

**Political Pedagogies of Death:
Speculating New Curricular Futures**

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ABSTRACT

The current socio-historical moment is socially and environmentally precarious and our collective societal future is uncertain. This seems the ideal moment to reflect on what has been and envision what could be in education and more broadly. In this dissertation, the author speculatively theorizes, dreams, and envisions new curricular futures. Engaged with the marginal educational field of death education and the under-theorized space of death as a curricular concept, the author gestures toward death and death education as potential pathways to a politically resistant form of interiority. Interiority, or self-knowledge, is the author's response to the fundamental question of curriculum theory—what knowledge is of most worth?—and forms the center of the author's speculative theorizing. Framed as a complicated conversation, this work seeks to hold divergent paradigms of thought together toward provoking new understandings. Death education and interiority have both historically been framed in terms of the humanistic, and death education is often tacitly presented apolitically. In conversation with critical, posthuman, and Indigenous theories, the author challenges these limited framings of death education, articulating various political pedagogies of death and implications for education more generally. Ultimately, the author reframes death education as a call for a curriculum focused on interiority—interiority not as self-knowledge, but as self-in-relation. This relational vision of interiority is informed by pedagogical notions of attending—attending to waste, attending to corpse, attending to Land, and attending to Ancestors—which form pathways to developing relationships with the under-appreciated more-than-human and non-human others with which we humans are always co-present.

DEDICATION

To the Land and everything else.

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Chapter One: Futurity, Death, and Interiority

As long as there are dreamers left, there will never be want for a dream – Cherie Dimaline, The Marrow Thieves (2017, p. 231)

We are in a mess, you know; we have to get out and only the archaic definition of the word ‘dreaming’ will save us: to envision; a series of images of unusual vividness, clarity, order, and significance – Toni Morrison’s 1988 Sarah Lawrence Commencement Address (Morrison, 2019, p. 69)

Curricular Futurities

The Austrian psychologist Victor E. Frankl is perhaps best known for his autobiographical account of surviving imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp, a text titled *Man’s Search for Meaning* (2006). Frankl, however, is also credited with founding the field of logotherapy—a form of psychoanalysis that emphasizes the will to meaning rather than Freud’s will to pleasure and Adler’s will to power (Frankl, 2006). His emphasis on meaning left Frankl with a rather optimistic disposition toward his fellow human beings. Notably, after the end of the Second World War, Frankl stayed in Austria and sought reconciliation with his neighbors, many of whom had been complicit in his persecution and imprisonment (Frankl, 2006). For Frankl, a personal meaning of life can be derived from work, love, and suffering, but each of these must look toward the future in some capacity. In the concentration camps,

A man [sic] who could not see the end of his [sic] “provisional existence” was not able to aim at an ultimate goal in life. He [sic] ceased living for the future... therefore the whole structure of his [sic] inner life changed; signs of decay set in. (p. 70)

According to Frankl, without the capacity to envision a personal future, we begin to rot from the inside out. The weight Frankl gives to the future resonates deeply in the current

socio-environmental moment, and indeed amid the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some have said that we are in crisis (Kumar, 2013), others that we sit at the precipice of dystopia (Saul, in press), others still that these are “disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times” (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). Regardless of the language used to describe it, there seems a wide acknowledgement that the current moment is a precarious, uncertain one (see also Bauman, 2007). In January of 2020, Australia was on fire with no reprieve in sight (The Associated Press, 2020). The year before, it was the Amazon; massive fires, caused in no small part by deforestation, ate away at the Earth’s lungs. Closer to home, the Wolostog river flooded in 2018 and 2019—a comparatively gentle reminder of climate change and its impacts. By far the most significant example of our precarity, however, is the (at this point) ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, which many have aptly identified as an environmental issue (e.g., Nano, 2020). At moments like this, what happens next is anyone’s guess.

Yet guess, or more accurately dream, we mustⁱⁱ—individually, as suggested by Frankl, but also as a society. In this societal regard, it is not the lack of a vision for the future that has led to decay, but rather an adherence to a misguided vision that demands progress and economic growth at any cost. This vision has left devastation in its wake for all but those artificially elevated atop the hierarchies of life—humans atop animals, plants, and places (e.g., Haraway, 2016; Kimmerer, 2013); the economic elite atop everyone else (e.g., Bauman, 2007; Latour, 2017). The current socio-environmental moment invites a serious consideration of the futures to which we have tacitly

contributed, but it also offers opportunity to envision something beyond the limits of current societal structures.

Schooling, as a microcosm of society (MacDonald & MacDonald, 1995), has been complicit with the structures and ideologies that have brought us to the current moment. Indeed, there is no shortage of literature detailing the neoliberal (Kumar, 2019; Ross & Gibson, 2007), settler colonial (Smith, Tuck, & Yang, 2019; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013), patriarchal (Grumet & Stone, 2000), ableist (Holt, 2004), racist (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and heteronormative (Castro & Sujak, 2014) structures of schooling. Despite these critiques, the system as a whole has continued more or less unchanged. By maintaining the structure of schooling, visions of the future have been effectively stymied, limited to less oppressive iterations of what already exists rather than a complete reconceptualization. This moment, however, seems ideal for dreaming. Now that schools have been shut down in every Canadian province and territory because of the COVID-19 pandemic, visioning something different is not only possible, but essential.

As the two quotes that begin this work would suggest, this dissertation is fundamentally concerned with visioning, dreaming, and speculatively theorizing alternative curricular futures. My avenue into this speculative theorizing is through the concept of death and the area of death education. In particular, I seek to speak back to the underlying and seemingly inescapable tendrils of settler colonialism, neoliberalism, and hierarchical ideology (Kumar, 2019)ⁱⁱⁱ by speculatively theorizing, (re)visioning,^{iv} and (re)conceptualizing the curricular spaces of death and death education.

Conceptual discussions of death in the broad educational literature are uncommon. In that, death is an under-theorized space, one that is replete with provocative possibilities for curriculum theory. In philosophy, existentialism, theology, and phenomenology have offered the most prevalent lenses in the study of death (Barry, 2007; Fairfield, 2015), and the few curriculum theorists who have conceptually engaged death also work from those positions (e.g., Pinar, 1992; Slattery, 1989). The study of death through these various lenses, which I consider part of a humanistic perspective, offers a call to inwardness or interiority (Fairfield, 2015). In other words, death offers us a conceptual space in which to cultivate rich internal lives and, as I will explore below, I see interiority as both the curricular knowledge of most worth and a tangible starting point for a more just future.

Though educational theory broadly tends to avoid the topic of death, death education as a specific field has a unique and robust literature. Death education can mean many things, and a full accounting of the field is taken up in chapter two, but here it can be generally understood as education about death and related topics, such as loss and grief. Although it began with rather broad intentions through the Death Awareness Movement in the 1960s (Doka, 2015), death education has become most common in medical professions, and there it has been largely reduced to technical discussions (Wass, 2004). There has, thus, been a sustained call for more humanistic death education (Wass, 2004). When used in death education, the term humanistic does not generally refer to the existential, phenomenological, or theological lenses listed above, but rather to the psychological dimensions of death, particularly death anxiety, grief, and bereavement. Indeed, existential discussions in death education are few and far between

(Lamers, 2012). This is one of the limitations I see with the current scope of death education. Others include the complete absence of critical, posthuman, and Indigenous theories from the literature. While I am interested in the potential of death and death education, inclusive of their respective and mutual humanistic forms, to provoke new curricular futures (particularly ones focused on self-knowledge), any vision of the future must be grounded in an understanding of socially endemic political issues, past and present. As such, my speculation attempts to expand the theoretical focus of death and death education beyond the humanistic (taken throughout to refer broadly to the psychological, existential, phenomenological, and theological lenses referenced above), toward the critical, the posthuman, and the Indigenous.

Death education and the concept of death in education are both marginal and thereby somewhat subversive to the dominant educational discourse. In some ways, in its current humanistic form, death education speaks back to dominant pedagogical modalities and curricular foci by encouraging us to stay with the messiness of death. Death education is also, however, currently entangled with neoliberal, settler colonial, and hierarchical thought structures by way of its adherence to developmentalism, humanism, human exceptionalism, and the empiricization of research. My project here is, thus, twofold: 1) to (re)vision death education through conversation with critical, Indigenous, and posthumanist theories; and 2) to use death as a conceptual site for dreaming a curricular ethos beyond (but responsive to) the limits of what currently exists.

In this introductory chapter, I lay the foundation for the following discussion. I begin by grounding my work in the field of curriculum theory. I then discuss humanistic

considerations of death and death education. In particular, I explore several of my own humanistic justifications for the study of death, gesture toward death as a site for subversive inwardness or interiority (Fairfield, 2015), and highlight some ways the current humanistic focus of death education can be reconsidered in light of critical, posthuman, and Indigenous theories. I conclude this opening chapter by discussing the structure of my dissertation and offering a brief overview of the remaining chapters in this work. While this chapter introduces my dissertation as a whole, the first three chapters explore the conceptual foundations of this work. The fourth chapter serves as a transition from those foundations into the realm of speculation—which is the project of chapters five and six. The seventh chapter seeks to conclude the work. Though this text is focused on death, it is fundamentally a work of curriculum theory, and thus the conversation must begin there. Below, I elucidate the rootedness of my work in curriculum theory.

Curriculum Theory

This dissertation is situated within the discipline of curriculum theory in its positioning of death and death education as conceptual curricular space. Where curriculum is concerned, I frame my inquiry as complicated conversation, a notion put forward by renowned curriculum theorist William F. Pinar (2012). Since the 1970s, Pinar's intellectual commitment to the study of curriculum has yielded a wealth of theory including the beginnings of the reconceptualist movement (Pinar, 1988) and major contributions to the conceptualization of curriculum as racialized (Castenell & Pinar, 1993), gendered (Pinar, 2003; see also Pinar & Grumet, 1976), postmodern

(Pinar, 1994), and international (Pinar, 2013). Through all of this, Pinar has maintained a commitment to the idea that the study of curriculum is a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2012). This notion of curriculum as a complicated conversation acknowledges the myriad voices at work within the educational experience. Curriculum is not simply a noun, a thing to be implemented by a teacher, but also the lived experience of the students and teachers, as well as the things that affect their learning and becoming. Through this notion of curriculum as a complicated conversation, which—whether named or not—was at the heart of the reconceptualization, curriculum theory is opened up to a diversity of ideas, experiences, theories, and disciplines. Curriculum theory as a field of study thus moves—and indeed has moved—beyond what happens in schools into the expansive realm of human experience that constitutes education. In chapter three, I will return to the notion of complicated conversation toward a justification for my particular open-ended approach to theoretical research. The relationship between my work and curriculum theory, however, extends beyond this expansive hermeneutic frame.

One of the central concerns of Western curriculum studies over the past century has been determining what knowledge is of most worth or, more recently, determining what is worthwhile (Schubert, 2010). This question of worth is a projection of the past into the future—a futurity, or a way that “the future is rendered knowable through specific practices (i.e. calculation, imagination, and performance) and, in turn, intervenes upon the present through three anticipatory logics (i.e., pre-caution, pre-emption and preparedness)” (Baldwin, 2012, p. 173, as cited in Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 80). In determining what is worth sharing with the next generation,

we make tacit assumptions about the future and act upon those assumptions. The question of worth discussed above, then, is of paramount importance in both understanding the manner in which neoliberal settler-colonial ideological intrusion into curriculum has contributed to the current socio-environmental moment, as well as in speaking back to it.

My curricular (re)visioning/reconceptualizing/dreaming as an act of theorizing emergent from a complicated conversation should be read within the tradition of curriculum inquiry, not curriculum development, measurement, or implementation.

Robert Nellis (2009) explains:

Being apart from apparatuses of bureaucratic measurement, the field of curriculum inquiry is able to explore a richer, more diverse sense of educational phenomena. It discovers alternative understandings of theories, assumptions, implications, and identities of educational actors and is often oriented toward change. Nevertheless, I do not regard the field in reductive contradiction to mandated curricula... Instead, I see curriculum inquiry moving toward a confluence of theory and practice. (p. 13)

My (re)visioning and (re)thinking are oriented toward change, both in a theoretical sense and a practical curricular sense.

More specifically, it is the current likelihood of an ongoing environment-related crisis event—an event encompassing of, and also beyond, the immense scope of COVID-19—that provides the impetus for the (re)visioning of curricular priorities undertaken in this dissertation. If, as some have written, we sit at the precipice of dystopia (Saul, in press) or exist in crisis (Kumar, 2013), it seems an intuitive and ethical response to radically redefine our answers to the fundamental questions of

curriculum such that they are reflective of the uncertainty to come—indeed, the uncertainty in which we now live.

My theorizing is aimed at provoking new curricular possibilities—a common theme in Canadian curriculum studies.^{vi} As such, it should be understood as an act of suggestion and speculation rather than an argument, polemic, or empiric statement of capital “T” Truth. These latter forms seem to me to be the work of philosophers of education rather than curriculum theorists. Though there are occasional overlaps between the two, the lineage of curriculum theory as a form of inquiry unique to education makes it distinct as a typology of thought—though it is sometimes informed by philosophy among a myriad of other forces. My project, as a work of curriculum theory does not seek capital T truth but, as I will elaborate more fully in the third chapter, “truthful exchange with others” (Leggo, 2007, p. 30). My intent here is to provoke new visions of curriculum, visions which both “[stay] with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016, title) of the current moment and dream something beyond it.

My truthful response to the key curricular question above is that self-knowledge is the knowledge of most worth, and this position is in some degree supported by both death education and curriculum theory. Though the significance of self-knowledge, and particularly self-in-relation (Graveline, 1998; Styres, 2017), is discussed throughout this dissertation, two points are worth elaborating here. First, regardless of the external circumstance in which we find ourselves, our internal realities stay with us (and we with them). If we are conflicted, fearful, jealous, or shallow, we will remain as such regardless of whether we are living a life of luxury and comfort or fighting for survival after environmental collapse. Second, as explored below, I believe societal change

begins with individual, internal change (Kumar, 2013; Mitchell, 2018). This belief should in no way be interpreted as a dismissal of the necessity for structural change nor an exoneration of individual and societally structured exploitation and hatred. Rather, I consider it a simple acknowledgement that in order for true, meaningful change to happen, it must *begin* with a shifting of hearts and a shifting of minds. The aim of a curricular focus on self-knowledge, then, is toward social and environmental transformation/resurgence/re-invigoration—which is sorely needed if we are to repair or otherwise move forward from the environmental, human, and more-than-human damage of hierarchal ideologies (Mitchell, 2018; see also Bookchin, 1982; Krishnamurti, 1992).

From a practical standpoint, I am interested in disrupting the humanist^{viii} underpinnings of death education. This project is aimed at envisioning education centered on self-understanding situated within the complex and various entanglements that transcend the human (Barad, 2007). It is not just self-knowledge in which I am interested, then, but what Graveline (1998) might refer to as a self-in-relation and what Haraway (2016) calls becoming-with rather than simply becoming. As I will discuss in my literature review, death education is often justified in terms of its ethical importance where the emotional lives of students are concerned (e.g., Durant, 2018; Wass, 2004) and in terms of the potential for intellectual rigour afforded by the scope of the topic (e.g., Ulin, 1977). While I agree with these premises, and the value of death education more broadly, I think death education has much more to offer us when reconsidered not through humanistic lenses, but through critical, posthuman, and Indigenous ones. While humanistic death education can be an avenue toward creating spaces more receptive to the cultivation of a rich internal life within the experience of schooling (Fairfield,

2015)—and in that, has subversive value—death education that considers the wider entanglement of the human with the more-than-human, and particularly their/our material remains (Edwards, 2018; Haraway, 2016; Harwood, Whitty, Elliot, & Rose, 2018), points us toward an environmental ethic sorely needed in the current moment. Indeed, as Haraway (2016) would have it,

Grief is a path to understanding entangled shared living and dying; human beings must grieve *with*, because we are in and of this fabric of undoing. Without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think [emphasis original]. (p. 39)

In attending carefully to our own material deaths, as well as creating a space to mourn and otherwise sit with the deaths that surround us, the study of death in schools and beyond has the potential to radically (re)imagine society. At present, it should suffice to say that through (re)thinking an already marginal area of education (death education), and in drawing on what I consider a subversive topic (death), I hope to push the complicated conversation toward a collective visioning of a future beyond, and responsive to, the exploitative societal structures to which our current school system is bound. In the subsequent section, I detail those societal structures as manifest in schooling and highlight the capacity of death and death education to speak back to them.

Death

As noted above, death is a marginal topic in education. Though there is a substantive body of literature focused on death education, the vast majority is aimed at medical professionals (Wass, 2004). Only a subset of the literature calls for sustained considerations of death within public curriculum (Durant, 2018; King-McKenzie, 2011;

Kortes-Miller, 2014; Testoni et al., 2018, 2019; Ulin, 1977), though many argue for a more substantial societal engagement with death (Doka, 2015; Kortes-Miller, 2018; Wass, 2004). Conventional justifications for death education are often articulated in humanistic terms (Wass, 2004) and, although several outside the literature of death education point toward the educative value of attending to the deaths of the more-than-humans around us (Harwood et al., 2018; see also Haraway, 2016), death educators are often primarily concerned with the emotional, cognitive, practical, and social benefits of studying death (e.g., Durant, 2018; Kortes-Miller, 2014, 2018).

In this section, I outline my own humanistic justifications for the study of death, which are rather more conceptual than those within the death education literature. Specifically, there are three interrelated humanistic points about death that interest me: its messiness, its universality, and its metaphorical relationship to change (death-as-change; the losses of learning; mourning). Each of these justifications can be read as emerging from the aforementioned notion of death as a conceptual space calling for inwardness, where “death itself is an affair of inwardness” (Fairfield, 2015, p. 3) and inwardness can be countercultural in the current moment (Coleman, 2009)—a starting point for social change. Although challenging to the dominant literature, this humanistic death education is not without its problems, particularly in the current socio-environmental moment. As such, I close this section by gesturing toward the need to rethink the field of death education—even my own conceptually subversive death education—in light of critical, posthuman, and Indigenous theory.

Human, all too human.^{viii} In his 2003 chapter, “A Pedagogy of Technological Replacement,” David Blades uses a fictitious futuristic setting in which the last human is about to die in order to reflect on the relationship between our humanity and technology. In it, he quotes from I Corinthians 15:26, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” Drawing on Blades and occupying a strategically humanist point of view, I think this quote points toward something core about humanity—that were it not for death, our lives would no longer be recognizably human. Human existence, as we have historically known it in a material sense, is necessarily temporal; our time here is limited, and the limitation of time seems to give human life recognizable meaning (see also Braidotti, 2013; Edwards, 2018, p. 174; Kortes-Miller, 2018, p. 23). If human beings were able to continue on living in perpetuity, the frame of reference for the meanings we ascribe to our lives would be vastly different—unimaginably so, I would argue. This notion is informed by existentialist readings of death where “death is a condition of meaning” (Fairfield, 2015, p. 29). Blades would have it that the biblical passage quoted above can, and perhaps *should* in the 21st century, be read as a statement that no matter what discomforts we may be able to alleviate—what messy, chaotic, human experiences we may be able to hide—so long as the fact of our death persists, we will remain human.

Modernization can be read as a process of sanitization—of systematically removing that which makes us uncomfortable; for example, death (Fairfield, 2015; Illich, 1975).^{ix} One of the last externally visible vestiges of our messy, chaotic, human selves—and one of the greatest sources of anxiety, uncertainty, and fear (Barry, 2007; Kortes-Miller, 2018)—is the fact that we, at some point, undergo a physical death. We have, as of yet, been unable to rid ourselves of the burden of dying, and thus modern

Western society has attempted the next best thing—to avoid thinking about it at any cost. This is what many who write about death refer to as the cultural ethos of denying and defying death—dominant Western death-denying culture, as it were (e.g., Barry, 2007; Durant, 2018; Fairfield, 2015; Kastenbaum, 1981; King-McKenzie, 2011; Kortess-Miller, 2018; Ulin, 1977).

As stated above, death is one of the last places in which our chaotic humanness is made externally visible. I see two separate meanings in this sentiment. First, there is the (admittedly morbid) fact that you and I will both one day be corpses.^x In this sense, we will cross the imaginary boundaries that have been constructed between subject and object, self and other, or animate and inanimate; we will transition from being alive and capable of maintaining an internal life to being an object—a thing, a corpse, an other—and the focus of largely external concerns (i.e., the preparation of the dead). The uncertainty involved in this transition can evoke in us a certain revulsion, and when dwelt within that revulsion leads to what Julia Kristeva (1982) called abjection, or the redefinition of self by way of the expulsion of the other with/in. Drawing on Kristeva and others (e.g., Ardnt, 2017; Žižek, 2006a, 2006b), I think there is a certain countercultural curricular and societal significance in dwelling within these revolting experiences—those experiences that force us to confront the not-quite-other and the not-quite-self and which propel us into seeing that which we have pushed away: the chaotic and fragile messiness of our existence. More succinctly, from a humanistic perspective, I believe there is a curricular value in what some call pedagogy of discomfort (e.g., Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2015), and death education is a space that allows us to attend to

our discomfort and learn from it (in much the same way that Carl Leggo positions his grief as a teacher, for example [Leggo, 2017]).^{xi}

The second meaning of my statement above is that death, from the perspective of the living, is an emotionally charged event. We have all experienced loss of this nature and can at least sympathize with the weight of mourning. Mourning, in Western culture, is one of the few times when visible displays of emotion are not only expected, but encouraged. It is a socially acceptable space in which to display the messiness of what Lacan might call our internal chaos (Žižek, 2006a). This is an aspect of the humanistic dimension of death, which is often used as a justification for the value of public death education (e.g., Wass, 2004). While I intend to move beyond the human in my engagement with death and mourning, particularly in chapters five and six where I am engaged in speculatively (re)thinking death from posthumanist and Indigenous perspectives, I do not deny death's significance to humans. Indeed, the (re)thinking of death gestures toward its curricular possibility to make apparent human relationships to the more-than-human and non-human, as well as a site of internal transformation or inwardness (Fairfield, 2015).

The second humanistic significance of death is the universality of our inevitable demise. Every human being who ever lived has died. Every human being who is alive today will die. Apart from birth, it is perhaps the *only* experience that can be thought of as truly universal. As alluded to above, the universality of our death defines the scope of meaning we can ascribe to life (Fairfield, 2015). To the academic reader, addressing the meaning of life may seem far more difficult and time consuming a question than can be addressed systematically in a dissertation,^{xii} but I would suggest that all endeavors are

ultimately attempts to give our lives meaning (see also Frankl, 2006). This dissertation is no different. As I will discuss through the topic of research in chapter three, my interest here is academic in that I am focused on death, curriculum, and death education, but ultimately, I write because I am concerned with how to live—or perhaps how to live my dying, as suggested by Stanley Keleman (1974). Personal justifications aside, the universality of death offers us a unique window into human relationships with the more-than-human and the non-human (particularly as represented in the material facts of death [see also Edwards, 2018]) and the perceived internal and external dimensions of human existence. Death, through its universality, is thus a rich, abundant, and fruitful site to (re)think education broadly and curriculum specifically.^{xiii}

The final humanistic significance of death I will suggest is the metaphorical relationship between death and change. Though death-as-change has been discussed in a variety of contexts (e.g., Barry, 2007; Keleman, 1974), here I take up the metaphorical implications in terms of educational change, or learning-as-becoming (and learning-as-becoming-with). Curriculum scholar Robert C. Nellis wrote recently that “if I am to open my mind, heart, and arms to new possibilities, I am called upon to change, to say hello to new selves and goodbye to old. This is a loss, and loss calls for mourning” (Nellis, 2018, p. 55). This giving up of older versions of ourselves is a sort of self-death and can indeed be a violent act. Educational philosopher Gert Biesta (2006) acknowledges this in his discussion of transcendental violence. Learning, when thought of not in linear, banking models, but rather as “coming into presence” or “show[ing] who [we] are and where [we] stand” (p. 62), asks us to give up a piece of ourselves in order to become, or learn, something new, and thus to change. By definition, after an

event—used here in the Badiouian sense of the word, as the experience of something that exists outside the parameters of a given system or beyond our concept of what is possible; something that shakes us (Den Heyer, 2010); an “oh fuck” moment^{xiv}—one’s perception of the world is never the same. Put differently, after an epistemological or ontological shudder (Charteris, 2014), the seen cannot be unseen. Change is necessarily transcendently violent, and in this the metaphor of death-as-change offers significant insight into learning-as-becoming. Put in more practical terms, death-as-change reminds us that *learning is not always a net positive endeavor*. Though we often articulate it in progressive terms (Egan, 2003), in learning there is also loss, and loss demands to be mourned (Nellis, 2018). Thus, throughout this dissertation I am equally concerned with the losses of learning, which are an extension of the notion of death-as-change, as with that which is gained.

These humanistic justifications for the study of death all stem from the salience of death education as a site to cultivate inwardness (Fairfield, 2015) and self-understanding—again, the curricular knowledge I consider to be of most worth. Even in its humanistic formation,^{xv} however, self-understanding must be understood in a political context. Below, I offer some conversation regarding the subversiveness of self-understanding by way of the concept of interiority as resistance.

Interiority as resistance.

As per the above, the humanistic study of death is a transformative educative space, and developing an affective relationship with death offers a pathway to inwardness (Fairfield, 2015) and self-understanding. Above, I also asserted that personal

change leads to social change. The position that social change begins with internal change is generally, but not universally, supported by Indigenous theorists (Graveline, 1998; Mitchell, 2018; Stonechild, 2016) and holistic educators (Hunt, 1987; Miller, 2000). It also serves as an impetus for much contemporary curriculum theorizing focused on interiority (Kumar, 2013, 2014). Perhaps the most powerful statement of this position, for me, comes from the Wolastoqiyik teaching of *piluwitahasuwawsuwakon*^{xvi} which is often used to talk about reconciliation and which has been translated as “allowing your thinking to change so that action will follow in a good way toward truth” (Pye, 2019, n.p.). In a piece currently in press, I wrote: “The teaching of *piluwitahasuwawsuwakon* acknowledges the role of internal work in the movement toward social change. While this internal emphasis doesn’t replace the structural changes we need to see, it does provide a tangible starting place—through self-understanding” (Downey, in press[a], p. 5). Here, then, I am interested in the subversive value of humanistic interiority—a curricular engagement with which I suggest can be facilitated by an affective, humanistic death education (Durant, 2018; Wass, 2004).

The cultivation of a rich internal life itself has become a profoundly countercultural act (Coleman, 2009; Gatto, 2003) and can speak back to the expectations and structures of neoliberal settler colonial schooling. Daniel Coleman’s 2009 text *In Bed with the Word* provides support for the notion of interiority as countercultural. In particular, Coleman is concerned with highlighting the spirituality of reading and the capacity of reading to cultivate a deep internal or spiritual life. In the second chapter of his text he explains,

Reading is counter-cultural mainly because it requires quiet time, being slow and meditative, and it is active rather than passive, being imaginative and dialogical. These qualities run in the opposite direction from the one in which Western commodity culture is heading. (Coleman, 2009, p. 26)

I would further Coleman's characterization of Western commodity (read as capitalist) culture by suggesting that capitalism systematically encourages us to ignore our internal lives in favour of more externally satisfying circumstance—the superficiality of which has been thoroughly noted and critiqued (e.g., Horkheimer & Adorno, 2012)—and greater productivity. Under the neoliberalism and flexible capitalism^{xviii} of the current era, ever-increasing demands for productivity (and, in education, accountability [Rodgers, 2018]) are held in place through shifting risk to individual actors (i.e., workers, entrepreneurs) rather than corporate or government entities, and individual actors can be simultaneously alienated from and fiercely devoted to their work (Snyder, 2016; see also Frayne, 2015). Work obsession (Frayne, 2015; Weeks, 2011) provides an example of the wider phenomenon. In the corporate and academic worlds, work obsession is not only normative, but expected (Frayne, 2015; Weeks, 2011), and the measure of work is largely external. Hourly wages surveil the body's presence; per-piece and per-project wages reward completion over process; and even those given to writing and thinking in an academic sense are judged primarily on the external/extrinsic value of the task: books, articles, lectures, service, and teaching. The constant measurement of our output begins to seep into our own self-image, and suddenly our self-worth is measured in productivity (Frayne, 2015)—I am only valuable to the degree to which I am productive at my given task. In this way, the external structures of capitalism seep into our own self-image, limiting the shape of our interiorities by way of

ideological saturation facilitated by the ubiquity of a seemingly benign societal obsession with work.

Ashwani Kumar (2013; see also Kumar & Downey, 2018, 2019), a key advocate for the curricular value of inwardness, would identify this process as one of being taught to strive toward unattainable societally constructed ideals. Kumar also highlights a potential meditative escape from the ideological saturation or social conditioning described above. Yet, the curriculum and the school system remain permeated by work obsession as indicated by the sustained presence of a recently more flexible (see Sennett 1998), liquid (see Bauman, 2007), and seductive (R. Saul, personal communications, January 22, 2020), (post)industrial ideology that presents the purpose of education as preparing workers. In a neoliberal economy, this is particularly evident through the push toward the precarious employment of entrepreneurship (Benjamin, Crymble, & Haines, 2017)—an obsession with which marks curriculum in the province of New Brunswick (GNB, 2016, 2019; see also Sears, 2018) among others (e.g., Hadley, 2018). As the “flexibility” of modern capitalism undermines work as a secure source of identity (Sennett, 1998; see also Frankl 2006), neoliberal ideological intrusion into the curriculum (Kumar, 2019) gives shape to students’ internal lives and self-image via what some would call the “curriculum of busy” (Kurki, Herriot, & French-Smith, 2018).

It serves the interests of those in power to keep us from knowing ourselves and each other; a self-aware, interconnected^{xviii} population is not a population easily influenced, coerced, or otherwise controlled. This is not to say that those who live primarily internal lives are universally immune to advertising or material desire.^{xix} Rather, the cultivation of a rich internal life can facilitate a countercultural intentionality

about our actions and lives, speaking back to capitalist economic structures that profit from thoughtless perpetuation of the consumptive status quo. Cultivating interiority can also make clear the ideological biases that are being pushed on us constantly (i.e., decolonization [Battiste, 2013; Fanon, 2008] and conscientization [Freire, 1970]). It can also bring us in contact with those biases we have already imbibed (i.e., conditioning [Krishnamurti, 1992; Kumar, 2013] and racism [Bryant, 2017; Lorde, 1984/2007]) and help us see through them to appreciate the complexity and nuance of those situations in which we find ourselves (i.e., reflexivity [Lyle, 2018]). The cultivation of emotional knowledge through interiority can help us see our emotional reactions for what they are and harness their power when needed (i.e., creation [Cajete, 2000; Kelly, 2015] and ceremony [Mitchell, 2018; Wilson, 2008]), or wait them out before making decisions (i.e., detachment [Krishnamurti, 1968, 1992; Kumar, 2013]). Finally, although somewhat beside the point, there are also those who suggest that the cultivation of interiority can help in the cognitive dimensions of learning in a structural sense (Hart, 2007, 2008). Based on these ways in which the cultivation of interiority can act against the patriarchal, settler colonial, neoliberal capitalist structures of Western society/schooling, I consider interiority (when viewed in political terms) and its cultivation to be an anti-capitalist ethic—a quiet resistance in a world, and a school system, that has become far too noisy (see Downey, 2019c).

It may be wise here to share a few words about the ways capitalism facilitates exploitation and the material circumstance of oppression, particularly for Indigenous^{xx} peoples. Glen Coulthard, a prominent Yellowknives Dene^{xxi} theorist, has made the claim that “for our nations to live, capitalism must die” (2013, n.p.). Settler colonialism as a

structure, and as a by-product of capitalist expansionism, is predicated on Indigenous dispossession or erasure (Simpson, 2017; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). In other words, in order for white economic ascension to continue, white settlers need access to Indigenous land, but not Indigenous people (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).^{xxii} Settler colonialism is built on trying to make ghosts of Indigenous people. In order for Indigenous people to survive, settler colonialism, and the capitalist expansionisms that underpin it, must die. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) is clear that capitalism and settler colonialism are not just detrimental to Indigenous people—they seep into the bones of us all and create hierarchies between us in every interaction. They blind us to the humanity in one another, emphasizing our difference and encouraging us to dominate or be dominated (see also Mitchell, 2018). Capitalism begets racism begets settler colonialism begets patriarchy begets heteronormativity begets ableism begets environmental degradation begets speciesism begets othering begets hierarchical thinking begets psychological fragmentation. Nothing in this world is indifferent to anything else. All the intersections of oppression are interconnected and feed off one another. In order for any meaningful social change to happen, capitalism must die.^{xxiii} Resistant interiority, to me, seems the least violent—and thus most self-preserving—death we can offer.

All capitalism is military capitalism, and all the intersections of oppression discussed above are held in place under the threat of violent military action (see Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2019). A salient example is the 2013 anti-fracking protests in New Brunswick,^{xxiv} where resistance to settler colonial capitalism was literally met with military action, or what Foucault (1972) would call sovereign power. Of course, those

benefited by a capitalist economic model, and those oppressions mentioned above, prefer if subjugation is not so ostentatious. Thus, the bulk of power exercised over resistance to capitalism, patriarchy, settler colonialism, environmental racism and degradation, and heteronormativity is disciplinary, or cohesive, in nature (see Foucault, 1972; Styres, 2017). Regardless, the threat of military action is always there—something of which the Indigenous community in New Brunswick needs no reminders.

If domination is rooted in the material fact of military or sovereign power, I suggest that resistance can best be mobilized through internal means—particularly education aimed at the cultivation of interiority. Here, I think back to the foundational work of Paulo Freire (1996). Freire articulated a conventional cycle to oppression and liberation where the oppressed overthrow their oppressors only to become oppressive themselves. Freire’s answer to this cycle of oppression was conscientization, or the raising of critical consciousness. Blending my own thinking with that of Freire, the way to break this cycle is to first change our thinking and our feeling—to escape the bitterness oppression has wrought. Those who have perpetrated crimes must be held to account, but we need not carry with us hatred, resentment, and bitterness over their transgressions. Rather, through critical consciousness raising, and I would suggest the cultivation of interiority, we can begin to release the oppressive and hierarchical ideologies that have seeped into the marrow of us through the endemic nature of capitalism, racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and settler colonialism (Brayboy, 2005). The roots of Freire’s thinking in roughly equal parts liberation theology and Marxism are well documented (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995), and this blend of the spiritual and the critical is precisely consistent with those in curriculum

theory who advocate for inwardness (e.g., Kumar, 2013; Macdonald & Macdonald, 1995). In my reading, humanistic interiority is not about navel gazing; it is about thinking, feeling, intuiting, being, living, and teaching our way toward a more just socio-material reality.

There are a few critiques worth noting here. Saul and Burkholder (2019), for example, levy a tough critique of intellectualizations of whiteness through a discussion of anti-racist thought. For them, it is not enough to recognize the ways in which we are implicated in racist systems, nor even to intellectualize that it is not enough; action is demanded. Saul and Burkholder (2019) are concerned that focusing on the internal aspects of racism does not address the material circumstance of oppression in which racialized people find themselves. I agree with Saul and Burkholder in their assertion that action is demanded—and moreover, I support the notion that decolonization is not a metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2012)—but as stated above, I believe any of this work must begin with the internal, lest there be some sort of residual negative energy left in those who have given up their privilege in the interest of social justice. As Megan Boler (1999) put it in her discussions of pedagogy of discomfort, “inquiry represents only the first step of a transformative journey” (p. 179).

Another critique of interiority as a project of social change is worth noting. Some argue that the notion of self-inquiry or a focus on internal change serves some more than others. Here, I emphasize the need for plurality in modalities of resistance. Internal change can be a starting point for radical social change, but we also need to address the material circumstance of oppression in the immediate present. Although I have discussed the wider societal structures of capitalism and settler colonialism above, my

specific focus in this dissertation is curriculum. As such, my discussion here should be read in that context. As a friend of mine often says, “education is slow politics” (V. Ferrier, personal communication, November 7, 2014). Education is the space where we get to have the first conversations, opening minds, hearts, and souls to the complexities and mysteries of existence. A curricular focus on knowledge of self in relation to others is subversive to the current curricular aim toward employable skills (Kumar, 2014; see also Sears, 2018) and may help us understand our own entanglement (with)in hierarchical ideology. Education is a space given to this kind of internal work, if we open ourselves up to the possibilities beyond the current curricular focus and the future it tacitly envisions. My focus on interiority, however, should not take anything away from the necessity of material societal change, in education or beyond.

One further response to the above critique, that self-inquiry as a response to oppression serves some more than others, deserves attention. The more social privilege to which we have access, the more ethical obligation we have to deeply understand ourselves, our relationships, and the biases that have seeped into our worldview. In my previous work around privilege (Downey, 2017, 2018a, 2020a), I concluded that, as a light-skinned Indigenous man with significant privilege, I had/have an ethical obligation to use my privilege for the best interests of my community (see also Styres, 2017). I think the same holds true more generally; we ought to strive toward “power with, not power over” (Graveline, 2002, p. 21). Those of us in positions of privilege and power cannot act simply on our own interpretations of what is best, lest we fall into the hierarchical patterns of paternalism. Rather, we must be willing to listen deeply and authentically—without the egotistical movement of thought (Kumar, 2013)—to those

around us and act according to what has been brought forward (Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Additionally, we must be willing to selflessly give away some of our power—not for strategic gain, but because we believe it to be right (see Bell, 2002). In my view, the only way to reasonably perform these acts without experiencing some kind of cognitive dissonance is to get to the roots of our hierarchical thinking, understand where it is coming from, and attempt to rid ourselves of its hold over our think-feeling. This, then, is another way in which interiority, as cultivated through humanistic death education, can be considered subversive to the dominant educational discourse and the futures it envisions.

Self-understanding, inwardness, and interiority are indeed countercultural, but in order for self-inquiry to be truly subversive, it cannot be steeped in the ethos of liberal individualism. Rather it must be a relational act (Boler, 1999)—thus my emphasis on self-in-relation. While in the current chapter, my discussion of self-in-relation has been largely focused on political relations between human beings, self-in-relation is incomplete without an acknowledgement of the more-than-human and non-human actors with which we find ourselves entangled, as well as our Ancestors. Thus, in chapters five and six I will (re)think death and death education through posthuman and Indigenous theoretical lenses, gesturing toward a larger, but still political, understanding of self-in-relation. In so doing, I will suggest a posthuman justification for the study of death, what I call in passing “the emerging environmental ethic.” Below, I will offer a few introductory thoughts on this reconceptualization of death—thoughts that will be more fully elaborated in subsequent chapters.

(Re)conceptualizing death. Sometimes in the literature around death and dying, when the author transitions from speaking about the process of dying to the facts of death, they cease speaking of the internal and emotional dynamics of dying and speak in material terms, often offering vivid descriptions of our terminal bodily process (e.g., Kortes-Miller, 2018, pp. 139-140). When they do discuss the psychological, emotional, or spiritual dimensions of death, there is often^{xxv} an abrupt stop at the moment of death. This linguistic shift can be read as representative of the transition from subject to object experienced in death and, crucially, the moment in which, under humanist logic, the dying lose agency. The movement from a humanist perspective to a posthumanist one centers around the notion of agency. For humanists, human beings are often assumed to be exceptionally capable of intentionally and autonomously enacting change within their perceived realities. Keeling and Lehman (2018) explain, however, that “a posthumanist perspective assumes agency is distributed through dynamic forces of which the human participates but does not completely intend or control” (n.p.). From this perspective, agency does not stop at the moment of death, rather it continues on as our material remains continue to act on, influence, and inform those around us (Edwards, 2018). Furthermore, posthumanism posits that human beings are not exceptional within the ecology of the planet, but rather entangled within complex relational networks of human, more-than-human, and non-human beings. As such, human material remains are in no way exceptional under posthumanism. The closely related logic of new materialism would have it that matter itself is agentic (St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016). The hierarchical logics of humanism have contributed to the construction of typologies of matter—divisions between what is alive and what is not. But these

divisions are not absolute. Consciousness, as known through the human perceptive apparatus, is not the be all and end all of life. Although there is a tangible moment in which our essence leaves our body, our matter lives on in the form of an agentic and entangled corpse.

