

# **Title: The depths of temporal desynchronization in grief**

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## **Abstract**

**Introduction:** The experience of disconnection is common in first-person accounts of grief. One way in which this feeling of estrangement can manifest is through the splintering apart of the time of the mourner and the time of the world. Supplementing and extending Thomas Fuchs' influential idea of temporal desynchronization, my aim in this article is to give an account of the heterogenous ways in which grief can disturb time.

**Method:** I organise these manifold experiences of temporal disruption according to a method of 'depth analysis': a phenomenological interpretation of temporal desynchronization that tracks the increasing disconnect between the mourner and the world as it manifests in time. In so doing, I draw on a wide-range of descriptive first-person responses to the question 'Has your experience of time changed in any way?', included as part of an online questionnaire on the emotional experience of grief conducted recently with colleagues at the University of York. I then stratify these according to a mild, moderate and profound level of disruption.

**Results:** Before setting out the results of this analysis, I give a background account of Fuchs' interpretation of temporal desynchronization in phenomenological psychopathology more generally and in grief specifically. In my results I then supplement and extend his interpretation by setting out my phenomenological depth analysis of the increasing disconnect between the time of the mourner and the time of the world, as demonstrated by the questionnaire data. As I argue, such a fine-grained account is an important step in understanding the way time can shape the meaning and significance of different grief experiences. Following this, in my discussion I demonstrate how a depth approach might be helpful in differentiating between temporal disturbances in a range of affective disorders and give an illustrative comparison of grief and depression.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion I reflect briefly on what grief might reveal about the depth and complexity of temporal experience itself. In so doing, I consider how the radical disruptions to time in grief might transform the mourner's experience of time irreversibly, but in a way that enables a renewed connection to both their deceased loved one and the world from which they have become estranged.

## Title: The depths of temporal desynchronization in grief

### Introduction

A profound sense of disconnection from the world is common in first-person accounts of grief. At the death of a loved one, the familiar can become unfamiliar, the meaning and significance of one's life-world can fall apart, and one's sense of belonging to the world as a whole can be fundamentally destabilised. As a result, one can find oneself cut off from the world and able only to observe it in a painfully detached way, as if from the outside [See 1]. As Robert Romanyshyn writes in *The Soul in Grief*, the sudden death of his wife shattered the familiar contours of his world such that the "ordinary things of life seemed strange." His world was tilted off balance and everything seemed far away [2, p. 37]. Disoriented and no longer securely at home in the world [2, p. 77], he lost his grip on things and became "a ghost, a shade haunting the outer margins of the world" [2, p. 32]. One of the most conspicuous ways in which this disconnection became manifest for Romanyshyn was through the rupturing of the experience of time, wherein the time of his mourning splintered apart from the time of the world. Throughout *The Soul in Grief* this disentanglement from the time of the world happens in manifold ways and at an increasing level of depth. Upon his wife's death, time moves very slowly, and moments feel like they last for an eternity [2, p. 60]. The future that they collectively imagined dies, whilst the past becomes a prison of memories that no longer make sense and no longer matter [2, p. 17]. Withdrawn and closed off, the past and future dissolve [2, p. 24]. As a result, the unified structure of time becomes increasingly unstable; the past, present and future blur into each other and the distance and proximity between events becomes irregular. As Romanyshyn writes:

It was the first anniversary of my wife's death. At least that's what the calendar said. In truth, however, the time since her death could have been as short as yesterday or as long as eternity. Grief had left me nowhere, and measured time had fallen away. Only time as endurance remained. In grief, my days bled into each other, and in the states of reveries which it encouraged, moments blended together, where one moment was everything and nothing [2, p. 41].

Finding himself nowhere, displaced in space and time, Romanyshyn has the experience of falling out of the time of the world [2, p. 24].

Exemplified by Denise Riley's influential *Time Lived, Without its Flow* [3], it is common for first-person accounts of bereavement to stress that grief can radically affect the experience of time.<sup>[1]</sup> Indeed, there has been increasing recognition in philosophy, psychiatry

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<sup>[1]</sup> For example, as Julian Barnes writes in *Levels of Life* (2014) of the death of his long-term partner: "[g]rief reconfigures time, its length, its texture, its function: one day means no more than the next, so why have they been picked out and given separate names" [4]. And Helen Macdonald emphasises in *H is for Hawk*, after the death of her father: "Time didn't run forwards any more. It was a solid thing you could press yourself against and feel it push back; a thick fluid, half-air, half-glass, that flowed both ways and sent ripples of recollection forwards and new events backwards so that new things I encountered, then, seemed souvenirs from the distant past" [5].

and psychology that time is often ‘out of joint’ in grief [1, 6–12]. One of the most productive interpretations of this disjointed time is given by Thomas Fuchs in his recent article ‘Presence in absence: the ambiguous phenomenology of grief’ [12]. In grief, Fuchs writes, the time of the mourner slows down and they become fixated on the past. As a result, time “sustains a sharp rift” wherein the time of the mourner which is focussed on the past becomes increasingly disconnected from the present time of the world which continues to flow [13, p. 83, 14, p. 618]. Framed by his broader interpretation of time and psychopathology, Fuchs defines this “fundamental division of time” that emerges in grief according to a process of *desynchronization* [12, p. 50]. For Fuchs, this division between the time of the mourner and the time of the world is what sustains the ambiguity inherent to grief, namely: the seemingly irresolvable conflict between the deceased’s presence in the past and their absence in the present.

