



# Dying-With

## An Educational Exploration of Interconnectedness

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### Abstract

This chapter explores how arts-based pedagogies can provide an education for thinking with death in an age of multispecies extinction events. Working with the notion of “dying *with*,” which emphasizes the relational nature of death and its role as a premise for response, it draws on Daisy Hildyard’s concept of the “second body” to address human-related effects on distant peoples and places—effects that often unfold across spaces and times beyond human perception. Conceptually, it is argued that the conjunction between the second body and dying-*with* can account for macroscale devastations embedded in our everyday embodied lives. Pinar Yoldas’ artwork *Hollow Ocean* is mobilized as a pedagogical tool to animate this concept and is analyzed for its capacity to evoke an affective and sensory encounter with death and extinction. In inviting audiences to consider their interconnection within a complex space of species death and ecosystem depletion, *Hollow Ocean* offers a present encounter with a future oceanic condition, making a distinct call for action and education to confront our contemporary ecological crisis. Concluding remarks show how multimodal and immersive artworks might foster educational conversations about death, and

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new ways for engaging pedagogically with it, and imagining it beyond a single-species vision of life.

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### Keywords

Death · Educational futures · Ahuman pedagogy · Eco-art · Arts-based pedagogies · Extinction crisis · Posthumanism · Necrocene

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## Introduction: Reclaiming Death for Educational Thought

It has become somewhat stereotypical to speak of a dying planet, yet in today's context, the uncertainty and precariousness of our times are difficult to ignore. As Claudia Ruitenberg writes in her call for papers for the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society symposium on "Philosophy of Education and the Demands of the Climate Crisis: Timely and Timeless Conversations" (2024), it is hard not to be "terrorized and angry" by "the now unavoidable sense that the very conditions of wonder and desire and human life are in jeopardy" (para. 2). This epoch, now commonly referred to as the Anthropocene (Crutzen 2006), has been renamed by Justin McBrien (2016) "Necrocene" in order to draw critical and urgent attention to a salient feature of our times: the increasing and accelerating mortality of various species, but also cultural loss and the disappearance of (mainly Indigenous) languages. As a concept, it places capitalist history at the heart of a process of "becoming extinction" (McBrien 2016, p. 116), emphasizing that the systemic logics, economic imperatives, and exploitative practices embedded in capitalist expansion have long shaped human interaction with the environment. This is a dynamic that, as Varga et al. (2021) elaborate, referring to McBrien, "is perpetuated, enacted, and sustained through the (re)development of *human* technologies" (pp. 12–13, emphasis in original).

Anger and terror could arguably be the most common affects, as Ruitenberg (2024) notes, as the necrocenic path we are on will only worsen with deteriorating living conditions, threatening the survival of many through violent conflicts and economic collapse triggered by resource scarcity. So, when addressing the current ecological and climate emergency, it may seem odd to devote time and attention to the notion of death itself and what it could teach us. However, reflecting on the question of death and our relationship to it, which is increasingly seen as central, as some have begun to argue in educational theory (Greenwood and McKee 2020; Affifi and Christie 2019; Bengtsson 2019; Varga et al. 2021; Bertoldo 2023), suggests that neglecting this topic might only push our educational selves further into a denial that inadvertently backfires into the present, leaving us without the resources to deal with present crises. Yet, dominant cultural discourses (Radomska et al. 2020) as well as educational ones (see the cited above), at least as they take place in the global north, are still incredibly unprepared and ineloquent to even acknowledge the sheer fact of this mass death and destruction that is occurring every day.

Some educational theorists working in the field of posthuman education, like Jason J. Wallin, have pointed to the need to tackle this topic head-on. Wallin writes:

A contemporary posthumanist turn in education must be one capable of thinking with death—and more specifically, the death of the anthropocentric conceit that the world is *as it is for us*. (Wallin 2015, p. 143)

“Thinking with death,” as he contends, implicitly means to foreground death as having educational value. But for Wallin, death in this context is not so much material loss as it is a productive concept aimed at rethinking dominant forms of education tied to humanist thought (for a genealogy of the humanization of education, see Snaza 2015) moving toward a kind of unavoidable demise. This reframing may be understood as the complete disinvestment from modes of educational thought and practice “that support the continuation of speciesism, the exploitation of animal and nonhuman life, and the illusion of human centrality” (Wallin 2015, p. 143), which, bluntly put, are complicit in physical deaths.

This critical trajectory echoes that of Jessie Beier and Jan Jagodzinski (2023) who problematize current claims about the need to decenter “all-too-human forms of subjectivity” (p. 1) in pedagogical and curriculum research and practice. As they argue, to decenter subjectivity in order to account for inhuman, nonhuman, and more-than-human forms of life within which the human is entangled is crucial, but insufficient when lacking a critique of asymmetrical power relations and radical forms of resistance against systems of injustice and oppression (colonialism and its legacies, capitalism, neoliberalism, etc.) and their educational manifestations. Equally insufficient are the relentlessly optimistic narratives exhorting “green educational initiatives,” often championed as the ultimate way forward, yet problematic for their tendency to focus on individual behavioral change rather than confront the systemic drivers of ecological collapse (e.g., economic growth imperatives, unsustainable technologies, governance failures, cultural patterns, and climate-driven feedback loops), thereby avoiding critical engagement with issues of power, environmental racism, extractive economies, and others.

