

Heidi Kosonen

Gendered and Contagious Suicide

Taboo and Biopower in Contemporary Anglophone
Cinematic Representations of Self-Willed Death



JYU DISSERTATIONS 292

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Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella
julkisesti tarkastettavaksi yliopiston vanhassa juhlasalissa S212
lokakuun 2. päivänä 2020 kello 12.

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by permission of
the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Jyväskylä,
in building Seminarium, Old Festival Hall S212 on october 2, 2020 at 12 o'clock noon.



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2020

Editors

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Cover illustration: Heidi Kosonen

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This is a printout of the original online publication.

Permanent link to this publication: <http://urn.fi/URN:978-951-39-8313-0>

ISBN 978-951-39-8313-0 (PDF)

URN:ISBN:978-951-39-8313-0

ISSN 2489-9003

Jyväskylä University Printing House, Jyväskylä 2020

ABSTRACT

Kosonen, Heidi

Gendered and Contagious Suicide: Taboo and Biopower in Contemporary Anglophone Cinematic Representations of Self-Willed Death

Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2020, 163 p.

(JYU Dissertations

ISSN 2489-9003; 292)

ISBN 978-951-39-8313-0

In this doctoral dissertation, I analyze contemporary Anglophone suicide cinema from the perspectives of taboo and biopower. The aim is to investigate, first, how films with suicide participate in the practices of self-willed death's biopowered regulation. Biopower refers to Michel Foucault's theories of the regulation of individuals' lives and deaths through normative techniques directed at their bodies, sexuality and death. Second, I inspect how cinema both reflects and renews suicide's tabooed position. In the theories of Mary Douglas, Franz Steiner and Valerio Valeri, taboo is approached as a normative structure with the function of protecting society from particular kinds of dangers; this structure is empowered by ideas of dirt and contagion in such instances where these classificatory borders and collectively agreed values are threatened or breached. By employing discourse analysis, semiology and several methods of visual analysis, I combine visual cultural analysis of contemporary cinematic representations of suicide with theoretically oriented considerations of taboo and biopower. I investigate what kinds of cultural meanings of suicide are created through its cinematic representations and connect these meanings to the normative and classificatory functions of biopower and taboo. The research materials are a corpus of 50 Anglophone feature films produced between 1985 and 2014. The research also includes three case studies of the films *Unfriended* (2014), *Vanilla Sky* (2001) and *The Moth Diaries* (2011) and of the first season of the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* (2017). The central argument in the dissertation is that, in the corpus examined, suicide cinema reflects suicide's tabooed ontology and status in its othering, marginalizing, stigmatizing, domesticating and pornifying tendencies. I also argue that taboo and biopower are present in the fears of contagion that occasionally justify the censorship of suicide's representations. Further, I maintain that suicide cinema participates in suicide's subjugation to biopower, especially in its gendered and medicalized aspects. Hundreds of titles featuring suicide are released every year in the popular medium of Anglophone cinema. Understanding the role of taboo and biopower in these wide-ranging representations can help reveal the curious dynamic by which suicide is heavily represented in the media while it is silently struggled with and mourned in real life as a shameful death.

Keywords: suicide; death; contemporary cinema; Anglophone cinema; representation; taboo; biopower, medicalization; gender

TIIVISTELMÄ

Kosonen, Heidi

Sukupuolitettu ja tartuntavaarallinen itsemurha: Tabu ja biovalta omaehtoista kuolemaa käsittelevissä englanninkielisissä nykyelokuviissa

Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2020, 163 s.

(JYU Dissertations

ISSN 2489-9003; 292)

ISBN 978-951-39-8313-0

Tässä väitöskirjassa tarkastelen itsemurhaa käsitteleviä englanninkielisiä nykyelokuvia tabun ja biovallan näkökulmista. Tutkin ensinnäkin, kuinka itsemurhaa kuvaavat tai sivuavat elokuvat osallistuvat omaehtoisen kuoleman säätelyyn osana biovaltaa. Biovalta käsitetään foucault'laiseen teoriaperinteeseen nojaten normatiiviseksi teknologioiksi, jotka pyrkivät säätelemään ihmisten ruumiita, seksuaalisuutta ja kuolemaa. Toiseksi tarkastelen sitä, kuinka nämä elokuvat sekä heijastelevat että uusintavat itsemurhan asemaa tabuna ja tabujen hallitsemana kuolemana. Mary Douglasin, Franz Steinerin ja Valerio Valerin teorioiden mukaisesti tabu voidaan nähdä sosiaalisena rakenteena, jonka funktiona on suojella yhteisöä tietynlaisilta sosiaaliseen ruumiiseen ja yksilöiden kehoihin kohdistuvilta vaaroilta. Tabu kytkeytyy likaa ja tartuntaa koskeviin käsityksiin ja pelkoihin, jotka ruokkivat tabua tilanteissa, joissa yhteisön luokittelujärjestelmän rajat ja kollektiiviset arvot ovat uhattuina tulla rikotuiksi. Tutkimuksessa elokuvien visuaalinen analyysi yhdistyy tabun ja biovallan teoreettiseen tarkasteluun: tutkin, millaisia kulttuurisia merkityksiä nykyelokuviissa annetaan itsemurhalle ja miten ne kytkeytyvät tabun ja biovallan prosesseihin, joiden voi käsittää olevan sekä *normatiivisia* että *luokittelevia*. Tutkimusmetodeitani ovat diskurssianalyysi, semiologia sekä erilaiset visuaalisen analyysin menetöt. Tutkimusaineistoni käsittää yhteensä viisikymmentä vuosina 1985–2014 tuotettua kokopitkää englanninkielistä draamaelokuvaa. Teen lisäksi kolme tapaustutkimusta elokuvista *Unfriended* (2014), *Vanilla Sky* (2001) ja *The Moth Diaries* (2011) sekä Netflix-sarjan *13 Reasons Why* ensimmäisestä kaudesta (2017). Väitöskirjan keskeinen väite on, että aineisto heijastelee itsemurhan sosiokulttuurista asemaa ja olemusta tabuna erityisesti itsemurhaa toiseuttavissa, marginalisoivissa ja stigmatisoivissa, tämän kuoleman tabuutta "kesyttävissä" ja "pornoistavissa" esityksissä sekä itsemurhaesitysten sensuuria perustelevassa tartunnanpelossa. Lisäksi väitän, että biovalta heijastuu itsemurhan esittämiseen elokuvarepresentaatioiden medikalisaation ja sukupuolittumisen välityksellä. Väitöskirjassa hahmotan sitä dynamiikkaa, jossa itsemurha on hyvin näkyvässä roolissa mediassa ja silti hiljaisuuden kätkemä silloin, kun katse käännetään valkokankailta itsemurhan sosiaaliseen kokemiseen.

Avainsanat: itsemurha; kuolema; nykyelokuva; englanninkielinen elokuva, representaatio; tabu; biovalta, medikalisaatio; sukupuoli

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I was nearly two years old, the man who was my biological father died by his own hand. I was never told about it, at least not in such clear terms. Rather, the self-willed nature of his death was something that became apparent to me from the silences that surrounded his existence and the euphemisms used when his death was discussed. In a similar manner, it also became apparent that this death was a death unlike other deaths, a death particularly painful and deemed shameful and bad. It was as if my father had never existed. It was not that he was never discussed; rather, an ominous silence followed my grandmother's every mention of him. Thus, I grew up without knowing anything about the life or death of the man who had given me life and was instead fathered by this enormous family taboo.

From the moment of waiting for my preliminary examination statements to writing this foreword, I have been reminded in particular of my mother's way of making sense of my father's suicide: "your father had a disease that made him believe things that were not real." It was a disease that I grew up fearing, a disease I was worried I had inherited from him. I remember monitoring myself from a young age through adulthood, fearfully scanning myself for all diseases that would distort my reality, similarly to how I imagined my father's disease must have distorted his. I had many tendencies in that regard. For instance, in my early teens I found the basic texts of Western metaphysics and had a panic attack: knowing that I could not possibly know if I really existed in the body I had thus far inhabited without questioning its reality, I went to my mother, curled up in her lap and cried about my hands not being real. Her suggested cure for my condition was thinking less – something that, perhaps proven by my having come to pursue a career in academia, I have never been able to accomplish. Starting from my early teens, I also struggled with finding meaning in life, which escalated into a suicidal depression in my late teens. Unlike my excessive thinking, I recovered from this sense of meaninglessness and depression with the help of four years of state-funded psychodynamic therapy, granted to me on the grounds of having suffered the severe childhood trauma of violently losing a father, a trauma that had been left unrecognized and untreated. In these conditions, from which I have recovered, are represented many of the diseases that are tied to suicide under prevailing knowledge production, but to my eyes their connection appears far from straightforward or simple.

It is certain that this dissertation would not exist without my undergoing these and similar experiences of taboo, suicide and depression and the human, societal and cultural ways of dealing with the unthinkable. They are the experiences that shaped me, and they have kept me questioning, as they revealed cracks in the meaning-making systems accepted by many others; they have subjected to scrutiny the very nature of reality and the many axiomatic knowledges of suicide and taboo we have authorized as truths. This dissertation has been my attempt to understand some of the questions I came across in my life and my studies. At the same time, this dissertation and the experiences it has brought me have been

far from easy, but that is likely unsurprising or unsuitable for any research dealing so centrally with death and suicide.

In preparing to defend my dissertation, I made the mistake of thinking I could finish my doctorate with a light heart, as if I could forget that suicide and taboo had once been painful topics and write a concise foreword that did not contain anything truly personal, but merely contained enough thanks to fill the appropriate number of pages. Then fate, or whatever we wish to call it, intervened. I ended up having three stitches on my left pinky and soreness in my shoulder from a tetanus injection, having accidentally cut my finger at my paternal grandfather's island cabin, where I go to feel grounded and whole. With my hand bleeding and bandaged, I mourned by my father's childhood picture and, while waiting for my mother and stepfather to take me to the emergency room, I thought, "this is where it started and where it all shall end: with deep wounds by the knives belonging to my father and his family." At this moment, I am writing with nine fingers and recalling what Heikki Hanka, my Head of Department, told me during first summer as a doctoral student: the real ethical challenge of a scholar studying death (even and especially if mere representations are involved) is to always remember its reality. I could not forget and knew he was right then; thus, it would be wrong for me to forget now or not to enclose it here: this dissertation is for my father and my young self, trying to avenge his death with a hunting knife that used to belong to him.

Moving onto the reason we really write forewords - to give thanks - this dissertation has been my companion for nearly a decade. Besides personal and academic challenges and transitions, this decade has seen many helpful acquaintances and significant friendships emerge and endure, so there is much to include in this foreword and plenty for which to give thanks. I am grateful for so many friendships, collaborations and chance encounters that have shaped me and this dissertation and have given both of us direction and meaning.

First, starting with this dissertation, it found shape with the help of three supervisors for whom I certainly was not the easiest of supervisees, with my very big ideas initially lacking specificity and sometimes-bohemian approach toward academic conventions. With Professor Annika Waenerberg, who oversaw my supervision until her emeritation, even the impossible is possible. Annika's superpower is her willingness to understand and the patience with which she goes through sentences, paragraphs and ideas until even the senseless makes sense to her. She once described my approach as an intuitive fumbling for the right words, concepts and theories until I found what I knew to be there in the direction I was blindly groping toward, and she had just the right amount of patience and trust to allow me this blind fumbling. My dissertation could not have had a kinder reader or I a madder supervisor, in all the positive senses of madness. I am sure that this research could not have been completed without her entrusting me with the freedom to follow my intuition and grow, always being there to encourage me, even when I doubted myself or failed. I first remember Annika from my basic courses in Art History, where she would occasionally stop in her tracks in the middle of the lecture, discovering something new from the paintings she was

discussing. She is the epitome of the science I want to believe in: always questioning, always keeping her eyes open for more and always discovering new universes to be excited about in the smallest of things.

Next, Professor Sanna Karkulehto took on the task of seeing me through the doctorate when it was time to do so and helped me finish by pushing me forward – firmly yet ever so subtly – toward something that we can actually call a dissertation. I consider Sanna someone with whom even the formless can attain form because she has an uncanny talent for recognizing both the limitations and potentialities in seemingly chaotic works in progress and for asking the right questions for the crucial common threads to be found. Sanna was a newly appointed professor of literature in our department whose work in the media representation of sexualities I had read and admired when I gathered up my courage and asked her to join my supervision team. I am happy she agreed without prejudices, because, as with Annika, this dissertation could not have been finished without Sanna, her realism and her encouragement. Finally, Ph.D. Tarja Pääjoki was involved in my supervision for the first five years and has ever since offered me support and sunshine in our encounters in the corridors of Educa.

Beyond my supervisors, my dissertation was blessed with two pre-examiners who read it kindly despite the risks I had taken in it; they offered constructive comments that helped improve it further. Docent, Ph.D. Taina Kinnunen is an anthropologist focused on body culture, and her presence in the media during the global COVID-19 pandemic has impressed me as a soft-spoken voice for the human needs to be seen and touched in opposition to the media's general suppression and demonization of individuals' behaviors and needs in this very exceptional time. I was most nervous in my dissertation about my take on the anthropological theorizations of taboo and thus want to thank Taina in particular for her encouraging comments as an expert in this field. Docent, Ph.D. Leena-Maija Rossi, who honored me by agreeing to be my opponent, has been my long-time academic idol (although I have never confessed that to her). She is the pioneer in Finnish visual studies; beyond that, her 2003 book *Heterotehdas* opened the eyes of many scholars in my generation to the complexities of gender through its brilliant analysis of the ways heteronormativity, built on a binarist conception of gender, is reflected in and generated through television advertisements. I survived the COVID-19 pandemic with the help of an online writing group of four feminist scholars situated across the range of cultural studies; in hearing about my pre-examiner nominations, all confessed to being similar fangirls of Leena-Maija Rossi. I want to finally acknowledge her immense influence and my (not at all idiosyncratic) appreciation in this foreword.

I also want to thank both the Faculty of Humanities and the Ellen and Artturi Nyyssönen Foundation for financial support of this dissertation, including several grants, two years of employment as a doctoral student and several project researcher positions between 2012 and 2019. I also want to thank both the Department of Music, Art and Culture Studies and Alfred Kordelinin säätiö for travel grants that helped my dissertation to grow and enabled me to seek out and establish important contacts. The Department of Music, Art and Culture Studies

has been my academic home through all this time, so it is necessary to thank its head, Professor Heikki Hanka. As any researcher fluctuating between different projects, grant periods and unemployment – that is, pretty much every researcher in this country – knows, it is hard to do research with one's email address disappearing after every project or without access to a functioning printer and to a research community where ideas can be exchanged and mutual support obtained and offered. Research takes time, and although in the humanities it is often born of solitary quests, no project is ever finished without the labors of many minds offering critical, constructive and inspiring comments, soothing words and a little help. I am thankful to Heikki for allowing me to belong with full privileges to my department even in such time periods that I went without funding or employment. Beyond his support, I want to express my thanks to the secretary, Riitta Liimatainen, and amanuensis, Juha Teppo, who are always there to help anyone with whatever little thing or issue arises.