Harwood and her co-authors (2018) provide several examples of the educative value of a corpse when viewed as entangled and agentic. They detail encounters between children and dead animals in three early childhood centres across Canada. In addition to their engagement with the animals through humanist pedagogic modalities, such as offering the animals a burial, using the opportunity to speak about the emotional realities of death, and/or reinforcing the finality of death to prevent so-called magical thinking, in some cases, the authors leave the animals where they are, recognizing their autonomy and agency within the entangled ecological world. This offers their students the opportunity to attend^{xxvi} to the corpse—to confront the material facts of death. Such attention is rare in the sanitized space of contemporary education.

This attention to the corpse, more-than-human or otherwise, gestures toward a less hierarchical view of life and thereby encourages an environmental ethic. The notion of attentive engagement with the corpse can be extended to an attentive engagement with waste. In so doing, the corpse is demystified, or more accurately waste is mystified, further suggesting the aforementioned environmental ethic—or making “a call to carefully consider how environmental pollution and *other forms of uneven material distribution* [i.e., matter out of place] are not an accidental by-product of capitalism, colonialism, and other power structures, but central to maintaining them as the systems that they are [emphasis added]” (Liboiron, 2019, n.p.). A posthumanist reading of death

as an eco-centric vital material phenomenon is the topic of chapter five of this dissertation, while chapter four draws on posthuman critiques of humanism to gesture toward an explicitly political consideration of death.

Some iterations of Indigenous knowledge support the above discussion in a number of respects. Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (2000), for example, writes that:

In Native science, there is ... an inclusive definition of “being alive.” Everything is viewed as having energy and its own unique intelligence and creative process, not only obviously animate entities, such as plants, animals, and microorganisms, but also rocks, mountains, rivers, and places large and small. (p. 21)

Cajete goes on to discuss death specifically, stating that “creative participation with the living Earth extends from birth to death and beyond” (p. 21), and furthermore that from an Indigenous perspective “death is understood as a metamorphosis, wherein the spirit of the deceased does not disappear, but becomes part of the animating and creative forces of nature” (p. 21). What in Cajete’s terminology is named as intelligence and creative process can readily be understood as agency, and in that there is a common attention to death not as an ending of life but rather as a transition to a different sort of entanglement—for the new materialists and posthumanists, a material entanglement; for Cajete, an energetic, spiritual entanglement. This reading of death informed by Indigenous thought will be taken up in chapter six.

Within the literature of death education, there is often a cursory acknowledgement that people hold different cultural views about death and that those views ought to be respected (e.g., Durant, 2018; Kortes-Miller, 2018). This, usually sentence-long, acknowledgement of divergent cultural understandings is generally

quickly followed by a statement of the importance of iterating the finality of death, particularly where children are concerned (i.e., to avoid magical thinking). This is but one way in which death education is located firmly within Eurocentric and anthropocentric thinking. My (re)conceptualization of death, informed by both Indigenous and posthumanist theories, is aimed at disrupting those logics and opening up the field of death education to new curricular futures, particularly those that contribute to a deeper understanding of ourselves-in-relation.

Having now offered a preliminary meditation on death from humanistic perspectives and given a treatment of its subversive potential, I now conclude this opening chapter with a structural overview of my dissertation and summaries of the remaining chapters.

Structural Overview

What follows is an open, fluid, flexible, and truthful exchange about death and death education as conceptual curricular space. It is not, I think, a work *of* death education, meaning that it is not fixed within the paradigmatic boundaries of that discipline, but rather a work of curriculum theorizing about death and death education—though I maintain hope that it speaks in both disciplines. As a work of curriculum theory, this dissertation should be understood as a complicated conversation and, thus, in the expansive intellectual spirit of reconceptualist curriculum inquiry.

Though conversation can often be instigated and propelled forward by questions, and there is a general expectation that research be framed around questions (Creswell, 2014), I am reluctant to give my project such a frame. The practice of forming research

questions can be seen as ideologically rooted in the movement toward systematization in social sciences research (St. Pierre, 2018, 2019)—something from which this dissertation attempts to distance itself (see chapter three). Indeed, seeking answers to questions gives direction, focus, and scope to a path of inquiry, and while such things are valuable in academic research, they also place limits on the trajectory of thought. As this project is engaged in visioning new curricular futures, it does not seek to answer set questions, but rather to uncover and provoke new possibilities. Thus, I will not offer research questions here. Rather, an articulation of the general trajectory of my thinking follows.

The overall trajectory of the conversation within this dissertation is one of (re)thinking, (re)visioning, dreaming, and envisioning. These projects are, I think, all expressions of speculation or speculative theorizing. Speculation has historically been criticized in the domain of Western philosophy as being a less-than-rigorous form of thought (Fairfield, 2015), but recent scholarship has tended to embrace speculative modes of thinking (e.g., Bennett, 2010; Haraway, 2016). Logic and rationality leave only more in-depth understandings of the way things are; in order to get beyond that which is, a different mode of thought—a more creative form of theorizing—is needed. In the current work, I think of this creative theorizing as speculation, and I fully accept the limited claim to truth that can be made from within that mode of thought. This is, again, the reason I am seeking truthfulness rather than Truth. With these points in mind, the subsequent chapters will engage the literatures of thanatology (death studies), death education, curriculum theory, as well as critical, posthuman, and Indigenous theory

toward envisioning new curricular futures. Each of the following chapters responds to that overall goal in some way.

In chapter two, I review the literatures of thanatology and death education, as well as briefly touch on some work in curriculum studies and other fields that discuss death. Though each chapter in this dissertation draws on different literature, the entire discussion is in some way responsive to, but not bound by, the literatures of death studies and death education. I thus devote a substantial space to sharing my understanding of that literature. I frame chapter two using the concepts of attending and mourning. My discussion of these ideas is rooted in the literature of curriculum theory, and they recur and develop throughout the dissertation, helping provide further insight into the relationship between my theorizing and teaching and learning.

In chapter three, I explore my approach to this research. I begin this chapter by laying out critiques of research and highlighting the ways that the empiricization of social sciences research has limited the scope of our intellectual engagement. The field of death studies is a precise example of this empiricization—another reason my work should not be thought of as of that field. I will then move on to discuss several of the methodological considerations that go into my thinking here before ultimately arriving at complicated conversation (Pinar, 2012) as a sufficiently open and paradigmatically appropriate framework for my theorizing. I then conclude with succinct statements of my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions and considerations moving forward.

I think of chapter four as an imperative intervention. Where my literature review in chapter two shows that the death education literature rarely engages the political and

that its general focus is toward affective, humanistic concerns, chapter four intervenes in that literature by gesturing toward the possibility for, and necessity of, a critical death education. Critical death education here should be understood as working at the intersection of the politics and affect of life and death. Chapter four also serves as a transition between the first three foundational chapters, which set up the topic of death and the field of death education, and the next two chapters, which deal in speculative theorizing. It thus devotes some space to giving a comparative positioning of posthumanism to some of its theoretical otherwises, namely postmodernism and psychoanalysis.

Chapter five picks up on posthumanism toward a speculative theorizing of a posthuman death education. Here, I further outline posthumanism as a conceptual space, then engage in a reading of the material remains of death from posthuman perspectives. I then gesture toward pedagogical considerations emergent from posthuman theory, which may be useful and transformative to contemporary death education and education more broadly. I conclude the speculation with a discussion of Braidotti's (2019) affirmative ethics as a form of response to the precarity of our current socio-environmental moment.

Chapter six is likewise devoted to speculative theorizing, but this time from Indigenous perspectives. I open this chapter by discussing the manner in which the deaths of Indigenous people have been normalized through settler colonialism. Toward a response to this normalization of Indigenous erasure, I draw on Indigenous metaphysical theory in order to theorize death as sites of transition rather than finality—a site of becoming Ancestors. The general thrust of chapter six is toward the notion of attending

Land and, as in the previous chapter, I conclude with a consideration of the pedagogical implications of Indigenous theory.

Chapter seven comprises a general conclusion to this dissertation. Here, I draw together the divergent threads of the complicated conversation toward an articulation of a curricular future far beyond the scope of the present, and intimately responsive to it. My concluding chapter is framed as a (re)turn toward inwardness and self-understanding. As stated in the opening sections of this work, self-understanding is the curricular knowledge of most worth in my own thinking, but after having passed through the complicated conversation herewithin, self-understanding takes on new meanings embedded in notions of relationality. This work, thus, concludes where it begins, but with much learned and lost in the process.

The nature of curriculum theory is ever changing, ever expanding, and ever opening up to new possibilities. Here, my general intent is to ride the wave of those new possibilities through a deep, divergent consideration of death and death education. It is toward that end that this complicated conversation is aimed. Before engaging the new, however, the old must be considered. Thus, the next chapter of this dissertation comprises a literature review of death studies, death education, and several haunting others that inform the remainder of the work.

Chapter Two: Attending to Death and Interiority

It's only by our lack of ghosts we're haunted – Earle Birney, Can. Lit. (1962).

You're too young to get the best of me – War on Women, I like Science (2012).

On Attending

When I began working with undergraduate students, I was often asked if attendance at a particular class or event was mandatory. What was not said in the question spoke louder than what was. With the experience of having taught a few courses, I began to address the issue of attendance before being asked. Attendance is mandatory, I told them. But more than that, attendance is a privilege, and it comes with responsibilities. Attendance does not mean showing up. That is just the first step. Attendance demands active attention—attention as an ongoing verb: attending. Attending, in my usage, implies an active engagement with the generative and transformative possibilities of a conversation, a moment, an event, a person, a relationship, or a phenomenon. Carl Leggo and Rita Irwin, in one of the last pieces published before Carl's death, "Ways of Attending: Art and Poetry" (2018), demonstrate this notion of attending through ekphrasitic conversation. Carl poetically attended to Rita's photography; Rita photographically attended to Carl's poetry. They were moved and changed by what they saw in the other (perhaps the Other), but this could only happen because of the trust, reciprocity, and openness of their relationship. I think of this as a relational aesthetic^{xxvii}—the beauty held in the sacred space of relationship, beauty that can only exist within that intimacy—and this is what I ask of the students with whom I work.

In this chapter, I am interested in attending to death. In the writing, I hope to make clear the relationship of my theorizing to the fields of thanatology and death and dying education. Specifically, I am interested in highlighting the limited scope of the death and dying education literature, its persistent apolitical, culturally specific, and anthropocentric justifications, and the ways my work attempts to move beyond these limitations. In short, in this dissertation I am not (only) interested in death education for humanistic purposes (e.g., Wass, 2004), but (also) in critical/political, posthuman, and Indigenous readings of death—particularly as a material phenomenon.

The key to attending is an openness to being changed by everything and anything we encounter. In attending to these literatures, I have been changed. Some may articulate this change as growth or learning, but to do so would ignore the losses of becoming (Egan, 2003, 2005; Nellis, 2009, 2018). While here I publicly celebrate and share those lines of flight (Deleuze, 1995) that were sparked by my attending, I privately mourn those lines of flight that were cut down by it. I have opened myself up to these changes, but to cast them aside without saying goodbye would enact precisely that to which I hope this dissertation succeeds in speaking back. I move forward in this conversation, then, with an air of attention, an air of mourning, and an air of celebrating lives, selves, and ideas that were, as well as those that now are.

Death Studies / Thanatology

Before moving on to a more focused and sustained engagement with the literature of death and dying education, it is necessary to briefly discuss the field of thanatology in general and, in so doing, attend to death broadly. This brief conversation

around the literature of death studies is aimed at contextualizing the study of death education within the wider field of thanatology and perhaps highlighting how oversights and biases in one feed directly into the other.

Doka (2015) puts the beginnings of the modern field of death studies in the period just after World War Two, particularly in the writings of Herman Feifel. According to Doka, an authority in the field, while Freud and Lindermann had studied death tangentially (i.e., the death drive), Feifel was the first to engage with death systematically and with sustained focus. Doka's perspective here shows the bias of death studies toward psychology and sociology rather than more established intellectual traditions such as philosophy and theology (Wittkowski, Doka, Neimeyer, & Vallerga, 2015), where death had been a focus of many thinkers (e.g., St. Augustine, Kierkegaard, Heidegger; see Barry, 2007). Nonetheless, Feifel's work and life are somewhat illustrative of the modern field of death studies as a whole and, thus, deserve some significant attention.

Feifel's 1959 edited collection, *The Meaning of Death*, is widely acknowledged as the beginning of the field of death studies (Lamers, 2012); however, in several accounts, it seems that the editor's continued presence in the field as a mentor to younger generations of death researchers, educators, and clinicians was as impactful as the initial text (Lamers, 2012; Wass, 2004). Feifel's interest in death stemmed from personal experiences, such as the loss of his mother and his time in the American air force, where he was stationed at the same base that housed the *Enola Gay*—the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb (Lamers, 2012). This image from Feifel's lived history is a significant marker of the time in which his writing and research occurred—

the post-war era, when death and its inevitability haunted every corner of American life. The twentieth century was also a time of transition where death was concerned: home funerals were becoming less common, death was increasingly the work of professionals, and discussions of death quickly became taboo despite its haunting presence (Doka, 2015; Lamers, 2012). This latter point is evidenced by the fact that two major academic publishers rejected *The Meaning of Death* before it went to press (Lamers, 2012). Throughout Feifel's life, the field of death studies expanded, perhaps because of his own involvement and foresight. Doka (2015), however, offers four reasons that the study of death and death education emerged when it did: 1) demographic shifts toward the aged and the prolongation of death through medical advances; 2) a greater social concern with death due to the possibility of imminent demise through nuclear weapons, disease, environmental collapse, and acts of terrorism; 3) the shared humanistic goals of the Death Awareness Movement and the broader social movements of the 1960s and 1970s; and 4) the capacity of death education to answer (spiritual) questions left unanswered by secular society. Whether because of Feifel's involvement or the broader social trends of the time, the result is the same. By the dawn of the 21st century the field of death studies had established itself with two major journals, annual meetings, and readership from a full range of disciplines.

The interdisciplinarity of the field of death studies is often stated by those in a position to assess its trajectory (Doka, 2015; Lamer, 2012; Wass, 2004). *The Meaning of Death* was perhaps the best example of this as it contained contributions from those situated in literature, psychology, sociology, history, philosophy, and the arts, among others (see Lamer, 2012). Feifel's work, however, was firmly grounded in psychology.

Several of his more notable studies took stock of death attitudes in the elderly (Feifel & Branscomb, 1973; Feifel & Nagy, 1980, 1981) and people with illnesses (Feifel, Freilich, & Herman, 1973; Feifel & Herman, 1973) and highlighted the anxiety and fear people felt about death, noting that, according to his studies, religious people were more afraid of death than the non-religious (Feifel, 1959 as cited in Lamers, 2012), as well as the fact that emotional disturbance and death anxiety were not correlated (Lamers, 2012). As alluded to previously, this bias toward the psychological is persistent in scholarly conversations around death and death education. Indeed, the contemporary notion of thanatology has much more to do with bereavement and grief (see Chapple et al., 2017; Wittkowski et al., 2015) than it does with my interest in the material facts of death. Though there are a number of examples of this bias above and below, one warrants discussion solely for its comedic effect. Of Walter Kaufman's 1959 chapter in *The Meaning of Death*, "Existentialism and Death," Lamer stated:

Some of the concepts in this chapter are difficult to understand, for example: 'Fear is inauthentic anxiety which conceals anxiety from itself' (Heidegger) and 'Life cannot be apprehended except in the act of participating in the death process.' It is not difficult to understand why existentialism has faded in importance during the past half century. (2012, p. 73)

It would seem that Lamer's reading of Kaufman's contribution lacked attention. Indeed, as alluded to by Lamer, few in the modern study of death and death education have adequately attended to the existentialist or phenomenological philosophers, Heidegger in particular, for whom death was an omnipresent concern.^{xxviii} This conceptual oversight calls into question the interdisciplinarity of death studies as a whole, despite its intended beginnings, making it rather like a multidisciplinary subject where only more

conventionally scientific and social scientific disciplines are honoured (see Wittkowski et al., 2015).

A 2015 review of 1550 articles published in the two top journals in death studies, *Death Studies* and *Omega - Journal of Death and Dying*, between 1991 and 2010 showed: 1) a 2:1 ratio of quantitative and qualitative work; 2) a decline in an already low number of theoretical articles; and 3) a decline in death education publications, which totaled only 3% of the 1550 articles (Wittkowski et al., 2015).^{xxix} The authors also noted that applied studies were only then beginning to be published and that medical discussions of death, such as those presented below, were less common than studies of grief and bereavement, which seem to form the focus of the contemporary field (Wittkowski et al., 2015; see also Chapple et al., 2017). My own search of *Death Studies* and *Omega- Journal of Death and Dying* yielded a mix of applied and social scientific research, but no sustained theoretical, philosophical,^{xxx} literary, or artistic engagements. At some point in the last 50 years, a discernable shift occurred: the field of death studies became more concerned with application than with theory or philosophy (see also Wu, 2020) and, in so doing, it left behind the foundational disciplines that breathe new life into practice. Thus, it should not surprise anyone that the field of death studies has yet to seriously attend to critical theory, posthumanism, or Indigenous theory and still clings to anthropocentric justifications for its significance.

This raises the question of what, if anything, my dissertation has to do with thanatology. As per the above, death education is marginal in thanatology (Wittkowski et al., 2015). As I have noted elsewhere, death is also marginal in the general scope of education. Further, thanatology seems to be moving toward a more scientific

engagement with death, and theoretical engagements surrounding death are uncommon (Wittkowski et al., 2015; Wu, 2020). Finally, where the general thrust of the field is toward understanding grief and bereavement (Chapple et al., 2017), my own concern is largely on the material facts of death. It would seem, then, that I am swimming against the current, but here I would remind the reader of two points. First, although my topic is death, this is not a work *of* thanatology nor death education, but rather a work loosely and speculatively *engaged with* them. Second, even those within the field acknowledge the dangers of over-empiricization (Wittkowski et al., 2015). Indeed, as I will discuss in chapter three, the systematic empiricization of the social sciences has resulted in a narrowing of what constitutes knowledge (St. Pierre, 2018). My response to this phenomenon is speculation: dreaming new visions of what is possible through complicated conversation with what exists. This dissertation, then, should be read as a work of theoretical imagination rather than a work of the scientific study of death.

Having now discussed the wider field of thanatology, I will move on to discuss death education specifically. As will soon become clear, much of the above discussion regarding the trends of thanatology also applies to the study of death education. As such, the above articulation of the relationship between my work and thanatology stands with regard to death education as well.

Death and Dying Education

Given the marginal status of death education noted above, a rather sparse literature may be expected, but such is not the case. Though somewhat eclectic—indeed the only thing upon which most death educators seem to agree is the need for more of

it—there is a robust field of death education worth attending here. Despite the unexpectedly high number of authors writing about death education, few offer definitions. While I am suspect of definitions in general and prefer open characterizations of terminology, it may be illuminating to begin by considering one definition of death education: “A developmental process in which death-related knowledge and implications resulting from that knowledge are transmitted (Dennis, 2009)” (Kortes-Miller, 2014, p. 39). Kortes-Miller’s definition is not uncommon in the field of death education. Durant (2018), for example, also draws on Dennis’ work in order to articulate death education as “a developmental process in which dying, death, and loss-related life experience transmit knowledge, and have profound personal implications for those who experience them (Dennis, 2009)” (Durant, 2018, p. 90). Durant’s definition is more open to the possibilities of death, and even positions the experiences surrounding death as a teacher. Yet, there is still a lingering specter of developmentalism surrounding Durant’s writing, and Kortes-Miller’s definition is closer to the norm in the existing literature. Kortes-Miller’s definition is haunted by the aforementioned absence of contemporary critical (not to mention posthuman and Indigenous) theory common to death studies in three notable ways. First, the dominance of developmentalism (psychology) in education has been widely critiqued (Egan, 2003, 2005; Walkerdine, 1993; Whitty, 2009). Second, the knowledge-based nature of the definition also raises alarms, as there is more to education than knowledge (e.g., Young, 2013)—a point Kortes-Miller (2014) later raises herself. Third, the word “transmitted” implies a transmissive form of pedagogy, what Freire (1996) famously called the banking model of education. These three critiques of one definition of death education

illuminate the fact that death education as a discipline has not adequately attended to the broader literature of education, nor the aforementioned critical, posthuman, and Indigenous theories. Indeed, Kortés-Miller's (2014) stated constructivist theoretical framework is not uncommon in the field, which, like thanatology in general, is dominated by psychology and sociology.

To return briefly to the second point in my critique above, the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC)—a professional organization for death educators and counselors in the United States, which also deals in certification—recently updated its framework for thanatology's body of knowledge and published the results as an article in *Death Studies* (Chapple et al., 2017). While obviously ADEC is not the only space in which death education occurs—indeed, the European literatures suggest the best death education as being diffused (Testoni et al., 2019)—the framework provides a window into what those rooted in thanatology view as important knowledge regarding death. Comprising a list of somewhere around 100 topics, the “outline of a body of knowledge in thanatology” is broken down into three overarching categories: 1) arenas of thanatology, 2) practice considerations for professionals in thanatology, and 3) contextual and theoretical considerations in thanatology. The first is largely concerned with definitions, different forms of dying, grief, and funerary practices. The second deals in the applied practice of death education and counselling, while the third addresses the history of the field and sociological readings of death. Overall, the framework is, as can be expected based on the above discussion of thanatology, largely concerned with the affective dimension of death—grief, loss, and bereavement. Where the political nature of death is concerned (my focus in chapter four), there is some

acknowledgement within the framework of marginalized communities as a site of study, though it seems rather tangential and is nowhere elaborated within the article. Likewise, divergent cultural perspectives are acknowledged within the framework, but a robust theorization of that area is lacking, particularly in conjunction with the marginalization of such groups and views both within the literature and within larger society. I further highlight some of these issues in chapter six of this dissertation.

Based on the above, it can be discerned that the contemporary focus of death education as manifest in ADEC is geared toward practitioners and shares many of the same biases discussed in the context of thanatology above. Of course, as I have already noted, the actual content of death education seems, to me, less important than the affective concerns that surround it. Indeed, there is more to (death) education than knowledge (e.g., Young, 2013). That being said, the overall trajectory of the content is largely humanistic, and that has not always been the case. Indeed, this humanistic focus in death education is a rather new development.

In 2004, the founding editor of *Death Education* (now *Death Studies*; the leading journal in the field for which it was named), Hannelore Wass, wrote an essay entitled “A Perspective on The Current State of Death Education.” The general conclusions of that essay were: 1) there is not enough death education, and 2) the death education that does exist does not engage “the humanistic component in death education” (p. 292) as much as it should. Though this essay was published 16 years ago and much has changed since then, it provides an avenue through which to further discuss the field’s trajectory. Wass’ position that there is not enough death education was based on a glut of literature, the majority of which was situated within medical fields. Because of the medicalization of

death in the West—by which I refer to the social phenomenon whereby the process of dying has become largely the domain of the medical industry (Barry, 2007, p. 47; see also Illich, 1975), not the medical necessity of naming a disease as a cause of death (Northcott & Wilson, 2017, p. 39)—the origins of death education as a practical field are in the preparation of medical professionals. In 2004, Wass observed that “there has been inadequate attention to death and dying in medical curricula at all levels” (p. 293), and she went on to list studies from the previous three decades showing that fewer than 13% of U.S. medical schools offered a full course on death (Dickinson, 1976; Dickinson, Summer, & Frederick, 1992; Dickinson & Mermann, 1996). Toward the end of the 20th century, however, many medical schools did integrate some discussion of dying into their basic curricula (Wass, 2004).^{xxxix} Nursing schools tended to offer more, but according to Wass, “what death education is available is inadequate. It offers little opportunity for participants to become knowledgeable about death and grief, to deal with their own feelings, or to develop empathy” (p. 295). In the last 16 years, terminology in medical education has shifted from death and dying to the more sanitized “end of life” (EOL) or palliative care,^{xxxix} and conversations around these topics have remained on the margins. A survey from 2008 suggested that 30% of medical schools required education on EOL and/or palliative care (Van Aalst-Cohen, Riggs, & Byock, 2008), while a more recent study focused on EOL conversations in medical residency reported that, “over half of residents reported inadequate EOL education during medical school and nearly 90% reported inadequate education during residency” (Schmit et al., 2016, p. 4). It would, thus, seem that Wass’ comments on the inadequacy of death education in medical training still stand, with some even positioning the lack of

adequate training as a global problem (Chapple et al., 2017). Despite the fact that Doka (2015) notes a number of improvements in these areas, he also reflects on Wass' legacy as a leading figure in death education by stating that hers is "a legacy yet unfulfilled" (Doka, 2015, p. 545).

The purpose of attending to these studies situated within the medical professions is this: If physicians, to whom Western society has delegated the responsibilities of governing life and death (Illich, 1975), find their own education in the subject inadequate, for whom *is* it adequate? In her essay, Wass (2004) also went on to describe the inadequacy of and need for education on death for counselors, paramedics, young children, and the aged. Indeed, if one were to sum up the entirety of the death education literature in one line, it would be that there is not enough quality death education (e.g., Durant, 2018; Kortés-Miller, 2014; Ulin, 1977; Wass, 2004). Many attribute this lack to the so-called death-denying or death-defying culture of Western society (Becker, 1973; see also Barry, 2007; Didion, 2006; Keleman, 1974; Northcott & Wilson, 2017). Testoni and co-authors (2018, 2019) further this perspective by saying that the medicalization of death has created five death-free generations—generations who have not experienced death intimately at home—and where death education was once the domain of religion, the secularization of the Western world has led to a discernable gap in death education (see also Fairfield, 2015).

Despite the shortage of adequate death education, there is a glut of literature seeking to justify its significance. Doka's (2015) justifications for the importance of death education amount to "the humanistic" discussed by Wass (2004). Kortés-Miller (2014) identifies this humanistic justification as the philosophical foundation of the

field, pointing to Feifel (1959) and Knott (1979) as examples. Chapple and co-authors support this affective and anthropocentric foundational scope within thanatology thus: “thanatology itself involves a very wide range of questions about life, death, loss, grief, and many other aspects of *human* existence [emphasis added]” (Chapple et al., 2017, p. 119).

Returning to death education and its justifications, Kortes-Miller (2014) makes the case that “through examinations of death, individuals may develop a greater appreciation, understanding, and reverence for life” (p. 40), and this potential of death to teach us how to live is supported by others as well (e.g., Fairfield, 2015; Keleman, 1974). There are also several related justifications for the value of death education. Some make claims that death education can help reduce death anxiety (Kortes-Miller, 2014; McClatchey & King, 2015; Wallace, Cohen, & Jenkins, 2019), but others are more guarded about that claim (Doka, 2015). Many more are willing to assert that death education can at least help make the unfamiliar familiar (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2009; Eddy & Alles, 1983; Kortes-Miller, 2014, 2018; Morgan, 1995; Wass, 2004). Another popular justification for death education with young children is to address what is sometimes called “magical thinking” (i.e., Didion, 2006), or misconceptions children may hold about the finality of death (Barry, 2007; Dennis, 2009; Kortes-Miller, 2014; Ulin, 1977). Furthermore, death education for school-aged children is sometimes justified through the fact that parents often feel uncomfortable talking to their children about death (Hadad, 2009; Kortes-Miller, 2014, 2018; Wass, 2004). Because “no death education is still death education” (Kortes-Miller, 2014, p. 42), many argue that schools ought to be a site of ensuring that any misconceptions about death—many of which are

perpetuated by the media (Cox, Garrett, & Graham, 2005; Testoni et al., 2015)—are addressed (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2006; Dennis, 2009; Kortes-Miller, 2014; Testoni et al., 2019; Ulin, 1977; Wu, 2020). Indeed, Kortes-Miller (2014) made the case that death ought to be a focus of study across our life spans because of the ubiquity of information and misinformation we receive about death through the media, culture, the arts, and religion (see also Testoni et al., 2019). Finally, in non-school-based settings, death education is sometimes justified in terms of utility with and relevance to aging populations (Nan et al., 2020). Death education, in this regard, is beneficial to society both when aimed at the general population (Kortes-Miller, 2018) and in the elderly (Nan et al., 2020). It is important to reiterate, given the trajectory of my theorizing, that most justifications for death education engage the human. There has not yet been an accounting of the value of death education which engages the more-than-human nor the non-human actors within our lives (and deaths)—though Wu (2020) does come near this topic, drawing on Hegelian philosophy in a call for a death education rooted in a natural view of death. A posthuman justification for death education should become evident through my discussion in chapter five, where I will draw on monist philosophy rather than the Cartesian transcendentalism evident in Hegel’s thought.

A third, interconnected body of literature worth attending to consists of those who address the question of how death education ought to be done and what subjects it ought to engage. Richard Ulin’s 1977 “Death and Dying Education” is among the first in the genre specifically aimed at articulating a curriculum of death education in public schools. Taking a truly interdisciplinary approach to death education, Ulin (1977) frames his conversation around the following key questions: 1) Why does death exist?

2) What is death? 3) Is it ever right to take a human life? 4) Is suicide a human right? and 5) Can we prepare for the death of a loved one? (pp. 16-23). In later chapters, Ulin also emphasizes the role conversations around aging, cross-cultural perspectives, and literature can play in death education—perhaps a movement back to Feifel’s (1959) original interdisciplinary emphasis. While all these conversations contribute to and stem from the overarching anthropocentrism of death studies, Ulin also poses at least one sub-question pertaining to the natural world: “[If mortality were solved], what would happen to our natural resources and our life-support system?” (p. 16). Even here, the framing of concern for the planet as dealing with *our* natural resources shows that Ulin’s concern for the planet is limited to human purposes rather than a concern for the more-than-human. At the end of Ulin’s text, there is a high school syllabus for an 18-week course on death. A survey of different ways of examining death, the emphasis of the course is on knowledge about death. It focuses on medical definitions of death, funerary practices, literary depictions of death, and a variety of other content areas. The example presented in Ulin’s text is a marker of one approach to death education, what is labeled elsewhere as the didactic (Wallace, Cohen, & Jenkins, 2019), but which might more accurately be called knowledge-based. King-McKenzie (2011), despite drawing on noted reconceptualist curriculum theorists like Pinar (1992) and Huebner (1967), is likewise interested in a didactic model of death education. King-McKenzie’s (2011) article is full of problematic statements and assumptions such as “this paper argues that the suicide rate among adolescents is as high as it is because the students have no understanding of the finality of death” (p. 517), proceeding to link this misunderstanding to video games, where death results in starting over. King-McKenzie’s justification for

and vision of death education, however, do echo some trends in the field mentioned below and above. My critique of King-McKenzie's (2011) vision is essentially that she is interested in telling students the way of things rather than creating space for them to explore possibilities. The absence of self-exploration through death education is yet another marker of the didactic model of death education. A meta-analysis from 1991 showed that programs situated within this didactic or knowledge-based approach were significantly less likely to lead to reductions in death anxiety than those which attended to the emotional realities of death, or the experiential approach (Durlak & Riesenber, 1991; see also Durlak, 1979)—though others later challenged those findings (Hayslip, Galt, & Pinder, 1994).

The didactic and the experiential are categories often used in empirical research to comment on death education's ability to alleviate death anxiety (Durlak & Riesenber, 1991; see also Durlak, 1979; Hayslip, Galt, & Pinder, 1994). While I remain unconvinced about the effectiveness of alleviating death anxiety through death education, or even the significance of that outcome, the categories are worth noting. The experiential model of death education puts emphasis on personal engagement with death (Wass, 2004). Rather than listening to a lecture or studying a text on a particular topic, experiential death education takes a more therapeutic and open-ended approach toward examining, confronting, and sharing reactions and feelings regarding death (e.g., Durlak, 1979). Sometimes roleplaying is used (Durlak, 1979), and fieldtrips to funeral homes, small in-class discussions, loss-simulating activities, and reflective essays or journal writing are also common (Wallace, Cohen, & Jenkins, 2019; see also Csikai & Jones, 2007; Testoni et al., 2018). The above discussions are primarily focused on post-

secondary students. With school-aged and young children, picture books, the death of a pet, classmate, community member, or an encounter with an animal corpse can often lead to a first experiential engagement with death (Harwood et al., 2018; Wiseman, 2013; see also Balk, 2009, 2010), and open conversation with teachers and parents is sometimes cited as an effective practice (Testoni et al., 2019).

Though the empirical literature presents the experiential and didactic models as dichotomous, in practice there is significant overlap (Wallace, Cohen, & Jenkins, 2019). Durant (2018), for example, advocates for applying the experiential principles of grief camp—retreats for young people who are coping with the loss of a loved one—to the didactic space of public death education. Durant envisions this combination as engaging with six over-arching goals of death education: “personal enrichment, plans for the future, participation in society, professional and vocational training, communication, and understanding the effects of bereavement (Hadad, 2009, p. 9)” (Durant, 2018, p. 91). Each of these goals shows a particular ideological assumption embedded in the wider field of death education. Personal enrichment, participation in society, and communication speak to the anthropocentric focus of death education. Plans for the future and professional training highlight the obsession with progress and the economic imperatives embedded in modern education. Understanding the effects of bereavement can be linked to the humanistic goals of death education, but also to the alleviation of death anxiety, of which I remain skeptical. The goals of death education as put forward by Hadad (2009) and reiterated by Durant (2018) are rather limited in their scope and are, once again, devoid of considerations of recent theoretical developments. In the same breath with which Durant acknowledges the emotional significance of death and death

education, she also gestures toward evidence-based practice as the marker of success in death education. Evidence-based practice read through the eyes of a curriculum theorist looks a lot like social efficiency and Tylerian rationality repackaged (see Kumar, 2019); evidence-based practice tries to make a science out of education and in so doing sanitizes and erases the complexity of the human experience and ontological entanglement. As should be evident by now, I am interested in the messy and in reclaiming the space of the messy within an over-sanitized world.

Neither the experiential, the didactic, nor any combination of the two fits within my vision of death education. Durant's goals, as well as her wider vision, are a marker of the developmentalism and structuralist pedagogy to which the last 50 years of curriculum theory has reacted, but which still holds sway in more psychologically informed disciplines such as death education (Wu, 2020). As alluded to in my critique of Kortes-Miller's (2014) definition, visions of what death education could look like are often informed by developmentalism, didacticism, and structuralism, even when framed as experiential. They seem to operate under the logic of industrialization: there is a problem,^{xxxiii} and we need to address that problem through the most efficient means possible. My interest in death education is much broader and less efficient. Even those who operate under holistic frameworks (Nan et al., 2020) or otherwise robust theoretical frameworks (e.g., Testoni et al., 2018; Wu, 2020) are firmly grounded in apolitical and anthropocentric understandings of death. When I am thinking of how death education could be enacted, I am inclined toward the notion of attending presented at the onset of this chapter and modeled after the artistic and contemplative movements of Carl Leggo and Rita Irwin (2018). Attending to death means being open to the possibilities,

tensions, and otherwise in equal parts and actively seeking meaning, relationship, and change through holding the concept, experience, and material reality of death near oneself. What emerges when we, and the students with whom we work, pull death toward us rather than push it away and how might we be changed by that? When I envision death education, I thus envision but one curricular outcome—a one-line course syllabus—which reads “attend to death.” My own visions for death education will be further elaborated in speculative terms in the coming chapters through the notions of attending corpse, attending waste, and attending Land.

Lingerings

In conversation, there is often much left unsaid. Sometimes, the unsaid lingers within us and haunts our relationship with the topic and with our partners in conversation. In this conversation around death, there is much left unsaid. I have attended to some of these lingering notes in subsequent chapters—in particular reviews of posthuman and Indigenous theory. Where this literature review and my attending are specifically concerned, however, I am haunted by those who write of death from outside the fields of death studies and death education. Thus, in this brief section I will attend to some of the influential thoughts I have read around death, which are left under pronounced elsewhere in the dissertation.

There are a number of curriculum theorists who have written of death, though they are few and far between. Pinar’s 1992 chapter “Cries and Whispers” includes death in a consideration of what it means to be whole, harkening back to Heidegger’s claim that meditating on our death brings life into focus. Pinar also alludes to the death

embedded in human destruction of the natural world: “we export [death] to Canada as acid rain, to Louisiana in the petrochemical industries” (p. 93). Ultimately, Pinar’s (1992) concern is that death become a more common topic in everyday conversation, and he links the fact of our death to our experience of time—just as I did in chapter one. Pinar’s chapter is an invitation to a larger conversation that was never fully taken up in the field of curriculum theory and completely ignored in other fields of education. Regardless, I find his comments generally supportive of my own dispositions toward death and death education. Carl Leggo openly discusses the death of his brother in a 2017 piece aimed at articulating the curriculum of loss. Begging the question ‘what does loss teach,’ Leggo is interested in dwelling within the experience of grieving:

I want to call out my grief because grief is now my teacher, and if I am going to learn from grief, I must articulate grief, to speak grief into a world where the first response to the polite question—how are you?—is typically a quick “fine. You?” (Leggo, 2017, p. 70)

Few inside the field of death education position death as a teacher, though Durant’s (2018) definition discussed above does allude to that positioning. The notion of death as a teacher is more common in existential philosophy (Fairfield, 2015) and Indigenous spirituality (Stonechild, 2020). Leggo’s poetic inquiry is deeply human; anthropocentric, yes, but in such a way that it transcends the simplicity of Wass’ (2004) humanistic justifications for death education. Leggo, like me, is concerned with interiority—his own experience of loss and how it might change him. Where we differ in our thinking is that I am interested in dwelling within loss primarily for its relational and political effect—that is, its potential to transform our interiority, yes, but also the external world. Regardless, I take Leggo’s offering, the curriculum of loss, to heart. Indeed, I am living

my own curriculum of loss for many people, more-than-people, and non-people—not the least of which is Carl himself, who recently passed and left a void in the world of curriculum theory and poetic inquiry.

Patrick Slattery's (1989) dissertation brings the concept of eschatology, or the study of the end times and all that goes with it, from theology into curriculum theory. In that it deserves some consideration. The work "outlines a postmodern vision in which the individual person, in relation to others and connected to a meaningful past and to an emerging future, is essential for social transformation and global survival" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 653). Slattery's postmodern eschatology shifts away from the modern self as an atemporal and isolated individual and heads toward an appreciation for our emergence from a particular lived reality (see also Aoki, Pinar, & Irwin, 2005; Martino, 1979; Pinar, 1994) and toward our capability of affecting our future. In short, we have agency over our time here on Earth. At the end of our lives, then, we will not be judged on the degree to which we accepted our lot, but rather the actions we took toward making the world a more just place. Slattery's use of eschatology could potentially be read as a link between death and interiority as resistance; however, like other emancipatory theorists his thinking is explicitly rooted in the agency of humans without a consideration of the more-than-human. Slattery's postmodern eschatology, then, gestures toward a self-in-relation in as much as it recognizes our interconnectedness to other human beings, though not to our non-human and more-than-human relations.^{xxxiv}

Though there are a handful of curriculum theory articles that take up death in passing (e.g., Van Kessel, Den Heyer, & Schimel, 2020), two articles give a slightly more than tangential focus to the topic, and both do so through discussions of literature.

