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The Tales of Death and Kindergarten: Becoming in Dark Encounters [COVID-19 Edition]

Abstract: For speculative pragmatism, aesthetics is an ethical practice of becoming with the world. Considering educational practice, we might say just the same. But an educational practice is not ethico-aesthetical by its nature – the challenge is to think and live it in an ethico-aesthetical manner. Acceptance of this conclusion goes easily with stressed importance of vitality, movement and creativity of thought – but what about death? Is death even *allowed* in educational practice? As this paper is written during the emergence of a pandemic, the question goes even further: could education and aesthetics even be of any concern if the danger of death “do us part”? This paper was meant to unfold between memories from an ethnography research in kindergarten and resonate concepts from affect theories – but it exploded unpredictably in resonance with the COVID-19 outburst. Yet, it remained an attempt to tackle the haunting feeling left behind from ‘dark’ encounters with different appearances of death. Hopefully, an encounter with this paper might open a crack in the understanding of educational practice, as well as this moment in history, as a much-needed place for patience and rethinking of the human endeavor as a *work of art*.

Keywords: early childhood education; ethico-aesthetics; death; COVID-19.

Intro

This was meant to be the story about the peculiar event from an ethnography research in kindergarten. This story is based on the memories and lived experience, and both life and memories could leak through different spacetimes, giving the story many unexpected turns. For example – putting the writer in the global pandemic and self-isolation just as she thought she has it. So it was that this paper unfolded between two lived experiences: one from the haunted and unresolved past of research and other from the sudden, unpredictable and frightening actuality of the author.

Their point of collision? Death.

It demands of the author to briefly explain her motifs before she brings the reader in the midst of this deadly encounter.

I'm a pedagogue, researching the field of early childhood education, following paths of relational and process-oriented paradigms to leave behind the common view of education as transmission of prescribed knowledge and acknowledge the very process of relational becoming with the world. The educational task lies not in the amount of information and skills one possesses, but in the very way of being (and becoming) in/with/of the world. Such education is a creative process of inhabiting, listening, meaning-making, performing and creating diverse modes of being – which makes it an aesthetical endeavor. But there is a *response-ability* towards human and nonhuman others which we are entangled with, the striving to imagine and enliven the ways of *joint* being and becoming a more just, vital and affirmative world. In this way, both education and aesthetics are inseparable from the question of ethics.

Ceder argues that every relation might be pedagogical, but what makes the institutionalized education different is the active “demand for change.”¹ When death strikes us, as in this pandemic moment in time, there is also strong demand for change – even if it's not imposed by human will and reason. The world will certainly change, for better or worse, but could we possibly dwell on this ‘better’ part? Could the encounter with death in an educational institution possibly help us learn something, by rethinking the human itself through the child?²

Working with “the traces, fragments, fleeting moments, gaps, absences,”³ this paper is on the path of hauntology, diffractive reading of multiple stories intra-actively, with and through one another,⁴ using writing as method of experimental thinking to forge new connections towards new possible ends.⁵

Mania della notte⁶

*A cold and gray day in the kindergarten backyard. As I wondered in my thoughts, someone crawled behind my back, whispering, calling:
“Nevena! Nevena!”*

¹ Simon Ceder, “Casting Through Water: Towards a Posthuman Theory of Educational Relationality,” 2016, 125, <http://lup.lub.lu.se/record/8410784>, acc. on 17th July 2018.

² Karin Murriss, *The Posthuman Child* (London: Routledge, 2016), 112.

³ Lisa Blackmann, “Researching Affect and Embodied Hauntologies: Exploring an Analytics of Experimentation,” in *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*, eds. Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 25-44: 26.

⁴ Blackmann, “Researching Affect and Embodied Hauntologies,” 37.

⁵ Anna Gibbs, “Writing as Method: Attunement, Resonance, and Rhythm,” in *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*, eds. Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 225.

