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## Critical Corpse Studies: Engaging with Corporeality and Mortality in Curriculum

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## Critical Corpse Studies

### Engaging with Corporeality and Mortality in Curriculum

*Mark Helmsing & Cathryn van Kessel*

#### Abstract

This article focuses on the pedagogical questions we might consider when teaching with and about corpses. Whereas much recent posthumanist writing in educational research takes up the Deleuzian question “what can a body do?,” this article investigates what a *dead* body can do for students’ encounters with life and death across the curriculum. The article calls attention to how a corpse’s pedagogical force functions as as a kind of curricular text. The authors present four different types of curricular encounters with corpses: curricular encounters of disgust, curricular encounters with denial, curricular encounters with dis/re-membering, and curricular encounters with disruption. educators to imagine how they might engage with corpses and corporeal through an enhanced sense of mortality in helpful ways. The authors suggest that a worthy curricular aim is not to simply de-center the valorization of life as a triumphant finish and logical conclusion but instead to teach how life in a larger, more exciting and terrifying complexity, continues into and beyond death.

#### On Death’s Door: An Introduction

What might emerge from rethinking human bodies, particularly in terms of how they function beyond our mortal coil? Although humans are prone to squishing down and defending against affective and emotional reactions to the subject of

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mortality, persevering in these initially troubling reactions provides an opportunity for different relations with each other as well as other entities on this planet (as well as the planet itself). This posthuman perspective suggests death “is not the teleological destination of life, a sort of ontological magnet that propels us forward” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 133), and the figure of the corpse thrust the concept of human into this ontological opportunity. Wallin (2016) indicates this when he suggests curriculum studies must respond to a “thanatonic scene,” a scene in which curriculum thought must be rested away from moribund, deadening apparatuses of school, technical rationalism, standardization, and other deadly dull devices of control and governmentality. Wallin (2013) tracks this other possible ‘life’ of curriculum in his concept of *deadagogy*, that considers death’s potential for resistance, experimentation, revolt(ing) protest, and other educative commitments. Inspired by this notion of *deadagogy*, we explore in this article what curriculum studies can learn from dead bodies—the figure of the corpse—in our present intellectual moment when curriculum theorists are thinking with and through the posthuman (Gough, 2004; Lewis & Kahn, 2010; Snaza & Weaver, 2014; Zembylas, 2018), transhuman (Bradley, 2018), inhuman (Springgay & Truman, 2017; Truman, 2019), and more-than-human (Schulte, 2019).

Before we proceed further, we should note that in this article we discuss in frank and vivid ways the affects and effects of corpses and related aspects of death, dying, and decay. Following how Haraway (2016) encourages us to stay with the trouble of “living and dying together on a damaged earth” (p. 143), we also encourage readers to stay with us in these arguments. However, we acknowledge how the affects and effects of death, corpses, and corporeality have the potential to elicit trauma and traumatic intensities and wish to caution readers of the contents of our article as having the capacity to overwhelm, disturb, and trouble beyond the reader’s desire for such intensities.

The editors of this special issue highlight affects and effects of waste by asking curriculum scholars to consider “the rejected, the dross, the chucked, and/or the useless.” We find these affects of waste in certain humanist notions of bodies and corpses. First, humans reject corpses and want nothing to do with them. A person cannot eat, fuck, or love a corpse, as a curriculum history of the corpse would attest. Recall history teaching us the taboos of cannibalism in the Donner Party (Brown, 2009; Wallis, 2017) and the taboos of necrophilia, as in the renewed cultural interest in Jeffrey Dahmer (Backderf, 2012; Meyers, 2017). Secondly, as Schwartz (2015) instructs us, we often think of corpses as useless because, as *lifeless* bodies, they no longer appear to possess agency and subjectivity, becoming husks or shells once life ends. Taking this further, Kristeva (1980/1982) suggests a corpse is “that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything” (p. 4). To be sure, neither Schwartz (2015) nor Kristeva (1980/1982) are suggesting here that corpses are useless, but we take their claims as our starting point to reject humanist ideas that corpses are useless and must be jettisoned from conversation, polite talk, talk at school and in the home.

Pushing back on this situation, we seek to illustrate in this article all that a corpse has to teach us about mortality through corporeality. Sonu and Snaza (2015) call our attention in how “to educate in ways that attune to the human as entangled with the more-than-human without hypostasising “the human” as if it were separate or separable” (p. 262). Following their call, we demonstrate in this article how we can thrust ourselves into a species-level humility needed as climate catastrophe looms along with its associated hardships on every entity on the planet. We can position education away from a denial of death and towards de-escalating harmful social and environmental processes without privileging educators (or any human) as savior (van Kessel, 2018, 2019).

To do so, through several examples of how corpses render death educationally as a reminder of life, we discuss how educators might read the corpse as a site of curriculum for death through four curricular modes: disgust, denial, dis-membering, and disruption. First, we provide some theoretical considerations for death, mortality, and corporeality in curriculum thought, examining which bodies are present in curriculum as we dig down into the curriculum of the corpse itself. Next, we examine the fluids that ooze out of bodies and corpses that engage us educationally as a curricular mode of disgust. Following this, we probe the logic of mortality through a curricular mode of denial emerging in human encounters with corpses and the corporeal. Third, we describe possibilities of communing with the dead that emerge in a curricular mode of dis-membering with corpses, attending to what the corpse dis-members and allows the living to re-member through attachments with and of the corpse. Fourth, once learners move through disgust, denial, and dis-membering, they must contend with corporeality and mortality as a curriculum of affirmative disruption that serves to (positively) disrupt the humanist boundaries of a corpse. Finally, we conclude our article with a call for educators to imagine how they might engage with corpses and corporeal through an enhanced sense of mortality in helpful ways. Our aim throughout the act of curriculum theorizing on offer in our article is not simply to de-center the valorization of life as a triumphant finish and logical conclusion but to teach how life in a larger, more exciting and terrifying complexity, continues into and beyond death.