Susan Moore's 2005 article came on the heels of the SARS outbreak; it is, thus, topical and relevant in the current moment as well. Moore offers a reading of works by Atwood and Wolfe through the psychoanalytic lens of Melanie Klein. Moore (2005) articulates a death drive pedagogy as "the process of working through melancholia into mourning" (p. 99) and draws on Klein's articulation of mourning as always centered on an object. In this, we diverge. As I will discuss at the end of this chapter, I see mourning as a broader space. The divergence between Moore's discussion of death and my own thinking might be characterized as the difference between working through trouble (Moore's emphasis) and staying with it (my emphasis, drawing on Haraway [2016]). Differences aside, Moore and I do share an emphasis on the potential of death as a teacher. More recently, Janicki (2019) touched on the topic of death in the context of the Gothic novel, such as *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. Here, death is a source of fear, but is also intimately connected with concepts of sex, desire, and science. Janicki also states that "death, for the Gothic imagination, is inextricable from desire for the perverse, the strange, or the different" (p. 13). This characterization of death has little in common with my own, but these comments could be read as a manifestation of or reaction to the societal repression of death (Testoni et al., 2019; see also Fairfield, 2015). At the historic moment in question, sex, desire, and science were, like death is today, rather subversive topics. Thus, in the imaginaries of the authors Janicki discusses, these notions have become intertwined. Perhaps then, the Gothic novel highlights the beginnings—or at least an earlier stage—of Western society's denial of death. Regardless of our differences, Janicki's article is worth note as one of the few discussions of death in curriculum theory.

Outside of curriculum, there are several writers and thinkers whose work around death inspire my thinking. De Beauvoir, on the occasion of her mother's death, wrote that

There is no such thing as a natural death: nothing that happens to a man [sic] is ever natural, since his presence calls the world into question. All men must die: but for every man his death is an accident and, even if he knows it and consents to it, an unjustifiable violation. (1969, p. 92)

Here, De Beauvoir evokes the ethos of the famous Dylan Thomas poem, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," where death is something against which to battle (or perhaps simply an inevitable violence). This idea of the battle against death is a marker of a death-denying society—a ubiquitous disposition outside the fields of death studies and death education already discussed several times in this dissertation. The problem of a death-denying society is that it forces us to repress an aspect of our affective material reality, which can only lead to psychological fragmentation and internal conflict (see Kumar, 2013). De Beauvoir has interesting things to say about death in other parts of her text. The position advanced by Thomas, however, that death is a violence to be avoided, is notable only for its short-sightedness and as a position to which my own thinking reacts.

There are, perhaps, too many notable lingerings to name. Paul Fairfield's *Death: A Philosophical Inquiry* (2015) has already proven formative, and later in this dissertation Kristeva's (1982) treatment of the corpse, Thomas Laqueur's monumental text, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (2015), and Erin Edwards' *The Modernist Corpse: Posthumanism and the Posthumous* (2018) all make significant appearances. Less pronounced influence is also drawn from Kendrick James'

(2017) work on digital waste and recycling, as well as the field of discard studies broadly (Liboiron, 2019) and the writings of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1962, 1992) and Richard Wagamese (2014, 2016). The list of names and texts is extensive and ever-growing. As the complicated conversations in the following chapters of this dissertation ensue, voices will enter and leave. The important thing is not necessarily that the names are remembered, but that the voices are attended—that reader and author alike remain open to hearing and being changed by them. As such, I leave the list of those who have informed my thinking open-ended in the spirit of embracing that which is yet to come in the complicated conversation.

Conclusion: Of Mourning

I began this chapter by discussing my intention not just to review the literatures of death and death education, but to attend to them. I also ended that opening section by honouring the losses that happen in learning and expressing my desire to mourn those losses through my writing. Though the degree to which I have made my mourning visible in the text remains to be seen, the intention has stayed with me through the writing.

Robert Nellis (2009) begins his discussion of mourning thus: “Meaningful learning becomes a process of aporetic mourning” (p. 124). Nellis’ characterization of mourning as *aporia*, an unresolvable logical tension, moves mourning outside fixed temporality into the Derridean realm of existence and non-existence, where neither is true, both are true, and each is haunted by the other. Mourning is impossible “in the sense that we bear the ghosts of our mourning with us forever, just as our mournings

bear us with them” (p. 130), but in as much as it is impossible, it is haunted by possibility, even inevitability: “Change calls for impossible mourning, and such mourning calls for patience” (p. 130). If attending asks us to open ourselves up to the possibilities of being changed, mourning reminds us that such changes are painful and that that to which we say goodbye in change never really leaves us. Like trauma, the specters of old selves recur in unpredictable moments, and Nellis advises that “one response is to learn to live with [our] ghosts” (p. 130). The language of haunting and the language of mourning have taken on negative connotations, but there is nothing inherently negative about either experience. These hauntings are not the ghost stories of our youth, but the excitement of new possibilities and ways of being with/in the world. Our mournings are not the teary-eyed goodbyes of physical loss, but rather markers of our capacity for radical hope (Lear, 2006)—the capacity to find meaning after all that one knows as possible has ceased to exist. The new will always be haunted by the old, but this is no reason to become stuck in nostalgia. Mourning is moving forward, but doing so in a way that honours that which we carry with us.

Having now further situated my complicated conversation in relationship with the literature of death studies education and death education, I will proceed to discuss the methodological considerations at play in this dissertation. Before parting the topic of my haunted learning, however, I name the questions that linger: by what is this chapter, text, word, sentence, and dissertation haunted? What ghosts am I learning to live with as I write these words? What am I mourning? Tangential questions, lines of flight, (rhizomatic) digressions from the point; all describe the questions and answer them.

Chapter Three: The Death of Method(ology)

Curriculum is an extraordinary complicated conversation – William F. Pinar (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 848)

*Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so* – John Donne, 1633

The Death of Method

The notion of death-as-change is not always directed at human interiorities; sometimes it is used as a metaphor for the changing tides of paradigm. Such is the case with recent work that falls under the umbrella of post qualitative inquiry^{xxxv} (Lather, 2013, 2016; St. Pierre, 2011, 2015, 2018, 2019). This work attempts to alleviate the tension between traditional qualitative research and postmodern thought. Post qualitative researchers note that traditional qualitative research has increasingly become systematized, meaning that the researcher is bound to a particular predetermined set of procedures and analytic frameworks based on their chosen methodological label. This systemization has precisely been the trend in death studies, manifest as a pull toward empirical standards of truth even in qualitative research. Post qualitative researchers look at these predetermined procedures and analytic frameworks as ideological remnants of empiricism and Cartesian duality or, in other words, misguided attempts to simplify and generalize the complexity of human experience in the name of science. Confronted by ubiquitous and expected thought structures counterintuitive to many of the theorists with whom they work (e.g., Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze), post qualitative researchers do away with the conventional structures of research in favour of more fluid and rhizomatic approaches. This abandonment of the conventional structures of research has led at least

one prominent writer in the field (Lather, 2013) to comment in passing on the death of method.

As the John Donne quote at the beginning of this chapter may suggest, however, I do not consider *this* death as something to be lamented. Rather, the death of method is the birth of research that begins to appreciate the complexity of human, more-than-human, and non-human experience and articulate that appreciation in ever more nuanced and truthful terms. This dissertation is intimately concerned with those aspects of ourselves and the living world that have been most ignored by the modern school system and curriculum. To try to examine these topics through conventional methodological means runs the risk of eliciting only conventional understandings, and the present moment demands the unconventional. It is, thus, in this spirit of celebrating the death of method that I move forward with this chapter meant, from a practical standpoint, to articulate the methodological considerations at play in this dissertation.

I begin this chapter with a summary of three critiques of research. First, I offer a critique from within the field of education (Barrow, 2013; Egan, 2003; Lather 2004, 2006). Second, I describe the problems with research from an Indigenous perspective (Kovach, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Third, I further the above discussion of post qualitative critiques of research (Lather, 2013; St. Pierre, 2018, 2019). I offer these critiques in order to support my own methodological positioning or, perhaps more accurately, lack thereof. Indeed, rather than adhering to one methodological label, my intent in this chapter is to highlight multiple possible ways of looking at my writing methodologically. While I will ultimately settle on complicated conversation (Pinar, 2012) as a broad hermeneutic framing for my approach, I do so

after articulating philosophy as spiritual exercise (Hadot, 1995, 2002), the theoretical ethos of poetic inquiry (Prendergast, 2009), and post qualitative inquiry (St. Pierre, 2018) as informative and provocative possibilities. Each of the four ideas listed above are potentially expansive enough to encompass the other three. Thus, as I will articulate later, my arriving at complicated conversation is perhaps best described as a way of situating my work within the intellectual tradition of curriculum theory—the field I have come to love and call my home.

In the third portion of this chapter, I briefly address ontology, epistemology, and axiology, offering thoughts on how each is at work throughout this dissertation. This frank discussion of the assumptions about reality, knowledge, and ethics that underpin research is often replaced by adherence to a particular methodological label. Having attempted to distance myself from such reductionism, I consider it an act of intellectual integrity to clearly articulate the assumptions from which my inquiry stems. I conclude this chapter by briefly offering a practical overview of what I am ‘doing’ in my dissertation. Throughout this chapter, I express my desire for a pluralistic, diverse, and messy approach. Indeed, I am seeking approaches to research and thought that are sufficiently messy to support the general thrust of my dissertation—toward a messy, chaotic curriculum centred on understanding self-with(in)-other as informed by the concept of death.

The Problems with Research

Post qualitative researchers are by no means the only ones to levy criticisms at contemporary research. In this section, I highlight three critiques of research common

within discussions of the social sciences. I then conclude the section by briefly discussing my own critiques of research as it is mobilized in education.

Education. Over the past 100 years, education has become one of the largest disciplines in Western academia. While many different areas of research exist within education, developmental psychology and its offshoots seem to have been awarded the most prestige—at least historically speaking (Egan, 2003). Kieran Egan (2003), among others (Barrow, 2013; Lather, 2004, 2006; see also Lather, 2007), has pointed out that this dominance of psychology in educational research perhaps stems from the Western adherence to the empirical as the highest standard of evidence. It is not difficult to trace the trajectory of empiricism through its Western inception in the Enlightenment, its rise to prominence through the Industrial Revolution, and its installation as the de facto standard of truth through the 20th century. In education, this push toward empirical, or scientific, research both supports and is supported by the broader trend of neoliberal management in schools and curriculum (Kumar, 2019)—specifically attempts to ‘streamline’ education through data-based decision-making and teacher accountability (Lather, 2004; see also Rodgers, 2018). As Egan (2003) suggests, however, empirical evidence is not necessarily the best conceptual fit for the study of education (see also Lather, 2004). Empirical research works well when things are easy to observe. Medical research, where the effects of a particular treatment can be seen physically on a patient, and physical sciences, where the trueness of a phenomenon within the world can be observed, fit empiricism well. The social sciences, however, which aim to study human experience and relationships between people within societal structures, seek to explore

phenomena that are much harder to observe with any scientific accuracy. Observation as an expression of empiricism is a rather limited form of gathering knowledge, one that has often led to policy decisions in education that privilege the observer and those the observer deem normative (Lather, 2004, 2006). At various stages in the development of qualitative research methodologies, have been created that attempt to remove bias, to bracket bias out, and to embrace the impossibility of objectivity. This latter approach, however, still seems something of a marginal option, taken up mostly by critical (e.g., Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) and artistic researchers (e.g., Cole & Knowles, 2008).

Underlying the dominance of empiricism is a social stratification of epistemology, or what some have called epistemic inequality (McIntyre & Cole, 2002; McIntyre, 2004; see also Martin, 1985).^{xxxvi} Epistemic inequality posits that certain ways of knowing, or epistemologies, have been privileged over others in the construction of knowledge. One example of epistemic inequality is the way in which Indigenous knowledges were, and continue to be, subjugated in favour of dominant Western empirical and Christonormative knowledges (Ferber, 2012; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Kimmerer, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Wilson, 2008). The tacit normativity of Western empirical knowledges, however, does not limit its de facto subjugation of other knowledge systems to the Indigenous. Indeed, both feminist standpoint epistemologies and qualitative approaches to knowledge creation and research have historically had to fight for legitimacy (Denzin, 2009, 2010; Forrest, 2008; see also Lather, 2007) and continue to be underfunded when compared to empirical, or quantitative, research (Richards & Morse, 2013).

As alluded to previously, even research firmly positioned in the qualitative realm necessarily takes on traits of empiricism via adherence to the conventional research structures. To truly get away from the empirical, and thus the (often politically coopted) unjustified claims to Truth associated with modern educational research, a radically different approach is needed—one that dreams beyond the confining structures of conventional research. In order to truly work toward epistemic equality, those dreams must also escape, or at least speak back to, the invisible tendrils of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006), cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2013), neoliberalism (Ross & Gibson, 2007), and military capitalism (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2019) that have been choking Indigenous and other marginalized communities for generations.

Research as colonial violence. It is often said that Indigenous peoples are the most researched people in the world (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008), with some even positing that Indigenous people have been researched to death (Castellano, 2004). Indeed, settler colonialism is very much concerned with attempting to make Indigenous peoples into ghosts (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015)—making them absent from the land in order to facilitate white capitalist expansion (Mitchell, 2018). In a physical, material sense this happens through genocide; however, it also happens more subtly, within the minds of settlers and Indigenous people alike, through the normalization of settler narratives of place as manifested in both literature (Bryant, 2017) and research (Kovach, 2010; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2014).

While the biomedical research conducted at residential schools (Justice, 2018) is perhaps the most egregious form of exploitative research levied against Indigenous

people, it is but one entry in a very long list. Wilson (2008, pp. 45-52) described the following periods of research involving Indigenous people: 1) the *Terra Nullius* phase, 2) the traditionalizing phase, 3) the assimilationist phase, 4) the early Aboriginal research phase, and 5) the recent Aboriginal research phase. The years associated with these phases are always unique to the specific local Indigenous communities and their experiences with settler colonialism but, generally speaking, most Indigenous groups in North America have experienced some variant of all these phases.

With the exception of perhaps the most recent Indigenous research, each phase listed above has had its own problematic form of discrimination and misconception, which has systematically worked against the best interests of Indigenous peoples. The *Terra Nullius* phase describes a period during which seemingly objective settler observations of Indigenous people, which were necessarily limited by a ubiquitous, unexamined Christonormative and Eurocentric frame of reference, comprised the only valid knowledge of Indigenous populations. The settler inability to see Indigenous peoples as conscious, brilliant, sophisticated human beings during this period is one factor that facilitated Indigenous dispossession and genocide (see also Bryant, 2017; Stonechild, 2020). The traditionalizing phase began after the possibility of sustained military resistance by Indigenous peoples against the settler state was extinguished. Politically, this phase is marked by increased systematization, surveillance, and control of every aspect of Indigenous life. In addition to the aforementioned biomedical research conducted during this period (Justice, 2018), there was also a concerted effort on the part of anthropologists to document Indigenous cultures, of which the extinction was seen as inevitable. The assimilationist phase shifted the focus of research on

Indigenous people from their physical traits to their social structures. Assimilationist research stemmed from the highly problematic government policies that were aimed, in Canada as well as elsewhere, at absorbing the Indigenous population into the national body politic (see also Palmater, 2011). As with the previous phase, control over every aspect of Indigenous life and government paternalism became the political norm (Killen, 2016). Paternalism also became a normative disposition of anthropological research, facilitating generations of White-saviour researchers who earned tenure through stealing stories of Indigenous people. Since the 1970s, Indigenous people have taken up the task of displacing, challenging, and speaking back to research that works against their best interests. Though many of the problematic ideologies of previous phases of Indigenous research persist, it would seem as though progress is being made with documents and structures such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report (2015) and the ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP [The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014]) framework available to guide the work of researchers, as well as the efforts of a growing number of Indigenous academics to offer advice, leadership, and critique.

Beyond the ways Western society has used research to facilitate the oppression of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous researchers have also critiqued normative research for its epistemological, ontological and, perhaps most importantly, axiological assumptions. While initially the emphasis in the literature was on the ways in which these philosophical assumptions harm Indigenous people, communities, and researchers (i.e., decolonization), in recent years there has been a push toward asserting the validity of the Indigenous philosophical positions in their own right (see Coulthard, 2014;

Simpson, 2017; Styres, 2017). This assertion of epistemic equality (perhaps epistemic sovereignty) on the part of Indigenous researchers—which called into question the very foundation of Western research—perhaps invited further (re)thinking from a Western perspective. Such (re)thinking has occurred under multiple names: new materialism, posthumanism, new empiricism, and in the realm of methodology, post qualitative research.

The limitedness and ubiquity of structure. Central to the turn toward post qualitative research is the perceived incommensurability between postmodern theory and “conventional humanist qualitative methodology” (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 603).

Elizabeth St. Pierre, perhaps the most recognized authority on post qualitative research, summarizes the problems with the conventional paradigm as such:

Conventional humanist qualitative methodology provides a handy pre-existing research process to follow, a container with well-identified categories into which researchers are expected to slot all aspects of their research projects so they are recognizable, clear, and accessible. And even though qualitative methodology still claims to be “emergent,” its concepts and categories, which have been tightened up over the years, just tend to control the study. (2018, p. 603)

The systematization of qualitative research can be readily observed through the many textbooks and graduate courses that offer step-by-step procedures for amateur researchers (e.g., Creswell, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013), as well as through the expectations of journals that manuscripts follow particular formats (i.e., introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, discussion, and conclusion). In another article, St. Pierre highlighted the way these structures primarily serve to limit the direction of thought, drawing on Deleuze to suggest they facilitate a “dogmatic image of thought”

(Deleuze as cited in St. Pierre, 2019, p. 5). St. Pierre goes on to provide an example around taken-for-granted ontological assumptions:

Social science researchers are often interested in identifying the *conditions of possibility* that enabled this or that to happen, assuming that something which exists could be replicated if the conditions that produce it could be reproduced. To that end, social scientists have developed research methods to identify those conditions. In that model, however, possible experience is always limited by what *is* so that, in effect, everything is already given, even the possible. (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 5)

In other words, social scientists are generally interested in understanding existing phenomena within reality and, in so defining their scope, have excluded the possibility of understanding that which is not yet—what Deleuze proposed to study through the ontology of immanence (St. Pierre, 2019). This is but one of the limitations the systematization of conventional humanist qualitative methodology tacitly places on thought, but it resonates deeply with my desire to dream toward the not yet. It is also worth noting here that, as was suggested in the previous chapter (see also Wittkowski et al., 2015), much of the death studies and death education literature serves as a precise example of what the post qualitative researchers are attempting to move beyond: systematization, empiricization, and conventional forms of thought. It is my desire to move beyond these same limitations that drives my theorizing toward speculation.

When the post qualitative critique is combined with those offered by Indigenous scholars and those skeptical of educational research, the image of research becomes bleak. While those who offer critiques also posit alternatives, some of which will be taken up later, there is perhaps something to be gained from dwelling (with)in the

discomfort with research raised by these critiques—a discomfort with which I am all too familiar.

My breakup with qualitative research. The point of this cursory review of contemporary critiques of research is to highlight the ethical and philosophical minefield into which one walks as a graduate student researcher—and particularly as a graduate student researcher of Indigenous descent studying something as complicated as death. To further highlight the complexities of research, and to elucidate my reasons for moving in the methodological direction I have, below I share several concerns emergent from my own experience.

When I began my PhD program, I was interested in doing Indigenous research that would work in the best interest of my communities and, particularly, my brothers and sisters occupying the liminal identity space between settler and Indigenous (see Downey, 2017, 2018a). Embedded in this work and my thinking around it was a profound commitment to what some have described as Indigenous axiology (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), and specifically what Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) calls relational accountability. Relational accountability is a foundational part of many Indigenous worldviews and describes the practical and metaphysical commitment to upholding good relationships with all our relations—human (past and present), plants, animals, spirits, and the cosmos (see Stonechild, 2016, 2020). The more I read about relational accountability and the way Indigenous academics in other parts of the world were putting it in practice, while also becoming acquainted with the expectations of doctoral research, the larger a divide I felt. Though there are perhaps a dozen

manifestations of this embodied discomfort with research, some of which have been described above, perhaps the most tangible—and the straw that broke the camel’s back—is my concern with authorship.

Authorship is not innocent. Rather, it is embedded within the complex and exploitative power structures endemic to Western society (e.g., Younging, 2018). As highlighted in the previous section dealing with Indigenous research, many academics gained access to immense privilege (degrees, tenure, promotion, book deals, etc.) by writing down the stories and lived experiences of Indigenous people and claiming authorship over them (Younging, 2018). Modern qualitative research, which draws primarily on participant interviews in order to articulate generalizations about a particular phenomenon, is complicit with this practice as it does not conventionally offer authorship to participants. Though some researchers are testing the boundaries of this power structure (at UNB the names Burkholder, Whitty, and Rogers come to mind), the norm serves the interests of already privileged researchers, not those with whom they work. Nowhere is the power structure more rigid than at the level of the PhD dissertation. A PhD dissertation carries with it the expectation of single authorship, and even when participants are named as co-researchers (e.g., Rowett, 2019), the privilege they gain from the title is significantly less than what is gained by the newly minted Doctor of Philosophy, whose average income has now reached around 73,000 dollars (US) a year (often much higher) by virtue of having completed the degree (www.payscale.com).

Even with the most rigorous adherence to the practical implications of relational accountability, authorship as it is currently structured seems incongruent with the spirit

of Indigenous axiology. This embodied discomfort with authorship in Indigenous PhD research was driven home for me through the sentiments expressed me by various Elders that “the only thing in which you can ever be an expert is your own story.” While I am sure other Indigenous academics have found ways of combating the colonial power structures of authorship in research (e.g., Younging, 2018), when combined with the myriad critiques of research discussed above, the structure of authorship was enough for me to break up^{xxxvii} with the idea of completing qualitative-style Indigenous research at the PhD level.

The completion of a graduate degree is often narrativized as a long journey—the implication being that, although one may experience difficulty through the process, the end outcome is always positive. Egan (2003) would link this to the overall vision of learning in Western society as a progressive endeavour, where learning is viewed as a net positive despite what is lost in the process. Others have also acknowledged that in learning something new, there is always something lost and that loss must be mourned (Nellis, 2009, 2018). It is thus in the spirit of mourning the lost possibility of conventional research that I move forward with a discussion of potential alternatives.

Alternatives

It is somewhat appealing to dwell within critique rather than to propose alternatives, and while dwelling can teach us much, we must all eventually find a way forward after loss (see Didion, 2006). In this section, I entertain the possibility of four approaches to research that, in my reading, respond either directly or tacitly to the critiques levied against research discussed above. More precisely, I discuss: philosophy,

particularly Hadot's notion of philosophy as spiritual exercise; the theoretical ethos of poetic inquiry; post qualitative inquiry; and William F. Pinar's notion of curriculum as complicated conversation. While I will eventually arrive at complicated conversation as an expansive hermeneutic framing through which to move forward, my emphasis throughout this section will be on plurality rather than adherence to a specific label.

Philosophy (as spiritual exercise). When confronted with the ethical, logical, and practical impossibilities of empirical research, as well as research haunted by the spectre of the dominant humanist qualitative paradigm, many turn toward the time-honored tradition of Western philosophy as an alternative. Egan (2003), Barrow (2013), and post qualitative researchers (St. Pierre, 2018, 2019) all take up philosophy in some capacity. Philosophy as a discipline, however, is in no way immune to the systematization and operationalization that St. Pierre and others find problematic in traditional humanist qualitative research. As such, any consideration of philosophy must move beyond logical-rational thinking and include some form of holistic, ontologically embodied engagement. The work of Pierre Hadot (1995, 2002) provides us such a vision of philosophy.

The beginnings of philosophy in the Western world are often attributed to the Greeks; however, what we think of as philosophy in the 21st century could not be further from what Socrates, Plato, and even the sophists practiced in ancient Athens. Hadot (2002), after meticulously articulating the philosophical practice of the Greeks as the quest to live the best possible life, stated that modern philosophy has become an abstract, discursive, scholarly task rather than a way of life. He also acknowledged,

however, that there has been a consistent thread of philosophers in the ancient sense since the time of Plato. In terms of modern philosophers, he cites Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant, as well as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Marx, Foucault, and a host of others including Thoreau (see Davidson, 1995, p. 33).^{xxxviii} Hadot's primary criterion for inclusion in this list appears to be one's willingness or ability to *live* one's philosophy, of which Thoreau's two years living in the woods provides an illustrative example. This lived philosophy, which is divorced from the abstract logical tradition philosophical scholars engage in today, is holistic and spiritual in nature, and Hadot (1995) describes philosophy practiced in this way as spiritual exercise. In his introduction to the English edition of Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Arnold I. Davidson (1995) describes Hadot's thinking around spiritual exercise thus:

[Ancient philosophical training's] goal was nothing less than an art of living, and so spiritual exercises were exercises in learning to live the philosophical life. Spiritual exercises were exercises because they were practical, required effort and training, and were lived; they were spiritual because they involved the entire spirit, one's whole way of being. The art of living demanded by philosophy was a lived exercise exhibited in every aspect of one's existence. (Davidson, 1995, p. 21)

Philosophy as a way of life, or spiritual exercise, is an expansive notion and may lend itself particularly well to the study of death and dying, in which life and living are always unspoken constants. Indeed, given the thrust of this dissertation toward a more considered and sustained curricular engagement with our internal landscapes, any form of inquiry employed here *must be a lived one*, lest it run the risk of becoming an instrumental, scholarly endeavour—thinking for the sake of thinking, knowledge for knowledge's sake. Having said this, philosophy, even in Hadot's thinking, carries with it a certain air of condescension toward the validity of non-rational forms of knowledge, as

well as a history of dismissing marginal viewpoints (e.g., Forrest, 2008). Thus, while philosophy as spiritual exercise informs the approach at work here, it does not form its base. Indeed, to move forward at all the logical demands of philosophy must be tempered and balanced by intuitive and emotive knowledges of poetic inquiry.

Poetic Inquiry. Though the arts have enjoyed a long history of prominence in Western culture, the validity of their use in research has only come into bloom in the last 30 years (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Eisner, 2008; McNiff, 2008). Despite extensive literature describing rigorous uses of art in research (Cole, 2004; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Eisner, 2008; Ewing & Smith, 2004; de Freitas, 2004), artist/researchers are perpetually called on to defend the legitimacy of their work. While arts-based research is, perhaps, still considered marginal by the majority of social scientists, within the field of curriculum theory the arts, and more particularly poetic inquiry, has become something of a norm (e.g., Aitken, Dobson, Ezcurra, Mitchell, & Strong-Wilson, 2018; Hasebe-Ludt & Leggo, 2018). In a search for something with which to temper the seemingly cold, logical intellectual work of philosophy, then, poetic inquiry is the best fit for this study. Here, however, I draw on the ethos and theory of poetic inquiry without implementing its methods.^{xxxix}

Poetic inquiry implies the use of poetry anywhere within the process of social science research (Prendergast, 2009). And indeed, it exists at a crossroads between disciplines: “poetic inquiry is the attempt to work in fruitful interdisciplinary ways between the humanities [literature/aesthetic philosophy], fine arts [creative writing] and the social sciences” (p. xxvi). While this intersection of disciplines is philosophically

somewhat problematic, especially in determinations of quality and rigour (e.g., Cole & Knowles, 2008; Eisner, 2008; Finley, 2008; Kerry-Moran, 2008; Leggo, 2011, 2012; Piirto, 2009; Richardson, 2000), experienced poetic inquirers ask not whether a poem is good, but rather what a poem is good for (Leggo, 2011, 2012).

A poem is good for many things. In previous writing situated within the context of my lived experience as an Indigenous person, I saw poetry as the place where “my heart meets my mind and where both are set free from the tyrannical rule of cognitive imperialism” (Downey, 2017, p. 155). Likewise, I later reflected in my master’s thesis that

Poetry enabled me to find my voice as an Indigenous person; it allowed me to momentarily push aside my academic training in critical theory and connect with what it meant for me to be an Indigenous person. In discovering my own creativity, I connected to the universal creativity of all living beings. (Downey & Harkins, 2019, p. 249)

Vicki Kelly points toward this interconnectivity as the root of Indigenous Poiesis:

“Indigenous knowledge practices are ecological encounters of profound ethical relationality that acknowledge the act of co-creating through living embodiments of Indigenous Poiesis” (Kelly, 2019, p. 17). In that way, poetry is not just a form of expression but a way of walking in the world—a way of existing in mindful awareness of the fact that you are related to everything around you: attending. Indeed, in my mind the notion of attending presented in the previous chapter is a form of poetic inquiry, regardless of whether the product is poetic or not. Attending, then, is informed by the theoretical ethos of poetic inquiry; attending is a lived poetic inquiry.

Though poetic inquiry is an expansive term and more holistic in the scope of its gaze than philosophy as a way of life, there is a certain anthropocentrism embedded within the basic assumptions of the term, which demands tempering. To summarize briefly this critique of poetic inquiry, phenomenology and poetic inquiry are intimately connected in their shared engagement with human perception (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016; Galvin & Todres, 2009; Owton, 2017; see also Bachelard, 1964; Heidegger, 1977). Many would position poetic inquiry within an interpretivist paradigm and the realm of phenomenological methods (Owton, 2017).^{x1} Citing the well-known phenomenologist Max Van Manen, Richards and Mores (2013) state that there are four existentialisms that guide phenomenology: “temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), and relationality or communality (lived human relations)” (p. 68). They go on to state the two major assumptions of phenomenology as: 1) “perceptions present us with evidence of the world—not as it is thought to be but as it is lived” (p. 68), and 2) “human existence is meaningful and of interest in the sense that we are always conscious of something” (p. 68). Where phenomenology is concerned with the workings of human relationships and human perceptions, it creates an anthropocentric vacuum where our non-human and more-than-human relations are rendered non-existent. The implications of this oversight are huge, particularly when one considers the history of non-humanity ascribed to Indigenous and other marginalized peoples (Wilson, 2008). In short, by focusing on human relationships *to* the world around us, rather than the pre-existent interconnectedness of all living things and our relationships *with* the world of which we are a part (Stonechild, 2016), phenomenologists limit their seeing in the same way that past generations of researchers

were limited in their inability to see marginal knowledges and lifeways as valid (see also Bryant, 2017; Stonechild, 2020; Wilson, 2008).

Thus, in moving toward an approach to research, those paradigms of thought which seek more relational engagement with more-than-human and non-humans must be considered. As per the above, where methodology is concerned, those paradigms have been mobilized under the banner of post qualitative inquiry.

Post qualitative inquiry. I have already written a fair amount about the theoretical origins of post qualitative research, so the focus of this section will largely be around what post qualitative researchers propose to do. Perhaps the most apparent answer to the question of what a post qualitative researcher does is that they read deeply, and then they write (St. Pierre, 2018; see also St. Pierre, 2011, 2015). While this deep reading has been critiqued by postcolonial theorists as being in some ways apolitical and alienating to those with whom post qualitative inquirers work (i.e., participants; see Gerrard, Rudolph, & Sriprakash, 2017), deep, sustained, thoughtful reading responds well to my previous considerations of the subversive inwardness of studying death (Fairfield, 2015; see also Coleman, 2009). Furthermore, to say that what post qualitative researchers do is read deeply and write is to ignore the internal magnitude of their work. What is actually happening in post qualitative research while reading deeply is an embodiment of theory, a becoming-theorist (St. Pierre, 2018; see also St. Pierre, 2015). Indeed, as with the ancient Greeks in Hadot's (2002) work, the post qualitative researcher is called on to live their theory or philosophy (St. Pierre, 2018). This

becoming is somewhat difficult to quantify, but that is perhaps precisely the point, and perhaps another reason it fits with my thinking.

The reason for attending to post qualitative research in this context, however, extends beyond its methodological appreciation of inwardness and becoming. As mentioned previously, the turn toward post qualitative research is a way of dreaming beyond the anthropocentrism and humanism of qualitative research. Here, it is important to highlight the conceptual alignment and overlap between post qualitative research and posthumanism, particularly as manifest in new materialism (e.g., Kuby, 2019; see also St. Pierre et al., 2016), but all broadly packaged as part of the so-called ontological turn or the second coming of postmodernism (Lather, 2016, p. 125). In a top ten list of lessons learned from this second coming, Patti Lather (2016) highlights the significance of both the posthuman subject and posthuman theories of agency to post qualitative ontological positioning. In my reading, we are all entangled in interconnected webs of being(s), and while pre-ontological-turn mentalities and methodologies may have attempted to break down and isolate these interconnections (i.e., Cartesian duality), those on the other side of the ontological turn embrace that entanglement and work from the starting point that understanding is by nature incomplete, and that what we have thought based on the seemingly banal assumptions of humanist paradigms needs to be (re)thought (Kuby, 2019).^{xli} Post qualitative researchers are interested in speaking back to these structures by (re)thinking and (re)imagining ubiquitous concepts within the conventional qualitative paradigm (Kuby, 2019), particularly in light of our non-human and more-than-human relations. On the topic of these relations, Lather describes the transition to a posthuman subject: “post-humanist theories of the subject move from the

unified, conscious, and rational subject of humanism (think Paulo Freire) through the post-humanist, split, desiring subject (think Jacques Lacan) to the Deleuzian subject” (2016, p. 125). In my reading, the Deleuzian subject is an assemblage of human, non-human, and more-than-human entities. This notion lead to an expansive appreciation of the agency of matter and thus an ethical appreciation for the rights of all living and non-living beings. This approach is akin to the Indigenous ontological position of interrelatedness (Stonechild, 2016; Wilson, 2008). Thus, by opening this conversation up to post qualitative potentialities, the possibility of understanding and dreaming reality beyond the anthropocentric lenses that have plagued traditional research enters the realm of the possible.

To conclude this section, I will return briefly to the “doing” of post qualitative research. On this topic, Lather states:

The implications for what Bettie St. Pierre (2011) calls the “post-qualitative” are perhaps best understood via the methodologies materialized by those who are exploring such space. This is in tune with Barad’s (2012) echoing of Latour’s critique of critique as having led us to stuck places whereas *it is time now to invent, not critique* [emphasis added]. (Lather, 2016, p. 126)

Perhaps the most significant change in terms of the ontological turn is a shift away from understanding through breaking down and compartmentalizing, and a movement toward understanding through building up and layering—and, of course, speculating and dreaming. In this, St. Pierre (2004), drawing on Deleuze, advises that we should not be overly concerned with whether or not we have read a particular theorist ‘correctly,’ but rather be driven by what emerges from a particular reading, for our understanding will always form a unique line of flight regardless of whether our interpretation matches the

author's intention.^{xlii} The question, thus, becomes not what is the most fundamental truth we can determine about a phenomenon, but how many different ways of understanding a phenomenon can we employ and which of those speaks most truthfully to us. Toward an honouring of the complexity of the ontological entanglement of human, non-human, and more-than-human entities, then, it only makes sense that a single methodological label, even the post qualitative, would be insufficient to layer a complicated understanding of a phenomenon. Indeed, understanding in line with this layering appears something like a conversation—a complicated conversation.

Complicated conversation. Complicated conversation has been used as a hermeneutic framing for a variety of works within curriculum theory including dissertations by Ashwani Kumar (2011) and Nathan Hensley (2011). Perhaps initially put forward as a framing for the study of curriculum as *text* informed by a plethora of voices (Pinar et al., 1995), in my mind complicated conversation—and the study of curriculum more broadly—has evolved to take on the various intellectual movements of the time. Indeed, curriculum theory, and thus the idea of the complicated conversation, *must* by its nature bring together voices from divergent paradigms in order to ensure that it stays a *complicated* conversation, lest it become stagnant. Though the degree to which curriculum studies as an intellectual space has historically been welcoming of marginalized voices is suspect (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; see also Sabzalian, 2018; Tuck, 2011), at least in theory the notion of curriculum as complicated conversation creates a space where the possibilities for divergent understandings of educational phenomenon are endless.

Complicated conversation has not, to my knowledge, been articulated as a methodological framework (though conversation has been used as an approach in philosophy of education [e.g., Martin, 1985; Whitty, 1993]). Rather, it is an overall approach to the study of curriculum in line with the general thrust of curriculum inquiry (Nellis, 2009) described in chapter one and what curriculum theorists have called the reconceptualization of curriculum studies (Pinar 1988). I have already articulated the situatedness of my theorizing within curriculum theory, curriculum inquiry, and the ethos of curriculum as complicated conversation, and, to me, situatedness within those fields comprises the methodological framing of this work. Where methodology is an overarching orientation toward the actualization of research (Grix, 2002), this can be said to be a work of curriculum theory guided by the notion of curriculum as complicated conversation. I have also characterized my mode of thinking as speculative and suggestive rather than argumentative. This, I think, can be thought of as the actualization of my research approach, or in other words my method. Of course, I do not limit myself to the art of speculation, as there are moments of argument, narrative, and intervention within this dissertation as well (such is the nature of conversation). Yet, the overall tenor of my thinking and writing here can be characterized as speculative in nature (particularly in chapters five, six, and seven).

Complicated conversation is, thus, the frame for the dissertation moving forward. It is worth noting here that the specific complicated conversation within these pages is largely, though not exclusively, informed by text. This is an important note with regard to chapter six, where I engage with Indigenous theories. As discussed above, Indigenous research has a long history of damage (Tuck, 2009). The limiting of my

complicated conversation to theorizing based on publicly available text in chapter six is a form of axiological respect for my positionality. Though I am Mi'kmaw (Indigenous) and in other contexts have theorized based on my own lived experience, here I limit my theorizing to that which has been said publicly by other Indigenous academics. As Glen Coulthard (2014) and Leanne Simpson (2017) suggest, rigour as an Indigenous academic can be framed as grounded normativity, and I am not sure I can claim a sufficient level of grounding. In addition, I have not engaged Elders and community members toward an enactment of Indigenous research methods (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Those operating under such frameworks, I think, have a larger claim to truth from Indigenous perspectives. My theorizing here, again, is aimed at truthfulness and, as such, is humble in its claim to offer knowledge of anything beyond that which has already been written. My contribution here is in holding together divergent perspectives in hopes of provoking new, speculative possibilities. As such, I would not call this an act of Indigenous theorizing (a term I have used elsewhere), but rather an act of theorizing that takes seriously and treats with respect Indigenous contributions to the academic literature. The significance of this positioning will become clear in chapter six.

Complicated conversation is a particularly generative framing for the current project because of my aforementioned reluctance to adhere to one theory, theorist, method, or paradigm. If this dissertation is to be viewed as a complicated conversation, then both author and reader must be open to plurality in all forms—even within my authorial self. In plurality, there is possibility, and possibility is always worth attending. Possibility, however, cannot exist without the looming spectre of its other, namely loss. The possibility of moving forward with complicated conversation—which in this case is

informed by philosophy as a way of life, the theoretical ethos of poetic inquiry, and post qualitative research—can only exist because of the loss of the possibility of traditional humanistic qualitative methodology.

Here, I have articulated my approach to this work as informed by William Pinar’s (2012) notion of complicated conversation. I have also attempted to articulate those methodological and philosophical positionings that inform my engagement within the current conversation. In all of this, however, I have relied on labels and terms to speak for me. In the following section, toward what I think of as methodological transparency, I offer succinct statements of the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions I carry into this complicated conversation.