⁶ *Mania* was a Roman goddess of the dead. She was said to be the mother of ghosts, the undead, and other spirits of the night.

I turned around and noticed Nina pushing her hands towards me.

“I’ve found a ladybug, but it’s not moving!” she said confidentially.

I looked at her clenched palms. Indeed, there she was. The fragile wings of the ladybug lifelessly pointed to the heavens and only slightly would tremble when the cold wind touched them. Distant in my thoughts, staring at the dimly red dot on the vivid pale skin, I noticed carefully:

“I think she’s dead.”⁷

When we encounter death in the presence of the young, we usually don’t stay for long enough to think about it. *Death*. We don’t use that word in this house – certainly not in early childhood education.

The philosophical and scientific discourses that dominate the field of early childhood education positioned vulnerability at the heart of the discord between adult and child – treating a child as innocent, gifted with imagination and fantasy, but ignorant – with lack of knowledge and responsibility. Such a child must be protected. Even the idea of a child as the rights holder includes the right and the need for protection, assuming adult knowledge of children’s needs and desires.⁸ Adults are obliged to know, protect and control children’s lives, to shelter them from violence and oppression and keep away adult secrets – such as death.⁹ Being protected somehow becomes the same as being inferior and patronized, living a sheltered life with no emotional upheaval and controversies, unrealistically pure and sterile – assuming it will bring you no pain and suffering as such.

But children are not the ones who seek such a life and run away from such encounters. Children notice and they ask. They want to see and want to know. Some would argue that younger people have more knowledgeable and profound ways to deal with death and illness than adults do.¹⁰

It is we who try to escape. Covering children’s ears and eyes so we could turn our heads away. Death is unspeakable – forgotten and disavowed, silenced by the “culture of life” that the last two centuries have brought to the throne.¹¹ The death brings out the chaos of the uncertain, the anxiety which we’ll never resolve, and – especially problematic for the educational context– the final cut that puts an end to everything we could ever be prepared for. As such, death is not just an eyesore on the pedagogical landscape – it is a horror of our existence, of our meaning and purpose.

⁷ Field notes, March 27, 2019.

⁸ Marg Sellers, *Young Children Becoming Curriculum: Deleuze, Te Whariki and curricular understandings* (London: Routledge, 2013), 74.

⁹ Murriss, *The Posthuman Child*, 117.

¹⁰ Gaile Canella and Radhika Viruru, *Childhood and Postcolonization: Power, Education and Contemporary Politics* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004), 67.

¹¹ Stuart Murray, “Thanatopolitics: On the Use of Death for Mobilizing Political Life,” *Polygraph* 18 (2006): 196.

6th of March 2020

Cold and gray day in a cold and gray little town a bit north of Novi Sad.

I was sitting on the unsightly and uncrowded bus station when my phone shortly rang.

“They’ve found the first case in Subotica”, the message said, “Please, take care.”

It could be anywhere. Everything that you know, that you do, that you’ve strived for might be gone in a flash of an unfortunate circumstance – by a hidden enemy behind the wheels, behind the doors, behind the masks, at the bottom of the river and the depth of the cliffs, in your blood, in your lungs, in the shape of the man on the bus station who sneezed. We don’t know what it might bring, but we know it is here to take us away. *Death.*

“Please, take care.”

The efforts of dominant contemporary politics have been largely oriented to keep disaster at bay, always a step ahead of the multiple potential catastrophes, always in control of every possible bearer of death. But death is stinking from everyone’s breath. The disaster is woven in the fabric of day-to-day life,¹² silent, small and insignificant until it’s too late. To control the possibilities of death becomes the necessity to take control over every day, everywhere and everyone.

11th of March 2020

E-mail notifications keep ringing. Cancelled meeting, cancelled seminar, recommendations to cancel everything unnecessary. I knew it before I’ve read it in the explanations. Pandemic.

It has begun.

