



THE LIMITS OF COMMUNICATION AND THE ETHICS OF SUICIDE IN CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

13.-14. DECEMBER 2024





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In the past two decades, there has been a distressing rise in suicides worldwide. In what has been termed an “age of crisis” – encompassing economic, environmental, and health crises – these rising statistics may underscore the urgency of acknowledging the intersectional impact of these potential risk factors and may even require social and individual countermeasures.

Hidden behind these statistical figures are the individual life stories of those who choose to end their lives, the profound impact on their families and social networks, and the ensuing silences, whether caused by the traumatic aftermath or the conscious effort to prevent the emulation of suicidal behavior by others. Contrary to this cautious approach, there exists a plethora of cultural products that tackle the topic directly and, at times, insensitively, potentially leading to adverse effects. Examples include the novel and TV show "13 Reasons Why," the film "Heathers," and the novel and film "A Long Way Down."

Simultaneously, particularly in neo-liberal cultures, certain constructed values result in a form of suicide stigma that prevents help-seeking and thus may exacerbate suicidal ideation. As a result, the very system that, as may be argued, causes a high degree of mental distress, communicates a hegemonic ideology that counteracts any attempt at dealing with its impact.

This conference aims to discuss and re-evaluate the ethics as well as the historical and cultural roots of representing and communicating suicide across various media, spanning literature, film, television, social media, and digital games. The objective is to explore the ethics, boundaries, and potential of representing suicide within increasingly global and multimodal discourses to enhance mental health literacy.

December 13

3pm Welcoming Remarks

(Olaf Berwald, MTSU, United States; Alexander Kästner, TU Dresden, Germany; Christoph Singer, University of Innsbruck, Austria; Cornelia Wächter, TU Dresden)

3:30-4:30pm Session 1

Moderator: Cornelia Wächter, TU Dresden

Jomy Abraham (GITAM University, India), “Writing While Dying: Reading the Suicide Notes of Farmers in India”

Philip Egbule (University of Delta, Nigeria), “The Prevalence of Mental Health Crises in the Global South: Implications on Suicide Rates and Intervention Strategies”

4:30-5:30pm Session 2

Moderator: Nina Opgen-Rhein, TU Dresden, Germany

Chukwuemeke Buzome and Juliet Agbefe Wawe (Delta State University, Nigeria), “Reviews on Perspectives on the Prevalence of Suicidal Actions as a Manifestation of Mental Health Challenges in Nigeria”

Charles Khamala (Africa Nazarene University, Kenya), “Paradox of Covert Suicides and Prosecuting Shakahola’s Ritual Deaths as Murder”

5:30-6pm Break

6-7:00pm Session 3

Moderator: Olaf Berwald (MTSU, United States)

Theresa Heyer (University of Strasbourg, France), “Breaking the Silence: Suicide in German Graphic Novels”

Kari Neely (MTSU, United States), “Intertextual Affinity and Absolution: The Use of Visual Medium in Processing Suicide”

December 14

3-4pm Session 4

Moderator: Christine Gerwin, TU Dresden, Germany

Mariza Brooks (University of the Free State, South Africa), “The Role of Suicide Narratives in Normalising Conversations about Suicide: Literature as a Catalyst for Social Change”

Katrin Röder (University of Dortmund, Germany), “Suicidality and Its Representation in Autobiographical Storytelling at the Intersection of Mental Distress, Disability, Femininity and Cultural Difference”

4-5pm Session 5

Moderator: Christoph Singer (University of Innsbruck, Austria)

Felix Christen (University of Osnabrück, Germany), “Challenging Silence: Representations of Major Depressive Disorders and the Ethics of Suicide”

Olaf Berwald (MTSU, United States), “Suiscribes: Writing Acts of Suicide and Hermeneutic Humility”

5-5:30pm Break

5:30-6:30pm Session 6

Moderator: Alexander Kästner (TU Dresden, Germany)

Shweta Arora (National University of Singapore), “Marginalized Identities and Suicidal Ideation: A Radical Feminist Analysis of Yosano Akiko’s Keshimochi (Poppyseed Rice Cakes, 1909)”

Mona Jafari (Tehran, Iran), “Suicide as Phantasmatic Sovereignty: Herman Melville’s Gothic Parody of Transcendentalism in Bartleby, the Scrivener”

6:30-7:30pm Session 7

Moderator: Alexander Kästner, TU Dresden, Germany

Arzu Karaduman (Marist College, United States), “Ethics of Suicide in Contemporary Global Cinemas”

Christoph Singer (University of Innsbruck, Austria), “The Longest Walk: Gamifying the Psychogeographies of Suicide”

