That which remains: Memorialisation in art and the 'living' melancholy object

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ABSTRACT

After the death of a loved one, specific objects transform to assume a unique identity and meaning to the bereaved. These melancholy objects, as articulated by Margaret Gibson (2004), start to have their own afterlife as objects memorialising the deceased, and the bereaved's own experience of mourning. In this article, I consider how the melancholy object, as an impoverished replacement of the body of the deceased, echoes experiences of bereavement and ruination. I investigate the objects of grief and our changing relationship with them (Mathijssen 2017) through the example of an episode of the British television series *Black Mirror* (2011-) titled *Be Right Back* (2013). Furthermore, I consider how artists respond to complex experiences of grief and loss, and how this is influenced by melancholy objects, by generating meaning through visual picture-making and artmaking. I propose that my digital drawing, *Sancrosanctity* (2019), can address melancholy objects and loss to become a nuanced melancholy object. Although melancholy objects, devices, and acts reiterate and remind us of the devastation – the ruination – of loss, they are the closest we come to tangibly engaging with what remains of the deceased.

Keywords: *Black Mirror,* digital devices, digital drawing, grief, loss, melancholy objects, mourning.

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Introduction

Every day, we surround ourselves and become attached to objects with their own personal hierarchy of importance. We take these things – potential melancholy objects – for granted, not considering the objects' lives and continued existence as a potential placeholder for ourselves should we no longer be present (Gibson 2004:285). Margaret Gibson (2004:286, 289) describes melancholy objects as 'objects that memorialise mourning'; objects that are in some way tied to the deceased and signify not only their memory, but also the experience of mourning their loss – of our own bereavement. Melancholy objects can be any-*thing* from the personal belongings of the deceased, clothes, valuables, photographs, books, letters, overlooked or 'cheap' objects, their ashes, or even larger objects such as a chair (Gibson 2004:287).[1]

In this article, I explore the unique role that physical objects and devices play in attempting to make present the absent deceased, and how the deceased can manifest as inner images in the inner imaginary world of the bereaved (Belting 2011). Firstly, I consider current and historic accounts of objects in grief and loss. I include and differentiate between the melancholy object (Gibson 2004) and the melancholy device, which I consider a specific category of melancholy object (Kühn-Botma 2025). Hans Belting's (2011) considerations of objects in grief, including historic examples and contemporary examples such as photographs, are discussed alongside the musings of other authors on the subject of grief, loss, ritual, and mourning, including Douglas Davies (2002) and Brenda Mathijssen (2017).

This consideration sets the foundation for my investigations on contemporary melancholy objects, devices, and art dealing with such objects. Next, I highlight the complexity of the relationship between one such object and the bereaved. The relationship between the bereaved and their *living* melancholy object is discussed in an episode of the British television series *Black Mirror* (2011-) titled *Be Right Back* (2013). Regarding the fictive changing relationship between Martha and her melancholy object, Ash, I highlight the intensity of this relationship and ultimately the nature of "lifelike" melancholy objects, such as melancholy devices, in their attempt to come as close as possible to imagining the presence of the deceased.

Finally, I consider my artistic practice as a research artist in scrutinising my inner world of images, and how these influence my artmaking. I explore the bereaved's complex relationship with melancholy objects from the point of view of inner pictures in an inner world of the imagination. I explore my dealings with melancholy objects and devices in the digital drawing *Sacrosanctity* (2019) (Figure 1). As a researcher and artist, I study the

ruination of loss as an inner world of bereavement in my work. This inner world exists within our bodies and act as the locus for all mental images and the imagination – where we conceive images, and where they gather from the outside world (Belting 2011:19). I expand on our inner imaginary world of bereavement, using Belting's (2011) idea of the body as carrier and locus of inner images. In working with loss as a point of departure, I explore the role that the artwork created in this context can play in becoming a nuanced melancholy object. I conclude that the artist, who has the potential to be both the bereaved and the researcher, could seek to negotiate this sense of loss in their practice.