What Matters

Often in research, methodology is communicated through a particular label. The problem with this approach is that labels mean different things to different people and communicate different assumptions about epistemology, ontology, and axiology. The adjective “critical” serves as an example. Broadly speaking, when research is called “critical,” the axiological position from which it operates is centered on social change—challenging the status quo in some capacity (Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagaard, 1994). Over time and between disciplines, however, the meaning of societal change shifts. While in the early part of the twentieth century “critical” was used primarily in the work of philosophers working in the Marxist tradition, it has today become associated with postmodern identity politics (Kumar, 2019; see also Crotty, 1998). Even within education there is a lack of agreement between disciplines about paradigmatic position

and terminology. Within counseling education, participatory action research (PAR) is situated within qualitative or interpretivist traditions, while in education research more broadly PAR is a clearly political project (Scholotiuk, Domene, & Tremholm, 2016). All of this is to say that conventional practices of describing methodology in research literature leave much to the interpretation and inference of the reader. At best, I believe this practice to be intellectually lazy, and at worst I believe it to be deeply unethical. In order to make any claim to validity, one should articulate the position from which one views the world—to assume this in any capacity is to assume a particular normative way of knowing. Thus, toward methodological transparency, I now state the epistemological, ontological, and axiological beliefs through which I enter into the complicated conversation to follow.

Ontology. Ontology, as it is understood in terms of social science research, is often articulated as being a view of reality (e.g., Wilson, 2008). Put in more simple terms, ontology for me has always been a question of what is real. The ontological position from which I work in this project can, I think, be discerned best in my discussion in chapters five and six regarding ontological pacifism, monism, and the sacredness of all things. My monistic ontological belief is that both mind and body—internal and external—are real and interconnected. An empirical ontological position would posit that only the external is real—that which can be observed. A rational ontological position in the Cartesian tradition would posit that realness is defined in terms of its ability to be thought (I think; therefore, I am).^{xliii} This Cartesian vision of reality separates mind and body, or our internal worlds and our external ones. The

ontological position from which I am working in this dissertation, informed in roughly equal measures by posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013; 2019; St. Pierre, 2019) and Indigenous articulations of relational ontology (Wilson, 2008), posits that reality is essentially monistic, comprised of one sort of thing with different permutations, and that those permutations influence each other in a myriad of ways unperceivable through our limited empirical senses (e.g., Barad, 2007; Cajete, 2000). This ontological position comes into sharper focus throughout chapters five and six, where the foundations of posthumanism and Indigenous metaphysical theory are given more space. To be precise here, I see reality as an interconnected entity; both singular and plural, alive and inanimate, all things and nothing. Perhaps the most succinct statement I can offer with regard to my ontological position is that we need not be able to know something for it to be a part of our reality. Indeed, reality is fundamentally unknowable; all we can do is catch glimpses—or as German critical theorist Walter Benjamin would have it, fragments.

Epistemology. This brings me to a discussion of epistemology. Where ontology is generally constructed in the social sciences as the study of reality, epistemology refers to knowledge and how we come to know (Grix, 2002). Previously, I touched on empiricism and rationalism as ontological frameworks, but they are primarily epistemological standpoints. Thus, much of my above discussion on ontology can be applied here as well. Rather than repeating myself, then, I will focus here on the notion of truth in order to articulate how I mobilize epistemology toward claiming validity in this research.

In academic discussions of truth, it is common to distinguish between capital “T” Truth and small “t” truth. I interpret this distinction as the difference between objective knowledge and subjective knowledge. Those things that can be proven absolutely to be true constitute Truth in the purest sense, while those things that are true based on our subjective understanding of the world constitute truth in a more limited sense. As per my discussion of ontology above, what is objective is by no means certain; indeed, that which is believed to be true is implicated in a wide host of, often unexamined, ideological assumptions. Ontologically speaking, I am agnostic about the possibility of an objective reality—if there is a Truth in the world, it is unknowable to us based on our limited human capacity for understanding. Thus, the domain of this work is small “t” truth. More precisely, my relationship to truth is best summarized by the renowned poetic inquirer and curriculum theorist, Carl Leggo: “I am seeking, not Truth with a capital T, but a truthful exchange with others” (2007, p. 30). Indeed, my intent in this complicated conversation is not to claim any sort of Truth (or even truth) but, rather, to be truthful in what I think and allow that honesty to inform my being moving forward—in other words, to learn how to live (and die) my philosophy/theory.

Axiology. Those in power decide what constitutes truth, and definitions of truth have historically been used as a weapon against marginalized peoples, particular Indigenous people (Kovach, 2009; Mitchell, 2018; Wilson, 2008). The limited scope of my claim to truth is, thus, an axiological imperative emergent from a lived knowledge of how often truth is mistaken for Truth in research and of whose interests that ‘mistake’ serves. Axiology, as it is taken up in the social sciences, is generally used to talk about

the values of the researcher or the research (Grix, 2002; Langenbach et al., 1994; Wilson, 2008). More directly, I have always understood axiology to be the philosophy behind a researcher's ethics.

I have already discussed several ethical imperatives of my writing, in particular the limitedness of my claim to truth and my unwillingness to claim authorship for the intellectual or emotional labour of anyone else. I have also previously discussed my overall commitment to relational accountability, from which these ethical imperatives stem. There are two other major ethical concerns that guide my approach to research: accessibility and a desire for social change.

First, research is often seen as alienating in the way it is communicated (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Kovach, 2009). In addition to the structural factors that limit public access to research knowledge, the use of jargon and prosaic conventions of academic writing serve as an often insurmountable barrier for those who most need access to the knowledge embedded in research. As a Mi'kmaw person, I am all too familiar with the ways in that research has been kept from those whom it concerns (see Downey, 2017). In the past, I have addressed the issue of accessibility by writing more accessible articles and poetry that speak to my theoretical interests as a way of communicating my research (e.g., Downey, 2016; Downey, 2019c), including two works informed by this project (Downey, 2020b, in press[c]). This is one practice I will continue toward fulfillment of my relational obligations to those whom my writing concerns.

Second, my overall ethical commitment to relational accountability demands that I write toward social change. As I have articulated throughout previous chapters, Western society's love affair with capitalism to the detriment of our inwardness has led

to a myriad of problems: environmental crises, hierarchical exploitation, racism, gender discrimination, ableism, and exploitative economic models, to name a few. Some would have it that all of these external manifestations of crises result from our fractured internal psychological states (Kumar, 2013), and while I suspect there may be validity to this point, I am more inclined to think there is an interrelated relationship between internal and external crises rather than a purely causative one. Regardless of the direction of the relationship, the movement toward societal change must start internally (e.g., Kumar, 2013; Mitchell, 2018). I have and will continue to make much of this point throughout this dissertation, so suffice it to say here that the reason for my writing is both to better understand my own internal landscape and to encourage others to do the same toward a more just, peaceful, and balanced material reality.

Conclusion: What I Will Do

The research I am engaged with is theoretical. As such, physically speaking, like the post qualitative researchers discussed above, I am reading deeply and writing. The aim of my reading and writing is toward layered and (re)new(ed) understandings of death and death education as curricular spaces. As alluded to above, the purpose of this research is to learn to live (and thus to die) in accordance with that which I theoretically and philosophically believe to be true. This I believe to be the true project of education—to learn how to live an intentional, thoughtful, and truthful life through to its completion (or lack thereof). As discussed above, this grandiose project must be methodologically supported by the potential for plurality and conversation. Again, like Carl Leggo, “I am seeking, not Truth with a capital T, but a truthful exchange with

others” (2007, p. 30). I am also seeking truthful exchange with myself about how to move forward in life, education, and death. This internal truthful exchange with ourselves is, I think, the knowledge of most worth in our society poised on the precipice of dystopia (Saul, in press); it is also the only way in which to dream something beyond the oppressive confines of what exists. I thus offer my engagement here as a speculative (re)thinking toward a more just curricular future.

Where these first three chapters have laid this dissertation’s conceptual groundwork, the subsequent chapters will actively seek to complicate the curricular conversation around death. While chapters five and six engage in speculative theorizing, the next chapter is devoted to an explicitly political consideration of death (education). I thus frame chapter four as an imperative intervention in the literature of death education.

Chapter Four: Critical Death Education

A pedagogy of discomfort calls not only for inquiry but also, at critical junctures, for action—action hopefully catalyzed as a result of learning to bear witness – Megan Boler (1999, p. 179)

To be Indigenous is to be inherently political – Keira Brant (in Brant, Cheechoo, McGuire-Adams, Vaudrin-Charette, Ng-A-Fook, 2017, p. 95)

Death Amid COVID-19

There is something eerily acute in writing about death in the midst of a global pandemic. First identified in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, COVID-19 spread across the world in only a few short months. I am writing the introduction to this chapter in March of 2020, and the effects are clear. Schools have been shut down, trans-Atlantic travel has slowed to a standstill, and universities are attempting to move their remaining classes and exams online. The World Health Organization (WHO) lists the mortality rate of the virus at 3.4% (WHO, 2020), but the percentage of deaths in “closed” cases of COVID-19 is currently estimated at 11%, or 383,030 total deaths (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>; Retrieved June 3, 2020). COVID-19 is a reminder of the *real* fragility of human life on this planet, and moreover a clear statement of the imminent precarity of our current socio-environmental moment. The precarity of today is not the vague uncertainty of past generations marked by a blind hope in capitalism’s promise of progress—a discourse in education often articulated using the phrase “preparing today for the jobs of tomorrow.” The precarity of today is an imminent and immediate uncertainty about the likelihood of human survival and the continuance of the social structures we have come to call normal. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the imminence of our precarity takes on new clarity.

As discussed in the first chapter, death haunts and potentially defines human existence (Fairfield, 2015). Where the humanistic is concerned, death is a temporal limit that binds us all together in a shared fate and gives our lives discernable, and perhaps common, meaning (Braidotti, 2013; Kortes-Miller, 2018). It is through the fact of our immanent and imminent death that we come to define the scope of meaning within our lives (Fairfield, 2015). Amid COVID-19, the scope and shape of that meaning is changing—but toward what we cannot yet tell. Despite the theoretical richness of the topic, the literatures of death studies and death education are rather focused on empirical, psychological, and medical discussions of death. This focus can be explained by a wider societal shift in the West toward the medicalization of death, as discussed in chapters one and two, and the empiricization of the social sciences discussed in chapter three. COVID-19, however, has brought the specter of death back in the center of our social existence. There is, thus, new urgency in theorizing not only the “new ways of dying” discussed by Braidotti (2013) as an extension of the posthuman condition, but also new ways of teaching about death. The primary focus of this chapter is to venture into that urgent gap through a consideration of the explicitly political nature of death in the third millennium.

I envision this chapter as distinct from the subsequent two in that it is an act of intervention rather than a speculation. As my discussion up to this point has indicated, the literature of death education is often devoid of considerations of the political nature of death and dying, as well as a consideration of the intersection between affect and politics. This, to me, is an incredible oversight. It thus becomes an imperative to disrupt the tacitly assumed innocence of death in death studies and death education. By

highlighting the explicitly political nature of death through a discussion at the intersection of affect and politics in death and death education, this chapter theorizes the foundations of what I call a critical death education. In education, the term critical can mean many things, but here it is informed by the work of the critical pedagogues to imply an explicitly political project of education (McLaren, 2007). Rather than reductively equating the critical to Marxist, neo-Marxist, or even postmodern critique, however, I invite a multitude of voices into the theoretical conversation. Specifically, I draw on a mixture of posthumanism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and critical pedagogy. This approach is generally supported by my methodological discussion in the previous chapter and allows for a deeper consideration of the affect and politics of death and death education—a by-product of which is a new perspective on resistant forms of interiority and death’s call for inwardness (Fairfield, 2015). Given the nature of curriculum theory as a complicated conversation, I think it only fitting to invite complexity into this space—perhaps also as a counter to the generally reductive empirical research common to death studies.

One of my broad intentions in this dissertation is to speculatively theorize death in the context of education from posthuman and Indigenous perspectives; however, I do not intend to throw out humanism completely. Rigour in the complicated conversation is found in the ability to hold divergent paradigms in conversation while acknowledging the multiplicity of their truths according to their various paradigmatic positionings. Here, I am seeking a truthful theoretical exchange, and the foundation of that exchange is multiplicity. While in chapter one my treatment of death largely dealt with the human and humanistic and in chapter five my discussion will be largely focused on the vital

materialist underpinnings of posthumanism, this chapter attempts to bridge those two theoretical realities. More precisely, a secondary purpose of this chapter is to position posthumanism relative to some of its theoretical predecessors and contemporaries.

Critical death education necessarily works at the intersection of affective and political dimensions of death. Thus, in this chapter I discuss the affect and politics of life and death toward a theorization of critical death education. I begin by discussing Foucault's notion of biopolitics—the politics of life—and extend into Braidotti's (2013) discussion of necropolitics—the politics of death. This consideration of necropolitics will lay the foundation for critical death education by way of a consideration of the inherently political nature of death and dying in the current advanced capitalist era. Secondly, this discussion will highlight some of the movements and tensions between the antihumanism of the postmodern moment and Braidotti's (2013, 2019) critical posthumanism. My consideration of the affective dimension of death begins with Julia Kristeva's (1982) thinking around abjection, which I use as an avenue to show union between the political and the affective, as well as to (re)introduce the notion of pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999) and locate my understanding of critical death education in relationship with that literature. Finally, I conclude this chapter by stepping one foot into the ocean of posthumanism through Erin Edwards' (2018) discussion of the social agency of the corpse and her notion of corpse-power. The idea of corpse-power brought into a pedagogical context, and supplemented by the work of several critical pedagogues, further draws together the political and affective underpinnings of critical death education and gestures toward the broader implications of posthumanism for death education discussed in the next chapter. Through this discussion of the affect

of death, I further my comparative positioning of posthumanism by considering psychoanalytic and posthuman subjectivities. Though this chapter attempts to do several things, and serves as a transition from the previous three foundational chapters and the two subsequent speculative ones, its ultimate aim is to theorize a critical death education—something I consider to be an imperative intervention in the current literature. The critical death education I envision necessarily begins with an understanding of the politics of life and death.

The Politics of Life and Death

The 1970s and 1980s saw a stark change in the global political economy. Specifically, the death of Keynesian economic models led to a decrease in government intervention into the market and private business and attempts to remove the government welfare programs put in place during the New Deal era in the United States (Kumar, 2019). Though Canada has a reputation for being more socially progressive than the United States, the same trends of deregulation and privatization can be observed in this country, including in education (Schuetze, Kuehn, Davidson-Harden, Schugurensky, & Weber, 2011; see also Rodgers, 2018). This phenomenon of deregulation can be thought of as a movement toward advanced capitalism, flexible capitalism, or neoliberalism, as discussed in chapter one. It is in this context of neoliberalism that Foucault (2007, 2008) began to think about governmentality and the ways in which governments enact controls over human lives, or biopolitics. Simply put, biopolitics is concerned with the application of biopower by governments on individuals

and populations, and “biopower” refers to the exercise of political power on *human* lives (Foucault, 1990, 2007, 2008).

Foucault’s emphasis was on the human as the basic unit of analysis within biopolitics, but Braidotti (2013) has done considerable work in showing that advanced capitalism is posthuman in the sense that it encourages biopower not just over the whole human, but also over the genetic material which comprises humans and non-humans alike. Braidotti summarizes thus:

The bio-genetic structure of advanced capitalism reduces bodies to carriers of vital information, which get invested within financial value and capitalized... there is a structural isomorphism between economic and biological growth, which makes the power relations of contemporary neo-liberal capitalism rawer and cruder than in the Fordist Era (Cooper, 2008). (Braidotti, 2013, p. 117)

Haraway (2016) provides another illustrative example of this phenomenon when she discusses her interrelationship and interconnections with horses as a woman taking estrogen supplements—supplements that were originally derived from the urine of pregnant mares. Advanced capitalism makes a commodity of life on a genetic level, and as such the biopolitical has been expanded beyond the human toward agentive, vital matter more broadly. Braidotti names this “posthuman *zoe*-politics, not bio-political governmentality [emphasis original]” (2013, p. 118).

It is precisely the biogenetic structure of advanced capitalism that has facilitated the COVID-19 outbreak. The Chinese ‘wet markets’—large markets that deal in the sale of exotic animals—where this virus is said to have first encountered humans (Kannan, Ali, Sheeza, & Hemalatha, 2020),^{xliv} are largely kept in place despite widespread health and safety concerns, not to mention animal rights abuses, because of strong lobby

pressure from those profiting from the sale of exotic animals (Li, 2020; Vox, 2020). These animals are often used in products ironically advertised as health supplements; their lives are literally lived in cages so that they can eventually become products for human consumption (Li, 2020; Vox, 2020). The zoepolitical^{xlv} is the commodification of the matter that makes up life. The ‘exotic’ nature of the life commodified in these wet markets—life with which humans have never lived in such close proximity, life that has never lived in such confined and degrading spaces—brings humans into contact with new diseases, such as COVID-19 and SARS (Kannan et al., 2020). In a very real way, then, COVID-19 is a posthuman, zoepolitical virus, and a mass manifestation of the necropolitical quality of advanced capitalism.^{xlvi}

The distinction between the zoepolitical and the biopolitical helps show the relationship between posthumanism and its theoretical predecessor antihumanism. Antihumanism should not be taken to refer to a disdain for the human (i.e., anti-human sentiments such as those of deep ecology), but rather refers to the intellectual movement in the 1960s and 70s away from European humanism as the de facto standard of truth and knowledge. Braidotti (2013) names several interconnected movements (feminism, decolonization, antiracism, etc.) that clearly show a shift away from Eurocentric humanism—though not, notably, anthropocentrism. Indeed, the union of critiques of European humanism and anthropocentrism is the defining marker of Braidotti’s iteration of (critical) posthumanism (Braidotti, 2019). Reacting to earlier Marxist humanist feminism and decolonial theorizing, the French “post 1968 generation” (later the poststructuralists) rallied around antihumanism. Foucault was a central figure in this movement, with *The Order of Things* (2002) marking the most substantial critique of

humanism at the date of its publication in 1970. For Foucault, Marxism, with its implicit emancipatory humanism, had become a grand narrative of Western theory—one that, despite liberatory intent, had succeeded in hegemonically defining the subject of thought (white, male, able-bodied, etc.). Braidotti (2013), upon whose work much of the above is based, summarizes Foucault’s antihumanism as such: “anti-humanism consists in de-linking the human agent from this universalistic posture, calling him to task, so to speak, on the concrete actions he is enacting” (2013, p. 23). Foucault and his colleagues, then, “rejected humanism both in its classical and its socialist versions” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 23).

Again, antihumanism is not posthumanism, though substantial critiques of the dominance of European humanism do form a portion of many posthumanist critiques, particularly that of Braidotti (2013, 2019). Braidotti’s posthumanism is not just concerned with decentering the human within the anthropocentric species hierarchy, but also with decentering the white European straight, able-bodied cis-gendered male and the tradition of European humanism as the centre of the intellectual world—thus the term she often uses, “critical posthumanism” (Braidotti, 2013, 2019). Indeed, to return to the notion of biopolitics, it was the anthropocentrism of Foucault’s original neo-Kantian formation that led to the above expanded concept—the zoepolitical—given by Braidotti (2013) and informed by Haraway (2016) among others in light of advanced capitalism. But Braidotti’s main focus in discussing biopolitics is not to show the lineage of posthumanism, as I have used it here; rather she discusses biopolitics in order to arrive at a discussion of contemporary necropolitics and in so doing discusses the politics of death in theoretically rich and nuanced terms—terms worth attending.

The central thrust of Braidotti's discussion of death in *The Posthuman* (2013) can be summarized as such: "posthuman vital politics shifts the boundaries between life and death and consequently deals not only with the government of the living but also with practices of dying" (p. 111). The desire to theorize death seems a natural extension of a broadened definition of subjectivity via vital materialism. When we are interested in life beyond the human as the subject of study, death takes on new meaning—it is seen as a necessary partner (Rose, 2012) rather than a frame of existential and temporal meaning as suggested by some (Fairfield, 2015; Kortes-Miller, 2018). For some, most notably Haraway (2016), this line of thinking leads us to the rather controversial topic of population control—though in discussions of its necessity the emphasis is more often on controlling birth ("make kin, not babies" [Haraway, 2016]) than controlling death (something perhaps learned from the failings of certain deep ecologists, whose defense of the planet lead to a decidedly anti-human sentiment; see Bookchin & Foreman, 1991). Although Haraway's response to the population problem engages birth rather than death, Braidotti's (2013) discussion of necropolitics and my earlier allusions to COVID-19 suggest that Western society has been systematically moving toward a higher degree of governmentality in death and dying. Indeed, Ivan Illich (1975; see also Cayley, 2020) noted the bureaucratization and institutionalization of Western medicine in the 1970s. The result of this institutionalization has been a shift in the way we experience death from something we do, to something that is done—the loss of our capacity to die our own death (Cayley, 2020). The medical institutionalization of death takes on new meaning amid COVID-19, when health officials in Italy have literally had

to make decisions about who lives and who dies (Parodi, Aloisi, & Barbaglia, 2020), and plans for similar decisions have been made in New Brunswick (Gerster, 2020).^{xlvii}

Foucault's emphasis on biopolitics is insufficient in advanced capitalism, where death is governed as closely as life. Enter necropolitics. Necropolitics can be thought of as "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 14). Of course, this is not limited to the human, as discussed above, but for the moment, I will leave the vital materialist readings of death aside to focus on the human implications and manifestations of the necropolitical. For Mbembe (2003), the power to exercise control over mortality is the highest form of sovereignty. Here it may be prudent to remind the reader of the distinction between sovereign and disciplinary power made by Foucault (1972), where the former is rule by force and the latter rule by coercion and surveillance (see also Styres, 2017). Indeed, when discussed in chapter one, sovereign power was likened to military violence—both the threat and reality of which, I argued, are used to hold capitalism in place. Sovereign power, then, is in its "purest" form when not just violence is being handed out and threatened by the state, but death. The posthuman condition—our entangledness with technological and biological others—gives the necropolitical a new form, that of being mediated by technology. Citing examples of unmanned drone strikes, Braidotti states, "posthuman wars breed new forms of inhumanity" (2013, p. 122) and new ways of killing and dying. The posthuman condition is deeply entwined with advanced capitalism, and it is significant that "many contemporary wars, led by the Western coalitions under the cover of 'humanitarian aid' are often neo-colonial exercises aimed at protecting mineral extraction and other essential geo-physical

resources needed by the global economy” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 123). This is a marker of the manner in which contemporary necropolitics, and thus sovereignty, is not as much the providence of individual states as of the global economy. In other words, and admittedly rather bluntly, it is capitalism that decides who lives and who dies, and more frequently than not it is those at the bottom of the hierarchies of life—people of colour, animals, and the planet more broadly—who are deemed killable, expendable, or *waste*.

The subject of the necropolitical is precisely disposable humanity (Braidotti, 2013), or what Bauman identifies as the “waste” of advanced capitalism:

The volume of humans made redundant by capitalism’s global triumph grows unstopably and comes close now to exceeding the managerial capacity of the planet; there is a plausible prospect of capitalist modernity (or modern capitalism) *choking on its own waste products* which is can neither reassimilate or annihilate, nor detoxify [emphasis original]. (2007, p. 29)

What Bauman identifies here is the process by which production is increasingly streamlined in advanced capitalism and human beings are seen as surplus as soon as their contributions to the global economy are no longer needed or efficient. In the United States, the industrial revolution saw trained artisans replaced by assembly line workers in the interests of efficient production. As the economy globalized, it became cheaper for many companies to outsource their production to jurisdictions with lower minimum wages, and thus those former assembly line workers were themselves replaced by globally exploited workers. As minimum wages in the global south increase, or as natural resources are used up, those exploited workers are left without work as companies move on to the next jurisdiction in which they can produce their products for the cheapest possible price. This brief, admittedly over-generalized, overview of

Bauman's (2007; see also Kumar, 2019) discussion of the process of globalized capitalism is but one manifestation of the myriad ways in which capitalism consumes life and leaves waste in its wake. When Bauman writes of the prospect of choking on waste, he is writing of the humanitarian obligation to help those who have been deemed unnecessary to the global economy. Regardless of whether or what someone produces, the maintenance of their life demands resources—resources that, under capitalism, are derived from production, from which they have been barred via their supposed obsolescence. Bauman (2007) argues that this is one of the many reasons for the recent increase in global migration toward cities, because in cities the “disposable humanity” produced by capitalism can be fed off its excess, whereas rural localities are more precarious and susceptible to collapse.

Here it is worth considering the social stratification of dying amid COVID-19. A March 11, 2020 article in *Time Magazine* by Abby Vesoulis (2020) hits the nail on the head: COVID-19 disproportionately affects the poor, particularly in the United States where healthcare is a corporate rather than social endeavour. Even in Canada, with its socialized healthcare system, however, those without substantial savings who cannot afford to take time off work and who are being forced to stay home are clearly in financially unsustainable positions. Class stratification is compounded through intersectionality: women are additionally disproportionately affected by increased in domestic violence during quarantine (Sachedina & Forani, 2020) and communities of colour have been hit hardest by COVID-19 (Moore, 2020). Despite government intervention, there is an imminent economic precarity to the situation both on macro, global and micro personal levels. The global economic precarity is actively being

weighed against expected mortality rates by political leaders, and at least one country—Brazil (Garcia, 2020)—has decided the economy is more important than human life, releasing its policies of social distancing well before the climax of the pandemic hit that country. Though obviously an extreme case, Brazil’s decision further highlights the necropolitical nature of advanced capitalism. There is an insatiability, a relentlessness, to the modern economy, which consumes everything in its path (Braidotti, 2019). While contemporary understandings of that notion have been rooted in the destruction of the planet and the consumption of *zoe*—of which Brazil is also a notable example—we are now witnessing the literal consumption of *bios*, the disregard for human life in favour of economic growth. Furthermore, as noted in chapter one, advanced capitalism seeps into our thoughts in insidious and undetectable ways. For instance, the poorest among us are often forced to choose economy over safety in the interest of their own survival. Though only time will tell what will happen in Brazil, one expects to see those with disposable income and social privilege survive in greater numbers than those without. The poor, who cannot afford healthcare or to take time off work, will die in droves (See also Garcia, 2020; Hanley, 2020).

In short, when read through the lens of necropolitics, the governance of human life and death are both technologically mediated and economically driven. The implications of this analysis for death education are both simple and profound. As my literature review in chapter two suggested, death education as a field of study is largely devoid of any interaction with critical theory. Yet, as my discussion of necropolitics highlights, death is intensely political; death, like life, is a site in which the social hierarchies and ideologies endemic to the fabric of modern life and their economic (and

affective; see below) motivations are made strikingly clear. As such, I suggest a movement in death education toward a critical engagement with the subject. Death education has largely been technical to this point, with humanistic iterations (affective) being the continued call of the field (Doka, 2015; Wass, 2004). Yet, as Braidotti (2013) highlights, our dying is quickly changing and is in no way innocent. Death education must respond to this fact through a troubling of the political implications of our dying—critical death education. Below, I offer an avenue forward for this critical death education through a discussion of the affective dimension of death.

The Affect of Life and Death

In my reading, affect was not as much of a focus in Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013) as in her more recent text, *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019). I have to wonder if this renewed focus is a result of several of the criticisms common to posthumanism, at least in the discussions to which I have been privy. Monica Prendergast (2020), for example, recently named her own misgivings about posthumanism through her keynote address to the International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry, in which she eulogized the death of Carl Leggo. Just before naming posthumanism's literature as intimidating in complexity (which it can be), Prendergast wonders,

How does the humanistically rooted field of poetic inquiry, so concerned with 'humanizing research' (Paris & Winn, 2014), make a shift toward the post-qualitative and posthuman discourses now so prevalent in the social sciences and humanities? Or is this shift to be resisted? And if so, why and how?
(Prendergast, 2020, p. 31)

These concerns are, to me, concerns of affect (which is, of course, a dimension of interiority). Where is the space for emotion within critical posthumanism? Our poetry

and our poetic inquiry feed on emotion and on storying our human perception; how then can we move toward the posthuman if our intellectual/spiritual project is so defined by the limits of our humanness? Braidotti (2019) gives something of an answer to this in her discussion of posthuman subjectivity, which includes the affective dimension as the force of a unitary, but fragmented, psychological landscape “beneath” the subject-*assemblage*. Likewise, Karen Barad is keen to acknowledge that “feeling, desiring and experiencing are not singular characteristics or capacities of human consciousness. Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers” (Barad in Dolphijn, Tuin, & Barad, 2012, n.p.) Yet, I find these answers wanting a rich theorization of the *power* of emotions—such as those offered by Boler (1999) in education and Ahmed (2014) more broadly—particularly given my focus on death, such an emotional topic for so many.^{xlviii} This section, thus, seeks to offer some treatment of the affective dimension of death toward a broader theoretical contextualization of a critical death education.

Before moving on, it should be noted that affect is not emotion, *per se*. The two terms refer to different literatures, though there are certainly overlaps (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). Indeed, some critical feminists have criticized affect as a framework for the manner in which it reproduces the normativity of heteropatriarchal forms of thought through trying to make the emotional logical (Ahmed, 2014). The term “affect” is also used in slightly different ways in education, psychology, and philosophy. In the current discussion, I use the word informed by a reading of Spinoza, Deleuze, and Guattari, by way of Braidotti (2019)—while sustaining the critiques of Ahmed (2014; Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). In this way, I think of affect not as a general emotion, which is nameable, but as that which precedes it. Affect is an embodied and embedded force that

shifts the body's vital force (Braidotti, 2019). The current discussion will focus on the affect of life and death with particular reference to the socio-political dimensions thereof.

Psychoanalysis. To begin, I will focus on affect through the psychoanalytically inspired thought of Kristeva by way of Lacan. Kristeva and Lacan were important figures in the poststructuralist movement discussed above though Foucault's work. Kristeva, for her part, began her academic life focused on literature and moved into the burgeoning field of semiotics under the tutelage of Roland Barthes (Jardine, 2020). Through her relationship with Lacan, whose lectures and seminars she attended from her earliest days in Paris, Kristeva became likewise interested in psychoanalysis (Jardine, 2020). Despite the break with Lacan described below, Kristeva remains committed to the ideas of psychoanalysis today, defending it as one way to move beyond totalitarianism of the self and of the other (Jardine, 2020).

The antihumanism of the poststructuralist movement can be observed in French psychoanalysis through Lacan's assertion that human subjectivity is like language in that it is not natural or innate, but rather socially constructed (Schwartz, 2003). Schwartz elaborates: "Lacan constitutes a serious challenge to modern Western concepts of the human individual, including the equating of subjectivity with consciousness and the assumption of a biological origin of the subjectivity of men and women, including their sexualities" (Schwartz, 2003, p. 255). Here it is helpful to think of what Braidotti (2013), who draws on Haraway (2003), refers to as the nature-culture continuum. On the nature end of the continuum, there is the classical humanist assertion that there exists a

given, normative biological human subject (who is male, white, able-bodied, and European). On the culture end, there is the antihumanist assertion that the subject is a result of socio-cultural construction and that there is nothing natural about the normativity of the white male subject. Where Braidotti (2013) and others (Bennett, 2010; Haraway, 2003; see also Malone & Ovenden, 2017) have proposed a move beyond the nature-culture continuum, articulating culture as a part of nature and vice versa (Bennett, 2010), Lacan remained at the culture end of the spectrum throughout his lifetime.

Despite being deeply entwined in the antihumanism of the poststructuralist movement, psychoanalysis suffers something of the same fate as poetic inquiry discussed above, in that the scope of inquiry in the paradigm is inherently anthropocentric—a condition totally embraced by, for example, Eric Fromm (Fromm, 1964; see also Funk, 2019). The psychoanalysis of Kristeva, thus, proves a different response than that of Braidotti to not just the antihumanism of Foucault, but also the posthuman condition more broadly. Kristeva's response seems to have been to throw out those grand narratives of the patriarchy but maintain human subjectivity as a site of intellectual exploration—and political praxis, as discussed below. Through an engagement with Kristeva's psychoanalytic thinking, then, the outline of posthumanism's theoretical positioning may be further revealed.

In order to characterize Kristeva's thinking, I will first describe her intellectual break with Lacan, which is often depicted as a return to the earlier work of Freud (Beardsworth, 2004). The initial break with Lacan's thought is rather technical, and as such, Beardsworth deserves full quotation:

When Lacan shows that structures of subjectivity depend on the structuration of the subject in language, he demonstrates how finitude (lack), and the acceptance of finitude, found and remain the mainstay of human powers and limitations. However, the identification of the unconscious with the structure of language also appears to tie culture, as such, to a founding, paternal law (the Law). Kristeva's idea of revolution both presupposes her acceptance of the Lacanian insight into language and lack (finitude) and *chips away at the dominion of paternal law over subjectivity and culture* [emphasis added]. (Beardsworth, 2004, p. 27).

I read in this description an adherence in Lacan to an overarching dominant narrative of paternal law, whereas Kristeva seeks ways of disrupting that—a movement further toward disrupting the normativity of male subjectivity (Kristeva is renowned for her theoretical focus of maternity rather than paternity [Jardine, 2020]). While some may support such a reading, they may also challenge Kristeva's interpretation of Lacan as reductively focused on the paternal (e.g., Rae, 2019).^{xlix} Others note Kristeva's critique as a shift away from Lacan's focus on language in psychoanalysis “and toward operations that are ‘pre-meaning and pre-sign (or trans-meaning, trans-sign)’ (“System” 29), that cut “through language, in the direction of the unspeakable” (Tales 29)” (Barzilai, 1991, p. 294). In other words, “Kristeva argues that Lacan's linguistic conceptualization of unconscious processes (“The unconscious is structured like a language”) restricts access to essential and hidden elements of experience” (p. 296). This is the crux of the issue, and the reason I entertain Kristeva's version of psychoanalysis rather than that of Lacan in this section: the chaos of affect. To me, Lacan's is a philosophy of chaos seeking order, while Kristeva's is one of embracing chaos and, in that, the chaotic affect of life reveals itself.

Abjection. Kristeva's focus on abjection as the borderland between subject and object in particular provides an avenue into the chaos rather than observing its orderly spectre as through Lacan's emphasis on the underlying structures of the unconscious. With regard to abjection, it is significant to note that Laquerur (2015) names Kristeva's work not as psychoanalysis proper, but as psychoanalytical anthropology. Indeed, I find this label suitable, particularly where Kristeva's 1982 *Powers of Horror* is concerned, for as much as it is an essay about abjection, it is also a work fundamentally concerned with totalitarianism and fascism (Jardine, 2020).¹

In abjection, I turn toward one of the overarching themes of my dissertation—a more attentive engagement with that which makes us uncomfortable in general and the corpse specifically. Kristeva (1982) uses the corpse and our embodied revulsion toward it to discuss abjection in the opening pages of her text:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. (p. 4)

The abject is the liminal space between subject and object, between self and other, between life and death. It is that which is not quite an object, but not quite myself either. As such, it can be confusing and traumatic, causing us to revolt and cast out the other within ourselves—to try and rid ourselves of that which causes us to confuse ourselves.

Why does the sight of a corpse cause us to react as we do (if we are not accustomed to such things)ⁱⁱ—with an eerie attentiveness, an unnameable presence? The corpse is, after all, materially no different than our own body. Yet we are not shocked and disgusted by the sight of ourselves in the same way we are when we come across a corpse. Nor are we shocked and disgusted, most of us, when we see meat in the

supermarket or on our plates—meat, which is an animal corpse. Abjection explains this in that my body is clearly alive (subject, self), while the meat is clearly an object (without life, other); the corpse, however, is neither and both. Here it is important to note that “it is...not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order...the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). In the moment of our seeing the corpse, then, we are confused and conflicted by its presence and unsure of what to make of it. Abjection is our response to the abject. The abject shows us the object (the other) within the self—for example, the corpse reminds us of our own mortality—and we then try to shed the other from the self. Abjection, then, is the casting off of the other within; it is a (perpetual) redefining of the self in accordance with the casting out of the other.

Kristeva is not as interested in the corpse as I am. Rather, her project is to examine and disrupt fascism. Jardine elucidates the connection between abjection and fascism:

In abjection, the boundary between subject and object is unstable, with the result that the subject (or emerging subject) is defensively drawn to clarity, purity, identity, and definition, which in turn means that it is obsessively fearful of what it experiences as unclear, impure, other, mixed, unclean, or foreign. (Jardine, 2020, p. 195)

It is illustrative to consider this quote in the contemporary context of the so-called alt right. Given the rise of third and fourth- wave feminisms,ⁱⁱⁱ along with decolonization, antiracism, and a host of other related social justice movements, we have recently experienced an extreme breakdown of the traditional boundaries of social identity—a shifting of the existential landscape (Latour, 2017). For those on the margins, this

breakdown is long overdue and validating of the various border-crossing identities they may embody. Those who have always been subject (always been human under European humanism; white, straight able-bodied, cis males), however, may experience the breakdown in boundaries as abjection—confusion, defensiveness, *fear*—and thus retreat into obsessive fearfulness (see also West, 2019). The fascism of the alt right, then, is anticipated by the perceived breakdown of traditional relations of subject and object.

Pedagogy of discomfort. Just as necropolitics was theorized as one dimension of the politics of death, so abjection serves as one dimension of the affect of death. It is significant to the current discussion in two ways. First, it offers further insight into the socio-political importance of critical death education and second, it provides a position to which posthuman treatments of the corpse as social agentive (see Edwards, 2018) can be compared.

Toward a brief explanation of the first point mentioned above, it should be noted that emotion in education is somewhat marginal,^{liii} and its exclusion from most foundational discussions of learning theory can be read as deeply rooted in a patriarchal dismissal of the affective dimension (Boler, 1999). Obviously, more recent scholarship has centered the relationship between emotion and learning; the work of Carl Leggo (2017) proves an illustrative example. Regardless, the role of emotion—particularly negative emotion (Carstens, 2018)—is still marginal in many educational experiences including in some, but not all, iterations of death education, thus Wass’ (2004) call for more humanistic death education.

Abjection is uncomfortable, and in that it teaches us something—it becomes a pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999). In its original formation, pedagogy of discomfort was an attempt to articulate the uncomfortable process of seeing that which has been collectively unseen—whiteness and privilege, for example. As indicated in the epigraph of this chapter, Boler (1999) also suggested self-inquiry and reflexivity as inadequate unless leading to action. In this there are clear resonances between pedagogy of discomfort and my discussion of the cultivation of resistant interiority in chapter one. In my reading, pedagogies of discomfort are meant to provoke new possibilities, to facilitate comfort in our discomfort (Carstens, 2018), and to create opportunities to learn about ourselves through things that are difficult.

A brief personal anecdote provides further context. My experience teaching Indigenous education is replete with pedagogies of discomfort, both for myself and for the students with whom I work. Early on in my career teaching Indigenous education to undergraduate students, a faculty member iterated the need to make the course a positive experience for students. At the time, I didn't think much about the interaction, but upon reflection I saw an implicit racist, colonial bias embedded in their words. Their comments were asking that my instruction of Indigenous education be comfortable for the (mostly white settler) students, and that they not be challenged too much. These comments could be read as an ask for tone policing, “a rhetorical strategy designed to draw attention to the tone or emotion behind a statement being delivered, rather than the statement itself” (Biddle & Hufnagel, 2019, p. 493), but I prefer to think of them as a tacit ascent of precisely the kind of multicultural celebration of diversity that so many critical race and Indigenous scholars have battled against in education for years. With a

bit more experience, I still think of my Indigenous education course as a positive experience overall, but it is taught largely through a pedagogy of discomfort. Students are expected to confront their own racist assumptions, actions, and indifference, and the process is uncomfortable to say the least.