### Framing the Corpse as a Site of Curriculum: Theoretical Considerations

The starting point for our argument is that there are many forms of human bodies normalized in curriculum: abled bodies; highly functioning and successful bodies; the glorified bodies of heroes and leaders (who even in death are “still with us” in history); and the valorization of life in biology (with a focus on life and how life begins, evolves, unfolds). Brooks (1993) accounts for these different kinds of bodies as “heroic, sacred, suffering, tragic... pornographic, even moribund” (p. 5). All of these bodies that champion life as the triumphant outcome and reward for

merely existing as human crash face a limit when we think about the forms of life minimized, excluded, and avoided in curriculum. However, as Brooks goes on to claim, “the primacy of the body is most dramatically felt in its failure,” its death and destruction (p. 5). These bodies serve as “a site of signification—the place for an inscription of stories—and itself a signifier, a prime agent in narrative plot and meaning” (Brooks, 1993, pp. 5-6). Thus, the humanist notion of a body breaks down when we think of the body as a corpse.

While a corpse is still a body, it functions differently in that it dissolves the self, complicating what some may take for granted as “the tendential connectivity of the living and the dead” (Locke, 2016, p. 72). The binary opposition of the living and the dead constrains what we think a body can do. Curriculum theory “wastes” many potential sites and scenarios for exploration, investigation, meditation, introspection, examination, and rumination on boundaries and passages of life and death when we set up rigid dichotomies that privilege states of being alive over being dead, or, as some curriculum scholars demonstrate, being undead in curriculum thought (Black, Gray, & Leahy, 2016; Flinders, 2016; Huddleston, 2016; Urmacher, 2014).

When curriculum studies scholars choose to prioritize the liberal humanist subject of life, living, and the human, it presents the humanist subject as a living body, in a way that Edwards (2018) describes as “an exceptional entity who exists apart from a world of animals and things and whose fate can be directed by the rationalist will” (p. 5). In this set-up, death and dying are excluded and rendered as a binary opposite of the human subject. When you are no longer human you are dead, inside and otherwise. Working against this limited perspective, we argue for productive educational engagements with death that engage with a species humility informed, in part, by Ernest Becker (1973, 1975) and Eugene Thacker (2011, 2015a, 2015b). These engagements help us embrace our fluid nature in death and life, providing a way to affirmatively examine our lives. In this way, a corpse (although frequently considered to be non-agentic, having ‘wasted’-away) is at the heart of what might be considered educational. This affirmative examination of the corpse maps on to how Braidotti (2013) thinks about death as:

a creative synthesis of flows, energies and perpetual becoming.... The full blast of the awareness of the transitory nature of all that lives is the defining moment in our existence. It structures our becoming-subjects, our capacity and powers of relation and the process of acquiring ethical awareness. (pp. 131-132)

Part of this ethical awareness involves effecting a posthumanist change in the body’s status from subject to object and decentering what we see as a subject, such as the sacred position living human bodies occupy in curriculum studies. One example of this awareness is in what Alaimo (2010, 2018) calls trans-corporeality, by which she means “that all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them” (2018, p. 435). This concept inspires the aim of our article in moving

curriculum thought away from the human as a “master subject of Western humanist individualism, who imagines himself as transcendent, disembodied and removed from the world he surveys” (Alaimo, 2018, p. 436). Replacing a view that chiefly considers how to improve and perfect the man-as-human-master, a view that foreground mortality and corporeality affirms death along with “the strange agencies that interconnect substance, flesh and place” (Alaimo, 2018, p. 436). In the sections that follow, we provide several examples to illustrate how curriculum studies can position corpses as interconnected objects that never *remove* the learner-as-human from the scene of thinking, but, rather, *re-positions* the learner-as-human as a less forceful and powerful force, one actant of many actants in the world.

But the human(ist) relationship to death is a fraught one and moving quickly towards a kind of trans-corporeality that Alaimo and other posthumanist scholars call for is not necessarily an easy move to make. This is because of a deeply human(ist) aversion to facing death, a denial of death we discuss in detail in section three of this article. This denial works on multiple levels. Derrida (1993) gestures towards this denial when he points out that “[f]or us, in the West, within our borders, death would be, and increasingly so, almost prohibited, dissimulated, disposed of, and denied” stemming from a “certain incapacity to look death in the face” (p. 57-58). Agreeing with Derrida, we wonder about why education, and curriculum in particular, supports such deep incapacities to look death in the face and confront it, read about it, think about it, talk about it, feel about it, and write about it when, in our present moment, death is inescapable within spaces of learning, from school shootings to youth suicide, from pep rallies for students with cancer to the drudgery and normalization of death when dissecting specimens of dead animals in a school biology lab.

Thus, a more affirmative and productive engagement with death is necessary to achieve a level of thought in which the human body becomes not a marker, but a conduit. We find that within curriculum theory and curriculum studies death has not often been a prominent conceptual concern of the field. Both Britzman (2002) and Snaza (2014) have in their own ways wrestled with issues of ghosts, spectrality, haunting, and death as structuring forces of curriculum studies through provocative and compelling engagements with death and curriculum. We, the authors of this article, follow these and other curriculum scholars in examining issues of death, corpses, and the corporeal, a collaborative project we are engaged in with colleagues in an ongoing project of death in social studies education. In the four sections to which we now turn, we cast our focus close to the corpse and its association with death as we consider how death, dying, and creaturely features of the corpse such as fluids and remains can alter foundational questions of curriculum. We agree with Wallin (2016) in asserting that “curriculum shares with ethics the fundamental question of *how to live*, or rather, *how a life might go*” (p. 39) and we take this questioning to the grave, so to speak, in considering how a life goes *on* after death and through the corpse.

### Corporeality and Mortality as a Curriculum of Disgust

A critical study of corpses must first attend to that which corpses are most often considered to do—revile and disgust—which is a common human reaction to the complex processes of transformation bodies undergo upon death rendering them into corpses. One aspect of the corpse associated with disgust is the process of decomposition a body undergoes immediately upon death. The decomposition of a body as it transforms into a corpse is a long process that occurs through sequential stages of pallor mortis (soon after death as the body becomes pale and discolored due to the loss of blood circulation); algor mortis (when the body becomes cold to the touch once an internal temperature can no longer be regulated); rigor mortis (when the body stiffens and tenses due to cellular changes in muscle tissue); livor mortis (when blood settles and pools in the lower portion of the body from gravity when blood flow stops). This process is followed by putrefaction and decomposition (when the corpse turns green from gases filling the body and compounds such as cadaverine and putrescine are released into the corpse) that then leads to final stages of skeletonization and fossilization of the corpse (Cohut, 2018; Suazo, 2017). Central to this accounting for the body's becoming-corpse is the nature of fluids with(in) a corpse, such as blood, pus, dissolved membranes, slime, and embalming fluids. These fluids circulate around and within the corpse as a site of curriculum through their affective intensity. In this section, we discuss how one aspect of the corpse as a site of curriculum is in how we respond to bodily fluids, often seen in discharges and viscera, in forceful ways.