7:30-8pm Concluding Remarks

Jomy Abraham is assistant professor at the Department of English and Other Languages, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, GITAM University, Hyderabad, India, since 2023. Prior to joining the university, she was a Visiting Scholar at the South Asia Program, Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, Cornell University, New York. She received her PhD in 2021, from the Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her doctoral research is located at the intersection of Literary Theory, Environmental Humanities and Critical Suicidology Studies, and focused on the idea of 'author' and 'text' in the context of suicide notes written by the farmers in India. She obtained her MPhil degree from the Department of English, School of Humanities, University of Hyderabad in 2014. Her areas of interests include Literary Theory, Death and Contemporary Cultures, Environmental Humanities, Law and Literature, Indian English Fiction, Gender and Literature, and Critical Suicidology Studies.

Shweta Arora is a PhD candidate [ABD] at the National University of Singapore [NUS], and a visiting scholar at the University of California, Los Angeles, specialising in gender studies. Her research focuses on Japanese women writers and the reception of Indian media in Japan. Before joining NUS, she was a Japanese language lecturer at Delhi University [India], where she also received her master's degree in Japanese. Her scholarly pursuits have led her to Osaka University [Japan] as a research scholar for two years, sponsored by MEXT [Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology], and to Kyoto University [Japan] as a research fellow for a year, supported by the Japan Foundation fellowship.

Olaf Berwald is Department Chair of World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures and Professor of German at Middle Tennessee State University. His publications include the co-edited volumes *Thomas Bernhard's Afterlives*, (2nd edition 2022), *Timescapes of Waiting: Spaces and Stasis, Delay and Deferral* (2019), *La globalización y sus espejismos* (2009), *Der untote Gott: Religion und Ästhetik in der deutschen und österreichischen Literatur* (2007). He is also the editor of the *Companion to the Works of Max Frisch* (2013), and the author of two monographs, *An Introduction to the Works of Peter Weiss* (2003), and *Philipp Melanchthons Sicht der Rhetorik* (1994).

Mariza Brooks is a lecturer at the University of the Free State (Bloemfontein Campus). Her teaching and research focus on the power of literature to illuminate, question, and challenge structures and attitudes that perpetuate inequality. Her work focuses in particular on representations of death and dying in literature, the backlash against feminism, as well as the confessional poetry of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, and specialist authors Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

Felix Christen is a Heisenberg Fellow of the German Research Foundation at the University of Osnabrück. He also taught at the universities of Heidelberg, Zurich, and London, as well as Brown University. His research focuses on the intersection of literature, materiality, and ethics. Dr. Christen published *Das Jetzt der Lektüre: Zur Edition und Deutung von Friedrich Hölderlins "Ister"-Entwürfen* (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2013)—a study on the dynamics of writing in Hölderlin's hymnic drafts—and *"ins Sprachdunkle": Theoriegeschichte der Unverständlichkeit 1870–1970* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021) on the obscurity of language in Nietzsche, Heidegger, Adorno, and Celan. He is a co-editor of the *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* and the new critical edition of Rainer Maria Rilke's complete works.

Philip Onyekachukwu Egbule is Nigerian. He holds a Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) in Economics/Geography (1997), B.Sc. (Ed.) (2004), and M.Sc. (Ed.) (2011) in Social Studies/Education. He lectures in the Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria. As a social scientist and educator by training, his chief scholarly interests include globalization studies, African culture and development, human rights, and gender issues. He is astute in research, which has resulted in the publication of 59 scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals between 2013 and present. He has presented over 45 research findings at national and international conferences and workshops in his area of interest. He has received several awards, grants, and fellowships from various institutions and organizations, including UNESCO's Regional Conference, Accra, Ghana, October 2019, funded by UNESCO. The most recent is the fully funded Summer University Course, Central European University (CEU), Budapest, Hungary, July 2024.

Theresa Heyer is a DAAD lecturer at the University of Strasbourg, France. Her recent monograph explores the relationship between poetry and visual art in the works of Manfred Peter Hein. She holds a doctorate from the University of Mainz. For several years, Dr. Heyer has been involved in teaching and research on graphic novels and how German history is portrayed in them.

Mona Jafari holds a Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Tehran, Iran. She is currently an independent researcher, whose primary areas of interest include twentieth-century British and American literature, the Gothic, trauma literature, literary suicidology, postmodernism, humanism, posthumanism, and parody.

Alex Kästner is a Post-Doc in early modern history and academic coordinator of the Institute of History at TU Dresden. He has widely published on issues of suicide and lifesaving programs in early modern Europe.