Death education in some ways works as a pedagogy of discomfort. In its humanistic form, death education centres the messy (humanistic) affective dimensions of human experience and, in that, it has subversive value (see chapter one). Boler's (1999) articulation of a pedagogy of discomfort, however, is explicitly political and seeks to move beyond liberal individualism toward a Freirean collective consciousness raising. It isn't enough to simply attend to affect—to answer the call toward inwardness in studying death (Fairfield, 2015)—we must view affect as a site for political change. The preceding discussion of abjection provides another avenue toward political understandings of affect; where pedagogies of discomfort centre the capacity to be vulnerable in moments of heightened emotion—living with our emotional lives toward seeing our unseen biases—they give us a means through which to fight fascism from a pedagogic standpoint. A death education seeking abjection is a critical death education—a death education aimed toward dismantling totalitarian fascism within the self and other—so long as it views itself in explicitly political terms.

Corpse-power. Having discussed abjection and renewed the case for humanistic death education, this time with a more explicitly political charge, I will now shift into a discussion of posthumanism's treatment of the affect of death, particularly Erin Edwards' (2018) discussion of the social agency of the corpse by way of its

affective power. Like Braidotti (2013, 2019), Edwards' theorizing is an explicitly critical posthumanism, aiming "to problematize the categorial privileging of the human that has made... dehumanization possible" (Edwards, 2018, p. 2). Though Edwards is engaged with Braidotti's posthumanism, she is also explicit about her willingness to attend to so-called "bad posthumanism... whereby the corpse is merely the dead body reanimated by ideological forces... rather than a site of vitalism and human reconfiguration" (p. 21). Likewise, my discussion here is meant to foreshadow the coming discussion on vitalist material readings of the corpse, but not meant to engage it fully. I am particularly interested here in viewing the corpse as socially and affectively agentic rather than materially so. As such, Edwards' notion of "corpse-power" (p. 36) is formative.

Others write of corpse-power as the power of death to redefine or re-create the living's perception of the world (Blanchot, 1982; Tiffany, 1995). In this way, corpse-power is an acknowledgement of the social agency of the corpse. In calling to mind the ethical obligations humans maintain toward those they have lost, and the care we exercise toward their physical remains (Laqueur, 2015), the social agency of the corpse comes into sharp focus. In death, the corpse can accomplish many things socially and affectively that its living other could not during life. The illustrative example of the corpse's social agency Edwards uses to showcase this dimension of corpse-power is that of Addie Bundren's in William Faulkner's text *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Addie's corpse is the sole motivator for the plot of *As I Lay Dying*, which focuses around the Bundren family's journey to deliver Addie to her intended familial burial ground in a nearby city. Throughout the novel, characters repeatedly defer to the judgement of the departed on

the suitability of her final resting place through phrases like ‘as she would have wished it’. In this way, Addie functions as a social motivator/agent for the action of the characters and is, thus, replete with a social corpse-power.

To highlight the social drive of the corpse, Edwards draws on earlier writing by Blanchot (1982) on the manner in which humans are made and unmade in their own image through death. In Edwards’ interpretation of Blanchot, death makes the subject a replica of what they were in life, but it is an imperfect replica whose resemblance to the deceased is amplified by the strangeness of the corpse as object. The image of the living is projected onto the corpse and, in that, the similarities between the living and the dead stop—the image becomes a site of departure. The image as a simultaneous site of replication and departure gives the corpse its power. As Edwards (2018) notes, Addie as a character had little agency during life, yet in death her corpse “unmakes exclusionary definitions of the human centered upon white patriarchal subjects” (p. 38). The uncanniness of Addie’s corpse, the amplification of her image through death, subverts (unmakes) the character’s boundedness within the social structures of poverty-stricken, patriarchal, southern American life. Put simply, a woman of Addie’s stature and position could never have asked so much in life, but in death she moves worlds.

Corpse-power is not the focus of Edwards’ reading of *As I Lay Dying*, which is centered more on the material discursive manner in which Addie’s decomposing body itself decomposes and recomposes the subjectivities of the characters in the text. In the context of the current discussion around the socio-affective dimensions of death, however, corpse-power deserves some wider (admittedly anthropocentric) consideration. First, corpse-power can be a driver of affective change within the

individual. Here, I think of the preceding discussion of abjection. The corpse has the power to instigate a (re)definition of our self-understanding by way of the discomfort it produces. Second, corpse-power can be a driver of social movements. A more common term for this phenomenon might be martyrdom, in which the fact of one's death becomes the instigator for social mobilization and, in many cases, social change. A contemporary example is that of Trayvon Martin, whose death at the hands of a white police officer subsequently instigated the black lives matter movement.^{liv} Rage at systemic justice can be a powerful motivator for social change, and corpse-power can ignite and sustain rage.^{lv} In this way, corpse-power is both affective and political. Third, and relatedly, corpses in criminal investigations have a particular sort of corpse-power that is often (but not always [e.g., Talaga, 2017]) bound within the structures of national systems of justice (see Tarlow & Lowman, 2018). In some ways, lodging the power of the victim-corpse within societal structures is a societal attempt to deal with the affective power of the corpse. Presumably under this logic, 'justice' satiates the emotion of death/loss. But it is important to remember that legality and morality are more often antonyms than synonyms. By this I mean that justice can be anything but just (e.g., Razack, 1998), and even when some semblance of justice is achieved, the affective power of the corpse is often far greater than the capacity of any system to contain it.

The fourth point is the most significant for the subsequent chapter: the corpse exercises power in the manner in which it compels the living to attend to it. I am referring here to the manner in which we deal with the material remains of deceased *humans* (see Laqueur, 2015). Here, it is important to distinguish between humans and those members of our common species who have at various times been deemed less-

than-human. While human remains are almost universally treated with care and reverence—and indeed compel the living to treat them as such via corpse-power—the remains of “the other” have historically been treated with a cold, calculated distance in Western society. Here, the example of Nazi concentration camps may prove an illustrative example of corpse-power diminished by way of a perceived (imagined, invented, fabricated) inhumanity.^{lvi}

The above should not be considered exhaustive, but rather illustrative of the interconnected nature of affect and politics when the social agency of the corpse is considered. Indeed, another contemporary example of corpse-power is the power of the dead to compel the living to implement social distancing and self-quarantine during a pandemic, but this is perhaps less a form of corpse-power and more a magnification of virus-power through the corpse. Then again, perhaps the corpse is a signifier of the virus brought into sharp focus through the uncanniness of the dead. Writing amidst the COVID-19 pandemic nothing is certain, and only the passing of time will tell us what sorts of social, political, and affective changes may be brought about by the corpses left in the wake of COVID-19.^{lvii}

Critical death pedagogy. Attending to the notion of corpse-power is informative for critical death education in that it further elucidates the intersection between the political and the affective implicit, though often under-considered, in discussions of death. To continue this discussion and fully articulate my vision of a critical death education, I turn to the literature of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is a body of literature in education that (rightfully) considers the act of teaching and the

structures of education explicitly and inherently political (McLaren, 2007). It stems from the foundational thinking of Paulo Freire (1996), who taught members of the Brazilian working class to read not just the words on the page, but the world—to see through the ideology they were being fed by oppressive state governments (McLaren, 2000). Throughout the 1980s, critical pedagogy maintained its Marxist roots through the work of Peter McLaren (2007), Henry Giroux (1988), and Joe Kincheloe (1991) among others. Today, however, critical pedagogy has brought postmodern, feminist, decolonial, and antiracist critiques into the literature toward a wider consideration of the myriad political issues implicit in education (McLaren, 2007; see also Kumar, 2019).

As suggested earlier and throughout this work, death education has largely failed to engage this literature—though one recently republished work does claim to offer critical perspectives on death education (Warren, 2014). Again, the reasons for the apolitical nature of contemporary death education have as much to do with the field of death studies being dominated by social sciences research as it does with the medicalization of death in contemporary society—not to mention the relatively marginal status of death education in both curriculum theory and public education. Yet, as my above discussion of critical death education as a pedagogy of discomfort suggests, death education is an ideal site in which to actualize critical pedagogies. At the level of pedagogy, critical death education has the potential to be an affective intervention into the social tendencies that facilitate fascism. This position is supported by my discussion of abjection above and chapter one’s discussion of the significance of individual change as a starting point for social change.

Beyond the pedagogical, the content of death education curricula also deserves politicization. At present, in most discussions of death education, death is tacitly assumed to be ideologically neutral but, as Braidotti's (2013) discussion of necropolitics makes clear, death is always deeply embedded in socio-political and economic systems fueled by particular ideologies. A critical death education must be willing to engage this ubiquitous ideological presence. Just as Freire (1996) taught the students with whom he worked to read the world as he taught them to read the word, a critical death education must teach students to read ideology in death as it seeks to open them up to the possibilities of personal change. Personal, humanistic, inward, affective change is a starting point for social change, but it must be seen that way to have any real, socio-material effect (Boler, 1999). Death education as a field may seek societal change through a more humanistic engagement with death (Doka, 2015; Kortés-Miller, 2014, 2018; Wass, 2004), but without an explicit engagement with neoliberal, colonial, and ideological influences on curriculum and research (Kumar, 2019), the field is destined to be absorbed into the fold of that which it seeks to change.^{lviii} A critical death education, then, must be both affective and explicitly political, and attending the former is a gateway to the latter.

Positioning posthumanism. The secondary purpose of this section on the affect of death is to further position posthumanism in relation to its theoretical otherwises—in this case, psychoanalysis. Here, Edwards (2018) provides insight into the divergent affective meanings of the corpse from psychoanalytic and posthuman perspectives: “Claiming that the psychoanalytic models of mourning are inadequate for the losses of

modernity, Deleuze and Guattari understand the corpse not as a signifier of the single subject's death drive and traumatic losses but as *crowd* unto itself [emphasis original]" (p. 9). Where psychoanalysis assumes a unitary subject demarcated by a singular (but fragmented) internal life, posthumanism recognizes the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and complexity of the subject and views the unified psychic landscape as a space "below" the subject (i.e., sub-subjective, a force acting on the assembled subject, but not the whole of subjectivity; see Braidotti, 2019, p. 53). Deleuze and Guattari's critique of psychoanalytic mourning is amplified by the myriad new ways of dying unique to the posthuman condition. Mourning, as suggested in chapter two, is a space of transformative potential—a pedagogy of discomfort, if we are willing to attend to it. Yet, the necropolitical nature of advanced capitalism makes it such that we cannot simply mourn human deaths; rather, we must also attend to and mourn the deaths of the non-human and more-than-human others with whom we are (always) co-present. Attending to our own corpses is one thing, but attending to the loss of the crowd is another.

To be a bit more precise, under posthuman thinking, we are all embedded within an intensely entangled network of life—not human life, *bios*, but life more broadly, *zoe* (Braidotti, 2013). When something within that network dies, we too suffer loss. In my thinking—and perhaps Braidotti (2013), Edwards (2018), and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) anticipate this to a certain degree—we humans, because of our anthropocentrism and our adherence to humanism, have been unable to see those non-humans and more-than-humans dying daily within our networks. We have, nonetheless, felt the effects of these losses and, with the acceleration of advanced capitalism, we have felt them more

often and more acutely. There is a particulate mounting affective effect to these losses because of our inability to see and, thus, to mourn them.

There is, however, a contradiction at play here as well in that, given the vitalist treatment of Edwards (2018), the corpse is not a monolithic signifier of death.^{lix} Under vitalism, the corpse is filled with life as much as it is a marker of death. Though the unitary (but fragmented) psychoanalytic subjectivity has ceased to exist, the posthuman subject—“an ensemble composed of *zoe*-logical, geological and technological organisms... a *zoe/geo/techno* assemblage” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 47)—continues on living. The vitalism of the corpse by way of posthuman subjectivity radically decenters the human in death and dying and, in so doing, brings the material facts of human death—often thought to be unique—back into balance with all that we generally perceive as waste. I will revisit this notion more thoroughly in the next chapter, but for the time being it should be noted that mourning loss is haunted by the impossibility of death’s finitude for the posthuman subject. All the more reason, perhaps, to understand death-as-change and to celebrate/mourn transitions in our becoming.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have dwelt where the affect and politics of death intersect. In particular, I have discussed Foucault’s notion of biopolitics and used it to position Braidotti’s posthuman in relation to Foucault’s antihumanism by way of a discussion of necropolitics. In so doing, I have also made the case for an explicitly political form of death education—a critical death education. In the interest of further fleshing out a critical death education, I discussed Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection and further

alluded to the potentially transformative power of a death education built around the pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999). My discussion of the affective aspects of death was further developed through a consideration of the social agency of the corpse and what Edwards (2018) names as corpse-power and, through a discussion of critical pedagogy, I made clear links between affect and politics where critical death education is concerned. Finally, in concluding this chapter, I positioned psychoanalysis and posthumanism in relation to one another via a discussion of subjectivity.

In the current chapter, I have dabbled with posthumanism, flirting at the edges of its critique while mostly bracketing out a discussion of monism and vitalist materialism. I have done this with intention. Psychoanalysis, antihumanism, humanistic treatments of death education, and even the medical and technical trainings that dominate the death education literature all have their role to play in comprehensive death education. They thus deserve attending. Further, the rigour of the complicated conversation that is curriculum theory is in the capacity to hold multiple divergent opinions in conversation with one another. Thus, this chapter has drawn on divergent paradigms of thought in order to theorize a critical death education informed by the politics and affect of death. This chapter was a necessary intervention into the seemingly apolitical literature of death education, but there is more than a little speculative theorizing embedded in these pages as well. The subsequent chapter, however, will be devoted more wholly to speculation. There, I will aim at dreaming a posthuman death education informed by the critical posthumanism of Braidotti (2019) among others.

Chapter Five: Posthuman Death Education

Within the ecology of life, death is a necessary partner – Deborah Bird Rose
(2012, p. 127)

*Fragile, life is so fragile
Fragile, love is so fragile
Fragile, hearts are so fragile
Fragile, I'm strong and yet fragile.*
– Joan Jet and the Blackhearts, *Fragile* (2013)

Fragility and Necessity

Life is fragile, and death is necessary. As discussed in the previous chapter, the current COVID-19 pandemic has shown our global society the former with frightening clarity. The latter, however, is still a question for many. The Silicon Valley transhumanists, who propose that the limitations of the human form can be overcome through technology, seem particularly critical of the necessity of death (Braidotti, 2019). Their attempts to conceptually overcome the temporal limits of human life, however, should be understood as a manifestation of a wider societal aversion to death, discussed earlier in this dissertation as the death-denying ethos of Western society. Recently, this death-denying culture is being dismantled with more frequency. Kortes-Miller (2018) and Durant (2018), for example, have highlighted the affective significance of talking about death both with the dying and the grieving. Likewise, the pull of the death studies and death education literatures has systematically and consistently been away from the denial of death—albeit largely in affective and humanistic terms as well (Doka, 2015; Wass, 2004). In the previous chapter, I attempted to complicate these affective calls by inviting a consideration and embrace of their implicitly political nature in the necropolitical context of advanced capitalism. The political and affective reasons for

acknowledging death's necessity further intersect in many iterations of the contemporary environmental movement. Although some deep ecologists were perhaps the most radical of this spectrum in their calls for humans to die so that the earth could live (Bookchin & Foreman, 1991),^{1x} many others are also aware of the necessity of human death to sustainability (Haraway, 2016). Beyond these grim and uncomfortable facts, however, is an ecological view of death, where life more broadly defined than the human but encompassing of it (*zoe*) cannot be without the limiting force of death (Braidotti, 2013; Rose, 2012). As suggested in the first epigraph above, from this ecological view “death is a necessary partner” (Rose, 2012, p. 127).

The fragility of life (*bios*) and the necessity of death present yet another reason to study, and benefit of studying, death. Understanding and coming to terms with our own mortality is one thing, but living-with the imminence of that mortality is another—one that can perhaps help us move beyond understandings of our human existence as somehow special or unique (i.e., beyond anthropocentrism). Indeed, life's fragility is not something that we can rage against—Dylan Thomas poems aside—but rather something we must come to appreciate in complex, localized, specific, and nuanced ways, both in terms of the human, and in terms of the non-human others who co-habit the agentive assemblages that form our subjectivity both during life and in death. This “living-with” mortality, our non-human and more-than-human others, and the mortality of those others (who help form subject), requires active attention or what I have named previously as attending. While in chapter two, I used this notion in a more intellectual sense to mark the significance of reading the words of others and being changed by them; here I return to the notion of attending in order to articulate ways of living-with

death. It is the ultimate goal of this chapter to gesture toward a theoretical and pedagogic living-with death through affirmative ethics and attending—specifically, through attending the corpse and attending waste.

This chapter, however, marks a departure from the humanistic. My concern here is no longer with humans *per se*, but with posthumans. While posthuman death remains a necessary condition for the survival of *bios* (lest we fall victim to the megalomania of the transhumanists discussed above), posthuman life is anything but fragile. *Zoe* is an unstoppable force second to no other (Braidotti, 2019). Even the seemingly inexhaustible technologies of the third millennium, whose blunt thinking power vastly exceeds our own, whose energy seems boundless, and whose presence seems relentless, fall short in comparison to the power of *zoe* (Braidotti, 2019). Though *bios* is rightfully limited temporally and spatially, *zoe* is boundless. Even in death, *zoe* shows relentless continuance through generational renewal (Rose, 2012) and the agency of the assemblage that forms the corpse (Edwards, 2018)—a signifier of *bios*' absence, which is replete with *zoe*.

In this chapter, then, my attention to the corpse and death more broadly is framed through posthumanism, particularly the critical feminist posthumanism of Braidotti (2013, 2019) and the “compost” perspective of Haraway (2016). Relying on my previous positioning of posthumanism relative to antihumanism and psychoanalysis, I begin this chapter by further laying out the theoretical considerations emergent from posthumanism that inform my thinking. In particular, I discuss vital materialism and its (Western) emphasis in Spinozian monism,^{ix} as well as further discuss the notion of *zoe* and Haraway's (2016) various contributions to the literature of posthumanism. I then

bring these theoretical underpinnings into the context of the corpse to highlight the complexity of posthuman death and to gesture toward the way an attention to the corpse offers insight both into the posthuman condition broadly, and into human engagement with waste specifically. I will then elaborate this connection with waste by discussing an emerging environmental ethic. From there, I pull back from the corpse in order to discuss a posthuman death education more generally. Toward articulating a posthuman death education, I first discuss posthuman pedagogy and draw that literature into conversation with that of contemporary death education. I then conclude this chapter by returning to Braidotti (2019) in order to offer her affirmative ethics as a response to the exhausting relentlessness of advanced capitalism—thereby gesturing toward posthuman death education as a form of pedagogical and curricular response-ability or “an ethic of care and response” (Haraway, 2012, p. 302).

Monism, Vital Materialism, *Zoe*, and Compost

In the previous chapter, I discussed posthumanism relative to the antihumanism of the postmodern movement with particular reference to Foucault. In that discussion, I suggested that posthumanism moves away from the human in two distinct senses of the word. First, it moves away from European humanism as *doxa*, or commonly accepted reality. Second, it moves away from exclusive and elevated considerations of the human, by which I mean anthropocentrism. While Foucault and his contemporaries moved actively away from the first, the second remains a more recent contribution. Posthumanism, then, should be read as both ‘after’ European humanism and ‘after’ anthropocentrism (Braidotti, 2019).

In the previous chapter, I also highlighted the notion of posthuman subjectivity relative to subjectivity as viewed by the tradition of psychoanalysis. There, I suggested that the unitary (but fragmented) consciousness or psychic space that comprises the subject under psychoanalysis is a force “beneath” the posthuman subject, which is an assemblage of *zoe*/techno/geo-logical actors, entities, and forces (Braidotti, 2019). Essentially, this means that there are many living entities co-present and working together autopoietically in a manner consistent with all life that comprise our (post)human bodies. Our ‘self’ is a network of entangled actors. Here, it is important to note that many iterations of posthuman thought have moved away from subjectivity in favour of object centered-ness (Braidotti, 2019). Braidotti centers subjectivity as a way of keeping posthumanism critical through an acknowledgement of the systematic marginalization of various subjectivities and identities. This is one reason why I favour Braidotti’s posthumanism over that of Latour or Actor Network Theory, which is popular in education. In the subsequent discussion, then, the posthuman subject ought to be understood as an agentive *zoe*/techno/geo assemblage coexisting with sub-subjective factors such as unitary (but fragmented) psychic space and supra-subjective social reality, particularly social marginalization and privilege (Braidotti, 2019).

The above are two important theoretical threads of posthumanism, but there are several other foundational ideas worth presenting and attending to here. In particular, below I discuss the interconnected ideas of Spinozian monism, vital materialism, and *zoe*, before concluding with some consideration of Haraway’s (2016) innovative contributions to the posthuman discourse. All of this is of course meant to offer a fuller

picture of posthumanism so as to be able to apply it to the context of death education later in this chapter.

One of the earliest Western philosophers to whom posthumanism owes a debt of gratitude is Baruch Spinoza (though others trace the Western lineage of monism back further to Lucretius [Bennett, 2010; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010]). Spinoza was a contemporary of Descartes and, while the latter has historically been more influential, the former has seen a resurgence in the last fifty years. Whereas Descartes separated the mind and the body as distinct entities in a split known as Cartesian duality, which ultimately extended into the separation of the human from ‘his world’ by way of the elevated status of transcendental reason (I think; therefore, I am), Spinoza saw the world and the human as unitary. Put succinctly, Spinoza saw the world as made up of one thing: what we think of today as matter. He also said that all things were God and that God was all things—a conceptual leap for which he was exiled from the Jewish community. Although Spinoza’s assertion of the sacredness of matter is often left out of posthumanist discussions, I reassert it here toward creating allyship^{lxii} between Spinoza and Indigenous thought, an allyship elaborated and complicated in the next chapter.

In the present chapter, I am interested in the implications of Spinoza’s thought for posthumanism. Braidotti summarizes Spinoza’s contribution succinctly: “matter is one, driven by the desire for self-expression and ontologically free” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 56). It is the oneness of matter from which monism derives its name. The desire for self-expression of matter is today considered life’s autopoietic quality—its capacity and ability to self-organize or its innate intelligence. This autopoietic quality of life, and technology as suggested by Braidotti (2013), is one of the many spaces in which

contemporary scientific research supports monistic readings of reality, and it is further one of the foundational thoughts of vital materialism discussed below.

Spinozian monism was brought back into philosophical consciousness by a host of French thinkers in the post-1968 generation. They were interested in finding a way out of the dominance of transcendental reason in Western thought, particularly as manifest in Marxist and Hegelian dialectics (Braidotti, 2013). Deleuze in particular drew on monism as a response to the transcendental, asserting an ontology of immanence (Braidotti, 2013; St. Pierre, 2019)—a reality defined by oneness and remaining within itself where the interest is not in what is, but what is not yet; not what we are but what we might become (St. Pierre, 2019). Immanence and becoming are both markers of Braidotti's posthumanism and help move toward relationality by way of what she calls ontological pacifism. Braidotti (2013) helps us draw together Deleuze, Spinoza, and the conversation thus far:

Species equality in a post-anthropocentric world does urge us to question the violence and the hierarchical thinking that result from human arrogance and the assumption of transcendental human exceptionalism... monistic relationality stresses instead the more compassionate aspect of subjectivity. A Spinozist approach, re-read with Deleuze and Guattari, allows us to by-pass the pitfalls of binary thinking and to address the environmental question in its full complexity. (p. 86)

I will revisit the environmental question below, but here it suffices to say that an ontology of immanence is free from the binary oppositions of Marx, Hegel, and transcendental reason more broadly. Returning to Spinoza through the above quote, it is also evident that Spinoza's thinking moves beyond the hierarchies of humanism and instead favours a relationality with all things—for Spinoza because all things are God,

for others because all things are interconnected and we cannot do damage to anything else without also harming ourselves (Braidotti, 2019; Butler as quoted in Gessen, 2020; See also Justice, 2018).

Deleuze and Spinoza are foundational thinkers in a body of literature variously referred to as “new” materialism (St. Pierre et al., 2016), neo-materialism (Braidotti, 2019), and agential realism (Barad, 2007). The central thrust of this literature is that matter is agentic: “nature is agentic—it acts and those actions have consequences for both the human and nonhuman worlds” (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p. 101). By extension, this paradigm of new materialism seeks to understand the interconnections of all things referred to above. Vital materialism (also vitalism and vitalist materialism) is a manifestation of the new materialist literature, again rooted in Spinoza and Deleuze (Edwards, 2018, p. 8), which asserts that not only is matter agentic, but it is alive (Bennett, 2010; Edwards, 2018). To summarize: where Spinozian monism asserts that God is in all things and new materialism asserts that all things are interconnected and agentic, vital materialism asserts all things are alive. Braidotti (2013) often uses the term neo-materialism, but there is an underlying current of vitalism embedded in her conceptualization of the material and, of course, the lines between the three thoughts are not as rigid as I have made them out to be for the sake of clarity (see Braidotti, 2013, 2019; Edwards, 2018).

The consequences of monism and vital materialism for posthuman theory are rather robust. First, as above, monism disrupts the dominance of transcendental reason and, thus, the doxa of Cartesian duality as well as both European humanism and anthropocentrism (Braidotti, 2013, 2019; see also van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010). The

latter critique of anthropocentrism becomes more salient in light of vital materialism because if all matter is alive, the matter that makes up the human is no different from the matter that comprises non-humans. Besides being the foundation of the relationality and ontological pacifism associated with Braidotti's posthumanism, this is also one of the conceptual means by which *zoe* is centered rather than *bios*. As discussed throughout this work, *zoe* is a notion of life expanded beyond the human, or *bios* (Braidotti, 2013). Under the logic of vital materialism, *zoe* extends to all matter, and although it may be an easy conceptual leap to see the life of plants and animals, it is important to note that Braidotti's posthumanism, vital materialism, and *zoe* extend the notion of life to our technological others as well (see also Bennett, 2010). The computer on which I write this has a life of its own that is deeply interconnected with my own life both on the level of our subject-assemblage and my affective, sub-subjective psychic space. Indeed, places (Chalquist, 2007) themselves, as part of a living world (Lovelock, 1987), have a vitality through the notion of *zoe*. Of course, Indigenous people have known this for millennia (e.g., Deloria, 1994), but I will return to that critique in my next chapter.

Before discussing some of Haraway's conceptual contributions, it is important to note that although monism asserts a sameness to matter, Braidotti's critical posthumanism acknowledges the different forms life can take, and indeed embraces those differences (see also Bennett, 2010). As stated above, Braidotti's posthumanism is critical and aware of the ways in which different subjectivities are marginalized through social and epistemic structures. It is for this reason that Braidotti is equally critical of object-centered iterations of posthumanism and of mystical assertions of the oneness of all life. Braidotti's approach differentiates monistic life by way of an understanding of

subjectivity, leading toward the assertion that “we-are-(all)-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 52). In the current conversation then, posthumanism offers an expanded, but *differentiated*, definition of life, one that radically decenters the status of the human. As will be discussed in chapter seven, understanding this differentiated interconnectedness is crucial to critical and resistant inwardness.

Haraway (2016) is her own sort of posthumanist and is worth attending to here to provide a chaotic counterfoil to the clarity of Braidotti (2013, 2019). Indeed, Haraway does not acknowledge that we are posthuman, rather opting for the term “compost” and the corresponding “compostist” (Haraway, 2016). She radically decenters human-constructed material boundaries, articulating life not as interconnected but as humus: a porous blurring of the lines between different forms of life. Life is not separate for Haraway; it is spongy, malleable, and transversal. Her ultimate call is toward “becoming-with” those non-human and more-than-human others around us, and she articulates this through multispecies storytelling and a variety of SF concepts including speculative feminism and science fiction. Her SF imagining of a future of symbionts who are genetically half human and half animal is evocative and illustrative of this notion of becoming-with. She also moves away from the language of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, opting for her own “Chthulucene”—a marker of the time of the chthonic ones who “romp in multicritter humus but have no truck with sky-gazing homo” (p. 2). Our human responsibility is to make the Anthropocene as short as possible and embrace the ethical response-ability of living-with, and perhaps more importantly, dying-with chthonic, tentacular critters. The notion of response-ability, discussed above

as the capacity for response and care, is an imperative of posthuman pedagogy, as is Haraway's call to stay with the trouble of the current era, and both will be discussed below, but here I should touch on Haraway's emphasis on dying. Humans do not die well. This has been seen already many times throughout this dissertation as the death-denying ethos of Western society, but Haraway puts it in terms of the duty to die—to become Ancestors (Justice, 2018) through the ecological notion of generational time (Rose, 2012). As previously stated, the human population is a problem for the Earth, and this deeply concerns Haraway. Rather than the crude anti-human calls for human death made by some deep ecologists, however, Haraway encourages us to “make kin, not babies” and explores alternative, and often explicitly and ethically queer, familial structures that effectively challenge the doxa of the two-person heterosexual family unit. In other words, why can we not have a family of three, four, or seven adults for one child? Though her response to the problem of population deals in birth rather than death, death is written throughout her text as well, implicitly calling on us to cease our raging against death and restructure the temporal limits of life in more ecological terms (see also Rose, 2012).

Haraway's thinking is robust, complex, and evocative. As such, several of Haraway's concepts inform my discussion of posthumanism, even if Haraway herself is a compostist. Having now articulated my understanding of the literature of posthumanism, I will proceed to the broader project of this chapter, namely speculatively theorizing a posthuman death education. Before I venture into the realm of posthuman pedagogy, however, I would like to pay another visit to my old friend the corpse; this time through the eyes of *zoe* and vital materialism.

The Corpse

In the previous chapter, I suggested that the corpse can function as a social agent, its corpse-power compelling the living to move in various ways. I also highlighted the affective power of the corpse to transform internal worlds via a discussion of abjection. But in each of these considerations I bracketed out vital materialism in order to attend to the human rather than the posthuman. Here, then, I turn toward a posthuman engagement with the posthumous, the corpse.

The notion of *zoe* suggests that when humans die, life continues; “death...is not final, as *zoe* carries on, relentlessly” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 130). As noted above in my initial discussion of the boundless power of *zoe*, the potential of *zoe* vastly exceeds the human and its biological, geological, and technological others. In that, *zoe* carries the potential to do harm—“*zoe* is always too much for the specific slab of enfleshed existence that constitutes single subjects” (p. 130)—and we can only try to catch a ride on the boundless cosmic energy of *zoe*. Death is the posthuman subject’s transition to becoming-corpse (Edwards, 2018), a vital corpse (Braidotti, 2013) replete with *zoe*. Remembering that the posthuman subject is not the unitary, fragmented subject of psychoanalysis, but rather a *zoe*/techno/geo assemblage, it becomes possible to imagine the ways our interconnections with other living matter might continue on after our deaths. In the specific material instance of the human corpse, life continues through the human microbiome and particularly gut bacteria, which proliferate after death and contribute to the body’s decomposition and, ultimately, the liquification of flesh, organs, and other soft tissues (DeBruyn, & Hauther, 2017). While anthropocentric bias doesn’t often allow for understanding human bodies in this way, the function of bodily

decomposition to the wider ecological world suggests that the remains of animals and insects serve as valuable sources of nutrients for plant life (Metcalf et al., 2016)—so too does the human corpse (Deloria, 1994). In this way, the relentlessness of *zoe* can harm through its demand for death, but again, this is not something that can be raged against, as death is written into the core of us as genetically mortal beings.

Ego haunts Braidotti's (2013) discussion of death, stemming from the Deleuzian distinction between personal death as an arresting of the ego (the end of 'I') and impersonal death as a temporal threshold to the capacity to become. The former is obviously a marker of anthropocentric visions of life—that 'I' am somehow unique or special, and my death is significant. The latter, however, is a vision of death more in tune with posthumanism via the acknowledgement that our material end is not an end at all, but rather a transition to different forms of life. Indeed, with playfulness Braidotti reminds us that life itself is a gift, not a right or something to which we are entitled: "life is passing and we do not own it; *we just inhabit it*, not unlike a timeshare location [emphasis added]" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 133). Posthumanism, then, acknowledges the impersonal nature of death not as a sacred call for the death of the ego as alleviation of suffering (see Kumar & Downey, 2018), but as a manifestation of the ontologically immanent relationship between the posthuman subject and vital matter more broadly (Braidotti, 2013). This does not mean that death is a return to the body's natural state, but rather an overflowing of potential becoming:

Death is the becoming-imperceptible of the posthuman subject and as such it is part of the cycles of becoming, yet another form of interconnectedness, a vital relationship that links one with other, multiple forces. The impersonal is life and death as *bios/zoe* in us—the ultimate outside as the frontier of the incorporeal: becoming-imperceptible. (Braidotti, 2013, p. 137)

Posthumanism's impersonal death is a becoming-imperceptible (Braidotti, 2006, 2013). To bring in Haraway's (2016) thinking, it is a material and affective blending of our human body into the humus of life. All things will eventually give way to the power of *zoe*; all things will eventually become indistinguishable from *zoe*. We will eventually cross this threshold of becoming. The cosmic roar of life will eventually bring us into new being (and subsequently new becoming), and we are only along for the ride.

I think this inexhaustible quality of life, the inevitability of it overrunning our human form, and the continuation of life through our corpse offer an appreciation of the simultaneous significance and insignificance of our material remains. The corpse, historically speaking, has been—when deemed human—treated with the utmost respect and reverence (significance), despite being materially indistinct from that which we deem waste (insignificant). This is, I think, because of the liminal status of the corpse as having been alive. Kristeva (1982) said the liminality of the corpse brings about our discomfort and uncertainty around it, but a socio-historical reading such as Laqueur's (2015) supports the notion that the corpse's liminality acts as a sort of corpse-power compelling the living to attend to it with care and reverence. We treat the corpse as waste, but as a special waste that was once alive, once ourselves. When this reading is introduced to the logic of vital materialism, which decenters the human, as well as ontological pacifism, which encourages us to do no damage to any life, care and reverence for the corpse is intuitively extended to waste more broadly, not just to that which is considered *human* remains. In this way, the corpse and our socio-historical attention to it offers a precise model of an environmental ethic—a model of attending to

waste. Simply put, our historical attention to and attending of the corpse shows us how we ought to engage with waste. In the subsequent section, I will elaborate this environmental ethic and the practice of attending to waste.

Attending to Waste and an Environmental Ethic

I would like to further this discussion of the corpse through the notion of “matter out of place” (Douglas, 2013). One definition for dirt is the idea that it is matter out of place (Douglas, 2013; Liboiron, 2019). In my reading, this notion opens up the possibility of a non-judgmental understanding of dirt. In the doxa of Western society, if something is dirty it is read in a negative context—dirt ought to be cleaned or gotten rid of. But to me, the notion of dirt as matter out of place invites us to see dirt as simply, and non-judgmentally, something where it ought not to be. It would be all too easy to say that waste can also be thought of as matter out of place, that the corpse is a waste matter that we have an ethical duty to put in its place, and that we ought to follow the same logic with all our waste. But waste is not matter out of place—at least not uncomplicatedly so.

Liboiron (2019) identifies three different uses of the phrase “matter out of place” within the discard studies literature: uses related to the spatial, the material, and social power. With regard to social power, one may think of the discussion in the last chapter about the waste-making function of advanced capitalism and Bauman’s (2007) comments about the system choking on its own waste. Liboiron summarizes: “where there is a system of power, there are necessarily rejected elements (or dirt)” (2019, n.p.). The material usage is complicated by social power by way of society’s normalization

and legalization of particular ‘dirty’ practices: “things that appear merely technical, procedural, or material may be either dirt or anti-dirt, depending on their relations to existing power structures” (Liboiron, 2019, n.p.). Pollution serves as a clear example of something that can be alternatively viewed as ‘dirty’ or ‘clean’ based on individual perspectives; ironically, the same could be said for the material facts of an environmental protest. Here, it is necessary to state that capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and other power structures have a consumptive and appropriative quality, where that which is originally intended to be subversive can be brought into the fold of the system under less threatening guises. The capitalist commodification of punk culture is one noted example; the institutionalization (and instrumentalization) of anti-racist, Indigenous, and critical pedagogies is another. In the context of the material usage of “matter out of place,” waste can be seen as an anti-dirt; a form of dirt the system deems acceptable in order to keep itself in power. To quote Liboiron again: “environmental pollution and other forms of uneven material distribution are not an accidental by-product of capitalism, colonialism, and other power structures, but central to maintaining them as the systems that they are: the creators of anti-dirt” (2019, n.p.). Likewise, the spatial use of “matter out of place” can also serve the interests of the systems that hold oppression in place. Litter, for example, seems by definition to be a matter out of place, yet as Liboiron points out, litter is a spatial category for waste that gives it a place—a place that takes focus away from the issue of industrial production of non-biodegradable disposable goods. For Liboiron, waste is not matter out of place—at least not when it is given a place within systems of domination.

With this critique sustained, I think waste can still be seen as matter out of place, provided the systems of oppression that hold space for waste in order to sustain themselves are deterritorialized or denaturalized (Braidotti, 2013, 2019). By this I mean that if the spatial and material categories into which waste can be placed are denaturalized, all waste is out of place. This becomes particularly clear given a vital materialist understanding of matter—which Liboiron denounces in passing. Under vital materialism, all matter including waste matter is alive and, given the relationality and ontological pacifism expressed by Braidotti (2013, 2019)—which it should be noted is present in the Mi'kmaw notion of *netukulimk* (Robinson, 2016) as well—we, the complex assemblage of vital matter that comprises the posthuman subject, have a relational obligation to the matter of our waste. Indeed, this relational ethic, I think, begs us not to see it as waste at all, but rather as matter out of place meant in my original, non-judgemental sense—as something that demands our attention, our understanding, and action on our part. We must carry our waste to its place—not in the neglectful doxa of Western society, where we flush away our waste into what we experience phenomenologically as a sort of ecological netherworld (see also Žižek, 2006b), but rather in a relationally accountable sense, where the life of our waste is respected and we attend to its various stages of becoming. We should observe, be compelled by, and be affected by its compost-ing, to borrow Haraway's (2016) terminology—we should be becoming-*with* waste rather than simply becoming it.

Furthermore, I would suggest here that just as corpse-power has a myriad of functions, both political and affective, waste has a similar sort of power—waste-power—which has been diminished by way of its perceived inanimacy, just as the

corpse-power of those (wrongfully) deemed inhuman is diminished. In my thinking, Braidotti's ontological pacifism is a call to acknowledge waste-power—to attend to it and to be compelled by it. As above, waste-power can teach us all sorts of things about our unconscious habits and biases through a sort of deterritorialization of our discard practices. Just as an attention to corpse-power formed an important curricular touchstone of a critical death education, so too can attention to waste-power give a direction to posthuman death education. Indeed, as above, a close socio-historical reading of our treatment of the corpse (e.g., Laqueur, 2015) can form a model of how we ought to engage with our waste—in blanket terms: with relationality, respect, and reverence.

I recognize that what I am calling for is rather impractical—or at least a profoundly uncomfortable change—but I believe it is important precisely for that reason. As discussed in my first chapter, this is a project of curricular futurity in the face of imminent precarity. What we need now is creative response-ability, dreaming, and envisionment of new curricular realities. We need creative, speculative theorizing. The above discussion of attending to the corpse and attending to waste, then, is just that: a materialization through language of a dreamed curricular future—far beyond the present reality, but intimately responsive to it.

Having now gestured toward the environmental ethic emergent from posthuman attention to the corpse, as well as elaborated what I call waste-power and encouraged a deep attention to our discard practices, I now return to the overall project of this chapter—the articulation of a posthuman death education. Obviously, the above vital materialist reading of the corpse, as well as the eco-centered direction of the posthumanist literature in general (Braidotti & Bignall, 2018), should indicate that a

posthuman death education ought to be concerned with death in a broad, impersonal, ecological sense rather than the personal death identified by Deleuze. This distinction functions as a general direction for the content of a posthuman death education curriculum, but the issue of pedagogy still remains. As such, in the following sections I engage the literature of posthuman pedagogy as well as Braidotti's discussion of affirmative ethics toward articulating a pedagogy of posthuman death education.