Building on Patricia MacCormack’s concept of “ahumanism,” Beier and Jagodzinski (2023) propose as an alternative “ahuman pedagogies,” defined as “small pedagogical tactics” and “minor educational radicalizations,” which do not aim to “solve current crises, educational or otherwise, but instead endeavor shattering the presuppositions that undergird humanist (and post-humanist) education” (p. 9). Turning to the “ahuman” offers a way of challenging one of the most deeply rooted assumptions in education: a mode of subjectivity inherited from the Cartesian model, which portrays the subject as bounded, autonomous, and universally human, conceived through dialectical opposition from objects and substances in space that are rendered available to be manipulated, used, and exchanged. Conversely, ahuman pedagogies are grounded in abolitionist and speculative approaches that aim to think “ways beyond and outside, not for ourselves, but for the world” and are dedicated to the “development of modes of expression that might generate care for *this* world” (ibid., p. 10), which, as shown in this chapter, cannot

emerge without facing up to the many deaths and extinctions, including that of humanity as a real possibility of the Necrocene.

For Ramsey Affifi and Beth Christie (2019), exploring mortality as a pedagogical exercise and considering how “the death of ourselves, our loved ones, and the natural world, are linked and linkable in various ways” (p. 1153) can provide rich educational possibilities for cultivating ecological awareness and learning. Such learning, they suggest, would aim “in part at helping prevent such irrational behaviors of the tasks now calling upon us” (p. 1144). These “tasks” refer to the necessary shifts in how we perceive ourselves and how we relate to more-than-human worlds (composed of an astonishing diversity of animals, plants, insects, fungi, lands, bodies of water) and to other humans—shifts that also involve confronting the reality of loss and the impermanence of all that we hold dear. In short, a death-facing attitude can thus be considered as an educational practice: a key part of the current efforts to engage creatively and critically with remaking education, and reflecting on its purpose in light of the ecological crises announced and underway. This also needs political and ethical thinking, as Queer Death Studies scholars Radomska et al. (2019) advocate, in the development of new stories of death, dying, and mourning in order “to produce new kinds of planetary consciousness about living in the ecological and social proximities to extinction” (p. 5).

Based on these theoretical benchmarks, one central argument of this chapter is to call for new concepts and aesthetic imaginaries for education to shift its focus from “thinking life from a single species” (Wallin 2015, p. 143) by taking seriously our planetary existence on a rapidly and unevenly transforming planet where death is “a site shared by all the living” (Radomska 2020, p. 122). Yet, one in which some lives are rendered “more mortal than others,” as Rosi Braidotti (2013, p. 15) reminds us, by virtue of necropolitical regimes that govern social and ecological milieux, making certain bodies fit to be killed or let to die by those who exercise power over mortality (Mbembe 2019; Haraway 2016, pp. 228–236). In the present discussion, death is therefore both a concept that implicitly challenges the humanist legacies of modern education and a lived reality; the two are distinct but linked and have something to teach us.

What can death teach us when loss, destruction, and killing stem from hegemonic systems—whether economic, political, cultural, and ideological—that underpin anthropocentric and capitalist ways of life in which we, as human beings, are implicated, along with our educational institutions, concepts, and practices? As Ruitenber (2024) writes: “most of us participate in the ‘apparatus’ and ‘relations of force’ that drive climate change, often without being really conscious of it or feeling ourselves responsible for it” (para. 5). But this is not meant to be understood as an individualized problem. Rather it calls attention to the formation of subjectivity that is woven into necrophiliac processes from which it is impossible to insulate oneself; here attention is drawn to the kinds of response that are possible in the face of these processes. One particular form of response is that of artistic practice, to which this chapter adds substance by analyzing the pedagogical force of the artwork *Hollow Ocean*, staging an immersive, multimodal experience of depleted oceanic futures.

This introduction has set the context for presenting a new concept for thinking with death, termed “dying-with,” which draws on Alison Stone’s feminist theory emphasizing the relational nature of death. In the first section of this chapter, dying-with, combined with Daisy Hildyard’s (2017) articulation of a “second body,” acts as a conceptual basis to bring to bear and explore the formation of subjectivity as intrinsically linked to impersonal processes and relations of death. As will be discussed, the recognition of mortality that entangles us in our becoming-with others is crucial because it constitutes the very condition for the possibility of response—in Donna Haraway’s (2008) sense of “response-ability”: a practice of making each other capable of response. In the second section, *Hollow Ocean* (2021a) by artist, researcher, and biologist Pinar Yoldas gives concrete expression to the pedagogical potential of this concept. The third section highlights the distinctive contribution of arts-based pedagogies as “small pedagogical tactics” evoking an ahuman pedagogy (beier and jagodzinski 2023, p. 9) in dealing with issues of ecological death and extinction. In particular, this approach builds on the potential of “educational encounters” (Todd 2023, pp. 19–43) stimulated by art, fostering a relational, affective, and embodied engagement with the difficult realities of the Necroocene.