Fuchs’ brief account of temporal desynchronization in grief is extremely promising but nevertheless preliminary; particularly when compared with the extensive amount of research that he and others have conducted into temporal desynchronization in schizophrenia and melancholia [13, 15–24]. For instance, whilst temporal desynchronization provides a very useful framework for understanding the experience of falling out of time in grief as a whole, it remains undecided whether different grief experiences splinter apart the time of the mourner and the time of the world in different ways and, more importantly, whether this disconnect can occur at varying levels of depth. A finer-grained interpretation of temporal desynchronization in grief is needed.<sup>[2]</sup> My primary aim in this article is to supplement and extend Fuchs’ account by providing a more thorough interpretation of the heterogenous ways in which grief can disturb time.

## Method

In my results, I organise these manifold experiences of temporal disruption according to a method of ‘depth analysis’: a phenomenological interpretation of temporal desynchronization that tracks the increasing disconnect between the mourner and the world as it manifests in time. In so doing, I draw on a wide-range of descriptive first-person responses to the question ‘Has your experience of time changed in any way?,’ included as part of an online questionnaire on the emotional experience of grief conducted recently with colleagues at the University of York.<sup>[3]</sup> I then stratify these according to a mild, moderate and profound level

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<sup>[2]</sup> Though framed by a different interpretation that focuses on practical significance in particular, Matthew Ratcliffe gives a similarly fine-grained account of the range of temporal experiences in depression. See [18, 19].

<sup>[3]</sup> This phenomenological survey was conducted as part of the AHRC-funded project, Grief: A Study of Human Emotional Experience and received ethical approval from the Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee at the University of York. Disseminated widely across social media channels, the survey was made available via the online platform Qualtrix, from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 until 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021. Anyone over the age of 18, who identified as currently experiencing grief over the death of a person, or as having experienced grief in the past, was invited to complete it. All participants consented to their anonymized testimonies being made publicly available in full. Participants were able to access the survey after reading an information sheet and completing a consent form. A total of 265 completed responses were received. 173 participants reported an ongoing experience of grief (65%), while 92 reported a past experience (35%). 240 respondents identified as female (91%) and 25 identified as male (9%); none chose to self-describe. The vast majority of respondents were UK-nationals (231). This was to

of disruption. As I will demonstrate, a phenomenological depth analysis of temporal desynchronization is an important step in understanding the way time can shape the meaning and significance of different grief experiences, in particular, the way time can contribute to variations in the depth of the mourner's disconnection from the world, which is my focus here. In what follows, I will firstly give a background account of Fuchs' interpretation of temporal desynchronization in phenomenological psychopathology more generally and in grief specifically. In setting out the results of my analysis, I will supplement and extend his interpretation by developing a depth analysis of the increasing disconnect between the time of the mourner and the time of the world, as demonstrated by the questionnaire data. This will then set up the conclusion, wherein I will reflect briefly on what grief might reveal about the depth and complexity of temporal experience. In so doing, I will consider how the radical disruptions to time in grief might transform the mourner's experience of time irreversibly, but in a way that enables a renewed connection to both their deceased loved one and the world from which they have become estranged.

## Background

In 'Presence in absence: the ambiguous phenomenology of grief,' Fuchs situates the experience of temporal disconnection in grief within his important and influential idea of desynchronization: a complex physiological and psychological process whereby the flow of lived time in which one is ordinarily absorbed becomes decoupled from the time of one's interpersonal world [13–16]. Fuchs develops his idea of temporal desynchronization and the psychopathology of interpersonal time throughout many of his works, the majority of which are focussed upon desynchronization in affective and psychotic disorders such as melancholia or schizophrenia [13–17, 25–27]. On one level, interpersonal time is a physiological process of continuous synchronization between an organism and its environment. Evident in chronobiological phenomena such as the sleep-wake cycle, synchronization is given here as endogenous and exogenous rhythms attune to each other and tend towards homeostasis. Extrapolating from the physiological, Fuchs argues that, on another level, interpersonal time is a psychological process of implicit inter-corporeal resonance between the time of the individual (internal or ego time) and the time of society (external or world time). As indicated by infant research into affect attunement and verbal interaction, synchronization is given here in the flow of lived simultaneity in the present. Taken together, Fuchs defines these physiological and psychological processes of synchronization as *basal contemporality* [13, pp. 81–83, 15, pp. 179–182]. Fundamental to Fuchs' psychopathology of interpersonal time