Posthuman Pedagogy

Having addressed in speculative terms the question of what we might teach in posthuman death education, two questions remain: 1) how can posthumanism inform our teaching; and 2) how can we continue to teach in this moment, the posthuman convergence? I address the first through a discussion of pedagogy informed by posthumanism, and I address the second through a discussion of Braidotti's (2019) affirmative ethics in the subsequent section.

While a full discussion of the rather expansive field of posthuman pedagogy is beyond the scope of the current chapter, there are several trends worth attending to in terms of how posthumanism might inform teaching. Here, it should be noted that I am not as much interested in specific practices that might be called posthuman, but rather in general, orienting principles that may be said to emerge from posthumanism.

First, posthumanism invites a wider consideration of the vital materials co-present in a specific educational context (i.e., walled classroom, online, outside). Candace Kuby (2019), for example, detailed the ways the grade two class with which she worked engaged and were engaged socially by the various non-human materials at

work in the classroom. Many articles, especially those introducing posthumanism, begin with an account of the many more-than-human and non-human others who are co-present during the educative experience (e.g., Gough, 2004; Snaza et al., 2014). In my discussion of posthuman death education, the corpse has been the most significant material other to inhabit the educative experience, but beyond the standard classroom array of textbooks, computers, pencils, and papers, there are several material others uniquely co-present and entangled with death education: animal remains, worms, soil, coffins, pagodas, tomb stones, obituaries, crosses, and/or the machineries of war.

This first point is furthered beyond a simple consideration of materials to an acknowledgement of their affective power and agency (Niccolini, Zarabadi, & Ringrose, 2018). Indeed, posthuman pedagogy is intimately aware of and interested in the intra-actions of vital matter both within the posthuman subject and beyond it/us. In the context of death education, one may refer back to the earlier discussion by Harwood and her colleagues (Harwood et al., 2018) on the intra-actions between animal remains and early childhood students. Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2015) also discussed multispecies intra-actions under the notion of common world interspecies learning of mortal entanglements toward an embodied understanding of the interdependence and vulnerability of life. Kuby and her co-editors (Kuby, Spector, & Thiel, 2019) further explore material entanglements in the context of literacy by discussing the ways that posthumanism opens up the definition of what counts as literacies from reading the words to reading of the entanglements that comprise posthuman subjectivity. Alluding to the previous chapter, if Freire (1996) was concerned with reading the ideologies at work within the world, Kuby and other posthumanist educators are *additionally*

interested in reading the intra-actions (see also Barad, 2007) within the entangled network of the posthuman subject.

The above links to a second thread of posthumanist pedagogy: that it must remain critical. Unlike some in education who favour the object-centered Actor Network Theory (e.g., Gough, 2004)—which Braidotti (2019) has thoroughly critiqued—Kuby (Kuby et al., 2019; Kuby & Rowsell, 2017) has consistently articulated posthumanism and its pedagogies as critical projects. The critical project of posthumanist pedagogy extends, and does not erase, the traditional critical pedagogical focus on human emancipation (e.g., Snaza et al., 2014). The extension is toward a consideration of the ways humanist pedagogies have marginalized and excluded non-human and more-than-human life (Snaza et al., 2014). Although there is some dissatisfaction with critical theories of education for their failure to actualize systemic change and the redundancy of their thought (Kuby & Rowsell, 2017), the overall project of posthuman pedagogy is still critical (Kuby et al., 2019; Snaza et al., 2014) in the foundational decentering and deterritorialization of the human and European humanism as doxa. Indeed, many—including myself in this dissertation—attempt to write at the crossroads of posthumanism and decolonial theory (e.g., Bayley, 2018; Zembylas, 2018). Taylor, Pacini-Ketchabaw, and Blaise (2012) also gesture toward the ways that posthuman pedagogies, particularly in their emphasis on building relationships between children and the natural world, might be viewed as a form of resistance to the neoliberal individualism that dominates education and Western society more broadly. I have already made a case for an explicitly political death education, but the above extends the

scope of that criticality beyond human relations into an ethical, relational engagement with all life.

A third trend of the posthuman pedagogies literature is an environmental focus. This environmental focus stems from the wider eco-centric nature of posthuman philosophies (Braidotti & Bignall, 2018), and there is ample allyship here from and between Indigenous education, science education (Higgins & Tolbert, 2018), and a host of environmentally focused pedagogies from other paradigms (e.g., Hensley, 2011). By now, the posthuman contribution to this environmental push in education should be evident given my previous discussion of ontological pacifism, but the general trend does warrant naming here.^{lxiii}

Finally, posthumanism is disinterested in binaries both in its foundations (Braidotti, 2013, 2019) and in its pedagogical interventions (Kuby et al., 2019; Niccolini et al., 2018). This lends itself to a recognition of the role of negative affect in education (Carstens, 2018), which is often articulated using Donna Haraway's (2016) formation of staying with the trouble (see Bayley, 2018; Niccolini et al., 2018). Previously, I entered this conversation through my own aversion to discourses of developmentalism (Egan, 2005; Walkerdine, 1993) and progressive education (Egan, 2003), which fail to acknowledge the losses of learning (Nellis, 2009, 2018), and through the previous chapter's discussion of pedagogies of discomfort (Boler, 1999). The emphasis in posthumanism is not dissimilar, but unique in its focus on mutuality. Niccolini and co-authors (2018), for example, note that tension, under posthumanist thinking, is not something that needs to be resolved, but rather something to be "worked." The call to be comfortable with discomfort (Carstens, 2018) in posthumanism emerges from a

relational ethic of ontological pacifism—we must stay with the trouble, no matter how uncomfortable, so as to make kin with those co-present within our subject-assemblage. I will return to this point in the conclusion of this chapter.

Though far from exhaustive, the above conversation does provide some preliminary answers as to how we might teach in a posthuman death education. We may shift our focus from the affective concerns of humans in death, such as grief, mourning, and sadness to a consideration of how those affects touch and are touched by materialities (Niccolini et al., 2018), and how we are entangled with the mortality of other beings (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015). We may pick up the threads of the last chapter in an explicitly political consideration of death and create space for the students with whom we work to encounter new relationalities in classroom ‘contact zones’ (Niccolini et al., 2018; see also Pratt, 1991)—thus learning to read our complex subjectivities and the networks of which we are a part in addition to the social ideologies that function above the subject (Braidotti, 2019) and decenter neoliberal individualism (Taylor, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Blaise, 2012). We may, as I have above, become more explicitly environmental in our consideration of death education, opting for time observing death in nature rather than studying it in human-constructed contexts (e.g., Harwood et al., 2018). We may attempt to embrace our own discomfort with the socio-environmental realities of advanced capitalism and encourage our students to do the same (Carstens, 2018). We may also explicitly teach posthuman concepts in order to amplify the above considerations (Niccolini et al., 2018). The possibilities are endless, evocative, and provocative, but there still remains the issue of how to move forward at this moment of precarity and trouble.

While it was briefly suggested above that we ought not to see negative and positive affect in dichotomous terms (Carstens, 2018) and that staying with the trouble can give us an avenue into new forms of becoming-with and relationality, this topic deserves a wider treatment. This is particularly the case in moments of imminent precarity such as those we live in today amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following section, which concludes this chapter, I will thus attempt to answer the questions as to how we continue to teach in the moment of the posthuman convergence through Braidotti's (2019) affirmative ethic.

Affirmative Ethics

I began this chapter by highlighting the fragility of human life, and the necessity of our deaths to the ecological world, but also to the continuity of human life as we know it. I have also suggested that the force of *zoe* is exponentially greater than the human capacity to experience life, and we are only able to catch a brief ride on its inexhaustible flow. In previous chapters, I have discussed the precarity of human existence in the current socio-environmental moment and drawn on the necropolitical elements of the current COVID-19 pandemic to elucidate the imminence of that precarity. I have also alluded to the inexhaustible accelerationism of advanced capitalism, as well as the manner in which it produces and chokes on its own waste products. This all paints a rather bleak picture of contemporary life and, by extension, begs the haunting question of how we can continue to teach—how we can carry on—in these precarious times.

While the personal answer I have found to the above is in Indigenous (Mi'kmaw) ancestral knowledge, cultural teachings, and spiritual traditions, which will be discussed in the next chapter, I think posthumanism offers some valuable direction here as well. In particular, the notion of attending is helpful. Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2015) encourage us as teachers to be attentive to various intra-actions and particularly those on a smaller scale; we ought not to attend solely to the very big intra-actions of humans, but also to the small, microbial ones. Attending asks for the *active* capacity and willingness to be changed by what one encounters; it is an openness to the intra-actions of life manifest both internally and externally. What I call “attending,” Haraway might name our capacity to ‘stay’ with those negative feelings of uncertainty and call it a form of response-ability (Haraway, 2012, 2016). Indeed, the notion of response-ability is helpful as well, in that it reminds us teachers to be open, vulnerable, and capable of responding to what is in front of us not with answers, but with curiosity and care. Braidotti (2013, 2019) is likewise concerned with our capacity to respond (and to attend)—to what she calls the intersection of the Sixth Extinction Event and the Fourth Industrial Revolution—through the notion of affirmative ethics.

Spinoza’s formation of monism was initially a response to Cartesian duality and was later revived by poststructuralists as a way of escaping the binaries and dialectic of Hegel and Marx, whose work formed something of a doxa within the intellectual trends of the moment (Braidotti, 2019). Braidotti (2019) picks up on this philosophical positioning of monism with regard to ethics and, from that position, escapes the duality between negativity and positivity by way of the affirmative. Negativity has its place as a part of the affirmative. If we attend actively to it, negativity drives an understanding of

the state of things as they are, particularly the social oppression experienced by marginalized subjects. Negativity, however, need not dominate our perspective, even as critical theorists. That which is generally perceived as negative can be reframed in the affirmative as a part of the reality to which we must respond. We need not judge the negative, but rather acknowledge it as it is and ‘get on with it.’ There is a resilience embedded in this notion, but affirmative ethics is relational in nature and driven by creativity, collaboration, and humility as well. Where the phrase “ontological pacifism” used above may suggest a sort of neutrality and inaction, affirmative ethics is an active envisioning of something beyond, but responsive to, what is; it is a form of responsibility marked by attending to negativity.

The affirmative ethic of Braidotti’s critique is particularly evident in her treatment of capitalism and technology. While Indigenous theorists, such as Glen Coulthard (2013) and Leanne Simpson (2017), are completely dismissive of Western capitalism with good reason, Braidotti is *both* highly critical of and willing to work with(in) advanced capitalism. The same can be said of technologies, where Simpson (2017) is critical of the manner in which social media and other technologies are deeply entwined in the fabric of neoliberal capitalism, while Braidotti is both critical and hopeful. Here Braidotti’s acknowledgement of the problem, but also her seemingly relentless willingness to work with the problem rather than dismissing it out of hand, should be read as a definitive example of the affirmative ethics she envisions.

I suspect teachers will find this affirmative ethic inviting because it gives agency to all of us with regard to social issues often seen as insurmountable. I also worry that in endorsing it widely, the profession will take it up as a blindness to critical issues

endemic to the fabric of Western society and as a justification for continuing with the status quo. As noted earlier, capitalism can consume subversive ideologies, acts, or cultures making certain versions of them acceptable. This happens continuously in education where theories meant to critique the system are taken up by it in ways that work only to sustain the system itself. This has been the trap into which both the social reconceptualization of curriculum theory and the related field of critical pedagogy have fallen and is perhaps a source of the theory fatigue manifest in Western society broadly and education specifically (Braidotti, 2019). Affirmative ethics does not mean we are not critical, nor that we continue with the status quo—indeed, the exact opposite is true. It means we understand and spend time with (attend to) the messy, sticky, complex problems of injustice, oppression, and inequality and remain willing to work with them. It is not a turning away from key issues, but rather a turning toward them with a persistent willingness to envision something better.

Humanistic death educators generally understand the importance of turning toward the messy issues where affect is concerned, but the literature has largely failed to address other critical issues—racism, sexism, ableism, environmental derogation, and the necropolitical nature of advanced capitalism. An affirmative ethics in death education is turning toward critical, posthuman, and Indigenous theories in order to build a more complex understanding of the issues inherent in contemporary ways of dying. From that understanding, new visions of death education will emerge, and indeed new visions of education in general. This is what is at the crux of my dissertation—the reconceptualization of death education and the dreaming of a curricular future based on that reconceptualization.

Amid the changing world of the COVID-19 pandemic, where the fragility of human life is on full display, we are faced with the uncomfortably imminent possibility of our deaths. Affirmative ethics, and the discussion in this chapter more broadly, suggests a choice in how we respond to these facts. We can face this discomfort with fear and anxiety, with the egocentric movement of selfish thought, and with a notion of death as a personal slight. Indeed, throughout most of Western Judeo-Christian history, death has been a looming battle to be fought to the end (Deloria, 1994). Yet, affirmative ethics would suggest we can turn toward our discomfort; we can face it with humility and reverence for the unstoppable roar of life, *zoe*. We are not here for a long time, but we are here, and we are all in this together, though we are not all one and the same (Braidotti, 2019). So, the suggestion is that we can acknowledge the reality of our death and work with it to envision new realities—new forms of living-with and becoming-with the life all around us.

In this chapter, I have given an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of posthumanism. I have applied those underpinnings in a discussion of the corpse, then furthered that discussion into an emergent environmental ethic where our socio-historical treatment of the human corpse serves as a model for our engagement with waste. I have also discussed posthuman pedagogy and how and why we might teach at this precarious moment. In all of this, my goal has been to gesture toward a posthuman death education. Together with my previous chapter suggesting a critical death education, I have highlighted the generative possibilities of Western theory to transform and expand the content and the pedagogy of death education curricula. From this, conclusions about education more broadly can also be drawn; indeed, these are

important contributions that may succeed in making education and death education better for marginalized people. As many have pointed out (Sabzalian, 2018; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013), however, discussions of curriculum have historically been absent of Indigenous thought and bodies, and this absence is a designed function of the settler colonialism endemic to Western society (Brayboy, 2005). As such, the final substantive chapter of this dissertation will introduce Indigenous metaphysical theory into this complicated conversation around reconceptualizing death education.

Chapter Six: Death, Education, and Indigenous Knowledges

Ceremonies, bones, genes, blood: whether belonging to the dead or the living—or both—there is a continuity in Indigenous experience across time and space, as death itself is no sanctuary from colonialism – Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018, p. 131)

Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds – Chief Seattle (as cited in Deloria 1994, p. 174)

Surviving the Apocalypse

The current COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the precarity of Western society as a whole and called into question the future we of that society have collectively (though often tacitly) envisioned. That future, of course, has never been a given for many Indigenous peoples in North America (e.g., Coulthard, 2013; Justice, 2018; Simpson, 2017). Indeed, as a reading of Jonathan Lear’s *Radical Hope* (2006) might suggest, each generation of Indigenous people has had to find meaning in a world radically different from the one in which their parents lived. Settler colonial society is always a shifting terrain for Indigenous people. Whether through war (Paul, 2006), disease (Paul, 2006), occupation and dispossession (Simpson, 2011, 2017), forced abduction in residential schools (TRC, 2015) and the 60s and millennial scoops (Vowel, 2016), or the ongoing genocide against Indigenous women and girls (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women [NIMMIW], 2019), the rules of settler colonialism are constantly changing, usually with deadly consequences, and each generation is left to find a new way forward. Lear (2006) suggested an innate human capacity, and perhaps obligation, to hope—to carry on in the face of the complete

eradication of that which we have known. I do not think it coincidental that Lear draws on Indigenous North America (specifically the Crow Nation) as the context for his theorizing. Indeed, many Indigenous authors have highlighted this same phenomenon in the context of settler colonialism. Chippewa author Gerald Vizenor (1994) uses the word *survivance* to describe the ability of Indigenous peoples not just to survive, but to survive and thrive through resistance. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) might call this capacity for *survivance* a marker of Indigenous brilliance—the sacred, ingenious quality of Indigenous knowledges, both historic and contemporary. Daniel Heath Justice, a Cherokee literary scholar, makes the point clear: “Indigenous and Black folks understand apocalypse—our people have lived it” (Justice, 2018, p. 167). I would add to this the recurrent temporal marker “again and again and again” before concluding as Justice does that “our peoples *survived* [emphasis original]” (Justice, 2018, p. 168). Thus, Indigenous *survivance*, and perhaps radical hope, offer a tried and tested response to socio-economic precarity and, indeed, apocalypse.

There is, then, something to be learned from Indigenous *survivance* in the current moment. Precarity and uncertainty are not uncommon; they have been a fact of life for marginalized people in ongoing and recursive fashion. It is only now that the scale of precarity has expanded and been shown with lucid clarity. Like the dissertation as a whole, this chapter works toward speculating a curricular future—toward finding responses to what is and dreaming what could be. Where I concluded the previous chapter by suggesting affirmative ethics as a response to advanced capitalism and the posthuman convergence, here I pick up that thread of conversation by suggesting

Indigenous metaphysical theory as a response to settler colonial erasure through the notion of attending to Land/Ancestors. Like many Indigenous academics (e.g., Ahenakew, 2018; Graveline, 1998; Mitchell, 2018), I am interested in the capacity of Indigenous knowledges to respond to social inequality. As such, I begin this chapter by discussing settler colonialism and the various ways it has attempted to erase both the humanity and physical presence of Indigenous peoples.

The personal response I find to precarity and uncertainty is in Indigenous knowledge broadly and in the specific cultural teachings of my own Mi'kmaw community/communities. Here, however, I seek to engage Indigenous knowledge *as it has been put forward in the academic literature*. This means I am bracketing out a huge and expansive set of knowledges that live in the experiences of Elders and other community members. As a way of differentiating my reading from the wider body of Indigenous knowledge—which I see as an axiological imperative of relational accountability (see chapter three)—I use the phrase “Indigenous metaphysical theory.” Indigenous metaphysical theory is an original formation, though it is informed by the more common phrase Indigenous metaphysics (e.g., Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Mika, 2017, 2019; Stonechild, 2020). I opt for Indigenous metaphysical *theory* as a way to emphasize my work as theoretical rather than philosophical—which is informed by both my methodological and paradigmatic positioning. In my formation, Indigenous metaphysical theory encompasses work around Indigenous sciences (e.g., Cajete, 2000; Kimmerer, 2013) and humanities (Battiste, 2016b; Henderson, 2016; Justice, 2018), Indigenous spiritual and cultural perspectives (e.g., Deloria, 1994; Stonechild, 2016, 2020), as well as Indigenous literature (e.g., Clair, 2017).

Throughout this chapter, I have drawn mostly on publicly available text and made every attempt to primarily cite Indigenous authors. As per my discussion in chapter three, this chapter does not claim grounded normativity, nor an Indigenous methodological framework. These positions perhaps have a stronger claim to Truth than I can offer; again, I am seeking truthfulness. I repeat these points here to be transparent about the fact that I am not claiming to present anything beyond what I have learned through reading. While I am Indigenous (Mi'kmaw) and have in the past drawn on my own experiences to write theory, here I am intentionally limiting my claim to truth as a form of relational accountability (see also chapter three). Having said that, I would again gesture toward the rigour of complicated conversation as being in the holding together of divergent voices on a single topic. Here, I hold together a variety of Indigenous perspectives on the topic of death in order to provoke and speculate new curricular possibilities.

Structurally, this chapter begins with a discussion of settler colonial erasure through a consideration of the scalp. Specifically, the next section focuses on the history in this (Wabanaki) territory of the scalp as a marker of the wider, ongoing phenomena of Indigenous erasure and settler colonialism. This chapter's second major section takes up Indigenous metaphysical theory in more detail. It is divided into four sub-sections: 1) an overview of the central concerns of Indigenous metaphysical theory; 2) a comparative positioning with regard to posthumanism; 3) an application of the theory to the context of death; and 4) an explicit articulation of the response I envision, attending to Land. In the final major section of this chapter, I articulate pedagogical implications for death education of Indigenous knowledges. I conclude this chapter by gesturing toward death

education as a site of developing a capacity to respond, much as I have throughout this work as a whole. Before theorizing a response, however, a fuller understanding of the problem must be developed. Settler colonialism, thus, proves a significant starting point.

Of Scalps, Death, Settler Colonialism, and Indigenous Erasure

In his 2017 novel, *Taapoategl and Pallet: A Mi'kmaq Journey of Loss and Survival*, Mi'kmaw author and artist Peter J. Clair offers a vivid vision of a possible and particular Mi'kmaw burial during the period of colonial occupation. One of the title characters, Taapoategl, is captured by European colonizers and taken to live and work at their camp. While there, she discovers the scalp of a close family member, her aunt. Though initially shocked, Taapoategl eventually works her way through what she remembers of a burial ceremony for her departed aunt.

Though a work of fiction, Clair's text is rooted in a very real history. In 1749, Edward Cornwallis founded the city of Halifax in traditional Mi'kmaw moose hunting territory in direct breach of the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1725/26 between the British and the Mi'kmaq nation (Paul, 2006). The Mi'kmaq launched retaliations against the English for encroaching on their territory. In response, Cornwallis declared open warfare (but not war) on the Mi'kmaq, offering bounties on the scalps of any Mi'kmaw person, including women and children (Paul, 2006; see also Paul, n.d.[a]). Scalping is often viewed as an Indigenous practice that was adopted by early settlers, but Mi'kmaw historian Elder Dr. Daniel Paul (2006, n.d.[b]), among others (see Marselis, 2016), has refuted such clarity.

The traumatic history of scalping Mi'kmaw people raises a haunting question: what did the colonizer do with the scalps? According to Paul, who references the scalping proclamations in Nova Scotia (Paul, 2006, n.d.[a], n.d.[b]), scalps were given by settlers to the government in exchange for money.^{lxiv} Settlers presumably had acquired the scalps through the systematic murder of Indigenous peoples. While in the context of Nova Scotia, this genocide is often considered an extension of war, in other contexts, such as the Beothuk in Newfoundland, it is widely acknowledged that murder was one-sided and common place (Wetzel, 1995). The Beothuk, however, were not scalped—rather they were, among other inhumane methods of destruction, shot from boats for sport (Wetzel, 1995). Indeed, settler colonial genocide took, and continues to take, many forms. Disease is, for example, widely considered to be the biggest cause of death to Indigenous people during initial phases of settler colonial occupation (Paul, 2006). Whether disease, war, murder, or forced assimilation, the overall project was the same: to erase Indigenous people.

To return to scalping in Nova Scotia, the scalp began with murder, then became financial exchange, and most accounts stop there. Did the scalp become waste? If so, what were the means of its disposal? Was it buried or cremated? Was it displayed as a deterrent as with the bodies of those hanged publicly? These thoughts haunt.

Some scalps have been saved and were displayed in museums until the recent practice of not displaying them emerged (Marselis, 2016). Indeed, there is a long history of anthropological grave robbing in Indigenous communities (Justice, 2018), and “many museums throughout the world have in the past bought [Indigenous] scalps, skulls, and skeletons” (Marselis, 2016, p. 22). In addition to the generations of protest and activism,

which led to the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in the United States, contemporary Indigenous scholars and artists such as Daniel Heath Justice and Wendy Rose have written back to the practices of stealing Indigenous remains. The practice of removing Indigenous remains from their culturally specified resting place is deeply unethical, especially given the significance of place to Indigenous worldviews discussed below. Furthermore, as Laura Peers states,

This is not just about what other peoples did to dead enemies, but also about what we [settlers] think of these peoples whose remains are displayed within it, and how we position ourselves in relation to them: about maintaining a distanced and colonial gaze. (Peers, 2009, p. 94)

Displaying the remains of the colonized is, thus, a way of maintaining power over them, and a way of keeping distance from the ugly realities of truth. Recent trends in museum curatorship have been toward challenging this historicization of Indigenous people and emphasizing the contemporary culture of Indigenous communities (Marselis, 2016), but there is still a long, unforgettable history of fascination with Indigenous bodies, both living and dead. Though written from an African-American perspective, bell hooks' (1992) notion of eating the other serves as an example of colonial obsession with living Indigenous bodies. Fascination with the remains of Indigenous people, including scalps, can be thought of as a material manifestation of the discursive categorization of Indigenous peoples as dead or dying—another manifestation of erasure.

The discursive normalization of Indigenous death is facilitated by the materializing effect of language on biopolitical reality (Young, 2015).^{lxv} For an illustration of this notion, it may be useful to think about the discussion of litter in the previous chapter. Where dirt is considered matter out of place, calling something 'litter'

creates a linguistic category that gives waste a place. The language creates a material category of placed-ness for the otherwise out of place waste. With litter this is, of course, a manifestation of the consumptive and appropriative function of advanced capitalism whereby something subversive is brought into the fold in acceptable forms. Where Indigenous people are concerned, the same function holds true of settler colonialism. Under settler colonial logic, Indigenous people are acceptable if they are in the linguistic category of dead or dying, but not if they are alive (Young, 2015); more bluntly, “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” (Mieder, 1993, p. 41).

Settler scholar Bryanne Young (2015, 2017) discussed this phenomenon in the cultural and discursive ethos surrounding the Indian residential school system. Young (2015) showed that the discourses of “killing the Indian in the child” (p. 63) contributed to the normalization of biopolitical violence against Indigenous people—it created a category of Indian-ness (dead or dying) acceptable within the system of settler colonialism. The categorical discursive normalization of death contributed to an ethos where dying Indigenous people were/are simply “‘the way it is,’ as if this kind of death was/is all there ever could be, a kind of death so recognizable it seems always to have been there” (p. 75). In addition to the phrase above, other common sayings contributed to the linguistic normalization of death among Indigenous people: “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” (Mieder, 1993, p. 41) and “civilization or death to all American savages” (Mieder, 1993, p. 39) to name a few.^{lxvi}

This discursive normalization of Indigenous death is an expression of the larger settler colonial project of Indigenous erasure discussed above and below, and it should be stressed that this is an *ongoing* phenomenon. Huge amounts of literary (e.g.,

Vermette, 2016), journalistic (e.g., Talaga, 2017), and scholarly (e.g., Corbett, 2019; Longstaffe, 2017) literature gesture toward the ways that police officers, reporters, and policy-makers all buy into this normalization through the perpetuation of damaging linguistic categories (Longstaffe, 2017) or systemic inaction (Corbett, 2019; Talaga, 2017). Perhaps no other document makes the normalization of Indigenous death, and the gendered dynamics of that normalization, more apparent than the 2019 final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (NIMMIW, 2019). Chief Commissioner Marion Buller articulates the basic findings of the inquiry:

The truth is that we live in a country whose laws and institutions perpetuate violations of basic human and Indigenous rights. These violations amount to nothing less than the deliberate, often covert campaign of genocide against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. (NIMMIW, 2019, p. 5)

In great detail, the report provides insight into the precise mechanisms through which (Canadian) settler colonial society perpetuates genocide. While full dissertations could be devoted to a discussion of that genocide, here it suffices to say that the normalization of Indigenous death—both linguistic and systemic—is both historic (Paul, 2006; TRC, 2015) and ongoing (NIMMIW, 2019; Talaga, 2019) and functions as part of the wider settler colonial project of erasure.

The ongoing nature of genocide and erasure are markers of *settler* colonialism rather than colonialism; settler colonialism is an ongoing process rather than a historic event (Wolfe, 2006). Indeed, despite the current movement in Canada toward resurgence (Simpson, 2011, 2017), which asserts the presence of Indigenous people in the present, many discursive engagements with Indigenous topics remain historical (Elliot, 2019; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; King, 2003). This historicization of Indigenous people keeps

Indigenous identities lodged in the past (King, 2003), but also keeps the body politic of North American society conceptually safe from having to deal with contemporary manifestations of historical issues, such as intergenerational trauma from residential schooling. A colloquial manifestation of this is the insidious phrase “can’t they just get over it” (Vowel, 2016). Settler colonialism, then, is not simply a historical fact—though there is a history of colonization—but rather an ongoing process into which are built three structured antagonisms: White ascension, Black containment, and Indigenous erasure (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Settler colonialism is driven by white settler need for land and resources in order to create economic surplus. To achieve surplus from the land, settlers need people to work it inexpensively, which historically was achieved through the reprehensible practice of chattel slavery. Settlers also need access to Indigenous lands, but not Indigenous people. There is thus a need to dispossess Indigenous people of their lands through a variety of practices ranging from genocide to assimilation. Put simply, White settler economic ascension was facilitated by the erasure of Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous erasure continues today in a range of ways: in ostentatious and violent forms, such as the genocide against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people (NIMMIW, 2019; Talaga, 2019); in legal forms, such as the Indian status system designed to eliminate the legal category of Indian from the Canadian body politic (Palmater, 2011); in curricular and scholarly contexts through the continued absence of Indigenous voices from the conversations that affect them most (Sabzalian, 2018; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; see also Downey, 2020a); and in a myriad of insidious and covert ways yet to be uncovered. At all turns within settler

colonial society, Indigenous people are pushed aside and made invisible. Even when brought into conversations as teachers, academics, consultants, or government officials, there is a question as to whether it is yet another case of litter—where a place has been given not for change, but to maintain the status quo, thus holding up a system that continues trying to make Indigenous folks disappear. Glen Coulthard (2014) might name this an extension of a colonial politics of recognition. In Coulthard’s thinking, the (Canadian) Federal Government is willing to acknowledge and recognize Indigenous people and issues, but only in so much as that recognition does not interfere with the status quo. There is a willingness, for example, to begin government proceedings with a land acknowledgement—a simple discursive marker that the territories upon which those proceedings occur have a history beyond but including colonization. This acknowledgement of land is discursively a representation of a respectful relationship with Indigenous peoples. Yet, when the interests of Indigenous people are pitted against the interests of the Canadian nation state, such respectful relationships are thrown out. The recent treatment of the Wet’suwet’en land defenders serves as a clear example. Moreover, the removal of the Wet’suwet’en from their traditional territories by the RCMP serves as a precise modern example of the settler colonial demand for Indigenous erasure: settler colonialism wants Indigenous land (for pipelines), not Indigenous people.

Erasure is a historical and ongoing function of settler colonialism, one that dispossesses Indigenous people from their lands. Settler colonialism attempts to make ghosts of Indigenous people (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015), but in that it has and will continue to fail. Indeed, despite the continued attempts at complete erasure, Indigenous

people are still here—the fact of continued existence and survivance (Tuck, 2009; Vizenor, 1994) is evidence of brilliance, resilience, and power. Rather than ghosts, erasure has created Ancestors (Justice, 2018), and Ancestors have immense power. As the Daniel Heath Justice quote that begins this chapter suggests, death is no escape from colonialism, but nor can settler colonialism escape the haunting of Indigenous Ancestors. I build on this notion below, but here the legacy of unburied scalps continues to haunt, yet unresolved.

There are, perhaps, historically accurate answers to the questions posed above about what happened to Indigenous scalps once they were exchanged for money, but the answers, I suspect, are less interesting than the questions—at least to the current discussion. Speculatively, at some point there must have been a careless discarding of the Indigenous scalps by settler governments. Anything else would seem radically out of character, particularly in the context of Cornwallis' Halifax, where the ruthlessness of the governor is well noted (Paul 2006). Peter Clair's novel, with which I opened this section, however, offers an alternative vision of how scalps were treated. In Taapoategl's burial ceremony, she shows a profound care for the departed and for their remains through: a several-days long oration speaking through her aunt's life, the preparation of a birch bark coffin, the cleaning of her aunt's scalp, the offering of a gift to her aunt, and a daily practice of prayer and remembrance. There is reverence embedded in Clair's discussion of Taapoategl's burial ceremony—an air of sacredness in the character's actions, but also in Clair's words. Additionally, throughout the burial process, Taapoategl is as attentive to her own emotional landscape as to the remains of her aunt: "you have to deal with yourself, as well as dealing with the remains" (Clair,

2017, p. 84). She views her responsibility to the dead as an extension of a relational worldview, where “no gain should be made from death; instead, people should give freely to the dead and their families” (p. 93). Yet she repeatedly notes the commonness of grave robbers—settlers looking for easy scalps and the belongings buried with the dead. The burial process, I think, is a way for Taapoategl to keep herself human as much as it is to acknowledge the humanness of the material remains of her aunt—there is a reciprocity to her actions. Though contextually dissimilar, Gadamer (1989) supports this reading: “the burial of the dead is perhaps the fundamental phenomenon of becoming human... by a remarkable expenditure of human labour and sacrifice there is sought an abiding with the dead” (p. 75). As suggested throughout, then, both Taapoategl and Gadamer highlight the humanizing and transformative potential of staying with the dead, attending them. For Gadamer, “Gifts of mourning are a way of cherishing human existence” (p. 75); attending the dead through burial is a fundamentally humanizing experience for the living. While ontological pacifism as discussed previously focuses on preventing harm, our interconnected nature can also be generative; by caring for another, we bring care to ourselves. Taapoategl’s care and reverence, and the deliberation on her actions, gives her an avenue to overcome her initial discomfort with the scalps—what previously I named abjection: “respect ... overcomes the odor of the scalp for Taapoategl” (p. 109). Through her (re)membering (Styres, 2017) of the burial ceremony, Taapoategl stays connected to what her culture has taught her, and moreover, what makes her human: her kinship; her interconnectedness. In the act of caring for the remains of her aunt, Taapoategl’s kinship transcends the boundaries of the living and the dead both spiritually and materially (see also Justice, 2018).

This is what was lost when the colonizer cast aside the scalps. Scalping was one manifestation of Indigenous erasure: the erasure of humanity through becoming-commodity and ultimately becoming-waste in a careless, inattentive sense. The erasure of Indigenous humanity has continued through history through the discursive normalization of Indigenous death (Young, 2015) and into the systemic mistreatment of Indigenous people by the colonial state (Coulthard, 2014; NIMMIW, 2019; Palmater, 2011). Yet this is, I think, a hopeful moment. Between the interconnected reconciliation (TRC, 2015) and resurgence (Simpson 2011, 2017) movements, Indigenous people are (re)claiming their humanity. There is, of course, still much work to be done in that regard. Just as in chapter five, then, the question of continuance emerges: how do we carry on in the face of uncertainty, precarity, and endemic structural inequality? Where posthumanists find their reason for carrying on in the affirmative and the boundless energy of life, here I will suggest Indigenous metaphysical theory—informed by a confluence of North American Indigenous traditional knowledges and beliefs—as a form of response. The answer to how we continue on, then, is “as we have always done” (Simpson, 2017, title) and through the gentle power of our Ancestors.

Indigenous Metaphysics, Spirituality, and Death

The preceding discussion of the myriad ways in which settler colonialism functions to erase Indigenous peoples and voices calls for response. As per above, the response I suggest here is in traditional Indigenous knowledges. A wide body of academic literature has developed since the 1980s around Indigenous knowledges (Kermoal & Altamirano-Jimenez, 2016), and it is this literature upon which I base my

subsequent discussion of Indigenous metaphysical theory. I begin this section by discussing the three foundations of my formation of Indigenous metaphysical theory: Land, story, and relationality. I then further my discussion through a consideration of the tensions and allegiances between Indigenous metaphysical theory and posthumanism. Next, I offer a discussion of death from the perspective of Indigenous metaphysical theory. Finally, I conclude this section by making explicit the response I envision: attending to Land as alive with the power of Ancestors.

Indigenous metaphysical theory. Though the literature around Indigenous knowledges is vast, three foundations have particular resonance where the metaphysical is concerned: Land, story, and relationality. To begin, many Indigenous scholars have noted that Indigenous thought is generally framed in terms of place and Land rather than time (Deloria, 1994; see also Styres, 2017; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Whereas dominant Western thought is generally framed in terms of a linear, progressive sense of time, Indigenous thinking is often circular (Graveline, 1998; Styres, 2017) and de-emphasizes time as an organizing structure (Deloria, 1994). In other words, in many Indigenous knowledges when something happened is less important than where it happened (Deloria, 1994; see also Basso, 1996). The notion of time at work in Indigenous knowledges has been characterized as ‘the long view’ (Smith et al., 2019; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; see also Downey & Whitty, 2019), referring to the millennia over which Indigenous people have lived in relationship with the particular land upon which their knowledge is based (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Here, it is important to differentiate land as viewed in Western thought as either space, which is empty, or

place, which is lived in, and Land as viewed in Indigenous thought (Styres, 2017, 2019).^{lxvii} Land (with a capital L) is a fundamental philosophical construct for Indigenous knowledges (Styres, 2017, 2019). The emphasis on place articulated above emerges from a millennia-long relationship with and storying of Land (Styres, 2017; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; see also Bryant, 2017). Land is both sentient (Styres, 2017; see also Sheridan & Longboat, 2006) and sovereign, meaning it is alive and in control of its own destiny. Deep understandings of Land are embedded in Indigenous languages (Armstrong 1998) and, as I have articulated elsewhere (Downey, 2020b), learning Indigenous languages is often an exercise in learning to understand Land and the mythopoetic layers that are built on top of the foundational concept.

This mythopoetic understanding forms a second foundation of Indigenous metaphysical theory (Cajete, 1994, 2000). This is sometimes articulated as the importance of story to Indigenous knowledges (Archibald, 2008; King, 2003). Where dominant forms of Western knowledge work under the doxa of rationality and linearity, Indigenous knowledges—while inclusive of rationality (Styres, 2017), particularly when guided by spirituality (Stonechid, 2020)—are more open, circular, holistic, individualized, and interpretive. Here, I often think of the illustrative example of pre-contact Mi'kmaw literacy (Downey, 2020b; Downey et al., 2019). Western literacy at the time of colonization was phonetic and linear in nature and generally reflected a direct and unambiguous form of communication and knowledge transfer—poetry and mystical writings excluded (Coleman, 2009; Manguel, 1996). Mi'kmaw literacy, however, was symbolic in nature (Battiste, 2016c). As I understand it, Mi'kmaw literacy consisted of the capacity to read notched sticks, wampum belts, petroglyphs and

pictographs (Battiste, 1984). The interpretation of these items, however, was open-ended and fluid; each image had a set meaning, but the individual reader was given the agency to be able to interpret and story their understanding of the image through the lens of their own perspective (Battiste, 1984, 2016c; see also Downey, 2020b; Downey et al., 2019).^{lxviii} In my reading, Mi'kmaw symbolic literacy is a particular manifestation of the wider mythopoetic nature of Indigenous knowledge: always open to interpretation and reinterpretation and inviting of multiplicity and complexity. It is also significant to note here that mythopoetic symbolism and story are both ontologically real in many Indigenous knowledges. Several authors (Deloria, 1994; Justice, 2018; see also Coleman, 2016) have noted the tendency of settlers to view the mythopoetic as 'fantasy' or 'fiction,' but those same authors highlight that such categorizations fail to measure the animacy and spirit embedded in all things within many Indigenous worldviews. The mythopoetic is an expression of a relational ontology and is, thus, taken as real (see also Sheridan & Longboat, 2006).

Land and story form significant foundations of Indigenous metaphysical theory, but both must be understood in the context of relationality. In the Indigenous research literature, relationality is shown in Indigenous epistemology and ontology (Wilson, 2008). By this I mean that relationships define knowledge and perception of reality—I can only know what is real based on my physical and spiritual experiences and the relationships I have built. Cree-Saulteaux scholar Blair Stonechild (2016, 2020) deepens the foundation of relationality by sharing four sacred relationships—relationships with ourselves, community, the natural world, and the spiritual world. Other Indigenous writers have also emphasized the importance of one or more of these relationships

through a variety of terms (e.g., Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 2000; Graveline, 1998; Hart, 2002; Kimmerer, 2013; Styres, 2017; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; Wilson, 2008). These four relationships cannot be separated from one another and, while self-understanding is often articulated as being at the center of knowledge (e.g., Graveline, 1998), it is almost always a self-in-relation (Graveline, 1998; Styres, 2017). Relationships with family, community, the natural world, and the cosmos provide avenues into understanding and building strong and truthful relationships with self. There is, then, an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of all things both as living and as sacred.

