

Article

Loss in Light of the Last Things: Christianity, Eschatology, and Grief in *Inside Out*

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Abstract: With reference to the film *Inside Out*, we show how Christian eschatology helps us understand the personal experience of grieving loss, generated by capital's demands for labor hypermobility and its resultant disjunctures in a person's biography. *Inside Out* cinematically portrays, in seemingly unremarkable moments, an inbreaking of a redemptive eschatological moment. We organize our case around two eschatological themes, those of judgement and death. The first section links a person's affective experience, the structures that generate those experiences, and the last things; we make our case using Merleau-Ponty's account of the interwoven body and Affect Theory's relationship to Foucauldian power. The second section investigates what becomes of loss and restoration when they are refracted eschatologically, using Guardini's idea of biographical death, Critical Theory's conception of the Messianic, and Bonaventure's conception of the convergence of opposites. We ultimately propose that, seen in the light of the last things, grieving over loss and its opposite, the restoration of what was lost, converge into one and the same thing. A third section will circle back to *Inside Out* and highlight the contours of the restoration of that which was lost in light of the two eschatological themes above.

Keywords: eschatology; judgement; death; affect theory; messianic; Bonaventure; coincidence of opposites; loss; *Inside Out*



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1. Introduction

The 2015 Disney film *Inside Out* (Docter and Del Carmen 2015) tracks the interior life of an eleven-year-old named Riley, as she, following her parents' pursuit of a business venture, leaves her childhood in an unnamed part of rural Minnesota and tries to adapt to life in the neighborhoods of San Francisco. Her outward journey of adjustment is paralleled by the attempts of her anthropomorphized emotions, Joy, Sadness, Disgust, Anger and Fear, to manage her interior state, which go awry when Joy and Sadness struggle over some key memories and wind up far from their emotional control center. While this movie was first explored in rudimentary form in another format (Tan 2024), the current work builds on those initial observations and lays out in detail what could only be hinted at in the former piece.¹

The movie is chosen for five main reasons. First, it is an exploration of the interplay between disposition and experiences. Second, and because of this interplay, *Inside Out* is interesting for tracking the interior life of someone needing to grapple with the biographical disjunctures that are borne by systems that have, in turn, become diffuse, individuated and, as a result, personal (in this case, the personal loss of a childhood *lebenswelt* or life world). Third, this specific movie, even if unintentionally, is also a fascinating exploration of losses as dislodgements and alienations resulting from meeting the demands of hypermobility, which, in turn, is demanded by the structures of capitalism and its imperative towards what Hartmund Rosa calls "social acceleration"—the imperative for undergoing ever-accelerating change if only to maintain the status quo (Rosa 2017, p. 439). Fourth, *Inside Out* stands out from other movies concerning loss because, more explicitly than others, it is

a case study of how specifically these structures of capitalism, imperatives towards labor hypermobility and the losses they generate, affectively break down the barrier between them and a person's interior life, a theme explored architecturally within Riley's psyche in the formation—or disintegration—of theme park-like islands which constitute her core memories. Against this backdrop, Riley also presents as a fascinating case study of someone who, even without the tools for recognizing hypermobility and its resultant imperatives, deeply feels the losses generated by those imperatives.

Fifthly, and most significantly, *Inside Out* lends itself to a theological reading of grieving our losses, in a way that yields further architectonics and layers of significance that a secular reading of grieving of loss might miss. More to the point, we argue in this article that elements of eschatology, the Christian theological study of the last things, are particularly well suited to map out these architectonics; furthermore, *Inside Out* has been chosen for the way it highlights how the last things are not categories that *only* apply at the end of the world but are also woven into the structural realities of this world and, flowing from that, the fibers of a single person's immanent experience, right down to the experience of a single child. Put another way, even if the last things as the end of the world is not imminent, they are still nonetheless immanent as mediated through our personal experience. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this article to wade through the debate between eschatology as the time of ending versus eschatology as the ending of time, its central argument will work on the assumption that the two are interwoven, such that the end of time finds echoes in this time.

The above interweaving becomes particularly acute in the grieving of personal loss brought about by the structural demands of capitalism and its corresponding demand of hypermobility of labor, a drama played out in *Inside Out* and brought to its cinematic culmination in the mutual admission of their loss between Riley and her parents. This article asserts that there is an inbreaking of an eschatological moment into another that might strike us as relatively mundane, a parent's comforting of a child in the grips of the realization that something has been lost. Furthermore, in highlighting the connections between the personal, the structural, and the eschatological, we ultimately propose that, seen in the light of the last things, grieving over loss and its opposite, the restoration of what was lost, converge into one and the same thing.

In this article, we argue this case in three parts. Under the eschatological heading of judgement, the first section draws out the links between a person's affective experiences, the structures that generate those experiences, and the last things. Here, we make our case with reference to Merleau-Ponty's account of the interwoven body and Affect Theory's relationship to Foucauldian power and governmentality. Under the eschatological heading of death, the second section will investigate what becomes of these experiences, in particular the experience of loss and restoration, when they are refracted eschatologically. We conduct this second investigation using Romano Guardini's idea of biographical death, Critical Theory's conception of the Messianic, and St. Bonaventure's conception of Christ—who is the *eschatos* or the very last thing—as the convergence of opposites. Before concluding, a third section will circle back to Riley and integrate our submissions in the preceding sections as well as highlight the contours of the restoration—or, more precisely, a redemption—of that which was lost in light of these two eschatological themes. We will investigate this redemption with reference to Riley's final confession to her parents, their attempts to comfort her, and what unfolds in the wake of this crucial juncture in the movie.