Walking down the street, rushing towards home, everyone who passes next to me talk about it:

“If it is a billion people, then the percentage of death would be ...”

“Will you send your kid to school tomorrow? I’m not sure ...”

“Now you can’t find medical alcohol anywhere in town ...”

My head hurts terribly, but I don’t want to admit it to myself. I’m thinking about everything I should buy in the next couple of days. Do I have a couple ...? Waiting to cross the street I notice the famous Chinese restaurant, standing there in the dark. Closed.

I can feel the apocalypse crawling upon my neck.

¹² Brian Massumi, “Everywhere You Want to Be: Introduction to Fear,” in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 11.

Thinking of death in the times of pandemic, the stakes grow high. You don't see it, but the enemy is there – in the line on the graph rapidly rising, behind the doors of those that locked themselves away, in the news about the systems collapsing and the whispers about what might happen the next day. The chances are that you don't see any of that but the glimpses, but ...

... I can feel the apocalypse crawling upon my neck.

“Fear is not fundamentally an emotion ... It is the mode of being of every image and commodity and of the groundless self-effects their circulation generates.”¹³ Not the content of our words and actions, but the very expression expresses itself becoming alive as a style, as a mode – leaking from what we think we do to the conditions of how we might be and how we could become.

It is not you. It is not the pandemic. It's not the welfare and safety of our children. It is Fear, the dynamics of our lives, ticking through priorities we make, actions we take and, maybe even more, through everything we decide not to do.

12th of March 2020

Waiting for the bus, I had to take the tissue out of my pocket.

An old man stares at me as if I'm pulling out a gun.

In public transport, I could feel the looks – on my hands cracked and a bit bloody from desperate washing for days, on my face ...

Is my nose red? My cheeks? Do I look like I have a fever ...?

The old lady started to cough. Everyone is extremely silent and still.

She sneezes. No one takes a breath, including me.

I wrestle with the urgent need to step away.

Nina raised her eyebrows at me:

“So what do we do?”

*Her voice insisted on the answer.*¹⁴

“When war is waged and experienced resentfully ...,”¹⁵ when Fear is something that only happens to us, “we care about our dead and not theirs, about our particular wounds, rather than the fact that these wounds are replicated as singular and universal signs of war.”¹⁶ We give ourselves the right to wage the worth of life according to our life and our likeness.

¹³ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴ Field notes, March 27, 2019.

¹⁵ James Williams, “Never Too Late? On the Implications of Deleuze's Work on Death for a Deleuzian Moral Philosophy,” In *Deleuze and Ethics*, ed. Nathan Jun and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: University Press Ltd., 2011), 176.

¹⁶ Idem.

“Kids simply enjoyed the flute!” Mima (the music teacher) is excited about the concert held the other day, “I thought I should tell them a bit about the history of the flute ...

*You know, the first flutes were made from the bones of mammoths and swans!
... But maybe I shouldn’t tell them about the swans.
It’s just so sad.”*

*I found myself staring at her.
Since when are the bones of mammoths ok and bones of swans are not?
For what it’s worth?
For beauty?¹⁷*

Swans and mammoths in this story are not here to live, but to make our life worth living. Using the other to make ourselves stronger – as an example, as an experiment, an instrument or a fashion accessory, learning to kill the other or to let it die, we learn that the Fear of death is only relevant when it is the death of our own.

... I could not do that to the old lady.

“We begin to wage war against war when we absorb the truth that it is a collective scandal, a division of the common, in its inflicting of personal death and wounds”¹⁸ ... when we recognize Fear as not our own, not as something that we could possess or that others could be blamed for.

When we recognize death not as a future threat but as something always already going on, we remain with the question of style and expression, not with the urge to run away from.

*... Before I even realized, I said:
“Well, now we can only bury her.”¹⁹*

It was not until my days in kindergarten that I felt obliged to stay and not look away. Children notice and they ask. They want to see and want to know. When we encountered death together, I felt no need to conquer or realize it – just a playful willingness to follow and to see what it might be and where we might together go.

