'no-thing' of meaning and experience (Eigen 2004). While this may be the case in psychic deadness, I have attempted to show that melancholy also acts as a counterpoint to deadness. This may describe a process through which colluding with the therapist, as I have noticed within myself, as with clients, is less about reassurance, and perhaps more about enacting losses. This evacuative process, in both cases, seems to be necessary, but one that in melancholy can be linked to a desire rather than a defence mechanism. Foregrounding desire might be one way to bring melancholy into relational focus, despite what can also be felt as a loss of connection or deadness. These endeavours bring out creative-relational forces as a curative way of relating in the therapeutic relationship.

However, Bion raises a point that has been named elsewhere in the thesis. His notion of psychic deadness and the wish to 'become everything without tolerating anything' (Bion 1965 in Eigen 2004) aligns closely with Gaitanidis's (2017) postmodern melancholic who 'wishes to become everything, and so risk losing nothing, and end up 'losing the world' and themselves. I believe both would critique the notion of foregrounding desire in relation to melancholia as the very form of collusion that

attempts to regain omnipotent control of good objects (as seen in Bion) or to deny and resist, at all costs, the loss or incompleteness of the lost object (as seen in Gaitanidis). My intention, however, is not to advocate or romanticise melancholic relationality. Rather, I feel both authors don't go far enough in asking what else might be happening in an attempt to 'become everything'. Such oscillation between helplessness and omnipotence, for example, does not suggest a linear relationship between a desire or wish to become everything and the fear of losing nothing. As Bion points out, evacuative activity itself seems to imply an unstable quality in relation to loss and good objects. Hence, the sentiment expressed may well be inverted; the melancholic wishes to become nothing, and losing the world and themselves, lose everything. Nevertheless, both authors may be right in pointing out that something remains intolerable, and that such evacuative movements defy something of emotional reality being held. Objects, it seems, cannot be held in mutual or relational awareness, cannot be left whole, nor can they be accepted as incomplete. Though what might such evacuative—and to an extent, suicidal—movements offer to the client?

Having already discussed Hook's view on melancholic suicidality as a higher order of suicide within the symbolic, Kristeva offers yet another angle from which to approach desire and melancholia. She writes: '[For the melancholic] suicide is not a disguised act of war but a merging with sadness and, beyond it, with that impossible love, never reached, always elsewhere, such as the promises of nothingness, of death' (Kristeva 1989). Kristeva takes a subtly different stance than we have seen before. She does not assume that the melancholic necessarily engages with suicide as an act of vengeance or *war* against ambivalence of the lost loved object (Freud 1920), or an attempt to save good objects through the act of killing a self which perpetually taints it (Klein 1935). For Bion and Gaitanidis, for example, the analyst works to make ambivalence or goodness tolerable under the threat of the crushing super-ego. In contrast, Kristeva brings an awareness to the expression of a desire in the face of suicide as a 'merging with sadness'. She is not describing a merging with the lost

loved object, but rather merges with the promise of what it offered and that which could never be obtained. What does Kristeva mean by this? Her thinking here is grounded in Lacanian thought, which I now turn to in the coming chapter.

This line of thought marks the transition from Freud and Klein toward Lacan and Deleuze. We venture further into desire and its importance in its relationship to melancholy. As I have shown, desire might not have been explicitly foregrounded by Freud, Klein, or even contemporary thinkers like Hook, though its presence is undoubtedly woven into the subtle fantasies and movements in each account. Therefore, this next chapter marks a deliberate and explicit turn toward relating differently with the lost object with desire in mind. The lost object has already, throughout the writing, taken on different qualities. Because of this, in the next chapter, I also foreground the theoretical and practical implications of this, framed by the ontological differences between Lacan and D&G that run throughout this thesis. We explicitly delve into lack, the loss or emptiness at the centre of being, and how melancholy intersects with competing notions of desire. Equally, Deleuze and Guattari, who have been less prominent and vocal about my writing on Klein and Freud, become more invested in desire, claiming a stake in this debate. The writing of these authors moving into the post-modern era is more experimental. In this light, my writing also appears to reflect this shift. My use of the dinkus becomes more sporadic, without warning or explanation as to what is happening. The short sections between the dinkus are pieces of writing that nonetheless correspond with where the theory takes me.

## Lacan and Desire

S's utterances follow me; 'I *want* to die' and 'I *want to want* again'. Though neither Freud nor Klein fully foreground desire in relation to melancholy, this is where Žižek and Lacan take my inquiry further. In relation to S, however, Lacan would not straightforwardly view either utterance as an expression of desire. Rather, such statements take the form of a wish, which, he argues, have a fixed object. He distinguishes between wishes and desires, the latter being the 'yet-to-be-realised' of the unconscious (Wilson 2018). What, then, is the yet to be realised of S's utterances that shift between death and desire?

Returning to Lacan, I delve deeper into desire and its connection to melancholy and the loss of self. What follows is an initial response to Žižek's melancholia, followed by my grappling and experimentation with the various Lacanian terminology that is suffused in Žižek's thinking, such as *lack*, *objet petit a*, and *Das ding* (Žižek 2000). In doing so, I continue to challenge some of the assumptions underpinning melancholia I have shared so far, primarily—as Freud or Kristeva would argue—that the melancholic finds loss intolerable (Kristeva 1989). I continue to build on the idea that the melancholic has cultivated a way of relating through loss. Despite that Lacan spoke of melancholy in his *Écrits* lectures, he did so sporadically. His project has since been taken up and developed by such thinkers as Slavoj Žižek, Derek Hook, Darian Leader, and Julia Kristeva. I will draw predominantly on Žižek's writing here, as he has written more extensively on melancholic desire.

Slavoj Žižek states: 'What makes melancholia so deadening is that objects are here, available—the subject just no longer desires them' (Žižek 2017, 294). Like my thinking of the unbearableness of falling out of love, there is a distorted attraction and repulsion toward objects. Such distortions are often regarded as a 'failure' to mourn, though Žižek rejects this notion. There are more movements at play.

By foregrounding desire, he further alludes to the evacuative impulses in melancholy, and why good objects (as I have explored in Klein) can become illusive, as though they are not allowed to take shape. Žižek's initial reasoning for this is that the melancholic subject is always fading, and as such, they never 'are' but always 'will have been' (Žižek 2017, 294). This perpetual fading elicits a process of continual loss. Nothing can quite land in much the same way that S cannot find traction with life. Despite this different approach to Freud, however, Slavoj Žižek's reading of Lacan nonetheless creates a bridge between the two psychoanalytic thinkers. Like Freud, Žižek writes of melancholy as this devotion or persistent attachment to a lost object that is paradoxically and retroactively lost. In this sense, the melancholic, consumed by the 'real' of the object, treats it as if it had once been possessed (Žižek 2000). To this, he attributes to melancholia an excessive mourning or spectacle. I think here of lovers that treat one another as forsaken despite seemingly being available to one another from an outside perspective.

Thinking of melancholia as a way of relating through loss takes on clearer contours when Žižek writes: 'melancholy is not simply the attachment to the lost object but the attachment to the very original gesture of its loss' (Žižek 2000). What Žižek means by this original gesture is related to a primal loss that marks the transition between preoedipal and oedipal processes. It touches on an original loss of that divine unity with the other, the absence of which is perpetually sought to be re-possessed. The melancholic, from this perspective, treats all other objects as though they have lost in them some sublime quality that promised fulfilment. Paradoxically, in the act of losing the object, the melancholic manages to keep such objects in phantasmatic proximity. It presents a cycle of perpetual grief. The crux of Žižek's Lacanian take, then, is that the melancholic ultimately conflates lack with loss (Žižek 2000). What does it mean to conflate lack with loss, and how is this conceived of in Lacanian thought? How does this connect to the original gesture of loss? To understand this idea, we turn to a brief exploration of desire which, for Lacan, is inextricable to the notion of lack (Schuster 2016). While there

is not enough space within the frame of this thesis to fully expound on Lacan's theory of desire and its intersection with the real, imaginary, and symbolic, I offer a brief account that serves to give the reader a sense of what Žižek means with the 'conflation between loss and lack' in melancholia (Žižek 2017).

Mitchell Wilson (2018) describes Lacanian desire as an empty space where something is always emergent and open. In this way, the therapeutic encounter becomes a receptacle for a desiring collision with the analysand. Again, desire is not what one consciously thinks one wants, nor is it, in the strict sense, derived solely from within the individual person. It is perhaps important to note that the Lacanian analyst does not purport to know the client's true desires, but rather sees the use of language as central to its emergence. As such, desire is worked with as a signifier as open potential (Wilson 2018). Wilson here uses a metaphor to describe how the Lacanian analysts are like 'listening accompanists' at a jazz rehearsal. The analyst listens to the client-as-musician who plays the same tune over and over, but suddenly a note is played differently, and the analyst—having listened intently—proclaims in excitement: 'I haven't heard you play it this way before!' (Wilson 2018, 258). It is in these open spaces and gaps, desire makes itself visible. Here we stumble on open spaces that, for Lacan, foregrounds the centrality of lack.

Lack does not appear to exist from the outset in the subject. Lacan observed that in the preoedipal scene, the infant, enmeshed with its primary caregiver, undergoes castration. This describes the process by which the infant detaches from the primary carer (Lacan 1960). This is achieved through a third, often (classically) assumed by the role of father or secondary caregiver. Consequently, the infant loses a sense of unity with the primary caregiver which leaves a void or lack. The infant then retroactively creates or fashions the ideal of what it has lost, which, according to Lacan, was never 'real'. What is retroactively fashioned by the infant is what I understand Lacan to mean with 'Das Ding' or the Thing (Schuster 2016). It symbolises the sublime unity with the primary carer and the perfect

holding and love that never really was. Now detached from this sublime object, the infant feels at the core of their being a lack, a missing part of itself, which is always looking to be completed through this imagined unity which was never there. Das ding, then, is the first lost object to become the object of desire that is boundlessly good. Lacan believed that, were this sublime object available to the subject it would resist, unable to bear its goodness, experiencing it instead as evil and incestuous (Lacan 1960). How, then, does the infant come to fill this lack? Within the oedipal situation, Lacan uses the concept of the imaginary phallus (Lacan 1977) to describe the infant's growing recognition that the primary caregiver desires something in that third 'other' that the infant is excluded from, and potentially reveals a lack that stands in the way of preoedipal unity. What the other possesses that I do not, what makes them desirable and myself lacking, is what Lacan calls the imaginary phallus.

Lack, then, is at the centre of being we constantly try to fill, which is what Sean Homer refers to as providing a window to understanding the Lacanian 'real' (Homer 2005). Central to lack, this *manque-à-être* or lack-of-being, remains this yearning for Das Ding, or what Lacan refers to as 'Objet petit a', or in other words, the object cause of desire (Schuster 2016). This is both the void and gap, and whatever objects come to fill that gap in 'symbolic reality' (Homer 2005). Homer writes, '[objet petit a] it is not the object itself, but the function of masking lack' (Homer 2005, 88). Again, object a is not desire itself, nor is it an object that is lost that can be reobtained or reinstated. It corresponds with an object or Das Ding, that sublime experience that was never there in the first place and in this sense objet petit a is the unobtainable object which is the cause of desire (Schuster 2016). Homer (2005) writes of this as a universal human experience that something is missing, never quite fulfilled, absent from our lives, or not fully loved. Yet, in our constant search to fill this lack, our longing, lust, and desire is never fully slaked, as there is always something more left to desire. Should we obtain that sublime object that fulfils and the promise of Das Ding, Slavoj argues, we risk the recognition that the sublime 'Grail' is nothing more than a piece of shit (Žižek 2009). Oscar Wilde touched on this very notion by

saying: 'There are two tragedies in life, one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it' (Wilde 2021).