2. Judgement

In the traditional chronology of eschatology, death is listed as the most primordial last thing. This article submits that, on this side of biological death, the experiential reality is such that death is closely preceded by judgement. As Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart argue, judgement manifests the reality set in place since the Passion of Jesus Christ, namely the ultimate sovereignty of Christ over creation, with the act of judgement manifesting that sovereignty over both the living and the dead (Bauckham and Hart 1999, p. 119). Put

another way, judgement as an eschatological category may, as tradition puts it, refer to the final judgement at the end of all things, and flowing from that, the final act of divine sovereignty over all creatures at the end of their collective life. However, even as we accept that this final act of sovereignty will take place, if we read Bauckham and Hart carefully, that final judgement is not the exclusive reserve for the end of the world. Rather, in locating judgement in the context of Christ's Passion—that is, during his earthly life—that final judgement is also retroactively mediated in the sinews of creaturely existence even before the end of all things. In other words, Christ's ultimate act of sovereignty at the end of all things is also woven into and finds echoes within the textures of history, including the historical and aesthetical experiences of the creatures. This remains the case even as God's sovereignty seems hidden under the ebb and flow of history, which seems to capitulate to the acts of sovereignty carried out by other more earthly and more malevolent forces which show that sovereignty by putting God's faithful to death (Bauckham and Hart 1999, pp. 120–21). Thus, we can see final judgement at the end of all things mediated as judgements in our experience within the world of things, coming in the form of our experiences of acts of sovereignty.

As we shall see below, the last thing of death may not exclusively constitute a literal one on this side of death. What is relevant, however, is the way the exercise of judgement, whether divine or earthly and for good or ill, is given aesthetic articulation. In other words, acts of judgement do not occur as distant, hermetically sealed cognitive categories. Instead, as Graham Ward makes clear, acts of judgement occur in the context of networks of practice (Ward 2009, p. 193). What this means is that such acts are "hardwired into the world". For Ward, judgement—including earthly and divine judgement—"is located in the world's times and spaces, histories, its societies, its cultures, its languages and its ideologies", even as it "address[es] the world from a point beyond it" (Ward 2009, p. 24).

Put another way, even if judgement is an eschatological category, it is also eminently immanent. Because judgement is immanent, it is also located within the world of human experience. More relevantly for our consideration of *Inside Out*, locating judgement within experience also creates an affective contact point between the act of judgement and our interior selves. It is the task of the remainder of this segment to establish these connections.

2.1. Interoivement

The connection between acts of judgement without and affective movements within becomes more apparent if we consider Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thought on our radical openness to the world. It should be noted that, contra the movie, Merleau-Ponty rejects the concept of an inner person distinct from the outer, which at first glance might undermine our argument concerning the impact of acts of judgement on our interior experiences. However, we argue that this distinction between the outer and inner person, both in the movie and this article's coverage of it, is for heuristic purposes only, and our argument does not require making such a sharp distinction. If anything, it proceeds from the presumption of a person's radical openness to the world in which acts of judgement are made, the vocabulary for which Merleau-Ponty provides.

We occupy the world with a primordial naivete, and our openness to the world is such that Merleau-Ponty remarked that "the world and I are within one another, and there is no anteriority of the *percipere* to the *percipi*" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 123). The deep involvement between us and the world means that there is also no anteriority of the person's perceptions, thoughts, and affects on the one hand, and the furniture of the world that triggers those perceptions, thoughts and affects on the other.

While it is not explicit in *Inside Out*, it is striking how the body constitutes the crucial junction of this involvement. In the same way that the drama of Riley's emotions is intimately bound up with Riley's unconscious embodied negotiations within the world, our capacity to apprehend anything is intimately bound up with the pre-cognitive capacities of the body's being in the world, which sets the horizons of the world in a pre-theoretical manner, and frames what is perceived and apprehended. Merleau-Ponty spoke of the body

being “intervolved” with its environment, such that it becomes continuously committed to that environment and its knowledge claims. The body then becomes a pivot of knowledge (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 94), in which the body intervolved with its environment receive imprints on that body of a field of dispositions from that environment. These fields orient subjects and commit them into acting in particular ways and to pre-cognitively accepting a particular shape of the world. As they move through and perceive our surroundings, they also become continuously committed to that environment.