Historic and current objects of mourning

There are many examples of how, in the past, cultures and societies have creatively replaced the deceased's body with another physical object (Belting 2011:88-118). One ancient example of such a practice would be the Skulls of Jericho, which Belting (2011) discusses at length in his book *An anthropology of images: Picture, medium, body*, where he also considers other objects of grief, including photographs and funerary imagery. According to Belting, the Skulls of Jericho, which date back to early 7000-6000 BC, suggest individuals' and/or societies' attempts to understand death. Belting (2005:45) argues that images were installed in the place of the missing body of the deceased. In this case, Belting speaks, specifically, of funerary images; however, I argue that the representation of the deceased – not necessarily as a likeness or trace as in the case of, for example, the photograph – has been instilled in melancholy objects in the place of the missing body of the deceased as well. There is an innate to-and-fro when it comes to experiencing the stark absence of the deceased. The memory of the deceased will always come to the present when reminded of their absence, and with that, always the experience of loss that follows. These moments are experienced exclusively within the body of a bereaved person.

According to Phillipe Ariès (2008:5), in the past, particularly the European Middle Ages, death, the dead, mourning, and grief were fundamental to everyday life. Douglas Davies (2002:7) adds that archaeology suggests that burials were an early human activity and that many historic religions have paid much attention to the ritualistic disposal of the dead. Moreover, throughout history, humans have dealt ritualistically with their dead (Davies 2002:25). Seminal authors, including Davies (2002), Belting (2011), and Ariès (2008), all posit that in most instances where ritual is mentioned, so, too, are objects. Historically, the bereaved have responded to death through mourning and grieving practices, which, in turn, are governed by their specific beliefs and cultures.

In contemporary societies, however, many people no longer belong to a specific faith community or are alienated from their cultural heritage. Avril Maddrell (2013:503, 509) attests that people negotiate grief and lamentation in more personal and unique ways. These are also structured according to westernised ideas of a medical approach to grief (Small 2001:20; Currer 2001:50). This negotiation is also connected to increasing 'privatisation' of faith and the focus on reason and progress since the Enlightenment (Small 2001:20). Davies (2002) asserts that recently, there has been a turn, or return, to ritual without a connection to religion or a specific cultural community group. Individuals have started to respond personally in terms of practice and tradition, especially when it comes to grief, loss, and mourning:

> Ritual has come to be seen as something which can stand alone, apart from traditional religion, as a part of basic human and social behaviour with power to support and encourage individuals during difficult periods of life' (Davies 2002:237).

It is through the conduit of the object that grief is practised as mourning – they represent the deceased in the continuing life of the bereaved. Photographs as picture objects, melancholy objects, devices, and, in some instances, art can trigger a bodily response in the bereaved – a reaction when reflections on and inner imaginary images of the deceased are unlocked as a moment of remembrance.

As articulated in the examples above, a *symbolic body* takes the place of the decaying *mortal body* to resocialise the deceased in the community of the living (Belting 2011:85). Funerary practices and objects of grief, be it officially recognised objects such as the ashes of the deceased, or personal belongings, find their way back into the everyday life and living spaces of the bereaved. The practices and rituals conducted in mourning processes are, simultaneously, an attempt to honour, make sense of, and make present (tangible) an absent deceased person to alleviate the shock of loss. Most importantly, 'the goal of the substitution was either to transform a body into an image or to duplicate a body' (Belting 2011:89). These practices are not primitive, immature, naïve, nor are they simply formulae to follow, but a human necessity in processing loss. Currently, the bereaved continue to find objects and artefacts which represent the missing body of the deceased. Indeed, Belting (2011:120) attests to the renewed interest in the topic of the image and death with the application of photography to trace the likeness of the deceased as a 'token of a living body'. These artefacts and objects, which include both overlooked and venerated objects, may be used during mourning as either an integral part of the rituals conducted within a community or as a unique artefact which acts as an alternative presence or representation of the deceased.