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be expected, given where and how the study was advertised. Other nationalities/ dual-nationalities listed were USA/American (13), Dutch (4) German (3), Irish (2), Australian (2), Ghanaian (1), Polish (1), Swedish (1), British-Australian (1), British-Asian (1), British-Irish (2), British-German (1) and New Zealand-European (1), as well as Caucasian (1). Respondents were from a range of age groups with the highest number being between 45–54 (55), 55–64 (95) and 65–74 (47). Almost half of the respondents focussed on the death of a partner (130). Others referred to the death of a parent (47), a sibling (14), a child (12), a grandparent (12), a miscarriage or termination (12), a friend (10) or another relative (8). Despite the study's explicit focus on bereavement, 29 responses were concerned primarily with grief over childlessness rather than grief over the death of a person, often in conjunction with experiences of miscarriage, termination, or infertility.

is the idea that affective and psychotic disorders such as melancholia or schizophrenia can interrupt synchronization through a process of desynchronization. Here the flow of lived time in which one is ordinarily absorbed becomes decoupled from the time of one's interpersonal world. An intercorporeal dissonance develops as a consequence and one has the experience of "falling out of the common time which runs on" [15, p. 181]; of becoming a "living anachronism" [15, p. 184]. In this rupture, the implicit time of synchronization as it is pre-reflectively lived is transformed through its negation into explicit time that is reflectively experienced or (more often) suffered [13, pp. 77–81, 16, p. 195]. In this movement from the implicit to the explicit, time becomes an issue.

Throughout the history of phenomenological psychopathology, as Fuchs' emphasises, temporal desynchronization has been conceptualised both relationally and dimensionally, and both aspects are critical to understanding the significance of disrupted time and the movement from implicit to explicit temporality [13, p. 95]. *Relational* desynchronization is defined as a disturbance of temporal flow and refers to the way in which disruptions to the (Bergsonian) flow of lived time splinter apart the time of the individual from the time of the world. Involving the interruption of what Fuchs' calls affective-conative drive — the striving or momentum that compels the flow of lived time — the time of the mourner can come apart from the time of the world through either retardation or acceleration. Interconnectedly, *dimensional* desynchronization is defined as a disturbance of temporal form and refers to way in which disruptions to the (Husserlian) transcendental synthesis of presentation, retention and protention in inner-time consciousness can cause structural disturbances to the dimensions of past, present and future. In this sense, whilst one dimension such as the future may be withheld or blocked off, another dimension such as the past can become much more intense [14].

Informed by his engagement with Riley's *Time Lived, Without its Flow*, Fuchs observes processes of both relational and dimensional desynchronization in his account of temporal disruption in grief. With regards to relational desynchronization Fuchs' argues that grief can be seen to conform broadly to melancholia, regret, remorse, sadness or guilt in that it slows the time of the mourner down. Referring to dimensional desynchronization, Fuchs argues that in the retardation of the flow of time, the past, as that which contains the irrevocable loss of the loved one, becomes painfully explicit. This is consistent with the interpretation of Robert Solomon, who similarly emphasises that grief involves the painful reckoning with the fact that the loved one is "*not there*." For Solomon this reckoning is necessarily grounded in memory, which means that "grief refers the present to the past, the past remembered" [28, p. 80]. Further commensurate with melancholic depression, Fuchs argues that the mourner's concern with the past necessarily then impacts their relation to the future, in the sense that "the future is no longer experienced as an open horizon of possibilities and projects" [12, p. 51]. This affirms recent accounts given by Michael R. Kelly, Constantine Mehmehl and Matthew Ratcliffe which emphasise the loss of futural possibilities in grief [1, 8–9]. For Kelly, for example, it is not the memories of the loved one that are the object of grief, but "the new significance of a world with the pervasive absence that is the world without the beloved" [8, pp. 158–159]. As an agonizing experience of absence, Kelly argues that grief "puts the past before us," meaning it is the hopeless realisation that the loved one is lost *henceforth* which gives grief its poignancy [8, pp. 167–

168]. Taking relational and dimensional desynchronization together, Fuchs' view of grief is that lived time is ruptured as the stagnating time of the mourner splinters off from the time of the world which continues to flow. The mourner becomes fixated on the past, whilst the future is experienced as blocked. Fuchs' concise interpretation constitutes an important yet preliminary starting point in understanding temporal disturbance in grief, but more work is required to understand this process in all its complexity and heterogeneity.

## Results

Drawing on a wide-range of first-person responses to a recent online questionnaire on the emotional experience of grief conducted with colleagues at the University of York, it becomes possible to see that grief can disrupt time in different ways and to various levels of depth, both within a particular grief experience, or more often between them. In answering Question 6 of the questionnaire: 'Has your experience of time changed in any way?', 43 of 265 respondents (16%) noted explicitly that grief has not affected their experience of time whilst 199 respondents (75%) report that grief has changed their experience of time in some way, often to a significant extent. With regards to relational desynchronization, some of these 199 respondents report time slowing down in grief, which is commensurate with Fuchs' account. However, many others report time as speeding up, both slowing down *and* speeding up, or standing still to the extent that some have the experience of being beyond or outside of time altogether. Correlatively, with regards to dimensional desynchronization, some respondents report a fixation upon the past and the foreclosure of the future which is again consistent with Fuchs' interpretation. Yet, many others experience the opening up and closing down of any or all of the past, present and future in varied configurations.