During this decade, I have been involved with the boards of two research associations: *Mutkun tutkijat* (Researchers of the Department of Music, Art and Culture Studies) and *Jyväskylän tieteenekijät* (The Researchers and Teachers of Jyväskylä, a local union of FUURT). With them, I have learned much about many things, from event organization to the Finnish university sector in general. From *Mutkun tutkijat* I want to remember in particular Tanja Välisalo, Jani Ylönen, Jonne Arjoranta, Heta Marttinen and Essi Varis, with whom I spent the longest times in positions of responsibility, finding ways to bolster the rights and sense of belonging of the early career researchers in our department. I also came to consider each of them a friend with whom I could see movies, play board and online games, cook lentil soup or bake suspicious bread, drink peer support pints or sip whisky and swim naked until dawn on summer nights. It was my departmental colleague Laura Piippo who eventually hijacked me to *Jyväskylän tieteenekijät*. Next to Laura, whom I admire for her unmatched eloquence and sensitivity to nuances, I want to thank my fellow board members from *Jytte*, in particular Mikko Jakonen, Elina Laurila, Johanna Turunen and Melissa Plath, who must be the closest thing to superhumans I have ever met.

I am particularly grateful for Susanne Ylönen, Max Ryynänen and Pauline Greenhill. They are among those rare individuals who have the ability to make the world feel unlimited – bending rules, defying conventions, freshening and shaking everything up – while still managing to be the most authentic thinkers and diamond-hard academics. All are familiar to me from *The Disgust Network* I co-founded with Susanne when we, as close friends, were wondering where to find the crux where our fields of study met. I especially want to thank Pauline for mentorship and the unimaginable amount of help and support she has given me and for a correspondence filled with all the things we love, such as unicorn poop and cat vomit. Beyond these three amazing scholars, my thanks and thoughts filled with appreciation go to Tuija Saresma, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, Anna Pehkoranta, Jani Tanskanen, Joonas Sääntti, Riikka Ala-Hakula and Taija Roiha, all of whom inspire me as colleagues and collaborators. Beyond this, Tuija and Jani took time to read important pieces of text and thus helped me polish this

dissertation. I also want to thank all my department colleagues, especially my roommates. During the last decade, I have shared office space with Katja Fält, Ljiljana Radosevic, Risto Niemi-Pynttari, Kaisa Ahvenjärvi and Aleena Chia (and I hope I am not forgetting someone). With particular warmth, I want to recall the popular cultural and life-tasting discussions with Ljiljana, listening to Risto's musical keyboard and feeling refreshed by Kaisa's promptness and sense of humor in my longest office companionships. Thank you also to my colleagues Lauri Ockenström, Kristof Fenyvesi, Tuuli Lähdesmäki and Sari Kuuva.

The people who know me know me as someone who is extremely grateful for people, friendship and all things that are soft in the world, and so the people I thank next I thank just for me. My soul sister Kukka Harvilahti is the sister I never had: a free spirit, an artist, a traveler and someone with whom you can either roll downhill like a rascal or drink calming woman tea. I watch films with Pauliina Peltonen and Mikko Tirronen; usually, Pauliina and I are in the middle of the strangest scene of some hard-to-find video nasty when Mikko walks in to wonder what on earth we are watching this time. Pauliina has the best taste in films and mad detective skills at finding them, while Mikko has the most accurate vision in commenting on them. I have also watched films with Ninna Alahäivälä and Juho Kangas, always with the best snacks, and I thank them for making their living room a place for me to go in spring 2020. Sari Paatelainen and Laura Paatelainen, my cousins and almost sisters, endlessly bested me in Catan when I was anxious about the fate of my dissertation. Lastly, there is Hanne Joenaho, with whom I exchange four-minute voice messages, watch sunsets while drinking rum, dance in parks, enthuse about dancehall and organize dance events in our two-person non-profit collective *Tun Up Jkl*. I also want to thank dancehall, although it is not a person but a Jamaican ghetto culture with arms open wide to the world and an energy you cannot describe but only experience. Thanks to mi Rumble Squad gyals dem with whom I have danced, performed and competed since January 2015, and Pape Cisse and Awa Sowe, with whom I have been involved through dance party organizations and who inspire me to no end. Thank you also to my creative friends Mira Laine, Miisa Sankila and Matti Kemi.

Lastly, I want to thank my family, Eija Kosonen, Juha Kosonen and Martti Lampinen, for always being there for me and for watching my back. Tarja Paatelainen and Arto Leppänen helped me when I needed help the most but wanted it the least. I also want to remember Heikki Kosonen (RIP), who gave me life, made me who I was and forced me to push forward – yearning, investigating, going through metamorphoses, letting go, until I was not the me I had been anymore but the me who finished this dissertation in a previous life and the one who defends it in this one. Thank you all; you have my love and gratitude, along with the sometimes-transgressive questions I cannot help asking.

From Karttuselkä, Äänekoski and Jyväskylä

8.8.2020

Heidi Kosonen

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- II 'Hollywoodin nekromanssi: Naisen ruumiiseen kiinnittyvä itsemurha elokuvien sukupuolipolitiikkana' [Hollywood's Gendered Politics of Death: Suicide's Necromantic Embodiment through Female Figures], *Sukupuoli ja väkivalta: Lukemisen etiikkaa ja poetiikkaa* [Gender and Violence: The Ethics and Politics of Reading], edited by Sanna Karkulehto & Leena-Maija Rossi. Helsinki: SKS, 2017, 95–118. URL: <https://oa.finlit.fi/site/books/10.21435/skst.1431/download/1800/>.
- III 'Itsemurhatartunnan taikauskosta: *The Moth Diaries* (2011) ja *13 Reasons Why* (2017)' [The Superstition of Suicide Contagion in *The Moth Diaries* (2011) and *13 Reasons Why* (2017)], *Tahiti* 1/2018, 35–49. URL: <https://tahiti.journal.fi/article/view/76559/37821>.
- IV 'My Mother, She Butchered Me, My Father, He Ate Me: Feminist Filmmaking Resisting Self-Harm's Gendering in *The Moth Diaries*'. Co-written with Pauline Greenhill. Submitted to *Screening the Past*.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Suicide, a feared and dishonorable death, is not only silenced societally. It is often also discouraged, condemned and marginalized in the coils of normative evaluation that differentiate natural from unnatural, moral from immoral, rational from irrational and good from bad deaths. Based on these qualities, suicide could be called a taboo and considered a death subjected to biopowered knowledge production.

This doctoral dissertation examines how these two systems of power, taboo and biopower, are reflected in contemporary suicide cinema. The study targets a corpus of 50 Anglophone feature films, and presents 3 case studies focusing on the films *Unfriended* (2014), *Vanilla Sky* (2001) and *The Moth Diaries* (2011) and on the first season of the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* (2017). The aim of the dissertation is to investigate, first, how films featuring or studying suicide participate in the practices of self-willed death's biopowered regulation. Second, it seeks to examine how cinema both reflects and renews suicide's tabooed position. In other words, I investigate the kinds of cultural meanings that cinematic representations of suicide ascribe to it and connect these meanings to the regulatory functions of biopower and taboo, which are both normative and classificatory.

This dissertation consists of this introduction and four original articles. The theoretical domains of biopower and taboo are discussed mainly in the introduction, whereas the articles focus more on analyzing the films in either one or both of these two theoretical frameworks, depending on the articles' chosen perspectives. In the articles, the films are also considered in relation to the concepts of othering, marginalization, stigmatization, domestication and pornification, and in relation to gendering, medicalization and suicide contagion, all of which are argued to be deeply relevant to the regulation of suicide through biopower and taboo.

1.1 Suicide as a societally stigmatized death and the pornification of the visual sphere

Throughout its history, suicide has occasioned polarized views that tend to either accept or condemn it based on normative arguments that often concern suicide's relation to societal benefit and the dominant cosmology: the prevailing set of collective beliefs, which can be spiritual or secular.¹ For example, the demonizing beliefs of Christian thinkers have historically connected suicide to sin, moral degradation and temptation by the devil,² while the pathologizing discourses of the medical institution have, according to some scholars, connected suicide to aberrations of the mind like psychopathology or depression.³

In these polarizing frameworks, suicide is frequently distinguished from related – even similar – deaths like the sacrificial deaths suffered or performed for some ideology or cause. In many languages, suicide is differentiated from these closely associated deaths (insofar as their voluntary or intended nature is considered) by referring to it as the murder of the self: the etymological roots of *suicide* are in the Latin words *sui* ('of oneself') and *cidium* ('a killing'), whereas the Finnish expression *itsemurha* consists of the words *itse* ('self') and *murha* ('murder').⁴ In Émile Durkheim's classic typology, this division between sacrificial murder and self-murder is reflected in the distinction between altruistic and "egoistic" suicides, the former of which denote the more easily accepted, sometimes even glorified deaths *for* the society (according to prevailing customs or for social benefit), while the latter are more easily condemned as acts *against* it.⁵

The individualistic egoistic deaths against society that are habitually called "suicides" could be considered a taboo in light of these differentiations, in light of suicide's normatively allotted qualities and especially in light of suicide's conventionally silenced status. Yet, it is very visibly and quite avidly featured and discussed in Western cultural discourses. Representations of suicide pervade not only the news media and academic discussion, where voluntary death is viewed mainly as a human conundrum and an issue of public health;⁶ they also permeate art and popular culture, where they take the form of Foucauldian "confession"⁷ and entertainment. To give an example from the heart of my research, audiovisual popular culture witnesses over 200 titles featuring suicide every year. Audiences are thus repeatedly stirred – touched, shocked or even titillated – by visual representations of these deaths that Western cultures continue to brand as

¹ Douglas (1970: 36) and Lévi-Strauss (1979: 333).

² See, e.g., Minois (1999).

³ See, e.g., Marsh (2010).

⁴ See, e.g., Daube (1972).

⁵ Durkheim (1966: 145–296).

⁶ Suicide's medicalization is discussed by Ian Marsh (2010) and Margaret Pabst Battin (2005), who recognize suicide as having been turned into "primarily a matter of mental illness," and a "tragedy to be prevented" (Battin, 2005: 164, quoted in Marsh, 2010: 65). From this position, suicide is monolithically discussed in professional journals and books, government policy documents and media reports and in suicidological theories, as Marsh (2010: 27) and Katrina Jaworski (2014) have pointed out.

⁷ Foucault (1972, 1990).

taboo with remarkable ease and frequency, even as they pervade the discursive sphere.⁸

Many viewers might be surprised by the abundance of cinematic representations of self-accomplished death that constitute my research materials in this dissertation. On the one hand, representations of suicide appear to have retained a certain invisibility, despite their permeating Western entertainment. On the other, the diegetic uses of these representations are, alongside the functions of offering solace or explanations, those of shocking and entertaining the viewers. Unlike most other discourses on suicide, which are authorized on the grounds that they offer moral considerations of and scientific explanations for voluntary death, discourses representing suicide for these affective purposes ostensibly challenge the limits of suicide's taboo status.

Instead, representations of suicide are often graphic in form and frenzied in volume, as the analysis of suicide cinema reveals.⁹ Due to these elements, popular cultural representations of suicide can be associated with "the pornographies of death," which thanatologist Geoffrey Gorer and film scholars John Anthony Tercier and Julian Petley have criticized in relation to the representation of death.¹⁰ More generally, representations of suicide could be contextualized in the cultural trend of "pornification," which Kaarina Nikunen and her colleagues have identified in the sexualized visual sphere¹¹ and which philosopher of post-modernism Paul Virilio has also linked to increasing levels of represented violence.¹²

Thus, in terms of its discursive treatment, suicide could hardly be called a taboo in the popular meaning of taboo: a topic shunned in public discussion. It is this popular definition that often motivates Eurocentric theorists to declare other historically taboo topics, including those involving sexuality and death, outdated or ineffective.¹³ Suicide is rarely denied on the same grounds, however, perhaps

⁸ The estimate is based on a keyword search of the Internet Movie Database (17.12.2018) for the years 2009 to 2018, which revealed an average of 242.8 films with the keyword "suicide" are released annually. A longer view reveals a steady rise in titles with "suicide" among their keywords, from 58 in 1985 to 263 in 2018, which speaks as much to the expansion of cinematic production and the availability of online databases as much as it does to the increasing prevalence of suicide.

⁹ I comment on the graphic and voluminous nature of suicide's visual cultural representation in general in my MA thesis (Kosonen, 2011). Beyond my own analysis, the volume of representations of suicide has been noted by John Saddington (2010) and Stephen Stack and Barbara Bowman (2012).

¹⁰ Gorer (1965), Petley (2005) and Tercier (2013). See also Tony Walter's critique of death as "the new radical chic" (1994: 1-5, 113) and my reflection on this pornography of death's prevalence in the contemporary artistic canon of suicide in my MA thesis (Kosonen, 2011).

¹¹ Pornification refers to the immersion of the "pornographic aesthetic" - and often "pornographic structures" - into mainstream culture. See Nikunen, Paasonen and Saarenmaa (2005: 7-29, 2007), Kappeler (1986: 86) and Williams (1999, 2004).

¹² Paul Virilio sees the media ranging between "hypersexuality" and "hyper-violence" and employs these terms to criticize the normalization of sexuality and horror in representation and the normalization of their excesses; see Virilio (2006) and Zurbrugg (1996).

¹³ See, for instance, Gilmore et al. (2013) on criticism of the Eurocentrism in taboo's discussion in Western cultures and Tercier (2005: 22) Troyer (2014) and Walter (1994) on the very discussions of death's taboo with which Gilmore et al. take issue.

because its social stigma and the silence surrounding it are still prominent enough to override its visibility in the media. For instance, Surunauha ry and the Samaritans, Finnish and British organizations offering support for those affected by suicide, name taboo, shame, guilt and the closely related fear of being stigmatized among the reasons that might discourage an individual considering suicide from seeking help in the first place.¹⁴ Additionally, in a recent autobiographical book on suicide-related bereavement, Kaarina Huttunen describes instances of social exclusion and silencing, along with the related "sticky" affects that left her feeling filthy in the aftermath of a daughter's suicide.¹⁵

1.2 Considering taboo and biopower in relation to the representations of suicide

My research has been shaped by these paradoxes related to suicide's representation and its position in Western cultures. The realization that suicide can be considered simultaneously a pornified topic and a socially stigmatized phenomenon encouraged me to reflect on its socio-cultural taboo and its visual cultural regulation from a new angle in this dissertation, and to dive deep into the anthropological theories of the taboo. The conceptual history of the taboo reveals several possibilities that compete with the popularized and often unchallenged Eurocentric definition connecting taboo to social silences. The approach used in this dissertation is affected in particular by such theories of taboo established by Mary Douglas, and developed by Valerio Valeri, which connect the taboo to the body as a classificatory system.¹⁶

In postwar anthropology, the taboo has been defined a societally necessary structure¹⁷ for the purpose of protecting society, or the "social body," from the dangers that threaten it.¹⁸ Usually, taboos are connected to societal dangers inherent in sexuality, death and culinary nutrition, all of which involve the social body through individual *somas* (from Greek σῶμα), the corporeal bodies.¹⁹ Because they are connected to life-sustaining nutrition and to the threats of both reproduction and the end of life, the taboos in these key domains help guard the entry points to society by regulating individual behavior through a range of customs and interdictions.

Furthermore, according to the theories of Franz Steiner, Mary Douglas, Valerio Valeri and other anthropologists, taboo customs are related to the prevailing

¹⁴ "Stigma attached to mental disorders and suicide means that many people feel unable to seek help" (Samaritans, 2013: 7). See also the World Health Organization, which states that "stigma can also discourage the friends and families of vulnerable people from providing them with the support they might need or even from acknowledging their situation" (2014: 32).