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## Dying-With as a Relational, Embodied Experience

Sharon Todd (2023) writes: “Interconnectedness *makes* us and is fundamentally a part of our own understanding of self as relation of the world. In this sense, we are always already implicated and entangled with the world” (p. 8). Todd’s understanding of interconnectedness—and thus interdependency, without which no living entity can survive—is expanded here by the idea that, as subjects, we not only live with others but are also enmeshed in their dying.

Stone’s (2010) reframing of death as a “relational event,” “rather than an exclusively personal or impersonal one” (p. 361), proves especially valuable for considering this expanded interdependence and advancing the notion of dying-with others. Stone (2010) argues that:

If I am constituted of a web of relations with others, then when I die, these relations end, relations that were equally part of the webs of relations that constituted each of those other people. So, something of each of those people does die at the same time. (p. 363)

The reverse is also true: “when others die part of me dies; our deaths are not separate from one another” (p. 363). In other words, because “my life” is made up of a dense fabric of relations and attachments, to experience the unraveling of one of these threads is to undergo “already in life, part of my death,” implying that with the death of the other, “a strand of relational history that has been constitutive of me” terminates (p. 364). This way of putting things—i.e., a part of me is dying-with the other—inevitably bears the question of whether the deaths of those who survive are merely symbolic. Might they be interpreted differently? The question is worth asking because the idea of dying the death of the other is an impossibility within existentialist traditions, which frame death as an isolating and nonrelational event

(e.g., Heidegger 1927 [1962]). A posthuman framework challenges what has often been considered an impossibility, and Stone's argument, decisive on the matter, is extremely useful. She meticulously develops a convincing argument that discards the "extended, metaphorical sense of death as loss" (p. 364). Indeed, the term loss is very often employed to refer to something that has died and remains situated within the survivor's perspective. By starting from the relation rather than the lack impressed by loss, Stone troubles the existentialist tendency that treats subjectivity as an individualized, isolated condition. Clearly, however, those who survive the deceased do not die in the physical sense. A truth that does not prevent Stone (2010) from asserting that "the death is not that person's own in the way that Heidegger maintains, where their own death is sharply differentiated from the deaths of others" (p. 365). In this line of thought, while no death is replaceable, as no one is reducible to another, death is never totally one's own: It is "always shared, a collective event of loss afflicting all those involved in these relations" (p. 354).

It is important to note that while Stone understands relationality as referring to the subject constituted by and through its interpersonal relations and intimate bonds, a posthuman critical approach to relationality is more expansive, as it casts its focal point on naturecultures relationality (or, *bios-zoe* relations) and accounts for the way power insinuates itself into subject formations (Braidotti 2013, 2019). In the post-human landscape, then, these relations concern not only humans but also affect and are affected by cultures, objects, technologies, ecologies, and human and more-than-human beings, both living and dead, reminding us that human life is always already embedded in broader flows of existence. From this standpoint, the more-than-human (an oak tree, a bird, a cat) like any human being, is a singular entity composed of and evolving through unique, complex assemblages of relations. When one of these entities dies, the matrix of relations in which it is enmeshed is ruptured. This recognition of torn interconnection is vital in the early stages of crafting arts-based pedagogies to habilitate a multispecies ethic, one that understands the Earth as composed of living and dying relations that are constitutive of, rather than secondary to, the individual.

Moreover, thinking relationally in the context of death is all the more crucial since more-than-human worlds have very much remained a fringe concern across western philosophical thought. A point that Marietta Radomska (2020, 2023), one of the principal initiators of Queer Death Studies, emphasizes in many of her transdisciplinary research, weaving art, philosophy, and political activism. As part of the posthumanist turn, Queer Death Studies is a field that moves away from human-centered philosophies, engaging a whole new way of understanding death, encompassing more-than-human victims that have been previously ignored—from animals intoxicated by pesticides to radioactive trees to marine life ensnared in plastic pollution that pervades every body of water, and thus also everybody, on the planet. The neglect, both real and conceptual, of the "ecological dimension of death and dying" (Radomska 2020, p. 118) is part of the thrust of the present educational discussion concerned with modes of subjectivity and becoming aligned with an ecological civilization—one orientated toward more just and nonsupremacist relations, and in resistance against technologically mediated endings.

In the middle of radical planetary transformations and destructions, dying-*with* points to the inevitable and particularly difficult task of making multiscalar entanglements perceivable, thinkable, and feelable (Rife 2020). Indeed, as mentioned, at the heart of any singular life lie overwhelming rhizomatic connections that unfold across different scales, but largely elude human perceptual, sensory, and cognitive grasp. In light of this, it is important to ask whether it is possible to envisage a sense of ethics that is not limited to the proximity or immediacy of a person's life, but capable of recognizing how the experience of distant deaths and collective losses can reverberate through, and be inseparable from, one's own existence. The point here is not to say that we should personally invest in all these multiscalar relations that make us, but rather to avoid cultivating indifference as the default mode of impersonal relations with the dying and the dead (Crépon 2008 [2013]). For while we may feel compassion for the death of a neighbor, it is all too easy to forget the deaths that occur elsewhere and for someone else, like the countless fishes killed by bottom trawling, or the many exiled bodies that drown each year in the Mediterranean.