Our precognitive reaction is likely linked to our uneasiness about our creatureliness and associated mortality: “Mortality is connected to the natural, animal side of his existence; and so man reaches beyond and away from that side. So much that he tries to deny it completely” (Becker, 1975, p. 92). Our visceral reaction to bodily fluids, in part, stems from its reminder of our animality and thus our status as finite creatures. As Kristeva (1980/1982) noted,

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death... corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. (p. 3)

This reaction to seeing a corpse is, upon Kristeva's description of it, an unpleasant reaction, one that “upsets” in her words. While we would suggest not all encounters with a corpse are de facto unpleasant encounters, we agree with Kristeva that when we encounter a corpse much of our humanist learning sputters out of control. We fill up with irrational thoughts, feelings, and affects: How could this be? What happened to this body? What circumstances have brought me into contact with this corpse? Seeing (and smelling, feeling, sensing) the corpse may cause us to cry, tear up, retch, race our heart rate, make our breathing heavy, turn knots in our stomach, or

even laugh—especially that kind of spasmodic, inappropriate laughter out of discomfort associated with encounters of the grotesque (Edwards & Graulund, 2013).

(Over)reactions that serve to deny our fluid (and mortal) nature are embodied in the example of how followers of the Greek god Dionysos (or “Bacchus” to the Romans) were treated. Dionysos, was a god of fluids—not only wine and honey (bee vomit!), but also (as a fertility god) semen, vaginal arousal fluid, breastmilk, and so on. Plutarch comments upon the god as not tied to nature (*physis*), but specifically to fluid nature (*hygra physis*):

Clearly, what Plutarch has in mind by this phrase are all of the flowering, dripping, throbbing, sluicing, gurgling forms which the force of life takes in nature, as water, milk, semen, blood, amniotic fluid, honey, saliva, sap, and the special gift from Dionysos himself, wine. (Meagher, 1995, p. 72)

Although ancient Greek culture is a shadow of its former self—at times even confined to cartoon form—it is an important reminder that Dionysos was not just a god of sex, drugs, and rock ‘n roll, but rather keenly linked to bodily fluids and death. Dionysos (in the Orphic tradition) was killed and dismembered by the Titans, then resurrected—akin to Orpheus travelling to Hades and returning. Dionysos was linked to death, and ancient Greek society saw death as unclean: “those affected [by death] are impure and are excluded for a certain amount of time from normal life” (Burkert, 1985, p. 79). The followers of Dionysos were also excluded by the dominant culture—perhaps due to his connections with the mortal bodies and their fluids. By the second century BCE, the Bacchanalian mysteries had come under scrutiny by the government and eventually outlawed. The Roman historian Livy (1970) noted that the Bacchic cult is not part of “authentic” Roman religion; for example, the cult is called a *prava religio* and is counted among dangerous foreign religions (39.16.6-10). The followers of Bacchus were “a people apart, on the fringe of the *Populus Romanus*, like the Christian church later on: a separatism that was heavy with menace” (Turcan, 1997, p. 303), and the visible presence of women was explained by the Roman historian Livy as due to their susceptibility “to religious frenzy” (Edwards, 1993, p. 44). In 186 BCE, nocturnal meetings and fires were banned, and access in and out of Rome was strictly monitored, and those involved in the cult of Bacchus were interrogated and punished. All Bacchic shrines in Italy, with the exception of altars and idols, were destroyed (Turcan, 1997).

Was the fluid nature of Bacchus and the cult the source of anxiety? Gruen (1990) noted that the Bacchic cult was beyond governmental control, and Livy used the word *coniuratio* which implies “subversion.” Despite its long-standing presence in Italy, the cult is described as having “alien rites” (Gruen, 1990, p. 48), and in plays of Plautus those who belong to the cult as seen as violent revelers who are irrational. Of particular note is a quote from his play, *The Bacchides* that hints at the fluid aspects of the cult: “... *sorores, quae hominum sorbent sanguinem*” (Gruen, 1990, p. 50). These, “sisters, who suck the blood of men” are female Bac-

chantes, and perhaps this quote indicates the existential terror the cult inspired in the (supposedly) rational patriarchy of Rome.

The association between women's particular connection to fluids, and thus creaturely aspects of nature, has repercussions in contemporary times. Roberts and colleagues (2002) measured how reminders of menstruation can lead to more negative reactions to women and increased objectification. In this study, a female member of the study team "accidentally" dropped either a tampon or hair clip out in front of participants, who were unaware that this occurrence was part of the research. When asked to evaluate her after the (fake part of) study, the results were disheartening. Dropping the tampon led to: lower evaluations of her competence, decreased liking for her, a tendency to avoid sitting near her, and increased objectification of women in general. Such findings align with what we know about aspects of sexism and misogyny: "Because of menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation, women are perceived as more closely tied to nature, and, at least in Western culture, this perception has been used to distinguish them from men, and ultimately to devalue them" (Roberts et al., 2002, p. 131). In order for these humans who lactate and have menstrual blood to become less of an existential threat (i.e., lessen their reminders of our creatureliness), their bodily fluids must be hidden and their bodies made into *objects* more so than creatures of nature. This objectification (in a very particular sense) explains why voluptuous near-bare breasts are considered (by many-but-not-all) to be acceptable for a store window advertisement, and yet a woman nursing a child with an exposed nipple might be (illogically) deemed to be indecent (Ussher, 1989; Yalom, 1997). Our fluids remind us that we are finite creatures subject to death.