Žižek's argument is that the melancholic conflates the object cause of desire, the lack at the centre of being, with loss. This is what he means when he writes: 'insofar as the object-cause of desire is originally, in a constitutive way, lacking, melancholy interprets this lack as a loss, as if the lacking object was once 'possessed and then lost' (Žižek 2000). Žižek goes on further to argue that in doing so, the melancholic relates to objects through a logical distortion whereby the turning lack into loss, they possess the lost object that was never possessed or never fully existed in itself. By virtue of turning lack into loss, the melancholic possesses the object in its very loss. My understanding, then, when Žižek writes of the attachment to the original gesture of loss, is that the melancholic in some sense possesses Das Ding, the sublime pre-oedipal Thing that created the very lack which is now conjured into a disappointing existence through perpetual loss. This proposes to me that what Žižek is hinting at is that the melancholic is affectively closer than most to recognising their ontological incompleteness, though seduced by the divine promise that they were once whole. In the purest melancholic sense, this conveys the fantasy that the 'loss of self' conjures a self into existence that never was, though in its abstraction, points toward the 'real' and the void at the centre of our being, the 'real' as ontological incompleteness.

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*Losing you, you come into being. I can't touch you or be with you, but the pain of losing you, the disappointment you cause me in the fulfilment you once promised in my desire, satiates. It empties me as much as it gives me life. I harmonise with a phantom of completeness and find myself spent.*

*Maybe this is where Kristeva takes me when she writes of this 'impossible love' and the 'promise of nothingness' which drives the melancholic. Maybe this is a sublime nothingness, the loss of self, the loss of you, it breaks into an ultimate dejection that transposes and breaks my being into a completeness I wish it had. If the objects I desire come too close, I see them for what they are, the excremental objects (Žižek 2017) that bring me eternal disappointment.*

*I think of all those laments that clients have brought to the counselling room. Reading Lacan brings this into a different light. It is not the fantasy or desire for something more or better, of course, sometimes it is.... but the possibility to think that desire is enacted by the very gesture of losing and, in so doing, keeping it alive.*

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As aforementioned, this very conflation between lack and loss offers the promise of ontological completeness, but one that ultimately disappoints. Still, this seems to give further credence to the notion that not only does the melancholic find loss intolerable, but they are more so caught in a paradox between the intolerability of loss and a need for it. Few accounts connect mourning with desire. My interest, however, is not to formulate a complete representation of melancholia's contrivances but to bring out its relational qualities. I aim to offer a different window into working with melancholia and the fantasy of the loss of self which follows me throughout my writing. I think of how S talks of many of her relationships as though they are lost, and in the embers of their absence, still offer a cold warmth. I think of my mother and the implicit fantasy of that maternal unity inscribed as lack, but which I have now lost, and in losing, have magically recovered.

## Lacaneutarri

*Desire, Deleuze tells us, lacks nothing and is tormented by no vain aspiration or melancholy impasse (Schuster 2017, 97).*

Deleuze and Guattari are shaking their heads. Lack is precisely one of those concepts they critique in *Anti-Oedipus* (2009). Having grounded my ontological approach in Deleuzo-Guattarian thought, my use of psychoanalysis and Lacan can be seen as ontologically inconsistent. For example, where Lacan's theory of desire is grounded in lack, Deleuze approaches desire as a force that creates. Where Lacan looks at the unconscious as shaped as language and as something that produces itself within the dialogic exchange, Guattari favours the pre-verbal and affective, regarding the unconscious as that which can be created and placed within flows (Nedoh and Zevnik 2017). D&G palpate and sense by employing a physical labour of running one's hand over objects, turning them around, whereas Lacan looks at the constant stream of signifiers, thereby favouring the dialectical. The list goes on. It is probably for this reason that very little literature exists that looks to create a synthesis between these theorists. Aaron Schuster similarly observes that what little literature there is, tends to create oppositional accounts, or seeks to eradicate difference altogether (Schuster 2016). I agree with Schuster that whilst their theories may be fundamentally at odds, they are also 'unbearably close' (Schuster 2016, 30). How can I justify my use of D&G in conjunction with Lacan?

This question is picked up by Nedoh Boštjan and Zevnik Andreja. In their book *disjunctive synthesis* (2017), they recognise that the respective schools of thought between Lacan and D&G are never quite together, and yet, they collide in theory as much as they did in life. Their work attempts to create practical mechanisms that can be produced between Lacan and Deleuze, which Nedoh refers to as 'Lacanuze' (Nedoh and Zevnik 2017). I use the title of this section Lacanuetarri as a nod to Nedoh and

Zevnik, but also a recognition of the presence of Guattari in this thesis. My writing on Lacan and Guattari, however, does not aim to create a disjunctive synthesis between the two schools of thought, but rather seeks to employ 'difference' by seeing what can emerge in the liminal space of their ontological proposals. As such, my writing stays closer to the ideas of Schuster and the ways that Lacanian and Guattarian desire might generatively meet in the territory of melancholia. Was it not precisely the friction between ontological spaces that Todd May (2005) describes to us as Deleuzian 'difference' in practice?

Nevertheless, bringing Lacan and D&G within the same writing space is challenging from the outset. Deleuze and Guattari (2013) decry the betrayal of desire and the psychoanalytic curses inflicted upon it. Their most relevant critique concerning Lacan is the notion of Lack 'as common law'. They reject any overriding principle at the root of desire, that *manque-à-jouir* (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). Desire, they say, lacks nothing. Desire is affirmative; it moves, de-and-re-territorialises, and is always in imminent flow. In Deleuzo-Guattarian practice, there are no subjects but only part-objects that collide to produce affects and contrivances of their own. They do away with the Lacanian theory of negativity. However, here Schuster argues precisely the opposite, that the affirmative view of Deleuze and Guattari is rather an attempt to reconceive negativity, (which I understand here as a move toward diminishment, emptiness, or void) rather than to do away with it. In this light, *Anti-Oedipus* is not an ultimate rebuttal of psychoanalysis but instead signals Deleuze's attempt to rescue the earlier conceptualisations of Freud and Lacan from their Oedipal restraints. Schuster (2016) argues that Deleuze's interest in the death drive led him to attempt to liberate it from the subject and ego. In this way, the death drive as such becomes a force, more so than a psycho-biological drive. It is not a force tethered to a subject or the ego but is imminent to objects. Again, Borrowing from Klein, Deleuze did not outright dismiss the ego, but rather saw in the ego multiplicities of part-objects all imminent to the desiring machine (Nedoh and Zevnik 2017).

However, this encounter between D&G, Lacan, and Freud is framed not only by their ontological variances. This thesis brings out a particular emphasis on the way each theorist accounts for the 'problem of desire' (Schuster 2016). This problem—more so a puzzle that most therapists are intimately familiar with—is borne from the observation that we seem to have an incredible talent and disposition for inviting misery into our lives (Schuster 2016). Rather than a force toward creation, comfort, and pleasure, desire can bring us closer to suffering, to a nauseating excess, or a desperate void that empties out goodness. For Schuster, neither Freud's pleasure principle nor Deleuze's desire as a creative force fully accounts for such desiring contradictions. Here D&G, as well as Freud and Lacan, all come very close to formulating a desire as negativity that returns to a stasis, a 0 point, a death drive conceptualised as an affirmation of life that empties out life, or as Schuster writes, 'a dissolution of being into nothingness' (Schuster 2016, 12). Hence, not only does this thesis contend with ontological divergences between Guattari and Lacan, but it must also account for the puzzle of desire.

While Žižek offers a piece of this puzzle—so far that the melancholic conflates lack with loss—it does not fully flesh out how desire moves toward negativity. Can this be reconciled with D&G's notion of desire as a creative force? Again, I use the word reconciliation deliberately here. If desire is not impeded by melancholy impasse (Schuster 2016), it would seem as though melancholy itself is placed outside desiring assemblages. For me, this is at odds with Guattarian thought. Consequently, positioning melancholy outside of desire, would separate it from the very imminence that supports D&G's ontological project. Therefore, it is important to my thesis and my thinking to bring melancholia into the imminence of desiring assemblage so that it can move with D&G's ontological vision. One such possibility, of course, approaches desire as negativity through the notion of de-territorialisation or the 'body without organs' (Deleuze and Guattari 2013).

This negative desire that I write about in relation to melancholia becomes most forcefully foregrounded by the fantasy of the loss of self. In this territory, I am confronted with a movement toward negativity and the abyss which follows in the wake of desire for untethering and disinhibition. I think there can be a delight in de-territorialisation. However, Schuster takes this 'loss of self' a step further. Much like Hook's (2018) notion of a higher order of suicide, he touches upon a desire of erasure that points to a longing never to have existed, which he refers to as 'mē phunai' (Schuster 2016, 24). It seems that Deleuze considered this very force toward retroactive non-existence in relation to Freud's early work. For Schuster, such notions of the 'Body without Organs' (Schuster 2016) is one that is precisely related to negativity. It is the emptying out of objects so that new intensities and lines of flight can take off. However, there is a difference between a smooth space upon which new intensities can emerge and one in which smooth spaces become erased.

As Schuster (2016) points out, Deleuze and Guattari's writing is full of references to a void, emptiness and de-territorializations from which emerges new ontologies and multiplicities. It is a river that runs dry, gets trampled, only to be re-flooded, and so veering into different directions. Such an evacuative force, one grounded in erasure, is what I see as constitutive of desire and becoming. It is the Deleuzian notion of change and the constant motions of territorialisation and deterritorialization. Schuster is merely pointing out that aside from the affirmative and vitalist position that most literature takes in relation to Deleuze, thinking of 'forces that create', cannot be extracted from negativity and the death drive. This is also why Deleuze was excited by Lacan's initial formulations of subject *petite a*. Of course, the important distinction between them remains, that for Lacan, *objet petit a* was a negativity framed by lack, one that stood transcendental to the creation of the subject. Deleuze, in contrast, saw *objet petit a* as a part object, a negativity of returning to a stasis, but nonetheless, in its negativity, it remains for Deleuze an 'object teeming with life' (Schuster 2016).

Therefore, bearing in mind my previous wonderings with Lacan, we might say that for Lacan, Deleuzian negativity is never 'negative enough'. The empty riverbed is too filled with potential; the void is never void of itself, and there are no tears in the fabric of space into which subjects become fully undone. The undoing of the body without organs, its exhaustion through desire leaves us still with a 'bodiless embodiment', still part of the desiring machine where indeterminate parts never cease to collide and assemble. It is, as Schuster purports, the anti-production as an integral part of production. This sentence perhaps captures Deleuzo-Guattarian negativity best: the negative is the power of mobility and displacement. For Lacan, there is no such movement. Lack, the nothingness that the object gives a body to, the irreconcilability of our nonexistence, tells us the subject is already dead, the apocalypse has already happened. Schuster encapsulates this at the beginning of his book, where he observes that for the Lacanian, what appears to be alive is already dead, whereas for Deleuze, what is dead, the non-human and the inanimate object, is full of life.

