

Queer Grief

Relations After Death and Loss

IN THIS SPECIAL edition of *lambda nordica*, we – the editors and contributing authors alike – seek to open up intersecting perspectives on queer lives, desires, death, and grieving. Taken both collectively and on their own terms, we hope the contributions in this issue invite dialogue across their respective themes and empirical contexts, while also troubling a range of normative assumptions about how grief is lived, navigated and felt.

The perspectives we explore here extend toward the relations between life and death, and toward sensibilities attuned to worlds *in between*. As editors, we are inspired – among other points of light and loss – by the work of Nina Lykke (2022). Reflecting on mourning following the death of her life partner from cancer, Lykke writes personally and philosophically (“autophenomenologically,” in her terms) on the dichotomies grieving might often be seen to restate, particularly within conventional Cartesian or Christian frameworks that imply clear delineations between life and death, mind and body, self and world. Such notions are tightly bound to ideas of “healthy” grief: a year of mourning may be socially acceptable in many (Western) societies, while prolonged grieving may be marked as indulgent, a signifier of mental fragility, or lack of self-contained rationality. Such views may be especially acute in worlds organized, directly or indirectly, around the logics of capitalist enterprise, where the value of persons is increasingly tethered to their productive capacity.

Against such rational “containments”, Lykke traces intersecting pathways through grief that disrupt temporal and spatial logics, as well as normative archetypes of valued, autonomous personhood. She interweaves her mourning with an intense experience of co-being – the enduring gendering of her femme lesbian identity *with* her butch, “no-longer-living”, life partner. Lykke instantiates the *mourning I* with a relational understanding of personhood that encompasses desire in grief as an affective attribute of continuing relationality with her partner. This prevails against any imaginary of the *sovereign I* – singular and delimited, engendered alone and rationally alive. For Lykke, death is vibrantly entangled with life – coextensive with landscapes still shared with her lover. On an island off the coast of Sweden, where her partner’s ashes were scattered, life and loss remain intertwined: mingling with pathways, flora, and fauna still traversed

Drawing on such reflections, we hope this issue contributes to the revealing of grieving processes as relational, co-lived matrices, and in terms that might query the vexed and often violating contexts in which queer grief and death may be (mis)recognized, (mis)categorized, or (de)legitimized. Such a perspective especially counters ways in which queer life projects might otherwise (be made to) evoke connections to joy and pride, so emphasized in the many celebratory modes of LGBTQIA+ representation. Such tropes have become prevalent across many global contexts, particularly where queer, trans, and related rights have been invoked or made aspirational – often bound to figurations of queer and trans persons within homonational logics. These processes typically unfold within legal and cultural frameworks that grant conditional citizenship to queer and trans persons, especially within urban-centric, transnationally referenced identity formations (Shah 2015). Such figurations evoke necropolitical loss. They sit alongside exclusion, mourning and shame as felt by same-sex desiring and gender non-normative subjects who find themselves excluded by, or only partially connected to, such modes of cosmopolitan queer and gender diverse recognition. They also run counter to the enduring socio-political violences experienced in gender and sexual minority lives.

In a recent intervention, Adnan Hossain and Momin Rahman (2024) reflect on the 2016 murders of two activists in Bangladesh, one of whom was a prominent gay rights leader and lawyer. Hossain and Rahman highlight the complexities of queer rights activism in Bangladesh – an activism that has largely evolved since the mid- to late 1990s, initially connected in part to internationally funded HIV prevention work – and how it has recalibrated in the wake of these violent deaths. This has occurred within the context of a movement already marked by the necessity of secrecy or discretion, operating in a governmental context that permits formation of relevant community organizations while also (potentially) suppressing them. In this environment, individualistic identitarian visions of “queer and trans politics” have been mobilized by the state to critique the “vanguard West” and its associated LGTBQIA+ discourses of minority recognition and protectionism. The notion of sexual and gender minority right as a “progressive marker” is re-signified in this discourse as a symbol of corrupting, individualist neo-colonialism. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the activists’ deaths, queer and trans activism in Bangladesh persists, but through increasingly oblique modes of praxis, and in the absence of relevant public protection. Queer and trans subjects are denied conditions of commensurate grievability and liveability.