To reflect on this difficult question, Hildyard's (2017) experimental reasoning on the existence of a second body, which she presents in her book of the same name: *The Second Body*, offers a compelling framework for addressing the porous boundaries of these Necrocenic times that shape human living and experience. For Hildyard (2017), to be living at a time of worldwide climate change means disposing of two bodies: "an individual body in which you exist, eat, sleep, and go about your day-to-day life" and "a second body which has an impact on foreign countries and on whales" (pp. 19–20). The second body, more porous and expansive than the first, is entangled in materialities spreading way beyond the confines of the first body, who is situated and physically defined. It is distinct from the public body in that it is concerned not merely with human life (*bios*), but with diverse forms of existence, entities, and forces (*zoe*), from seabirds to melting polar ice caps and satellite imagery, while at the same time also being implicated in political and social assemblages. The second body can sometimes be perceptible and feelable; sometimes its existence cannot be detected or even imagined—in any case, it exists beyond self-perception: "it leaks and infects the world" (p. 40).

It is in these terms that dying-*with* can be understood: The second body is potentially the one dying-*with* others, while the first remains in function. In considering this second body, the configuration dying-*with* as a thinking device with real implications starts to become imaginable because the second *dying* body can hold together the local scale of experience and account for how bodies affect and are affecting each other over time and across space. Through this lens, we can better account for macroscale devastations embedded in our everyday embodied relations. Although this configuration may appear strange, it is helpful to foreground the idea that mortality extends beyond (what we think of) the confines of one's own bodily integrity, where death becomes a radical provocation reminding (posthuman) subjects of the interconnectedness that we all live in, even if culturally or in our daily lives we by necessity fall into a kind of denial.

The second body as a problem of education is also provocative in terms of how to account for this doubling (rather than duality—it is not either/or it is both/and). There is something truly educational about being able to keep these two bodies in motion, and what we do in education, and in most curricula, is just to focus on that first body, which is a pretty poor understanding of the diversity of realities through which we become. What the second body does is to point to modes of interconnection that exceed the everyday and when linked to “dying-*with*” the aim is not to provoke more anxiety into students’ lives, but to enable them to experience different modalities of being that are overlapping. This is something the arts allow us to do, that is, the ability to take someone out of the one modality in which they think they only exist and bring them into unexpected ones. Such perspective aligns with jagodzinski (2023) who claims that art, a composite of “affects and percepts,” has “the potential to propel imaginaries ‘beyond’ simply lived experience and a meaningful present” (p. 216).

Following Todd (2023), if education consists in a kind of curation, where the teacher “stages encounters between students and elements in the environment” (p. 170), then the aesthetic dimension of the educational encounter is key because it does not just touch us, it transforms how we perceive. She writes:

Aesthetics is fundamentally a term of encounter that captures its multiplicity, where the borders between feeling, perception, affect, understanding, and art are constantly shifting in relation to whatever it is I am encountering. The aesthetic dimensions of educational encounters thus do not only pertain to whether or not they are creating some kind of art form, but rather *how* the encounters can be seen as (artistic) formations of sensory experience. (p. 8)

Following on from this, fostering educational encounters rooted in an ahuman aesthetic sensibility (after beier and jagodzinski 2023) does not entail introducing “more death” into the curriculum, but rather shifts attention to *how* and *when* we engage with such (aesthetic, ahuman) experiences of the world itself. It is about cultivating attentiveness to more-than-human worlds—particularly, in this context, those that involve death and transformation. This can be approached through the hybrid-concept of “the second body dying *with*,” which can serve as a useful pedagogical figuration for tracing these entanglements and exploring the implications and complexities of impersonal relations in a tangible, affectively real manner. This is where the discussion is now headed.

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## ***Hollow Ocean and Being in Relation To***

For over a decade, Pinar Yoldas has been building a body of work that addresses the perils and severe environmental pressures oceans are faced with. *Hollow Ocean* (2021a), first exhibited at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, is an architectural installation conceived as a multimodal, immersive experience, blending marine biology research and speculative artistic practice, imagining an ocean empty of life

in the year 2048 (Kragen 2021). The Biennale's theme that year posed the question "How will we live together?" Yoldas (2021b), instead of interpreting "we" as solely referring to "humans," envisions it as a complex oceanic web composed of habitats, sea creatures, cetaceans, all types of fish, birds, marine turtles, and human relationship to the ocean. As Yoldas (2021c) notes elsewhere, *Hollow Ocean* seeks to make perceptible "the imperceptibility of our anthropogenic impact and ignorance about eco-destruction" (p. 96). To this end, the work features six beautifully crafted and large 4–6 meter water-filled "aquatic columns" divided into six "death chapters," each one representing a specific problem of anthropogenic ecocide (ibid., p. 88), bearing witness to the complex relationships "we" have with these forms of destruction.

