

THE LIVING DYING BODY: ARRIVING AT THE AWARENESS OF ALL LIFE'S INTERDEPENDENCIES THROUGH A VIDEO ARTWORK

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I ask how an artwork handling mortality can address human belongingness to the rest of nature. I develop my argument from my video work, which I discuss through the concepts of ecosocialization and the “paradox of tragedy.” The orientation of curiosity in artistic experiences may aid in generating a more welcoming relationship with the diverse affects of life’s complexities and vulnerabilities. As a result of my artistic journey, I propose that art can help us abandon our aspirations of refuting human mortality and separating humans from the rest of nature and aid in recognizing all life’s interdependencies vital for adopting the ecosocial life orientation.

KEYWORDS

death, ecosocial approach, ecosocialization, more-than-human world, mortality, the paradox of tragedy, video art

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INTRODUCTION

A modern human living in a (post)industrial society has a strange relationship with death. Even though people are constantly exposed to real and fictional deaths through media, the relationship to death is anything but natural (Hakola, 2015). Institutionalization has removed human death away from people's everyday lives so that it now only belongs to hospitals and nursing homes (Pohjola, 2019). People know it to be a biological fact that everyone will die someday, but this knowledge about death does not seem to be accepted on experiential and psychological levels (Hakola, 2015; Heinämaa, 2015; Pohjola, 2019); nothing feels as wrong as death when one has to face it in their own life.

Cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker (1973; 1975) has argued that humans' fear of death has led humans to hyper-separate themselves from other animals and deny their creatureliness. Humans living in (post)industrial societies have developed various models of cultural behaviors to distinguish themselves from other animals (Becker, 1973; 1975). We train our bodies and minds toward idealizations, shower off our natural body odors, use bathrooms to keep our bodily behaviors private, and dress up and act according to social norms. Humans have also created diverse ways to take other than human lives under their control (Martusewicz et al., 2015). For example, food production and the forest industry have been developed to benefit humans at the cost of the well-being and diversity of more-than-humans. In short, many of our cultural features seem to be developed to highlight the statement "I am *not* an animal" (Goldenberg et al., 2001; Marino & Mountain, 2015), but now we have gradually become aware that this hyper-separation between humans and other animals may be one of the key reasons behind the ecocrisis (Plumwood, 2002). Transformation in attitudes regarding humans' relationship with other life forms has been recognized as crucial in achieving ecosocially sustainable life orientation (Foster et al., 2019b).

In this paper, I ask how an artwork exploring mortality can address human belongingness to the rest of nature and generate ecosocial life orientation. I pose this question partly retrospectively—meaning that my artistic research was not driven by the question of human denial of death (Becker, 1973) or the theoretical explanations of *the paradox of tragedy* (Smuts, 2009), which

It is suggested that the reader views the artwork *The Body* created by the author/artist prior to reading the article (<https://youtu.be/RTC-jm9iCQs>).

explain why at the same time people are afraid of mortality they still seek to experience fictional deaths. These inquiries, however, responded to the reflections on my artistic practice. Therefore, in this article, I will discuss particularly my video artwork entitled *The Body*, through these theories as well as my previous research on ecosocialization (Keto & Foster, 2021; also Foster et al., 2022a), which, in short, means that human social life must be ontologically understood as multispecies.

HUMAN DENIAL OF DEATH AND CREATURELINES

Physiologically, death means the cessation of vital bodily functions. Experientially, the meaning of death can be understood from the perspectives of ontology, spirituality, and politics (Davis, 2008; Whitaker, 2010). Thus, studying death and the practices of dying and mourning as philosophical, social, and cultural phenomena is of great interest in various fields of modern sciences (Hakola, 2015).