Elsewhere, the politics of LGTBQIA+ “identitarianism” are marked by erasures that take shape amidst ever-mutating exclusions. This is particularly evident within the context of a resurgent right-wing insistence on binary gendering, witnessed most prominently at the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump – and in the prefigurative policy statements that accompanied it. Here, the rhetorical refusal to recognize gendered experience outside male and female categories as assigned at birth serves to frame other gender expressions as simply unreal. This is far from an isolated incident, but one magnified in particularly potent ways in the current political moment. An effect is to provoke new questions about feminist and far right connectivity over “phantasmic” fears of imagined threats (to women, to futurity, et cetera) posed by transgender, non-binary, and otherwise gender-diverse persons (Ring 2024).

More crucially, however, such rhetoric lays the groundwork for resistance grounded in the grieving of (future) lives foreclosed in such a speech act. Defiance, in these terms, calls forth the life projects that would not be possible in a world increasingly governed by the ascendance of such beliefs. This is not to ignore those lives that are already unliveable, but to fold them into a broader queer temporality – one that refuses linearity and mourns life-worlds that have been, and are also yet to be, lost. This work of grief extends, too, to planetary futures. The same ideological insistence on gender binarism is yoked to the current US governments plans to pull out of Paris Climate Accords, funding for the WHO, et cetera.

The examples discussed (Lykke, Hossain & Rahman, among others) draw from markedly different contexts, yet they evoke connected themes regarding the capacities for conceiving queer and trans living and grieving relationally: linking persons and issues across time and space as relational entities. This is particularly evident in how the otherwise imagined “dead” live on – across various scales of affect and temporality, from the intimately personal to the transnationally political. These reflections raise broader questions about the interconnected attributes of “being” through which persons experience life and death, both as in the world and not in the world (*per se*) connectedly. As Marilyn Strathern has noted, “Death does not just emerge as a part of everyday life but as something for and with which people must actively work in order for there to be any future at all” (2024, 23). Queer grief, in these terms, becomes a conduit for such work – a practice through which the labor of retrieving death and loss as praxis becomes possible. Against this background, in this issue we want to wonder about worlds that are increasingly precarious – and about the kinds of work that queer grieving may help us to conceptualize and enact in response. Extending from these concerns, the papers included in this issue raise questions about what happens when the world does not respond to queer experiences of grieving, when prevailing concepts and politics fail us, and when our differences do not help us find the cracks from which light might enter – or through which possibilities for connected, liveable futures might emerge.

Motivated by such rifts and connections in experience, the issues explored in the following pages pertain to:

- disrupting conventional notions of life and death as securely separate domains;
- invoking interruptions between human and non-human relations and contexts;
- attending to the affective dimensions of who and what counts as a “grieveable” in queer life-worlds, politics, relationships, and storying; and
- exploring failures of queer grieving – especially in terms of capacities to produce connections and relations or the lack thereof.

We hope that, even as we struggle to offer commensurate perspectives on such concerns, that the conversation we start in this edition will foreground new discussions.

Conceiving grief

Grief provokes a yearning to make sense of one’s experience. A common – yet vital – way of doing so is through seeking self-understanding in relation to others who have experienced similar forms of loss. This may take place through direct conversation, but also through engagement with writing and other forms of expression that others have employed to express their own grieving processes. In this sense, grief may be understood as closely aligned with, and accentuating of, queer and anthropological understandings of *dividual personhood*. A dividual perspective conceives persons as relational entities, rather than as singularly imagined individuals. Grief, in this light, can be seen as both disrupting and revealing dividual understandings of persons. The breaking of an attachment (whether to a person, place, entity, et cetera) through loss or bereavement, illuminates how persons are relationally constituted – grief becoming an affective conduit to such realizations. Even when not framed explicitly in terms of dividual versus individual conceptions of self and world, the relational rifts expressed through grief reveal something about the nature of life-worlds: about qualities of being and living that, by their very nature,

engender attachments that may not endure in conventionally worldly terms, but which might continue through alternative understandings of persons, worlds, and relations (Davies 2020; Strathern 2018).