More to the point, subjects become continuously committed to the forms of knowledge embedded within those environs (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 94). Here, we must consider the epistemological heft carried by the body. This is important because the pre-cognitive field of possibilities comes not just from the intervovement of a singular body but also with a field generated by other bodies. These bodies could be biologically, culturally, socially, and linguistically mediated, encompassing literal and refracted modes of embodiment. At a very fundamental level, the embodied self is always, in Michel de Certeau’s words, “moving towards the other” (Certeau 1984, p. 110). As Merleau-Ponty suggests, any embodied practice constitutes a call towards the practitioner’s commitment to a sociopolitical body, even if that commitment is unarticulated or unacknowledged. Building upon Merleau-Ponty, Ward argues that because of the sociopolitical nature of our embodiment, knowledge is less individual cognition than embodied participation in other forms of embodiment and the other subjects within those embodiments. Within these relations, Ward says, lies an ongoing “transcorporeal” exchange of knowledge, wherein we emit and receive claims on our knowledge that are not of our making (Ward 2000, pp. 81–96). In short, our movements within the world are constantly affectively contoured, with our bodies acting as transistors in which outward movements of the world are registered interiorly.

2.2. Affect

The link between our affective movements and the movements within the world are relevant for our consideration of *Inside Out* because, more than anything else, the focus of the movie is as much about Riley’s affective state as it is about Riley herself. More precisely, the film is an extended exploration of how her subjective feelings affectively work in the face of external stimuli from her environs. The caveat is that, in the world of *Inside Out*, there are two sets of “subjective” protagonists, Riley herself and Riley’s emotions. While our coverage on our intervovement with the world epistemologically sets the stage by highlighting our radical openness to the world and its institutions, understanding the dynamics between Riley, her emotions, and her constituents of her environs requires other explanatory tools.

We submit that Affect Theory in the tradition of Silvan Tomkins provides such tools for drawing out the contours of this connection. We consider the film as a case study on the aesthetic dimension of Tomkins’ Affect Theory, which focuses on how feelings are experienced. While our coverage on intervovement alerts us to the possibility of judgement, mediated as it is by acts of judgement within the world, which are also prone to perception and experience by individual persons, we consider Affect Theory in the context of a reflection on eschatology because, from the standpoint of Affect Theory, affect can be described as, as Donovan Schaefer puts it, an effect of power (Schaefer 2019, p. 1), that is, an effect of an exercise of sovereignty. In other words, and more to the point on the immediate theme on cultural grief, intervovement and Affect Theory complement one another by addressing different sides of the equation concerning acts of power and sovereignty on persons on the one hand and how a person feels in the face of those acts on the other.

On a surface reading of the film, we can see how affects generate psychological power insofar as they are “primary motivators of human behavior”, providing more impetus for behavior than simple Freudian drives (Frank and Wilson 2020, p. 15). In the context of the film, we can see the way in which Riley’s actions are preceded by the dynamics initiated by her emotions. We will, however, distinguish this sense from a second sense that is more interesting and more relevant to the article’s purposes, because it more directly follows the

path opened up by Merleau-Ponty's observations on our radical openness to the world. This second reading relates to affective power that is as much exerted outside of actors as within them. More specifically, this article will focus on what Schaefer calls the "felt and sensed dimensions of power" and on how affects are also "the substance of subjectivity" in a Foucauldian sense, distributed across architectures that in turn create situations that subjects are motivated to move within (Schaefer 2019, p. 1).

As mentioned in the beginning, we are given a cinematic glimpse of this architectural dimension of affect in the way that certain "core-memories", experiences that form the core aspects of Riley's character, concretize themselves architecturally within her psyche in the form of theme park-like islands. These become spaces that Joy and Sadness must traverse and negotiate to return to headquarters after becoming lost whilst retrieving some misplaced core memories. These architectural expressions pale in comparison, however, to the way in which the movie also gives glimpses of the way external exertions of power interface with the interior movements of "intention, cognition, accident, awareness and what gets called 'reason'" (Schaefer 2019, p. 3). At a macro level, we see this in the way the drama of Riley's emotions is driven by the cross-continental family move, a move driven in turn by her father's pursuit of career opportunities in a tech startup. This detail is given scant attention in the movie itself, but it is interesting that the movie, set as it is in San Francisco, is also in the shadow of Silicon Valley, a global synonym of capital flows seeking out profit in the information technology industry. As much as the drama of the movie is focused on Riley's emotions as they adapt to life in a new city, it is also a drama set against the backdrop of the sovereignty of what Ward calls "flexible accumulative or late-capitalism", marked by the "mobility of land use and the dis- and relocation of production" (Ward 2000, p. 53) and its attendant demands for hypermobility, not only of capital, but also of labor. It is this very hypermobility that sets in train the familial dislodgement from Riley's childhood home and the concomitant emotional disjuncture within Riley's psyche. Put another way, what Riley experiences affectively is the fallout of the injunctions of capital, mediated through the exercise of parental authority, as manifested in Riley's parents' decision to make this shift away from her childhood home in their own obedience to the movement and pursuit of capital and, in the process, planting the seed of Riley's grief. Parental mediation of the demands of capital is also subtly played out in one scene where Riley's mother, in a private conversation, instructs the child to set aside her struggles and continually report having a good day and maintain a happy front. This instruction is given, not for Riley's sake, but to ease the stresses of her father, who in one scene expresses concern over the phone about the financial backing of their startup. At this point, we witness a more direct chain linking the dictates of venture capital (or, in this case, possibility of its deprivation leading to the ruin of the startup), the exercise of parental authority and the control of one's interior states.