In (post)industrial societies, the institutionalization of death has removed the natural phenomena from everyday situations into medical institutions to be dealt with by professionals. Thus, in our daily lives, mortality is treated as taboo or considered a personal issue hardly discussed, even though we will all face death at some point in our lives and deal with all the complex emotions, such as fear, helplessness, and despair that it carries (Hakola, 2015). Perhaps the mystery of death and human's complex relationship with mortality has also provoked many artists and art scholars to address death in their works (Doss, 2002; Guthke, 1999; Irving, 2007; Townsend, 2008). For example, contemporary artists, such as Ana Mendieta, Richard Long, and many more, have captured traces of their physical presence in imprints, casts, and photographs; in this way, they have evoked questions of mortality through the absence of their bodies (Warr & Jones, 2012).

With the development of medical science, human has also become misled that death can be relayed indefinitely (Hänninen & Pajunen, 2006; Pohjola, 2019). Perhaps because death is not discussed as part of everyday life, a fear of death is reinforced. Furthermore, death has become an inexplicable mystery because, as an experience, death is impossible to research objectively. To manage the fear of death, humans in (post)industrial societies have created complex cultural practices that raise humans' (immortal) bodies above the other than

human (mortal) bodies (Becker, 1975; Goldenberg et al., 2001):

Mortality is connected to the natural, animal side of his existence; and so man reaches beyond and away from that side. So much so that he tries to deny it completely. As soon as man reached new historical forms of power, he turned against the animals with whom he had previously identified—with a vengeance, as we now see, because the animals embodied what man feared most, a nameless and faceless death. (Becker, 1975, p. 92)

Human mortality seems to evoke fear because we do not know what happens in death. The fear of death is thus not a fear of physical death but the fear of emotional and existential stress it arises. Does life end there, or is there anything else after that? Also, a dying person or another being reminds us of our mortality, and therefore it may be challenging to face a dying or grieving person. However, dealing with others' deaths and gradually growing into the idea of one's mortality may give life a more profound meaning. When acknowledging death as a natural part of life, one can become free from existential death anxiety and also gain wisdom about the possibilities of living a meaningful life (Heinämaa, 2015).

Sara Heinämaa (2015) argues that we can make sense of death through the two phenomenological understandings of the body as a perceiving subject and as a perceptual object (Merleau-Ponty, 2008). Our capacity to objectify something we are living through in our bodies makes it possible to experience such things as mortality, Heinämaa (2015) argues. We are aware that we cannot experience our death on a level of perceptual objectification, but we can experience the death of others. The death of others—humans and more-than-human—thus works as an analog to the understanding of our own mortality.

ECOSOCIAL FRAMEWORK FOR LIFE AND DEATH

Birth and death create the extremes of experiential life, which the individual can never reach: a person does not remember one's own birth, and likewise, one's own death is an unattainable point that is always some distance away. One suggested possibility is to look at the sense of life and death from the perspective of ecosocialization (Keto & Foster, 2021), which extends the idea of

human-centric socialization to include more-than-humans too.

Various planetary crises, such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity, have driven humanity to a situation where understanding the entanglement of human social life with other realities has become vital for humans' and others' lives to continue on Earth. In recent years, the ecosocial approach (Salonen & Bardy, 2015) has become a significant perspective in Finnish educational philosophy. Ecosocial issues have been examined in areas such as virtue ethics (Pulkki, 2021; Värri, 2018), justice (Foster & Turkki, 2021; Foster et al., 2019a), well-being (Salonen, 2014), socio-cultural animation (Järvinen et al., 2020), and art education (e.g., Foster, 2017; Foster et al., 2019a; Foster et al., 2022b; Suominen, 2016). These ecosocial insights into educational philosophy have also informed the ecosocialization theory (Keto & Foster, 2021; also Foster et al., 2022a).

Combining the perspectives of ecology and phenomenology, the conceptualization of ecosocialization seeks to promote an understanding of how human socialization always takes place in multispecies communities where various human and more-than-human agents interact with each other (Keto & Foster, 2021). So, the ecosocialization theory first describes how the ecosocial world must always be understood ontologically as a *more-than-human world* (Abram, 1996). Second, the theory states how participation in the more-than-human world happens in the multispecies agents' relational bodies before the subject-object distinction and conscious reflection (Bannon, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1968; Värri, 2018). Third, recognizing these interactions and participation in the more-than-human world is vital because it helps form ecosocially sustainable communities (Keto & Foster, 2021).