Sounds scary when death is in question – but does it have to be so?

Playful willingness to experiment with the world and to enliven it – whatever it takes, without the exact goal in mind, might open a crack in our culture of fear, opening the possibility to reimagine power, laws, hierarchies and different kinds of relationships that shape the world and our being (and dying) in it.

¹⁷ Field notes, March 15, 2019.

¹⁸ Williams, “Never Too Late?” 176.

¹⁹ Field notes, March 27, 2019.

*For a moment, Nina stared at me, eyes wide open and lips apart. Suddenly, she thrust her hands into mine and hollered: “Keep it safe!”
Swiftly she disappeared amongst the other children and trees.²⁰*

Lament

I looked at the ladybug Nina had left me – amazingly still, fragile and small on my palm. In all the gray and cold of that day, outside the noise of children in the yard and the rumble of Nina’s steps moving away, there was something trustful in the air.²¹

25th of March 2020

#Andratuttobene

“Everything is going to be ok” – a hashtag that has been trending in Italy since the crisis erupted.

... But at the moment there is no sunshine in sight. And although all pray for it, no one knows exactly when everything will be ok once again.

A part of the suffocating feeling that it is here to take us, when we encounter death there is grand opening of something untimely, holy, bigger than the world we know.

Death is not the end of times. It is a transition. A fold. An event *par excellence*.²²

It is never here, nor does it follow the linear path, but it *insists* within the exact moment as still to come and something that has already happened.²³ So when we encounter death, somehow we know not just that it is our fate – but that we are already stricken. “Every live event, every birth and novelty, is also a little death and an inching step towards a final death of the whole: the reddening of an autumn leaf; the poisoning of Socrates; the cracking of a deep intercontinental fault; the breaking of a shell as a chick emerges; the slaughter of another battery animal; your birth; your death; slow ageing or sudden disappearance.”²⁴

... untimely, holy, bigger than the world we know – always here, in the small things.

²⁰ Field notes, March 27, 2019.

²¹ Idem.

²² Vladimir Dukić, “The Two-Fold Structure of the Death-Event,” *Gnosis* 10, 3 (2009):1.

²³ Ibid., 2.

²⁴ Williams, “Never Too Late?” 172.

25th of March 2020

Small things are usually important
for the bereaved.
Caressing their cheek one last time,
holding their hand,
seeing them look dignified.
So many families ask if they can see the body one last time.
But it is forbidden.

Can't dress them up,
can't brush their hair,
can't put makeup on them.
Can't make them look nice and peaceful.

Relatives try to pass on
handwritten notes,
family heirlooms,
drawings
poems
in the hope they will be buried alongside.
But not one of these things will be put in the coffins.

During the burial, one or two people allowed.
No-one feels able to say a few words.
It is just silence.²⁵

“We are who we are because of the memory of those we have loved and carry within us.”²⁶ We are who we are for all those we've wept upon, for the ways we remember and the ways we mourn. In mourning there is belonging, the sense of in-betweenness and far-beyond, at the same time reach and solitude, making peace with life which none of us own. Both individuals and societies rely on established mechanisms – institutions and ritual – to incorporate death in everyday life, to accept it, regulate it, make peace and move on.²⁷

But thinking death in the times of pandemic, the stakes grow high. Cultural beliefs and practices got taken away by the fear of transmission, regulating death

²⁵ Adapted words of undertakers, from: Betizza, “Coronavirus: How Covid-19 is denying dignity to the dead in Italy,” March 25, 2020.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 28. Quoted in Joan Kirkby, “Remembrance of the Future: Derrida on Mourning,” *Social Semiotics* 16, 3 (2006): 464.