Within Riley's psyche, the distributions of power can also be seen at a macro and micro level, and both demonstrate the link between Riley's psyche and her environs. At a micro level, the power asymmetry is apparent in the unspoken hierarchy that Riley's emotions set amongst themselves, with Joy often setting the agenda for the other emotions, particularly considering Riley's mother's instructions to maintain a happy front. At a more architectural macro level, the affective relay of the distribution of power is apparent in the way that Riley's "core-memory" islands, in the face of external events, either emerge in technicolor splendor or fall into the grey forgottenness of the Memory Dump, which is then reflected in Riley's emotional shifts.

At the same time, Affect Theory allows us to understand the movie as a showcase of how we are mysteries even to ourselves. More specifically, Affect Theory brings into sharper relief the way in which our "feelings both are and not our own", and that "we don't know and don't want to know what we are feeling" (Frank and Wilson 2020, p. 3). Furthermore, in keeping with the power dynamics tied to our affectivity, Affect Theory also highlights the ways in which that unknowability stems from our unspoken commitment to our environs and their subsequent affective imprinting of their knowledge claims onto us.

One scene that plays this dynamic out can be found on Riley's first day of school, where Riley undergoes the ritual of introducing herself to her new classmates at the behest of her teacher. What Riley does not know is that her introduction coincides with a fracas among her emotions, in which Joy and Sadness argue over the latter, turning what should have been a happy memory into a sad one by touching it. This interior struggle is then exteriorly reflected in the sudden shift in Riley's mood, from a blissful nostalgia to a tearful realization that what was remembered was no more, a situation compounded by the awkward stares of Riley's classmates. This experience becomes cemented within Riley's psyche as her first sad core memory, with the only thing stopping its full architectural expression being Joy's and Sadness' struggle, which leads to the complete shutdown of every core memory. Here, we see two sets of power dynamics at play. More immediately, viewers can see the power dynamics at play in the struggle between Joy and Sadness over control of the emotions and the main control panel, which then feed into the unexpected shift in Riley's emotional composure. More broadly, and more subtly, Affect Theory should cause us to consider the power dynamics at play between Riley and the structures of the school. Viewers can see a subtle demonstration of this—made more subtle by its utter familiarity—in the awkwardly blank stares that surround Riley during her introduction, a situation that only arose because of Riley's compliance with her teacher's instructions. What this act instantiates is put on display in the shift in Riley's emotional state, in which her speech goes from fondly recalling her childhood to tearily realizing that it is gone. It is arguable that the shift within Riley whilst introducing herself to a new class setting is a microcosm of the nexus linking Riley's emotional state, the micropractice of submitting to new power asymmetries with her school, and the macropractice of submitting to her father's pursuit of capital. Put another way, the involuntary shift in her interior state is a reflection of the disjuncture brought about by the equally involuntary shift in her exterior setting, which in turn arises because of an exercise of the reorganizing sovereignty of capital mediated by the pastoral authority of her parents and her new school.

Affect Theory does not only help us analyze the intersection between Riley's interior and exterior worlds. As Schaefer indicates, these affective architectures extend Foucault's notion of rationality or governmentality (Schaefer 2019, p. 3). Decisions are made or are being made as one moves within these affective networks and architectures. More specifically, Affect Theory highlights the way in which, as an exercise of sovereignty, the last thing of judgement can be interwoven within the sinews of everyday experience as well as the intimacy of our own interior life.

Be that as it may, considering judgement in isolation establishes the contact point between the last things and our experience and opens that experience to grief in the face of acts of sovereignty, it does not in itself bring into relief the telos of that experience. To that end, we must turn our attention to the last thing of death.

3. Death

As mentioned above, the last thing of death has often been associated with merely the end of biological life, which has resulted in a limited range of relevance for our pre-death experiences. As a corrective, certain strands of Christian theology have broadened the definition of death and thus the range of applicability for human experience. Broadening this definition also furnishes to our analysis a vocabulary to understand Riley's experience of grief in *Inside Out* as a living death. More hopefully, we propose that looking at the subject of living death eschatologically allows us to view this death as one capable of redemption.

We will look at the treatment of the last thing of death in three stages. We will first consider Guardini's notion of "biographical death" before looking at Critical Theory's notion of the messianic. Finally, we will consider how Bonaventure's coincidence of opposites brings Critical Theory's messianic thread to its completion.

3.1. Biography

In his *The Last Things*, Guardini provides a definition of death that encompasses several subtypes of death that go beyond merely the biological. Of relevance here is what Guardini describes as “biographical” death, which he defines in this way:

Each man’s life is built around certain settled motives of action. These motives, for some reason, may cease to be, and no new ones come up to supply their place.

A woman, for instance, may be married, have children, manage a household. Then her children grow up, leave home and start families of their own. . . If she is not able to take up some other activity or fill her leisure from her own inner resources, her life, biographically speaking, is over [. . .]