In what follows I will supplement and extend Fuchs' interpretation by mapping out the heterogeneous ways in which grief can disturb time according to processes of both relational and dimensional desynchronization. Developing Fuchs' claim that as desynchronization unfolds the time of the mourner becomes *increasingly* disconnected from the time of the world, I will organise this process of desynchronization into a depth model of analysis, composed of three levels. With each level, the disconnect between the mourner and world becomes more pronounced. At the most *mild level*, desynchronization unfolds in a way that is relatively straight-forward, with the time of the mourner either slowing down through retardation or speeding up through acceleration. Here the dimensions of past, present and future remain intact but are opened and closed in different configurations. At the *moderate level*, desynchronization is more erratic and unpredictable, with the time of the mourner both slowing down *and* speeding up. Here the dimensions of past, present and future are opened and closed in different configurations, but the distance and proximity between them is changeable and less stable. At the most *profound level*, desynchronization effects a complete disconnect between the time of the mourner and the time of the world, with the time of the mourner coming to a standstill such that one finds oneself beyond time, which is experienced as meaningless or unreal. Here the dimensions of past, present and future are closed off as a whole and experienced as if from the outside.

### *Mild level of disturbance*

Beginning with the most mild level of disturbance, 46 questionnaire respondents (17%) reinforce Fuchs' view of relational desynchronization in grief by describing the flow of time as slowing down or dragging. This stagnating is often accompanied by a feeling of time's flow being lengthened or extended. Here minutes and hours, days and nights are described as stretching out endlessly in a way that is disproportionate to their usual measure: "Time slowed down. Days seemed to be very long" (#1) or "Time seemed to stretch unbearably and agonizingly at first" (#164). In slowing down and stretching out, several respondents describe the flow of time as feeling like an oppressive or relentless burden that weighs heavily: "There seems to be an awful lot of it... I feel like a rudderless boat in a stormy sea with endless time to endure it" (#81). As the time of the mourner stagnates and slows, several respondents note an emerging sense of disconnection from the time of the world, which continues to flow: "A feeling of my inner life feeling slow and the other world going too fast in a way I couldn't keep up with or process" (#190).

Relatedly, several respondents also affirm Fuchs' account of dimensional desynchronization in grief by describing themselves as being fixated upon the *past*. Oriented firmly toward the irrevocable loss of their loved one, some respondents report a fear of time passing: as time continues to flow, the mourner is taken further and further away from the one they have lost, which is anchored in the past. This fear of time passing quite often manifests in a preoccupation with chronological time: "I was angry that time continued to pass, and measured my life in days, weeks, months since I lost him. I still do this" (#69) or "I counted every day since he died for the first year. I would work out how many days, months etc." (#129). Also affirming Fuchs' interpretation, and that of Kelly, Mehmehl and Ratcliffe, some respondents describe themselves as being oriented toward the *future* which, in the retardation of temporal flow, has become withdrawn and closed off. Here the future is no longer experienced as an open horizon of possibilities and projects: "The future was unimaginable" (#170) or "Looking ahead and seeing nothing in my future" (#188).

Still at the most mild level of depth, an additional 20 respondents (8%) report that time does not stagnate in grief as in Fuchs' account, but rather speeds up to the extent that the days seem to blur and blend into one another. In this instance where the time of the mourner unravels too quickly, several respondents again note an emerging sense of disconnection from the time of the world, which continues to flow in a uniform way: "Yes, it does not feel like 2.5 years at all. I feel that I 'lost' time as much as the person. You go down into a set of experiences that suck time. It seems like a long time to others, but a year went by in a blink" (#14). As time accelerates, several respondents report a fear of time passing that, instead of being oriented toward the past and the death of their loved one, is oriented toward the *future* and toward one's *own* death. With the past and the present withdrawn, it is common for respondents to feel dread that time is running out, that there isn't enough time, and that they are racing toward their own inevitable death: "Time seems to be passing so much faster than before. With my husband by my side, we seemed to have all the time in the world to enjoy life, now there seems to be no time at all to fill life with as much experience as possible before it all ends for me too" (#127). Here the combination of the orientation toward the future and the acceleration of temporal flow heighten anxiety about one's own death, and can

also provoke despair over the fact that one will die alone. In an excerpt that captures just how painful this experience can be:

The months pass by in a blur. The years roll on only highlighted by the anniversaries within them. There's also a feeling that you have no control over time. Will fate decide your path again or is this existence the best that it can ever get and how long will you have to put up with it. The other thing is that you know that you were with your partner right up to the moment that they took their last breath and that you're going to have to face that same moment alone (#47).