Ecosocialization happens inevitably, without conscious efforts or educational interventions, but the problem is that we ignore this phenomenon. With the help of a phenomenological understanding of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 2008; Heinämaa, 2015) as a physical, psychological, and spiritual whole, we can better understand how humans are ontologically intertwined with other forms of life and how the understanding of this embodied entanglement is ethically crucial (Aaltola, 2018). American poet, philosopher, and environmentalist Wendell Berry (1996) has also argued that our ignorance of the holistic concept of the body is the

main reason behind the unsustainable culture of (post)industrial societies:

At some point we assume that the life of the body would be the business of grocers and medical doctors, who need take no interest in the spirit, whereas the life of the spirit would be the business of churches, which would have at best only a negative interest in the body. (p. 104)

In the (post)industrial societies, human mortality is almost solely understood as the business of medical science. However, the physiologist's attitude toward the body and death is only one of our many perspectives. The experiential perspectives, such as those of the dying person or the mourner, are often overlooked (Heinämaa, 2015; Pohjola, 2019.) Following the theory of ecosocialization, the physiology of death can be conceptualized with the help of ecological knowledge. With the phenomenological approach, death can be viewed as a human experience and the fundamental element affecting our perceptions of reality. By combining these two perspectives of ecology and phenomenology, death can be viewed based on the idea of the body as the symbiosis of multispecies agents serving various co-beneficial physical functions and life-cycles (Gilbert et al., 2012) and the body as a multisensible, experiencing, and expressive creature belonging and participating in the more-than-human world (Abram, 1996).

THE PARADOX OF TRAGEDY

The human-animal lives in the paradoxical realm: on the one hand, human is very aware of the physical fact that someday everything that lives must die but on the other hand, with various cultural practices, humans try to manage their existential fear of death and mortality (Becker, 1975; Goldenber et al., 2001; Marino & Mountain, 2015). Even if it seems that people are trying to protect themselves from concerns about death in real life, they still want to experience art and entertainment that portrays death. This phenomenon can be described as the paradox of tragedy (Smuts, 2009). We see fictional deaths in hospital and crime series and cry with film characters mourning the death of their child or partner. Thus "[i]t certainly seems that people are far more willing to experience negative emotions in response to artworks than in their daily lives" (Smuts, 2009, p. 39).

Aaron Smuts (2009) has discussed the paradox of tragedy with six solutions—conversion, control, compensatory, meta-response, catharsis, and rich experience theories—to understand the difference between the types of experiences humans try to avoid daily but seek out in response to artworks. Rather than a single problem, the paradox of tragedy refers to diverse issues experienced differently by each individual and in response to different artistic experiences. The paradox of tragedy can also be viewed as a moral problem; is it ethically right to take pleasure in watching the suffering of (fictional) others? However, most of the research about this paradox has been driven by the motivational question “[w]hat motivates audiences to pursue artworks that arouse negative emotional responses?” (p. 40) or the difference question “[w]hy are people more willing to experience painful affect in response to art than in their normal lives?” (p. 43).

The difference question can be addressed by the control theory (Menninghaus et al., 2017; Smuts, 2009), which implies that because a person receiving art has personal control over the exposure to the artwork, it helps keep the negative emotions from becoming too overpowering to manage. The difficult events and negative emotions in daily lives are not similarly controlled, and thus the painful affects are more challenging to handle. However, control theorists cannot answer the motivational question of why we want to experience such emotions at all. Indeed, negative affects in response to the art may be easier to tolerate than difficult emotions in daily lives because we can control their occurrence, but this does not eliminate the pain (Smuts, 2009, p. 46).