Or take a man who has thrown himself into his work with everything there is in him. The day comes when he perceives that out of loyalty to the work itself he must resign. . . Unless he finds something to do that makes worth his while to begin afresh, or can put his leisure to intellectual or social use, his life, viewed as biography, is finished, however long it may linger on in fact. (Guardini 2019, p. 9)

Gendered roles notwithstanding, what is relevant in Guardini’s observation is that, as the adjective “biographical” suggests, the driving force within the “motives of action” Guardini identifies are stories of lives we once had, think we had, or wish we had, stories that include jobs, places, relationships, hopes, and dreams. These stories can be cut short by some traumatic event, and when this event happens, we experience a loss of the life we thought we would have. Again, Riley’s first day in school plays the death of one’s story very well. In introducing herself to her class, Riley elaborates on her childhood of skating with her family and hockey games on the frozen lake with her former team, the Prairie Dogs, a happy memory before Sadness tinges it with the blue of melancholy. When that happens, a teary Riley then finishes awkwardly with “but everything’s different now, since we moved”.

Several things occur in this deceptively short scene. First, notice how Riley’s fond recall of her childhood was constituted by stories of her activity with both friends and family. Second, these stories come to an abrupt end and are contrasted with the almost vacant resignation “. . .since we moved” followed by awkward silence. This little vignette captures a dramatic ending to the motive of action, namely the story of Riley’s continuing childhood in Minnesota, now rendered impossible because of the move to California. Insofar as this story of her life has come to an end, Guardini suggests that this is an experience of her life itself coming to an end. We thereby have grounds for arguing that Riley’s recounting the loss of her childhood home and the visceral experience of that end in her telling her new class (evidenced by her teary expression of grief) constitutes a tactile experience of death similar to her experience of judgement. This is insofar as the causes of these experiences are the imperatives set by the pursuit of capital and its concomitant demand for hypermobile labor.

3.2. Messianic

Guardini’s conception of biographical death gives us a broader net in which more categories—and specifically experiential categories—than simply biological death are pulled into an eschatological orbit. After that initial affirmation of the link between loss and death, however, the later chapters of his *The Last Things* overlook what becomes of these experiences. On its face, we seem to have reached a limit in having death give direction to our experience of judgement. What might help push past this limit, however, are threads of Critical Theory’s engagement with the messianic, with particular attention to Theodor Adorno and Giorgio Agamben.

Space does not permit us to exhaustively explore the genealogy in which Judaism’s concepts of the coming of the messiah became secularized in some strands of Critical Theory. What is relevant in these strands for the purposes of this article, however, is how the upshot of this secularization is not the replacement of a religious messiah with

a secular one but the replacement of a messianic *person* with a messianic *perspective* on times and conditions. This perspective sought to correct a tendency within philosophy to have what Paul Chung called an “absolute starting point” (which he attributed to Kant and Hegel) leading to absolute knowledge as the endpoint of cognition, all of which feed a triumphalist unitarism attached to the creation of exhaustive systems of thought (Chung 2019, pp. 72–73). What are ignored, indeed what are suppressed, are the myriad of contradictory and heterogeneous remainders, which result in a history of brutalization and victimization of those remainders. Interestingly, for our purposes, as Matthew Sharpe observed, this messianic perspective closely coincides with loss, particularly the loss of “a sense of stable historical or political reality” (Sharpe 2009, p. 40.15). While Gershom Schlolem observes this correlation of loss and the messianic posture within Judaism, going as far as to call it “a theory of catastrophe” (Schlolem 1971, p. 7), Sharpe suggests that this correlation is also evident in its secular counterparts (Sharpe 2009, p. 40.16). The messianic perspective within Critical Theory is a perspective which, particularly in times of loss, “counterpoises the fulfilled image of wholeness to the piecemeal, wretched reality” (Schlolem 1971, p. 14). Placing the messianic perspective within this fractured locus serves two purposes. First, there is the messianic restoration of that which was lost or the “return and recreation of a past condition which comes to be felt as ideal”. Second, there is also the possibility of a messianic pressing towards a utopic horizon, “aim[ing] at a state of things which has never yet existed” (Schlolem 1971, p. 3).

In either case, to borrow from Theodor Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, the messianic perspective aims to furnish a “standpoint of redemption” in the face of loss. For Adorno, this standpoint constitutes “the only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair”, going as far to say that “knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption” (Adorno 1974, p. 247). The knowledge this messianic standpoint provides, to use Walter Benjamin’s famous phrase, is a tiger’s leap back into the past and interrupts the monopoly of self-contained official histories. As Stephen Bronner tells us, such an interruption “gives cohesion to what has become fragmentary and redeems the suffering of the past” (Bronner 2002, p. 107) whilst also opening up possibilities for human freedom when our material conditions, like a deterministic cage, shut us in and close off any such possibility (Bronner 2002, p. 107). In this vein, Giorgio Agamben, in his *Means Without Ends*, sought to bring together wholeness and fragment by bringing together fulfilment (in this case, the fulfilment of the law) and its transgression (Agamben 2000, p. 135). This messianic cohering is given sharper relief in *In the Time that Remains*, where Agamben proposed a messianic cohering of the fragments of history by bringing all polarities within history—in particular, history’s beginning and end—into tension with each other (Agamben 2005, p. 136). Agamben’s point is relevant because in bringing together the opposites of beginning and end, the messianic causes us to contend not only with the fact of loss—the ending of our history with things—but also its opposite, namely the restoration of that which was lost, a new beginning.