¹⁵ Huttunen (2019); see also Chapple et al. (2015) and Uusitalo (2009).

¹⁶ Turner (1991: 5); Douglas (1970, 1996, 2002) and Valeri (2000).

¹⁷ Douglas (1979: 78).

¹⁸ Steiner (1999a: 107–108) and Douglas (1996).

¹⁹ Valeri (2000: 48).

"natural-cultural matrix," or the classifications of phenomena, people and other entities into hierarchically ordered categories that have been established to reflect a society and its values.²⁰ Based on Edmund Leach's and Mary Douglas's analyses of cross-cultural taboos, anthropological theory further recognizes the prominence of "anomalies" – uncategorizable in-betweens or things diverging from collectively agreed ideals – at the heart of many taboo customs around the world.²¹ Douglas also notes these anomalies' association with the affective ideas of contagion and filth.²²

According to this strain of theory, the taboo serves as a normative structure that seeks to protect society from various kinds of dangers to its constitution – dangers that have in some instances been categorized as unnatural in that they do not fit the classificatory matrix. Empowered by the notions of dirt and defilement, taboo customs and interdictions guard the classificatory borders and the collectively agreed values where those borders and values are particularly vulnerable, threatened or already breached.²³ According to Valerio Valeri, taboo's relationship to classification also includes the hierarchical differentiations between social groups.²⁴ In the West, taboos are often seen reflected in the silenced status of a wide range of topics studied through theories far removed from these anthropological ones, yet certain similarities between these "discursive taboos" and the taboo customs studied by anthropologists can still be discovered.

In Foucauldian analysis, which assumes power to be inherent in all cultural discourses, the taboo-governed phenomena of sexuality and death have been subjected to biopower. Like the taboo, biopower seeks to sustain the socio-cultural order through varied techniques of normative regulation. This power is directed at individual bodies, through which the lives and deaths of the "symbolic bodies" of entire populations can be rendered controllable.²⁵ Like the taboos discussed in cross-cultural anthropological literature,²⁶ biopower also regulates the human body in regard to procreation, nutrition and death. According to Foucault, biopower in these domains is targeted at the creation of "docile bodies" through normative processes that involve the institutional efforts of knowledge production, signification and objectivization, as well as the various "technologies of the self," through which individuals' subjugated, normatively governed bodies are eventually regulated.²⁷

These theories by Foucault and the anthropologists Douglas and Valeri, which recognize death's regulation through normative techniques in both cross-

²⁰ See, e.g., Douglas (2002), Leach (1979), Radcliffe-Brown (1979), Steiner (1999a) and Valeri (2000).

²¹ Douglas (2002), Leach (1979) and Valeri (2000).

²² Douglas (2002).

²³ See, e.g., Douglas (2002) and Davies (1982).

²⁴ Valeri (2000: 69).

²⁵ Foucault (1972, 1988, 1990: 135–159), Agamben (1998, 2015) and Hardt and Negri (2009).

²⁶ See, e.g., Frazer (1993); see also Douglas (2002), Steiner (1999a) and Valeri (2000).

²⁷ Foucault (1988b: 16–49, 1990: 135–159).

cultural and modern Western contexts,²⁸ highlight the need to consider the regulation that also manifests itself in suicide's definition as a bad and unnatural death. In particular, the affinity between taboo and biopower merits consideration. Biopower has, in a sense, replaced the taboo in contemporary theoretical understanding of power, where many contemporary scholars recognize biopower as a modern system of power²⁹ and see the taboo in more obsolete terms.³⁰ Although nutrition, reproduction and death all pose dangers to individual lives, the threats met by taboo customs are not simply physical; they lie in normative regulation through biopower. They are also symbolic and moral and pertain to "society writ large,"³¹ in collectively accepted mores and narratives, for which reason the taboo was long studied as a structure pertinent to magical and religious cosmologies – a stereotype that still sticks.³²

1.3 Invisibly visible? Biopower and taboo in suicide's visual cultural regulation

Whether they are specifically associated with the aforementioned Foucauldian theories of biopower, visual studies' theoretical backbone lies in the paradigm of socio-cultural construction, which sees the role of cultural discourses and representations in shaping the dominant conceptions related to worldly phenomena.³³ It has been widely recognized that discourses have the power to affect human beings' embodied lives within particular populations and cultures, as discursively communicated and affectively loaded ideas and norms guide human behavior on a wide range of occasions.³⁴

In framing the normative technologies employed in the regulation of sexuality, Foucault recognizes its subjugation to these different kinds of authorized discourses in the modern era and sees these discourses as shielded by the "repressive hypothesis": the ahistorical view that sexuality had been historically repressed before the advent of modernity.³⁵ This repressive hypothesis, Foucault argues, has helped to frame the new technologies of knowledge production – the

²⁸ Foucault (1972, 1988, 1990), Douglas (2002) and Valeri (2000).

²⁹ See, e.g., Esposito (2004) and Hardt and Negri (2009) on death. See also, e.g., Stapleton and Byers (2015) for other theoretical domains in which Foucault's theories have been employed.

³⁰ See, e.g., Browne (1984: 4), who frames an article collection on American taboo customs thusly: "To modify the insightful words of the 19th century British author George Gissing: 'It is because nations tend to [follow taboos] that mankind moves so slowly; it is because individuals have a capacity for better things [for breaking taboos] that it moves at all.'" Similarly, Thody (1997: 6, 9) in his British taboo dictionary expresses optimism about the disappearance of the phenomenon: "Taboos, in contrast, are based neither on reason nor on experience [...] The boo-word status of the term 'taboo' suggests that we are becoming the first society to try to base our ethical standards on wholly utilitarian criteria."

³¹ Durkheim (1974: 52).

³² Steiner (1999a: 108); see also, e.g., Frazer (1911) and Lévy-Bruhl (1931).

³³ See, e.g., Hall (2013a).

³⁴ See, e.g., Butler (2004, 2011) and Ahmed (2014).

³⁵ Foucault (1990).

academic discourses as well as the confessional realm of psychiatry – as revolts against the old model of assumed repression. Yet, with these technologies and their incitement to talk about sex, reproduction and sexuality were steered to different systems of power and control. These new systems offered new models that were more suitable for secularizing large-scale populations and for the regulation of individual lives through normative discourses encouraging self-regulation and the individual's submission to power relations. In Foucault's theory, suicide is even cited as a key factor in the transition from the sovereign power's "right to kill" to the discursive and normative processes of modern biopower, which seek to "infest life through and through."³⁶

Particularly when these technologies of biopower have been studied in the domain of sexuality, these discursive processes have been recognized to be generative of not only liberation but also power. These processes are also enmeshed with popular entertainment's "pleasure-producing"³⁷ machinery, which may have normalized ways of speaking, showing, imaging and confessing that can easily register as liberation from power on the surface, but which media scholars' and post-structuralist philosophers' theories reveal to be quite far cry from liberation.³⁸ Such views reflect Foucault's suspicion of the discursive realm's self-proclaimed liberation. This collision between power and liberation, and between love and fear of images, is also what visual culture pioneer W. J. T. Mitchell is talking about when he states, for instance, that "*what is specific to our moment is exactly this paradox.*"³⁹ This essentially reiterates Foucault's view that "visibility is a trap."⁴⁰

Next to these views of normative power, it is accepted within cultural studies that representations and discourses both participate in the process where prevalent conceptions of the material and mental worlds and their phenomena are created and affect individuals in different ways. Representations and discourses can be defined as units of meaning-making and established social practices, respectively, for representing aspects of world.⁴¹ In studying sexuality, the influence of such cultural forms of meaning-making has been forcefully stated by, for instance, Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed, who study the effects of representations and discourses on the gendered and sexually labeled embodiment, identities and emotions of an individual.⁴² By comparison, the regulation of death, including suicide, through reiterating representations and established discourses has been less studied. Moreover, when considering the taboo in relation to biopower, taboo as a system of power has not been woven into contemporary analyses of the regulation of sexuality and death, although the repressive hypothesis questions these topics' regulation through silence and invisibility.

³⁶ Foucault (1990: 141).

³⁷ Kauffman (1998: 7).

³⁸ See, e.g., Baudrillard (2012), Debord (1983), Mirzoeff (1995) and Virilio (2006).

³⁹ Mitchell (1994: 15).

⁴⁰ Foucault (1977b: 200).

⁴¹ Hall (2013b), Fairclough (1995) and Foucault (1972: 49).

⁴² Ahmed (2014) and Butler (2011, 2004a).

In its subject matter, this dissertation, *Gendered and Contagious Suicide: Taboo and Biopower in Contemporary Anglophone Cinematic Representations of Self-Willed Death*, approaches the cinematic representations of this sensitive death with the ideas that suicide is still regulated through biopower and that its tabooed position are both reflected and renewed, although its representations are ubiquitous and pornified. The dissertation seeks to identify the normative and classificatory forces of biopower and taboo included within the trap of the visible that was identified by Foucault and has been studied by a number of cultural scholars from Stuart Hall to Sara Ahmed.⁴³

1.4 Paradoxes and problems in discussing the concept taboo

Next to these notions related to suicide's conflicted position in the Western culture and to the power of representations and discourses, the research constellation has been affected by knowledge of taboo's conceptual history and its definition in Western discussions.

The concept is still prevalent. As an analysis of contemporary discourses reveals, a plurality of often competing definitions have come to be circulated, unchallenged, in a variety of contexts. In this study I divide these definitions into three categories, "Bourdiesian" (or Leachian-Bourdiesian), "Freudian" (or Freudian-Kristevan), and Douglasian (or Leachian-Bourdiesian). I see the fields of cultural studies and visual studies relying in particular on the Bourdiesian definitions, where the taboo is related to the prohibition against speech and representation. In discussing taboos in contemporary media environment, I argue this has brought about the paradoxes visible in suicide's conflicted position as an avidly represented phenomenon and a death shrouded by silence.

This complication involved in "thinking taboos" as a cultural scholar today find their origin in the taboo concept's colonialist research history, which has come to affect the theorization of taboo phenomena, particularly through key colonialist differentiations and prejudices that have their roots in the appropriated concept's past in anthropology. They have resulted in taboo's sensitive position in post-colonial academia.⁴⁴ In the 1960s, socio-cultural anthropology awakened from its colonial past and began to detach itself from the study of magic, a general category through which the taboo had also been defined.⁴⁵ Anthropologist Chris Knight comments on this development:

Abandonment of the old vocabulary has recently seemed a safe way to maintain political correctness, helping to emphasize that traditionally organized peoples are not 'different' but in reality 'just like us'.⁴⁶

⁴³ Hall (2013b) and Ahmed (2014).

⁴⁴ Steiner (1999a).

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Bailey (2006) and Jöhncke and Steffen (2015).

⁴⁶ Knight (1996: 815).

Taboo formed, in postwar socio-cultural anthropology, something of a taboo in itself, as its analysis was limited and the concept was removed from many dictionaries of the discipline.⁴⁷ The English scholar Stefan Horlacher's introduction to literary transgressions makes this point:

Moreover, many popular science books as well as dictionaries on the subject bear witness to the still unbroken interest of a broad public in this interdisciplinary, not to say in several senses paradoxical topic of taboo; paradoxical because the concept of taboo has become a taboo in itself.⁴⁸

The problem with the type of political correctness of post-colonial academia that is sought by abandoning old vocabulary and literature, as Knight points out, has been that it has helped neither taboo nor similar magical concepts to cross the gap from the state of "primitive otherness" inflicted by their colonialist research history in anthropology. Furthermore, although the purpose of curbing the Polynesian concept's use in this particular field of study was to diminish the inequalities of power within post-colonial academia, it has not helped eliminate or even defuse the volatile preconceptions that have followed the taboo from its discovery through its continued use in other disciplines and in popular discourse, including cultural and visual studies.

1.5 The present study

This dissertation consists of an introduction and four original research articles in which I study suicide cinema and its general tendencies within a corpus of 50 Anglophone feature films and three case studies of the films *Unfriended* (2014), *Vanilla Sky* (2001) and *The Moth Diaries* (2011) and of the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* (2017-).

The dissertation's objective is to disclose the relationship between suicide's position as a biopower-regulated death and a socio-cultural taboo on the one hand and suicide's cinematic representations on the other. These representations are considered both reflective and generative of the prevalent conceptions of various phenomena, from gender performances⁴⁹ to LGBTQI+ communities' self-disgust and black shame.⁵⁰ The dissertation's focus is on particular representations of individualistic egoistic suicide, differentiated from Durkheimian altruistic suicides for the society,⁵¹ in contemporary English-language films produced after 1985.

The research questions in this dissertation are qualitative and query how the chosen cinematic representations of suicide participate in the practices of self-willed death's biopowered regulation on the one hand and how they both reflect

⁴⁷ Thody (1997).

⁴⁸ Horlacher (2010: 6).

⁴⁹ Butler (2011).

⁵⁰ Ahmed (2014).

⁵¹ Durkheim (1966: 145-296).

and renew suicide's tabooed position on the other. I examine the kind of cultural meanings of suicide that are created through its commercial cinematic representations, with different kinds of values and conceptions related to suicide relayed and created through them, and study what kind of normative discourses these cinematic representations participate in. By asking these questions, the dissertation seeks to disclose the relationship between suicide's cinematic representations, which represent the wealth of popular discourses featuring voluntary death, and the views that continue to render suicide an abnormal, unnatural and bad death, in line with its historical treatment.

Under the premises arising from the two theoretical domains relevant to this study, Foucauldian biopower and anthropological study of taboo, I regard biopowered regulation as permeating suicide's cinematic representation through normative views of self-willed death. Second, I suspect that suicide's tabooed position, which is evident in the shame, fear, stigma and social silences that still surround it, is manifest in the classifications and associations with danger, anomaly, dirt and contagion through which suicide is represented in commercial cinema.

My approach combines visual cultural analysis with theoretically oriented considerations of taboo and biopower. Next to these, my analysis makes use of gender and queer studies that pay their critical attention to the role of discourses and representations in the production of binary gender system and compulsory heterosexuality, employed by such scholars as Judith Butler, Lynda Nead and Leena-Maija Rossi, in particular.

The research materials consist of suicide's Anglophone cinematic representations, which I examine employing a mixture of visual analysis and discourse analysis. My findings are discussed in four research articles; one features a broad survey of suicide cinema, and the other three are case studies of the films *Unfriended* (2014), *Vanilla Sky* (2001) and *The Moth Diaries* (2011), along with the first season of *13 Reasons Why* (2017), a Netflix program.

Unfriended is an American horror film directed by Leo Gabriadze, *Vanilla Sky* an American science fiction film directed by Cameron Crowe and *The Moth Diaries* a Canadian-Irish horror/drama directed by Mary Harron. *13 Reasons Why*, which debuted in 2017, is a Netflix series created by Brian Yorkey; its first season was the subject of a media controversy in spring 2017 because of its "graphic" and "gratuitous"⁵² representation of suicide. This controversy is the very reason why this televisual representation was chosen for analysis in this dissertation that otherwise focuses on cinema.