Compared to ritualised objects of the past, which could serve a wider audience or provide easier access in mourning to the community or household, such as the cemetery or a house shrine, contemporary melancholy objects are generally more intimate, personal, and unique to the bereaved. Margaret Mitchell (2007:2) identifies contemporary melancholy objects as the deceased's artefacts, objects, and personal belongings, which gain specific and potent meaning after their death. According to Gibson (2004:286), melancholy objects are essential to the mourning experience and can act as a conduit in memorialisation, in the process of mourning itself. Gibson's conjecture of the melancholy object concerns contemporary societies and individuals in grief. However, I surmise that throughout history, melancholy objects have been present in the grieving experience – seen in the example of the Skulls of Jericho, and the use of photographs to memorialise and *make present* the absent deceased.

Gibson's (2004) conceptualisation of the melancholy object forms the basis of my interpretation of contemporary melancholy objects. I build on Gibson's trajectory regarding the melancholy object by singling out what I term the melancholy device. The melancholy device can be regarded as a digital device that either recalls the deceased through moving or still images, displays an online presence of the deceased on its interface, or can be the device itself that previously belonged to the deceased (Kühn-Botma 2025:208). Apart from what one would associate with traditional melancholy objects, including the personal belongings of the deceased or their ashes, for instance, photographs as melancholy objects often no longer exist as printed picture objects today. Images and traces of the deceased can be accessed through various digital technologies, which in turn have the potential to become melancholy devices themselves (Kühn-Botma 2025:208).

In a previous article, I differentiate the melancholy device from melancholy objects by noting that:

> …along with perhaps more common everyday objects recognised as melancholy objects, digital devices, such as cell phones, computers or video game consoles could be considered as melancholy *devices* that on some occasions have the potential to digitally recall the deceased through voice notes, images, photographs, videos, and social media sites' (Kühn-Botma 2025:208).

The objects are referred to as 'melancholy devices' to differentiate their more common everyday role as digital devices (Kühn-Botma 2025:208). I theorise that the melancholy device's existence depends on the circumstances in which the digital device is regarded, what is displayed on the screen, which data is stored on the device, and/or perhaps if the digital device itself may have previously belonged to the deceased. Therefore, the melancholy device only exists, or manifests as such, given that certain conditions are met, as mentioned above, and can revert to its role as a digital device used for other purposes.

In retaining certain data, such as digital photographs, videos, voice recordings, messages, or documents, reminiscent of, representing or belonging to the deceased, the digital device holds personal meaning and potential for presenting images and traces pertaining to the deceased. The static block of technology, the cell phone or computer, becomes a melancholy object because of what it represents or houses within its own memory. However, the device needs to be interacted with to display these traces of the deceased. It can, within seconds, project the voice and moving image of the deceased and show a social media post regarding the latest political gossip. Yet the device *can* recall the deceased's moving trace or voice, which other objects can only trigger internally as inner images of remembrance. The traces of the deceased can be carried by multiple devices sharing the same cloud source. Also, the traces of the deceased, which their own bodies can no longer carry, are exchanged with a technological body that is seemingly invulnerable, that of simulation (Belting 2011:122). However, Belting notes that this immortality is only a 'new fiction with which we conceal death' (2011:122). I agree with Belting; however, I also attest to our yearning to engage with these types of traces of the deceased, as moving, speaking images, in simulating or recalling a past life. Indeed, even this engagement is wounding. In digitally recalling traces of the deceased through devices, the devastating reality of their bodily absence is brought to light. The device can evoke a certain type of trace of the deceased, yet it is void of their presence in an embodied sense. It is only in our imagination 'that images are received and interpreted in a living sense' (Belting 2011:37).

'Living' melancholy objects

In my creative research, I am invested in exploring and questioning melancholy objects, devices, and our reverence for these objects. In my grief, my melancholy objects include overlooked things such as a single earplug and old pens. Along with them, I also have objects such as a printed photograph, a hard drive, and my brother's (the deceased) personal computer. Most of these objects can be identified in the digital work discussed in this article (Figure 1).

The digital drawing, titled *Sacrosanctity* (2019) (Figure 1), explores the bereaved's inner world, an imagined landscape of ruination, objects, devices, rumination, play, and loss. It suggests a space that the bereaved may turn to, or return to over time: an inner world that changes and reshapes itself with every new encounter.