Subsequently, the differences between Lacan and Deleuze can be thought of as a set of mirror images. Schuster observes that Lacan employs what he considers to be the 'dialectics of intersubjectivity' whereas Deleuze and Guattari work with 'non-dialectics of interobjectivity' (Schuster 2016). To write with Deleuze and Guattari is, after all, to surrender that subject to which I cling, that intersubjectivity and dyadic interplay in what happens when two personalities collide. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari, write about the multiplicities of objects, part-objects, and the fragmented ego, which collides with other constellations. For this reason, they say that when they write together, they make quite a crowd (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). Yet, for all their differences, their respective approaches come very close to one another. Taking the therapeutic encounter as an example, Lacan encourages his clients to follow a stream of signifiers in ascertaining the emergent (Wilson 2018), unusual, new, or odd articulations and experiences. Schuster gives the delightful example of a child that perpetually asks

‘why’, arriving finally at the inevitable failure of the signifier from which something nonetheless emerges. Dialectical intersubjectivity looks to see not only where language can take the client, but also to become ‘worthy’ of its utterance that ‘speaks in the person and its slippages and short circuits’ (Schuster et al. 2016, 88). Different, yet similarly, Deleuze and Guattari look at the imminent assemblage of forces that produce lines of flight and how bodies become-together in the flows of where affect takes them, what it does and produces in the therapeutic encounter.

Therefore, both Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari, *Lacaneuzettari* meet in their eagerness to stay with desire yet diverge in how one does so through language and a conceptualisation of lack, whereas the other looks to palpate and sense. It is difficult and so tempting in the therapeutic encounter to engage in meaning-making as an explanation, as oversight or insight, as opposed to the creation of meaning. It was Deleuze who admitted that where psychoanalysis runs the risk of closing down thought (through interpretation or representation), Lacan picks up the project of desire within the therapeutic exchange (Nedoh and Zevnik 2017). Hence, where Lacan and D&G see desire as vital to their theoretical practice, they are closely at odds about the ontology of desire.

Thinking with Deleuze, what does the non-dialectics of interobjectivity make possible? Schuster (2016) helps me consider melancholy as part of the desiring machine that cannot create a ‘body without organs’. I might tweak the language a little and say that melancholic objects cannot quite lose themselves fully. Yet desire for loss creates a glitch, a loop, an un-be-coming, a push and pull that can’t quite make up which direction to flow, delighting still in the cadence of its orbit around other orbits and melancholic machines. Melancholic machines desire, but cannot quite de-territorialise enough, cannot find the traction with other bodies. Such machines lose and lose losing, but in doing so cannot fully create a smooth space, cannot find traction because that emptying force is too full. Yet, this does not align itself with the Lacanian sense where the melancholic possesses the lost object through its

very gesture of loss. Where Žižek states that the Lacanian melancholic conflates lack with loss, the Deleuzo Guattarian melancholic is too full of void, too filled with emptiness (lack?) to which the body returns. Perhaps, in a Lacanuzian twist, the melancholic is the primordial organism that cannot quite dis-organize and create a body without organs. Schuster might put it in a more pointedly, that the melancholic object, the dead object teeming with life, has become too full of that primordial intensity of the death drive that brings objects back to 0, inertia.

For Guattari, melancholy objects are the antithesis of madness that creates ruptures from which new ontologies can be produced. Melancholy is not empty enough to become 'other' or 'more than', and not full enough to be closed off from one another. It's not that melancholy objects lay preserved in a glass vitrine that cannot be touched or placed within a desiring assemblage. Though such objects, as far as I can tell, need risk or a sudden jolt that allows them to desire differently.

How to embody the inter-objective through my work with S? Which part-objects to palpate and sense? How can we fashion ourselves a body without organs? We are becoming deadness-loss-overflow and delighting in the dance of indifference and primordial inertia. Without discarding the dialectical, however, I look for an embodied way to ask the question, 'Where does it take you?'. S and I are not dead enough, not alive enough, stuck in some liminal space. It is precisely in this liminal space that the fantasy of the 'loss of self' re-emerges, one that Schuster (2016) refers to as *mē phunai*, to revert to a negative state and emptiness on which everything may become possible. Yet, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, it seems this fantasy of the loss of self is melancholic insofar it cannot fully unravel, and that it cannot fully untether to create a smooth space. In a way, melancholia is not negative enough in its desiring movements. Maybe S's utterances that she wants to die, and wants to want again, are eerily saying something similar, that she wants to lose more than she can or that she is attempting to create a body without organs, but the empty spaces are just too full of emptiness.

## The time I saw Jesus in a Hostel.

I met Jesus in a hostel in Portugal. It was where the Atlantic Ocean crashed down on its southernmost tip and the froth of the waves reached the shack-like lodging where I stayed. I saw Jesus ponder at himself in a bathroom mirror. I was standing in the doorway, my feet finding respite from the hot sand on the stone tiles, ready to take a piss. Jesus just stood there, looking at his own reflection, and I couldn't help but stare at him. I was gawking at his wild hair and rugged features, wearing flip flops, what looked like linen boxer shorts, and an arrangement of string bracelets on his arm. But I was most struck by his eyes, polished by decades of sand and sun, luminescent.

He looked at me and, full of distress, pointed at himself in the mirror and said: 'Who is this?'. I stood frozen. Not quite sure what to say to Jesus, believing it was well beyond my scope to answer. He glanced back into the mirror and said: 'This is not me... this is not my face...', his tone was serious, pensive. He looked me in the eyes and spoke again, 'I do not know this man, It's not me!'. His demeanour was changing. His bracelets rattling, his hair caught in a storm! Something clearly seemed preposterous, which made this obscurity of recognition all the madder.

Freud tells us that the melancholic sees themselves most closely as they are (Freud 1917), in much the same way that Žižek observes that the melancholic is closer than anyone to recognising their ontological incompleteness (Žižek 2000). Freud states that the melancholic has a 'keener eye' for the truth and asks why we must fall ill before accessing such truth (Freud 1953). The truth that he references similarly appears to allude to a feeble and lacking nature. As Freud said of the psychoanalytic process, it leaves us less inhibited, but unhappier. It is almost as though seeing one's true reflection is ultimately anticlimactic, empty, and for the neurotic, an altogether disappointing

experience. Yet, I don't see Jesus here as disappointed in self-lacking exposure. There is something about the gaze and the pair of eyes that stare back from the other side of the mirror.

Lacan regarded the gaze as productive of the subject's joining of the symbolic order. While this idea is centrally discussed in relation to the mirror stage (Julien 2021), I am interested in the inherent alterity that constitutes the image of ourselves as always estranged, slippery, and placed under phantasmatic control of that 'Other'. Wouldn't Hook remind us of the melancholic's attempt at escaping the symbolic order? It captures the eerie feeling of wondering who is looking back, who am I? 'Are you really who you say I am?' (Nedoh and Zevnik 2017). The subject forms through the folding of that 'other's' gaze through which the subject comes to know themselves as subject. I feel here a resemblance with Jesus's potential melancholic gaze, as one that makes it all too plain the inherent alterity and otherness that constitutes our being, always in connection with some 'Other', to something ineffable. It is to look in the mirror and to meet yourself as other, estranged, stripped from everything that ordinarily makes you feel like you, me feel like me. Yet, this is not so much melancholic as it is about recognising that familiar otherness in ourselves. Maybe Jesus is experiencing a kind of loss of self, too close to that 'other' in himself.

Zevnik and Nedoh subsequently develop what they refer to as the Lacanian anxious gaze. They describe it as a gazing that 'appears at the vanishing point of existence' (Nedoh and Zevnik 2017, 80). Yet, in contrast to any ordinary gaze, it is not the other staring back; it is you as a 'spectator'. There is a distorted expectation to place yourself within the wholeness of a self-narrative. Jesus looks in the mirror expecting the 'him' staring back to close the loop of a life's story. There is an expectation to have an answer to the question 'Who am I?'. Yet, the anxious gaze hears no answer. Recalling my earlier exposition of Lacan, I am talking of that lack as the primordial fold, the *manque-a-etre* (Lacan 1993). The anxious gaze is looking for fantasies or to create new ones, but none are returned. They

sense a presence, though it eludes them. What is this presence? What do they see that they can't? This, Zevnik argues, is what Lacan wants to investigate. It is as though the anxious gaze is piercing or sensing the presence of nonexistence (Nedoh and Zevnik 2017, 80). Of course, we can only conclude from this that Vampires are the ultimate melancholics because they see themselves truly for what they are and banish themselves into the shadow realm. In the shadows, every mirror still holds the promise of wholeness.

When I think with Deleuze, however, I think again of the non-dialectics of interobjectivity. Gazing into the mirror it is not the relationality of an intersubjective encounter, but rather of part objects mapping the potentiality of becoming. It is almost as though Jesus looks in the mirror, and rather than seeing alterity, he sees the virtual collisions of what can be produced and what can become. Gazing in the mirror is not so much working with the Body without organs, as it is the unsettling feeling of seeing many bodies become. The mirror is not a passive reflection machine. It is a fortune teller of the virtual and of perspectivism (Braidotti 2013). It holds more than it can contain, and the virtual always spills over, and whatever does, takes flight. But what, then, does it say of the melancholic gaze, seeing only their limp and inert eyes gazing back?

Perhaps, Lecuneuze brings me closer instead to the notion of *mē phunai* and the loss of self. It is yet another way of relating to the gaze, wondering what feels most compelling, which gazes we come across when looking at ourselves in the mirror, or, in this Lacanian-Winnicottian sense, when the client gazes at their own reflection through the eyes of the therapist. When Jesus proclaims, *'This is not me'*, the absurdity I feel is the impossibility of being free from this me-otherness constellation. Free, not from the gaze, but of being a spectator, of potentially being inscribed by the position of indifference that cannot quite ooze and connect with the virtual potentialities and partial objects of the mirror image. This, again, evokes a melancholic quality for me, one accompanied by an estranged presence,

but not being fully swept away by the affect. There is pesky and enduring awareness. If I were a melancholic Lacanian, I would say Jesus is the spectator that sees both sides of the symbolic order, its rise and fall, is both a part of it, and apart from it, but never fully connected. As a melancholic Deleuzian, there is a senselessness in the encounter of Jesus' face, an encounter on the smooth space (Deleuze and Guattari 2013), the negative, the void, where so many Guattarian objects take flight. Yet they don't.

I return to melancholy as a way of relating through loss, and the notion that a gaze appears at the 'vanishing point of existence' (Nedoh and Zevnik 2017). This vanishing point becomes the very territory through which the melancholic, in its misery and evacuative delight, senses that ineffable and original loss that was never there in the first place. It is Jesus, gazing, lamenting, and indulging in the loss of the divine union with God, tracing the ineffable lines of subjectivity that he cannot escape. The melancholic loses, and seeks loss, but in their evacuative fervour, they cannot get free of themselves. Trapped in their own lack, made inert and empty by the empty signifiers. The melancholic loses even in fantasy and colour but comes so close to that ineffable Das Ding, which is in itself lacking.

Of course, I cannot be sure what distressed Jesus so. It nevertheless had a profoundly unsettling feeling. It was many years later when pinned by the rays of the black sun that I too stared in the mirror and felt a similar, yet different sense of otherness. There was absurdity, but thoroughly without affect. It leaves me to consider how Deleuze and Guattari were on to something, that madness here is a potential antidote, a spark, a short circuit that doesn't de-territorialise or territorialise, but cuts through. I also wonder what S sees when she gazes into the mirror, or gazes into my eyes. Perhaps I should ask her. Though I know asking her what she desires often leads to narratives of death and deadness, just as I intuit that working with the gaze may be inscribed with apathy. What can two apathetic bodies do? It is here that I struggle most with my own feelings toward S. I have a growing

sense now that despite the fervour of how I respond to deadness, the way it animates me, both in my longing for escape, or even connection with S, that I am afraid that somewhere I too am apathetic. I would rather hate S than feel apathy toward her and stoop into a lethargic indifference. Perhaps I can hate that too.

## S

I've just gotten home from client work. It's late, I'm tired and hungry, but S follows me<sup>2</sup>. I hate how we're never quite touching but not far enough apart. I don't have the capacity to process right now. I tell myself I will set half an hour aside tomorrow to write about her, to give some space to what's weighing on me, hoping this affirmation will ease S's presence. I don't want to think, I don't want to consider what this might be mirroring in the therapeutic relationship or S's life. I just want to be home and switch off.