Fluids seem integral to our perception of bodies, otherwise we are "just skin and bones," and perhaps it is our reaction to those fluids that produce the most heightened affective and emotional responses—a corpse, after all, elicits a response different from a dry skeleton. Similar to how, because of their connection to fluids, some Romans responded to the followers of Dionysos, as well as how contemporary societies continue to treat women in harmful ways, we can fervently react to affects of zombies. Ndalianis (2012) embodies this affect when she contrasts how the dead bodies of vampires and zombies function differently as potential sexual partners. Vampire lovers are seductive, but if one were to rewrite a similar sex scene with a zombie, the affect would evoke disgust and revulsion—the congealing blood as the rotting flesh is peeled away, the smell and ooze of decomposition as it mingles with saliva and sweat:

Her nails dug into his shoulders, and she felt the flesh give way, her fingers plunging inwards. She felt her fingertips touch a squishy, sticky substance and the first thing she notices when she pulled her hands away was the rancid, nauseating stench. Peering over her shoulder she gazed at her nails, which had pulled out with them bits of torn, rotting flesh, and her fingers dripped with an oozing, green substance... (p. 95)

This scene, had it been with a vampire would still be risqué in its bodily fluid exchange (e.g., blood as well as perhaps semen and vaginal fluid), but not to the same extent. Although eroticism breaks taboos, it clearly lies in the domain of (living) human bodies (Bataille, 1986). Vampires walk a:

fine line between life and death, but this teasing ultimately favors erotic life and undying passion. The zombie, on the other hand, steps firmly into the realm of death and, through the carnal presence of its animated and putrefying corpse, is a reminder to the living (both diegetic and beyond the diegesis) of what awaits them when life comes to an end. (Ndalianis, 2012, p. 97)

Although any fluid can remind us of our mortality, not every fluid does this to the same extent. The average person does not seem terribly affected by blood from a paper cut (although it is indeed unpleasant), and yet, returning to the menstruation example, menstrual blood elicits a strong response. Vampires, although sexual creatures, walk the line of what might be acceptable more delicately than zombies. Zombies ooze a variety of fluids in uncontrolled ways, while vampires' bodies remain more intact. Perhaps a comparison can be made to women's breasts. Cleavage is just sexual enough—teasing us about our potentially wild, sexual nature—while many consider nipples and areole to be too far. Vampires tease us with death while zombies slap us in the face with it. Particular fluids in situations where they are more untamed can be potent reminders of death, and zombie corpses tend to have these oozing liquids in abundance.

Considering the examples in this section—Bacchantes, women, and zombies—how might we engage with fluids like semen, blood, and breastmilk in ways that affirm life instead of denying death? We are arguing here in this paper that corpses provide a literal and figurative site for such educational endeavors. Returning to the ideas from Edwards (2018) at the beginning of our article, we see (and feel) corpses as an opportunity to trouble the liberal humanist subject of life “as an exceptional entity who exists apart from a world of animals and things and whose fate can be directed by the rationalist will” (p. 5).

As revolting and disgusting as most accounts are of seeing, smelling, and sensing a decomposing corpse and its fluids, even the affects of a corpse's fluids are not neat and clean guarantees of disgust. Doughty (2014) draws upon her years of experience as a mortician to explain to lay readers the curriculum of mortuary science and mortuary work. The scent of a decomposing corpse, in her words, is a complex one:

[T]he first note of a putrefying human body is of licorice with a strong citrus undertone. Not a fresh, summer citrus, mind you — more like a can of orange-scented industrial bathroom spray shot directly up your nose. Add to that a day-old glass of white wine that has begun to attract flies. Top it off with a bucket of fish left in the sun. That [...] is what human decomposition smells like. (Doughty, 2014, p. 158)

Whereas disgust is one curricular mode activated when encountering a corpse,

another curricular mode of the corpse relates to how humans subvert a propensity to deny their finite creatureliness.

### Corporeality and Mortality as a Curriculum of Denial

Humans (and perhaps other animals) are blessed and cursed with the knowledge of our finite bodily existence, and reminders of our limitedness (e.g., the sight of our bodily fluids outside our bodies) trigger our sense of creatureliness. We can project ourselves forward in time and anticipate our death occurring in a myriad of ways—all of which seems horrific to us. Such a situation provides us with an opportunity to consider what, then, comprises a good life, and thus “the fact that we die is the most important fact about us” (May, 2009, p. 4). Yet, many humans choose instead to deny their mortality, which exacts a toll on their relations with others as well as the planet because humans “use one another to assure their personal victory over death” (Becker, 1975, p. 108).

According to Becker (1973), “[m]an” is “out of nature and hopelessly in it... he [sic] sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever” (p. 26). Philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal identified the paradox that the more humans come to learn, the more we realize our insignificance—a situation which calls for “species-level humility” (Thacker, 2015a, p. 165). In many ways, humans are like our fellow animals on this planet. We eat, digest, and defecate. We feel urges and produce sexual fluids, and some of us procreate. And then we die. As far as the planet is concerned, each individual’s existence matters not: The planet does not care whether we are here or not (Thacker, 2011).

This situation, however, has not prevented some humans from exacting extraordinary damage on the planet—climate catastrophe is unfolding, in part, because many assume that the world is *for* humans, rather than us simply being one species of many on a planet that is ontologically intact with or without us. Scholars from diverging perspectives and disciplines have noted the need for many-but-not-all humans to rethink their arrogance; for example, in relation to climate catastrophe. Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (2017) have linked the concept of the Anthropocene to colonialism rather than a time when humans began to use technology to damage the planet in exacerbated ways. Drawing from their own experiences as well as the work of Indigenous scholars, they reveal that: “the ecocidal logics that now govern our world are not inevitable or ‘human nature’, but are the result of a series of decisions that have their origins and reverberations in colonization” (p. 763). The dangerous species arrogance of many-but-not-all humans continues to have profound aspects on the planet, our societies, and even our personal lives. This exemplifies the necrocene—an era of death and destruction of lives, cultures, and ways of existing. McBrien (2016) calls for humans to find ways of doing better as individuals and communities. Humility is necessary for this task and the grounding

effects (literally and figuratively) of the corpse can position persons to engage in this task.

Humans *could* be humbled by our (lack of) status, as illustrated by how Sheldon Solomon introduces himself: “a twitching blob of respiring biological protoplasm no more fundamentally significant or enduring than a lizard or a potato” (Reynolds, 2014) or by more ethical relations between and among the humans of the past, present, and future, as well as our other-than-human kin (Donald, 2009; Tallbear, 2016); but, unfortunately, many humans tend to do quite the opposite. We deny our limitedness and connectedness. As hard as we fight to claim “a towering majesty” (often to the detriment of others), at the end of our lives our bodies turn into corpses and return us to nature, and we do not take kindly to this knowledge, despite the opportunity to embrace a sort of bodily humility.