However, before I reflect on the digital drawing, I first want to articulate how complex, overwhelming, and pivotal the bereaved's relationship with one such object can be. While *Sacrosanctity* may be an investigation into the bereaved's inner world of loss, the



FIGURE Nº 1

Lyrene Kühn-Botma, *Sacrosanctity*, 2019. Digital drawing. Giclee print on Photo Rag, 60 cm x 150 cm. Bloemfontein, South Africa. Courtesy of Lyrene Kühn-Botma.

episode in the British television series *Black Mirror* (2011-) titled *Be Right Back* (2013) can be considered – amongst many other readings – as an intimate reflection on the relationship[2] between one such object, specifically a melancholy device, and the bereaved. The episode involves the death of Ash Starmer (Domhall Gleeson), Martha's (Hayley Atwell) fiancé, after the couple's recent move to Ash's secluded childhood home. The melancholy object that the bereaved (Martha) eventually has is a synthetic body of Ash, which has been implanted with his "personality". This personality was derived from digital data, such as social media posts, voice notes, videos, and photographs of him. After Ash's death, a friend introduces Martha to a service that uses the deceased's data on online platforms and personal computers, emails, photographs, and videos to digitally recreate a virtual personality with whom to communicate. Initially, this alien concept frightens and angers Martha. After some time has passed, and she realises that she is pregnant, Martha feels the need to share the news with her fiancé immediately, turning to the 'fiancé' on her laptop.

In the episode, following Ash's death and before he is "reincarnated" into a lifelike puppet of himself, Martha is initially infatuated with, and devoted to, her phone or laptop on which she communicates with "him". Not only is her grief fresh, but she is pregnant and is facing this transformative life experience without Ash, the father of her baby. There are different facets with regard to her immersion into the "personality" of the deceased. At first, they merely exchange emails. Later, the programme comments that they can take it a step further by being able to talk to each other, to which Martha agrees. She talks to "him" constantly rather than with anyone else. Finally, the programme suggests they can make

the experience more “real”. She orders something resembling the deceased, onto which his image and personality are uploaded.

As Martha’s melancholy object, Ash becomes a unique burden. He is like an infant who is still learning new things – things that her fiancé is unable to learn because he is dead. She cannot talk to him about shared experiences, because he did not share them with her; he is still learning by following her orders and becoming more human. Yet this human into which he evolves is not her deceased fiancé. Instead, he is becoming a new being with new experiences and opinions. In the end, Martha attempts to force her faux fiancé, her *living melancholy object*, to commit suicide – right after considering doing the same herself. She realises that the body in front of her is not truly her beloved, but a perfect imitation of him (Figure 2). She recognises the utter eeriness of her choice to revive her fiancé synthetically. She is confronted with a being whom she supposedly knows but who has failed to truly replace the deceased. He is a shadow, a trace, a gesture, a copy, an imitation, and a persona. He is about to do as she commands by jumping off a cliff when she hopelessly utters that her Ash would not commit such an act because any human has free will and would be terrified at such a command. In turn, the synthetic Ash absorbs this information and starts sobbing. He becomes frightened, pleading with her not to make him jump (Figure 3). Of course, she cannot force her beloved to kill himself.



FIGURE Nº 2

Martha Powell (Be Right Back), *Black Mirror*, 2013. (Black Mirror Season 2).