Politically, queer grief typically emerges intersectionally – entangled with, and shaped within, hostile environments. These conditions intensify isolation and produce fraught relationships with dominant norms and prevailing social values. Journeys toward a politics capable of supporting queer grief frequently falter – blocked, delayed, or met with further grief in the encounter with intransigence and failures of recognition. And yet, it is precisely these encounters that can open up potentiality. As Judith Butler argues, “it [grief] does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility” (Butler 2003, 13). In other words, grief draws attention to apprehensions of dependency and, in doing so, reveals potential to reimagine collective ties – within communities and in society at large. Understanding persons as relational entities helps us better conceive the effects of loss and death. When others die – when places, things, or beings are lost, or when political hegemony abandons us – “we” (as conventionally imagined singular persons) die or are lost too. The grief that arises from such ruptures marks the depth of our connectedness, both inwardly and outwardly, in such a way that imagined boundaries between self and world collapse, blur or dissolve. Grieving points toward realizations of relational rather than singular modes of being.

Such realizations have been especially germane to the development of this special issue, which has brought about new connections between those of us involved in the project – authors, editors, and others. Rather than adopting a Stoic stance of coping alone, we have shared personal stories through writing and other forms of communication, exploring and experimenting with our personal and shared understandings of grief along the way, particularly as they may be apprehended and explored in queer terms (e.g., Tillmann 2005). These exchanges have, in turn, evoked those whom we grieve – folding these persons, places, and entities into the life-worlds of our grieving, across any imagined divides or particularities. In this sense, the project has been about the collective

making of “queer grief” – a term we do not offer as a fixed definition, but as an evolving domain of shared and unfinished reflections on grieving from the perspectives of queer lives, relations and materialities. These reflections, we hope, open onto broader existential vistas that disrupt normative understandings of grief.

Viral times

Such reflections have become especially salient in recent years. As a collective, our writing began shortly before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its widely varied necropolitical effects. At the time of first imagining this project, we could not have anticipated how profoundly the pandemic would come to resonate with the themes we sought to explore. Whether or not we found ourselves directly affected or bereaved by COVID-19, grief came to the foreground of public life – grief for those lost to the virus, as well as for the loss of ways of life we were forced to relinquish. As we have moved beyond the most immediate vicissitudes of the pandemic – its associated lockdowns and precarities – new light has been cast on intimate relationships, kinship structures, global political economies, communities and livelihoods, mutual aid and care practices, and the troubling, productive, and queer aspects of solitude. Many of us were confronted with difficult, if not impossible, ethical choices as borders, societies, regions, and social relations closed, reopened, and closed again. Post-pandemic worlds have now begun to materialize – realized in part, yet still stretching forward into unexplored and fragile horizons.

The effects of long COVID, for instance, continue to unfold. Recent research on the ongoing consequences of COVID-19 in Africa has revealed a substantial health care burden: almost half of COVID-19 survivors on the continent report persistent, physically and psychiatrically debilitating symptoms. In low- and middle-income countries, such effects are particularly pronounced, as access to social security for those suffering long-term effects of the illness remains limited (Geddes 2023). Similarly, in India, the pandemic intensified the precarity of many migrant workers, as the regimes through which such labor is organized

capitalized on restricted mobility, as lockdowns and travel bans curtailed freedom of movement. Government policies that tied welfare entitlements to a person's state of origin further compounded these vulnerabilities. Migrant workers were cast as "aliens" in the places they lived in – not through the formal loss of citizenship, but through the denial of rights and protections that they might otherwise have been had access to *in extremis* (Carswell et al. 2022).