Promising as this messianic perspective might be, there are limits in its capacity to deliver. Sharpe suggests that it arguably fails at a political level because it amounts to an uber-Platonist perspectivalism, in which mere thought, rather than action, is given priority (Sharpe 2009, p. 40.10). Even if we concede thought to be politically sufficient, that messianic thought experiment would still not be fit-for-purpose. At a fundamental level, as Boštjan Nedoh notes, even though Benjamin makes an important contribution in opening the gateway for the messianic, his tiger leap does not seem to save what was in the past but brings to light that which was suppressed by official history (Nedoh 2019, p. 46), even though that history is still dominated by those same officials. Furthermore, if all one can expect is for opposites to be brought merely in tension, as Agamben seems to suggest, it leaves open a metaphysical gap between these opposites. So long as this gap persists, there is a conditionality to this redemption of history and all its attendant sufferings more generally, and the experience of loss and its restoration more specifically. Within the context of a purely immanent metaphysics, it would be impossible to arrive

at a point in which something and its opposite completely coalesce. This is particularly the case considering Critical Theory's resistance to the "absolute starting point" and its accompanying triumphant unitarism. This is why, interestingly, even proponents of the messianic within Critical Theory despair about the feasibility of this messianism. Adorno, for instance, after extolling the standpoint of redemption, in the same paragraph also rejects the possibility that such a standpoint can even exist. The reason Adorno gives is that the transcendence needed for such possibilities to be conceived renders those presuming to occupy the standpoint of redemption as indulging in an illusion, distorting and obscuring the same possibilities that standpoint was meant to illumine and open (Adorno 1974, p. 247).

3.3. Coincidence

As mentioned above, Critical Theory's engagement with the messianic provides a hopeful opening insofar as it tackles the grief of loss and seeks to interface with its opposite, the restoration of that which was lost. That being said, it is metaphysically stymied by its inability to truly bring those opposites together in a single moment. Overcoming this gap, and equipping the messianic to deliver on its promises, requires a metaphysics in which the immanent is also open to the transcendent, which opens in turn the possibility of a joint participation of something and its opposite in that same transcendence.

In this segment, we contend that the Christian tradition, precisely because it presumes a metaphysics of participation with the transcendent, completes what Critical Theory's messianism promises by closing the gap between opposites and having those opposites converge in a single point. From the Christian standpoint, the convergence is underwritten by Christ the incarnate Word who, because he is the Word of God, is fully divine, and because he is incarnate, is also fully human. Furthermore, as the Nicene Creed professes, because he was with the Father and the Spirit before all ages and before all things were made, and because it was through and in him that all things were made, Christ constitutes a metaphysics in which a true coincidence of opposites is possible. We now turn to the thought of Bonaventure, whose thought was profoundly structured by the Word as the coincidence of opposites.

Bonaventure grounds the coincidence of opposites in the mystery of the Trinity comprising the Father, Son, and Spirit. This trinity of persons is held together because two opposite poles (namely the Father and Spirit) are united by Christ as the common center between those poles (the Son or the Word). For Bonaventure, the center holds together these seemingly opposing poles because the former bears the characteristics of both the latter. We find Bonaventure's understanding of this in his *Journey of the Mind Towards God*, wherein:

Christ, the Son of God, who is the image of the invisible God by nature [is]. . .the first and the last, the highest and lowest, the circumference and the center, the Alpha and Omega, the caused and the cause, the Creator and creature. (cited in Delio 2018, p. 88)

Within the Trinity, the Son shares the same generative powers of the Father, since it is from *both* Father and Son, as stated in the Nicene Creed, that the Spirit proceeds. At the same time, like the Spirit, the Son is *generated* by the Father (Effingham 2018, p. 299), born of the Father before all ages. While the Trinity is conceived as the ground of relationality writ large, what holds that relation itself together is the Word (Delio 2018, p. 87).

The importance of this relationality within the Trinity for this article becomes apparent when we consider how relationality in the transcendent Trinity finds an immanent mirror in the relations between all things in the cosmos that were made through the Word and bear the Word's image. As Ilia Delio observed in her commentary on Bonaventure:

Everything in creation that is opposite to another is united to the other through the Word. . .because every person, plant, animal and star is created through the Word and bears a relationship to the Word, every person, plant, animal and star which, on the one hand is opposite to the other is, at the same time, related to the other precisely through the Word. (Delio 2018, p. 88)

In the Word, the union in relation between things and their opposites holds right up to the end of all things because of their participation in the divine Word. Furthermore, at the end of all things, things would not be annihilated but instead have been fully drawn into the Word who is the last thing par excellence. At the arrival of this common terminus, things and their opposites arrive at the pinnacle of their participation in the Word in whose image they are made. All things thereby reach the pinnacle of their thingness, precisely because of their convergence with their opposites in Christ.

In the Word, not only things in the cosmos but the things we *experience* while in the cosmos are drawn into Christ as the point of unity between opposites. Bonaventure suggests this possibility when he links Christ as the coincidence of opposites with Christ as the redeemer from sin. As Delio notes, Bonaventure argues that sin is not a thing per se but its negation, an experience of an infected mind and flesh, a state of misery assumed by the incarnate Word into Himself so that, in Christ, this miserable state might be restored to its former *elevated* state of union with God and former glory as God's image (Delio 2018, p. 89). To do this act of restoration, Bonaventure states in his *Breviloquium*, the Word who is most actual had to become one with "the one who suffered supremely and died" (cited in Delio 2018, p. 134). For Bonaventure, actuality becomes united with its loss in the passion and death of Christ. Conversely, in Christ's resurrection, loss becomes united to its opposite, the restoration of the actuality of what was lost.