Let's begin by introducing the work. Everything is interconnected, for better or for worse. In these six water chapters, it is indeed for worse. Yoldas highlights the many challenges arising from two predominant interrelated movements highly detrimental to oceanic health: the extraction of resources (e.g., overfishing, oil and mineral extraction, and ocean farming) and the introduction of man-made substances and pollutants (e.g., plastics, toxic chemicals, noise, heat, carbon dioxide, and ghost nets from fishing). Additionally, she explains how global warming "is a shared component as it is connected to each problem, either by causing it or catalyzing it" (ibid., p. 96). The global warming column forms a spiral staircase where each step corresponds to 10 years. When one goes up a step, 10 years is covered, and each step is connected to changing temperatures and the impact of climate change. In the chapter titled "Dark Ocean," visitors are exposed to the deadly and damaging consequences of offshore drilling—a process used to access geologic reservoirs and extract oil and gas via specialized rigs, located far from inhabited land yet intrinsically bound up with the rhythms of modern life. Death, in a relational, posthuman sense, is linked to the extraction, production and use of petroleum products that permeate many of the essential objects of daily life: from the fuel that powers our cars, to the energy that lights and heats our homes, to our heavy reliance on devices, like smartphones, and the innumerable items made of plastic. Another column called "Phantom Ocean" features an assemblage of animal skeletons trapped in phantom nets from bottom trawling. It reveals the consequences of overfishing for human consumption, what is commonly called "seafood." Overfishing has led to the disappearance of 90% of marine mammals due to the phenomenon of what the fishing industry misleadingly refers to as "bycatch," which, in reality, is the pointless killing of nontarget marine life. Another death chapter "Acid Ocean" depicts the complex and tightly regulated chemical environment of the ocean, whereby even slight changes in acidity can have catastrophic effects, potentially leading to the loss of billions of organisms.

This staged encounter with Thanatos (i.e., the force of natureculture devastations), materialized through each column, is an educational experience in itself, one that subtly unsettles linear time and ways of relating beyond the human frame. *Hollow Ocean* combines a speculative, radical ecology of environmental change with a critical lens on extractive economies and politics, making visible far-reaching impacts of capitalist violence through multiscale replications of ecological death. Yoldas' installation is thus not a mourning of the past; it is a creatively critical

provocation that evokes the abyss of entangled devastations, offering a raw and clear perception of the ocean in the future *presently*. Put differently, she is visualizing the dire outcomes of what is scientifically stated; outcomes that are usually abstract, since these complex environmental issues are typically represented through numbers and graphs. In this way, the aesthetic imaginary the work proposes is a physical manifestation of futures populated by fleshless, lifeless species, set in motion in our all-too-human present. Learning from these new oceanic ontologies and speculative engagements with more-than-human worlds therefore involves unsettling anthropocentric sensibilities of time, life, and death, enabling visitors of the exhibition to confront, quite literally, “the specters of the future that already haunt us in the damaged sea—the sea of plastic bags, of lost species, and poisoned nutrition” (Shefer 2021, p. 84).

This confrontation forces us to rethink how education can respond not only to individual loss but also to the disappearance of entire ways of life, by promoting a mode of learning and teaching that takes into account the interdependent future(s) of all beings. In that regard, it is important to note that the enactment of death in this artwork contrasts with an exceptionalist human conception of death as a unique and defining feature of human existence that separates humans from more-than-humans (for a critique, see Radomska et al. 2020). The focus here is on extinction as a form of multispecies death that carries no generative possibility: a “deathful emptiness” (Rose 2011, p. 25). This expression emphasizes, on the one hand, something absolute: the devastating force of death, and on the other hand, paradoxically, it reveals a teaching, one of interconnectedness that emerges from and through the very occurrence of such endings. As Gan et al. (2017) note “extinction is a multispecies event” (p. G4), that is, it is neither exclusively impersonal or personal, but rather a profoundly relational, dispersed, and unfolding process. In keeping with the theory developed above, this understanding of relationality suggests that the world coming to an end for a particular species is not simply the end of “their” world, but also the dissolution of a world made up of a particular coalescence of relationships that once sustained it. As Gan et al. (2017) write:

The extinction of a critical number of species would mean the destruction of long-evolving coordinates and interdependencies. While we gain plastic vortex and parking lots, we lose rainforests and coral reefs. (p. G4)

Yoldas’ work that values ecological awareness makes this palpable by giving material form to such deathful absences, prompting a visceral understanding of our implication in these losses. In that, *Hollow Ocean* is also an invitation, both subversive and potentially memorable, to engage viewers in a space of interconnection through a critical space of death, one that proposes an affective, polysensorial experience, including sound, light, and temperature as agents of design. It emphasizes aesthetic pedagogy as a mode of learning through affect and the senses, not merely information delivery. As an educational encounter (after Todd), it reveals how anthropogenic shifts have perforated the cycles of multispecies living and dying, conditioning the ecological precariousness of the present—forces that ripple

across bodies, geographies, and temporalities, converging in the mind and somatic sensibility of the viewer.

