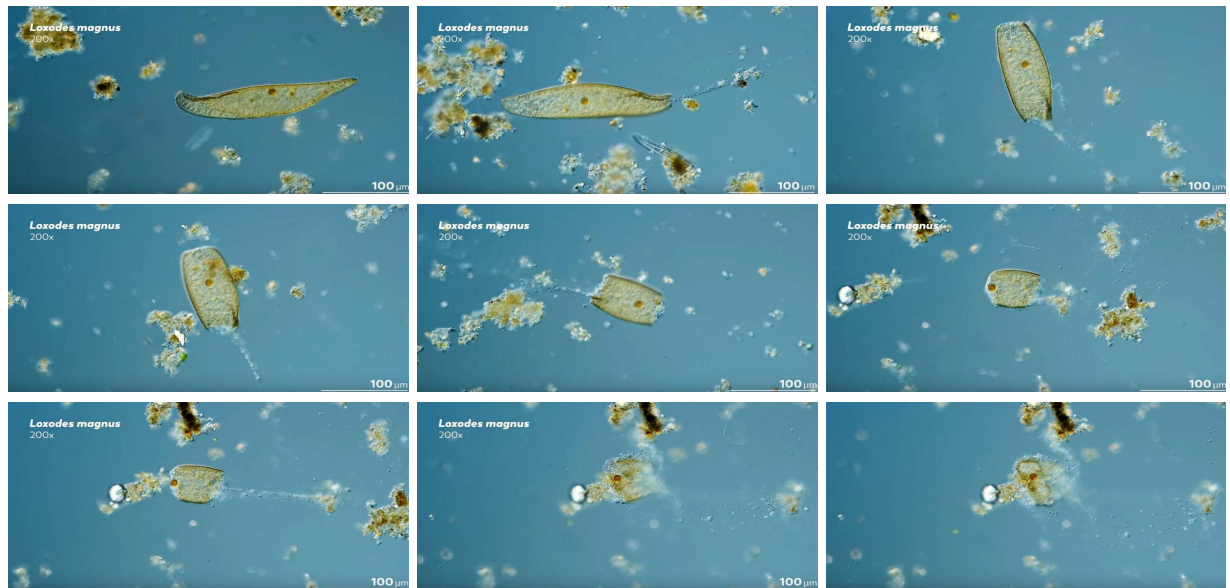


# I Watch a *Loxodes* Die

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I WATCH A LITTLE unicellular ciliate called *Loxodes magnus* swim through its aquatic world.<sup>1</sup> I watch the moment its plasma membrane ruptures at one end, causing the creature's cytoplasm to begin to ooze out, leaving a trail of organelles. Seemingly unaware, the *Loxodes* continues to swim, propelled by its cilia—microscopic paddles protruding from its membrane.

Unable to repair its membrane, the rupturing worsens, and the cytoplasmic trail becomes a spill. Now both ends of its single-celled body rupture. Organelles and bits of membrane are being shed rapidly, as if tugged and ripped by some rapacious reaper.

And still the *Loxodes* swims. Does it swim to escape this insidious unseen predator that would see fit to dissociate the *Loxodes*'s body in such undignified way? Or does it swim because it must swim?

This *Loxodes* is about to die. It comes to rest alongside some white blob, as if summoned there. What remains of its body now dissociates. And the ensemble of organelles which constitute the *Loxodes* a mere few minutes ago is now no more. The state of chemical non-equilibrium which was its life has now given way to equilibrium. It has become its environment.

That, right there, was a moment of death. I watched the *Loxodes* die. And in that moment, my own vacuoles of sadness that sit behind my eyes also rupture. I cannot offer the little creature any antidote to its death. I cannot offer it any elixir of an afterlife. There will be no ceremony, no moment of silence, no eulogy save for here.

Death—that moment when a life ceases, when a system that harnesses energy to keep itself in a state of chemical non-equilibrium ceases. That instant when the organic machinery, forged by Time since Deep Time to enable a life for a time to be, fails.

I watched a *Loxodes* die.

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<sup>1</sup>This essay was inspired in part by:

“What Is Death”

Journey to the Microcosmos

24 November 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibpdNqrtar0>