The stage for a drama between opposites seems set, in which Riley's outward drama of negotiating the loss of her childhood home and her desire for its recovery is reflected in the internal drama amongst Riley's emotions, particularly around Joy and her seeming opposite, Sadness. In trying to help Riley settle into life in San Francisco, Joy is determined to keep Riley happy, particularly seeing that the imperative to stay happy comes at the behest of Riley's mother. These attempts, however, are thwarted by Sadness' uncontrollable urge to touch every yellow orb of happy memory and render it blue with melancholy. The movie's main plot twist is where the former comes to an important realization about the latter, especially when it comes to the extent of a particular memory providing the full account of a particular event. In one scene where Joy examines what Riley took to be a happy childhood memory involving her being surrounded by cheering friends and family lauding her hockey playing, she finds out that the yellow glow of happiness surrounding this memory obscured another important part of the story. Looking at the full account of the memory, Joy finds out that Riley's cheering friends were not simply marking a joyous moment of victory. In fact, that joy was preceded by the pathos of Riley's team's defeat, making the cheering a poignant moment of comfort in the face of the loss of a game. As Joy would later find out, the full reality of this memory was one in which yellows of joy are intermingled with the blues of sadness. The intermixture of the opposites of joy and sadness then becomes axiomatic of the reality of Riley's memories both old and new. Before we reach this point, however, we must consider how this intermixture of opposites is also reflected in Riley's affective life in a way that embodies Bonaventure's coincidence of opposites. We thus circle back to Riley.

4. Redemption

In making sense of her emotional upheaval, Riley masks her uncertainty and insecurity under an increasingly difficult-to-contain veneer of anger, which manifests itself in several rebellious outbursts, particularly directed at her parents. Driven by anger and stricken by nostalgia, a crucial crossroads arrives when Riley comes to the conclusion that happiness was lost the moment her parents decided to leave Minnesota. Restoring that which was lost, in her mind, would necessitate breaking herself from both her city and family and reliving her childhood days in her childhood home. Her realization prompts an attempt to run away from her new home and return to the old, only to abandon the attempt at the last minute. This episode is a prelude to another subtler, though more significant, crossroads when Riley returns to her worried parents. Finally dropping the angry front for what it is,

a cover for an underlying sadness at the loss of her childhood, Riley breaks down, weeps, and makes this confession to her parents: “I miss Minnesota. . . I want to go home”.

In the face of this confession of the loss generated by her submission to those in authority over her, there is neither anger nor retaliation from her parents. Instead, Riley’s confession initiates a messianic event. In the words of Creston Davis and Aaron Riches, this unexpected event “reconfigures the extant parameters of cognitive possibility within the situation” (Davis and Riches 2005, p. 48) or, to put it another way, opens an unexpected zone of possibility that a situation ought not to allow. This unexpectedness is manifested in a reciprocal declaration from her own parents, who declare that they too miss the woods and backyard of their Minnesota home. Instead of continuing to act as mediators to the authority of capital, Riley’s parents also confess that they too have become victims who have experienced loss in their submission to capital’s dictates. This mutual confession culminates in Riley’s parents providing a comforting embrace for the eleven-year-old. This outward act is reflected within Riley’s psyche when Joy and Sadness take joint control of her emotional console, creating a new multicolored core memory, which is registered on Riley’s face as a tear-tinged smile and then architecturally manifested in a new memory island.

Beneath this simple moment lies a dense profundity. This is not only the emotional crescendo of the movie, but it is also an eschatological moment that breaks into immanent experience. On a surface level reading of the film, this communal family embrace can be seen to point to, even if faintly, a final integration of all things, persons, and experiences into the heavenly communion of saints. We say faintly though because viewers do not and cannot yet see what this integration looks like. More imminently, however, this embrace signals the inbreaking of an integrative messianic moment. As Benjamin argued, such a moment interrupts the ongoing operative processes of capital. It is in Benjamin’s words, a “messianic cessation of happening” (Benjamin 1968, p. 283). The integration becomes clearer because, as Davis and Riches argue, this act coincides with the inbreaking of the Christ who constitutes “the material intersection of the transcendent and the immanent” (Davis and Riches 2005, p. 23). In other words, rather than mediate the imperatives of capital, Riley’s parents in this moment mediate the divine operations in Christ. The implications of this inbreaking are twofold.

In the first instance, we argue that the event coincides with an act of judgement by those exercising pastoral authority over Riley. As argued above, the emotional dividend affectively relayed (i.e., the comfort of parental embrace) constitutes the material substrate of this act of judgement. The difference this makes lies not just in Riley’s affective response, it is also the first time that the viewer sees present-day Riley’s joy amidst the grieving of the loss of her childhood home. As an act of judgment, her parents’ embrace cuts across the other prior acts of judgement and the imperatives transmitted by the structures of authority surrounding the family—capital, industry, school—all of which forbade the family to acknowledge the loss for what it was, the biographical death of a Minnesota family. We submit that in so recognizing this historical loss, this act fits the definition of a messianic moment covered above, for in interrupting the smooth flow of the family’s transition to San Francisco, it constituted a temporal spike in the ground, Benjamin’s “messianic cessation of happening”. Furthermore, such a cessation redeems the loss by opening up Davis and Riches’ zone of new cognitive possibility, or, in Benjamin’s words, “a revolutionary chance” (Benjamin 1968, p. 263).