In contrast, in Sweden, it was the oldest generation of Finnish migrant workers – those among the hundreds of thousands who migrated for factory work during the 1960s and 1970s, and who perhaps never learned Swedish (Lahtinen 2015) – who were hit especially hard by COVID-19 in terms of mortality. This example sheds light on how the history of migration within Europe was redefined through the pandemic. Queer lives often get enmeshed with migration, and this is true of the Finnish immigration to Sweden as well: many queer individuals moved across the border seeking a more liberal atmosphere. While we lack precise demographic data, the grief associated with the fate of queer Finnish migrants during the pandemic in Sweden remains an open question that still needs to be researched. This is a shared cultural grief – lingering, suspended and awaiting recognition

Amidst such effects, one notable observation about COVID-19 has been its embeddedness in processes of both remembering and forgetting queer knowledges – particularly those developed during community-based responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In a recent paper, Peter Hegarty and Joe Rollins (2020) explore how global responses to COVID-19 iterated individualistic and small household-oriented strategies: "stay at home", isolate, contain, and so forth. These approaches prevailed over more relational strategies, for example those that emerged during responses of sexual- and gender-minority persons to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in many global contexts. Such responses emphasized community-based care, sharing knowledge gained from experience, the management of intimate connections, liveability, and – vitally – resistance to the stigma and isolation that so characterized responses to people living with HIV and AIDS in the early years of the epidemic.

One of the critical lessons learned from the global HIV/AIDS epidemic was that effective public health responses take shape through the building of social connections and the inclusion of stigmatized persons in programmatic efforts. Yet, as Hegarty and Rollins note, it is striking how quickly these lessons were sidelined during the COVID-19 pandemic. Global responses largely failed to draw on queer-type knowledges about how to live with and support one another through an epidemic – at least within the most dominant, orthodox forms of public health knowledge production. More “heterodox” responses, by contrast, were informed by the care work of gender- and sexual-minority communities in various country contexts. However, this work often took place outside the prevailing frameworks of heteronormativity and cisnormativity that undergirded much of the COVID-19 health promotion messaging, in most global contexts (Banerjea et al. 2022). This may be understood as a form of universalism – aims to flatten out the epidemic simultaneously flattening the conception of the human subject, aligning them with norms.

This kind of forgetting – of knowledge and experience rooted in the expertise of queer persons and communities – connects to our theme of grief. One of the things we have been especially mindful of throughout the writing and editing of this special issue is the fragility of queer ontologies and epistemologies: their continued marginality within mainstream academic frameworks, despite their felt potentialities for helping to signify queer, trans, and other gendered and sexual lifeways (and deathways). The circumstances described above paralleled the unfolding of this special issue (and the broader project). It is fair to say that all of us involved in this work were profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. For some this meant turning away from the project at various times, as we each dealt with our own shifting health, housing and economic conditions; the loss or transformation of relationships; and the revaluation of our own practices of care. Writing about grief was apt in the circumstances but also oftentimes felt futile amidst the greater global precarities we were all too aware of. Yet, engaging these tensions became part of the work: an act of recovering queer-type

perspectives and theorizing, of querying the value of such work. At times, turning toward our own research and stories of grief felt like an intrusion. At other times, however, it felt like an opportunity for reconnection. We sought to incorporate these responses into our writing and editorial processes, finding community through the act of composing and thinking together.

Amidst the periods of lockdown that most of us experienced during the pandemic, we convened a series of collective online workshops – facilitated by the editors and involving the contributing authors alongside a small group of additional co-researchers. These gatherings took place periodically from 2021 onwards and included facilitated writing exercises and discussions. In many instances, these sessions extended well beyond the scope of the papers presented here, and included experiments in creative writing, poetry, and reflection. This process allowed us to engage a larger group of contributors than those included as authors in this special issue, and provided opportunities for those involved to express ideas that exceed the limits of this special issue.

The workshops and discussions brought us together, and, crucially, allowed us to share – in the moment and across time – and explore how to write about the approximate domain that we were determining as queer grief. These interactions became integral to the editorial and writing process for our group of contributors: a space in which to explore emotions, affects, and our own creativity.

This brings us to the potentiality for transformation inherent in queer grieving – together. Writing about grief can be understood as a way of charting paths through the maze of loss; it is, in itself, a transformative act. It helps us relate back to experiences and allows for growth and processing of deep-seated feelings. It also allows us to understand the role of oppressive structures and systems of internalized shame in our grief, and can thereby help us to challenge these as we explore the dimensions of loss negotiated by queer bodies in our societies. Furthermore, understanding the non-linearity of loss – the permanence, but also the uncertainties of it – can be argued as crucial to understanding how we can grow through grief in our communities and wider society.