This “relational and aesthetic encounter with the world,” in Todd’s (2020, p. 5) words, calls into question what Hildyard has called the “second body,” distinct from the “first body” participating in everyday life, the one that is able to recycle its plastic bags and eat seafood for dinner. In light of the second body, *Hollow Ocean* enables viewers to experience different modalities of being by being pulled out of everyday situations (e.g., Strolling the Venice Biennale, drinking coffee with friends, swimming in the Adriatic sea). It is another way of affectively entering into relation with more-than-human death and can be thought alongside an awareness of the spatio-temporally dispersed second *dying* body—entangled in webbed relations with things and biotic communities that are themselves dying—perceptible through the effects that the first body has on and in the world. In simple terms, *Hollow Ocean* helps make visible the implications of the global presence of the individual first body. So, if my “first body” does not die-with dolphins caught in the meshes of the fishing nets, in a way, what *Hollow Ocean* makes me aware of is that part of my second body dies with them. As Hildyard remarks, “[d]ead whales have something to do with you” (p. 12), which says something about paying attention to what was previously concealed, underplayed, or ignored. In this case, it is the sacrifice and the letting die of marine creatures, along with the destruction of the habitats they rely on to survive, which result from the logics of capitalist production and frenzied consumption. In a fundamental way, mobilizing this concept through the artwork highlights the path of extinction traced by all-too-human, inherently political activity—one that confronts all living beings with an ontological limit: Without others, existence becomes gravely compromised. Indeed, the second body, always affecting and affected, eventually reaches a point where the first body can no longer endure the new conditions of an ocean emptied of all life. A looming horizon, *Hollow Ocean* compels its viewers to give close attention.

In activating a minor pedagogical gesture of ahuman sensibility, the spatially immersive and affective experience of the artwork fosters a teaching of interconnectedness centered on naturecultures relations. At the same time, it raises pressing questions about the forms these relations of death and destruction take in situations where power relations are highly asymmetrical, such as those found in the extractive industry or intensive fish farming, and how they shape the ways humans and other beings live and die. By compressing the distance—whether, ontological, geographical, or temporal—that separates viewers and their “cultures” from the depths of the oceans (so-called “Nature”), Yoldas creates a kind of new proximity—an “ethico-aesthetic paradigm” in beier and jagodzinski’s (2023, p. 12) terminology—in response to more-than-human death and mutating ecologies. She shows how distance is bridged not by logic alone, but by affective engagement as a core feature of ethico-aesthetic experience, drawing viewers into direct relation with transcontinental, impersonal effects of drilling and other wrecking technologies. As an educational encounter, it exposes the dominant cultural and sociopolitical forces that deepen the fractures between humans and other species, which have rendered death and dying either invisible or acceptable. The disruptive yet instructive dimension of *Hollow*

*Ocean* thus opens space to contemplate ecologies of death, entangled to the everydayness of human life—lives that are implicated, not least through complicity in capitalist modes of subsistence and distraction. In this way, the critical teachings that emerge from the work encourage a shift in perception and elicit new affects about life on the planet, and (co)extinctions, compelling viewers to think, feel, and perceive beyond the first modality of existence and toward the often imperceptible and/or ignored dire consequences of anthropogenic alteration of marine environments.

With *Hollow Ocean*, the frame of reference for thinking (with) death expands, offering different ways of experiencing, understanding, and engaging with its various forms and its linkages (between species, ecosystems, fellow humans, and one's own). In doing so, it invokes a capacity for ethical response, revealing that more-than-human dying others are “not simply ‘others’, but parts of ourselves and our worlds” (Affifi and Christie 2019, p. 1155). Pedagogically, it helps destabilizing the false modern dichotomy between self and other by imagining a vision of *being in relation to*, i.e., a relational ontology that resists viewing other creatures as merely alive to serve all-too-human wants and needs, and who are in fact suffocating under anthropogenic pressures, while we—as a species and as individuals—hope to be spared the consequences of their demise. As a pedagogical project, *Hollow Ocean* creates such a disruption in the first modality in which one thinks one lives, enabling the emergence of what Bozalek et al. (2021) call a “justice-to-come” (p. 1): a form of justice anchored in nonanthropocentric awareness and the possibility of thriving more-than-human futures. Perhaps paradoxically, this remains only an experience of confrontation, that is, an encounter not with future life but with death, one that resists resolution and in which it is difficult, if not impossible, to come to terms with this trajectory that generates no hope.

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## Arts-Based Pedagogies for Teaching amid Death

Out of this context, it seems that the challenge of entering into a relationship with what appears at first abstract and impersonal is bound up with the pedagogical conditions that do or do not establish the possibility of being in this type of relationship. This third and final section examines such conditions, providing insights for informing environmental education (and beyond) using arts-based approaches that address themes of mortality and ecological loss.