Conversion theorists have come to the conclusion that difficult emotions in response to art must be somehow converted to pleasure; perhaps it is the whole experience of receiving art that feels pleasurable in retrospect, and that is why the difficult topics, such as death, are more accepted and the painful affects it temporarily arouses are even forgotten at the end (Smuts, 2009, pp. 43–44). Moreover, the pleasure felt in response to painful art is often explained by following Aristotle’s idea of cathartic effect (p. 50), purifying or expelling the negative emotions experienced in art. The empowering effect of painful art arises thus by overcoming our fear (of death). Compensation theorists similarly assume that other pleasures must compensate for any painful reactions; this can be done with the artistic craft

of the narrative or composition or by raising “the awareness that we are sympathetic creatures responsive to the suffering of others” (Smuts, 2009, p. 40). Meta-response theorists, likewise, stress the overall experience rather than a single negative emotion: people want to experience tragedy because “they take pleasure in the reactions they have to such fictions” (Smuts, 2009, p. 49; also Markowitz, 1992).

Smuts (2009) argues that the problem with these single explanations is that they all assume “that our response to tragedy and other painful art is predominantly one of pleasure” (p. 52). Perhaps the shame of watching the pain and suffering of others in fictional representations forces us to seek moral justifications, which then obscures the other motivational factors than pleasure. The desire to experience painful art can be explained from the pain (and its conversion to pleasure) but in contrast from various other motivational reasons, too, as rich experience theorists argue (pp. 51–53). The experience in response to art can be painful but still valuable for aesthetic or cognitive reasons. Most of all, the multifaceted and complex experience in response to art is often a reward itself since one is “seldom as fully engaged intellectually, perceptually, and affectively” (Smuts, 2009, p. 53) as when experiencing diverse painful and pleasurable emotions in a safe frame provided by an artwork.

COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY AND VIDEO ART

Before analyzing my artistic practice and video artwork from the perspective of Smuts’s (2009) ideas of the paradox of tragedy as well as the theory of ecosocialization (Keto & Foster, 2021) in my mind, I will overview the art-based project that the work was conducted as part of. *The Body* (2021) is a video art piece I created from a memory story, *Life Cycle*, collected in the *Reconnect / Recollect* project (2019–2021). The memory story describes a child’s encounter with a bird’s dead body. I worked the memory vignette into my previously filmed video material of a dead bird eaten by maggots and my movement exploration with that material. The montage-like work moves between narrative and lyrical poetry, between a straight-forward documentary and a mystery story, and between illustration and pattern abstraction. So far, the work has been exhibited in my *More than human*

solo exhibition in June 2021 at the Saskia Gallery, Tampere, Finland, as well as in two online conferences.

The *Reconnect/Recollect* (2021) was an international research project that combines artistic practices with traditional academic research. The project explores childhoods during the Cold War through the participants's memories — both scholars and artists. In the fall of 2019, participants produced more than 250 memory vignettes in five different workshops. Unfortunately, I did not attend the workshops myself since I started to work on the project in the fall of 2020. However, the memory stories have been archived on the project website (*Recollect/Reconnect*, 2021), through which I and anyone else could access them.

In the memory workshops, a method of collective biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006) was used to create richly descriptive narratives of childhood experiences. Collective biography is an intensive group process of sharing, listening, questioning, and rewriting the memories to describe the sensations and emotions of the remembered experiences (Davies & Gannon, 2006). The idea is that the one who listens to the memory can potentially feel and sense what the child at the described moment had experienced. As the workshop participants collaboratively create memory stories, they explore moments of affective and material entanglements that are collectively recognized and made sense of (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Haug et al., 1987). Because memory stories are developed collectively, they capture more than one person's experience. The memories are also written in the third person to invite experiences that others can relate to. The artistic creation of *The Body* further challenged the idea of an individual's memory in various ways.

The video material was filmed in Iceland in the summer of 2017. I was visiting an abandoned fish factory which is now turned into an art gallery. I walked outside the building by myself and noticed a dead bird on the ground. I saw white maggots crawling all over the body and was immediately captivated to film the scene with my mobile phone. I went closer with my camera to get a good view of the insects doing their work in tearing the bird's dead body in part. I was fascinated by this unexpected encounter.