In the following chapters, I introduce my materials and methods (chapter 2), my theoretical points of departure (chapter 3) and the four original articles included in this dissertation (subchapters in chapter 4). In the theory chapters, I discuss suicide, visual cultural theories on how power and its effects operate through representations (chapter 3.2.1) and my two key concepts: biopower and taboo. Suicide, whose status as a value-laden death I take as one of my starting

⁵² See, e.g., Fallon (2017) and Tolentino (2017).

points, is discussed in a chapter introducing the definitions, differentiations, discourses and other forms of meaning-making and their effects on how suicide has generally come to be understood in the West (chapter 3.1). I include biopower within the systems of power and control operated through (visual) cultural discourses (chapter 3.2.2). Taboo as a system of power and control is introduced in a fulsome section that considers not only taboo's particular characteristics but also its conceptual history and its current reputation in post-colonial academia, as affected by its history (chapter 3.3, also 3.2.3).

As I discuss in the theoretical subchapters of the dissertation, biopower operates as a modern system of power and control that governs the social body through individual bodies, through normative discourses on sexuality and death, beauty and health that feature different technologies for the subjugation of individuals to the prevailing relations of power. It has been included within the mechanisms through which cultural discourses participate in the modern systems of power and control and even tentatively applied in attempts to understand the "masculinist" and "medicalized" knowledge production of suicide.⁵³

For many reasons, taboo, which I introduce as a system of power and control similar in many ways to biopower, has not received the same level of discussion as biopower within the studies of contemporary culture. This is why taboo has a more central position than biopower in my dissertation. This is necessarily reflected in the theory chapters, where I discuss these concepts (chapters 3.2.2, 3.2.3 & 3.3). In a sense, I see biopower as one of the ways that suicide's tabooed position can be argued to be manifest in visual cultural discourses and representations.

The introductory section of my dissertation concludes with a discussion (chapter 5) that is followed by the four original research articles included within the body of this dissertation. In the conclusion, I discuss the four articles and the ways the materials I study in them reflect and renew suicide's tabooed position and participate in self-inflicted death's regulation through biopower. The conclusion also contains a self-reflection on the research process and ethical considerations related to suicide and my approach to it in this dissertation.

⁵³ Jaworski (2014) and Marsh (2010).

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research questions and materials

This dissertation's objective has been to understand how cinematic representations participate in suicide's biopowered regulation and how they both reflect and renew this death's tabooed position. The research materials consist of suicide's Anglophone, cinematic representations, most of which are American or British productions, which I have analyzed implementing discourse analysis and multiple methods of visual analysis.

It is well established in visual studies that representations take part in the meaning-making processes, which construct our understandings of worldly phenomena, not so simply reflecting our understanding of our reality, but also generating, or (re)constructing it.⁵⁴ When looking at suicide, representations of this death have held a place in the Western visual cultural imagination ever since antiquity, occupying both public and private places in decorations, domestic items, book illustrations and works of art, and later on as mass-mediated items.⁵⁵

Suicide has thus been featured in both high and low culture, and those representations of it have reflected the attitudes with which suicide has been viewed in specific cultural contexts. These representations have, in turn, also affected the cultural imagination and understanding of suicide. For instance, the medieval depictions of Judas Iscariot⁵⁶ and the Renaissance *topos* of Lucretia have impacted suicide's representation far beyond their original cultural contexts and brought with them long-standing recurring elements, such as suicide's connection to temptation by the devil and suicide's sexualization through attractive and scantily dressed female characters motivated by sexual shame and, often, rape.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Hall (2000, 2013b).

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Bronisch (2014), Brown (2001), Cutter (1983) and Kryszynska (2009).

⁵⁶ Brown (2001: 52–55) and Camille (1989).

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Brown (2001: 88–123), Donaldson (1982) and Wolfthal (1999: 13–15).

Representations of suicide can affect not only how we continue to represent it but also how we understand it as a death and as a phenomenon pertinent to the human experience. Both the values and conceptions mediated through suicide's representations are interesting in this regard, as are the recurring choices that inform suicide's representation, because they can affect our understanding of suicide's moral qualities (good or bad) and of its position in the natural world (natural or unnatural, typical or atypical).

Beyond affecting our understanding of suicide as a phenomenon, representations can also affect our views of self-willed death's manifestations in the human world and of suicidal people. In being reiterated, these representations affect how individuals thinking of suicide or dying by their own hand are seen in relation to humans in general: whether they are viewed as good or bad, normal or divergent, sane or insane. In this sense, suicide's representations have enormous power over how suicide and the suicidal are viewed and classified and even in how these individuals see themselves. Cultural scholars, again, recognize representations' influence on the formation processes not only of cultural ideas but also of viewers' identification with them through the affective positions they offer viewing subjects as models to which they can relate.⁵⁸

Particularly in considering how suicide's popular cultural representations infiltrate our lives as entertainment, it is vital to ask what kinds of conceptions and values of suicide are mediated through them. Popular cultural items, a collection of material and immaterial items that can be sold to the commercial masses, surround us and have a wide reach as approachable, low-threshold forms of art.⁵⁹ As such, they also play an important role in cultural meaning-making processes.⁶⁰ In order to study the constructed meanings of suicide, I have chosen to approach suicide's representations through Anglophone cinema. As global commodities, English-speaking and especially American and British films have a particularly powerful impact beyond their immediate cultural contexts through their domination of global movie theatres and streaming services. Anglophone cinema was picked because it holds this influential position, although it is understood the meanings given to self-willed death are not so simply global but ultimately negotiated in their immediate cultural and societal contexts.

In this dissertation, these films are subjected to scrutiny concerning how their representations could be related, first, to biopower's practices directed at suicide as a normatively governed death. Second, these films are inspected in relation to suicide's position as a taboo, as a death with particular types of beliefs related, for instance, to its classification, dangerousness and contagiousness and to the anomalous and filthy ontology that may be reflected in representing suicide.

⁵⁸ Ahmed (2014) and Hall (2000: 704–706, 714).

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Fiske (1995).

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Rafter (2006).

2.1.1 General survey of suicide cinema

I started my study with a corpus of 50 dramatic films produced between 1985 and 2014. I decided to focus on suicide as represented in a Western society, which leaves out the occasional representations of *harakiri* and suicide bombings. I also chose to limit my study to films classified in the Internet Movie Database as "dramas" (though as a "macro-genre" that is not necessarily their only label) to study how suicide is represented in the context of a society with low-level Durkheimian integration.⁶¹ Knowing that drama is easily combined with other genres from comedy to horror, I sought with this decision to include as diverse a corpus as possible of representations of egoistic suicide, those that we tend to dissociate from related deaths as "suicides" proper. I found nearly 2,000 feature films produced between 1985 and 2014 by using the keywords "suicide" and "suicide attempt," out of which I presumed that around 800 to 1200 matched my criteria after removing possible foreign language films and false positives.

Out of this number, I chose 50 films for examination (for research method details, chapter 2.2). Because they would represent only a small corpus, I wanted them to cover a wide variety of Anglophone suicide cinema. For this reason, I chose box-office hits and classic instances of suicide cinema well known to me as well as less popular films. I also selected both films that closely study suicide specifically and ones featuring it only as a narrative trope, seeking to include films that would cover suicides, suicide attempts and representations of suicidal ideation. I chose dramatic films representing different fusions as to genre. In making my selections, I made use of my previous knowledge, of information provided by the Internet Movie Database (keywords, production details, synopses, etc.) and of the ability to arrange search results according to popularity. I emphasized films accessible to me as a Finnish viewer. I believe this corpus to be a representative sample of contemporary Anglophone suicide cinema that is thus suitable for a qualitative analysis of how egoistic suicide is represented in contemporary popular culture. The 50 feature films are listed in Appendix A.

In later stages of my research, I undertook analyses of select films. In the first article, closer attention is given to the films *According to Greta* (2009), *The Moth Diaries* (2011), *Inception* (2010), *Vanilla Sky* (2001), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Boogie Nights* (1997), *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), *Where the Truth Lies* (2005), *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013) and *Cloud Atlas* (2012). The three case studies analyze four productions. Mary Harron's 2011 horror/drama *The Moth Diaries* and Cameron Crowe's 2001 sci-fi-drama *Vanilla Sky* were already familiar to me from my corpus of 50 feature films. Leon Gabriadze's 2014 found-footage horror *Unfriended* and the first season of Brian Yorkey's Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* (2017), meanwhile, caught my interest as I went through other instances of suicide ci-

⁶¹ Internet Movie Database is Amazon-owned, originally a fan-operated, website originating from the 1990's with most of the data provided by volunteer contributors. Drama is their most used genre label, with over two million titles. This genre label refers to the macro-genre of films defined by a serious tone and is often joined by additional genre terms specifying the films' particular settings or subject matters.

nema. As this list suggests, in most of my case studies, following the initial analysis of 50 drama films, I approach suicide's representation through horror films or horror/drama fusions. They are interesting in their representations of suicide since one function of the horror genre is "to scare, shock, revolt or otherwise horrify the reader."⁶² Linda Williams also considers horror as one of the "body genres," alongside pornography and melodrama, designed to elicit affective reactions in viewers.⁶³ This makes horror films' manner of representing voluntary death particularly interesting from my viewpoints on biopower and suicide's tabooed position.

Over the years, the number of films I have studied has grown and their range diversified. For a conference presentation in 2016, I examined a small corpus of Fenno-Scandinavian cinema, consisting of 25 Finnish, Danish and Swedish films produced between 1996 and 2015, in order to see if the Anglophone tendencies corresponded with Fenno-Scandinavian contemporary cinema. For similar reasons I continued watching Anglophone suicide cinema beyond my corpus of 50 feature films, along with foreign-language films from outside Scandinavia: to determine whether my corpus was representative and if there were correspondences between Anglophone and foreign-language films, commercial cinema and art house films. All the films I considered or closely analyzed are listed in Appendix A.

Although suicide's prevalence in the popular imagination is striking, the study of suicide's popular cultural representations does not represent the most popular branch of suicidology or visual studies – or media studies or related fields, for that matter. In studying suicide cinema, the situation is no different: there is little existing literature that addresses suicide's on-screen representations. When I started my study, the only previous research offering a broad sweep of the qualitative aspects of suicide cinema (vis-à-vis its effects) was a psychiatric analysis: Stephen Stack's and Barbara Bowman's 2012 classification of 780 films produced between 1900 and 2010 out of 1158 films that met their inclusion criteria.⁶⁴ In his 2010 PhD dissertation in sociology, John Saddington studies a corpus of 350 feature films from the perspective of the crisis of masculinity. Later in 2014, film scholar Michele Aaron's book chapter on suicide appeared in a monograph studying death's cinematic representations, offering the first media studies account of suicide's representation in cinema.⁶⁵ There are also a few case studies on particular films⁶⁶ and/or from more specific perspectives, often from those of gender and sexualities,⁶⁷ but also arising from interest in particular genres⁶⁸ or

⁶² Cherry (2009: 4).

⁶³ Williams (1991: 2–13).

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Camy (2009), Guimares and Pereira (2010) and Hyler and Moore (1996).

⁶⁵ Aaron (2014: 42–68). Regrettably, I discovered both Saddington and Aaron only after my analysis of the 50 feature films was completed. Unfortunately for this research, the differences in our definitions of suicide's representations prevent easy comparisons between Saddington's sizeable data and my own.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., LeBlanc on *The Hours* (2006) and Backman Rogers on *The Virgin Suicides* (2018).

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Cover (2012: 17–36, 2013), Goltz (2013) and Marshall (2010) on LGBTQI+.

⁶⁸ See Gutiérrez-Jones (2015) on both literary and cinematic contemporary science fiction and Stack and Bowman (2009) on John Wayne films.

social groups.⁶⁹ Integral to the choices I have made throughout regarding my methods and frameworks is this scarcity of existing research on suicide's on-screen and visual cultural representations.

In relation to these earlier studies, my dissertation is distinguished by its qualitative nature,⁷⁰ its focus on visuality (vis-à-vis the textual elements suicide cinema is often reduced to, especially in quantitatively large analyses), its focus on contemporary Anglophone cinema and the theoretical perspectives of taboo and biopower. Underlying my approach here are both my bachelor's and master's theses, in which I studied suicide's visual representations, and my ethnological and art historical background, which has drawn my attention to the both visual and societal aspects of representing suicide. My bachelor's thesis is a case study of Finnish artist Kalervo Palsa's 1983 painting *Kullervo* (2007) in the discipline of ethnology, and my master's thesis is a survey of suicide's functions in modern and postmodern art in the discipline of art history (2011). These research processes informed me both of suicide's position in the specific cultural context of Finland and its position in the Finnish and international art scenes. They also made me to take note of suicide's pornification,⁷¹ first in the contemporary art scene and then in Western visual culture more generally.

Suicide's prevalence in its art historical past and in contemporary culture is also reflected in the innumerable cinematic representations from which I selected my materials, which are interesting in reflecting suicide's representations both from the theoretical understanding of biopower and in relation to suicide's taboo position as a shameful, feared and silenced death in social life. As noted, this dissertation's background has been especially shaped by these two theoretical domains. Foucauldian biopower recognizes the normative power over individual lives and deaths inherent in cultural discourses. Meanwhile, the anthropological understanding of taboo considers the phenomenon to be a structure protecting society from dangers to its constitution and continuity.⁷² The classificatory theories of taboo in particular see its close connection to normatively constituted anomalies, nature-defying phenomena that are kept at bay with affective ideas of filth and contagion.⁷³

In relation to this, my approach to suicide cinema and the research questions I have posed have been informed by two hypotheses presuming that, first, biopower regulates suicide's representation just as it regulates normative discourses of it and, secondly, suicide's tabooed position is manifest in the categorical position given to this death in its commercial representations. My research question is qualitative and queries how these cinematic representations reflect and renew suicide's tabooed position and participate in the practice of biopower. More specifically, I have sought to understand the kinds of cultural meanings of

⁶⁹ See Scalco (2016) on the suicides of the elderly and Sevim (2009) on adolescents.

⁷⁰ The perspectives of accuracy (in terms of suicide's diagnostic aspects and treatment) and of suicide prevention often pervade the psychiatric analyses of suicide cinema; they are reflected in how suicide cinema is analyzed and/or written about, which leaves cultural scholars asking for more qualitative nuances.

⁷¹ Gorer (1965).

⁷² See, e.g. Steiner (1999a) and Douglas (1979).

⁷³ Douglas (2002) and Leach (1979).

suicide that are created through its cinematic representations, with different kinds of values and conceptions related to suicide relayed and created in those representations. In opposition to earlier scholars with an interest in suicide's representations, my research is thus more theoretically oriented, since my aim has been to connect the recurring elements in suicide's representations to this death's status as a socio-cultural taboo and to the biopowered visual economy to which sexuality and death have been subjected.

In each article, the manner of approaching these research questions has differed, often depending on whether a general survey or a case study is involved and on the context informing the analysis, such as the nature of the publication for which that analysis was intended. All four articles included in this dissertation have either been requested from me for a specific purpose or negotiated in collaboration with other scholars. I will introduce them in the next subchapter.

2.1.2 Three case studies on productions *Unfriended*, *Vanilla Sky*, *The Moth Diaries* and *13 Reasons Why*

My first article was invited to a special volume on suicide by a death studies journal, and introduces and inspects suicide cinema in its general tendencies. In the remaining three articles, I have chosen for closer analysis the American horror film *Unfriended* (2014), the American box-office science fiction hit *Vanilla Sky* (2001), the Canadian-Irish horror/drama *The Moth Diaries* (2011) and the first season of the American Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* (2017). The productions are presented here in the order they appear in my articles.