As an innovative, affectively charged, and quite radical intervention, *Hollow Ocean* can serve as a compelling “pedagogical tactic” (beier and jagodzinski 2023) for environmental education seeking to engage with the relational complexities of death and acts of ecocide, positioning these as sites of ethical possibility. As discussed above, rather than simply transmitting knowledge, the artwork evokes a form of learning that is embodied, relational, and speculative. Through virtual tours, immersive media, or facilitated encounters with the work, *Hollow Ocean* opens a space for students to grapple with the felt dimensions of environmental degradation (this is particularly valuable for students who may be living in cities

without close access to the ocean). Educators might scaffold these encounters with multimodal resources—such as archival footage, interactive maps, or case studies like the Deepwater Horizon spill or deep-sea mining plans in Norway—not to “explain” the work, but to contextualize its affective force within broader legal, ethical, and ecological frames. Importantly, *Hollow Ocean* can foster critical reflection and speculative thought, giving students one small means to navigate the complex terrain of living and dying in the Necrocene. Opening up and cultivating new modes of attention, relationality, and response-ability are key educational orientations—ones that *Hollow Ocean* is well able to activate through its immersive, unsettling, and pedagogical force.

Based on this example, which illustrates one concrete application of arts-based pedagogy, I now turn to highlight (and indeed insist on) three key points before concluding this chapter.

My first point centers on the political dimension. Artworks similar to *Hollow Ocean* serve as a distinctive pedagogical tool, enabling individuals to viscerally and intellectually engage with the multiscale realities of planetary damage within a sociopolitical framework. This latter point is crucial, as critics have argued that one of the major flaws of traditional environmental education is its tendency to depoliticize the themes and objectives of its content (Schleicher 1989; Slimani et al. 2021), while also being influenced by the pervasive rise of neoliberal rhetoric (Derby et al. 2015). Presenting facts and data devoid of sociopolitical context fails to promote socially just and contextually aware understanding, and hence cannot ignite meaningful change. Moreover, as Klaus Schleicher (1989) points out, focusing solely on the *consequences* of human impact often overlooks the systemic root causes of climate and ecological crises, such as colonialism, ongoing settler-colonialism, neoliberalism, and advanced capitalism. Ahuman arts-based pedagogies understood here as the integration of aesthetic encounters committed to non-supremacist perspectives and the possibility of collective liberation might prove invaluable for politicizing education in the Anthropocene (as advocated by Wallenhorst 2016). Given these considerations, this chapter calls for deeper engagement with situated and critical art as “minor educational radicalizations” (beier and jagodzinski 2023) for its capacity to illuminate that which is often imperceptible and/or made invisible by systems of injustice and anthropocentric blindness, or culturally silenced and normalized.

My second point centers upon the importance of exploring new aesthetic imaginaries of death, dying, and mourning (Radomska et al. 2019). As it has been argued here, this involves shifting the focus away from merely presenting a litany of information and data, and instead, activating multiple senses and relationality (e.g., Windsor and Sanders 2023; Bertling 2021; Todd 2020, 2023, 2024) to bring abstract and often overwhelming concepts into the tangible and affective realm. As Todd (2024) asserts, educators can “learn from certain artworks” to involve “children and youth in complex, felt understandings of their interconnection” (p. 1104). In the context of *Hollow Ocean*, for instance, this interconnectedness concerns not merely “elements of the environment” (ibid.) but also the dying of other lifeforms and lifeways. The relatively recent advent of artworks enacting ecological loss and

representing more-than-human death provides a valuable array for enriching the challenging subject of mortality within environmental education, and to reveal its collective, material, and relational dimension. Other notable examples include Olafur Eliasson's climate piece *Ice Watch* (Todd 2020), which explores the multi-temporalities of vanishing ice shelves, and Aria Dean's *Abattoir, U.S.A.!*, which confronts the hidden deaths underpinning the workings of consumerism (see also selected works by Radomska 2023). As educational encounters, these spatially immersive artworks allow learners, as Todd intimates, to experience and "become part of their environment—social, cultural, and biological" (2024, p. 1102), challenging "notions of separateness and objectification" (p. 1104). The strategic integration of material inquiries, posthuman writing or poetry, and artistic experiments related to these types of works could help further stimulate intellectual curiosity, rekindle "political imagination" (Bazzul 2022) and inspire an ethical commitment to act "with care" (beier and jagodzinski 2023, p. 10).

In line with my argument, such pedagogical practice is not concerned with examining the notion of death *in general*, but, as Afffi and Christie (2019) propose, with tracing points of connection between seemingly disparate forms of death. As they aptly observe "many grieve the loss of the natural world in a way that actually evades thoughts of personal destruction" (p. 1152), it follows then that grieving more-than-human others without acknowledging one's own mortality risks reinforcing a sense of invulnerability in the face of natureculture devastations. Conversely, neglecting nonhuman death and dying only sustains entrenched patterns of denial and indifference (Burgat 2004; Radomska et al. 2020; Madelin 2022). Thus, attending to both personal and impersonal forms of death, but also to the ways they are interconnected is essential for cultivating a more responsive and ethically attuned engagement with mortality. Using aesthetic experiences to illuminate these often-overlooked interconnections is a pressing challenge for environmental education. This can be achieved both through direct engagement with immersive artworks as shown, and/or by undertaking creative projects tied to personal experience.