Instead of accepting our finite creatureliness, we can deny it. We try to devise ways of “transcending the world of flesh and blood... by devising an ‘invisible project’ that would assure [our] immortality” (Becker, 1975, p. 63). We cultivate a variety of personal immortality projects to leave an enduring imprint on the world (e.g., having children, building monuments, accumulating academic citations), as well as grounding ourselves in powers borrowed from those beyond us: parents, social groups, societies, and nations. Our cultural worldview, for example, tells us what came before us, why things are the way they are, and what will endure after us. But the price for this reassurance is steep.

The problem with adhering to cultural worldviews and nations as an antidote for terror is that all worldviews are to some extent arbitrary, fictional assemblages about the nature of reality, and thus require continual validation from others in order to remain believable. Exposure to cultures of people with alternate worldviews, especially those that are opposed to one’s own, therefore, potentially undermines one’s faith in the dominant worldview and the psychological protection it provides. When our buffer against our impermanence is removed, we can react in harmful ways. To illustrate, Harrington (1969) puts it this way:

Cruelty can arise from the aesthetic outrage we sometimes feel in the presence of strange individuals who seem to be making out all right... Have they found some secret passage to eternal life? It can’t be. If those weird individuals with beards and funny hats are acceptable, then what about my claim to superiority? Can someone like that be my equal in God’s eyes? Does he, that one, dare hope to live forever too—and perhaps crowd me out? I don’t like it. All I know is, if he’s right I’m wrong. So different and funny-looking. I think he’s trying to fool the gods with his sly ways. Let’s show him up. He’s not very strong. For a start, see what he’ll do when I poke him. (pp. 125-126)

If groups of people with opposing beliefs can be injured or killed, the implication is that their beliefs are truly inferior to our own. Further to this point, by eliminating large numbers of people with a different version of reality, the threatening worldview may cease to exist, and thus no longer pose a threat (e.g., Hirschberger et al.,

2016; Pyszczynski et al., 2006; Schimmel et al., 2007). Some of the most horrific human behaviors throughout history, namely war and genocide, are examples of annihilation as a form of worldview defense. As Baldwin (1962) aptly noted:

Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have. (para. 50)

We may harm (directly or indirectly) others during our quest for immortality. In the case of nationhood, we cling to our nation and thus are prone to shunning or even hurting those who construct reality differently. When dominant groups marginalize other groups, the stage is set for political underrepresentation (after all, those “weird individuals” have nothing to offer “us”) as well as oppression—the subjugation of the abject other. According to Becker (1975) we can affirm our symbolic immortality by taking the lives of others. In this way, our corporeality is denied, in part, by enhancing the bodily creatureliness and thus mortality of others. Mbembe (2005) noted “the life in death” and that “the taking of the enemy’s life is the privileged dialect of history” (p. 18). Through the idea of necropolitics, Mbembe (2003) shifted Foucault’s idea of biopower, specifically focusing on who is allowed to live, and who is left to die or killed: “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (p. 14). As such, mortality is “decoupled from the project of living—a direct relation to killing that renders impossible any subterfuge in a hallucinating disavowal of death in modernity” (Puar, 2007, p. 33). Mbembe flipped Foucault: Instead of death as affirming vitality, for Mbembe, death (especially death on a massive scale as in massacres) is evidence for “the brutality of biopower’s incitement to life” (Puar, 2007, p. 33).

Perhaps this turn of phrase seems to the reader to be inconsequential at first, and yet it more aptly explains how the death of one’s socio-political enemy can become the primary objective. If Power ignores death, then it makes little sense to focus on murder. Instead, it is Power that embraces the death of others—whoever is deemed to be “not us.” Necropolitics plays upon our existential fears. Those who threaten our nation (or other immortality projects) are evils that must be eradicated. Our heroic quest, then, is to annihilate it. One’s own group is “pure and good” and others “are the real animals, are spoiling everything for you, contaminating your purity and bringing disease and weakness into your vitality” (Becker, 1975, p. 93). Not only can lives be considered disposable, as we see in the context of precarity and biopolitics (such as Black, Brown, and Indigenous lives in Canada and the US), but also certain lives are seen as sacrificial in the name of immunizing the lives of those deemed good. The use of necropolitics, for example by governments, can manipulate and control people using “the language of survival” to gain support for physically harming or killing others, such as during the War on Terror (Braidotti, 2013, p. 122). Not only are those deaths acceptable, but they also serve a suppos-

edly positive function of protecting the rest of 'us' from harm. Such adherence to nations as immortality projects has led to bloody wars and much human suffering. Humans, when we are overcompensating for our mortality, can become intensely destructive:

The thing that makes man the most devastating animal that ever stuck his neck up into the sky is that he wants an earth that is not an earth but a heaven, and the price for this kind of fantastic ambition is to make the earth an even more eager graveyard than it naturally is. (Becker, 1975, p. 96)

If, as humans, we hope to accept our mortality and stop futile quests for immortality at the expense of others, then engagements with our fluid nature could be a powerful curricular mode.

### Corporeality and Mortality as a Curriculum of Dis- and Re-membering

We can turn to a more hermeneutic orientation of curriculum that considers what it means for the living to see another human as a member of the dead, to engage in practices of dis-membering and re-membering that build upon the affects and feelings created in the aftermath of denial for more affirming affective relations to mortality. Semantically, dismembering conjures images and associations with a destructive and violent inflection commonly encountered during scenes of instruction in a history course: cutting off a gangrenous arm in a U.S. Civil War medic camp; decapitation of an aristocrat at the guillotine in France; a market vendor's leg blown off during a suicide bombing in Afghanistan. Here, though, we consider dismemberment differently in thinking of funerary and mortuary practices that, through specific rituals, partition the corpse from living bodies and remove a dead body as member of a community of living bodies, to literally dis-member from the living. Similarly, we use remembering to refer to practices that allow a living body to recollect, recall, or reinstate a dead body as a member of a living body's community, practices by which the living to commune with the dead, to rejoin the fold.