For another subset of respondents, however, the speeding up of temporal flow and the awareness of one's own finitude can lead to a profound recognition that, because life is short and the timing of one's death unpredictable, one should focus on making the most of their life in the *present* moment and not think too far into the future. Here whilst the past withdraws and the future is withheld, the present moment is seen as a precious gift that should be taken up and not wasted: "It has made me live for the moment more and not plan too much for the future" (#109). Depending on whether time speeds up or slows down, and whether it orients the mourner towards the past, future, or present, temporal desynchronization can be seen to position the mourner in relation to their own life and death and that of their loved one in decidedly different ways, which has the potential to shape the meaning and significance of different grief experiences in distinctive ways.

#### *Moderate level of disturbance*

Moving to a moderate level of disturbance, there is a more complex presentation of relational desynchronization which I would suggest is indicative of a more pronounced disconnection between the time of the mourner and the time of the world. Here 43 respondents (16%) describe an experience in which the flow of time becomes strange, mixed up, irregular, or elastic. As the linear or sequential structure of temporal flow increasingly breaks down, time alternates between slowing down and speeding up: "I feel like time is more elastic than it was. Some days feel like they have been stretched out and others feel compressed" (#234). In some cases, this fluctuation is so fluid that one can often no longer grasp whether time is accelerating or stagnating: "Time was strange. Knew it was happening, couldn't tell you if it was fast or slow" (#4). A common consequence of this irregular or mixed up time is that the time since the loved one died can feel like it has gone by in an instant in some ways and an eternity in others, as these respondents note: "Time seems to drag, but also to fly. The time that elapses between the loss and continuing life is both too long, and too short" (#69) or "Time seems fluid, it can pass quickly or drag for hours. I feel my husband died yesterday but I have been alone forever" (#97).<sup>[4]</sup> This irregularity of relational temporality, where time is

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<sup>[4]</sup> This seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of time both speeding up and slowing down has been well-documented in the psychology of time perception. More generally, the explanation is that in negative affective experiences such as grief, boredom, depression, loneliness or trauma, a 'time paradox' can arise in the Jamesian distinction between prospective time perception (which is a judgement of *duration*) and retrospective time



experienced as unfolding both quickly and slowly, correlates to an increasing irregularity in dimensional temporality, where the past, present, and future are experienced as being both close and far. As this respondent writes:

Time is a strange concept for someone bereaved. I know some people who can tell you exactly the number of days, weeks, months since their loved one departed. I can't without working it out. However, the concept of time I have found is one where it can be close & far at the same time. Some days it feels like D died yesterday, whilst other days it can seem like it happened 10 years ago (#42).

In this increasingly pronounced form of dimensional desynchronization, the mourner's proximity and distance to the past becomes unstable, such that the horizon structuring the past, present and future begins to weaken. In this blurring of temporal form, the mourner's hold on time becomes more and more tenuous.

### *Profound level of disturbance*

At the most profound level of disturbance, relational desynchronization in grief culminates in the radical disconnect of the time of the mourner from the time of the world. Represented by Fuchs' idea of the "fundamental division of time" in grief, this experience of detachment is exemplified by both Romanyshyn's falling out of time and Riley's time lived without its flow. At this level, 10 respondents describe time as halting, stopping or freezing, such that the flow of time comes to a standstill. Here, there is "Sometimes no feeling of time passing at all" (#170). Fixed by static time, the mourner has the experience of being utterly cut off from the world: "Yes, I'd say that there was a feeling of being disconnected from time. As though I was standing still while the world rushed ahead around me" (#144). In the most extreme instantiation of relational desynchronization in grief, therefore, the standstill of time involves the experience of being beyond or outside the flow of time. Yet, in being utterly desynchronized from the flow of lived time, the mourner importantly still has a *relation* to the time from which they have fallen, but in the sense that they are on the outside looking in. It is experienced as a timeless *time* rather than timelessness as such. Relatedly, at the most profound level of disturbance of dimensional desynchronization, the mourner can find that the form of time has become meaningless, pointless, and lost its significance. As several respondents note: "I can't order time and it's all meaningless. I don't remember when things happened anymore" (#45) or "Time does not matter so much" (#48). Here we can see the culmination of the process of dimensional desynchronization where time disappears or becomes unreal: "Time doesn't really exist anymore" (#21). Amidst this derealization, the past, present and future become arbitrary and irrelevant as a means through which experience

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perception (which is a judgement of a time *interval* that has already elapsed). Here the negative valence of the affective state is thought to slow down the rate of passage in the prospective time perception, whilst the lack of positive engagement in meaningful or novel events through which to structure memory mean that the elapsed intervals in retrospective time perception appear to have passed very quickly. On the definition of and distinction between prospective and retrospective time perception see [29–31]. On the idea of the 'time paradox' see [32, 33]. On the role of the positive and negative valence of emotions in time perception see [34–36].

might be meaningfully structured. As with relational desynchronization, in being desynchronized from the dimensional structure of time, the mourner importantly still retains a relation to time *as* meaningless, *as* unreal. In this sense, the processes of relational and dimensional desynchronization involve the *privation* rather than the negation of lived time; an impoverishment of the mourner's experience of lived time which is reflective of their radical disconnection from the world. In the most extreme experiences such as Riley's, the impoverishment of time can involve the feeling that one has joined the timeless time of the dead.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Discussion