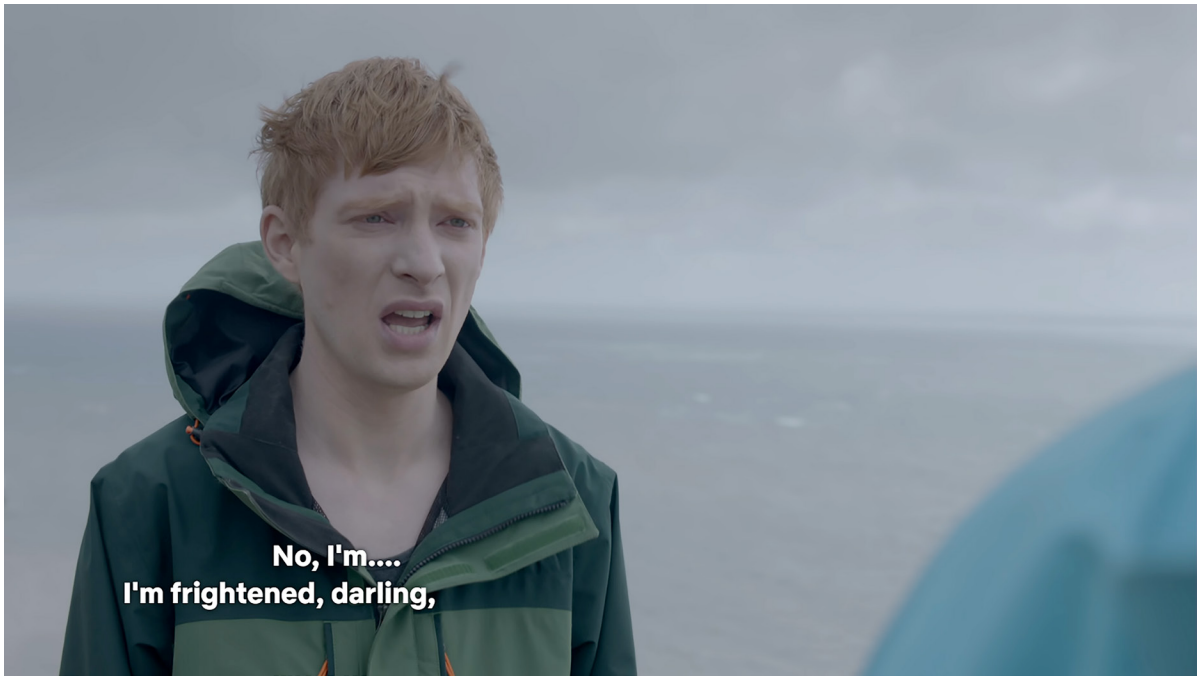


FIGURE Nº 3

Ash Starmer (Be Right Back), *Black Mirror*, 2013. (Black Mirror Season 2).

The materiality of Ash's "re-animated" character can be considered an interrogation of the continuing relationship between the bereaved and the melancholy device. Brenda Mathijssen (2017:2) highlights a ritualistic perspective with regard to grief and melancholy objects and argues that such a perspective can stimulate 'continuing bonds as a process of negotiation in which the bereaved separate, relocate and integrate the deceased in their ordinary lives' (Mathijssen 2017:2). The deceased can infiltrate day-to-day moments and activities once again, especially when one carries their traces with oneself on cell phones, tablets, or computers.[3]

The continued relationship with an object, even a hyper-realistic imitation, after the deceased is absent, still cannot compare to the living presence of the deceased. The melancholy objects referred to thus far are tangible. In the case of Ash, the reanimated object is made to closely resemble the deceased with a synthetic body by a company that provides such services, since merely communicating on an interface basis was no longer good enough. A body, or something tangible, is yearned for. In my case, the videos, photographs, and recordings of my brother's voice could no longer become physical in the same sense, apart from printing the photographs of him or interacting with the digital devices. Videos cannot be touched or made tangible in the same sense; the moving image requires media to function. I surmise that the technological melancholy object left to most grieving individuals today is the hard drive, tablet, cell phone, and computer.

The technology we have at our disposal today (such as hard drives, for example) could, however, possibly, become inaccessible in the near future, in the same way that the floppy disk, VHS tapes, and CDs have become. It is our thinking regarding technology as immortal, in a sense, and our viewing it as the absolute solution to our problems, that is problematic. Not only may the hard drive break, be lost, or stolen, but the means of reading the data on that particular piece of hardware may also soon no longer be available or easily accessible. Thus, the idea that the digital photographs, videos, and recordings, when stored, are perfectly preserved, is false. However, I posit that videos, recordings, and multiple digital photographs are nonetheless the closest one can get to the external moving image of the deceased once again. The technology upon which we rely is uncertain in terms of their longevity. Still, it is the only way of experiencing the deceased as a moving picture. While it is far from creating the authentic bodily experience of being in the presence of the deceased in life, it is a comforting compromise.