I step into the shower and imagine the hot water carrying away the sediment of S. I close my eyes, relax into the steamy cocoon from which I am reborn into the evening, but something of her keeps clinging to me. Flashes of our sessions intrude, and suddenly the steam and water become suffocating, and my breathing becomes shallow. In typical fashion, I maintain composure, taking deep breaths, knowing I don't have it in me to look after the panic that's setting in. From the hallway, I can hear my wife come through the door, unable to explain to her I just need a moment alone.

There are evident contradictions at play. I'm trying to wash S away, to rid myself of an anxiety of being too close to what she is evoking in me which only exacerbates further what I am resisting, foreclosing, and struggling to accept into awareness. Equally, however, is my own desire to find traction with her, for our bodies to become more animated, alive, and moving, finding it difficult to dwell in that disconnection between us that is neither wholly disconnected, and neither connected.

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<sup>2</sup> The above scene was inspired by Suzie Orbach's (1999) opening chapter in the impossibility of sex.

S has hooked something in me. It reminds me of Hook's (2018) over-proximal 'real' object, which is like the grimace of that skull behind a beautiful face that haunts me. It's not S, it's something unsettled in me. Thinking of grimaces and death, I suddenly have the image of S and I being like a murder of crows, tiny beaks pecking at bodies and organs. I want to wonder where it takes me, but I'm done, exhausted.

## From dyad to dad, men, and gender melancholy

A male therapist takes a shower and is unable to take his mind off a female client. Such accounts, often heteronormatively framed, could evoke the dilemmas and thrills of erotic (counter)transference if it weren't for the powerful undercurrents of angst. It nonetheless foregrounds how, as gendered bodies, S and I move, repel, and attract through the vicissitudes of mourning and melancholy. This might be something which you were already curious about, wondering why my imaginal client is a woman and what gestures of power and ethics are imbued in my writing her into being. How might melancholy become differently through the melancholy gender assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 2013)? My emphasis, however, is not on the gendered difference between S and me. Nor is it my intention (relevant though it would be) to take you through how I engage with ethical practice through an awareness of gender in the counselling relationship. Rather, it is to delve deeper into what I have imbued S with through mourning and my writing of her. Many of the losses that I feel in relation to her, especially in that agonising closeness and far-away-ness, is also visible in my experience and relationship with men, masculinity, and fathering. Here too, I find desires that seem to enact ways of relating through loss.

In a way, S is that gendered other that I am. 'Other' in the sense that I have projected and animated S with the (unconscious) gendered conflicts that I have been unable to own. This feels pertinent to the counselling relationship, but especially to the writing and how S is borne through the unconscious. Again, I think of Lacan, who would say that (inter)subjectivity does not speak but is spoken in the way in which the unconscious shapes and forms. There is a violence involved in how S becomes through my writing tumult, having to contend with those ambiguous parts of myself that might not have a clearly gendered coordinate. Moreover, it is mainly through client work—many of my clients who are much better versed than I am around topics of gender or sexuality—that I have learned that I can

appear to my clients as queer, as masculine, or feminine. All this might not be so new to my reader, but it has been for me, and has—even more so—unsettled my memories and relationships of men and masculinity. Why is gender so relevant to melancholy? Why now?

It is precisely here that Judith Butler's earlier psychoanalytic grappling with gender melancholy tells us how foreclosure can be constitutive of gendered emergence (Butler 1995)<sup>3</sup>. They observe how such foreclosure is culturally mediated through practices that disavow the loss of homosexual love. The absence of avowal and recognition 'produces a culture of heterosexual melancholy' (Butler 1995). This is because foreclosure itself becomes almost impossible to mourn. Butler writes about an unmournable loss at the heart of gender that designates a pre-emptive loss; *I never loved you, and therefore I never lost you* (Butler 1995). Subsequently, Butler observes the emergence of a constellation whereby the foreclosure of homosexuality is that location where heterosexual identification takes place. This forms an apparent contradiction. The man insistent on his 'heterosexual coherence' will claim that he 'never loved a man, and never lost a man' (Butler 1995, 172). What follows:

*'The straight man becomes (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he "never" loved and "never" grieved... It is in this sense, then, that what is most apparently performed as gender is the sign and symptom of a pervasive disavowal.* (Butler 1995, 179)

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<sup>3</sup> I draw on Butler's 1995 paper on gender melancholy because their writing here maps closely to my experiences of disavowal and foreclosure in relation to masculinity. Given my situatedness as a researcher, this does take on a heteronormative frame, though one I seek to trouble. While Butler's thinking has evolved even from their works on gender performativity, I deliberately think with their psychoanalytic writing as one possible layer to thinking with melancholy gender, which remains obscure in the broader literature.

Butler argues that we must risk the incoherence of identity and decentre the subject that allows for desire to become liberated. Their message is an optimistic one. Cultural mediation of gender need not be grounded in repudiation and foreclosure. This is beautifully captured when they write:

*'Indeed, we are made all the more fragile under the pressure of such rules, and all the more mobile when ambivalence and loss are given a dramatic language in which to do their acting out.'* (Butler 1995, 180)

Therefore, in this territory we come to see parts of gendered becoming as imminently connected to that strange intersection between desire, mourning, and ways of relating through loss that this thesis has been about. Only retrospectively, and often through clients such as S, do I begin to have glimpses of how gender is a territory where I have attempted to find a language for a tenderness and softness that has felt elusive and potentially beyond the male body that (I) am<sup>4</sup> or was expected to become. This echoes Braidotti's thinking of becoming minor, as dislodging 'man as the privileged referent of subjectivity' (Braidotti 2013, 348). She makes the Deleuzian argument that for male bodies to become differently, they can only be the 'site of deconstruction' (Braidotti 2013). Privilege and the taken-for-granted veils angst that is always and already there. I think Braidotti here is saying that male bodies, because of their molar status, are also stubborn and too often fixed, while gender trouble (Butler 2006) is evidently present, waiting.

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<sup>4</sup> I make an unintended assumption that my body and gender are one and the same, and that these are equated to myself as a subject. I don't appear to have a gendered body; I am one. This assumption is problematic, though I kept this sentence because it resembles how Chodorow (1999) argues how men tend to identify themselves linearly and rigidly through gender.

When writing about gender melancholy and men, I think of those juxtapositions of tender love that is nonetheless tinged with—and in such proximity to—humiliation and violence (Chodorow 1999). This obfuscates the becoming of male bodies (of any bodies) and the unique contradictions that I was often unaware of in my relationships with men. In contrast to what little there has been written about gender melancholy, however, my writing here is not foregrounding the repudiation and disavowal of homoerotic love, as found in Chodorow (Chodorow 1999), Butler (1995) or even Kristeva (1989). Instead (or I might say, alongside), where I aim to take the writing is an attempt to stay with this unsettling of male bodies in moments when something of maleness is transgressed. Perhaps I am revisiting gender through the Lacanian ‘real’ and the loss of a gender that was never possessed. Alternatively, Deleuze might consider the ambiguity and desire of male bodies that become more than they are. I write into my unnameable angst of male tenderness, both riveting and treasured, often so closely positioned to the scenes of humiliation through which male bodies appear to relate through, as Butler puts it, an unmournable loss.

Consequently, what could be located as a matter of further inquiry is the intersection between gender melancholia and gender dysphoria. This is particularly relevant in the way I have written earlier of how melancholia distorts bodies. Melancholic bodies become less than they are, revealing their shadowy contours while, simultaneously, coming to overflow. What happens when gender overflows? Here again, Lacaneuzetarri and the ‘fullness’ of a desire move toward a zero point, an emptying out and disembowelment, the empty space of which cannot find traction with other assemblages. This aspect of melancholic gender (gender dysphoria), however, falls beyond the scope of this thesis. While I write of melancholic distortion of male and masculine bodies, this does not touch on the notion or ideas of gender dysphoria. This is because I stand too far removed from such unique experience as a researcher to appropriately do justice to the complexity of such experiences. I merely wish to highlight its possible connection to melancholia for further research.

Subsequently, it is because I write from the (never unproblematic) position of a cis male researcher that the writing skews towards heteronormativity. This is clear, especially in my engagement with the aspects of Chodorow and Butler's literature I have chosen to emphasise. For example, neither theorist would argue that foreclosure is de facto a necessary condition for the constitution of gendered bodies. I only highlight this aspect of their thinking because it maps on to the hyper-masculine setting that I was brought up in. My aim, however, is not to restructure gendered roles but to explore how gender melancholy can deconstruct the performativity of maleness that has often felt incomplete, boundaried, or foreclosed. As my writing progresses, Butler especially assists my thinking in how melancholy can evoke a lost object in relation to male bodies, though, as Hook might say, an object that is nonetheless present (or over-proximal). Such lost objects, however, have the potential to cut through heteronormative performativity.

A further reason gender is important is because my writing has evaded a degree of psychosocial scrutiny. While I have touched on various ethical and political implications of melancholy assemblages throughout this thesis, the ways such bodies desire, repel and fall out of love. In this thesis, gender, as well as the psychosocial, remain suspiciously absent, but crucial to this experience. Gender is another part of the melancholy rhizome this thesis needs to journey through, especially because the many territories I have crossed—the loss of my mother, the loss of affect, nightly objects, the desire toward nonexistence and the destruction of the symbolic—have gendered connotations which feel important for me to name. Moreover, this abrupt digression also honours the rhizomatic ontology of Deleuze and Guattari and the way other political, gendered, human, and non-human bodies can be mapped onto melancholy assemblages. After all, the fantasy of the loss of self, and my own engagement with it as an 'untethering' also connects through melancholic gendered coordinates that would undoubtedly be different from S.

Therefore, this last section on gender also acts as an example of how desire and mourning can be found through different assemblages that are, perhaps, more acutely politically and ethically alive in discourse. Here I take somewhat of a risk in straddling between my own experience of gender melancholy through a memory I had of my father, but I also present an argument that can be read as more applicable to a possible way of thinking of male assemblages and the melancholy when the question is asked; *what else can male performativity look like?* What angst does this evoke? Nevertheless, though this section can feel like an abrupt shift for the reader in terms of its scope, I maintain a bridge in how 'the loss of self' and ways of relating through loss are engendered through gender.

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#### At the Urinal

*Fuck, I thought I was alone in here. He better go into the stall.... Please please please....*

*Damn...*

*All right.*

*Breathe.*

*Relax.*

*Just another guy peeing next to you.*

*Any other normal day.*

Dropping the shoulders. *It's easy. Why was this easier, why could I do this as a kid and not now? And Why don't they have fucking dividers in the UK...what's up with that? He could be looking at me, at mine. (He's not though, just pee!)*

I'm staring, in the obligatory fashion, at the poster above the urinal which, in equal obligatory fashion, seems to hang in front of every urinal. The eyes are either all the way up, or all the way down. There is no side to side, but we both know there is.