Taking all three levels of depth together, as the process of relational desynchronization unfolds in grief, temporal flow can be modified by slowing down, speeding up, both slowing down and speeding up, standing still or pushing the mourner to the extremity of being beyond time. Significantly, these modifications can be seen to function at an increasingly radical depth of disturbance, wherein the disconnection between the time of the mourner and the time of the world becomes more and more pronounced. When time is experienced as slowing down or speeding up, the mourner feels desynchronised from world time by either lagging too far behind or pressing too far ahead. When temporal flow is both slowing down and speeding up it becomes more erratic and unpredictable, indicating an increasing level of desynchronization. At the most profound level, temporal flow is brought to a stand-still and the mourner becomes desynchronized to the extent that they find themselves beyond or outside of time altogether. As the process of dimensional desynchronization unfolds, grief can involve the reification of the past and the foreclosure of the future, it can involve opening up and closing down any or all of the past, present and future in varied configurations, such that whilst some recede, others become much more intense. Whether one is fixated by the past and is unable to move forward after the death of the other, or moves forward too quickly; whether one is disoriented by being simultaneously near and far to the death of the other, or finds oneself racing towards the inevitability of their own death; whether one clutches to the present moment, or feels like time has become meaningless and irrelevant for structuring experience to the extent that it no longer exists: increasingly radical processes of relational and dimensional desynchronization can be seen to configure the unique contours of distress that constitute each mourner's experience of disconnection from the world as it is manifest in the impoverishment of lived time. By giving a more thorough account of the heterogeneous ways in which grief can disturb time, and organising these according to the depth of disconnection between the time of the mourner and the time of the world, this interpretation both supplements and extends Fuchs' account of temporal desynchronization in grief. Further work is required, particularly in understanding whether there is a correlation between the

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<sup>[5]</sup> This idea that timelessness or atemporality involves the privation rather than negation of time comes from Heidegger and is inherent to his claim that the disruptive temporalities of fundamental attunements are disclosive of time in its entirety, lighting up its flow and form as if from the outside. See [37]. This experience of being beyond or outside time has also been attributed to other affective states like melancholia and also trauma. See for example [38, 39].

depth of desynchronization and the pathological trajectory and severity of any particular grief experience. Nevertheless, a fine-grained account is an important step in understanding the way time can shape the meaning and significance of different grief experiences, in particular: the way time contributes to variations in the depth of the mourner's disconnection from the world.

Developed further, this kind of depth model could also be helpful in comparing and contrasting disturbances to temporal experience across different affective and psychotic disorders. For example, in 'Varieties of Temporal Experience in Depression' [18] and *Experiences of Depression: a Study in Phenomenology* [19] Ratcliffe demonstrates convincingly that depression, like grief, can disrupt both the 'affective-conative momentum' of time (temporal flow) and its 'protentional-retentional structure' (temporal form) in a variety of ways and to significantly different levels of depth. Considering responses from Ratcliffe's 'Depression Questionnaire' [see 19, pp. 26–27] in light of a depth model of temporal desynchronization we can see striking resonances between the disturbance of temporal experience in depression and grief. For example, we find preliminary evidence that depression, like grief, can modify temporal flow at a mild level of disturbance by slowing time down: "#38. Things seem much slower, time drags" [19, p. 175]. Similarly, at a moderate level of disturbance we see that for some respondents depression, like grief, both slows and speeds up the flow of time: "#45. When I am depressed I feel like time goes slowly, yet at the same time I feel like I—or anyone else—has hardly any time to live at all. It feels as if time is running out" [19, p. 175]. Finally, at the most profound level of disruption, we find that depression, again like grief, can modify temporal flow to the extent that one feels beyond or outside of time:

#271. When I'm depressed, for the most part there is no time. The concept of time no longer exists. It's like living outside of time. There is no concern or even awareness of schedules, day or night, normality, commitments, birthdays, events—nothing. It's like being in a box with no holes or light—time just disappears [19, p. 184].

Further, we can see preliminary evidence for the fact that depression, like grief, can modify temporal form through the reification of the past and the correlate foreclosure of the future: "#199. Time is backwards and all I can think about is the past, all the horrible things that happened..." [19, p. 193], to the extent that time becomes unreal; meaningless and irrelevant for structuring experience. As this respondent writes: "#54. When I am depressed I don't seem to notice time, it just doesn't matter to me, it all seems to blend into a mass of nothing. [ . . . ] Time loses significance" [19, p. 176]. As in grief, these heterogeneous processes of relational and dimensional desynchronization can be seen to function at an increasingly radical depth of disturbance, wherein the disconnection between the time of the depressive and the time of the world becomes more and more pronounced. As respondent 17 notes of their experience of time: "#17. I just felt very detached from time, it simply didn't matter" [19, p. 175]. Which is then reflected in the way in which they experience of the world when depressed:

#17. Often, the world feels as though it is a very long way away and [ . . . ] it takes an enormous amount of effort to engage with the world and your own life. It feels as though you're watching life from a long distance. At times it felt as though I was looking through a fish eye lens, and couldn't see clearly around the periphery, or even very well at all. I felt slightly pulled back from reality, as though there were cotton wool between my brain and my senses. A feeling of exhaustion often prevented me from being able to interact with the world, adding to the inability to process what was going on around me [19, pp. 31–32].