This innate relationality is sometimes forwarded through the notion of *M'sit No'kmaw* (all my relations), which is a deep and profoundly complex teaching encapsulated as relationality to all things, past and present (Henderson, 2016; King, 1990; Stonechild, 2020). Indeed, the notion of relations does not just extend to physically present relations, but also to Ancestors (Justice, 2018). This moves relationality, manifest as ontological pacifism in Braidotti's (2013) work, into metaphysical reality by way of what has been called seven generation thinking (D. Perley, personal communications, October 17, 2019; see also Styres, 2017). Seven generation thinking is a particular expression of an Indigenous axiology of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008)—an ethical obligation to uphold our relationships with all things, past and present, animate or inanimate (see also chapter three). In practical terms, the words we say today, the things we create, the feelings we have, all stay with us and our descendants for seven generations (see also Downey, 2017a). Likewise, we are responsible for and living-with the effects of what has happened in the previous

seven generations. Relational accountability, then, is not simply to have strong relationships in the moment—to live the ethics of relationality as manifest in ontological pacifism—but rather to actively walk in beauty and think our highest thoughts so that we can carry forward that energy to the next seven generations (D. Perley, personal communications, October 17, 2019).

Indigenous metaphysical theory is robust and, as with other chapters, I have been selective in my iteration of the concepts valuable to subsequent discussions. But based on the above, several points should be clear about Indigenous metaphysical theory: 1) its three foundations are Land, story, and relationality; 2) it envisions temporality (and thought) as expansive in scope and circular in nature; 3) mythopoetic understandings are ontologically and relationally real; and 4) its analytic scope transcends the corporeal. Whether pronounced or tacit, these notes carry through the subsequent section, offering a foundation to the following conversation. To further this consideration of Indigenous metaphysics, I now offer a comparative positioning with posthumanism as discussed in the previous chapter—a cross-paradigmatic conversation that is far too often absent from the literature.

Indigenous metaphysical theory and posthumanism.^{lxix} There is a well-known critique of antihumanism in all forms that comes from the postcolonial and feminist literatures: that those who have never been deemed human (i.e., the marginalized) are disadvantaged by moving away from humanist ideals (Braidotti, 2013). As discussed above, settler colonialism functions as a means to erase the humanity of Indigenous people. Thus, while posthumanists are attempting to show our

implication with non-human and more-than-human others, some Indigenous theorists are still looking for *human* equity, freedom, and self-determination. In asserting the primacy of relationships, Indigenous metaphysical theory seeks freedom, autonomy, *and* accountability within its interconnectedness (Justice, 2018; Styres, 2017; Wilson, 2008). In order to achieve this, the history of trauma associated with colonial occupation cannot be forgotten. Perhaps, then, the expanded definition of subjectivity within Braidotti's (2013, 2019) critical posthumanism gives an avenue for allyship between the theories. The relationship, however, is not unproblematic in its actualization. For example, Haraway's (2016) call to "make kin, not babies" (p. 102) rubs against the Indigenous sensibility that birth is sacred and a tangible way of speaking back to the attempted erasure of Indigenous peoples (Maracle, 2014; Simpson, 2011; Stonechild, 2020). It is fine to make kin, not babies, unless babies are a means through which a community is attempting to recover from genocide, and are replete with spiritual significance. These tensions can, of course, be resolved in the practicalities of 'if, then' statements, but the emphasis still raises questions.

A few other critiques are worth highlighting as well. First, although the so-called new materialisms that underpin posthumanism are often named as such to differentiate themselves from the Marxist materialism associated with second wave feminism (St. Pierre et al., 2016), they are not new (Gerrard et al., 2017). Indeed, vital materialism in various forms has been present in Indigenous thought—and in Eastern philosophy and spiritual belief—for countless generations, and it is only now that Western theorists are catching up. Although some acknowledge these overlaps, many do not, thus perpetuating the erasure of Indigenous intellectual contributions common in research

practices (see chapter three). Second, although posthumanism is built upon a monistic foundation, and thus seeks an escape from dialectics and dichotomies (Braidotti, 2019), the paradigm ultimately functions as a reaction to a certain doxa of Western thought—particularly anthropocentrism and European humanism—thus setting itself in opposition to something and creating something of an, admittedly rather complicated (see chapters four and five), paradigmatic dialectic (Gerrard et al., 2017). As per the above, Indigenous thought is fluid, dynamic, and constantly evolving (Styres, 2017). As two authors put it in the context of Métis women’s land stewardship, “the old ways of doing things are always under review and modification” (Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016, p. 157). Just as many Indigenous cultures have changed over time, maintaining a base in the traditional ways of Ancestors while encompassing new technologies and ideas, so too have Indigenous knowledges evolved through conversation with Western knowledges (Styres, 2017). Perhaps the clearest articulation of this comes from Mi’kmaw Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012), who share the teaching of *etuaptmumk* or two-eyed seeing. *Etuaptmumk* invites a multiplicity between two worldviews—we see the world more completely through two eyes than through one (see also Archibald, 2008). I have also heard the same principle explained in terms of the Mi’kmaw relationship with early Catholic missionaries: Mi’kmaq were only willing to be baptized because they saw the spiritual systems as complementary rather than competitive and as a way of building spiritual relationships (see Battiste, 2016a, 2016b; see also Bryant, 2017).^{lxx} In my understanding, where posthumanism says “no” to humanism and “no” to anthropocentrism, Indigenous metaphysical theory takes the opportunity for multiplicity and subtlety through a more

ambiguous “maybe; let me tell you a story” to both. Indigenous Elders often enact this multiplicity when confronted with complex issues. Rather than giving an answer to a question, for example, an Elder may offer a story about something seemingly unrelated, but which ultimately weaves together multiple possibilities for truth and understanding (e.g., Talaga, 2017).

The above raises the question of whether there is some humanism in Indigenous metaphysical theory and, if so, if it is the sort of humanism to which posthumanism reacts or of a different order entirely. In the spirit of the above discussion, I think the answer to both is “maybe.” First, many Indigenous scholars and Elders recognize and appreciate our collective humanity (Battiste, 2016b; Henderson, 2016); some even suggest that part of our journey here on Earth is to learn to become human (Justice, 2018). There seems, however, little, if any, elevation of the human above other forms of life (Kimmerer, 2013; see also Sheridan & Longboat, 2006), as is common in European hierarchical thinking (see Mitchell, 2018). Anthropocentrism, is thus, generally speaking, incongruent with Indigenous thought. Indeed, in the mythopoetic tradition of many North American communities, humans are often viewed as servants of the natural world (Kimmerer, 2013)—caretakers often placed at the whims of spirits. There is, however, an acknowledgement that the human is a unique category of being. Indigenous metaphysical theory, therefore, is not an undifferentiated materialism, meaning that there is an acknowledgement that we are all in this together but we are not all the same, as Braidotti (2019) might say. The category of the human itself is thoroughly differentiated by Indigenous social theorists (e.g., Elliot, 2019; Kermoal & Altamirano-Jimenez, 2016; Simpson 2017; Styres, 2017),^{lxxi} but Indigenous metaphysical theory

does have a tendency toward universal humanism, by which I mean a consideration of all humans as essentially the same (e.g., Stonechild, 2016). Given the fact that pre-contact Indigenous social structures were far less stratified than those of contemporary Western society (Paul, 2006, 2017), a certain amount of universal humanism can be expected—perhaps all humans really were the same, or at least treated with equity (Stonechild, 2020). The theorizing offered by Indigenous social theorists, of course, should be understood as an adaptation or extension of traditional Indigenous thought to contemporary contexts (Styres, 2017). Thus, Indigenous metaphysical thought *could be* considered a humanism, but if it were, it must be a humanism built on a series of premises radically and categorically different from anything in Western thought.^{lxxii} Furthermore, contemporary contributions to Indigenous knowledge acknowledge the differentiated treatment of human beings. It is, thus, a humanism only in as much as it acknowledges, but does not give in to the elevation of, the human.

There are a few conceptual overlaps between posthumanism and Indigenous metaphysical theory worth attending. First, the general environmentally focused direction of both posthumanism (Braidotti & Bignall, 2018) and Indigenous thought (Kimmerer, 2013; Sheridan & Longboat, 2006; Styres, 2017) are well documented. The way each paradigm thinks of ecology is, of course, radically different, but in general both can be said to be working in the direction of sustainable relationships with the natural world, non-humans, and more-than-humans. Both acknowledge and build upon the foundational image of an interconnected world. In the next section, I characterize each vision of interconnectedness: the posthuman as vitalist and the Indigenous as sacred. The overlap between these two is in the assumption that everything is alive,

while the sacredness of everything is a significant and challenging postulate of Indigenous thought (see Stonechild, 2016).^{lxxiii} As an extensions of the paradigms' shared vision of a living and interconnected world, ontological pacifism forms an axiological imperative of both (Braidotti, 2013; Justice, 2018). Toward illustration of this point, consider Justice's remarks: "giving proper respect to the Ancestors isn't just good manners, it's also good sense for the course of one's own life, as any harm introduced into the network of relationships will affect every participant, living and dead alike" (Justice, 2018, p. 124). There is, of course, a difference in the tenor of the ontological pacifism of Braidotti and that of Justice stemming from their respective secular and sacred ontological assumptions, but they ultimately gesture toward the same point: any harm you do, will also affect you.^{lxxivlxxv} Given this inescapable interconnectedness of life, past and present, attending to death becomes increasingly significant.

Indigenous metaphysical theory and death. As alluded to throughout this work, from some Indigenous perspectives, death is not final but simply the end of our physical journey. Western psychology tends to view this fluidity between life and death in a negative sense under the term "magical thinking" (Barry, 2007; see also Didion, 2006), but as suggested in the previous chapter life does continue on after death. While for posthumanists, life continues in a strictly material sense (e.g., Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016), Indigenous metaphysical theory suggests a continuance of life in a more spiritual sense (Deloria, 1994; Stonechild, 2016, 2020).

In his discussion of Cree-Saulteaux spirituality, Blair Stonechild (2016) articulates life as a learning journey where our spirits take on a physical, human form in

order to learn particular lessons. As we near our deaths, our spirits prepare to return home to the spirit world. Death, then, is not something to be feared, but simply the end of the physical part of the cycle of life (see also Deloria, 1994). Furthermore, Stonechild provides an image of continuity after life: “After death there is greeting by relatives and significant beings, then review and reflection on life...because consciousness of Ancestors continues in the spirit world, a great deal of effort is invested in maintaining contact” (Stonechild, 2016, p. 66). Continuity is incorporeal, but fundamentally, “there is more to life than what we see, and in reality we are spirit beings” (p. 66). Though many religions and cultures have particular views of the afterlife, and I have largely avoided discussions of the topic, favouring a focus on the material circumstance of death,^{lxxvi} in Indigenous metaphysical theory the ontological reality of the incorporeal is intimately entangled with the material facts of death. Indeed, the two cannot be separated. Death cannot be understood physically without reference to the spiritual/incorporeal/metaphysical—as perhaps is highlighted by the earlier discussion of scalps.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Spinoza also saw unity between the physical and the spiritual. Spinozian monism asserted that all things were alive and God, and that God was alive and all things. Later, poststructuralist and posthumanist theorizing adopted elements of this monism, but left behind the emphasis on the sacred.^{lxxvii} This served as a way to expand conceptions of the material or the corporeal by including the incorporeal, but in the transition, the incorporeal dimension became equated with affective psychic reality (i.e., Braidotti, 2019) rather than the expansive notion of the spiritual world present in many Indigenous knowledges. Stonechild (2016;

see also Sheridan & Longboat, 2006) maintains the sacredness of material reality: “In the Indigenous world view, all Creation is sacred and spiritually alive” (p. 75). This raises the question of whether there is a qualitative difference between an affective incorporeal and a spiritual incorporeal dimension in terms of material reality. I would suggest that the answer is yes, and death is the context in which that answer becomes clear.

In the vital materialism of posthumanism, the affective dimension is the domain of the unitary but fragmented psychic space working beneath the subject-assemblage and, as such, it can be thought to die with the human—though as per my previous discussion, the corpse’s affective power and agency can be said to continue through corpse-power. From an Indigenous perspective, however, the affective dimension continues on after the death of the human, not just agentively through corpse-power, but reciprocally, relationally, affectively, *and materially* through a sort of Ancestor-power. Manifestations of Ancestor-power can be observed in the notion of blood memory, genetic trauma, genetic memory, and story, as well as in the ceremonial presence of spirits. Though it is common for settlers to read these notions, particularly the latter, as mythopoetic, Vine Deloria Jr. (1994)—a renowned scholar and member of the Standing Rock Sioux (Lakota) nation—notes that “for [Indigenous] people symbolism is not the communicative image of Westerners, but the expression of a reality Westerners often refuse to acknowledge” (p. 173). Again, the mythopoetic is real. Death, then, from an Indigenous metaphysical perspective is not an ending, but a transition to becoming-Ancestor or a movement to the spirit world—a world still very much capable of acting on and affecting the physical world.

Though the ontological reality of incorporeal continuity through Ancestor-power is my main point here, and that to which I will return shortly, there are three other theoretical points worth considering in thinking about death from Indigenous metaphysical perspectives. First, the emphasis on place rather than time, as well as the extended ‘long view’ of time foundational to many Indigenous knowledges, calls into question the notion of death as a temporal heuristic for human life (Braidotti, 2013; Kortés-Miller, 2018). In a place-oriented understanding, the when of death is obviously less significant than the where. Deloria notes that “the souls of people often remain in various places” (1994, p. 173) and, as the above discussion of Ancestors would suggest, an Indigenous place-oriented worldview understands Land as alive with the spirits of previous generations (Deloria, 1994). Deloria (1994) cites this as one of the many reasons Indigenous people were reluctant to give up their land. There is further evidence of the significance of place-oriented dying in Richard Wagamese’s (2014) fictional vision of dying like a warrior and Peter Clair’s (2017) articulation of being buried with the belly button—a fictional accounting of the practice of being buried in the place of birth, a place marked by the burying of the placenta (see also Horn-Miller, 2016). This practice, which Wolastoqiyik Elders have recently been (re)turning to Wabanaki territory (Elder Opdahsomuwehs as quoted in NIMMIW, 2018), further highlights the circular nature of Indigenous knowledge structures articulated by Graveline (1998) and Styres (2017) and is steeped in the mythopoetic symbolism of the continuity of life after death. It also harkens back to an ecological view of death, where the human body might serve as nutrition for other forms of life (Rose, 2012). This ecological view is explicitly supported in some Indigenous worldviews: “Human beings were an integral part of the

natural world and in death they contributed their bodies to become the dust that nourished the plants and animals that had fed people during their lifetime” (Deloria, 1994, p. 171).

A second point worth noting is that, according to the work of Deloria (1994), fear of death is almost universally absent from North American Indigenous cultures. Deloria (1994) attributes this to the continuity of life after death woven into the fabric of Indigenous beliefs, but also suggests that Christian culture, dogma, and doctrine have made fear of death a more common experience.^{lxxviii} Deloria (1994) further suggests that the death-denying ethos of Western society has a Christian underpinning. Third and finally, though it may be anticipated by what I have said above, it is worth explicitly articulating the notion that because life continues on after death, the relationships between the living and the dead continue as well (Justice, 2018; Stonechild, 2020). While above I stated this in terms of an ethic of relationality, here I mean it in a personal sense. Whereas within dominant Western culture, “few are less truly heard than the dead” (Justice, 2018, p. 127) within Indigenous metaphysical theory, Ancestors’ voices resonate with deafening clarity.

Ghosts, Ancestors, and response-ability. Indigenous metaphysical theory and the above discussion of death offer a way forward in the current moment and, as in the previous chapter, the response offered is a form of attending to our interconnectedness. The notion of Ancestor-power discussed above offers a new vision of interconnectedness, one that transcends the temporal boundaries of human life and the onto-epistemic boundaries of human perception. Ancestors live in Land (Deloria, 1994),

and Land is powerful beyond measure. Posthumanists know this through the notion of *zoe*, but Indigenous metaphysical theory knows it through the power of place (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Styres, 2017). The land upon which we live and work is alive with generations of life beyond life. I would suggest that whether those co-present others haunt^{lxxix} or empower us (or some mix of the two) is a result of our disposition toward Land.

The neglect of Land, as a by-product of settler colonialism, anthropocentrism, and advanced capitalism, has left us haunted. We are haunted materially through unjust social structures continuing in perpetuity. We are haunted affectively in unresolved and unnameable psychological anxiety, repression, and fragmentation (Kumar, 2013; see also Chalquist, 2007). We are haunted through the imminent threat of socio-economic and environmental collapse, and through precarity and ongoing uncertainty. These facts, feelings, and structures are the lingering ghosts of ‘progress’ and modernization. Learning, I suggested earlier, is always haunted by loss. As a society we have learned many things, solved many problems, and made lives much more comfortable, but there has also been loss. That loss has been of our capacity to write love songs to the Earth (Downey & Sagy, in press), but more acutely it has been the loss of our relationship to the Ancestors of the places we live. We have not attended to them nor our relationship, and so we are haunted. Our response, I think, is to (re)turn toward the very old knowledges alive within Land (Styres, 2017).

I suggest we attend to Land—learn from it, become-with it, and build sustainable, meaningful relationships with it—and allow the power of our Ancestors alive in Land to heal the traumas of the societal specters named above. In doing so, the

turbulent, unpredictable hauntings of our ghosts will be soothed by the gentle embrace of something older and more mature. Eventually our ghosts will become Ancestors, resolving their own internal traumas and those manifest in society through time, mourning, and attending. Attending to Land is an act of burial—a way of saying goodbye to that which has gone before, and a way to open up a ceremonial space of reclaiming lost humanity (see above, Clair, 2017; Fairfield, 2015; Gadamer, 1989).

Western society is haunted by historic and ongoing trauma perpetuated against Indigenous peoples specifically, but all life generally. There is an obligation to respond. Braidotti (2019) suggested a need to move forward with sound understandings of the critical issues endemic to society. In her view, we need not cast those issues off, nor dwell too deeply in them. Braidotti's is an affirmative ethic of moving forward. Indigenous metaphysical theory, I think, points us forward as well, but circuitously so, through the past. It invites us to (re)turn toward Land, and to do so relationally. We are invited to attend Land in intimate relationship and learn the knowledge embedded in Land itself—the sacred knowledge of the natural world.^{lxxx}

I envision attending to Land as a form of response-ability—an ethic of care and response (Haraway, 2012). Where in the previous chapter, attending to waste and the corpse formed a speculative direction for death education, here attending to Land forms something similar. Attending to Land, however, is a less radical idea. Indeed, though speculative in the context of death education, attending to Land is a normative practice in Indigenous education. Thus, in the subsequent concluding section, I will elaborate the pedagogical implications of attending to Land through a discussion of the foundations of Indigenous education and how they might inform death education.

Conclusion: Indigenous Pedagogy and Death Education

If death education can learn anything from Indigenous education, it must be understood within the context of Land as a foundational philosophical and pedagogical concept (Styres, 2017, 2019). The above discussion of attending to Land as a form of response-ability is meant to provide speculative direction, but it also has meaningful pedagogical implications. The clearest of these implications is the framing of Land as a/first teacher (Simpson, 2014; Styres, 2017). When Land is seen as a teacher, we are encouraged to develop an intimate, personal relationship with Land, understanding its subtle language, its stories, and our own interrelationships. The relationship we form with Land must always be steeped in an ethos of relationality and consent (Simpson, 2014). (Re)turning to Land is a tangible way of speaking back to the eurocentrism of contemporary education, decentering the classroom space in favour of the natural world in which Indigenous knowledge was/is developed over generations (Bang et al., 2014; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014; see also Cajete, 2000).

Land has much to teach us about death. In the previous chapters, I highlighted animal corpses as a site of learning (Harwood et al., 2018), but several other possibilities emerge. Affectively, Land can teach us humility and respect by observing directly what I previously named the unstoppable force of *zoe* (Braidotti, 2019). In this, perhaps there is an opportunity to learn the impersonal death of ecology as well and, when combined with ceremony and reflection (Stonechild, 2020), perhaps an opportunity to confront our anxieties about death. Land can also give us a moment of respite from the accelerationism of advanced capitalism—time needed if we are to confront those uncomfortable existential affects associated with death and our societal denial of it.

Where the death education literature has called for more humanistic death education (Doka, 2015; Wass, 2004), Land seems an intuitive fit. As per the above, nothing is so humanizing—particularly for Indigenous people—as developing and sustaining relationships with Land (Kimmerer, 2013; Simpson, 2014; Wildcat et al. 2014).

The significance of Land in Indigenous education cannot be overemphasized. There are, however, several other pedagogical considerations emergent from Indigenous education—all of which are steeped in the relational ethos of Land. Self-in-relation (Graveline, 1998; Styres, 2017), for example, has been brought up several times throughout this dissertation. Self-in-relation is an acknowledgement of the situated self. From Indigenous perspectives, we cannot know ourselves without viewing ourselves through the lens of relationality (Styres, 2017). Indigenous education is an education aimed at self-understanding, but that understanding is always contextualized through relationships (Graveline, 1998). Those relationships through which we understand self are not limited to the world of the living (Justice, 2018). Two pedagogical considerations emerge from this notion of self-in-relation: first, as discussed further in the next chapter, (death) education should/could be aimed at self-understanding;^{lxxxix} and second, as per the above, we can learn much about ourselves by attending to Ancestors/Land (Justice, 2018).

Another common thread of Indigenous education is the power of story sharing (Archibald, 2008). In my reading, there are two sides to this: 1) the power of story, traditional or otherwise, to respond to the complex realities of the moment and respect the autonomy of the learner; and 2) the profound experience of sharing a story and being heard. First, as noted above, Indigenous Elders often respond in story rather than with

clear yes or no answers. This storytelling respects the intelligence and the capabilities of the listener to interpret what is being said as it is related to their life, rather than being given a perspective and definite answer (Archibald, 2008; see also Goulet & Goulet, 2014). This storytelling seems a good fit for death education. Rather than imparting the cold facts of how we die or information about the legalities of death, a humanistic death education could be built around story and exploring the affective and personal meaning emergent from story. The second point, which involves student story sharing, is best represented by the ethos of a talking circle, where participants come together and share their thoughts and feelings around a topic one at a time, each given equal space and each heard regardless of circumstances outside the circle. Talking circles are great teachers of how to listen intently and without judgement (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; see also Downey, 2017b, in press[b]). This ethos of listening and of creating a space in which students can be heard is precisely a humanizing experience—a gift offered to students (Downey, 2017b). Death education, particularly the grief camps discussed by Durant (2018), has some elements of this listening and story sharing built into it, but more can always be added—particularly in professional settings where the affective dimensions of death education are least discussed (Wass, 2004).

To extend the focus above on storytelling, critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and tribal critical race theory (Brayboy, 2005) both emphasize the significance of storytelling as counter-hegemonic action. I have often thought of this point through the axiom “personal narrative disrupts dominant narrative.” In death studies, many dominant, grand narratives exist, such as the presumed practice among Indigenous people of abandoning Elders to die in the wilderness (Northcott & Wilson,

2017). Such narratives need to be (re)contextualized, disrupted, challenged, deconstructed, and held in conversation with other stories from/with students themselves toward complexity and multiplicity. Relatedly, there is a history of Indigenous erasure in death education and in education more broadly (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Toward rectifying the Eurocentric focus of (death) education, then, Indigenous perspectives ought to be included in the content of curricula. This inclusion should not be formed as an extension of a colonial politics of recognition (Coulthard, 2014)—inclusion for the sake of inclusion—but rather should be a thoughtful, considered, authentic inclusion marked by an open and honest engagement with Indigenous knowledges on the part of teachers and students alike (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; see also Downey, in press[b]). As indicated above and throughout, such an inclusion of Indigenous perspectives can enrich death education in multiple ways. Furthermore, as per chapter four, death is not innocent, but implicated within complex socio-political structures that work to perpetuate the status quo and systematically disadvantage groups of people. Understanding the manner in which genocide facilitated the dismantling of traditional Indigenous sovereignty is a starting place for such an explicitly political understanding of death. Furthermore, understanding the ways in which Indigenous death was, and is, normalized linguistically and materially (Marselis, 2016; Young, 2015) forms an ethical imperative of both a critical death education and a death education informed by Indigenous perspectives.

The above suggests some of the ways Indigenous theory might inform death education—particularly toward the goal of a more humanistic engagement with death. I will, however, also point out that although Indigenous thought contains more than a

little humanism, it *also*^{xxxii} moves the conversation into a consideration of elements of the posthuman. In particular, the non-anthropocentric focus of posthumanism is shared by Indigenous theory, and this ought to be considered carefully as folk continue to (re)think and (re)envision death education. Within Indigenous thought, personal death is not an ending, but a transition. Transition is a space of learning, an act marked by equal parts growth and loss; it is how we become “human.” As such, transition is where I suggest educators spend their time through what I have called attending: attending to waste, attending to corpse, attending to Land, and above all attending to self-in-relation—the interconnected self.

Times of precarity are times of transition, and it does us no good to rage against them. Just like our deaths, we must work with what we are given and adapt and change as needed. Braidotti’s (2019) affirmative ethics makes this point, but so do Indigenous Elders. As Mi’kmaw Elder Stephen Augustine said to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: “[when we tip a canoe] we may lose some of our possessions... eventually we will regain our possessions [but] they will not be the same as the old ones” (S. Augustine quoted in TRC, 2015, p. 206). Indeed, things are the way they are; our only option is to try to pick up and carry on—living, dying, and actively attending to the possibilities of both in the ethical spirit of relationality, interconnectedness, and ontological pacifism. That is, to me, the possibility of death education and, as I will suggest in the concluding chapter, the possibility of an inward (re)turn.

Chapter Seven: The Inward (Re)Turn

Philosophical inquiry into death is a 'way' ... [that] leads far less to any position taken than in a direction of uncertainty and often back to where we began – Paul Fairfield (2015, p. 77).

Humanity will eventually transcend technology by turning inward, the only viable alternative that allows a human being to continue to experience oneself in a world as a creative and vital element – James B. Macdonald, (1974/1995, p. 75)

(Re)turn to the Beginning

Curriculum theory is an ongoing and complicated conversation. Within the scope of this dissertation, much has been said and not all of it has been thoroughly accounted for—nor will it be. Some thoughts are meant to linger. Some lines of flight are meant to be taken up by others in their own theoretical imaginations rather than spelled out in detail. Braidotti (2013, 2019) has said that what we need now, where theory is concerned, is conceptual creativity, and I would argue there is rigour and the potential for such creativity in open-endedness. Indeed, that is the beauty I see in curriculum theory. As a field, curriculum theory asks what is possible, what can be provoked, and through those questions, it is intimately concerned with visioning a future.

My dissertation has attempted to speculate, dream, and provoke a curricular future through conversation around death and death education. In the first chapter, I shared my own humanistic justifications for the study of death and death education as conceptual curricular spaces. There, I also introduced the notion of death as a call to inwardness and elaborated my belief in interiority as a form of social resistance. In chapter two, I contextualized my theorizing in relation to the literatures of thanatology and death education—highlighting their tendency toward the empirical and the

therapeutic rather than the theoretical (Wu, 2020). Throughout chapter two, I attended carefully to the words of others and was often affected by them. I mourned the possibilities that were and the changes that occurred through my reading. In chapter three, I discussed the problems with research and gestured toward what some have called the death of method (Lather, 2013). I mourned my own loss of the possibility of conducting traditional humanist qualitative research—at least at the doctoral level. Ultimately, however, I found solace and comfort in the field of curriculum theory and in William Pinar’s (2012) notion of curriculum as complicated conversation. With such an open hermeneutic frame, it was possible to move forward truthfully, without making any claim to Truth.

Moving forward became an imminent concern. As I began writing chapter four, the global COVID-19 pandemic struck.^{lxxxiii} The foci of my writing became eerily present in the mainstream media. My reality was haunted by my academic work, and my academic work was haunted by my reality. In particular, the politics of the situation startled me. Economic decisions were, and are still, being made in ways that endanger the lives of millions. Doctors and politicians were and are literally being forced to make decisions about who lives and who dies. As a whole, the situation has shown the precarity of modern society and the fragility of human life. Those two points gave direction to the next chapters of my dissertation.

In chapter four, I made the case for a political understanding of death, which I then contextualized within a political understanding of affect and an affective understanding of death. The intersections of politics, death, and affect intervene upon the status quo of death education, where affect is significant but apolitical. Many death

educators have called for more humanistic death education, but not all humanisms are equal. Ours, in death education, ought to be an emancipatory humanism—so long as we remain lodged within that anthropocentric tradition. In chapter five, I tacitly challenged those anthropocentric conceptualizations in death and death education. I drew on the theory of posthumanism in order to highlight life’s continuity in a material sense after death, gesturing toward an environmental ethic emergent from the human socio-historical attention to the corpse. We should, I speculated, be concerned with waste-power—with attending to our waste and learning from it. Chapter five concluded by addressing the question of continuance: how do we carry on in the face of precarity and uncertainty? There I drew on Braidotti’s (2019) discussion of affirmative ethics to suggest the need to stay with the negative only in as much as it gives us the agency to change the future. Chapter six picked up on this thread of continuance in the context of Indigenous North America. Precarity and uncertainty, I suggested, have not been uncommon for marginalized people, particularly in North America where settler colonialism has tried everything in its power to erase Indigenous presence. Toward a response to settler colonial erasure, I drew on Indigenous metaphysical theory. From that perspective, death is not an end, but rather the point of our transition to the spirit world—a moment of becoming-Ancestor. The power of Ancestors, I suggested, gives us a new imperative within ontological pacifism; it is not enough to do no harm, but we must actively seek ways of doing good in the world around us, ways of raising up our material and ethereal relations. We must attend actively to Land where Ancestors make their home.

In all of this writing, I have sought ways to continue, ways to continue in the face of precarity whether manifest as an ongoing socio-environmental crisis or as a global pandemic. I have sought futures: curricular, political, affective, environmental, and spiritual. I have sought ways of moving forward and carrying on. Where I have found answers, they have been fleeting. As suggested in the first epigraph of this chapter, the study of death often leads back to the beginning. Indeed, although I have been changed by the conversation—marked by loss and growth in equal measures—and the world may never appear as it once did, I find myself once again looking to the future with eyes pointed inward.

In this, the concluding chapter of my dissertation, I thus offer no conclusions. Rather, I offer a (re)turn. Styres (2017) uses the prefix “(re)” to suggest a circularity in Indigenous thought, a recursiveness to ideas and the necessity of returning to very old knowledges. Likewise, post qualitative inquirers (Kuby, 2019) use the prefix “(re)” to suggest a disruption of normative thought patterns, a rethinking of that which is considered a given. Here, my (re)turn is more akin to Styres’ usage of the prefix, but I playfully invite the haunting resonances of the other as well. In this chapter’s second epigraph, James B. Macdonald (1974/1995), the so-called great curriculum theorist, makes a call for an inward turn. He, like many others, was interested in spiritual growth and developing the capacity for self-understanding through education. This is an interest we share. Indeed, death’s call for inwardness (Fairfield, 2015) is where I began this dissertation, and it is to this notion of interiority—now an interconnected interiority—to which I return in these closing pages.

Each of the following sections is meant to pull a thread of the preceding work into sharper focus. I begin by (re)turning to the notion of futurity and highlighting several responses to precarity and uncertainty found within this dissertation. I then (re)turn to the natural world and the ecological threads scattered throughout this text as another form of suggested response. Next, I (re)turn to the notion of death-as-change through another discussion of the losses of learning and the significance of mourning. Here, I suggest ceremony as a healing response to precarity and loss. Finally, although the above are all rooted in a larger (re)turn toward interiority, the final section of this dissertation is dedicated to revisiting the notion of interiority as resistance—a notion that takes on new, relational meaning given the preceding complicated conversation.

(Re)turn to Futurity

As suggested above and throughout this work, precarity and uncertainty mark the current socio-political moment. In this moment, what is demanded is an active and creative envisioning of a future. Throughout this work, I have speculatively and suggestively gestured toward a future of education informed by the concept of death and death education, but many of the overarching themes of this preceding discussion can be thought of as movements toward response-ability (Haraway, 2012, 2016). Ethical forms of response to our present are desperately needed in order to make possible a different future. Two major forms of response mark my work: affirmative ethics and spiritual response—each of which should be read through an explicitly political lens.

Affirmative ethics (Braidotti, 2019) is a way of taking the negativity of critique and mobilizing it toward futurity. It is a way of saying “fine; now what?” in response to

social inequality and catastrophe. Faced with precarity, change is a certainty, but rather than becoming lodged in a circuitous critique of that which was, we must move forward; we must carry on. We should not, however, forget our understandings of what has happened in the past, but rather draw on those understandings toward actualizing a different future. This demands humility; it asks us to put aside ego toward working alongside those who have wronged us—as Justice (2018) puts it, raising each other up while we hold each other to account. This affirmative ethics is situated within an ontological relationality not founded on hierarchy or dichotomy, but on differentiated unity and monistic multiplicity. We are not all the same, but we are all in this together (Braidotti, 2019). In other words, some of us have been systematically advantaged by current social structures, and that cannot be forgotten. Yet, we are all in *this*. As I suggested in chapter one, this means those of us with privilege must ensure that we use it and give it up in ways that make our collective future a more livable one—which includes the inward work of reckoning with internalized hierarchical thinking. We must carry on, not with the status quo, but with individual ethical responses to what we know.

Indigenous people in North America have continually, in each generation, been faced with the end of the world (Downey, 2017a; see also Lear, 2006). Whether the genocide of colonial occupation, residential schools, or forced abduction, each generation has had a new reality radically different from the last in which to make meaning. The capacity of Indigenous peoples to continue—resilience, survivance, and brilliance—is embedded in cultural tradition and languages founded in intimate relationship with Land (Simpson, 2017; Styres, 2017). As discussed in chapter six, for many the relationship with Land is sacred (Stonechild, 2016). The sacredness of Land

offers a form of response similar to an affirmative ethic, but grander in scope. In my reading, rather than saying we must carry on, Indigenous metaphysical theory offers us the understanding that we will carry on—“as we have always done” (Simpson, 2017, title). In seeing the sacred continuance of life and in knowing Indigenous history, there can be no doubt of continuance. Regardless of what happens in the future, life will carry on. As such, life is profoundly humbling. Through witnessing the sacredness of life—the unstoppable force of *zoe* (Braidotti, 2019)—the ontological necessity of acting to honour life becomes clear. The certainty of continuance does not excuse us from our relational obligations; rather, it adds magnitude to those obligations. Because life will continue, because something will always be here, and because we have and will become Ancestors, we must ensure that we act so as to support those future generations—seven generation thinking (Styres, 2017).

The (re)turn to futurity is thus marked by response *and* responsibilities. To actualize these responses and responsibilities, I suggest, we look inward—toward our true relationships—and decide how to move forward. Any attempt at enforcing collective movement will result in residual dissonance.^{lxxxiv} Likewise, any attempt to hide from our responsibilities will leave an unnameable bitterness on our tongue—a directionless and pervading anxiety. The answer to uncertainty and precarity, for me, has always been and still is an inward (re)turn. Now more than ever, however, it is an inwardness contextualized in the ethos of universal but differentiated relationality.

(Re)turn Toward the Emerging Environmental Ethic

Both posthumanism and Indigenous metaphysical theory can be thought of as eco-centric, and throughout chapters five and six I showcased the various ways in which matter and Land could be considered both alive and sacred. The implications of such vitalism are profound. Here I will revisit some of these implications through the notions of attending to waste and becoming-with (Haraway, 2016) more-than-human others and Ancestors.

In chapters four and five, I highlighted the uniqueness of the human relationship to the corpse. We have, from a socio-historical perspective, almost always treated corpses deemed human with a certain care and reverence. I named this attending. In our attending to the corpse, we are changed; we are given the ceremonial space to mourn loss and learn from it, ontologically. The same attention, I suggested, ought to be offered to waste in general. There is an easily observable carelessness to discard practices in Western society, a carelessness we experience phenomenologically as an ecological netherworld. Just as Kristeva (1982) and Boler (1999) suggest transformative and political educative potential in dwelling within the chaotic and messy spaces of the self—that which makes us uncomfortable—so too do I suggest a transformative potential in dwelling within the ecological netherworld. The wrapper we have just thrown out, the egg shells we cast aside, even our own human waste products are all alive and sacred. Ontological pacifism suggests we do no harm to them, and the Indigenous metaphysical iteration of that idea suggests we have a sacred relationship with them; we must honour our waste as we do our Ancestors and learn from them in the same way. Waste is Land is corpse is Ancestor; attending to each is a unique gift and

space of learning. What we can learn will be the domain of each specific relationship; I only gesture toward the significance of what has widely been viewed as insignificant.

If there is an answer as to what we might learn, I think it can be discerned in the concept of becoming-with. Throughout this conversation, learning has always been less about knowledge and more about becoming—developing understanding of our self-in-relation as a state of being rather than a condition of knowledge. While becoming presents its own conceptual difficulties, the meaning of “with” is infinitely complex (Fairfield, 2015). Embedded in my understanding of “with” is an ontological relationality and a respectful reciprocity. Becoming-with means opening ourselves up to the possibilities of the other, to the presence of the stranger (Huebner, 1984) as it were. Becoming-with life in a grand and sacred sense is an imperative of a sustainable future, one which begs humility in our understanding of our place within the universe, the impersonal nature of our deaths, and the unstoppable force of *zoe* (Braidotti, 2019). It is also a process and, by nature, is never completed. The process of becoming-with life is a daily practice. Attending to waste and Land, I suggest, can teach us this. Of course, these changes demand a death on our part. Thus, there is a call to (re)turn toward the notion of death-as-change and attend to the losses of learning.

(Re)turn to Death-As-Change

At the beginning of this dissertation, I wrote about the metaphorical meanings of death-as-change as related to learning. Learning, I suggested, is less about the acquisition of new knowledge—even knowledge of self—and more about coming to presence (Biesta, 2006). In short, true learning is an onto-epistemological event—something that rocks us to our very core. This kind of learning is a call for change.

Many educators are devoted to change both in society and the individual but often view it as synonymous with progress or growth (Egan, 2003). Change, however, always contains loss as well as growth. Change is a death; learning is haunted by loss, and death and loss both beg for mourning. When we are unable to mourn, we lose touch with our humanity and/or our posthuman subjective relationality. Mourning is a form of attending; it is a moment of heightened affect where focus is both inward and outward. Thus, I suggest mourning as yet another response to that which is—another pathway forward through an embrace of change, personal and otherwise.

In chapter six, I highlighted the way Peter Clair's (2017) fictional burial ceremony gave the character of Taapoategl an opportunity to (re)claim and (re)new her sense of self. This function of ceremony to help us mourn and make sense of what has been lost can be found in many ceremonies from different spiritual traditions (Stonechild, 2020). Paul Fairfield (2015) notes that the secularization of death in Western society—its move from the domain of the Church to that of the medical institution (see also medicalization; Illich, 1975)—has led to a certain anxiety around death. What is missing, for Fairfield, is ceremony: "Ritual is mobilized to create understanding in response to change, to transform persons in light of what things mean to us, to remind us who we are, and to restore calm in the face of crisis" (Fairfield, 2015, p. 44).^{lxxxv} In this way, ceremony is a response, and a powerful one at that: "ceremonies large and small have the power to focus attention to a way of living awake in the world" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 36). Ceremony is a space of healing and, as Fairfield notes, "healing is not a function of time alone" (p. 45). Rather, healing, which is also a form a learning, demands attention; it demands perspective and distance, but also intimacy.