Martha's relationship with her melancholy object changes significantly throughout the episode. Initially, she and the object are inseparable; however, as time passes, and her responses and reactions to grief evolve, she begins to push the object away. It should be noted, however, that this is a normal process. At first, the object is central to the lives of the bereaved, but as time passes, the 'intensity of [their] grief changes and so too does the meaning, value and emotional effect of objects' (Gibson 2004:288). The deceased's clothes may be worn daily, even if they are too big, too small, or made for a different body. Firstly, objects enable the bereaved to 'separate the deceased from a passive setting' and, secondly, to 'recreate physical as well as mental proximity' (Mathijssen 2017:7). It is an integration of both the medical model of grief, constructed funerary practice, and personal responses, which may give new meaning to grieving individuals. Davies (2002:209) notes that the mix of approaches to death, including a combination of religious, secular, artistic and idiosyncratic approaches, which is emerging in developed secular societies, can be considered as the result of our secularisation as well as the human drive for significance. The objects then start to hurt the bereaved because they memorialise their grief. Gibson (2004:289) theorises that the melancholy object itself becomes a memorialisation of grief:

> However, the melancholy object as a memorialised object could also signify the incompletion of mourning – a reminder that grief never entirely goes away. The melancholy object is then the affective remainder of residual trace of sadness and longing in non-forgetting.

If *Be Right Back* is considered a close and honest, albeit tragic, reflection of the relationship between the bereaved and one melancholy device, I posit that the digital drawing *Sacrosanctity* suggests the memorialisation of the character of the melancholy object itself: a visual reminder of how grief never entirely goes away.

Rumination on the melancholy device

In *Sacrosancity* (2019), a large-scale digital drawing, I created an imagined landscape of loss and ruin. It is a suggestive inner world of the bereaved, accumulative of sites, traces, reminders, melancholy objects, and devices. In the background, one can see a small cathedral digitally copied and in the process of being interlaced with components of a motherboard.[4] I sought to interrogate my melancholy objects and devices in this work. I compare them to the ruined landscape, which they dominate. A motherboard permeates through the bricks of the church, while detailed, drawn elements of the moss-covered roof sit heavily atop the seemingly bare and light structure.

The church is a copy of St George's Anglican church in Knysna, South Africa, a site I had visited in 2012 with my brother, the deceased. This site was ironically captured days after destructive fires ravaged the town and surrounding forests in July 2017. Facing the same site at different times in my own, and the site's life is poignant. The first visit involved curiosity and general aesthetic and architectural appreciation.[5] In encountering the site again, years later, the site was forever changed, similar to me. The church's core still appears strong, but its surroundings, and the cemetery garden, were decimated during the 2017 Knysna fires. I was captivated by that which remained in the partially ruined cemetery garden. In the digital recreation of the imagined landscape, I attempt to intersect the site in different slices of time. To capture my contradictory grief and loss amidst the objects and devices, I compare them with the deceased. I used digitally captured photographic elements of the site, cutting certain details out. The site becomes an intermedia merging between digitally drawn elements and copied and cut photographs. In some areas, such as the middle bottom of the work, I deliberately use the eraser tool to "draw out" details that were captured in a digital photograph. In using the eraser tool to essentially draw as an act of erasure, I attempted to suggest a negotiation in memory, forgetting, and an attempt to directly intervene in a site captured and now changed.