Even from this brief comparison, it appears that grief and depression both disrupt temporal flow and form in heterogenous ways and to varying levels of depth, and that this is reflective of an increasing disconnect between the time of the mourner or depressive and the time of the world.

On the one hand, this fine-grained approach of depth analysis appears to obfuscate rather than illuminate the differences between grief and depression, at least where time is concerned. Yet, perhaps this emphasises how a phenomenological approach can help us to shift the focus away from the attempt to differentiate between affective disorders and focus instead on the depth of disruption to temporal experience within any affective disorder itself. At the same time, I suggest it also highlights the importance of pushing the phenomenological analysis of temporal desynchronization further, to consider how disruptions to time can be seen to impact lived experience more generally in both grief and depression. For example, given that one's relation to death relies upon one's finite temporal structure being intact, temporal disturbance necessarily impacts the way in which one relates to death, both of the self and of the other. Indeed, as seen in the mild level of disturbance in grief, in slowing time down such that the mourner becomes fixated upon the past, grief can sometimes involve the experience of being unable to move forward after the death of the other. Relatedly, in speeding time up, grief can also involve the experience of moving on from the death of the other too quickly. At the moderate level of disturbance, where time both slows down and speeds up such that the mourner finds themselves simultaneously near and far the death of the other, grief can involve the experience of racing inevitably toward one's own death. In certain cases, this reckoning with finitude prompts the mourner to clutch onto the present moment and take hold of their life which takes on renewed meaning. At the profound level of disturbance however, where the mourner can find themselves beyond or outside of time, grief can involve the experience of being partially dead, held out into the timeless time of the dead. What unifies these different experiences of death and dying, is that the question of the death of the self arises through a confrontation with the death of the other, which in turn relies upon the inter-subjective relation between the mourner and their deceased loved one. By contrast, as Ratcliffe and others have pointed out, the inter-subjective dimension that is intrinsic to grief is often lacking in depression [19, pp. 198–200]. Accordingly, whilst temporal disturbance in depression affects one's relation to death and dying, it is fundamentally oriented towards the death of the self. As I have argued elsewhere, at a mild level of disturbance, in slowing time down, depression can involve the experience that death will not come soon enough, whilst at a moderate level of disturbance it can seem, as time stagnates to a halt, that death has become impossible. At the profound level of

temporal disturbance in melancholic depression atemporality can, like grief, involve the experience that one has partially died [see 39, p. 208]. Yet, as a footnote in the DSM-5 (2013) entry for Major Depressive Disorder suggests, because this experience is oriented towards the death of the self rather than the death of the other, its meaning differs significantly:

If a bereaved individual thinks about death and dying, such thoughts are generally focussed upon the deceased and possibly about 'joining' the deceased, whereas in MDE such thoughts are focused on ending one's own life because of feeling worthless, undeserving of life, or unable to cope with the pain of depression [40, p. 161].

In a preliminary way, this brief discussion comparing time and death in grief and depression aims to demonstrate the way in which a depth analysis of temporal desynchronization might be substantiated through analysis of the impact that disruptions to time can have on the way in which one experiences the meaning of death. In so doing, we gain some insight into the complex patterns of similarity and dissimilarity between different affective disorders that a fine-grained analysis attempts to draw out.

## **Conclusion**

Having set out my depth analysis of grief and briefly considered it in relation to depression, I want to consider in closing how such radical disruptions to temporal experience might position the mourner in their attempts to reconnect with the world from which they have become detached, particularly with regards to the resynchronization of the time of the mourner with the time of the world. Though there has been little research into the phenomenon of resynchronization in grief (or in affective and psychotic disorders), Fuchs does address it briefly. In the final sections of 'Presence in absence: The ambiguous phenomenology of grief,' Fuchs suggests that the resolution of the ambiguous conflict of grief, between the deceased's presence in the past and their absence in the present, presupposes that the time of the mourner be resynchronized with the time of the world. This tension between presence and absence is resolved by inwardly incorporating the lost loved one through identification, whilst representing them externally in imagination, symbolism and narration. Importantly, identification and representation enable a renewed, symbolic relationship with the deceased loved one, but this continuing bond is predicated upon the painful recognition that "the past has really become past, and the dead have really died" [12, p. 59]. As the past is restored, so too is the dimensional structure of the present and future meaning, as Fuchs writes, that "the order of linear time is established again" [12, p. 60]. Though Fuchs' does not elaborate any further, his discussions of resynchronization in melancholia imply that in remission or recovery the mourner or melancholic's reconnection with the world requires that they be reintegrated into the ordinary flow of lived time, such that both relational and dimensional synchronicity are restored [15, 41]. This implication is also affirmed by his understanding of interpersonal synchronization as a complex physiological and psychological process of desynchronization and resynchronization that continually tends towards homeostasis and lived simultaneity in the present.