Later in the day, I showed the footage to my artist friend with whom I was working in Iceland. We explored the video material by projecting it onto my body. I sang a lullaby and moved gently in the warm beam of the projection. I already then found the original footage and my movement exploration with the video exciting. However, both materials stayed untouched until I ran into the memory story in October 2020, when I started to work on the *Reconnect / Recollect* project.

I arrived at the question of death unintentionally. The topic hit me almost as suddenly as an unexpected occurrence of death. I was not planning to investigate mortality in my artwork, but when I discovered the memory story of the dead bird, I remembered my own encounter with maggots eating the remnants of a bird in Iceland. Thus, in some sense, it could be said that the work was not created but found from the memory archive and my own archive of video materials. To be clear, I did work on the memory story in various ways to form the final script and composition. Finally, I decided to use online software to generate text-to-speech using computer-generated voice. The machine voice has no emotions when reading the text. This allows the receivers of the work to interpret the work more freely. However, the following section does not aim to present all the diverse emotions and possible interpretations of the work; instead, I will illuminate some of my own retrospective responses to *The Body*.

My reflections could be described as a theory-driven content analysis since I will reflect on my video work with Smuts's (2009) thoughts on the paradox of tragedy in my mind. The purpose is not to evaluate or offer generalizations of interpreting the artwork but instead to find a few significant aspects and learning points from this particular work of art.

PERCEPTIONS, AFFECTS, AND INTELLECTUAL RESPONSES IN EXPERIENCING THE VIDEO ARTWORK

Informed by Smuts's (2009) analysis of the diverse theoretical explanations of the paradox of tragedy, I interpret my own experiences in practicing and receiving (in this case, my own) art and discuss my findings under three pairs:

Control and seduction, which mainly stem from the control and compensation theories of negative affects in art

Beauty and pain, which follow the ideas of conversion and meta-response theorists

Emotions and experience, which focus on catharsis and the rich experience theory

These theories are not exclusive. Thus, my reflections, too, flow from one category to another. However, these categorizations help me illuminate the diversity of experiences and affects that the artwork provoked.

Control and seduction

When I was exhibiting *The Body* in an art gallery, one visitor thought the work was extremely dark and sad. Some others experienced the work as comforting because it stated the fact of life: someday, we will all die. The 3.5 minutes long video was projected on the wall, and the sound was coming from the speakers (Figure 1). The video was played in a loop, and the audience could walk into the room anytime. Two chairs were placed facing the projection, so the exhibition visitor had a chance to sit down and watch the video as long as they wished for, or if they liked, they could pass the work without almost any notice. The visitors had great control over their exposure to the work, so if they experienced the work as too painful, dull, or uninteresting, they could simply walk away at any time. According to the control theorists, the power of control is crucial to why “we seek out negative emotions from art

when we avoid them in real life” (Smuts, 2009, p. 45). Especially in a gallery setting, compared to a movie theater, spectators have great control to choose if and how they want to experience the artwork. However, they may not completely control the emotional state that the experience may seduce them into.

When encountering the artwork, the perceiver may first acknowledge the narrating voice or the stunning light on the human figure. Then, when the work is observed longer and more closely, one suddenly may become surprised by the maggots crawling all over the body (Figure 2). The mechanical computer-generated voice tells the memory of a dead body as if it was nothing. This kind of coldness in the narration may bring a feeling of cruelty. Death as a topic is profound, but the narrating voice has no emotions, which may cause some sense of puzzlement for the observer.

The visuals of the video have polarization in them too. On the one hand, the image is just appealing, but on the other hand, disturbing. In the end, the work’s overall tone is not disgusting or terrible. Instead, the work appears captivating when child-like curiosity overlaps with the melancholy of the memory. I remember one visitor telling me how the work seduced him to watch the whole thing from the beginning to the end. He articulated how the affective experience surprised him because he had never before enjoyed video art. So, the observer may become similarly curious as the child of the story who decides to uncover the bird’s grave to see what is happening to its body under the soil. I also experienced this kind of curiosity when I encountered and then decided to film the dead bird and the maggots in Iceland.