Some drips and A swirl of anxiety later.... *Oh, the shame, the deep and everlasting shame.*

*Sigh...maybe I pretend I've already gone, but I'll have to go back. Oh god, I think he knows...*

*Penis envy, peeing envy, masculinity. An encounter at the urinal. Is it Inadequacy or shyness? Or a repressive sense of holding back of fluids until it bursts? Or a refusal of the excremental object (Lacan 1978)?*

*Urine*

*Ur in*

*Ur in it*

*You are in it –signifiers that produce themselves.*

*Looking for disinhibition, for release.*

*The masculinity assemblage.*

## Sons and Fathers

Father closed his newspaper, looking thoughtfully, inwardly as he does, before he let out a sigh saying, 'Men have lost their way'. Upon hearing this—and of course, you may have heard such dramatic platitudes before—one might ordinarily anticipate that what follows is a desired return to a masculine ideal. Yet, this masculine ideal did not seem underpinned by a desire for a power once possessed and now nostalgically yearned for. Some of the men I grew up around seemed to convey this. Wealthy men with rings tight on their bulging fingers from too much drink, delighting in blunt jokes about unfulfilled marriages and tense relationships with their children. They might say, '*They don't make men like they used to!*'. In contrast, my father was speaking into a different masculinity, whose shapes remain ill-defined. It is an elusive ideal masculine that is searching for an IT-ness, a magical and imagined IT that I might relate to the Lacanian phallus (Lacan 1977). As though we ever possessed IT, as though we ever lost IT, as though IT was ever clear or never taken for granted. When he said, 'men have lost their way' he was speaking about a different kind of loss or lostness of masculinity. But what? I've often wondered whether this lostness veils that underneath it all there is little to show. We're looking up our own garments for a change and finding a familiar lack that all too readily evokes inadequacy and the much-anticipated gestures that attempt to make up for it. Would men be men without inadequacy?

I think, in our own way, my father and I have often attempted to search for something we always wanted but didn't have the language to ask for. Gentleness or softness, especially in my formative years—and throughout most of my father's life—was not something that felt within reach. Yet, once it was available, it seemed it could never be fully reconciled or received freely. Neither of us were quite ready to reveal a soft underbelly. Whatever IT was (I say IT as that ideal or sublime object), seemed beyond words, but perilously and threateningly close. Rather than uttering a longing or a desire for that Thing, we arrive at this unsettling of coordinates; *men have lost their way*. I consider it

again as the loss of something which was only ever possessed as a phantasm; *Das Ding*, that conjures softness as a lost remnant, and as such, is permitted to be held and related with. Therefore, I might reconsider the phrase ‘men have lost their way’ in reference to the Lacanian death drive and the desire for self/gender-loss. It is not that men have lost their way, it is that these men (Dad and I) cannot become uninhibited and fully lose themselves; *I wish I could lose myself beyond the confines of this masculinity that tethers me, binds me, beyond which lies a desire through which I must truly risk gendered unbecoming.*

I think back to being a five again, hugging my father when he returned home from work, feeling the scratchiness of his stubble pressed against my cheek. The way we can stand in the kitchen now and say that we love each other, though perhaps expectantly, in the presence of a beer, and the excitement—too muchness—of staying with that gooey moment. I remember also all those childhood memories of collapsing from training, heaving, bruised, and passed out on the pavement. I remember other fathers who, seventeen years later, still apologise to me for never having stepped in. In those early years, I learned to oscillate between the aggression and intimacy my father offered as though the two necessarily went hand in hand. What would have happened if that aggression had waned? Would it have troubled what it meant to give affection to such a gendered body designated ‘son’, or would something in the giving of gentle affection change, irrevocably, how either of us could come to know our own bodies? Would we suddenly have to open our eyes at that delightful warmth that always lay waiting there for us, whilst acknowledging all those years we were silly enough to deprive ourselves of it, that we deprived others of it. What would become of male bodies then?

When I write about this with Deleuze in mind, the question is obvious; of course, male bodies can become differently and hold different qualities of affection. Of course, men can be soft, of course they can cry. All this permissiveness, however, about gendered bodies becoming and desiring differently undermines for me this unavoidable cut and a rupture into what such performativity (Butler 2006) of maleness was for me. It shatters what was once assumed, taken on and lived. Becoming differently male shows that at the heart of it is a real anxiety around the illusive qualities of gender that supposedly tethers me relationally to that gendered other. Where cis white men have often historically enjoyed the privileged position of being able to assume and territorialise gender, there is an emergent de-territorialisation where men might see that gender was always and already unsettled. It again foregrounds the divine freedoms and desires that become available through such de-territorialisation. Equally, however, such uninhibitedness accompanies the dread of what is also lost, or what might never have been. Perhaps it is safer, then, to conjure lost objects through the onset of mourning rituals as opposed to taking the risk to fully engage with those objects that are available. If I were to take that risk, I must look back and revisit all those iterations of masculinity through which I must confront myself, my father, and the various lacks and losses that may come to haunt me.

This positions melancholia as something which brings father-son-bodies into a liminal space from which it reluctantly and indecisively de-territorialises from what it was before, but cannot 'become' through other forces or assemblages. We arrive again at male bodies that cannot find traction, at once too far away, and confronted by a desire (desire *as* a lost object) which is over-proximal. It's as though the life-affirming desire of Deleuze and Guattari are just beyond reach. They might say that I, as a writer, am too wedded to psychoanalysis, so rooted in repression and lack. Yet, for me their desire is too slippery, too extreme, unsure how I could ever hope to find such disinhibition. The language that might have eluded my father and me feels close precisely through its uncertainty and the way it stutters. Its incompleteness lives through me as recognised only retrospectively through the memories

of gender continuously folded through me. Of course, there are many more memories of gender which seemed to transgress what my body could be; the dread of hiding from the older boys before dance class, falling asleep on my friend's shoulder on a bus trip that was put on YouTube, that moment when a childhood friend becomes a female friend with a question mark; no, we're just friends.

*A young boy is humbled, and a father carries his shame. Both naked, stuttering into existence (Gale and Wyatt 2009). It is a hard place for sons and fathers to meet. A small hand pressed into the palm that holds his word, soft with rings like a tree. We gaze hesitantly, shamefully, sheepishly—hand in hand. I don't think you know what to do with softness. I don't know, either.*

*I am older, and suddenly, we are a pair of sons. Envious because both have lost differently. Full of hate because neither can stand the softness the other can offer. Neither of us able to untether, yearning for that release we hoped to find. A sweet song for hard ears. Sons are holding their breath. Can you see the whites of their eyes? Suddenly I see you as you see me. Not for long, but long enough.*

I don't think either of us knew, at points in our relationship, how to allow softness to take us somewhere, or how to give violence and aggression a place. In either case, gender and father-son constellations seemed to foreclose some of these territories in ways that remain unclear. Our bodies were caught in a bind, unsure and perhaps helpless at knowing where to go. It seems so abstract, at once so close, and so inconceivable, that father and son can sit together, and both share that experience of not knowing how to 'become' differently as father and son. Wherever male bodies are unable to move forward, I anticipate all too readily that source of humiliation and desperation that acts as that wellspring of violence. *What the fuck are we to do? Who are we to become?* I refer to such memories as the entrails of gender melancholy because there is no clear sense of 'what is lost in them'

or whether there is even something to be mourned in the first place. My father and I can meet in father-son constellations, which are slippery, acknowledging there remains something unspoken and bizarre about that place. In that sense, melancholy does not binarize gender relationality. Perhaps it de-territorialises gender; it dis-embodies, though it seems to become even more difficult to consider 'what 'else' such father-son bodies might become. When considering melancholy as a way of relating through loss, however, gender begins to appear through embodied distortions.

Chodorow asks, what do fathers and sons become when they manage to relate beyond the threat of feminisation (Chodorow 2011)? Moving beyond binaries, do we start to see something incomplete about gender? When reading Wyatt and Gale (2009), for example, I come across male-male intimacy in their relationship in ways that create pathways that precisely cut through the normative heterosexual male frame so firmly rooted in the 'threat of feminisation' (Chodorow 2011, 131). My reading of Wyatt and Gale, which also talks of how their closeness is witnessed, reminds me how such intimacy in many of my own relationships, and the witnessing, has largely been mediated by alcohol and humour. While not wishing to discount the value of disinhibition, it remains nonetheless a disinhibition that is mediated by culturally condoned rules of engagement. Intimacy between heterosexual men, it seems, is often navigated by rules.

Chodorow (2011) touches on two fault lines that ground masculinity. The first is grounded in the observation that masculinity is often positioned and maintained against the threat of feminisation. This describes the 'repudiation' and the threat of humiliation of the 'powerful mother' that inscribes the male 'sense of self' (Chodorow 2011, 134). The argument being that the male sense of self is more defensive in its attempt to maintain a stable identity category by defining itself as non-feminine or not mother, despite that femininity is not (and does not need to be) cast as an opposition to masculinity. Hence, Chodorow argues that the male self is grounded in opposition to the 'other' where merging is

more threatening and engenders violence in a way that appears fundamentally different for women (Chodorow 2011). For me, this evokes the Kleinian notion of the paranoid-schizoid position, and how femininity becomes the persecutory object. In this vein, Chodorow writes, 'Characteristically, femininity and submissiveness to men have to be split off and projected outward, where these, in turn, become extremely persecutory possibilities' (Chodorow 2011, 135). This maps all too easily onto those childhood experiences of play in my own life where any perceived connection with femininity was (within the context of still progressive upbringing) squeamishly and inadvertently admonished; *let's play with this instead.*

The second part of Chodorow's argument, however, fills out a dimension she feels lacking in the first. While the repudiation and fear of the feminine seem for her core to the male sense of self, Chodorow goes further to argue that such sense of self is not reducible to male-female dynamisms, but that much of the violence engendered against women, and indeed men, stems equally from the humiliation that underpins male to male relationships. While there is not enough space to discuss the anthropological reconfigurations of the Oedipal complex central to this argument, she outlines how the father-son relationship can hinge on a masculinity underpinned by the humiliation of a superordinate-subordinate split (Chodorow 2011). Much of this, Chodorow argues, depends on the father's ability to tolerate ambivalence toward his own masculinity. Subordination is tied with the threat of remaining a little boy, soft, under the grip of a powerful male leader. Chodorow shifts the attention of the Oedipus myth toward Oedipus's father Laius, and his attempts to kill Oedipus as setting the stage for male aggression (despite his otherwise minor role. She relates other myths such as the story of Achilles as emblematic of (the Achilles heel of men) the fear of 'narcissistic humiliation' by other men, often engendering, though such trivial conquest, notions of ownership over women (Chodorow 2011).

Chodorow's phrase hooks me; *the father's ability to tolerate ambivalence toward his own masculinity*. I recall the bodily impulses I had as a young boy that I could conceive of as not masculine and, therefore, potentially gay, or feminine. Ambivalence did not seem like a possibility. As Chodorow observes, my actions as a boy were staunchly anchored in a gendered self. I can't recall fathers who evoke a sense of ambivalence toward masculinity. Ambivalence seemed a notion so far away, at once threatening, and at once riveting in what it might have offered. Despite the heteronormative frame, Chodorow (2011) powerfully evokes this superordinate and subordinate dynamics between my father and I (and in turn, between my father and his father) and the recurrences in our relationship in which I was physically overpowered, or attempting to live up to his image, and the affection that was nonetheless also there in our relationship. The amalgamation of Chodorow's (2011) argument touches closely on my childhood experiences that I am recounting. It tells me how male repudiation of the female persecutory object leads to humiliation between men, which also spills over into the precarious positioning of women in male fantasy. As a Kleinian, it takes me to a place of wondering about the 'depressive position' of masculinity, and the ethical potential this might offer in the therapeutic encounter with other men. In conjunction with Deleuze, such depressive male bodies might de-territorialise to become part of a different desiring assemblage through which such humiliation can not only be owned but is allowed to transform.