²⁷ Robert Neimeyer, Holly Prigerson and Betty Davies, “Mourning and Meaning,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 46 (2002): 241.

technically and practically. By denying the dead the shirt they loved and the last drawing their grandchild has made them as if someone took away all that they were and nuances of the lives they were living. By denying us the one last note, the one last look, the one last touch, someone has left us irreparably broken.

... and now we weep for our reach violently interrupted; for our solitude forced, not found. The very weep expresses itself becoming alive as a style, as a mode – leaking from the face we try to remember the conditions of how we might be and how we could become.

19th of March 2020

I sit in silence, eyes fixed on a laptop monitor. A convoy of army trucks stretches across the social networks driving more than 70 coffins through the streets of Bergamo. Each one contained the body being taken to a nearby city to be cremated.

In the night, Belgrade bridges and buildings light up in the colors of the Italian flag.

We went out on our terrace to applaud for all those who fight ... but tonight clapping strangely pierces through the ears and heart, like the cutting of a knife. #Andratuttobenne ...

19th of March 2020

“A generation has died in just over two weeks.”²⁸

Shall we ever bid farewell? How could we ever find solidarity and affirm our future, if we are always just the ones who lost?

One day, Tina brought to the kindergarten a large, gilded cup that her dad won in a chess tournament. As the children approached her in waves, touching the goblet and excitedly describing it to each other, I heard the teacher’s voice by my shoulder:

“Her dad passed away this fall. It was such a tragedy ...”

As Tina approached the desk to write her name on the chart we were making, she sat next to me and proudly stated: “I brought the cup to the kindergarten today!”

“I saw it. It’s very beautiful.”

“Yeah. My dad played chess, but he doesn’t play anymore because he’s dead.”

Calmly, she writes her name.

Carefully, I grabbed a pen to help her.

²⁸ Angela Giuffrida and Lorenzo Tondo, “A generation has died”: Italian province struggles to bury its coronavirus dead,” *The Guardian*, March 19, 2020.

*“My dad died last year, too”, I sad while outlining the letter.
Our pencils crossed on the paper and for a moment, in the full room and our
silence, I was only aware of their gentle scraping.
“You must be very proud of your dad”, I sad.
She nodded decisively.²⁹*

Although the past is always here with us, there is a degree of historical sense fatal to living thing.³⁰ To establish the boundary at which the past has to be forgotten, especially when in this difficult task rituals of culture and institutions of society let us down, we would have to rely on our joint capacity to heal, to develop anew, replacing what has been lost, transforming what is left.³¹

Encountering death with children in kindergarten, I’ve never found myself in the fields of misery. There was a lot of questioning, sudden strikes and secret aches of sadness, as well as confusing farewells, but the past has never become “the gravedigger” of our present.³²

Children notice and they ask. They acknowledge, but without the necessity to claim, neither as fate or as a personal loss. Children do not dwell in memories nor projections – they act, harnessing the sense of the possible that endures through any actualization, allowing us to differ from our conditions and ourselves so to keep on becoming with the world.

*Jane and Ida slowly approached, looking at my palm from a distance.
“What is that?”
“Nina found the ladybug, but it looks like she’s dead.”³³*

This is not a call for ignorance, on the contrary. This is a call for patience – to move with our times, however they might be, without the rush to recognize or predict them; to inhabit difficult places for long enough to discover cracks of hope in them; to build solidarity in a joint invention to make this loss and this life livable again.

*They took another step, leaning toward the bug, but still not touching it.
“How small is she ...” Ida said quietly, her face serious.
“And why did she die?” Jane looked worried.
“I don’t know. But it happens. That’s life.”³⁴*

²⁹ Field notes, February 22, 2019.

³⁰ Catherine Malabou, “History and the process of mourning in Hegel and Freud,” *Radical Philosophy* 106 (March/April 2001): 19.

³¹ Idem.

³² Idem.

³³ Field notes, March 27, 2019.

³⁴ Idem.