The redemptive revolutionary chance brought about by the event paves the way to our second implication. Because the event is inbreaking of the Christ, it is also an inbreaking of the coincidence of opposites. In Davis and Riches’ words, the coincidence of opposites comes in the form of the “reconfiguring of the non-collapsible relation to beginning and end through itself” (Davis and Riches 2005, p. 23). In so doing, the coincidence of opposites brings together not only the opposites of Joy and Sadness but also the opposites of recovery and utopian messianism and those of loss and return. We submit that the new convergence of these two emotions and experiences manifests the messianic conjunction of beginning and end, as we see that Riley’s beginnings are, in a sense, brought to an end. As Nedoh

hinted above, this messianism is not a simple replication of a past situation. What we see in *Inside Out* is not simply a messianism of recovery; it is not a simple overcoding and retelling of the life lost by the one who grieves (Yadav 2024, p. 198). No longer will they be recovered as the unadulteratedly joyous memories bathed in yellow light, intermingled as they now are with the blue of melancholy. At the same time, this is also not simply a utopian rupture with the past, leaving behind shards of history, including shards marked by the grief of loss. As becomes clear in the final sequence of the movie, the closure of Riley's childhood is also redemptive, simultaneously opening new possibilities of the recovery of her joy in the context of new beginnings in her life of adolescence.

That which was lost is found again, not in a return to the old lifeworld of Minnesota, but a reawakening of childhood passions in the new lifeworld in California. In the movie, this is encapsulated in the recovery of her passion for hockey, but on a new Californian team. Affectively, she regains her core memories islands but now constituted by myriad intermixtures of seemingly opposing emotions, which fan out into an array of islands impossible to count. Herein lies the poignant twist when loss is taken up into the redemptive work of the coincidence of opposites. In the messianic restoration of things we have lost, nothing is ever truly lost, but the lack of renarration means that what we have lost may not be restored to the state we intend, and the wounds of loss may not disappear in that redemption. Bonaventure suggests, however, that they are restored to us in their actuality in the Word, in which their ends are divinely oriented to the purposes not intended by us. However, because of their actuality in Christ, their culmination is clarified and manifested to us.

5. Conclusions

In the foregoing, we put forward the case that the Christian theological vocabulary of eschatology, when understood as an immanent personal experience rather than a far-off spiritualized prospect, has the resources to help us negotiate the grief of loss. In particular, we submitted that it helps us negotiate the loss borne by the march of capital and its demands of labor hypermobility and fills in important lacunae that social theory—while helpful in scaffolding the problem—is alone unable to address. We made our case using the eschatological categories of judgement and death as our main reference points and *Inside Out* as our case study.

We argued that the eschatological category of judgement lays the foundation for linking eschatology with our experience. As acts of sovereignty, judgement is manifest not only in a distant future moment but is also experienced by us in the here and now. Furthermore, with reference to Affect Theory, we submitted that these acts of sovereignty and their resultant distributions of power are not only environmental phenomena but affectively seep into our visceral experience and tap into our emotions, particularly when such acts of sovereignty result in an experience of loss and the emotional correlate of grief.

Judgement as an affective theme to refract the grief of loss borne by distributions of power paves the way to consider what is to become of these losses. In this vein, we looked at how the eschatological category of death—understood to encompass more than mere biological death—reads the grief of loss in a messianic vector. Against this backdrop, we argued that Bonaventure's coincidence of opposites completes the messianic oeuvre that Critical Theory begins. Viewed holistically, we submit that this move takes up our histories fragmented and by the march of forces not of our making—such as the flows of capital and its accompanying demands—and symphonically bringing those fragments together, particularly the beginning and the end of things. In this account, everything escapes seemingly inescapable loss, though what is recovered may not align with our expectations of restoration.

Critics might argue that this account of eschatological redemption, in laying out the promise of messianic restoration of loss with the above qualifier, fails to adequately address the losses borne by the acts of judgement by others and even capitulates to the judgement of capital. Such criticisms would be correct if, we submit, capital possessed a complete

spatial monopoly that is impervious to any interruption or, if such interruptions do occur, they only reproduce predetermined possibilities set by capital. However, in positing the messianic as a cessation of happening, and going beyond that, a redemptive convergence of opposites, the Christian eschatological categories of judgement and death suggest the possibility of other surprising openings in the human experience of grief and loss.

Space has not permitted us to exhaustively consider the experiential heft of every eschatological category, and further work will thus be needed on this score. However, we hope that our exploration of the categories of judgement and death has provided sufficient grounds for arguing that, in the light of Christian eschatology, history is not reduced to a space for the operation of unstoppable linear processes, of beginning and ending, of gaining and losing. In the case of *Inside Out*, the coincidence of opposites completes what the standpoint of redemption desires, a latter-day convergence between that which is lost and that which is found *in* the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega (Revelation 22:13).

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