Alaimo (2010) reorients our thinking about what it means to remember in a conventional sense, to recollect a thought or experience, by shifting the grounds of our subjectivity through how we think of our *selves* as members within a living collective, a "material world that is never merely an external place but always the very substance of ourselves and others" (p. 158). Whereas the previous two sections on disgust and denial use examples to break down humanist assumptions of the bodily and the creaturely, this section remains within this more-than-human realm of life and death to consider different objects that dis-member the human and, in turn, re-member them through different funerary and memorial practices.

There has been a rise in the number of green or ecofriendly funerals in the United States, in which companies process a corpse and mix the human remains

with straw and wood chips to place in the ground as a compost to help grow plants and flowers (Boylan, 2019). When actor Luke Perry died in 2019, he was buried in a mushroom suit, which is a biodegradable suit that interacts with the decomposition of his corpse to turn his remains into nutrients that re-enter the ground (Pesce, 2019). These and related trends in mortuary practices (at least within the United States) point to changing attitudes and relationships the living have with corpses that strive to re-orient our relationship to the deceased vis-à-vis our understanding and appreciation for what corpses do in efforts to ‘make sense’ of death and bring the irrationality and terror of death to a scientific, sensible, worldview. This approach to dis-memberment compels the living person to think about the corpse through processes of dis-memberment and the various ways one dis-members a corpse: through a burial at sea, a cremation, a dissolution in a bath of sulfuric acid, or mass burial in a grave or pit.

We can also see the corpse functioning as a curricular mode of re-membrance in some of the memorial practices of death in Japan. Families take the bodies of deceased family members away from hospital morgues and into their homes for an overnight wake that lasts through the following morning upon which the corpse is taken to a crematorium for remains to be cremated (Rich, 2017). As the population of elderly persons approaching death reaches higher and higher numbers in Japan, the country’s crematoria cannot rapidly process all of the corpses in need of cremation. As a result, *itai hoteru*, or “corpse hotels” in English, are spreading across Japan as a service in which families can spend the night in rooms with their family member’s corpse to properly practice mourning rites while the corpse then goes back into storage for a later cremation (Blakemore, 2017). In these corpse hotels, the corpse becomes a companion and a centerpiece. Spending the night with the dead takes on a literal dimension in this sense as the living dis-members the once living, by placing them in objects of death, such as a casket or coffin, and then re-members the corpse, breaking it away from daily actions with the corpse as it ‘rests’ or ‘remains’ in a ‘final’ place, thus allowing for the human to be in contact with these objects as conduits for remembering and recalling memories of the deceased as once living. We find the ease and acceptance of “living with the dead” (if only for a night and a long morning) illustrative of the broader sets of affects and practices that attend to rituals of wakes, viewings, and other ceremonies in which we the living are not traumatized or in refusal of being in contact with the dead. The corpse functions in this instance not as a subject of denial, but as an object of celebration through both dis-membering and re-membling.

This celebration with the dead is not unique to Japanese corpse hotels. In wakes, people gather to socialize and celebrate a deceased person, with the historical antecedent that mourners would stay awake with the dead until it was time to bury the corpse, keeping a watch or vigil over the corpse in the home. Wakes, viewings, funerals, and other mourning rituals may be seen as elaborate rituals for the relatively simple process of chucking and discarding the remains of deceased

persons, the very literal issue at heart of this journal's special issue. But to commune with the dead requires positioning the corpse as an object of celebration, commemoration, and reflection. In the United States, end-of-life ceremonies are changing to become more convivial and less somber affairs, channeling grief into different affective states in which the affective power of a corpse to move us is routed into parties, celebrations, and other festive occasions (Heller, 2019). All of this may seem infelicitous for opening new modes of thinking about mortality and corporeality in curriculum thought, but the process of dis-membering and re-membering radically shift what can be possible for reflection, a concept we find too grossly clichéd and drained of vitality within educational and curricular practice.

If we take communing with the dead to mean the process of feeling in close spiritual contact in one's thoughts and feelings with someone deceased, we often think of paranormal and supernatural scenarios such as seances, psychic medium readings, or the use of Ouija boards to allow the living to re-member the deceased into their community of living bodies. Yet, if we look back at the medieval history of Europe, we would see that communing with the dead occurred outside of these paranormal settings and involved both secular and sacred practices, practices that appear to us in the twenty-first century as more akin to the celebratory nature funeral services have adopted in recent years. For example, Rollo-Koster (2017) contends that after one-third of Europe's population died during the Black Death in the fourteenth century, attitudes towards death became more dispassionate, quotidian, and less fearful. Because corpses were, quite literally, everywhere, burying the dead was a growing and increasingly important industry, intertwined with people wishing to be buried close to saints. Pits were dug in the courtyards of churches, tombs were carved out below churches, and some bodies were even buried within church walls or placed in ornate cadaver tombs that feature effigies of the deceased as a skeleton or a decomposing corpse.

According to Ariès (1977/1981), in his history of how Europeans have approached death, people danced and partied in cemeteries, often taking walks through the graveyards of churches, for "the dead completely ceased to inspire fear" after "a lessening of the aversion that the dead inspired" (p. 36). This orientation to how we bring complacency and calm when surrounded by corpses (which emitted foul odors inside the unrefrigerated churches) shows how a physical re-membering alongside and with the dead reroutes affects of disgust and denial in the presence of posthuman, living-dead assemblages amongst bodies and earth.

### Corporeality and Mortality as a Curriculum of Disruption

We believe humans have very little incentive to consider the pedagogical aspects of corpses—and even are psychologically discouraged from doing so. Yet, the disruptive potentialities arising from these corpse encounters are many. The places where we encounter corporeality and mortality help us in asking Wallin's question

of how a life might go because they render visible some discomfiting lessons about humans' mortality that disrupt our humanist sensibilities. Encountering a dead body often triggers uncomfortable and difficult knowledge(s), disruptive moments of learning in which the corpse becomes a curricular text producing "both cognitive and affective responses of discomfort and unease" (Sandlin & Letts, 2014, p. 1).

In Philadelphia's Mütter Museum of medical history, human anatomical anomalies are displayed for visitors in jars, glasses, cases, and through other technologies of representation. The cadaverous collection of infantile corpses, mummified heads, and preserved organs are meant to educate and enlighten, as evidenced in the museum's tag line of enabling visitors to become 'disturbingly informed' (Aptowicz, 2014). Although the Mütter Museum focuses on representations of medical history from the 19th century amidst a Victorian and Edwardian aesthetic, it is similar to museums such as the anatomy and pathology collections in the United States Defense Health Agency's National Museum of Health and Medicine; the skinned cadavers in France's Musée Fragonard; and almost a thousand embalmed body parts at the Museum Boerhaave in the Netherlands (Cichanowicz, 2016).