Editing can be understood as an act that reflects and engages with broader power structures. It takes place in response to queer necropolitics and the pervasive heteronormativity through which queer grief is often edited out: erased, unrecognized and sometimes sensationalized and scandalized. These structures are not limited to externally conceived social phenomena, they also inhabit our homes, our work places and the texture of our lives; relational processes deeply seated in the experiencing of grief and loss.

Engaging with these structures and processes has proven to be difficult and, at times, painful work. Over the course of this project, we came to better understand that what was required was *measured attention* – that the task at hand was not simply the efficient production of text. Throughout this project, the editing in and editing out of textual representation has generated complex emotions, especially as we navigated the expectations of academic writing and review, that sometimes ran counter to what we had been trying to achieve in terms of the emotional nature of our shared work. In some ways, this process has mirrored the experience of grief itself. Losses were incurred in writing and editing, and choices were made to defer parts of the work (of both writing and grieving) to other times, other contexts. As such, we conceive of this special issue as the first in a series of projects, with work in the near future aimed at opening up further reflections on grief through hybrid forms of art, curation, textile, and text.

The processes we describe have also helped us to reflect on what is typically taken for granted in publishing projects: deadlines, the oft privileging of text over other formats, and so on. As a group of authors, editors, and collaborators, we have – both together and separately – become acutely aware of what is made (in)visible, and what is not given space, within “common” or “normal” grieving relationalities and their representations. These unfolding understandings have shaped the writing of this special issue and – crucially – enabled us to generate contexts in which grieving can be approached as multidimensional and unresolved. This has led us to consider how we reveal – and conceal – our own queer grief as writers and editors, alongside (we hope) our readers.

For some of us, these unfolding experiences have also been about editing our own bodies and our own stories, asking ourselves what is key to say and what may be too much to say. These decisions have arisen for varying reasons, but central among them are the tensions between autoethnographic openness and the need to preserve our own well-being – and that of our friends, interlocuters, and co-researchers.

Melancholic insistence

Amidst these reflections, we conceive of queer grief here not only by attending to the grieving processes of queer-experiencing persons (though we do engage with these), but also by calling attention to the ways in which current (im)possibilities for living securely in the world intersect with themes of futurity, the Anthropocene, global politics of diversity and inclusion, and planetary and environmental well-being. To attend to non-binary, transgender, queer, and other associated ways of embodying “gender and sexualness” is to evoke a wide sense of how normative assumptions frame liveability – prefiguring certain bodies, beings, and contexts as already marked for death, both literally and symbolically. These framings are often based on ascribed and assumed characteristics regarding race, ethnicity, caste, class, socio-economic precarity, and religion (Haritaworn et al. 2014). Queer grief calls attention to these intersecting structural violences, their affects and effects. In part, this means attending to queer bodies. But it also requires engagement with of wider and more capacious necropolitical framings.

At the time we began our work on this issue, the world had been engulfed in acts of public grieving – most prominently following the death, the public asphyxiation by police, of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. The Black Lives Matter movement, which has continued to evolve in response to these and other events, transformed acts of mourning into an internationalized process – a moment of reckoning for racism in politics and societies across the globe that bear the imprint of slavery, postcolonial legacies and the forceful extraction of and contestation over natural resources. Simultaneously, we have been

witnessing a rise of fascist and/or increasingly violent, supremacist tendencies in many global contexts.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine – launched just as the world was beginning to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic – shocked many, particularly in countries geopolitically connected to the aggressive situation (NATO member states, neighboring countries and those sharing borders with Russia). Queer grief was heightened as Putin's Russia simultaneously became increasingly antiequeer while further isolating itself from many international communities and institutions. This resulted in many personal and communal crises within Russian and Russian-born queer populations. Many were forced to leave the country. Yet, even in many neighboring countries queer Russians often faced suspicion, cast as “aggressive Russian nationals.”