Arzu Karaduman is a Visiting Lecturer in Media Studies (Cinema Arts) at Marist College. Karaduman studies sound in contemporary global cinemas and film philosophy. She has presented widely at national and international conferences and published on film sound, film philosophy, psychoanalysis and film, and gender and race in contemporary global cinemas. Dr. Karaduman is currently working on turning her dissertation titled "Sounding Anew: Anasonicity in Contemporary Global Cinemas" into a book."

Dr. Charles A. Khamala is a Senior Lecturer in law (since 2016) and Academic Leader of Criminal Justice and Security Management at Africa Nazarene University Law School, Nairobi. Previously, he lectured at Kabarak University Law School. He holds a Ph.D. in Law from the Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour (France, 2015), LL.M. (London, 2006), LL.B. (Nairobi, 1990) and Postgraduate Diploma in Law (1992). Dr. Khamala has practiced as a High Court of Kenya advocate for 30 years and is Listed Counsel of the International Criminal Court, member of the Association of Defence Counsel Practicing before International Courts and Tribunals, and on both the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights' and UN's Ombudsperson to the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida, Legal Aid Schemes. He was a Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Themis Laureate (2023), joint Platform Magazine's C.B. Madan awardee (2020), served at the Law Faculties of KU Leuven (Visiting Scholar, 2018) and Rhodes University (Andrew W. Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow, 2016). His doctorate Crimes against Humanity in Kenya's Post-2007 Conflicts is published by Wolf Legal Publishers (2018). Besides serving the Criminal Justice Committees of the EALS (2023-4) and LSK (2018-22), Dr. Khamala is Kenya's Director General on the International Forum on Crime and Criminal Law in the Global Era (since 2018), and sits on six Editorial Boards of journals in Africa (including the LSK Journal, since 2020), Asia and the US. He is widely published in international criminal law, criminal law and procedure, white collar crime, and human rights.

Kari Neely received her doctorate in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan and is currently an associate professor at Middle Tennessee State University where she teaches courses about the Arabic language, international graphic novels, graphic novels about the Middle East, and the intersection of language and culture. Her research explores the intersections of language, identity, and visual narratives, focusing on Middle Eastern representation in comics and graphic novels. Her work highlights the role of narrative in fostering cross-cultural understanding and critical engagement with complex identities. In addition to her academic role, she has served on the board and chaired the Popular Arts Conference, an annual conference held at DragonCon.

Katrin Röder holds the Chair of English Literature at Technical University Dortmund, Germany. She is the author of two monographs: *Entwürfe des Glücks und des guten Lebens in englischen Romanen vom 18. zum 20. Jahrhundert* (2015), which explores the history and development of the British novel from the 18th to the 20th century in connection with conceptions of happiness, and *Macht und Imagination: Fulke Grevilles Konstruktion diskreter Autorschaft* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006), which discusses the works of Fulke Greville in relation to their perspectives on authorship, surveillance, censorship, the formation of subjectivity, political philosophy and early modern Protestant culture. She has recently completed her DFG-funded research project on shame as a narrative affect in contemporary examples of autobiographical storytelling by female British and Indian anglophone authors with disabilities, chronic illnesses and mental distress (book publication under contract with transcript). She is the co-editor of a themed issue on 'Shame and Shamelessness in Anglophone Literature and Media' (*European Journal of English Studies*, 2019), of a volume titled *The Cultural Heritage of Psychiatry and Its Literary Transformations* (to be published in 2025) as well as the editor of a themed issue on 'Autobiographical Writing and the Gestalt of Shame. Disability, Chronic Illness and Mental Distress in Contemporary Intersectional Life Storying' for *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*.

Christoph Singer is Professor for British and Anglophone Cultural Studies in the Department of English at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. His Habilitation discusses the temporality of narratives in times of crisis, particularly the experience of existential waiting. He also published anthologies on *Well-Being* (Brill, 2021), *the Heritage of Psychiatry* (Brill, 2024) and the anthology *Narrative and Mental Health* (Oxford UP, 2023). Christoph Singer is one of the series editors of the book-series *Narratives and Mental Health* (Brill).

Cornelia Wächter is Professor of British Cultural Studies at the Technical University of Dresden, Germany. She is the author of *Place-ing the Prison Officer: The 'Warder' in the British Literary and Cultural Imagination* (2015) and co-editor of, for instance, *Negotiating Institutional Heritage and Wellbeing* (2021) and *Complicity and the Politics of Representation* (2019). She is the principal investigator and coordinator of the international, interdisciplinary network *Complicity: Enfoldings and Unfoldings*, funded by the German Research Foundation.

Zoom Link

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https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89655806175pwd=bid4B5vRkZ3T0fttrjJNk1FHuznGPzR.1_

Meeting-ID: 896 5580 6175

Code: sui24

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