More contemporarily, Lee (2014) reminds us of the disorienting and disruptive effects of the once massively popular Body Worlds exhibitions that traveled on display around the world. These anatomical displays allowed visitors in science museums and other places of learning "to view plastinated cadavers, posed in striking arrangements of partial dissection and intactness" (p. 5). The disruptive effects of the corpses on display in the Body World exhibits implicate the living viewer to consider "violating notions of the human" such as in how one "flayed specimen's holding his "coat" of skin in his hand—and their flagrant use of human tissues" disrupts the living's comfortable sense of embodiedness (Lee, 2014, p. 5). This disruption is disclosed to the living viewer through "a speculated relation between the carved-up tissues and a certain life narrative" (Lee, 2014, p. 5). By collecting, curating, and exhibiting anatomical oddities, deformities, pathologies, and specimens drawn from a multitude of corpses, these museums mean to educate through affects of disruption in what could be argued as a morbid and macabre curriculum of mortality and corporeality.

This disruption is akin to what Domanska (2005) sees as a frequent "exhumation process" of our engagement with the dead in how our "treatment of dead bodies as evidence introduces radical distance" between us, the living, as "subject" and the corpse as an "object of analysis" working to force us in curriculum, as both students and teachers, to consider "scientific patterns of discourse about scientific truth, objectivity... and the dead body's helplessness to resist the violence of a variety of discourses" (p. 403). Foucault (1963/1973) links different historical moments in the Enlightenment to show how corpses, often operating as medical cadavers, functioned as eminent sites of learning for scientists as well as sites of disciplining the medical gaze of physicians. In this genealogy of medical knowledge, Foucault points out the way corpses work as a kind of curriculum text, in which the corpse disrupted

scientific and medical knowledge to work through the emergence of new knowledge of the body and its mysteries. Working to disrupt prior regimes of knowledge, “the corpse became the brightest moment in the figures of truth” through studying corpses “where once larva was formed” (Foucault, 1963/1973, p. 125).

Foucault’s historical scene of the corpse and Enlightenment knowledge tracks with how literature, art, and popular culture portray Enlightenment-era Europe as full of zealous physicians, mad scientists, curious surgeons, robbing graves and experimenting on corpses in the vein of Dr. Frankenstein, all in the name of disrupting what humans believed about the body and its capacities. These capacities are also at work in what Shapira (2018) notes in a detailed study of how disruptive encounters with human remains and corpses worked to “thrill” readers, scientists, and the public in eighteenth-century Europe, whether the corpse is “riddled with worms or idealized into an object of ethereal beauty” (p. 6). An effect of the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment has been to discipline and control the disruptive effects of the corpse and the living’s encounters with human remains, whether they be in the form of putrefying flesh of bodies rotting in a cobblestone street, or the limp bodies hanging from gibbets in a town square, or the pockmarked and blackened skin of bodies that succumbed to sickness, disease, malnourishment, famine, and lack of sanitation.

This approach to the corpse as a disruptive site of knowledge and awareness for the living exists today in the form of body farms. In 2019 the United Kingdom opened its first body farm, also known as a forensic cemetery or taphonomy facility, which allows researchers to place corpses in open-air settings, shallow graves, and floating pools to better observe and study processes of decomposition, skeletonization, and fossilization (Adam, 2019). In the United States, the Forensic Anthropology Center at the University of Tennessee Knoxville opened in 1980 and continues to use donated corpses and human remains in the training of forensic anthropology and skeletal biology (Fitter, 2019). In these spaces, the bodily materiality of the corpse enlightens us and educates us through knowledge of what happens to bodies after death. Considering this function of a corpse calls our attention to the many things the living do with corpses: we dig graves and bury bodies, but also exhume corpses when digging them up to study them; we dissect and inspect bodies through autopsies and coroner reports; we experiment, embalm, and cremate corpses; and we store corpses, sometimes for scientific and legal purposes, such as in laboratories and morgues, and other times for purposes of sacred ritual and remembrance, such as in charnel houses, crypts, and mausoleums.

When the corpse is used to educate and enlighten, it enacts what Frieze (2019) identifies as an animating concern of a “forensic turn” in the humanities and social sciences, a turn focused on discovering, identifying, and presenting evidence in an objective, methodological way to unlock a secret or yield information, like the calculated and rational endeavors of a detective such as Sherlock Holmes or a forensic investigator on *Bones* or *CSI*. According to Frieze (2019), “death is no barrier to the flow of information that is the lifeblood of the forensic; and, in forensic culture, in-

formation seems not only to cheat but to *exert* death” (emphasis his; p. 31). A critical corpse studies would ask where and how the corpse has been used to disrupt received wisdom of being human via a curriculum of corporeality and mortality.

As social studies educators, we both have encountered the corpse in our teaching and our curricula as a disruptive object of instruction and explication. In our history classes, for example, corpses appear in lessons on the guillotine in the French Revolution; sacrifice in Mayan and Aztec civilizations; starvation as a result of colonialism in nineteenth-century Ireland; the path of the plague during the Black Death; the emaciated bodies in the concentration camps of the Holocaust; the genocide of peoples in the various slave trades around the world; the high death toll of World War II and the obliterated bodies of victims of the atomic bomb’s destruction in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to name only a few of the more gruesome and perennial topics in the social studies curriculum. These are perhaps disciplinary ways a corpse disrupts historical knowledge, but we wish to briefly discuss less intuitive ways that corpses disrupt our knowledge, in a subtle fashion, through routes in the history curriculum that produce affective responses different from disgust and denial found in the previous examples.