There must be something in artwork in a gallery installation that captures the spectator’s curiosity. Perhaps in *The Body*, the mystery of the narration took one’s attention: whose body was found under the soil? The script is purposely composed so that the dead body can be first understood as a human body. Only the end of the narration reveals that the memory talks about the body of a dead bird. One spectator told me that she was greatly relieved when she discovered that the buried body was not a human child as she had first assumed. As the artist, I hope the work pushes at least some observers to reflect: whose bodies and deaths matter? Whom do we empathize with, just humans or more-than-humans? Compensation theorists have identified curiosity and cognitive pleasures as motivations for experiencing pain in art



Figure 1. *The Body* video work was projected directly on the gallery wall. Photo: Raisa Foster.



Figure 2. The artwork's still image shows two superimposed videos, connecting the maggots with the dead bird and the human body in motion. From *The Body* by Raisa Foster.

(Smuts, 2009, p. 47). First, the child-like curiosity and then the cognitive reflections that the video may stir can be thus speculated to be reasons why the work is experienced as somehow significant. The work may be experienced as pleasurable despite its intense and sad, and for some even disgusting and fearful, topic.

Beauty and pain

Even though the topic of the video is intense, and it may provoke negative affects, the aesthetic choices of the work are somehow subtle. The straightforwardness of the voice, combined with the tenderness of the moves, creates a certain solidness to the artwork. The gentleness comes from the delicate gestures, the internal focus of the performer, the slow movements of the hands, and the subtle motions of the lips (Figure 3). The flickering light on the body creates an illusion of a morning sun piercing through the leaves. Vital colors of green grass, in contrast with the monochromatic coloring of the feathers and bones of the dead bird, are projected on a human body in motion. The perceiver of this artwork can rest in this beautiful image. The painful topic is turned into pleasure, as the conversion theorist suggests (Smuts, 2009), with the aesthetic choices of the narration and composition.

Following David Hume, Smuts (2009) argues that the conversion theory assumes beauty as the prime emotion that overrules painful responses in art (p. 44). However, behind the beautiful images, death is still present in the video artwork, and the observer may not find the work pleasurable but rather sad and painful. The work may cause other negative responses, such as fear for some observers. Perhaps the fear comes from the unknown,

realizing that we cannot know what happens after death. Alternatively, the fear may come from realizing that this will happen to all of us after death: we will simply decompose and eventually disappear. Even though the work stirs negative affects, the observer may experience cognitive pleasure in witnessing a very fact of life that one knows about but has forgotten and is now reminded again about through the artwork.

One spectator told me how *The Body* brought a particular childhood memory of his own to the surface. He remembered, as a child witnessing a little bird hitting a window and falling to the ground lifeless. He recalled feeling extremely sad for the bird but how his father was very angry with him and told him not to cry over an animal. This memory led the spectator and me to discuss how these little moments in life, especially careless words from adults, can have a long-lasting impact on our attitudes towards the lives and deaths of more-than-humans. For this particular observer, the significance of the artwork came from the meta-response to art (Smuts, 2009, p. 49). The man took pleasure in his childhood memory and the ethical reflections that the work initiated.

Emotions and experience

As I have observed through my personal responses and some of the spectators' comments, the video art may incite profound emotions, such as curiosity, surprise, fear, disgust, and fascination, in the perceivers' diverse experiences. However, not just diverse emotions create a rich experience in response to an artwork. When encountering art, the immediate percepts of sounds, moods, colors,

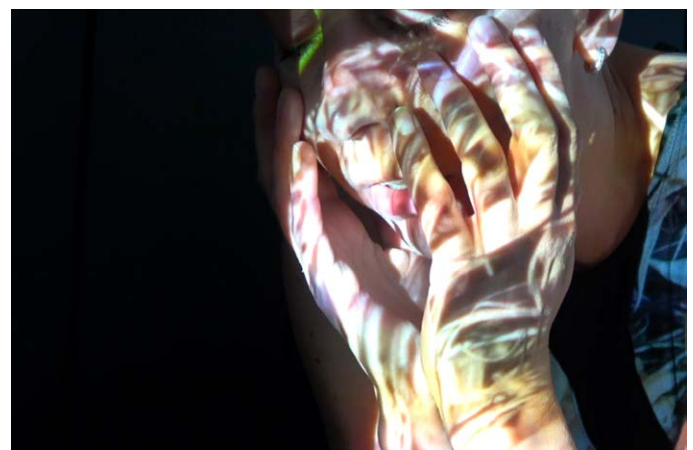


Figure 3. The detail from the video shows the performer's internal focus and delicate gestures. From *The Body* by Raisa Foster.