Momentum mori

Nina rushed as “the man on a mission”, bumping into other kids along the way. “Where are you going?” Philip and David asked as she pushed herself to pass between them. “I have to bury the ladybug!”, she retorted, with a hint of urgency in her voice – urgency which made Philip and David put down the branches which they played swords with and rush after her.³⁵

It was not in the words she said. Not in the fact that ladybug died. But somewhere, there was a sense of new, forbidden, *other*; something that depends on you. It was a rupture in practice and chronology, a moment that strikes “as if” there’s no past nor future, no rules and established regulations, but only *this*, in all of its uniqueness and thickness, revealing potentiality of what is already happening.

To differ from our conditions and ourselves – from established practice and chronology, we need to recognize our time as a critical moment – as a force and a chance, a time ready to be seized; performative, qualitative, creative time always in interplay with our thought-in-action, the unfolding decision, measured less by the hour and more by the event.

Is it possible to respond to death in such a creative performance, to seize it and acknowledge as a new critical juncture where something could happen and to move with it in further affirmation of life?

14th of March 2020

Videos have been shared on social media of Italian citizens singing and dancing during a nationwide lockdown. The videos, from various cities and towns, show people singing from balconies and windows in an attempt to boost morale, with all non-essential shops and services still closed in the country.³⁶

What if death is not a loss but a trace? Not a borderline, but a rupture for a different embodied becomings, different nuances of the void? What if every life matters for what it brings into matter – for ways of life, ways of death and ways of caring and remembrance as new conditions and expressions in becoming of the world?

13th of March 2020.

I realize it is not about me. What if I already got it anyway? There’s nowhere to escape – no need to do it. No panic urgency to save yourself – you’re already out of the game.

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ Matt Clinch, “Italians are singing songs from their windows to boost morale during coronavirus lockdown,” CNBC, March 14, 2020.

So what could you do to help others?

“What happens when ... part of life is never extinguished, because death is not an end? What happens when life is affirmed in death, despite its consumption of living creatures? Do we find reasons not to act, or to temper our acts, because absolute lateness never comes, because any resolution of *never again* resonates as nonsense in a world where nothing is ever the same again, where it is always too late and still too early in every passing instant and atom, and hence never too late *for this life here*?”³⁷

Such a perspective would bring on strong and immanent ethical and at the same time aesthetical responsibility towards our style of being and becoming with the others and the world – being it dead or alive.

Nina flew through the grass, turning around as if she knew exactly what she was looking for. The boys, rushing after, peeked out from behind her back. She grabbed something from the ground, turned in the jump, and rushed toward me.

“Nevena! Nevena!”, she ran to me and pushed her hands out in front again, “Can we bury her in this!?”

She was holding a nutshell.

*“Well ...” I started, but I don’t think anyone heard. They all-gathered, suddenly realizing the fuzz, scattered in different directions, announcing their intentions aloud. In a minute, Jane brought a piece of styrofoam to put under the ladybugs head, Ida brought a leaf to cover her, and David a dirty plastic spoon to dig the grave.*³⁸

I remember this deep and unselfconscious sense of intimacy, without a word, thought, goal or content, but only somewhere in the air this feeling that we are, that we do, that we belong to this moment in time, to this world, this life, to us – along with the ladybug, plastic spoon, leaf and a nutshell. There and then, around and with the dead ladybug, unsaid, unclear but real – there was a community and there was a purpose. It was a matter of affect – physical energy that unites a variety of human subjects through and with nonhuman objects, helping to constitute social relations prior to any deciphered meaning.

“Where no one will find her!”

“Where it’s soft!”

“Where it’s quiet!”

Soon the children decided to bury the ladybug under the bench.

While the boys were digging a grave in a hurry, I stayed with the girls to put the ladybug in her final resting place. The next minutes passed in the tips of the

³⁷ Williams, “Never Too Late?” 172.