Chodorow here touches on precisely that utterance my father once spoke, *'Men have lost their way'*. If masculinity is, as Chodorow purports, contingent on the 'other' as the repudiation of the feminine and the fear of male-male humiliation, such selves appear at once utterly deprived but also melancholic (though potentially liberating/affirmative or emancipatory project) for those who undertake the arduous journey of 'what else' masculine or gendered bodies can become. My attempts to move away from such a binarized outline of masculinity have felt liberating, but always with an eye of mourning a version of masculinity, the loss of which I cannot register. For me, such loss of

masculinity might at once be situated in a comparison and culture of masculine performativity, but perhaps more pointedly in the boyhood crisis and realisation that I am not a man like my father. Of course, I don't have to be. I've since found many ways of championing different forms of intimacy I can have with bodies, male bodies, and masculinity, though that kernel of angst never fully dissipates. It lingers and I'm not sure how I can move past it. Tucked away in some dark corner remains some anxiousness about the enough-ness of my gendered becoming, and a reluctance to fully become differently.

Subsequently, I consult with Julia Kristeva's notion of melancholy, which uniquely positions gender within its theoretical frame. Akin to Freud, melancholy first appears through the process of separating from the primary object of mother and breast, leading to a mourning of the lost (mother) object. However, Kristeva goes further to contend this mourning also accompanies a 'narcissistic depression'. This entails a self-loss as an 'unsymbolised' or 'pre-object thing' (Radden 2002). I might here draw a parallel to Lacan and the loss of Das Ding. However, Kristeva also incorporates into her theory the notion of a 'universal matricidal impulse', which leads to gendered differences within her exposition of melancholy. It is this Matricidal impulse which supposedly becomes the 'attack on self'. She contends this impulse is experienced differently for girls as this because that same lost object shares the same sex. This, according to Radden's reading of Kristeva's, problematises mourning in women. There is a resemblance with Chodorow (1999) in how the linearity of the Oedipal process in boys, within heterosexual culture and frame, leads more simply to the sublimation of a 'female mother substitute' (Radden 2002). However, whereas Chodorow employs a contextual account of the oedipal process, Kristeva maintains that the matricidal impulse is universal. In contrast to Freud, she believes women do not shift or change the object of sexual desire from female to male, and it is due to the identification with the maternal object that the attacks on the maternal object become the cause for

further melancholy. Kristeva writes: 'The hatred I bear her is not oriented outside but locked up within myself' (Kristeva 1989).

However, there is much to say against Kristeva's account concerning gender melancholy, most prominently pointed out by Judith Butler (2006). Staying closer to their psychoanalytic engagements, they observe that the aforementioned theories seem to argue for a sexed or gendered predisposition before coming into being. Here Kristeva cannot account for the question as to why the primary object of desire for men could not be their fathers. Why does the universal status of matricide lead to melancholy but not patricide? Perhaps my thinking here is wanting to digress from gender, and toward focusing more on the process of deindividuation stemming from the loss of the primary object. Such a primary object, as Chodorow often points out as being centred around 'mothering' could be received as beyond the binary of mothering and fathering. Neither Chodorow, nor Kristeva include in their theory about what familial dynamics might change within same-sex parents. Butler critiques Kristeva's matricidal impulse as reproducing a narrative of a universal female 'melancholy heterosexuals longing for lost love' (Butler 1993, 111). Within the context of my writing, it is such accounts that conveniently leave 'fathering' out of the picture. Does this not reproduce the same family structure Chodorow aims to criticise as that reproduction of mothers mothering, and fathers being elsewhere, free from responsibility or accountability (Chodorow 1999)?

Curiously, Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble* (2006), observes that Freud himself attempted to incorporate bisexuality into his thinking in the primal scene. Yet, this created a discrepancy as Butler writes: 'With the postulation of a bisexual set of libidinal dispositions, there is no reason to deny an original sexual love for the father, and yet Freud implicitly does' (Butler 2006, 80). Perhaps this criticism extends to Kristeva, with the consequence that both theories position object love or identification vis-à-vis the binary between masculine or feminine. Butler rejects this, though points

out that if we were to use Freud's theory that repudiation of fatherly love for young boys, results on castration fear not for fear of the father, but (in similar tones to Chodorow) for fear of 'feminisation within heterosexual cultures' (Butler 2006). My point here is that within theory, not only are heterosexual frames inadvertently reconstructed, but the notion of love between men, whatever that connection might look like, becomes itself problematised. The melancholy of father and sons appears, for me, a loss in what other connection men might have, what 'other' desiring connection male bodies may be permitted to have.

The psychoanalytic readings that Butler presents of gender melancholy foregrounds multiplicities in the Freudian reading of the Oedipal scene. To reiterate, their writing evokes for me an unmournable loss central to the formation of the 'bodily ego'. This bodily ego is produced by an unfinished (melancholic) grief, as this grief is internalised through the cultural and contextual foreclosure of same-sex desires and the cultural prohibitions that further problematises this grief. Here, Butler follows the conjecture that if one were to appease Freud, and regard that a man becomes heterosexual through the 'repudiation of the feminine (Butler 1995), then it follows that this repudiation lives within man in the identification of the very thing he seeks to repudiate. The point that Butler makes, however, is less to do with Freud, and more to do with the question of how such homosexual/feminine desires come to be grieved within our socio-cultural context. Butler asks whether the feminine within man, or is the lesbian/homosexual desire within woman is regarded as 'true love' or 'true loss' (Butler 1995). They also recognise, of course, that such gender categories are more problematic and unstable as outlined within Freud. Nevertheless, they contend that the loss or foreclosure of such desire is foreclosed from the start within a heterosexual matrix. There are 'unlived possibilities' as the heterosexual must deny, as Butler puts it. We return once again to this notion of 'never having loved a man, and thus never lost a man (Butler 1995). This disavowed grief, implicit in

Butler's argument, leads to a systemic refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of gay love, as much as the refusal to grieve the loss of it.

Subsequently, in the same 1995 paper, Butler bridges their rethinking of the Freudian gender-melancholic and returns to their more recognised theory of gender performativity. In doing so, they argue that rigid gender and sexual identification categories engenders melancholy. Here I consider performativity both as the everyday 'doing and being' of rituals that communicates (for me a still unconscious process) gender, and true to Butler, that performativity is the retroactive production of the 'illusion' that there is a 'gender core' (Butler 1995). Using their earlier exposition of Freud, Butler notices that performativity can also be thought of in reference to what is foreclosed performatively, that which becomes an 'unacknowledged loss' (Butler 1995). As a way of understanding this, they use the example of drag to show, both its gendered idealisation as well as its 'radical uninhabitability', arguing that what drag points towards is that gender itself is an outward display of unresolved grief. It is the foreclosure of sociocultural relationships to same-sex love that trouble our capacity to grieve. To this extent, it is this very foreclosure that also forebodes its reversal, remembering again Butler's claim that within this matrix, *heterosexual men become the very men they 'never loved nor grieved'* (Butler 1995, 178).

I think again of what Butler writes: 'Indeed, we are made all the more fragile under the pressure of such rules, and all the more mobile when ambivalence and loss are given a dramatic language in which to do their acting out.' (Butler 1995, 180). However, I find myself unsure whether my father and I can find such a language. Perhaps we skip such dialectical steps and move toward acting out and taking the risk to trouble gender. Though, underneath it all, is the fear that in doing so, my father and I unravel from the very relational tensions that produced us. What of masculinity brought us together and tore us apart (not just us, but other men too)? It creates a split of gender performativity that

oscillates too violently between the different iterations of 'becoming man', as though our gestures of acting out would be a choice, or worse, an elaborate performance (as opposed to performativity) and display that only brings more awareness to the futility of it all.

Perhaps I can put it differently. We have both, in our own way, melancholically performed the softness and affection we have yearned for through the gestures of loss and mourning. This proposes a different vantage point from which to observe Butler, or alternatively, a vantage point from which to regard its transformation. Such gestures of loss are not altogether repudiated but becomes acceptable through the economy of a perpetual mourning that gives permission for men to meet differently. Though, of course, the necessity of such mourning remains shadowy, liminal, and not fully alive. I think, though this would only be conjecture that my father and I are subliminally aware of this, that even though we can receive and invite a different kind of relationality, we can't ever fully lose ourselves to it. As gendered melancholics, we can't venture fully toward that unbecoming.

*'Men have lost their way'*. The way was never clear, but the lost-ness itself creates the very contours which evokes what is melancholically yearned for. I spoke earlier of this proximity between S and I and how far away and close our bodies can be, and how this reminds me of my relationship with other men. There is this yearning for an affection which is related to as a maternal lost object which can be reclaimed and felt. Though if it is, I only need to simply return to that seemingly inescapable place of standing at the urinal, unable to pee. There, plain as day, is my experience of the impossibility of gender.

Deleuze and Guattari have remained in the background, and subliminally present in this part of my writing. I feel that both authors are much more radical in their approach to gender. For them, there is

far greater friction and movement between bodies to become other than they are, not necessarily hindered by repudiation. Their writing suggests for me a much more fluid and dynamic understanding of gender that appears, very simply, much too radical in what I can embody, and too removed from the anxiety that I feel around gender. It's as though they are too optimistic; there is not enough angst. They, in turn, may well consider how I am something of an Oedipal melancholic, unable to reconceive how men and masculinity can come to be outside of the desiring constellations of family dynamisms. Of course, Butler, much like Chodorow, do not write along Freudian lines of the Oedipal, though they do write closer to an ontology of repression and repudiation than do Deleuze and Guattari. However, Butler, for me, touches more closely on the resistance to mourning and writes evocatively into that 'impossibility' of gendered loss.

My writing in this chapter has taken on a more classical feel and approach to gender than I expected. There is softness and love in my relationship with other bodies, male bodies, though I suppose I find myself returning to Butler's psychoanalytic thinking because so much of that camaraderie and male bonding seems framed by implicit boundaries and prohibitions. Here especially, I find banter an example of something that can act both as an expression of affection and love, but equally as a rule which mediates the rules and the too-muchness and littleness of affection. Anxiety imbued by cultural norms of engagement are woven into the desiring machine of Deleuze and Guattari. Still, such affectionate bodies may very well enjoy more freedom than I give them credit for. Consequently, this brings some meta-awareness that the two male authors more prominently featured in my writing, get the least to say when it comes to gender. This, too, might act as a form of repudiation.

I think Deleuze would ask me what I'm afraid of and what I can risk losing. He might wonder whether this risk is what is needed to break beyond melancholic liminality. Suddenly, I see Deleuzians everywhere.

(Memory)

It's time for my session though today I'm the client. I peer at my screen, patiently waiting for Zoom to load, when a bushy grey beard and small lunettes suddenly pop up. I'm aware of a smell in my living room I don't recognise. The smell coincides so clearly with the start of our session that it could only come from his office.

A little while into our session, my therapist says, 'We can think about the ebb and flows of all those different relationships', He says, pausing briefly to consider his words. 'Those objects in you, we can find a softness in them (...) some way they are allowed to move from where they were once rigid...'.  
  
'I... I can't seem to...I want to...that softness, it's just that it's not allowed to fully take shape somehow...'

'Maybe it doesn't need to be fully there, maybe it's enough to feel those movements and let them become.'

I anticipate how much I'm resisting softness, resisting him, to this Deleuzian gesture.

'But it's so soft, it doesn't feel real. I think that's why I ask you to be critical, say something harsh...tell me I'm wrong (*cut me up, shove me, punch me*). It doesn't feel like...like it's real, that it matters.'

‘Yes, I wonder why that softness isn’t allowed to move freely in you. Again, like it’s hard for you to hold on to those soft squishy objects (he gives a chuckle), for them to become through you.’

It’s a new experience for me, having an older male presence that isn’t demanding anything, and content simply to witness. It’s endlessly annoying, precisely how it is everything I yearned for as a young boy and entirely confusing. It’s the ethics of therapy: What are you doing to me, folding in softness, don’t you know what it will unfold!