Unfriended is a 2014 horror film directed by Levan Gabriadze and written by Nelson Greaves. The film is a pseudo-documentary, found-footage,⁷⁴ supernatural horror film set entirely on a computer screen. The film stars the relatively unknown actors Shelley Hennig, Moses Jacob Storm, Renee Olstead, Will Peltz, Jacob Wysocki and Courtney Halverson as high school students in a Skype conversation haunted by their deceased school friend Laura Barns, played by Heather Sossaman. The storyline resembles the conventions of slasher films in the vengeance game played by the supernatural character who had been bullied to suicide as a consequence of her sexual behavior.⁷⁵ The film premiered in 2014, gained theatrical release 2015 and was a box office success (\$64 million in worldwide gross against a budget of \$1 million) while also receiving positive reviews from critics.

Vanilla Sky, with which I mirror *Unfriended* in my analysis for its gendered aspects, is a 2001 psychological thriller with a twist of science fiction directed, written and co-produced by Cameron Crowe. The film is an English-language adaptation of Alejandro Amenábar's 1997 Spanish film *Abre los Ojos* and stars Tom Cruise as David Aames, the owner of a large inherited publishing company,

⁷⁴ Found-footage refers to a film technique pertinent to horror films, where part of the cinematic effect rests on the illusion of reality that is created by presenting part of the work as discovered film or as video recordings.

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Clover (1992).

and Penélope Cruz and Cameron Diaz as his love interests, Sofie and Julie. The film is structured around David's telling his life story to a court psychologist in prison, having killed Sofie in a fit of paranoia after Julie has destroyed his life in a suicidal car crash. The film led the box office when it premiered and earned a worldwide gross income of \$203.4 million, but it received mixed reviews from critics.

The Moth Diaries is a 2011 Canadian-Irish young-adult horror/drama directed and written by Mary Harron and based on the 2002 novel of the same name by Rachel Klein. The film stars Sarah Bolger and Sarah Gadon as two young women, Rebecca and Lucy, dealing with self-harm, suicide and anorexia in an all-girls' boarding-school while falling in and out of their intense friendship, with Lily Cole playing a vampire who disrupts their relationship and tempts them with self-harm. Rebecca's consideration of suicide is exemplified not only by the vampire's supernatural temptation; in addition, the girl is still mourning her father's suicide. The film did poorly both at the box office and among critics, producing a worldwide gross income of only \$413,035 and receiving generally negative reviews.

13 Reasons Why is a young-adult drama series developed for Netflix by Brian Yorkey, based on the 2007 novel of the same name by Jay Asher. The series revolves around seventeen-year-old high school student Clay Jensen, played by Dylan Minnette, who gets to know the reasons behind the suicide of his deceased love interest Hannah Baker, played by Katherine Langford, through thirteen cassette tapes recorded by the girl before her death.⁷⁶ Hannah's suicide is caused by a culture of gossip, bullying and sexual assault at her high school, depicted according to the pattern of developing depression and told through the parallel narrative of Clay's self-destructive mourning. In its first week of streaming, the series became the most tweeted Netflix show ever;⁷⁷ it has spawned three more seasons, two of which have aired. It also provoked a controversy because of its graphic depictions of suicide and rape,⁷⁸ the first of which was accused of glamorizing suicide,⁷⁹ which made it interesting for me as material for this dissertation.

These four items of popular culture were chosen for closer analysis for different reasons. *Unfriended* was initially selected because its trailer promised a thought-provoking account of the relationship between representations of suicide and representations of sexual violence. The article was written for an article collection on gendered violence in literature and audio-visual fiction. *Vanilla Sky* was picked both to highlight these representations' relationship to normative discourses of gender and sexuality and to deepen the initial understanding of represented suicide's gendered and marginalizing aspects, which were discovered in the broad survey I began with.

⁷⁶ In this dissertation, television and cinema are understood to have different affordances for approaching a topic like suicide, despite their similarities as forms of on-screen fiction. However, the controversy surrounding the series, which proved a stark reminder of suicide's status as a Western taboo, made the series a necessary addition to my material.

⁷⁷ Bruner (2017).

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Tolentino (2017).

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Curtis (2017).

13 Reasons Why was chosen because the controversy surrounding it made the televisual series, divergent from the cinematic corpus because of its format yet in many senses is conventional in its depiction of suicide, interesting from the points of view of suicide taboo and of the contagious logic pertinent to both taboo and apparently to suicide (for instance, in relation to its representations). It reminded global viewers of suicide's still sensitive status in the visual sphere and caused suicide to be named "the last Western taboo."⁸⁰ Like the previous article, which was written for an article collection from an invited perspective, the article in which I study this Netflix series was requested of me for an edited volume on the position of magic and superstition in contemporary culture and in the interdisciplinary field of art history.

Lastly, *The Moth Diaries* is interesting as a suicide film playing with queer desire and as a vampire film studying suicide's feared contagion in a female figure predisposed to self-harm through her artist father's suicide. Because suicide's representations appeared to be heteronormative and heavily gendered in my examination of the 50 feature films, *The Moth Diaries* is also interesting as a film by a feminist filmmaker in a male-dominated field studying a variety of phenomena from gender to self-harm through patriarchal conventions. The plurality of these perspectives and the polysemic nature of representations in general meant that this film is featured in three of my articles, in the last of which I join Professor Pauline Greenhill in studying the film from a more reparative angle than in the first three articles, and from a feminist perspective.

2.2 Research methods

This dissertation, as noted, rests on the examination of suicide's on-screen representations in 50 feature films, after which I have undertaken case studies with qualitative analyses of the films *Unfriended*, *Vanilla Sky* and *The Moth Diaries*, and of the first season of the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* (2017), all of which have been introduced in the previous section. My methods include multiple methods of qualitative analysis, especially discourse analysis and semiology.

My choice of methods has been influenced by the theoretical interest in taboo and biopower that informs the research constellation and has directed my focus on the chains of signification that relate cinematic representations to the societal conventions, norms and power structures that affect them. My approach has also been guided by the understanding of the polysemic nature of representations, prevailing in the understanding found in cultural studies of their relationship to power.⁸¹ With this, the meaning-making capacity of representations is realized in full in their accumulation into regimes, into hegemonic systems of representation.⁸² For this reason, I have started with a more content-analytical

⁸⁰ Tatz (2017).

⁸¹ As Stuart Hall has argued, "it is worth emphasizing that there is no single or 'correct' answer to the question, 'What does this image mean?'" (2013b: 9.)

⁸² Hall (2013b).

approach toward the 50 feature films that are the core of my materials before moving into closer analyses of them.

My chosen methods of analysis are employed according to each article's research constellation. For instance, at 50 feature films, the corpus is quantitatively too large for the kind of qualitative close analysis required by point-by-point discourse analysis. Thus, in the first article, discourse analysis and semiology appear as methods of qualitative analysis of what Norman Fairclough calls "texts" or "micro-level discourses,"⁸³ which here mean the cinematic representations themselves.

Discourse analysis is well suited to studying and uncovering the traces of ideology in cultural texts: it is specifically directed at the analysis of the power structures that affect and authorize different kinds of representations and discourses, along with their "inter-discursive" formations. As Gillian Rose writes, "as a method (of visual analysis), discourse analysis pays careful attention to images and to their social production and effect."⁸⁴ It is focused on the identification of the "productive performances" and "strategies of persuasion" that manifest as "regimes of truth" and the "knowledges" they produce.⁸⁵ Discourse analysis does not presuppose the existence of hegemony but seeks out regularities as the loci of this power and thus studies the dominant, intertextual (or inter-discursive) regimes of representations and formations of several discourses.

Discourse analysis is relevant as a method focused on detecting both the recurring patterns and regimes in suicide's representation and the meaningful absences in them. These recurrent elements are related to "discursive" and sociocultural "practices," according to Norman Fairclough's analysis, which differentiates between micro-, meso- and macro-level discourses that gap individual "texts" (micro-level discourses), their contexts of production, distribution and consumption (meso-level "discourse practices") and their situatedness in wider inter-discursive formations in particular socio-cultural contexts (macro-level "sociocultural practices").⁸⁶ Thus, discourse analysis is a valuable tool for recognizing the "presuppositions" of suicide guiding the formations of representations and regimes and at considering the underlying norms that guide suicide's on-screen representations.⁸⁷

In this sense, it could be suggested my study seeks to uncover the myths that have been naturalized in suicide's normative representation and that affect these representations.⁸⁸ In this task, I employ not only discourse analysis but also semiology, which, as Rose writes, "searches for the dominant codes or myths or referent systems that underlie the surface appearance of signs".⁸⁹ Like discourse analysis, semiology pays attention to the recurring representations,

⁸³ Fairclough (1995: 16-17, 57-64, 2001).

⁸⁴ Rose (2007: 141).

⁸⁵ Butler (1990, 2011), Gill (1996) quoted in Rose (2007: 135-163).

⁸⁶ Fairclough (1995: 16-17, 57-64, 2001).

⁸⁷ Fairclough (1995: 106).

⁸⁸ See Barthes (2009) and Nead (1988).

⁸⁹ Rose (2007: 138).

the stereotypes they feature, and the values they reflect.⁹⁰ Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros describe semiology an attempt to detect the “tokens” that in cultural representations “stand for something else” and to separate the tokens from the something else; the “signs” from what they signify.⁹¹ Semiology also pays attention to the focalizations and relationships that inform different images, which makes it useful in studying, for instance, how agency is divided between subjects and objects in suicide’s representations.⁹²

If in the analysis of the 50 feature films, discourse analysis and semiology are focused on the detection of patterns in representations, in the case studies these methods are employed to scrutinize sites of analysis that go beyond the micro-level texts of individual films that is largely dealt with by the first stage of my analysis. In her guidebook on visual analysis, Gillian Rose recognizes two more sites that prevail beyond the visual object itself, which in certain instances are relevant for its analysis: the site of production and the site of audiences, which relate the visual object to its contexts of origin and reception.⁹³ My third article deals with the normative reception of a Netflix series; an analysis of the representation is joined by an examination of the texts, like reviews and opinion pieces, contributing to the series’ reception. My fourth article, meanwhile, considers a film as a feminist act of resistance to certain recurrent patterns of representation by taking a closer look at its polysemic representation and its context of origin, including interview material with the director.

In addition to using discourse analysis and semiology in the examination of the films and their representations, I have used my regular repertoire of qualitative analysis. My methodological apparatus for the study of on-screen representations also tends to be particularly informed by visual analysis, which is a motley collection of methodologies directed at the analysis of varied visual phenomena, as its moniker suggests. Of course, because cinema is in question, the understanding of the films’ visual components (cinematography, editing) needs to meet an understanding of their narrative (story, dialogue) and other sensory (sound, emotional tone) qualities. Next to this, studying a TV-series demands a slightly different analytical toolbox due to its different format: created for serial watching over longer periods of time and from typically smaller screens. Even though the analysis of on-screen productions thus needs more than simply a good eye, I feel my method is well described by Gillian Rose’s seven key points of visual discourse analysis, which are listed below:

1. Looking at your sources with fresh eyes,
2. Immersing yourself in your sources,
3. Identifying key themes in your sources,

⁹⁰ Howells and Negreiros (2012: 112–136). See also Barthes (2009).

⁹¹ Howells and Negreiros (2012: 120).

⁹² See Bal (1996, 2001) and Fairclough (1995, 2001).

⁹³ Rose (2007: 5–16).

4. Examining their effects of truth,
5. Paying attention to their complexity and contradictions,
6. Looking for the invisible as well as the visible and
7. Paying attention to details.⁹⁴

As Rose proposes, I have often started with fresh eyes, identified key themes and concepts in suicide films, paid attention both to recurring elements and to what is missing and anchored individual representations into larger wholes by studying contextualizing literature, by comparison to other individual representations and to suicide's art historical genealogy and by taking into account the general contexts of the films' (or of the Netflix-series's) production. My analysis has in this sense been qualitative, comparative and critical in terms of discursive and socio-cultural premises.

All of the on-screen productions chosen for analysis in either the first stage of research or later stages were first viewed once, during which central elements in each were identified and noted. I was looking in particular at the following factors:

- Whether suicide was thematically central or narratively instrumental,
- What kind of function suicide served in the diegesis and cinematography,
- At what part of the narrative the suicide occurred,
- Whether a suicide, a suicide attempt, suicidal ideation or some combination was depicted and, if there were several examples, how those depictions were related,
- How the suicidal character(s) were like when studying their gender, age, ethnicity and other characteristics, such as profession or likability,
- If the suicidal figure(s) were main or side characters,
- If the suicidal character(s) could be characterized as either heroes or villains,
- What kinds of characters died of suicide and what kinds survived,
- Whether a suicide or suicide attempt was visually depicted or merely alluded to, and through what kind of stylistic and narrative choices,
- What the choice of suicide method was, if detectable, and what the motivations were, if given,
- Whether additional elements related to suicide or self-harm, other than the suicide or suicide attempt, present in the diegesis and cinematography.

Certain recurring elements surfaced, and the first of my four articles, "The Death of the Others and the Taboo: Suicide Represented," presents an analysis of the

⁹⁴ Rose (2007: 158).

elements central to my research questions. Specifically, I detected suicide's gendering in relationship to the cinematic evaluations of its acceptability. On a similar note, suicide was also connected to marginalized states of minds explained according to different worldviews, connected to villainy and ethnically othered characters. These discoveries led to the broadening of the theoretical framework. First, I chose to apply Durkheim's typology differentiating between egoistic and altruistic suicides⁹⁵ in order to better understand how this evident gendering occurred in a field that featured what appeared to be an even number, in terms of gender, of self-harming characters.

Durkheim's framework has not been uncontested by other scholars, who have offered other kinds of frameworks to make sense of suicide's origin. Jack Douglas, for instance, proposes a division into suicides as reunion, as atonement and as revenge,⁹⁶ Jean Baechler offers a similar division into escapist, aggressive, oblativ and ludic suicides⁹⁷ and Edwin Shneidman differentiates between egotic, dyadic and ageneratic suicides.⁹⁸ In film studies, Michele Aaron challenges Durkheim's framework and proposes a more diverse typology influenced by Baechler's categories: "professional" (self-sacrifice "in the line of duty"), "honorable" (enacting personal integrity), "dishonorable" (avoiding guilt and/or humiliation), "avoiding dying" (preempting pain and suffering), "avoiding living" (willing the end of life) and "mass" (collective).⁹⁹ I have chosen to apply the Durkheimian typology because I believe that its simpler model better grasps cinema's gendered and normative take, which is often focused on individual motivation, on suicide's morally tinged relationship with society than the other options. In short, Durkheim's division between egoistic and altruistic deaths takes into account suicide's relationship to society and its level of integration while differentiating between deaths in communities with low-level integration, often committed against the social collective's mores, and deaths in high-level integration, which might accord with collective mores or be of social benefit.

The notion of suicide cinema's gendering also led to the adoption of theoretical approaches pertinent to gender studies, especially those drawing on feminist and queer theories. Gender studies is an interdisciplinary field devoted to the analysis of gender identity and gendered representation from a variety of perspectives, while feminist and queer theories are methodologies of analysis that seek the deconstruction of heteronormative social norms, gender hierarchies and classifications and their discursive production. My theoretical choices were directed in particular by my situatedness within the disciplines of art history, visual studies and film studies and influenced by the theories of scholars like Sara Ahmed, Mieke Bal, Judith Butler, Richard Dyer, Lee Edelman, Harri Kalha, Sanna Karkulehto, Laura Mulvey, Lynda Nead, Leena-Maija Rossi and Eve Kosofsky-

⁹⁵ Durkheim (1966: 145–296).