Such a perspective is especially germane to queer grieving. This is evident, for instance, in contexts where queer-experiencing persons are not grieved – because they have been denied conditions of (full) liveability within prevailing structures of relation, such as natal families, kinship networks, or nation-states. Basile Ndiyo's recent research in Cameroon, for example, details how prevalent homophobic beliefs and attitudes result in the deaths of (often childless) same-sex desiring persons rarely being mourned. They are rendered, in Giorgio Agamben's terms, *homines sacri*: persons already deemed useless, with no imagined contribution to the future of society. An effect is that death simply reconciles such persons within wider social orderings that already rendered their lives as having no material substance or value in the first place (Ndiyo 2020).

The particular necropolitics of the present moment are manifold. Racially, nationally, and virally motivated deaths now intertwine with past and future epidemics, prejudices, and abjections. Amidst these entanglements, the burden of grief – and its un-prescribed or culturally not-rooted contingencies – can hold us captive, if we allow it. And yet, this is also a moment filled with potential: a time in which we might seek to capture the resonant losses of the present from new perspectives.

This special issue evokes the ontological work of queer grieving in particular ways. Throughout the development of this project, we have

wondered how the melancholic present might be retrieved into thinking about both the past and futurity from the standpoint of queer experiences of loss, death, and grief as generative. In this vein, Sara Ahmed (drawing on Silverman and Klaus) has proposed a connection between grief and the melancholic that runs counter to Freud's. She describes grief for the lost object – be it a person, animal, “thing,” or home – as a necessary and enduring discomfiture, one that enables the ongoing accommodation of loss and ensuing negotiations of meaning in life ongoingly, over time (Ahmed 2004, 159). This contrasts with Freud's view, in which prolonged attachment to the lost or dead object is conceived as signifying pathological melancholia: a refusal to “let go” via the creation of an abstract image of that for which one mourns, preserving and internalizing the object even as it cannot be retrieved or reconciled. For Ahmed, this Freudian figuration fails to recognize melancholic attachment (as it were) as a necessary means of keeping the past alive in the present (Ahmed 2004). From a queer perspective, this resonates ethically as a necessary condition of insisting on the recognition of histories, standpoints and relationships that otherwise might be written out of more orthodox (temporally linear) stories. Such a view offers potentialities for a conceptual framing of queer grief, inviting us to consider what it means to grieve a lost object that might anyway always already have been lost to orthodox imaginaries of grieveability? This connects to ways in which queer bodies and relationships might be re-politicized – not as figures without futurity, or whose futures have yet to arrive, but rather as entities projected into the work of making new and better worlds, which also hold our losses close.

Empathy – toward oneself and toward others – is vital under such conditions, especially when exhaustion sets in and community ties begin to feel overwhelmingly challenging. But where can we find the resources for empathy in moments of collective despair and austerity? For some, art may offer a lifeline. For other it may be conscious self-acclaim. The resourceful may turn to the re-imagination of the situation. The more fragile or marginalized or critical may prioritize escape, at any cost. For many, or combination of these and other pathways may be a

typical strategy. Amidst these possible trajectories we may reflect that not everything that is lost is lost, to paraphrase Tolkien's well-known line. And not every norm is inherently oppressive; some may be imagined as scaffolds that hold us together at our most vulnerable, even if performing as sites, structures and signifiers that we resist. This might be especially so in the midst of our queer (or querying of) grief, as undertake the work that death and loss require for the conceiving and enactment of livable futures.

Against this background, the papers assembled in this issue intertwine diverse possibilities for conceiving grief and loss across spatial and temporal settings. This special issue includes four research articles (Walker et al., Renkin, Mills and Lahti) and two essays (Monk and Sorainen), each covering a wide range of societal, cultural, political, and historical dimension of queer grief.

Walker et al. is a writers' collective composed of Chloe Cannell, Heather McGinn, Toni Walsh, Simon-Peter Telford, Lyndal Hordacre Kobayashi, Aden Burg, Morgan Chilvers, Jenn Ngo, and Amelia Walker. In their article, the co-authors reflect on how grief surfaced within a critical-creative research collaboration, underlining how grieving can be held, processed and shared through collective writing. Their contribution asks: Why did we not initially expect grief to arise here? And why, in the end, did it?

Elizabeth Mills explores urgent and contentious issues in her article on reproductive policies and laws in the United States, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. Drawing on the work of Gayatri Spivak among others, Mills demonstrates how engagement with these policy contexts reveals ways in which heteronormative notions of kinship can generate grief, as reproductive processes iterate estranging practices, with effects in bodies, and lived experience.