Yet, to return to *The Soul in Grief*, it would seem that for Romanyshyn once implicit time becomes explicit, and pre-reflective time reflective, the mourner's experience of time is transformed irrevocably which means that one cannot simply resynchronize with the time of the world as they experienced it before. That is to say, the breakdown of time reveals something about temporal experience, which cannot just be forgotten, or at least not entirely. Held out into the melancholic reverie of grief, Romanyshyn falls out of the time of the world in a way that fractures the ordinary boundaries of space and time and, in so doing, reveals what he calls 'the time of the soul.' The time of the world is governed by the mind or ego-consciousness, and is ordered by linear time and the separation of past, present and future. By contrast, the time of the soul is circular, vertical, and is organised according to moments which each contain the depth of past, present and future as a whole. By collapsing the distinctions between the past, present and future, in the time of grief "[t]he past is not what happened and is over; nor is the future what is about to happen" [2, p. 104]. In contrast to Fuchs (and Solomon), therefore, Romanyshyn considers that the past in which his wife was alive is not past, but is rather experienced anew in the living present. He writes: "I am not remembering an event which happened before Janet died. Rather, I am living that event in the moment. I am living it as if for the first time" [2, p. 132].

Romanyshyn implies throughout that once this time of the soul is revealed, it cannot be wholly concealed again. "The line of time has been broken by death" and yet, in this destruction, a far more expansive experience of time is revealed: "In these moments, I always have the sense that something of me has been here before and that I am coming home" [2, 135]. In fact, it is through this revelation of the time of the soul that Romanyshyn is able to reconnect with the world anew, in a way that is profoundly intimate. Reflecting on this transformation, he writes:

In the early moments of grief, I was a ghost in the world, and my sense of isolation was almost total. The truth, however, is that the process of grieving and the long, slow winter of mourning dissolved that separateness in unexpected ways. After the winter passes, after the ice around the heart, broken in grief, has melted, a new sense of intimacy with the world appears, an intimacy whose boundaries explode the usual parameters not only of space but also of time [2, p. 151].

In *Time Lived, Without its Flow*, Riley follows Romanyshyn in arguing that the time of the world is completely inadequate for conceptualising her connection to the timeless time of the dead that continues despite the fact that she has reconnected with the time of the world. In some ways reminiscent of Romanyshyn's time of the soul, Riley considers that her grief has revealed a thicker, more expansive conception of 'maternal temporality,' a time in which the time of the dead child is folded back into the ongoing time of the mother.

Though this article is focussed on the unfolding trajectory of desynchronization and the increasingly pronounced disconnect between the time of the mourner and the time of the world, the radical disruptions to the experience of time in grief have the potential to give significant insight into the depth and complexity of temporal experience. Particularly important for further research would be to understand how the mourner might reconnect with the world without forfeiting the time of the soul that grief has unconcealed, and thus without

necessarily consigning their deceased loved one to the past.<sup>[6]</sup> For Romanyshyn, not only does the time of the soul make possible a relationship with the lost loved one in the living present, but it also leads to a more intimate and profound connection with the world from which one had become utterly estranged. Further insight into the experience of time underpinning this renewed capacity to be at home in the world again could prove extremely useful in better understanding how the mourner might reconnect with the world after loss.

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<sup>[6]</sup> Romanyshyn's conception of the time of the soul which is in many ways reinforced by Riley, has potentially important implications for the debates around non-pathological and pathological grief and the literature on continuing bonds. In particular, the time of the soul calls into question the idea that grief and the ongoing relationship with the deceased is necessarily time de-limited, and that it can be conceptualised according to linear, chronological time at all. For some interesting sociological research on this see [42, 43].

## **Statements**

### **Acknowledgements**

I am thankful to my colleagues on the ‘Grief: A Study of Human Emotional Experience’ project at the University of York for reading an earlier draft of this paper. I am also thankful to the audience at the Northern Phenomenology Network Annual Workshop and the members of PhenoLab for the extremely helpful feedback I received on a version of this paper. Above all I am grateful to the questionnaire respondents who were willing to share their experiences of grief, and thereby make this research possible.

### **Statement of Ethics**

This article uses questionnaire data which I conducted with colleagues at the University of York as part of the AHRC-funded project ‘Grief: A Study of Human Emotional Experience.’ The study received ethical approval from the Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee at the University of York on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2020. It was made available via the online platform Qualtrix from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 until 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021. Anyone over the age of 18 who identified as currently experiencing grief over the death of a person, or as having experienced grief in the past, was invited to complete it. All participants consented to their anonymized testimonies being made publicly available in full. Participants were able to access the survey after reading an information sheet and completing a consent form.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author has no conflict of interest to declare

### **Funding Sources**

The research for this article was conducted as part of the AHRC-funded project ‘Grief: A Study of Human Emotional Experience.’ AHRC (UK) Research Grant no. AH/T000066/1

### **Author Contributions**

Emily Hughes is the sole author of this article

### **Data Availability Statement**

The data from the questionnaire is not currently available but there are plans to make it public mid-2022.



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