and movements hit our bodies first. Furthermore, we can experience intellectual pleasure in our reflections long after encountering the artwork. The rich experience is formed by intertwining sensory, emotional, and cognitive responses to art. In short, the rich experience theorists suggest that it is not the pleasure but the overall experience with all kinds of, even conflicting affects, in the art, we are after (Smuts, 2009, p. 52).

Art provides a safe space to investigate topics that arouse distress in real-life situations. *The Body* offers an opportunity to examine life after death. The video shows how death connects humans with other species in a very concrete way. The maggots make visible how the bird's body is decomposed. The observer of the artwork thus senses how humans are necessarily living and dying in multispecies relations (Keto & Foster, 2021): the bird's dead body is full of the life of other creatures. Life and death fuse in front of the child's eyes in the story, and the observer of the video piece witnesses how death and life exist interdependently as these diverse creatures connect in the web of life.

The nothingness of death is questioned through the image of a lifeless bird full of animated maggots. The spectator is led to reflect on the very fact of life that as I am born, not from nothingness but from something, my dead body too will not end up in nothingness, but it will breed a new life again. The bright green color reflecting on the body suggests a new beginning (Figure 4), which brings a certain sense of relief: there *is* something after life. Perhaps, the response could even be described as a cathartic experience; one gets



Figure 4. The still image of the video shows how green light appears on the body, suggesting a new beginning; there is something after my death.
From *The Body* by Raisa Foster.

purified from the fear of death. Nevertheless, at the same time, the mystery is put back to the ordinary. Life is put back to death, and death back to life.

FROM THE DENIAL OF MORTALITY TO RELIEF TO LIVE AN ECOSOCIALLY MEANINGFUL LIFE

At birth, the first breath of air binds us to the more-than-human world. Human animals breathe in the air the plants breathe out, and vice versa (Abram, 1996). Before a human is even born, the baby in the womb is affected by multiple microbes, and this necessary cooperation between multispecies communities continues throughout life. So, in addition to other people, other animals and plants form a significant living and interactive environment for humans (Keto & Foster, 2021). Diverse agents of multispecies communities participate in the shared world of the living and dying.

The idea of finality, in particular, makes facing death difficult. Death is a one-way street from which there is no going back for an individual. *The Body* video work troubles this idea of individual autonomy (Pulkki, 2021) and offers a sense of fulfillment from recognizing what happens after death: one's body may die, but life continues in the bodies of others. The work triggers awareness of mortality, but this realization does not paralyze but raises curiosity about life after death. The awareness does not need to mean a spiritual belief in the afterlife but the very concrete fact that someone must die for the other to live. So, through death, it can be recognized how all life exists interdependently.

Death is the door to a hidden world, and this unknownness of death often causes fear. However, the anxiety, pain, and terror experienced in the face of death can widen a person to think about what is truly valuable and lasting in life and what is not. This kind of existential reflection requires a person not to deny mortality but to agree to deal with the complex perceptions, affects, and existential questions death raises. Thus, the skill of death (and living) cannot be a controlled project; instead, it is simply a matter of recognizing the vulnerabilities and unexpectancies of life (and death).

I conclude by suggesting that through artistic practice and presentations, we can cultivate curiosity about the unknown of death and the

mysteries of life and celebrate all the diverse affects that arise. As a result, art can help us abandon our aspirations of denying human mortality and separating humans from the rest of nature and arrive at the awareness of all life's interdependencies, which is vital for adopting the ecosocial life orientation.

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