Our example is in teaching about ancient Egypt. In looking back at my teaching, I (Mark) recalled how prominent mummification was in my history curriculum as a cipher for understanding complex beliefs, values, and histories entwined in ancient Egyptian art, literature, and culture. When I have taught middle-grade students about the process of how Egyptians mummified bodies, I would lead students through a process of mummifying apples with salt and baking soda. The objective of the lesson was less on teaching the natural processes of decomposition that leads to the skeletonization and disintegration of bodies, but rather on the processes of how Egyptians worshipped, commemorated, and celebrated the dead, with ornamental sarcophagi and jewelry; canopic jars that stored a body’s viscera and organs; hieroglyphic inscriptions in funerary tombs; and mythological sources for ancient Egyptian beliefs in the afterlife. And yet the affective power of mummifying apples with my students was not in the aesthetic choices we made to adorn our mummies; rather, it occurred in our comprehension and observation of the decomposition of the apple itself. We watched it shrivel up, wrinkle, putrefy, and become, by all outward appearances, “dead,” an apple corpse.

Later, when my students and I would travel to a local history museum in our city to view an ancient Egyptian mummy exhibited in a display of the museum founder’s (politically and ethically questionable) trips to Egypt in the 1920s to collect ancient artifacts, we would think about our apples as we gazed at the body in the enclosed glass display. That gaze becomes a mechanism through which our engagement with corpses so often transpires as an educative act. Life, in these instances of gazing, is disrupted with thinking about the dead and “make of death an object of affirmation and joy, rather than one of fear, sorrow, and negation...as the absolute possible of our being” (Locke, 2016, p. 23).

The mummified corpse functioned for me and my students as an object lesson in death and in considering the very concept of ancient Egypt as weird and eerie, feelings that disrupted what we take for granted not only about being alive, but in the ways of becoming-corpse in our modern era that make ancient Egyptian mortuary practices feel so alien and unsettling. Fisher (2016) approaches the eerie as when something is absent or unaccounted for and we cannot explain or know why, a disruptive sense of absence through dread, and the weird as that which arrests our attention because it makes us confront something we see that feels out of place, threatening, disorienting, or inexplicable, a disruptive sense of presence through dread. The mummy's corpse and its items in the glass display case made ancient Egypt weird for me and my students because seeing clay jars containing body organs and large metal hooks utilized to remove brain tissue through the corpse's nose are disorienting, a disturbing presence that makes us think "it should not exist" through "a sensation of wrongness" (Fisher, 2016, p. 15). It is not that this preserved corpse and the jars for its organs and the tools for its dismemberment and preservation are inherently wrong, invalid, or illogical; rather, the affects of the weird are that we are seeing these things in a space where we often do not or feel we should not gaze upon them—a museum, a place of learning and 'appropriate' things, as is our relation to schools.

These disruptive affects may amount to what Thacker (2015b) calls "the limit of thought, human characters confronted with the limit of the human" that unsettles our foundations for making sense of being in a human-centric world (p. 11). This unease corresponds to what Kristeva (1980/1982) theorizes about the abjection we find in corpses. The insistent materiality of death, for Kristeva, disrupts us when we see a corpse, especially a corpse of someone we know or love, because it makes confronting our own mortality more real and visceral. The disruption from a corpse is an instance of "death infecting life" as the corpse draws our desire to the compulsion of facing up to death through the abjection of the corpse (Kristeva, 1980/1982, p. 4). We can endeavor across our disciplinary fields to work towards a spirit of curriculum that approaches corporeality and morality for this purpose, tracing disruptive moments when death infects life and unsettles us.

### A Final Rest: Concluding Thoughts

Our forays into a critical corpse studies have illustrated how the corpse activates curricular modes of disgust, denial, dis-/re-memberment, and disruption. Animated by our realization that certain bodies are privileged over others in curriculum, we have found thinking with and through the corpse informative insofar as it opens up new possibilities for thinking about relations between life/death, the living/the dead, the corporeal/incorporeal, and the human/nonhuman. The fluids in our bodies remind us of our status as creatures, and if we can overcome our denial of death and our associated creatureliness, we might engage in a different ethics.

Despite the topic being one of corpses and death, we find this area of inquiry to be hopeful: “To be a creature is to accept our dependence and limitedness in a way that does not result in disaffection and despair. It is rather the condition for courage and endurance” (Critchley, 2009, p. 248-249). This hope is not about a command to be happy and deny the troubling times within which we find ourselves. Rather, this hope is *radical* in the sense of Lear (2006)—a hope that taps into our shared vulnerability in precarious times.

What can educators and curricularists try to do to achieve a radically hopeful way of being that becomes more attentive through disgust, denial, dis-memberment, and disruption? First, in order to pluck up the intestinal fortitude required to face our mortality, we need conceptual tools. Without such tools, the potentialities of educational engagements with corporeal curriculum are limited. As discussed in this article, these educational engagements with mortality can help us live. Perhaps we might treat our finite lives as May (2009) suggests—like we would an antique watch. He doesn’t want us to keep it in a museum or locked away at home so that we cannot really engage with it, but neither does he want us to treat the watch in a cavalier way. Instead, we might be “careful: not neurotically careful, but careful in the way of enjoying it without abusing it” (p. 86). Through a consideration of corpses, we might disrupt our patterns of denial and instead embrace our status as interconnected creatures living among others on the planet. At the very least, we must acknowledge that in educative spaces ignoring and denying death simply will not do and is educative malpractice.

Secondly, we can implicate ourselves in a pedagogy and curriculum that pursues lessons in which a human becoming a corpse is not an end to a body’s agency in the world, and, as such, exists as an educational site. In particular, experiences with corpses and their fluids have a curricular potential not only to teach us about our resistance to the idea of death but also to help us resist overly rational, disembodied, and narrowly-focused learning outcomes. Corpses are not the waste of a living body, and rejecting their power does us a disservice. The fact that a corpse is an assemblage of tissues, viscera, bacteria, fluids, odors, and always in flux molecularly render the corpse a dynamic curricular vessel.

Whether we teach literally with corpses, as perhaps common in a biology or anatomy course, or figurative, as perhaps in a literature or history course, we can resist any arresting nature of thought through the corpse’s decomposition, its array of cultural, historical, biological, chemical, and political meaning(s) that always gesture and refer to something else: a Great Beyond, an afterlife, a pine box, a memorial shrine, a crematorium, a hole in the ground six feet under, ashes spread in the wind, a body rotting into the soil, a DNA sample, a dental record, something that is no longer with ‘us’ the living. Through a recognition of these and other examples of a corpse’s place in the world we are forced to consider what we have neglected, and thus opens up the space to imagine more meaningful educational encounters in schools and beyond.

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