⁹⁶ Douglas (1967: 235–270).

⁹⁷ Baechler (1979: 59–198).

⁹⁸ Shneidman (1985: 25–26).

⁹⁹ Aaron (2014: 42–47).

Sedgwick.¹⁰⁰ Their approaches bridge topics such as the male gaze and female objectification, gender performances and stereotypes and their effects. Their theories are adept in detecting how different types of characters are represented, gendered and sexualized within the affective economy of cinema, with different effects on viewers' minds and bodies.

Another aspect related to suicide's gendering that struck me at this stage of the research was its close connection to sexuality and its instrumental use in narratives delivering sexual morality or offering atonement for the sexually shamed. In order to address this more fully, I broadened my theoretical framework to include transgression theory and other theories that would help me better understand suicide's relationship to the suicidal characters' sexualization. Both transgression as a theoretical domain and pornification as a concept are closely related to the taboo on the conceptual level. This also steered me toward horror films, which are one of the "body genres," alongside pornography and melodrama.¹⁰¹ This analysis led to a general survey of how otherness was featured in suicide's representations and what kind of functions it appeared to play in relation to suicide and its tabooed position.

In the next stages of research, I executed close readings of select films, viewing them two or three times, depending on whether they had been part of my original corpus of 50 films, in order to ensure I undertook at least three viewings per film. Since I executed my second and third viewings of exemplary cases chosen to offer material to my articles, I often looked at films with particular frameworks in mind, even as I sought to deepen my understanding of the nature of suicide's cinematic representation. This time I was also looking at the following factors:

- What kind of role suicide played in relation to the central thematics of each film,
- What cinematographic and other sensory elements (e.g., color, editing, sound) were used in representing suicide,
- How suicide featured in the dialogue in relationship to the cinematography,
- How gender, sexuality and suicide's medicalization figured in the films,
- How the themes considered relevant for each film, as described below, figured in the overall presentation.

At this stage, the films and the one televisual production were not only viewed for a second and third time. They were also compared with one another: *Unfriended* with *Vanilla Sky* and *The Moth Diaries* with *13 Reasons Why*.

The second article, "Hollywood's Gendered Politics of Death: Suicide's Necromantic Embodiment through Female Figures," is an effort to better understand gendered narratives' relationship to suicide's marginalization through the

¹⁰⁰ Ahmed (2014), Bal (1996, 2001), Butler (1990, 2011), Dyer (2002), Edelman (2004), Kalha (2005, 2008), Karkulehto (2011), Mulvey (1989), Nead (1988), Rossi (2003) and Sedgwick (2008).

¹⁰¹ Williams (1991: 2-13).

theories of transgression and pornography as revealed in the films *Unfriended* and *Vanilla Sky*. The third article, “The Superstition of Suicide Contagion in *The Moth Diaries* (2011) and *13 Reasons Why* (2017),” on the other hand, is a consideration of the relationship between the suicide taboo and suicide contagion, which was manifested in *13 Reason’s Why’s* reception but is also familiar from the vampire folklore used in *The Moth Diaries’s* diegesis. For this article, I also sought theoretical frameworks that related to suicide’s medicalization.

The article’s research was based on an analysis of the series through which I sought to understand *13 Reason Why’s* notable level of controversy.¹⁰² The series was created for Netflix, and as a televisual representation spanning several episodes, has different affordances with suicide cinema. For this reason, the analysis of the series was slightly different, and was based on an episode-specific detection of key elements, juxtapositions and narratives. The comparison with *The Moth Diaries* in the article was asymmetrical and sought to emphasize certain similarities in the meanings created of suicide, as well as in the characteristics of the suicidal characters and in the relationships between them.

More in-depth analysis of the suicide films and their representations was also executed in this stage. As Rose notes, the visual object and the two exterior sites of analysis each consist of three modalities: technological, compositional and social, which bridge the many forces that affect the constitution of the visual representations.¹⁰³ These include, for instance and in this dissertation, the limitations and affordances of different genres such as genre- and technology-specific visual economies and their conventions, the processes that shape the production of films and the cultural yet individual “ways of seeing” that affect a film’s reception.¹⁰⁴ Since in the first stage of research the consideration of films was out of necessity focused on their recurrent patterns and their relationship to the taboo, in the later stages of research I tried to better acknowledge the other sites and their relevant modalities while studying the films from these particular theoretical frameworks.

For this reason the fourth article, “My Mother, She Butchered Me, My Father, He Ate Me: Feminist Filmmaking Resisting Self-Harm’s Gendering in *The Moth Diaries*” (co-authored with Pauline Greenhill), differs slightly from those above in its examination of the critical possibilities of Mary Harron’s film. We here sought to adopt something that could be described as critical-reparative analysis. To the approach coined by Koistinen,¹⁰⁵ the “paranoid” approach detecting “hidden patterns of violence” in cultural representations and criticized by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,¹⁰⁶ is joined with a more hopeful, reparative reading of the possibilities of suicide films’ polysemic representations. Critical reading is also characteristic of my research dealing with the hidden patterns of taboo and biopower in the recurrent elements in suicide’s representations. Yet as a feminist

¹⁰² See also Kosonen (2017a, 2019).

¹⁰³ Rose (2007: 16–28).

¹⁰⁴ Becker (1982), Berger (1972) quoted in Rose (2007: 16).

¹⁰⁵ Koistinen (2015: 45–48).

¹⁰⁶ Sedgwick (1997: 17–19).

film-maker's film against commercial cinema's sexist conventions, *The Moth Diaries* appeared to require also a more reparative approach: it not only reiterates suicide cinema's existing conventions but also in places bends them, inasmuch as gendered depictions of young women's self-harm are considered.

3 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

3.1 Suicide, a death “spoken for”

Edwin Shneidman, the progenitor of contemporary suicidology, writes of suicide:

Surely “suicide” is one of those patently self-evident terms, the definition of which, it is felt, need not detain a thoughtful mind for even a moment. Every adult knows instinctively what he means by it: it is the act of taking one’s life. But, in the very moment that one utters this simple formula one also appreciates that there is something more to this human drama of self-destruction than is contained in this simple view of it. And that “something more” is the periphery of any satisfactory definition. Are totally lethally intended acts which fail (e.g. shooting oneself in the head and surviving) suicide? Are non-lethal attempts on the life (e.g. ingesting a possibly lethal dose of barbiturates) suicidal? Are deleterious and inimical patterns of behavior (e.g. continuing smoking by a person with acute emphysema) suicidal? Are deaths which have been ordered by others or deaths under desperation (e.g. Cato’s response to Caligula’s requesting of his death, or the deaths on Masada or in Jonestown) suicide? All these questions and more constitute the indispensable periphery of the definition of suicide.¹⁰⁷

Shneidman describes suicide’s axiomatic status as a death that need not be defined, as a (fatal) act of killing oneself and as a human drama, whose presumed clarity of definition constantly bounces back from the peripheries of its definition. In suicide’s case, the question of the positions from which this death is recounted is most impressive. As Colin Davis writes in “Can the Dead Speak to Us” (2004), death “curtails our dialogue with the deceased as it removes their ability to speak with us,”¹⁰⁸ and this is clearest in suicide, which most direly asks for a dialogue between the living and the dead because it is a voluntary death. Those who can still speak – those who attempt suicide yet live – instead tend to remain silenced

¹⁰⁷ Shneidman (1985: 6).

¹⁰⁸ Davis (2004: 77).

by suicide's history as a sin, a private shame and a taboo. As inexplicable mysteries that demand to be defined, explained and made sense of, suicides in particular tend to be "spoken for"¹⁰⁹ by others than the suicidal and those who die by suicide; the webs of suicide's understanding, conceptualization and knowledge production are thus "implicated" from the outside in the "social processes, inscribed by cultural norms" that cultural scholars recognize.¹¹⁰

As a result, suicide has been perpetually defined and redefined from the perspectives of the prevailing cosmology, with the collectively agreed values directing the explanations by which suicide is appointed forms, motives and justifications and affecting the borders and differentiations that come to separate suicide from other kinds of death. Like these other kinds of deaths, those we today conceptualize with the term "suicides" always touch upon the communal as issues that surpass the lives and deaths of individuals. Yet here, as deaths ending individuals' lives before their "natural" expiration, as affronts to society's power over individual and as likely sources of social trauma caused by a violent death, suicide has been subjected to the processes of meaning-making as a particularly dangerous death. This position of danger has insisted that suicide be defined in relation to the prevalent norms and mores, and its status as a sensitive moral question remains, although suicide's spokespersons vary, with their different values, definitions and borderlines shaping suicide's understanding from culture to culture and era to era.

Even in defining suicide within this dissertation, I cannot fully escape the webs of suicide's knowledge production, which direct my gaze into viewing it from the perspective of an individualistic Western culture that tends to view suicide as an individual solution (and yet as collective trauma). As Katrina Jaworski writes, in its contemporary definitions suicide appears as a death that is tied to its intentionality.¹¹¹ Jaworski also recounts the definitions by Holmes and Huebl, who define suicide as "explicitly individual choice and act"¹¹² and as "the act of taking one's own life; a voluntary, intended and self-inflicted act,"¹¹³ respectively, thus reflecting the way suicides are understood in modern Western societies. Shneidman's approach to suicide is similar, as he divides attempted suicides from successful ones, defines suicide a "human act of self-inflicted, self-intended cessation" and further divides "the peripheries of the definition of suicide" into sub-intended and unintended deaths, as opposed to the intended ones he privileges as suicides.¹¹⁴

Shneidman's taxonomy of intended, subintended and unintended deaths contrasts with the classic 1897 definition by Émile Durkheim, who has influenced contemporary suicidology with his sociological approach to suicide:

¹⁰⁹ Honkasalo and Tuominen (2014: 5) and Jaworski (2014: 5).

¹¹⁰ Butler (2004a: 20).

¹¹¹ Jaworski (2014: 20)

¹¹² Holmes and Holmes (2005) quoted in Jaworski (2014: 19)

¹¹³ Huebl (2000) quoted in Jaworski (2014: 19).

¹¹⁴ Shneidman (1985: 6-22).

We may then say conclusively. The term suicide applies to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself which he knows will produce this result.¹¹⁵

Although Durkheim, like Shneidman, discounts suicide attempts as suicidal acts that “fall short” in their execution, Durkheim’s definition is fairly broad, as it is intended for cross-cultural analysis between cultures, whose customs and different approaches to suicide may vary greatly.¹¹⁶ His definition, considering both negative and positive acts that either directly or indirectly produce an individual’s death, takes into consideration all the various kinds of death that could be called “self-inflicted.” He subsequently proposes a typology in which suicide is divided into “altruistic” and “egoistic,” “anomic” and “fatalistic” suicides.¹¹⁷ All four types consider suicide and its causes in relation to society and its level of integration, in opposition to the wealth of contemporary definitions, most of which consider suicide as a self-intended and thus individualistic phenomenon. Egoistic suicide results from low levels of social integration, altruistic from high levels; anomic suicide is as an effect of societal deregulation, or too little societal regulation, and fatalistic is an effect of too much regulation.¹¹⁸

Durkheim’s framework has been challenged by later suicidologists, who have offered other kinds of frameworks to make sense of suicide’s origin.¹¹⁹ In most of these frameworks, the causes of suicide are primarily psychological in nature, embodying both suicide’s medicalization in the secularizing West and Western culture’s psychologization.¹²⁰ Jack Douglas, for instance, proposes dividing suicides into 12 types with suicide “as reunion,” “as atonement” and “as revenge,”¹²¹ while Jean Baechler offers a division into “escapist,” “aggressive,” “oblativ” and “ludic” suicides.¹²² Both taxonomies feature types in which suicide offers a release from intolerable situations (reunion and escapist), is directed at punishing or harming others (revenge and aggressive) or works as a sacrifice intended to transform the individual in the eyes of others (atonement and oblativ). Baechler’s fourth type, ludic, involves a reckless attitude to life or treating death as a game. There are other frameworks that also seek to categorize suicides according to self-willed death’s estimated primary motivations, which highlights the effects of Western culture’s psychologization on how suicide is understood.

¹¹⁵ Durkheim (1966: 44).

¹¹⁶ Durkheim’s typology considers, for instance, suicides that differ from the regular Western understanding of “self-killing” and are often exoticized in the Western media. These include the Japanese honor suicide *seppuku* (also known as *harakiri*) or the historical Hindu practice of *suttee*, in which a widow must ritually sacrifice herself after the death of her husband. These forms result from high-level societal integration and regulation as altruistic and fatalistic suicides (Durkheim 1966: 241–276; see also Abrutyn 2017 on *suttee* and Pierre 2015 on *seppuku* and other culturally sanctioned suicides).

¹¹⁷ Durkheim (1966: 145–296).

¹¹⁸ Durkheim (1966: 145–296).

¹¹⁹ See, e.g., Halbwachs (1930).

¹²⁰ See, e.g., Minois (1999) and Rieff (1966).

¹²¹ Douglas (1967: 235–270).

¹²² Baechler (1979: 59–198).

Shneidman, by contrast, differentiates between “egotic,” “dyadic” and “ageneratic” suicides, which he distinguishes according to whether a given death is primarily psychological, social or sociological in nature,¹²³ which assumes that suicide’s psychological, social and sociological causes can be differentiated from one another.

Durkheim’s typology is well suited to illustrate the particular ways that Western society has come to understand suicide, as it seeks to categorize suicides according to the varied attitudes and customs related to it and according to individuals’ ties to the society in which they live. The concepts of egoistic and anomic suicides are particularly appropriate to draw suicides together in an individualistic era such as ours, where individuals are detached and ever more isolated from their social environments, society’s relationship to suicide is proscriptive and the explanation for individuals’ self-inflicted deaths is sought from within their psyches. Durkheim’s typology also aptly reminds us that conceptualizing suicide according to individualistic deaths alone is a decision that pushes other kinds of suicides to the “peripheries of its definition,” based on the prevailing moral attitudes and values. For instance, altruistic suicides, which are sometimes treated as sacrificial deaths and excluded from contemporary definitions, can still help make sense of self-inflicted deaths in social environments where the level of integration is high, such as Western armies.¹²⁴

As Durkheim’s broad typology also reveals, suicide’s narrow contemporary definition as an individualistic death and as “drama of the mind”¹²⁵ has been achieved through conceptualizations and definitions that differentiate suicide from other kinds of death. The normative evaluation is also evident here. Most authors on suicide tell us that the concept’s etymological roots date from seventeenth-century England, as no unitary definition previously existed.¹²⁶ The Latinate ‘suicide’ discussed above was proposed as a definition for “self-murder” following an epidemic of suicides; it defined voluntary deaths as modes of killing instead of modes of dying.¹²⁷ David Daube, who has studied conceptual variation in Ancient Greek, proposes similar nuances between killing and dying to differentiate between more and less acceptable types of suicides.¹²⁸ Suicide’s definition as killing reflects suicide’s intended nature. Yet what is clear in these distinctions

¹²³ Shneidman (1985: 25–26).