In learning much is lost, but much is also gained. While we in education have historically been focused on the gain, I think it has been to the detriment of ourselves and the students with whom we work. The study of death as a conceptual space in curriculum calls into focus the losses of learning, and I would gesture toward that as a way forward. In order to carry on, we must be prepared to mourn that which we have lost personally and societally. The future does not change unless the past is mourned. It must be learned from; it must be honoured and held close to us, and ultimately, it must be given away so that our relationship with it is allowed to mature. Ceremony is the space in which we learn to give away, but not cast aside,^{lxxxvi} the past so as to redefine ourselves as a society, but ceremony is also a window into ourselves. It is an invitation to the inward (re)turn.

Taking the Inward (Re)turn

When I began the process of writing my dissertation, a friend and colleague^{lxxxvii} advised me to go back over everything I had written and/or published in search of a common theme. That theme, they said, would be a good topic for a dissertation because it would be something about which I was passionate. After doing the exercise, I was surprised that the most recurrent theme was what I call interiority or self-knowledge. Interiority began this journey, but death gave it life. The two are intimately related: existential and phenomenological considerations of death call for inwardness and reflexivity (Fairfield, 2015). Yet, my path through the study of death has not always been concerned with interiority. Rather, it has been focused largely on the material—which of course has many intra-actions with the internal, and in some ways the two

cannot be separated (Barad, 2007; Cajete, 2000). But haunting my concern for the material realities of death has been an overarching interest in changing the socio-material world through interiority and self-understanding. Indeed, one major, though under-pronounced, contribution of chapters five and six has been extending the notion of interiority beyond liberal individualism *and* emancipatory anthropocentrism toward a plural and relational understanding of inwardness—the self-in-relation. Whether through abjection, pedagogy of discomfort, relationality and attending, mourning, ceremony, or our interconnectedness, much of my theorizing here can be thought of as contributing to a project of cultivating an understanding of self-in-relation.

Centering self-in-relation in the educative experience is a countercultural act. It is a method of resistance to the status quo and to those oppressive hierarchies endemic to Western society and a necessary first step toward political action. Capitalism, settler colonialism, and hierarchical thinking are all interconnected. They are also interconnected with us and our Ancestors. That interconnectedness extends in both directions. We thus have agency within our relationship to the various oppressions endemic to society. Settler colonialism is affected by the haunting presence of our Ancestors, just as capitalism is affected by our affirmative move beyond it. In chapter one, I suggested that inwardness offered a self-preserving death to military capitalism; here I suggest the same, but expanded through a deepened understanding of interconnectedness—a relational resistant interiority. Nothing in this world is indifferent to anything else, and our interconnectedness to everything else gives us power(with), response-ability, and responsibilities.

In chapter one, I laid the foundation of a resistant interiority in terms of anti-oppressive and humanistic theories, and I have extended it through chapters four, five, and six. As per the discussion in chapter four, the cultivation of interiority, whether through a contemplation of death or other means, must be political. Moreover, we must *see* the cultivation of interiority as a form of political resistance. If we fail to have this foundational aim, our meditation and searching becomes nothing more than navel gazing. Chapter five showed the depths of what self-in-relation means. Self-inquiry is aimed not just at our internal world but at the relationships that define our reality; we cannot understand ourselves apart from those non-human and more-than-human others who help form our subjectivity. In our cultivation of interiority, then, we must attend to the interconnected others (with)in our subject. Finally, in chapter six I suggested that our relations are not just material, but also hauntingly ethereal. In the cultivation of interiority as a form of resistance, we must attend to our Ancestors. Just as with our relations, human and otherwise, we are accountable to our Ancestors and our descendants (Justice, 2018); I suggest we meet that accountability through openness, relationality, and vulnerability toward all our relations, past and present. This is the inward (re)turn I proposed. This is the curricular future I envision. This is the purpose of education I hold close to my heart. It is a world made more just and more livable for all life through relationality, gentleness, humility, and vulnerability. With this as a curricular focus, we can carry on. With this, all things are possible.

M'sit No'kmaw

- i Throughout this dissertation, the personal pronoun “we” should be understood to refer broadly to human beings and their co-present others. “We” is meant to refer to the human species and society, but it is always haunted by the multiplicity of posthuman subjectivity, as well as by the co-presence of Ancestors. Posthuman subjectivity is discussed more in chapters four and five. Ancestors are discussed in chapter six.
- ii Haraway’s repeated mantra “we must think” (2016, p. 40) is perhaps an inspiration here. The difference between dreaming and thinking is perhaps the same difference between staying with the trouble and envisioning futurities. This dissertation is engaged with the latter, inclusive of the former.
- iii Throughout this introductory chapter, I refer to Kumar’s (2019) analysis that curriculum in international contexts has been negatively influenced by three main forces: Ideology, neoliberalism, and colonialism. In my mind, any project of envisioning a future must be responsive to these forces.
- iv My use of (re)thinking and (re)considering is modeled after post qualitative writers such as Candace Kuby (2019) and Indigenous writers such as Sandra Styres (2017). My use is designed to show methodological allegiance, as well as to linguistically represent the disruption to conventional thought I am proposing. I would not take the phraseology to be a claim to a newness in any of my thought, but rather in some cases a statement of disruption and in others a statement of renewal or (re)membering (Styres, 2017). Given my epistemological positioning discussed in chapter three, I am not seeking newness so much as truthfulness.
- v Inwardness and interiority are used somewhat interchangeably throughout this work.
- vi Here I might point to the bi-annual “provoking curriculum” conference in Canada as support for my statement.
- vii Note the difference here between the earlier use of humanistic. Humanistic is a broader term, whereas humanist denotes a specific relationship to the posthuman. Here, I distinguish between humanist and posthumanist perspectives thus: “Whereas a humanist perspective frequently assumes the human is autonomous, conscious, intentional, and exceptional in acts of change, a posthumanist perspective assumes agency is distributed through dynamic forces of which the human participates but does not completely intend or control” (Keeling and Lehman, 2018, n.p.). This juxtaposition is further discussed later in the current chapter. Death education, I argue, is both humanistic and humanist.
- viii A playful reference to the text by Nietzsche of the same title.
- ix See chapter two for full discussion of the medicalization of death. See chapter four for a more extensive discussion of the modernization’s “sanitization” of internal chaos. See also Liboiron’s (2019) section titled “matter out of place is about power.”
- x Throughout the remainder of this dissertation I sometimes refer to this as “the material fact(s) of our death.” It is worth noting here that the corpse, and the material facts of death, is something of an emerging focus in posthumanism: “While posthumanism has considered relations between the human and its various others, such as the animal, the

machine, and the thing, the corpse provides a significant but thus far underexplored nonhuman ‘other’ that is intimately yoked to the human as its inevitable fate” (Edwards, 2018, p. 3). Though this emergent literature is one voice in the conversation, my (re)consideration of death extends beyond an examination of the corpse from posthuman perspectives.

^{xi} Chapter four takes up this discussion in more detail toward an explicitly political death education.

^{xii} This is, admittedly, a very large conceptual project. I would remind the reader, however, that I am seeking truthful exchange rather than objective Truth, and in so doing, I remain rather reserved in my claim to comprehensiveness.

^{xiii} Additionally, that death is meaningful to all of us points to the potential for complicated curricular conversations (Pinar, 2012). Based on the above, the universality of death becomes something of a justification for the fit between my methodological framing and content.

^{xiv} This somewhat crude language is borrowed from a presentation given by Robert Piazza and Kent den Heyer at CSSE in 2018 entitled “The Rolling Stones, Alain Badiou, and the Implications of an Educational Event.”

^{xv} Chapter five, six, and seven suggest self-understanding situated within various articulations of a relational ontology.

^{xvi} Piluwitahasuwawsuwakon was brought forward to the University of New Brunswick as an alternative to the term reconciliation by Elder Opolahsomuwehs (Imelda Perley) (D. Perley, personal communications, April 15, 2019).

^{xvii} Throughout this introductory chapter, I have referred to capitalism and neoliberalism somewhat interchangeably. Later, I also use the term advanced capitalism in the same spirit (Braidotti, 2013). In this, I am drawing on theorists and theories of ‘flexible’ capitalism (Sennett; 1998; Snyder 2016), a term that gestures broadly to the post-industrial forms of capitalism that de-emphasize planning and stability in favour of responsiveness to market demands. In my reading, neoliberalism is a particular economic policy/ideological framework that fits under the umbrella of flexible capitalism (though the inverse could also be argued). Neoliberalism is particularly concerned with eliminating the safety nets of Keynesian economics, allowing the market to regulate itself completely free of government intervention (Kumar, 2019).

^{xviii} It should be noted here that humanistic discussions of interiority tend to focus on the individual, but there is generally an acknowledgement that spirituality and interiority can, and in many cases should, be cultivated in relationship with others. I will (re)visit the notions of self-in-relation and interconnectedness, expanded through the subsequent discussions of posthuman and Indigenous theories, in chapter seven.

^{xix} The fact that Osho drove a Rolls-Royce ought to be enough to disprove that idea

^{xx} It will be relevant to some readers to note that I am Mi’kmaw. I was a status Indian with the Qalipu Mi’kmaw First Nation from 2012 until 2018 but lost status as a result of several technicalities. I self-identify as Mi’kmaw, my family (who have maintained status) recognizes me as Mi’kmaw, and I continue to work toward deeper

understandings of the language and the culture. I do not consider status to be a meaningful marker of Indigenous identity, but because of my use of Indigenous theories throughout this dissertation, I consider it an imperative to be clear about my positionality in this regard. Because this work is not focused on Indigenous identity nor my own experience, I only discuss my own identity tangentially beyond this note. Those interested should my previous publications around Indigenous identity (Downey, 2017, 2018a, 2020a). M'sit No'kmaw.

xxi Throughout this work, community/nation labels of Indigenous theorists reflect their own identification in wording and spelling (see Younging, 2018)

xxii Indigenous erasure is discussed further in chapter six.

xxiii Again, my focus here is neoliberal capitalism's ideological intrusion into curriculum. I use a broad characterization here in order to highlight the grandiose scope of the issue.

xxiv A more recent example might be the invasion of the unist'ot'en camp in Northern BC where the RCMP were authorized to use lethal force in removing Indigenous people from their land (<https://unistoten.camp/>).

xxv Those outside death studies and death education are more willing to discuss ceremonies of dying and their significance (Fairfield, 2015), but these conversations are meant to apply to the living, not the dead.

xxvi My use of the term attend is specific and intentional. Attending is a pedagogical notion developed throughout this work. See chapter two for an initial characterization.

xxvii My usage of this term is not directly related, but is in some ways responsive, to the term "relational aesthetics" put forward by French curator Nicholas Bourriaud in the 1990s. Bourriaud defines his use of the term as such: "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 113). My characterization above seems less rigid, to me.

xxviii Philosophers focused on death do tend to give these thinkers more attention (e.g., Fairfield, 2015), but death studies tends to be populated by social scientists.

xxix A companion study showed three trends in authorship over the same sample: more collaboration, a higher number of female authors, and a stronger international presence (Doka, Neimeyer, Wittkowski, Vallergera, & Currelley, 2016)

xxx After repeated visits, I eventually found an article dealing with Hegelian philosophy and death education (Wu, 2020). I have cited it several times below as it gestures toward the absence of sustained theoretical engagement with death education, despite the tensions I may feel with traditional philosophy.

xxxi My sister, a registered nurse who graduated with a BSc in Nursing from a Canadian university in 2017, claimed that although she had no courses in her degree focused on death and dying, it was a persistent topic in her core courses. She tempered this by alluding to the notion that most of their discussion was technical, and any conversation of the humanistic was relegated to elective courses (E. Downey, personal communications, October 17, 2019)

xxxii Each of these terms has particular definitions in the medical community. Palliative care simply refers to not actively treating a disease or cause of death, for example, while EOL care refers more broadly to the care one receives in their dying hours. Here, I use the terms broadly and interchangeably within the scope of talking about death.

xxxiii Some even frame death as a problem (e.g., Testoni et al., 2019), a notion to which I tacitly speak back later in this dissertation.

xxxiv Tensions between postmodernism and posthumanism will be more fully explored in chapter four.

xxxv Here I use “post qualitative” rather than “post-qualitative” or “postqualitative” despite my tendency elsewhere for conjoined words (e.g., posthumanism, postmodernism). This choice follows the convention of leading writers in the field, namely Elizabeth St. Pierre.

xxxvi Jane Roland Martin (1985) used a related terminology, epistemological inequality, to discuss the inequalities in knowledge in philosophy of education—and particularly the absence of women as a concern within those discussions.

xxxvii A playful allusion to Tuck’s (2010) break up with Deleuze.

xxxviii This is obviously a limited list. I would add Arendt and Kristeva among others.

xxxix To offer some elaboration here, I will not claim poetic inquiry as a methodology for although my lens is informed by poetry of my own and others, poetry is only one source of many. Plurality in sources of inspiration are clearly evident throughout my work and comprise rigour within my understanding of complicated conversation.

xl There are, however, many examples of folk who are more evidently positioned within the critical paradigm (Sameshima & Vandermause 2009), or at least more critical strains of interpretivism (Faulkner, Calafell, & Grimes, 2009). Regardless of the exceptions, the norm is an undeniable presence of phenomenology in poetic inquiry.

xli The foundations of post qualitative inquiry come into sharper focus later in this work as I discuss posthumanism and its theoretical otherwises.

xlii This is, of course, not as much the case with Indigenous authors where correct and limited interpretation is an obligation of relational accountability. This is discussed further in chapter six (see also Younging, 2018).

xliiii Though the rationalist and empiricist labels generally refer to one’s epistemological beliefs, as contemporary writers have continually articulated (e.g., Styres, 2017; Wilson 2008), there is a deep interrelation between ontology and epistemology. I thus use these terms to articulate two common ontological positions.

xliv While it is still commonly held that the virus originated in wet markets, a recent report suggests the virus may have been circulating before the wet market outbreak (Nsoesie, Rader, Barnoon, Goodwin, & Brownstein, 2020).

xlvi Throughout, Braidotti favours hyphenation of various terms. I do not. There are a few exceptions.

xlvii It should be noted here that there are critiques of the Western media’s treatment of wet markets as “backwards” (Mason, 2010), and the anti-Chinese racism amid COVID-19 is blatant and frightening. Hopefully my treatment has gestured toward the wet

markets as a practice facilitated by, or perhaps made necessary in light of, advanced capitalism without casting judgement on those who rely on wet markets for their economic survival.

^{xlvii} While Illich and Cayley (2020) are highly critical of the over-medicalization of illness and death in Western society, I remain more guarded about these claims. Tara Westover's (2018) autobiographical account of growing up in a family where Western medicine was completely ignored serves as a stark reminder of how criticism of science can often go to radical and non-sensical extremes. In the spirit of *etuaptomunk* discussed in chapter six, I would suggest a more balanced approach to both science and medicine—approaches that honour the multiplicity of truth including the perspectives offered through critique. I will further elaborate this perspective in my discussion of affirmative ethics in chapter five.

^{xlviii} I experience something akin to Eve Tuck's (2010) reading of Deleuze here. Tuck reads Deleuze wanting him to say that desire is a good thing, but he never does; this becomes the impetus for her "break up" with Deleuze. Here, I want the posthumanist and new materialists to say that emotions have the power to change material reality—that our thoughts, prayers, and emotions have a power to affect physical reality. In my reading, they skirt around the edges of the issue, but never really name it. Indigenous theorists have no such qualms, and Gregory Cajete's (2000) discussion of the sacred breath within us proves the illustrative example. Posthumanists seem much more willing to acknowledge that we are affected by material reality than to acknowledge the potential of mind and emotion to alter physical reality (see also Bennett, 2010; Bennett in Watson, 2013), but I'm not ready to "break up" with them over this—at least not yet.

^{xlix} Kristeva didn't see the maternal in Lacan; that doesn't mean it wasn't there

ⁱ There is a long tradition of applying psychoanalytic thought to socio-political contexts. Eric Fromm was the first to take on this project in a systemic way (Funk, 2019).

ⁱⁱ It should be noted here that it is rather unusual from a socio-historical perspective that we find the sight of a corpse so unnerving. As Fairfield (2015) notes, the modern relationship with death where it is hidden away both physically and affectively is rather unusual within the scope of human history.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wave theorizing is rather reductive as there are many movements within each wave that deserve individual attention (i.e., Indigenous feminism or Indigenous womanism [see Horn-Miller, 2016; See also Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013]), but the language is useful in creating an image of that to which the alt-right identity reacts (see also West, 2019).

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ There are notable exceptions to this, of course. As noted in the text, more recent curriculum scholarship centers emotion, but early childhood education has worked with emotion for much longer.

^{iv} Emmett Till serves as another powerful example, as does George Floyd. In the context of Canada, the Murdered and Missing Women and Girls—discussed more in chapter six—also illustrate the principle of corpse-power.

- lv Let's be frank here. People shouldn't have to die for social change to happen. Yet, we cannot deny the fact that nothing moves the living to action like a corpse left in the wake of injustice.
- lvi History is replete with other examples. Residential schools are briefly discussed in chapter six and provide another illustrative example.
- lvii While there is no shortage of opinion on this topic, the debate between philosophers Giorgio Agamben and Slavoj Žižek is worth note. While Agamben asks whether we are willing as a society to sacrifice everything for 'bare life,' or physical survival, and is wary of the increase of state surveillance under COVID-19, Žižek (in true Marxist form) sees the current moment as a call to solidarity and argues that what we need—and perhaps what we may be able to achieve in the current moment—is control over state power (Tsilivakou, 2020).
- lviii This assimilative capacity of capitalism is discussed in chapter five and tangentially in chapter six.
- lix Edwards (2018), incidentally, explicitly attempts to move beyond mourning and discussions of ethical obligations to the corpse as markers or humanist psychoanalytic thinking.
- lx It is important to note here that not all deep ecologists were so bold. Many simply respected nature on its own terms, not through the lens of the human. Furthermore, some of the more radical deep ecologists were blatantly racist in their assertions of who should die (Bookchin & Foreman, 1991).
- lxi There is, of course, a long history of vitalism outside of Western philosophy (see chapter six; see also footnotes lxx and lxxv).
- lxii The notion of allyship in theory has received some attention by Indigenous scholars, such as notion of 'allied theories' (Absolon, 2011; Pictou, 2017). Here I use the term in a broad sense to showcase overlaps in the overall projects (praxis) of the theoretical orientations.
- lxiii For other pedagogical examples see the previously cited work of Taylor, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Blaise (2012; see also Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015).
- lxiv Paul (2006) reports the price at around 10 guineas, which roughly equates to 2500\$ in today's currency (Nye, 2020).
- lxv Young (2015) links this back to the thought of Lacan, but it should be considered a marker of the wider poststructural movement as a whole, particularly the work of Foucault cited previously in this dissertation.
- lxvi For a full treatment of these sayings, their origins, and their impacts, see Mieder (1993).
- lxvii Earlier sources, primarily those from before 2005-2010, use place rather than Land. Deloria (1994) is a prime example. My usage follows that of Styres (2017, 2019).
- lxviii As further evidence of the consumptive and assimilative nature of exploitative structures like settler colonialism and capitalism, consider the fact that these symbols were eventually brought into the fold of Catholicism as a means to help Mi'kmaw people memorize prayers, thus expediting conversion (Battiste, 1984, 2013).

^{lxi} This section is in no way meant to set up an exclusive dichotomy between Indigenous and posthuman metaphysics where animacy is concerned—my focus here is a result of the scope of my dissertation. Many world religions and philosophies have variants of the ideas herewithin. Stonechild (2020) has done much work toward elaborating the intersections between other spiritual traditions and north American Indigenous thought. Shinto, Jainism, Bhuddism, and Doaism all express some degree of material animacy and interconnectedness. Again, my focus here is responsive to the scope of this work as a whole.

^{lxx} The concept is perhaps best illustrated by the baptism of Grand Chief Membertou in 1610. See the two edited collections referenced above for more details.

^{lxxi} The idea of a differentiated human category here should not be taken as a stand in for intersectionality. Many Indigenous feminists are critical of intersectionality as a framework for the lack of attention it gives settler colonialism as an issue.

^{lxxii} Stonechild (2020), in conversation with Forbes (2008) and others, would be disinclined to name Indigenous thought as a humanism. Indeed, they critique the foundations of European humanism as an unsuccessful challenge to the greed of European Wetikoism (i.e., cannibalistic consumerism/capitalist consumption), and if pressed might say the same of Western emancipatory models of humanism. The word ‘humanism’ carries a lot of ideological baggage with it; there are likely better terms here for what I am trying to articulate (particularly terminology in Indigenous languages). Here, I name my understanding of Indigenous metaphysical thought as humanism in order to highlight particular aspects of the literature and to juxtapose it with posthumanism. I remain respectfully open to debate on the issue.

^{lxxiii} As per the discussion in the previous chapter, Spinoza did acknowledge the sacredness of life. Deloria (1994), however, would likely offer some compelling critique on the differences between the Judeo-Christian God Spinoza had in mind and the sacredness of all matter under North American Indigenous thought.

^{lxxiv} As per above, it should be noted that these ideas of reciprocity can be found in other worldviews as well—some of which can be named as Indigenous (Stonechild, 2020), some of which cannot. In particular, Buddhism and Jainism both emphasize variants of the idea that any harm you do will also be brought onto you (see Valley, 2012; Whelan, 2012).

^{lxxv} While both Indigenous and posthuman theories put forward iterations of the notion that we should do no harm lest harm come to ourselves, the impossibility of avoiding harm is strikingly obvious from any realist perspective. My thinking here is speculative, and thus I take the ideal seriously, but a note on causalities is warranted nonetheless. Potawatomi author and committed environmentalist Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) noted the unavoidability of casualties to even the gentlest of restoration projects as she nearly removed a willow containing a bird’s nest in clearing a pond near her home: “restoring a habitat, no matter how well intentioned, produces casualties” (p. 92). Short of becoming Bartleby the scrivener and opting to do nothing whatsoever, harm is unavoidable; there are always casualties. I think both the Indigenous and posthuman iterations of

ontologically pacifism, however, are concerned with intentions. If we intend to do no harm, less harm will come to us. The Indigenous iteration of this idea is particularly helpful here in considering traditional acts of gratitude for animals who have given up their lives so that humans may be nourished. By honouring the sacrifice of the animal or the plant, the harm we have done in order to sustain ourselves is contextualized within a reciprocal relationship rather than an exploitative one (see also Kimmerer, 2013). Ontological pacifism in the abstract, then, is actualized through attending: attending to Land, waste, self, and other.

^{lxxvi} For a full accounting of Christian and Indigenous views on the afterlife and their divergence, see Deloria (1994).

^{lxxvii} For a fuller discussion of poststructuralist readings of Spinoza see chapter five (see also Braidotti, 2013).

^{lxxviii} I have largely avoided any consideration of the fear of death in this dissertation. That topic is, however, one which has been explored deeply by philosophers of death (See Barry, 2007; Fairfield, 2015) and by death educators. Testoni et al. (2018, 2019) and Van Kessel et al. (2020), for example, both engage terror management theory in the context of education. Terror management theory proposes that people deal with their fear of death through particular cultural values or beliefs. Some might be inclined to read Deloria's (1994) comments through this lens as well.

^{lxxix} There are multiple meanings of the term haunting at play within this dissertation. Tuck and Ree (2013) discuss the haunting power of Indigenous people—the recursive quality of Indigenous resilience to continue to challenge settler colonialism. Nellis (2009) draws on Derrida (1995) to discuss haunting in a more neutral sense: where there is difference, one is always haunted by the other. Presence is always haunted by that which is absent. Absence is haunted by presence. At the end of chapter two, I drew more on Nellis' characterization, particularly around the haunting losses of learning and other conceptual absences. In the current section, there is a bit more of the meaning carried by Tuck and Ree (2013). Haunting is uncomfortable here, and rather than dwelling in discomfort as before, I suggest offering the uncomfortable hauntings their own resolution. This is, I think, merely a difference of emphasis, but it is nonetheless worth note toward clarity.

^{lxxx} One tangible pathway to the legacy of Indigenous knowledge of place is through the languages of Land (Armstrong, 1998; Styres, 2017, 2019; see also Downey et al., 2019). Indigenous language as a marker of attention to Land becomes a mechanism through which the Ancestors empower the living.

^{lxxxi} Admittedly this is an extension of my own view of education, but one I think already supported in some death education literature, however tacitly.

^{lxxxii} In other words, non-dichotomously. Indigenous thought is both humanism and posthumanism as per the earlier discussion.

^{lxxxiii} My proposal, which comprised drafts of chapters one, two, and three, was defended on February 27, 2020. I started working on the first draft of chapter four on Monday March 9. The following Tuesday, March 17, I started working from home.

^{lxxxiv} This is evidenced, perhaps, by the anti social distancing protests in some parts of the United States.

^{lxxxv} Younging (2018) notes the use of the term “ritual” in Indigenous context is inappropriate and proposes the term ceremony as a more accurate alternative. Here Fairfield (2015) is writing outside an Indigenous context, thus his use is appropriate. I opt for the term ceremony as per Younging’s (2018) recommendation, even if my meaning here is more broadly human than specifically Indigenous.

^{lxxxvi} This is a nod to Kristeva’s (1982) discussion of abjection—perhaps a (re)visitation of the concept through a sacred air.

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Curriculum Vitae

Adrian M. Downey

Education

Bishop's University, 2008-2012, Bachelor of Arts

Bishop's University, 2012-2013, Bachelor of Education

Mount Saint Vincent University, 2015-2017, Master of Arts in Education

University of New Brunswick, 2017-2020, Doctor of Philosophy

Academic Publications

(BR) = Blind Review; (OR) = Open Review; (ER) = Editor Review; (IN) = Invited

Book Chapters (8)

(IN) Downey, A. (Accepted, June 2020). (Re)membering Indigenous curriculum theorists: Gifts and gratitude. In C. Shields, A. Podolski, & J. Guiney Yallop (Eds.), *Legacies of Learning in Curriculum Studies: Gifts, Grace, and Gratitude*.

(BR) Borhani, M., & Downey, A. (Accepted, February 2020). What good is a poem when the world is on fire?. In A. J. Farrell, C. L. Skyhar, & M. Lam (Eds.), *Teaching in the Anthropocene*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press/ Women's Press.

(ER) Downey, A. (Accepted, January 2020). Classroom time and its otherwise. In J. MacDonald & J. Markides (Eds.), *Brave Work in Indigenous Education*. DIO Press.

(BR) Downey, A. (2020). Toward a Mi'kmaw poetics of place. In E. Lyle (Ed.), *Identity Landscapes: Contemplating Place and the Construction of Self* (pp. 47-58). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Sense.

(ER) Downey, A., & Rowett, J. (2020). Seeing the light in another through practitioner eyes. In J. E. Charlton, H. J. Michell, & S. L. Acoose (Eds.), *Decolonizing Mental Health: Embracing Indigenous Multi-Dimensional Balance* (pp. 177-188). Vernon, British Columbia: J Charlton Publishing.

(IN) Downey, A., & Whitty, P. (2019). Temporality. In J. Wearing, M. Ingersoll, C. DeLuca, B. Bolden, H. Ogden, & T. M. Christou (Eds.), *Key Concepts in Curriculum Studies: Perspectives on the Fundamentals* (pp. 209-214). New York: Routledge.

(BR) Downey, A., & Burkholder, C. (2018). (Re)constructing anti-colonial teacher identities through reflexive inquiry. In E. Lyle (Ed.), *The Negotiated Self: Employing Reflexive Inquiry to Explore Teacher Identity* (pp. 65-77). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Sense.

(IN) Downey, A., & Sagy, G. (2018). Young Eagle and Hoopoe: Conversations from the forest. In M. J. Harkins & S. Singer (Eds.), *Educators on Schooling, Social Justice and Diversity: A Reader* (pp. 256-267). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Refereed Journal Articles (10)

(BR) Downey, A., & Sagy, G. (Accepted, April 2020). Love songs: conversations with the Earth and each other. *Artizein*.

(ER) Downey, A. (Accepted, November 2019). Reflections on conversations and dialogues with recent settlers. *Studies in Social Justice (special issue)*.

(BR) Downey, A. (2020). A reflection on white-seeming privilege through the process of currere. *The Currere Exchange Journal*, 3(2), 1-10.

(BR) Downey, A., & McGuire, M. (2019). Metaphors beyond the duet: A reflection on shared teaching. *Canadian Music Educator*, 61(1), 12-17.

(BR) Downey, A., Bell, R., Copage, K., & Whitty, P. (2019). Place-based readings toward disrupting colonized literacies: A métissage. *In education*, 25(2), 39-58.

(BR) Downey, A. (2019). Mindset and meditative inquiry. *Journal of Educational Thought*, 52(2), 130-142.

(ER) Downey, A., & Harkins, M. J. (2019). Envisioning language reflective of an Indigenous worldview. *Antistasis*, 9(1), 236-255.

(OR) Kumar, A., & Downey, A. (2019). Music as meditative inquiry: Dialogic reflections on learning and composing Indian classical music. *Artizein*, 4(1), 98-121.

(OR) Downey, A. (2019). Revisiting Bucket Truck: Locally engaged public intellectuals. *The Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 10(1), 89-98.

(BR) Kumar, A., & Downey, A. (2018). Teaching as meditative inquiry: A dialogic exploration. *Journal of the Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies*, 16(2), 52-75.

Refereed Conference Proceedings (6)

- (ER) Downey, A. (Submitted, October 2019). Lessons learned from a life with music. *Proceedings of the 2019 Creative Connections Conference*.
- (BR) Downey, A. (Accepted, June 2019). The metamorphic, the subtle, and the awkward: Three thoughts on Indigenization. *Proceedings of the Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase*, 22.
- (BR) Downey, A. (2019). Reclaiming the savage mind: A poetic meditation on the creative process. *Antistasis Special Issue: Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference 2018 Proceedings*, 9(2), 66-69.
- (BR) Downey, A. (2018). Speaking in circle: Lived experiences of white-seeming privilege. *Antistasis Special Issue: Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference 2017 Proceedings*, 8(1), 1-11.
- (BR) Downey, A. (2017). Listening for reconciliation and beyond. *Proceedings of the Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase*, 21, 67-72.
- (BR) Downey, A. (2016). Reconciliation and Indigenizing the curriculum: Stories from an Indigenous teacher and graduate student. *Proceedings of the Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase*, 20, 84-87.

Book Reviews (5)

- (ER) Downey, A. (Submitted, March 2020). Book Review: At the Risk of Thinking: An Intellectual Biography of Julia Kristeva. *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*.
- (ER) Downey, A. (Submitted, February 2020). Book Review: Kiskajeyi—I am ready: A hermeneutic exploration of Mi'kmaq komqwejwi'kasikl poetry. *Dawnland Voices*.
- (ER) Downey, A. (2020). Book review: Canadian curriculum studies: A métissage of inspiration/imagination/interconnection. *Journal of the Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies*, 17(2), 100-113.
- (ER) Downey, A. (2018). Book review: The knowledge seeker: Embracing Indigenous spirituality. *McGill Journal of Education*, 53(2), 393-395.
- (OR) Downey, A. (2018). Book review: Visioning a Mi'kmaw humanities: Indigenizing the academy. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 9(1), 128-131.

Editorials (2)

(IN) Downey, A., Gallagher, C., & Noreiga, A. (2020). Introduction to the special issue: Proceedings from the 2019 Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference. *Antistasis*, 10(1), i-xi.

(IN) Downey, A. (2019). Introduction to the special issue: Proceedings from the 2018 Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference. *Antistasis*, 9(2), i-vii.

Other Publications

Creative Non-Fiction (6)

Downey, A. (Pitch Accepted, May 2020). Of corpses, land, and responsibilities amid uncertainty: Three fragments. *Geez*, 58.

Downey, A. (Accepted, February 2020). Becoming-with Birch. *Geez*, 57.

Downey, A. (2019). The poetics of gentle resistance. *Geez*, 52, 59-61.

Downey, A. (2017). Raven and Eagle: A fable about curriculum. In A. Robinson, B. Diamond, B. Donaldson, & J. Richardson (Eds.), *Speakman Press Volume 2: A collection of MSVU student Creative & Academic work* (pp. 15-18). Halifax: Mount Print Shop.

Downey, A. (2017). Supporting essay: Social efficiency, standardization, and self-inquiry in Raven and Eagle. In A. Robinson, B. Diamond, B. Donaldson, & J. Richardson (Eds.), *Speakman Press Volume 2: A collection of MSVU student Creative & Academic work* (pp. 19-22). Halifax: Mount Print Shop.

Downey, A. (2016). Dear uncle. In A. Robinson, B. Diamond, B. Donaldson, & J. Richardson (Eds.), *Speakman Press Volume 1: A collection of short stories and poems* (pp. 39-40). Halifax: Mount Print Shop.

Refereed Conference Presentations (36)

Kumar, A., Brigham, S., **Downey, A.**, Kharbach, M., Lemieux, A., & Petersen, B. (2020, June). *Emerging perspectives on the internationalization of curriculum studies*. Symposium proposal accepted at CACS (CSSE) Annual Conference, Western University, London, Ontario (conference cancelled).

Downey, A., & Whitty, P. (2020, June). *Discomfort, revolt, and abjection in Skim*. Presentation proposal accepted at CACS (CSSE) Annual Conference, Western University, London, Ontario (conference cancelled).

- Downey, A., Sabattis-Atwin, A., Reid, A., & Copage, K. (2020, June). *Wabanaki experiential education in compulsory B.Ed. courses*. Presentation proposal accepted at CATE (CSSE) Annual Conference, Western University, London, Ontario (conference cancelled).
- Downey, A. (2020, May). *Crossing the borders of life and death with posthumanism and Taapoategl and Pallet*. Presentation at the 2020 Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, University of Maine, Belfast, Maine (conference canceled).
- Downey, A. (2019, October). *Lessons learned from a life with music*. Presentation at Creative Connections Conference 2019, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.
- McGuire, M., & **Downey, A.** (2019, October). *Creativity in team teaching*. Presentation at Creative Connections Conference 2019, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.
- Kumar, A., **Downey, A.**, Kharbach, K., Petersen, B., & Wells-Hopey, D. (2019, October). *A dialogue on meditative inquiry*. Symposium at the Canadian Association for the study of Adult Education (CASAE) East Conference 2019, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS
- Downey, A. (2019, October). *Toward (my) Mi'kmaw poetic inquiry*. Paper Presentation at 7th International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry, Acadia University, Wolfville, NS.
- Downey, A. (2019, August). *Mi'kmaw 'devils': Good and evil in The Stone Canoe and Taapoategl and Pallet*. Paper Presentation at Devils and Daemons: An Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS.
- Downey, A. (2019, July). *Upon whose shoulders?: Challenges to conventional citation practice in social science research*. Presentation at Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference 2019, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.
- Kumar, A., & **Downey, A.** (2019, June). *Dialogic meditative inquiry*. Paper Presentation at CACS (CSSE) Annual Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- Downey, A., & Burkholder C. (2019, June). *(Re)Constructing anti-colonial teacher identities through reflexive inquiry*. Panel Presentation at CERA (CSSE) Annual Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- Whitty, P., Copage, K., **Downey, A.**, & Bell, R. (2019, June). *Place-Based reading toward disrupting colonized literacies: A métissage*. Paper Presentation at LLRC (CSSE) Annual Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.

- Downey, A. (2019, June). *Love songs to the Earth: Poems from deep, social, and sacred ecology*. Paper Presentation at ARTS (CSSE) Annual Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- Downey A. (2019, June). *Toward a curriculum of internality*. Round Table Presentation Accepted at CCGSE (CSSE) Annual Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- Downey, A. (2019, May). *Indigenous poetics and poetic inquiry: Toward reading place*. Presentation at the 36th Annual Qualitative Analysis Conference, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB
- Downey, A. (2019, April). *Meditative mind: An alternative to the growth-fixed dichotomy*. Presentation at the Second Annual New Brunswick Education Research Symposium, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.
- Downey, A. (2018, October). *The metamorphic, the subtle, and the awkward: Three thoughts on Indigenization*. Presentation at AAU Teaching Showcase, Dalhousie University, Truro, NS.
- Downey, A. (2018, October). *Mi'kmaw symbolic literacy and artistic practice*. Presentation at Artful Inquiry Research Group Symposium 2018, McGill University, Montreal, QC.
- Downey, A. (2018, August). *Toward a curriculum of transcendental violence, death, and rebirth*. Presentation at De/Composing Death: An Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS.
- Jamtsho, T., & **Downey, A.** (2018, June). *Two-eyed seeing and Bhutanese science education: A complicated conversation*. Presentation at Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference 2018, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.
- Downey, A. (2018, June). *Waves of convergence and divergence: Ruminations on research and art*. Presentation at Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference 2018, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.
- Downey, A. (2018, May). *Writing my privilege as talking circle: White privilege and Indigenous identity*. Roundtable Presentation at CCGSE (CSSE) Annual Conference, University of Regina, Regina, SK.
- Kumar, A., & **Downey, A.** (2018, May). *Meditative inquiry and Indigenizing the curriculum: A complicated conversation*. Roundtable Presentation at CACS (CSSE) Annual Conference, University of Regina, Regina, SK.

- Kumar, A., & **Downey, A.** (2018, May). *Dialogical meditative inquiry: An existential and emergent approach to research*. Presentation at the 35th Annual Qualitative Analysis Conference, St. Thomas University, Fredericton, NB.
- Downey, A. (2018, May). *Meeting points: An Indigenous arts-informed exploration of white privilege and Indigenous identity*. Presentation at the 35th Annual Qualitative Analysis Conference, St. Thomas University, Fredericton, NB.
- Downey, A. (2018, May). *Stories of Qalipu Mi'kmaw erasure, resistance, and resurgence*. Presentation at 2018 Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, Acadia University, Wolfville, NS.
- Downey, A. (2018, April). *Jiddu Krishnamurti, classroom management, and the fear of not being: A self-study*. Presentation at the New Brunswick Research Symposium, St. Thomas University, Fredericton, NB.
- Downey, A. (2018, March). *Netukulimk in the Mi'kmaw Creation Story: Enacting Mi'kmaw humanities*. Presentation at the UNB Graduate Student Conference, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.
- Downey, A. (2017, October). *Listening for reconciliation and beyond: The huge impact of a simple idea*. Presentation at AAU Teaching Showcase, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS.
- Downey, A. (2017, October). *The large and small of challenging racism in the university writing centre*. Presentation at AAU Teaching Showcase, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS.
- Downey, A. (2017, October). *Qalipu stories of Newfoundland's confederation*. Presentation at UNB Peace and Friendship Treaty Days 2017 Colloquium, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.
- Downey, A. (2017, August). *Mi'kmaw resistance in Newfoundland: Historical, personal, and future perspectives*. Presentation at DEFIANCE: An Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS.
- Downey, A. (2017, June). *Speaking in circle: lived experiences of white-seeming privilege*. Presentation at Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference 2017, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.
- Downey, A. (2017, March). *White-seeming privilege: Situating racial privilege in the context of settler colonialism*. Presentation at Critical Indigenous, Race & Feminist Studies Student Conference, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS.

Downey, A. (2016, October). *Reconciliation through Indigenizing the curriculum: Stories from an Indigenous teacher and graduate student*. Presentation at AAU Teaching Showcase, University of New Brunswick, Saint John, NB.