After a while my therapist closes his eyes and speaks again: ‘I...as we were talking, an image came to me of you in a garden, with the presence of an older man, who is just happy to be there in the background...while you get to tend your garden.’

I’m uncomfortable with, what I feel like, is the implicit parallel of him being a father figure to me. It evokes in me an impulse of wanting to shout, fuck you! You are not my dad! And at once, Yes! That’s precisely it.

‘I...was always more at ease being alone...you know...hours of kicking the ball against the wall...I was a bit obsessive that way, but I preferred not to have my mother or father watching...In fact, I feel guilty I didn’t want them to be there at all...during play, I mean’.

My therapist offers something that is so clearly available to me. There is a softness and gentleness that he brings. But I can already feel myself shutting down. Whatever I say, it’s just empty words at

this point. I can't quite bring myself to tell him. I look down at my keyboard, my mind vacuous, static, full, and empty.

'I wonder what we would say to that young boy, whether something might be allowed to shift'.

I think to myself how that kid was a bit of an asshole. I'm not sure he'd listen (I think to myself). After another silence I say, 'I don't think he'd understand the language I offer, I'm not sure we'd recognise one another'.

'Maybe he doesn't understand the language, but is he able to receive anything else at all?'

No, I don't think he would. But I replied, 'Yes'.

(End memory)

S

Well... you say grief or whatever ...It reminds me of how women are depicted...you know those tragic novels.... always mourning...always lamenting. S appears animated, and I, in turn, find myself excited. I watch her run her fingers over her buzz cut.

'Like I'm making you out to be this dramatic grieving woman.' (I put my wrist on my head in dramatic fashion)

*'Ha! Well... YOU are dramatic', she retorts.*

'Hmmm' I say I my annoyingly performative therapeutic voice.

'Uhu...' S nods, reaffirming my aptitude for the dramatic.

'So your story of grief is different...it's not like that...so how would you depict your tale of mourning?'

'I would sail...I've always wanted to sail... I would travel to far corners of ... and just sulk somewhere else for a change.'

*(We both laugh)*

'That was a bit anticlimactic', I say.

S sighs. 'I don't know how to sail, but I know where to find my medicine cabinet'. She gave me an expectant look.

'Oh that went dark fast....I was wanting to sail with you...maybe enjoy the misery...'

S laughs, and I feel a pinch of discomfort.

I sigh and respond: 'I don't know...maybe, there is something about sailing and suicide. The women you described in the novels seemed tethered. Sailing is free, and I don't know from what, but suicide seems to offer something untethered too...in a slightly more euh...ultimate way...'. My thinking here is again with Hook (2008) as suicide as the higher order of death from the symbolic order. I'm playing with connections and patterns; it feels difficult for me to move into the felt sense or to catch hold of the transference.

'It certainly sounds nice. The smile on her face fades. I remain silent.'

About thirty seconds pass. S begins to look at the carpet.

'I'm watching your smile fade into something distant', I observe.

'I just don't know, it doesn't matter...empty'.

T: 'Empty'

She nods her head. I think of glimpses of S having had excitement in her life, or desire, only to be met by mother's neglect or father's inability to be responsive and to meet S where she was emotionally. This is the transference, and the place we might now be having an encounter. This is the territory of encountering differently though I too, here, begin to feel empty, and hopeless. Equally, thinking with Deleuze, how to plug into something beyond the constraints of the Oedipal and triadic scene. How does emptiness work when it plugs into and assembles?

'I want it to feel miserable, at least then I'd feel something.'

I'm unsure how to respond, silent.

'But I'm not dead, am I?' (She pauses for a while, maybe surprised by what she just said) 'I feel like I've already ....

I wait for S, but as the silence grows, I'm aware she's looking for me to say something but I'm at a loss. I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. I am overcome with exhaustion. I can see S looking disappointed, and gazes again at the carpet – I'm suddenly aware I'm afraid of losing her, and that in not responding, she might feel dropped.

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Writing betrays and oxidises. There is decay at the moment of exposure. Sophie Tamas writes about our apparent nakedness in sharing ourselves and how exposure can be 'deployed strategically, to manipulate perception' (Tamas 2009, 614). Rather than an act of vulnerability, we present what we want others to see. Yet, I can only 'expose' as strategically as the unconscious allows. Words have plans of their own. Like hitchhiker weeds, they cling unsuspectingly until they drop into a bed of soil to sprout off-shoots of their own, rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). You will have undoubtedly picked up on movements of our sessions I cannot and might not want to see. In that regard, you briefly hold the position of supervisor. What am I not seeing? What have I missed? Despite telling you that I want to encounter S in painful parts of her process, my silence places a distance between us in our session. Perhaps this distance or dissociation—unsure which would feel more accurate—is already present in the relationship. Here I see the two contradicting movements of my fear of losing S, followed by a muteness that betrays my intentions, and enacts a gesture of withdrawal. This may be relevant to the (counter)transference of S's own childhood experiences. After all, her parents were

both ambivalent about their relationship with her and withdrawn in their presence and attentiveness toward her struggles. Undoubtedly, however, S's deadness hooks something in me far beyond what takes place in our sessions.

Re-reading our sessions, I notice the various points at which I offer S an invitation: *can we go here together?* Initially, I see it as a gentle invitation to empathise, tolerate, and tend to something that has been waiting in the shadows. I think of such invitations in line with Ogden, in that the therapeutic relationship can act as the containing function for whatever intolerable affect may arise (Ogden 2004). Such togetherness also moves through the resistances and attractions to care that was so fragmented for S throughout much of her childhood. In that sense, the work of counselling allows S to internalise the presence of the relationship enabling her to dwell and tolerate difficult territories. Yet, my invitation is not innocent nor unproblematic. Implicitly the message may also be one of longing to be closer, needing to be together, or finding distance unbearable.

Therefore, in another sense, I read my invitation to S as positioning myself as that 'wounded healer' that can offer the very closeness, holding, and containment her own parents neglected to give. These are the shadowy parts of myself as a practitioner rooted in my teens and how I attempted to console a dying mother, and a grieving father in ways in which I could finally find resolve and words for so much that had been foreclosed. Such longing for resolve, however, only brought about my withdrawal from grief and hatred. The hours of talking to my mother and father about what they were going through were somehow soothing. They needed me. There was closeness. Though it was one sided. It would have been much more congruent to admit my own hatred and tumult; *'fuck you for making me go through this, for colluding with me!*' Therefore, my gesture of invitation toward S is both sincere in its intention, through potentially betraying me in my fear that I don't know whether I can go there.

Stepping into this fear, then, might offer something much more truthful but also risky in the therapeutic work.

Yet another perspective might again be offered by Freud, who wrote of the Melancholic's obsession with exposing themselves, their pain, and their narrative. My emphasis, however, is not about how S and I are exposing ourselves through grief and pain. I do not see that type of exposure being particularly characteristic of our sessions together. Rather, it is what is not allowed to be exposed. I have noticed also, perhaps only now that the writing process is almost complete, that there have been many glimpses where S and I connect in light-hearted ways. There are fading smiles everywhere. When I think of exposure, it's not that S and I foreground pain and grief, so much as that good objects can't seem to fully take shape on the surface. In contrast to my earlier writing, I do not necessarily frame this as an evacuative effort by S to preserve a tyrannising ego-object. Staying much more closely to S's description, and that of Žižek, we can see glimpses of goodness are there, available, but at once seem lost to S (and myself), as though something of its goodness is too slippery, without traction, rather than dangerous and tyrannical. In the language of Guattari, goodness is somehow unable to produce lines of flight; it moves instead toward that 0 point, it fades rather than creates.

## The Cemetery

We are arriving at the end. While mourning a thesis feels exaggerated, an inevitable departure from this body of text is imminent, just as I depart from S, and you, the reader, whom I have imagined as an absent companion. You are a virtual presence. Virtual in what is still to come and because whoever reads this writing will undoubtedly imbue it with something of your own, connecting through other assemblages, taking it elsewhere. In that way, the thesis is always incomplete, and because of it, lingers and shifts until it is no longer recognisable from what it once was. I prefer it this way. I have never enjoyed returning to my writing because I am confronted by too much of myself that is all together off-putting. It seems something of Freud's melancholic self-abasement has been a part of my process.

What this ending will engender is perhaps only knowable as a retrospective, though this doesn't absolve me from considering the manner of my departure. I could leave without saying goodbye, or I could elaborately mourn the loss of you in a way that only heightens suspicion. Alternatively, I could sum up the contents of this thesis. Surely, though, this would betray D&G in that summaries tend to tell the reader what message they ought to have taken away. Or perhaps I can be sentimental. In some quiet corner of a pub, after everything is done and dusted, I whisper and ask you, 'Remember when I wrote about melancholy as the unbearableness of falling out of love?'. Freud (1917) might say that this form of sentiment is characteristic of mourning, where all other losses and memories are revisited, and gradually let go. Again, Barad (2014) might add that such a return or reminiscence does not aim to travel back to a place in the self-same way, but rather enacts a gesture of turning over. I can't be sure. Endings have a way of sneaking up, there is hardly enough time to properly say goodbye in most instances, I often want to get endings right but rarely do. Why would it be any different in a thesis?

I find it difficult to gauge which stones to turn over and which to leave at rest, wondering what can remain unspoken, and whether I, you, or we, can bear it. Much like Gaitanidis (2017) argues, mourning is not so much a process of gradual completion, rather, it is the ongoing process of recognising the incompleteness of the lost object itself. I often find I try to speak into the unspoken and the unresolved when endings come in sight. This is not so much an attempt to find closure, but rather a defence against something unexpected. Loss will hit me either way, but it might not blindsides me if I can make subtle preparations. Of course, it never works. There is always something unexpected despite my subdued if anxious approach to endings. I feel a need to describe to you what this ending might tentatively mean with the acknowledgement that I can't know, and of course, that it might be different for you. This insincere nod to the unknown, however, is different from letting the ending happen, and being open to the unexpected. It is a continued point of development for me in my psychotherapeutic practice. This de-territorialisation might produce something different, might bring something life-giving. Here again is that yearning for disinhibition which feels at once so close, but so far away.

Nevertheless, the thesis is incomplete, and my grappling with it is not yet done, though the writing tells me I have exhausted what I can in my thinking around these iterations of melancholia and the loss of self. Like shells on the shore, each chapter is imprinted on a sandy surface:

Through Freud, I think of that original melancholic gesture of knowing 'who has been lost', but not 'what has been lost in them' (1917). I think of what I find on the surface of Freud's text; a desire to stay near the object while unable to bear that the object is no longer desired in the same way. There appears a desperate resistance to ambivalence and a falling out of love.

With Klein, I see how 'other' loss always entails self-loss (Leader 2009). Here, the melancholic subject looks for the scattered parts of themselves that were once bound by that loved other. Much like S describes that tractionless feeling, the Kleinian melancholic can't seem to re-introject those good objects from where they once resided.

Mourning becomes unbearable. I long to be free from myself, to untether, to fulfil this fantasy of the loss of self. Here Hook talks of that melancholy desire to escape from the symbolic order as that higher order of suicide. Can melancholics desire? Are the rays of the black sun not alluring?

Thinking with Lacanian desire, my words lose their spark. Everything turns to an empty husk. I mourn the words that, as a phantasm, offer me comfort in my delirium. There is nothing and deadness, I desire only insofar loss imbues me with life.

Through that disjunctive synthesis of Lacan with Deleuze and Guattari, it's not that I cannot tolerate the loss of you, but that I do not know how to assemble with you other than through loss. I relate to you in ways in which you are gone, mourned, out of reach, which fills my cup and empties it.