¹²⁴ Suicide terrorism, as exemplified by both suicide bombings and mass shootings, similarly marks the periphery of suicide’s definition. Both types of murder-suicides prevail over a strict prohibition on suicide. They also reveal the problematic nature of differentiating between types of death and representing them: Sharia law, like the Bible, draws a strict distinction between glorified martyrdom and suicide, and school shootings embody the connection between self-harm’s definition through weakness and toxic masculinity. Both forms of suicide terrorism are also good examples of suicide’s xenophobic and gendered knowledge-production. See, e.g., Slavicek (2008), Butler (2004b) and Burgoyne (2012) for analyses of ethnicity in considering suicide terrorism, and Follman (2019) for toxic masculinity in school shootings.

¹²⁵ Shneidman (1993: 4).

¹²⁶ See, e.g., Shneidman (1985: 7).

¹²⁷ Brown (2001: 63), Daube (1972) and Jaworski (2014: 17).

¹²⁸ Daube (1972).

is suicide's definition as an "unnatural," "violent" and thus "bad" death, in contrast to the deaths that are seen to follow the course of nature as "natural" and "good" deaths through denotation to murder and slaughter.¹²⁹

Suicide's conceptualization for the first time aligns with suicide's secularization after the centuries during which self-inflicted death had been defined and conceptualized in the West under ecclesiastic rule and, subsequently, criminal law. As historians of suicide recount, it came to be defined as sin, a transgression against God, in the fifth century, with the Church fathers deciding that it violated the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."¹³⁰ As a sin and a crime it was subjected to heavy sanctions and juridical punishment until the early decades of the nineteenth century, with the bodies of suiciding individuals subjected to public defamation and divergent burial customs and bereaved families left to atone for the "crimes" of the dead in the form of both social and economic sanctions.¹³¹

An easing of the level of condemnation of suicides in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be seen in verdicts deeming suiciding individuals to be *non compos mentis*: being out of their minds at the moment of their suicides, which could refer to diabolical influence and later, increasingly, to madness.¹³² This was opposed to the *felo de se* verdicts, which showed no mercy to suicides who could be argued to have acted with sound minds.¹³³ MacDonald and Murphy, who studied suicide verdicts in England, propose that by the 1720s, over 90 per cent of all suiciding individuals were judged insane, with *non compos mentis* becoming the only verdict by the end of the eighteenth century.¹³⁴ This line dividing condemnable suicides from more acceptable ones follows a logic similar to the ancient philosophical discussion, with a more tolerant attitude toward suicide than the subsequent religious one. The oft-reiterated Platonic argument, for instance, drew the line between reason and irrationality.¹³⁵

As the normalization of the *non compos mentis* verdicts suggests, the pinnacle of the trajectory of suicide's secularization is its medicalization in the first decades of the nineteenth century,¹³⁶ as a result of which suicide has widely become defined under "psy-knowledge," that complex of discourses produced by the various professionals of the mind.¹³⁷ Ian Marsh reports that the roots of suicide's current understanding were set out in detail for the first time by French psychiatrist Jean-Etienne Esquirol, whose 1821 definition considers suicide a form of *pathologie interne*,¹³⁸ a pathological inner space that justified the suicidal individual's subjection to doctors' power. Marsh also recognizes that these prevailing truths in the formation of suicide were based on notions of an imbalance

¹²⁹ See, e.g., Hoppania-Koivula (2015).

¹³⁰ Lieberman (2003: 10).

¹³¹ See, e.g., Jaworski (2014: 65) and Minois (1999: 9-32).

¹³² Minois (1999).

¹³³ Minois (1999).

¹³⁴ MacDonald (1986: 61-64) and MacDonald and Murphy (1990).

¹³⁵ Novak (1975).

¹³⁶ Marsh (2010).

¹³⁷ Rose (1998).

¹³⁸ Marsh (2010: 10).

in an individual's bodily state or mental condition, both of which have contributed to suicide being associated with the idea of a disease,¹³⁹ a connection that has persisted in the definition of suicide as a "neutral, clinical symptom of illness."¹⁴⁰ In the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5, 2013)*, for instance, suicide risk is measured under most disorders, and "suicidal behavior disorder" appears for the first time. The criteria for this disorder are met if the individual has "made at least one suicide attempt," including "behaviors in which, after initiating the suicide attempt, the individual changed his or her mind or someone intervened."¹⁴¹

As is reflected in the both medical and popular discourses on suicide and as Jaworski notes, the most common name for this dysfunction and for the human drama emphasized by Shneidman, is depression.¹⁴² The *DSM-5*, for instance, identifies suicide as "a visible symptom of the major depressive episode."¹⁴³ As Jaworski explains, suicide is seen as "the most serious sign and consequence of depression,"¹⁴⁴ while depression can, according to Isacson and Rich, be regarded as a "necessary condition for suicide."¹⁴⁵ With this, and with the privileged position of psy-knowledge in defining suicide, the way we understand suicide is focused "on the state of the mind instead of the body," although this dysfunction of the mind is sometimes viewed as affected by a biochemical and thus bodily dysfunction.

Although these prevalent medical approaches to suicide do not entail moral condemnation of suicide to the same extent as the medieval ones that punished suiciding individuals as sinners, it must be noted that they are not bereft of moral evaluation; nor do they treat all self-inflicted deaths as the same. This is clear in the persistent division between "natural" and "unnatural" and "good" and "bad" deaths and in suicide's ongoing conceptualization as a mode of killing or murder. Here, Durkheim's typology is useful in drawing attention to the ongoing differentiations between "proper suicides" and more acceptable self-inflicted deaths. It also includes under the term "suicide" deaths that can be accepted, sometimes even glorified, by society as altruistic or fatalistic suicides,¹⁴⁶ as opposed to the egoistic and anomic suicides that more easily meet suicide's stereotype as a death that is easily condemned as an individualistic act against other people and the community at large.

These differentiations sometimes lead to the demarcation between suicides and such sacrificial deaths that could be considered altruistic suicides. A succinct illustration is found in the medieval tradition, uniting both ecclesiastic discourses and artistic representations in juxtaposing the martyrdom by Christ with the sinful, diabolical death of Judas Iscariot as two inherently different deaths, although both deaths could be argued to be self-inflicted, voluntary or resulting from

¹³⁹ Marsh (2010).

¹⁴⁰ Jaworski (2014: 95).

¹⁴¹ American Psychiatric Association (2013: 801–803).

¹⁴² Jaworski (2014: 95).

¹⁴³ American Psychiatric Association (1994) quoted in Jaworski (2014: 97).

¹⁴⁴ Jaworski (2014: 95).

¹⁴⁵ Isacson and Rich (1997: 168) quoted in Jaworski (2014: 95).

¹⁴⁶ Durkheim (1966: 145–296).

God's deterministic plan, with the two figures' fates intertwined with one another.¹⁴⁷ The conceptual distance between the two deaths is often produced by juxtaposing them, where the formal similarities between the societally beneficial, or otherwise acceptable, suicides and the other kinds of self-inflicted deaths are erased. Beneficial deaths are glorified as honorable, whereas the latter attract the demonizing and pathologizing attributes circulated by institutions seeking to define and discuss suicide. In this sense, the assertion of a "good death" often requires the existence of its opposite, a "bad death."

As I discuss suicide in this dissertation, I tend to refer specifically to the egoistic type of suicide, intentional deaths against the (mores of) society that constitute the Western understanding of voluntary death and represent the more typical suicides in Western societies marked by individualism and alienation. Such deaths, formed in the dominance of the demonizing and pathologizing views that have rendered it generally unnatural, immoral, irrational and bad, are also easy to see as taboo deaths, as discouraged, condemned and marginalized deaths, surrounded by social silence and stigma. Considering the varieties through which suicide has come to be known in contemporary culture, Katrina Jaworski points out additional conceptions whose circulation has helped mold the contemporary understanding of suicide:

Suicide comes to our notice in varied forms, each acting to reveal yet also mask what we 'know' to be suicide: suicide as genuine attempt, suicide as 'attention-seeking behavior', suicide publicly unspoken yet locally known. It stems from private despair attached to celebrity deaths, or takes the form of a political statement writ large through the spectre of 'the suicide bomber'. It appears, muted, in publicized accounts of Indigenous deaths. Like death, suicide presents us with aspects of the unfathomable, but with something added: the incongruity of a life that seeks its own end.¹⁴⁸

Many of the changes in suicide's knowledge production reflect those also affecting death more generally: over the course of the past centuries, death has been secularized, subjected to the discourses of hygiene and medicine and institutionalized.¹⁴⁹ Reflecting these changes, John Tercier recognizes death's having become known through the imageries of hospitals and medical care in Western popular culture.¹⁵⁰ These trajectories have, according to several scholars, also brought about death's distancing from lived life: Norbert Elias, for instance, talks about death's denial in the cultural attitudes toward dying, while Geoffrey Gorer discusses the increased representation of the violent deaths in Anglophone entertainment in relation to this taboo against dying.¹⁵¹ Both these views and trajectories have faced resistance,¹⁵² but they are also interesting to keep in mind when considering the processes of suicide's meaning-making and its position in Western culture.

¹⁴⁷ Brown (2001: 52–55).

¹⁴⁸ Jaworski (2014: 2).

¹⁴⁹ See, e.g., Ariès (1974) and Pajari (2013).

¹⁵⁰ Tercier (2005).

¹⁵¹ Elias (1985) and Gorer (1965).

¹⁵² See, e.g., Walter (1991, 1994).

Within this dissertation, I seek to understand suicide's cultural position as a tabooed, regulated death in relation to these and other kinds of values and conceptions that are circulated in suicide's cinematic representations. Approaches like mine are relatively rare in a field dominated by suicidology and regimes of truth that subject suicide to scrutiny precisely as a social problem and mental disease. Suicidology is a multidisciplinary field of science aiming at suicide's prevention, constituted mainly by psychology and sociology and targeted in particular to producing an understanding of suicidal behavior and its causes. It is hardly fair to criticize suicidology, or the fields that dominate it, for seeking to prevent death and the attendant human suffering, but like all unchallenged knowledge placed on a pedestal, it is difficult – even dangerous – to compete with and criticize. There are, however, some scholars who have examined suicide's knowledge production more critically.¹⁵³

My theoretical framework relies in particular on Ian Marsh, who approaches suicide from the theories of biopower and whose work I introduce in chapter 3.2.2. Next to Marsh, Katrina Jaworski, who studies suicide's "masculine and masculinist" regimes of knowledge,¹⁵⁴ is featured in my discussion (chapter 5). Approaching the topic in relation to my materials, the research on suicide's representation in the fields of visual studies (counting in the specific fields of film studies and media studies) is in general scarce, and only a few studies reach beyond single articles or book chapters. Most of the theoretical background in this dissertation is thus produced by art historical writing on suicide, with Ron Brown studying the art history of suicide and Lynda Nead studying suicide in Victorian art seeking to produce knowledge of gender. Michele Aaron represents the more contemporary media cultural approaches to suicide in an analysis of suicide cinema, in addition to which Steven Stack's and David Lester's *Suicide and the Creative Arts* (2009) includes articles on contemporary representations of suicide alongside historical ones.

3.2 Visual studies and biopower

3.2.1 Visual studies and the power of representation

As it has been prepared for the discipline of art history, this dissertation represents the interdisciplinary field of visual studies in its theoretical focus and field of study. Visual studies is situated on a continuum with the political new art history of the late twentieth century, media studies and cultural studies.¹⁵⁵ It is in-

¹⁵³ Within Finnish academy, Anu Salmela (2017) has challenged suicide's knowledge production in her doctoral dissertation of cultural history, where she approaches suicide's gendering and medicalization through criminal court proceedings of female suicides in Finland in 1869–1910.

¹⁵⁴ Jaworski (2014).

¹⁵⁵ Dikovitskaya (2005: 6), Rojek (2007), Seppänen (2005: 34–40) and Vänskä (2006: 22–26).

volved with the study of contemporary visual culture, shaped by new technologies and philosophies of seeing that not only are reflected in the increasing visuality of new media but also affect how seeing itself is comprehended. Visual studies thus includes not only the established forms of high culture but also the theories and practices of seeing and the various fields of contemporary culture pervaded by visuality, from cinema and advertising to the memesphere found in new media.

In its field of study, focal interests and theories, visual studies has taken after cultural studies, an interdisciplinary field originating in the social sciences and Marxist analysis. Officially founded in 1960s Birmingham under the influence of the sociologists Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall, cultural studies is known for directing its gaze away from the established forms of culture, especially traditionally esteemed high culture, in a new postwar wave of socio-cultural research. In settling into the intersection between the humanities and social sciences, cultural studies sought to address the emergence of new cultures and cultural forms of meaning-making, thus advancing the study of previously overlooked phenomena such as mass media and popular culture. It also acknowledged the consumption of media as an active form of cultural participation.¹⁵⁶

Most notably, this “cultural turn” represented by cultural studies was involved with advancing the theoretical analysis of how cultural meanings are generated and bound up with systems of power and control. Emphasizing the role of representation – the processes by which meanings are produced and exchanged in a culture through the use of language, signs and images¹⁵⁷ – both cultural studies and visual studies examine how cultural products and their consumption participate in the socio-cultural construction of reality through visually and discursively communicated sets of conceptions, values, affects and definitions.

Representations, which are discussed in this dissertation inasmuch as they appear in the popular cultural field of cinema, function as symbolic stand-ins or substitutes for selected components of reality.¹⁵⁸ The act of representing consists of the practices of defining, naming and signifying the elements that are considered central in each culture, as is illustrated, for instance, by suicide, defined in relation to other kinds of deaths through the processes in which it is defined as separate, named and loaded with social values. The processes of representing these entities are understood as semantic tools for their meaning-making, where these entities, their relations to other entities and thus eventually the entire reality we live in, are re-presented and organized by using varied representational systems such as spoken language, cultural texts or figurations within visual cultural discourses.

Representation’s situated and polysemic nature is central to understanding these meaning-making processes, where meanings are negotiated between senders and viewers on the one hand, and according to varied socio-cultural positions

¹⁵⁶ Hall (2008).

¹⁵⁷ Hall (2013b).

¹⁵⁸ Hall (2013b).

on the other. How the meanings conveyed by representation are understood to become, so to say, fixed enough to participate in the constitution of particular kinds of meanings occurs first through their reiteration, both in the aforementioned representational systems and in social life.¹⁵⁹ Gender theorist Judith Butler has made sense of these processes in her conceptual work with performatives: repetitive social practices that help constitute social reality through not only immaterial representations but also their material, embodied performance.¹⁶⁰ Butler defines performativity “as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains,”¹⁶¹ well illustrating how material reality can be created and re-created by immaterial entities such as representations, with their repetitive significations, values and chains of association. Discursive practices are thus, as Ian Marsh adds, “understood as a way of acting and thinking at once.”¹⁶²

In the Barthesian analysis of types of speech, these reiterating representations can be repeated to the point that they lose the traces of their construction as “second-order semiological systems” called “myths.”¹⁶³ Here, myths refer to deeply encoded cultural constructions that have been naturalized in their reiteration and in this sense rendered unquestioned and invisible as cultural constructions.¹⁶⁴ Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros see myths as ‘repositories of value’.¹⁶⁵ A similar notion is found in anthropology, where the types of speech called myths are viewed as socio-cultural tools of organization and classification that are cosmologically bound, learned and accepted through acculturation into a particular community.¹⁶⁶ In this sense, myths “think in men without their knowing.”¹⁶⁷ With this background, myths refer to those types of representation that participate in cultural meaning-making processes as accepted facts and also continuously help construe these facts.