My third point revolves around the introduction of mortality-related themes into the classroom, which inevitably risks eliciting ambivalent responses from learners. To cite our case study again, the ambivalence inherent in *Hollow Ocean* highlights both its ability to engage and inspire critical thought and its capacity to unsettle. On the one hand, the work effectively builds emotional resonance with ecological death, linking spatiotemporally distant events to students' embodied experience, revealing the entangled dynamics of the "second body" dying-*with*. In this way, it evokes both imagination and grief and can transform passive awareness into active concern, encouraging forms of multispecies ethic and environmental stewardship. On the other hand, *Hollow Ocean* may create cognitive dissonance or eco-anxiety for those who may struggle to reconcile their awareness of ecological harm with daily habits and cultural norms dictated by voracious capitalist aims. Exposure to death, whether actual or represented, can indeed heighten fear and denial, as it forces confrontation with realities many prefer to avoid or resent. As Afffi and Christie (2019) and Panu Pihkala (2017) suggest—drawing on "mortality salience" (a concept coined by Terror Management Theory)—this intensified awareness may lead people to seek

solace in dominant cultural practices, which ironically, exacerbate the very problems environmental educators seek to challenge (e.g., compulsive consumption or excessive screen usage). The pedagogical challenge of ambivalence is nonetheless worth embracing, for it reflects a dimension of deep learning, prompting students to face the reality of things, to critically evaluate and potentially shift anthropocentric visions of life tied to necropolitical regimes that inevitably influence their choices and lifestyles.

In this respect, *Hollow Ocean* serves as a particularly compelling example for conceptualizing ahuman arts-based pedagogies capable of maintaining tension between contrasting notions such as hope and despair, or affirmation and nihilism (see also Todd 2024), as it embodies a dual capacity: it both presents a vivid challenge and an opportunity to engage and disrupt. As beier and jagodzinski (2023) suggest:

the ahuman might help to stave off the weight of nihilism that drags thought into apocalyptic scenarios, while, at the same time, facing head-on the more and more likely possibility of extinction that now threatens the species *Homo*. (p. 10)

This tension is something Yoldas (2021c) herself grapples with when she asks: “Is there still space for beautiful narratives to surface, when the subject is the death of our planet as we know it?” (p. 88). Indeed, her work dances on a tightrope: While offering an aesthetically rich and sensorial language of death, it resists collapsing into the binary of hope versus despair. Instead, it seeks to keep minds and hearts open, all the while sounding a clear alarm. The pedagogical challenge, then, is to invite curiosity rather than inhibit it. By fostering environments that support exploration and reflection, educators can harness this ambivalence to guide students toward a deeper understanding of the challenges an artwork contains. It may be in confronting these uncertainties, and in remaining open to the discomfort they provoke, that students encounter what Affifi (2020) describes (and Yoldas gestures toward): the possibility for beauty to emerge from gestures of care toward vulnerable beings and environments. The experience of vulnerability, in this sense, can become a moment of deep insight, reorienting desires and motivating action in the world.

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## Conclusion

In this chapter, the aim has been to show how an artistic work speculating on other worlds and ahuman futures can generate pedagogical insights and offer arts-based pedagogies something distinctive in the encounter with mortality linked to climate change, socio-environmental injustices, and necropower, beyond the dominant narratives of techno-optimism, and dystopian universes. The conceptual configuration explored—namely, that of the second body dying-*with*—may also prove educationally helpful to start imagining more just and equitable modes of relations, unrestricted to blood ties or immediate familiar circles toward a more extensive network of kins. *Hollow Ocean* shows how aesthetic practices and experiences

possess enormous potential to act as wake-up calls, without repressing viewers' curiosity and potential to act, and can generate a different kind of engagement with the world, in which death emerges as a shared, relational event, rather than an individualistic enterprise. Finally, this chapter highlighted the importance of educational encounters with contemporary art—even if not always successful in serving their purpose (Ruitenbergh 2014; Biesta 2017)—for they provide fruitful avenues for embodied and critical reflective engagement with the ecological crisis and the many unjust and premature deaths that ensue. *Hollow Ocean*, one of many case studies, has revealed the educational value of engaging with art that deals specifically with mortality, for it can profoundly enrich, enhance, and even transform our perceptions of life and death.

As a final note, I would like to acknowledge the challenges educators may face when trying to integrate arts-based pedagogies that address this theme into traditional educational frameworks, for they often resist innovative approaches due to curricular constraints or institutional hesitations, particularly within the pervasive anthropocentric and neoliberal educational paradigm. Nevertheless, with this chapter I attempted to emphasize the necessity to incorporate these pedagogies as part of our educational commitment to new modes of becoming and shifts in subjectivity attuned to these times and toward better futures that dismantle and forsake human privilege. My hope is to inspire further reflection on these critical issues, both in theoretical and practical contexts.

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