In much the same way that clinical sessions often circle back to beginnings, so too does the writing that follows have excerpts from my very first pieces of nomadic writing. Fitting, then, that our ending should take place at the cemetery in front of the Edinburgh flat where I sit typing away. The cemetery, for me, is a place of spiritual mysticism, of rest, privilege, and of the assemblage of maggots, decay, and fertiliser. If it is a place of transformation, it is perhaps not the one I hoped for to have our ending, though it is peaceful and a great place to read a book while sheltering from the wind. Especially on a beautiful day like today, it's easy to lose track of the dead. When it's this sunny out, death is only

foregrounded by those well-tended to headstones. There are fresh flowers, lighted candles, or polished marble; freshly deceased? In any case, such deceased persons appear well tended to. It's a good place for me to pause and think on loss. I take my first and final stroll through the cemetery.

\*

*The headstones cast their shadows on the red gravel path. Like a child skipping between the white and black of a street crossing, I step onto the shapes conjured by the low-hanging sun. Angels, crucifixes, and obelisks accompany me on my afternoon walk. The warmth on my neck and the smell of freshly cut grass lifts the ache in my shoulders.*

The cemetery is an odd juxtaposition between the materiality of death and a seemingly immaterial spirituality. There are rotting corpses, just as the stone effigies above them point me toward the ineffable beyond. Žižek (1989), in writing about 'looking awry' talks about how we see more pointedly the nature of something when we look at it from aside, rather than head-on. It conveys to me the importance of the psychotherapeutic gaze. Bion and Ogden, for example, both observed that we begin to experience more once we allow ourselves to gaze at the world through reverie and dreams (Ogden 2004). Similarly, Val Wosket (1999) works with the 'edges of awareness', to catch hold of those thoughts, affects and feelings that linger on the pre-conscious. I am not talking of ethereal dances to cosmic forces and the ecstasy of free spirits, of hemp pants and yoga mats. In line with Slavoj Žižek, it becomes a necessity to also bring out the darker edges of spiritual practice (Žižek 2010). Rotting corpses have a claim to the spiritual.

*I can see my own shadow touching a headstone, giving the impression that I am lying in my own grave. I stare, then muse until it becomes disturbing, only to look up to see the engraved words 'Here lies all that could die of Edward Parrott'. Mr Parrott's grave commands pause. My thoughts drift between Mr Parrott, my mother's grave, and the words 'all that could die of'.*

I remember my mother didn't really want a gravestone, knowing that we would eventually stop visiting. She was convinced that it would sit there accumulating weeds, anticipating, fearfully, that we wouldn't always think of her, or remember her. Sure enough, there are weeds aplenty, though I do return every few years. When I do, however, she feels different, sometimes far away. As Leader might say, I have come to grips with her alterity. She is now, perhaps, like S, in the realm of the imaginal. Neither, however, have I lost all of her, though perhaps all that could die of her, did. As Leader might again argue, killed twice, and transformed (Leader 2009). The various fragments of lost objects were pried loose and allowed to take on different forms. In that way, what once was, is not the same. There, but forgotten. For me, relating differently is emblematic of my walk through the graveyard because it happens on the bones of the deceased.

*All that could die of Mr Parrot... It takes me somewhere else. What is all that could die of me? I approach it as an erasure, not just an erasure of existence, but to never have existed in the first place, to go beyond loss; mē phunai.*

Like S, I have found a home in loss, though not one evidently tied to a lost object. This thesis has instead moved closer toward a Lacaneuzian view which has approached melancholy through the conflation between loss and desire (Žižek 2000). Consequently, an unintended part of this thesis has grappled with the problem of melancholic desire; how can pain and loss be desired? While this

problem is at first rooted in my engagement with Freud and Schuster, it is instead D&G's affirming and creative view on desire that creates an opening—one which can be thought of as applying difference to their very approach to desire—of seeing it as a de-territorialising force which moves toward a zero point, towards stasis. I think of some of my clients who tell me they envy death, and how they feel jealous when they hear of disasters on the news to find they are not among the dead. For me, walking along these stone effigies, the impulse is slightly different. Again, you've heard me say it before, how nice it would be to unravel, to dissolve, and to untether in the nothingness of it all. I don't want to die, though Hook (2018) has helped me see this as a melancholic untethering from the symbolic order, and a fantasy which touches on a higher order of suicide as a desperate affirmation of life.

There is something pointed about Hook's presence in the cemetery. The symbol-laden effigies point beyond life and death, as much as they seem to guard and preside over those souls that have passed to the other side. *Would my dead body be presided over; would my spirit be guarded by these symbols?* Hook's melancholia unsettles these effigies, makes them less concrete, more menacing, untethering my obligation that binds my coordinates in the subtle everyday interactions. Somewhere a guardian angel throws their hands in the air, exclaiming, *'I don't want to do this shit anymore, I'm abandoning my post, I untether, don't bother me, don't preside over me'*. Melancholic angels, for Hook at least, would make poor guardians. It foregrounds that melancholic fantasy of the loss of self, and that desire toward a zero point (as we see in Schuster) and withdrawing from the symbolic order (as we see from Hook). Yet, I would contend, against Hook, that the melancholic can never fully obtain their fantasy and can never fully achieve that loss of self unless those very relational forces that bind them are abandoned and can no longer be lost.

The loss of self, however, has, throughout this thesis, intersected with melancholy in different ways. It has not always assumed the phantasmatic qualities that I relate to it. Within the Freudian Frame,

for example, self-loss occurs in melancholy through the installation of the lost object into the ego. In that sense, the lost object supplants the ego, now impoverished and weak. For Klein, it has meant the loss of the 'other' that binds us together, irretrievable, and unable to re-introject into a self-structure which remains fragmented and lost. These stand in dialogue with Leader's Lacanian-Kleinian thesis, which holds that 'other' loss is always a 'self-loss'. Leader goes on to show that such a loss, enacted and re-enacted through the killing of the deceased is a mourning that allows for the opening up of relating again, not just to others, but to and with those part-objects we have lost in the deceased. Here the 'loss of self' treads that existential thread that I have not explicitly explored in this thesis, that of the self that only comes into existence or is co-produced through the 'other'—bearing in mind this is not a human or singular other, but one always imminent to assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 2013).

*The shadows that the headstones cast down create piano-like keys. Deep grey intersperses with bright-red gravel. Wherever there is a shadow, the gravel is noticeably cooler. Each dark spot appears as a lack. Though this does not appear as a lack that is inherent, but only one that is produced, again, imminent to desiring assemblages.*

I resonate with the Lacanian 'lack at the centre of being', though I cannot separate it clearly from Deleuze and how this lack is itself created. Much like Freud, Kristeva, and Butler purport, a melancholy is inscribed from the very beginning in the way that loss forms the subject. I look at all the gravestones and all those fragments of lack folded everywhere. I think of those earliest primal detachments from the primary caregiver, which creates those initial folding of loss through which subjectivity emerges. I think again of that divine union with my mother, one that never existed, but can so effortlessly be conjured phantasmatically into existence. It is that which I have never possessed (Das ding) and that lack inscribed at the core of my being, which, through my elaborate mourning, I can finally possess

and come close to. Yet, when I do, I lose it again and again. As surely as this divine object is conjured, it too is lost, emptied, and expelled, moving toward a zero point which can never be reached. The melancholic can never find that release into nothingness, cannot quite untether. This becomes a way of relating through loss. Perhaps the melancholic comes closer than most to seeing the disappointment embedded in desire, the lack that lays on the other side, but precisely through this distortion, nevertheless manage to conjure it into existence. My thinking here is mirrored by Žižek, who says that melancholics commit a Kantian paralogism (Žižek 2000). Close to the 'real' but not quite. In the fervour of desiring loss, I find myself in that familiar place where traction is lost with that other. As surely as melancholic desire brings a shadowy warmth, it is only ever a shadow before it is once again emptied out. Deleuze, then, would look at the melancholic as Žižek might, as someone who conflates desire with de-territorialisation.

While melancholia often alludes to bodies gripped by inertia and endless lamentation, I think also of bodies that have become diaphanous and thinly bound. I think that is what happens when relating occurs from a place of loss and de-territorialisation. Goodness always fades from the surface, and every love-filled moment turns ashen because it was never there, and only ever a phantasm.

*Obelisks, angels, and crucifixes are jolted back into their resting place. The birds are singing; I've finished my loop, walking now with the sun on my face.*

S

'We crave those dark edges...but...it sometimes feels like there can't be enough of them.' I'm looking at S, who is grabbing one of the blankets that have apparently been made available for the rooms. I'm surprised by S's casual nonchalance.

'Yeah'. S smiles, as she snuggles and makes herself comfortable. 'I need that misery'.

I, in turn, raise an eyebrow, nodding toward the blanket.

'Yes, comfy!', but after a short silence she exclaims, 'Wait...are you calling me a masochist?!'

'No... it's just that you've looked at the fragments of loss in your life, the different parts of you. You can tell that tale, you know the ins and outs, I'm... it's just not sticking is it...not landing, I mean.'

'Ah...' S has a wry smile on her face... 'We're just too smooth'.

I'm taken aback by S's playfulness, for some reason it angers me. In my annoyance, I find it hard to see that S is perhaps bringing a different side of herself. Instead, I consider her playfulness to be a gesture of avoidance, or disruption. 'Not sure about smooth', I say. 'Translucent...fading maybe...'

S is silent. She looks up at the ceiling and sighs, 'Yes...I can be miserable with you'.

'We've been more than miserable. We've been dead, on the brink. I'm not sure I can always stomach it.' I look down at the carpet, shifting my eyes away from S, as though I've admitted to something shameful. I'm unsure whether I should have said that last part.

'Well, I'm sorry I've caused you so much pain then, sounds really awful'. There was a tinge of bitterness in her voice.

'No... no, that's not it.' I feel caught out, wondering if I'm placing blame on S and finding it difficult not to be defensive.

'You're so careful....' S said it with a tone of accusation, but it leaves me stunned. We are silent for a moment.

'Maybe...I go silent, then in half an attempt at congruence: Yes, I am careful.'

'You know...you can throw at me what you want.', She says, and I'm not sure what to make of it. If this is her challenging me, it feels to me to have the opposite effect. It contradicts, grinds, not quite right.

'Sounds violent, S, but I hear it as a call for something to matter, for something to finally land'.

'Nothing lands! It's just all fucked, it's all lost!'

'What have you lost, S? What have you lost in us, our sessions together? Is being miserable together not enough for you, is that all lost too?'

'As if you're so central in my life'.

'Sure', I say, my turn to sound bitter.

'I didn't say it didn't appreciate you or feel gratitude. I never said I wasn't moved either.'

'If it's gratitude, it sounds empty.'

'It's loss all the same.'

'What will you have really lost, though. Or what is it you are afraid to have? We have something... I don't feel you're really showing any courage to acknowledge that.'

'But I do think we have something. I've never said we didn't!'

My ears become warm. I consider for a moment a sense of having something together that might extend beyond the boundaries of our hour. Suddenly I am aware of our gendered difference, of the

potential erotic presence. I think I am foregrounding this more than S, but I am unsure. The thought annoys me and throws me off balance.

S switches her leg and leans her head to one side. 'Maybe I am afraid of loss, I just don't think it's the entire picture. Maybe that's the thing; there's always something missing, always something that's empty.'

'Yet, I can hear you raising your voice, I can see the whites of your knuckles.... Doesn't feel so empty now.'

'That's too optimistic', she retorts.

'That's avoidant', I parry.

'There's still emptiness', she says, looking downwardly, increasingly dejected, lost. In response, I also begin to stare sorrowfully at the carpet. She tries to look into my eyes and says: 'you desire loss as much as I do.'

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