An orange silhouette copy of water towers next to train tracks is superimposed over the church and graveyard scene. The train tracks recall my loss – my brother's fatal motorcycle accident while crossing train tracks in the Namibian desert. These sites, the church in Knysna and train tracks in Namibia, exude a universal sanctity and elicit experiences of inner reflection. Typically, a church is a quiet space for contemplation, and if there is a graveyard, a space for visiting the deceased and spiritual connection. Similar personal experiences and expressions are suggested in the digital drawing of the church and churchyard. To the church's right, the shell of a computer box is copied, right above the scattered remains of a motorcycle buff (typically worn halfway up one's face from the neck up to protect from wind and cold). Scattered across this landscape are pictograms: a cell phone, a PlayStation controller, and a repeated earplug. My melancholy objects

invade, infect, and become entangled in the imaginary landscape of the artwork. At the bottom of the work, one can see two large line drawings of hands. These hands suggest religious gestures and the types of gestures used in video games to indicate spellcasting. Video games are suggested in this sense due to my own personal mourning practices in playing video games (Kühn-Botma 2022:15). The duality of the gestures alludes to a duality in experiences of grief, oscillating between religion, faith, play, and grassroots rituals.

Art dealing with the topics of trauma, grief, and loss has the potential to reveal or expose to the viewer their own personal experiences thereof. The artwork under discussion deals with the artist's own dealings with mourning and expressing the complex experience of grief and our relationship with the objects surrounding personal loss, and is similarly experienced by viewers engaging with this work. This characteristic of art differentiates it from other melancholy objects, being intimate, personal, and unique to each person. Art on the subject of grief and loss has the potential to trigger personal loss for multiple individuals, suggesting a thread of commonality between individuals whose grief does not even stem from the same loss. Art can become a meeting place where a diverse audience can translate or recognise one of the most intimate experiences, namely loss. This notion is supported by the potential that art has to communicate about grief and loss to trigger an imaginary world of inner images for each viewer.

In engaging with the artwork, the viewer is confronted with their own inner landscape of loss: a complex, heavy, and entangled world that one must process. This experience is not reserved just for art, of course; this rings true for the melancholy device or object. Inner images, memory, and imagination are generated and can be triggered by an artwork, in the body of the viewer, which itself becomes the living medium that carries all of this (Belting 2011:11). The viewer or bereaved perceives the imaginary world in the work, which unlocks or recalls inner images and remembrance within oneself. A perceived picture has the potential to turn into remembered images, thus becoming part of the viewers' archive of memory, continuing to propagate and link with inner images and personal experiences (Belting 2011:16).

Sacrosanctity suggests a glimpse of the artist's inner world of loss, or rather, an attempt to visually trace a moment of loss. This lived inner world of the artist is shared with an audience who is invited to internalise the imagined landscape of loss and assimilate it into their own inner imaginary world. The artwork explores the meaningful ways objects and devices contribute to conveying loss amidst the absence of the deceased. Inner images of memory, sites, moments, and objects are hosted in the artwork, which in itself also becomes a melancholy object. I surmise that in turning to the creative process while working through loss, the artwork has the potential to become a nuanced and complex melancholy object. In creating the work, the artist continuously faces and translates her

own experiences, memories, and reactions of grief and loss. This artwork, as a complex object, thus has the potential to trigger, in the viewer, their own unique experiences of loss. This makes the artwork a more universal trigger for bereavement, with the potential to reveal individual inner worlds of loss to different viewers at different times.

In the landscape of *Sacrosanctity*, the objects are all gathered and then venerated – enlarged, repeated, and compared ot the structure of the church in the background – situated in a large imaginary space of grief. I propose that the labour-intensive and time-consuming process of creating the work itself can be considered a performative act of mourning and memorialisation. It is a confirmation of grief felt, exposed, and integrated in the inner visual landscape of the bereaved. Some time has indeed passed since the death of my loved one; however, it was his death that catalysed my interest and constant recognition of pain and loss in creative endeavours. In creating the work *Sacrosanctity*, after years of ruminating on the topic of grief and loss, the work can thus now be considered a reminder of the act of memorialisation – a melancholy object in and of itself. The work can also be regarded as a type of "inventory" of melancholy objects, or a reminder of the inner landscape of bereavement. It is an imaginary site of loss and pain that continues to exist among all the other sites within us. The work invites an imaginary space of bereavement to continue to exist amongst all other accumulative experiences coexisting in new, growing ecologies of mourning.