Also addressing queer grief in intimate spaces, Annukka Lahti focuses on the grief associated with LGBTQI+ relationship breakups. Like Mills, Lahti discusses the complexity of queer grief in relation to how her interlocutors navigate loss within heteronormative societies. She does so by examining multiple queer grief assemblages, showing how

heteronormativity, human and nonhuman elements, and psychical, cultural, and spatial contexts are all crucial elements that complicate the grieving process after a relationship ends.

In his article, Hadley Renkin engages with queer grief over lost pasts and foreclosed futures among activists in post-socialist Hungary. Drawing on interviews with activists who have been part of the queer/LGBTQ+ movement since before the regime changes, he explores various themes to understand queer attachment to past and future political alternatives, showing that grief can lead to despair and disengagement, but also to renewed determination, shared solidarity, and a deepened sense of collective struggle and hope.

Antu Sorainen's essay explores queer grief in cultural products by discussing the representations of complex gay grief in two recent Netflix series – *Tore* (2023) and *Good Grief* (2023) – in contrast with the figure of Larry in W. Somerset Maugham's classic novel *The Razor's Edge* (1944). Across these three works, Sorainen demonstrates how queer grief unmask the normative theatricality and the necessary duality of existence, in which death is always present, but where grief – like life – is shaped by powerful normative expectations.

Daniel Monk's photo-essay offers a deeply personal reflection on the COVID-19 pandemic, conveyed through the medium of costume play. For Monk, "dressing-up" – inspired by an eclectic mix of resources including a remembered children's television programme and inherited clothing and artefacts – becomes a performative engagement with boundaries. These boundaries were enforced by lockdown, but also opened up time and space for Monk's photographic adventures. The isolation of the moment created a space for the living/recalling of activism, relationships, and family, where emotional ruptures of the past breached into the present, and vice versa.

Alongside the contributing authors, we – the editors of this special issue (Paul Boyce, Trude Sundberg and Antu Sorainen) – each bring our own experiences of queer grieving to this volume. We have folded some of these experiences into this introduction, alongside reflections on the affordances and troubles these journeyings have engendered.

These paths have not been solitary; they have been shaped in dialogue with other co-thinkers and collaborators. Olga Lidia Saavedra Montes de Oca's visual ethnographic work in familial contexts of gender transition in Cuba opened out important and subtle insights as she joined us for this project. These reflections became especially resonant, as during the period of the workshops Olga found herself attending to the grief of a longtime close friend. Meanwhile, Declan Wiffen offered invaluable assistance by mentoring some of our collective writing exercises, opening up perspectives on the group's experience that would not otherwise have come into view.

All of the work assembled here reminds us that grief is not easy. The contributions to this collection offer carefully crafted entry points into the emerging field of queer grief studies – building upon, and extending from, the still-nascent field of queer death studies. Our aim has been to conceive of queer grief as a research terrain that evolves in concert with long-established themes in queer studies. In this spirit, we envisage a field of thinking, being, and collaborative creating that has the potential to express queer life projects in concert with attributes that are anyway already present. By this we mean to evoke how grief may be intrinsically encoded into the histories and structures of being-in-the-world that continue to inform (im)possibilities for queer liveability. Queer being, we suggest, is also queer grieving. This is not to refuse joy, pride, or everyday capacities. Rather, it is to encompass queer grief as a vector toward working with death and loss as prefigurative of possible futures, pasts and presents.

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E.J. Gonzalez-Polledo and Silvia Posocco) and *Covid-19 Assemblages: Queer and Feminist Ethnographies from South Asia* (co-edited with Niharika Banerjea and Rohit K. Dasgupta). He is currently conducting research on queer and transgender experience of employment, education and welfare with research partners in India and Bangladesh for MFARR, a project aiming at bringing about new LGBTQ-IA+ inclusive research in Asia (lead by Peter Newman). With Svati Shah, Paul is currently co-developing a new network aimed at bringing about innovative connections in queer and trans social scientific scholarship in the Global South. This includes work on Global Health, co-developed with Svati Shah and Beth Mills.

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