³⁸ Field notes, March 27, 2019.

fingers, too big for a piece of styrofoam, shabby for the tenderness of the leaf, unwieldy for the fragile wings of a ladybug that needed to be dignifiedly fitted. *None of us said anything – not to disturb a thing with our breath.*³⁹

The common point in understanding rituals is that they serve as a response to the needs arising from the difficulties of loss – as order and meaning in the chaos of grief, as a symbol of transition to a new social status and as a material connection to that which is lost.⁴⁰ But what did we lose in kindergarten? It was never *our* bug. We didn't have any history nor plans with her. There's no logical ground for being personally shocked or distressed. No *need* for the ritual.

But there was a *desire* – a demand for change.

Unrealized, mutated, a burning sense of purpose without purpose. Apart from histories and plans for the future, apart from personal belongings and instrumental goals – we sensed and we desired it to matter. The purpose: not of the ladybug, not even of ourselves, but of change in our inter-connection. The purpose in finding the ways to *endure* in this place, and to invent some new and beautiful ways to enliven it.

15th of April 2020

The fifth week of the quarantine.

A few days ago, I noticed bread-crumbs on the terrace next to mine. Never before have I noticed anyone on that terrace. I wasn't sure if someone lives there. Now, bread-crumbs appear early in the morning every day. Pigeons started stopping by, firstly for short and shy, but now they've gotten used to coming. Today I've seen the neighbor, a small and old lady, spilling the bread-crumbs across the terrace with a smile.

The ethical and political task is not in denying the darkness, but in re-working it together from the inside, affirming potentia of life to endure, to continue, by becoming other-than-itself. It requires the will to power to operate artistically and situationally, inventing new and immanent possibilities of life; It requires investment of our energies in the ways we perform, for the sake of style, for enlivening different ways of living (... and different ways to die).

As death is a problem, unknown and unknowable, never finally given, encountering it we have not much established and indisputable meanings to rely on, but only each other and immanent movement of coming together to give legitimacy to our actions. "Only" each other to make any sense at all.

In becoming there is belonging,⁴¹ and this is how we belong: only in the im-

³⁹ Idem.

⁴⁰ Neimeyer, Prigerson and Davies, "Mourning and Meaning," 237.

⁴¹ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 76.

manence of process do we build our home. The encounter with death – if we could endure it – might function as a driver for inventing novel ways to inhabit this place together.

Outro

“We must be worthy of our times, to interact with them, in order to resist them, that is to say, to differ from them, especially when they perpetuate injustice and negativity.”⁴² To be worthy in times of death doesn’t mean to accept it, but to will the life itself so intensively, that death is not an option – that we’ve already made peace with it.⁴³

What we might learn, not from the children but from encountering darkness with them is to be *response-able* toward demand for change in a critical moment; to be open to what is happening in the immediacy, to the event as the potential bearer of new “constellations of universes of existence”⁴⁴ to resonate with it. This might help us not just endure the death encounters, but to rework even greater darknesses of our societies and our times in a collective and performative effort to make them endurable, workable, thinkable – to make life an art.

The story remains unfinished and uncertain as it can be...

The next time I came to kindergarten, a small congregation which took part in the funeral quickly gathered. In a rush and excitement they led me back to the grave, bewilderedly yelling and waving at each other the whole way. We’ve ran to the bench and crouched around it, lowering our heads almost to the ground.

But the ladybug was gone.

*Along with her coffin.*⁴⁵

... but we “build our house on the crack, so to speak.”⁴⁶

⁴² Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman, All Too Human* (March 1–2, 2017), 50.

⁴³ Dukić, “The Two-Fold Structure of the Death-Event,” 8.

⁴⁴ Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 18, quoted in Gunilla Dahlberg, “An ethico-aesthetic paradigm as an alternative discourse to the quality assurance discourse,” *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 17, 1 (2016): 130.

⁴⁵ Field notes, March 27, 2019.

⁴⁶ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 344.

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