I surmise that melancholy objects attempt to continue and reattach the ruptured relationship through the physicality and presence of the objects themselves rather than merely to what and who they represent. In line with Davies' (2002:5) assumption that, 'grief is that human emotion which expresses death's rupturing of relationships', it is the sheer absence of the deceased that ruptures the relationship in grief. However, the melancholy object and device, as inanimate, physical replacements for the ruptured relationship, are attempts to make the relationship central to the everyday life of the bereaved once again. The melancholy object becomes a totem to hold onto amongst the ruins of grief, albeit an inadequate placeholder for the absent bodily presence of the deceased. In *Sacrosanctity*, one can see the artist visually tracing, retracing, copying and attempting to remediate these objects too. The obsessive repetition, delicate redrawing, and deliberate copying of such objects in between photographic evidence of real-world sites suggest this desire to reiterate and reconfirm reminders of the deceased in the bereaved's imaginary inner landscape of bereavement.

Conclusion

Melancholy objects and devices are intrinsically interwoven in grief and loss. These objects play a decisive role as a tangible replacement for the absent body of the deceased. The deceased's body and physical presence are forever changed after death, yet this unique presence is so desperately yearned for by the bereaved. In mourning, melancholy objects and devices act as a replacement for the deceased. Melancholy devices can even digitally recall the moving, speaking image of the deceased. However, in engaging with these traces on devices, we are once again reminded of the absence of the deceased's bodily presence.

The bereaved's experiences of the presence – the closest they can come to the lived presence of the deceased – are within their imaginary world of inner images, where an imaginary landscape of bereavement exists. Regarding the *Black Mirror* episode *Be Right Back* the bereaved's engagement with just one melancholy device is highlighted. The profound effect and importance of the melancholy object are delicately interwoven in the relationship between Martha and the synthetic Ash. Above all, both these visual examples express the desperate need for the bereaved to make present, make tangible, the absent deceased, yet at the same time demonstrate how every and any replacement will always fall short of the actual presence of the deceased in life. The deceased is a presence that is no longer reachable. Even though it is comforting, among experiences of loss, grief, and melancholy, to engage with the deceased using digital devices, the experience feels incomplete and wounding, as explored through *Be Right Back*.

The digital drawing *Sacrosanctity* (2019) interrogates an imaginary landscape of bereavement. In the work, my rumination on years of grief and loss is explored as an imagined landscape where real-world sites, photographic elements of such spaces, melancholy objects, devices, and perspective are interwoven. The work itself becomes a memorialisation of the character of the melancholy object – a reminder of the permanence of loss and the role objects of grief play in our lives.

I contend that, for the bereaved, the response to grief and loss is experienced as inner images of the deceased. I surmise that it is within our inner imaginary world of images that we experience the complete absence of the deceased. This is because images in our imagination and memory can be said to colonise our bodies (Belting 2011:9). This response is triggered externally by identified melancholy objects, which, in some cases, can be art dealing with grief and loss. The bereaved's ongoing relationship with the deceased is mediated through melancholy objects, devices, and their own embodied remembrance of the deceased. This can be explored in art dealing with grief and loss.

Therefore, I argue that the art created in such ways, particularly the artwork discussed in this article, may also be transformed into nuanced melancholy objects themselves. In the act of creating and in the subject of the artwork discussed, an experience of grief and loss is evoked – an experience that is shared, which is internally, and uniquely, experienced as an inner landscape of bereavement and loss. I postulate that the artmaking process in and of itself has the potential to become an act of remembrance, memorialising the grieving relationship.

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Notes

1. Melancholy objects also include artefacts, photographs, digital images on digital devices, ashes, possessions previously owned by the deceased, or, in some cases, art dealing with grief and loss.
2. Season 2, Episode 1.
3. In contrast to this, a medical model of grief, which sees grief as an unwelcome intrusion to everyday life (Anderson 2001:139), may indeed be lacking in terms of agency and efficiency due to the diminished importance and significance given to melancholy objects which provide a sense of continuity in grief.
4. A motherboard is the central hardware component of a computer. It is the central circuit board inside a general computing system.
5. The first introduction to this site was in the company of the deceased during his life, an architect by profession.

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