Representations as meaning-making vessels, naturalized as myths and performed in the material world, are reiterated in particular kinds of social systems of power and control. Here, the focus is, on one hand, on “discourses” that in Foucauldian terms are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.”¹⁶⁸ They are “social practices” and “particular forms of language” that offer the social boundaries for the kinds of representations and statements that are allowed for specific topics in specific contexts.¹⁶⁹ As Lynda Nead notes,

¹⁵⁹ Butler (2011: 20), Ahmed (2014: 92) and Rossi (2003).

¹⁶⁰ Butler (2011: xi-xxiv).

¹⁶¹ Butler (2011: 2).

¹⁶² Marsh (2010: 15).

¹⁶³ Barthes (2009).

¹⁶⁴ Barthes (2009: 131-187).

¹⁶⁵ Howells and Negreiros (2012: 120).

¹⁶⁶ See, e.g., Douffé (1909) and Durkheim (1961). In carrying information about essential cultural “facts,” myths often function as ideological tools and have been argued by Ernst Cassirer (1979a, 1979b) in this function to be particularly characteristic of the political thought of the modern era

¹⁶⁷ Lévi-Strauss (1975: 12, 1979, 1980).

¹⁶⁸ Foucault (1972: 49).

¹⁶⁹ Fairclough (1995, 18-19).

these discourses as particular forms of language have their “own rules and conventions and the institutions within which the discourse is produced and circulated.”¹⁷⁰

Beyond recognizing these implicit rules of representation, cultural studies has been particularly impactful in its analysis of cultural hegemony. In the Foucauldian understanding, the power of discourses rests on their accumulation into “discursive formations” of discourses of a heterogeneous nature across cultural institutions and social conduct.¹⁷¹ It is also understood in cultural studies that the access to positions of power where cultural meanings can be negotiated more freely are not equally found among society’s groups and individuals. In a situation where participation is unequally divided, ruling groups get to impose the beliefs, perceptions, values and mores reiterated through representations and cultural institutions with greater ease, so their worldview ends up becoming the accepted cultural norm. Here, cultural studies has advanced the critical study of social class, ethnicity, colonialism, ability, gender and sexuality:¹⁷² the areas in which cultural hegemony’s power over representation have been most obvious and their impact on the lives of “subalterns” most evident. The subaltern refers to social groups who are excluded from society’s socio-economic institutions and these processes of meaning-making in order to deny their political participation.¹⁷³

In cultural hegemony, what is reiterated through representations are not only meanings and naturalized myths of the world, phenomena and human beings but also value-laden preconceptions about them.¹⁷⁴ Stuart Hall, in particular, has excelled in the study of “otherness,” where representations participate in the differentiation between the hegemonic “universal human being” and its others.¹⁷⁵ Zygmunt Bauman argues that otherness is central to the way in which societies establish identity categories. He notes that identities are often set up as dichotomies: woman as the other of man, animal as the other of human, stranger as the other of native, abnormality as the other of normative, deviance as the other of law-abiding, illness as the other of health, insanity as the other of reason, layperson as the other of expert, foreigner as the other of state subject and enemy as the other of friend.¹⁷⁶

With these differentiations, the universal human being is constructed as a white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied and able-minded cis man. Many scholars also recognize that these two groups are constructed in relation to one another, by which the universal human being is constructed with the help of its others and the others created in relation to this universal human being.¹⁷⁷ Richard

¹⁷⁰ Nead (1988: 4).

¹⁷¹ Foucault (1972: 31–39).

¹⁷² During (1993: 1–25), Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler (1992), Hall et al. (1980), Munns and Rajan (1995) and Rojek (2007).

¹⁷³ Gramsci (1971).

¹⁷⁴ Althusser (1971). Barthes (2009) and Howells & Negreiros (2012).

¹⁷⁵ See, e.g., Hall (2013b).

¹⁷⁶ Bauman (1990: 8).

¹⁷⁷ Okolie (2003: 2).

Dyer captures the fundamental questions of representation that are pertinent to cultural studies:

How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of, these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights of a society claims to ensure it citizens.¹⁷⁸

Dyer describes a stereotyping process in which groups of people and various phenomena are reproduced as “deceptively simple” forms that say nothing unexpected yet “imply knowledge of complex social structures.”¹⁷⁹

Clearly, these value-laden representations are powerful and affective in many ways and in several spheres of life. For instance, the aforementioned study of cultural hegemony’s power over subalterns and the universal human being’s various others recognizes that representations affect how individuals identify and feel about themselves through the internalization of social categories and their value-laden representations.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, those self-same theories recognize representations’ participation in “affective economies” whose circulating emotions, from fear to disgust, shape our perceptions and have the power to influence both individual and collective bodies. As Sara Ahmed has noted, the representations and discourses constructing our reality are “sticky,” with emotions that “stick to” particular kinds of figures or bodies with greater ease than to others.¹⁸¹ Both Ahmed and Hall also recognize that these particular kinds of bodies also stickily gather value-laden characteristics in the affective economy’s representative chains of associations, where values, emotions and affective attributes cluster together to make them into loaded stereotypes.¹⁸²

Returning to visual studies, it is occupied with the same forms of meaning-making that cultural studies is occupied with, but it approaches them as participants in the construction of reality and the recreation of systems of power and control insofar as they are visual. The field of visual studies strives to draw attention to the different non-textual ways in which visual representations participate in these processes.¹⁸³ Here, visual studies pivots in particular on the “new art history” of the 1980s, which – like the social sciences waking up to their colonial history through changes of paradigm – had discovered the colonial and gendered dynamics molding both the art historical canon and the discipline of art history.¹⁸⁴ The Marxist influences stirring in cultural studies also shook the new art history into taking an interest in theory on the one hand and the influence of cultural systems of power on the other. With this apparatus, a new wave of art

¹⁷⁸ Dyer (2002: 1).

¹⁷⁹ Perkins (1997: 76); see also Dyer (2002) and Hall (2013b).

¹⁸⁰ Hall (1996).

¹⁸¹ Ahmed (2014: 1–16).

¹⁸² Hall (2013c: 232–237) and Ahmed (2014: 1–16).

¹⁸³ Mirzoeff (1998: 3–13), Mitchell (1986, 1994: 11–35), Jencks (1995) quoted in Rose (2007: 5–16).

¹⁸⁴ Vänskä (2006: 22–31).

historians moved into the emerging field of visual studies and brought with them their knowledge of *vision* and *visuality*.

Visual studies thus widens the scope of cultural studies by problematizing the dominance of the semiotic concept of “text.”¹⁸⁵ In being established on the cornerstone built by cultural studies, the truth value allotted to visual media and vision in opposition to the understanding of language’s disingenuous nature had not yet been dethroned despite “the pictorial turn,” which still equated “seeing” with “knowing” and obscured the extent to which ideology operated through visual means. Visual studies instead maintained that postmodernism had come to be qualified as an increasingly “ocularcentric” and “spectacle-oriented” era,¹⁸⁶ recognized how vision and visuality were bound up with the same power as texts to produce the phenomena of the world and emphasized the role of visual forms of literacy and the spectator’s position in the interpretation of visual culture.

These theories form the background for my scrutiny of suicide’s cinematic representations. Any representation can have a manifold impact on the collective understanding of varied phenomena and on human beings’ individual lives through its circulation of conceptions, values and emotions. It is also taken as a necessity that this is so when suicide’s representations are in question, and indeed both Katrina Jaworski and Ian Marsh have already employed Butlerian ideas on performativity in striving to understand how knowledge of suicide is produced.¹⁸⁷

In the next section, I discuss the Foucauldian theory of biopower, one of the systems of power and control that operates through cultural discourses and representations. Specifically, biopower recognizes the normative regulation of sexuality and death, including suicide, and of related subjectivities. There are many reasons to suspect it represents one of the contemporary institutional and ideological forms of the taboo, which biopower has in some theories come to supplant; that is why I have chosen to include it in my theoretical framework, along with the anthropological theories.

3.2.2 Biopower as modern power over life and death

As noted, the discursive sphere, with its representations of varied phenomena, not only participates in the construction of socio-cultural reality but also explicitly seeks to reproduce its ideologically constituted order. The Foucauldian theory of biopower, introduced in the introductory volume to his four-volume study *The History of Sexuality* (1978), is central to the theoretical repertoire of the understanding of power in cultural studies and visual studies, which both seek to understand the regulation of the social bodies of social communities in the era of modern nation states and global capitalism.¹⁸⁸ Later scholars, such as Michael Hardt and the Italian philosophers Giorgio Agamben and Antonio Negri, have

¹⁸⁵ Kalha et al. (2002: 7–21), Mirzoeff (1998: 3–13), Mitchell (1986, 1994: 11–35), Rossi and Seppä (2007) and Vänskä (2006: 22–31).

¹⁸⁶ Debord (1983) and Jay (1993) quoted in Rose (2007: 5–16).

¹⁸⁷ Jaworski (2014) and Marsh (2010).

¹⁸⁸ Foucault (1990: 141).

developed the theory further, arguing that biopower is pertinent to all forms of power in both Western history and the contemporary era.¹⁸⁹

Foucauldian analysis considers biopower to be a symptomatically modern system of power and control that has come to substitute for the sovereign power exercised by religious and supreme rulers at the dawn of the Enlightenment.¹⁹⁰ Biopower seeks to sustain the socio-cultural order and organization, regulating how individuals both live and die in particular kinds of social collectives, through varied methods and techniques of normative regulation, where “men are governed by one another.”¹⁹¹ According to Foucault, in opposition to the juridico-political power of the sovereign order that exercises its power through its right to kill, biopower's “highest function” is instead to “invest life through and through.”¹⁹²

Foucault characterizes biopower as the methods and techniques “used in different institutional contexts to act upon the behavior of individuals [...] so as to shape, direct, modify their way of conducting themselves.”¹⁹³ He also divides biopower into two interrelated fields: the anatomo-politics of human bodies and the biopolitics of social populations. According to Foucault, the purpose of anatomo-politics is the disciplinary optimization of the human body's capabilities, usefulness and docility.¹⁹⁴ He views biopolitics as the regulatory controls directed at imbuing bodies with “the mechanics of life,” so that they may serve as “the basis of the biological processes” for the entire population.¹⁹⁵ Together, these politics seek to regulate the human body in procreation, nutrition and death through the norms, mores and identity politics related to sex and sexuality, through gendered conceptions of health and beauty and through the “thanatopolitical” practices treating death.¹⁹⁶

Biopower is “massifying” rather than “individualizing” and is encoded into social practices through subtle technologies better suited for secularizing large-scale populations.¹⁹⁷ It is targeted at managing larger groups through the regulation of individuals' identities and bodies. Accordingly, biopower operates as a set of normative technologies achieving the regulation of social bodies through the subjugation of individual bodies; through the individuals' own acts of self-regulation, the lives and deaths of the symbolic bodies of entire populations can be rendered controllable.¹⁹⁸ Foucault expands on the issue:

But a power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms. It is no longer a matter of bringing death into the playing field of

¹⁸⁹ Agamben (1998, 2015) and Hardt and Negri (2009).

¹⁹⁰ Foucault (1988b: 16–49, 1990: 135–159). Giorgio Agamben, though, problematizes this division by noting that biopower has also been included within sovereign power (1998: 1–12).

¹⁹¹ Foucault (1972: 463).

¹⁹² Foucault (1990: 139).

¹⁹³ Foucault (1988a: 463).

¹⁹⁴ Foucault (1990: 139).

¹⁹⁵ Foucault (1990).

¹⁹⁶ Esposito (2004).

¹⁹⁷ Foucault (2008: 55–86).

¹⁹⁸ Foucault (1972, 1988b, 1990: 135–159).

sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor. I do not mean to say that the law fades into the background [...] but that the law operates more and more as a norm.¹⁹⁹

Biopower is executed through multiple institutions that are not restricted to disciplinary organs of jurisdiction and punishment; they also include the university, military, writing, media, education and healthcare.²⁰⁰ According to the Foucauldian doctrine, biopower is targeted at the creation of “docile bodies” through the normative processes that contain the institutional efforts of knowledge production, signification and individuals’ objectivization, as well as the eventual involvement of individuals in the regulation of their subjugated, normatively governed bodies with different “technologies of the self.”²⁰¹ In the Foucauldian analysis of biopower, discursive practices deal with the “imposition of a ‘law of truth’” that individuals must recognize in themselves through “conscience” or “self-knowledge.”²⁰² In this, biopowered discourses participate in the constitution of both subjects and objects, which are produced in a correlative relationship to one another.²⁰³ Recognizing the role of cultural classifications and differentiations in the domain of madness, Foucault offers the following insight:

I have studied the objectivizing of the subject in what I shall call “dividing practices”. The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him. Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the good boys.²⁰⁴

In its essence, biopower, as a normative power, is able to regulate individuals and social collectives by molding the general understanding of what is normal versus abnormal. In this sense it operates on a slightly different scale in relation to the ecclesiastic, sovereign and disciplinary institutions preceding it, which worked on the axes dividing good from bad and natural from unnatural in more straightforward processes and dictations. Biopower is also relational and seeks to segregate individuals from one another through their hierarchization.²⁰⁵ The previously noted differentiations between social groups into selves and others are valid here; in addition, Giorgio Agamben has tried to understand biopower’s paradoxes, with particular types of bodies rendered more valuable than others, by distinguishing them with the Greek concepts *zoe* and *bios*, ‘bare life’ and ‘qualified life.’²⁰⁶

Biopower increasingly relies on discourses under whose reign human subjects gradually acquiesce to the subtle regulations and expectations of the social order. According to Foucault, biopower is “dispersed and always relational” and must, like discursive power in general, be understood “as the multiplicity of force

¹⁹⁹ Foucault (1990: 144).

²⁰⁰ Foucault (1977b, 1990).

²⁰¹ Foucault (1988b: 16–49, 1990: 135–159).

²⁰² Foucault (1982).

²⁰³ Marsh (2010: 15).

²⁰⁴ Foucault (1982: 777–778); see also Foucault (2006).

²⁰⁵ Foucault (1990: 141).

²⁰⁶ Agamben (1998: 1–12).

relations [...] which constitute their own organization, as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations transforms, strengthens or reverses them."²⁰⁷ It is easy to see how the visual cultural processes of representation and meaning-making, described in the previous section, also participate in biopower through the conceptions, values and emotions affecting the performance of material bodies. For instance, the visual cultural scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff discusses how the normative representations of the body affect real, corporeal bodies:

Now, rather than being observed from without, we monitor and control our own bodies.²⁰⁸

At the same time the corporeal sign has very real effects upon the physical body, especially in regard to determining what is held to be normal.²⁰⁹

Foucault, in studying these processes in sex and reproduction in particular, notices the explosion of precisely these discursive technologies at the dawn of the Enlightenment, when these topics' regulation was achieved by both authorized "regimes of truth" and "confessional discourses."²¹⁰ Having been incited to talk about their personal lives, individual citizens participate in modern biopower's technologies of knowledge production, which foster their subsequent subjugation to the modern institutions of power as their objects, as Foucault writes:

Through the varied discourses, legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness; from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described; pedagogical controls and medical treatments were organized; around the least fantasies moralists, but especially doctors, brandished the whole emphatic vocabulary of abominations.²¹¹

Foucault also recognizes these discourses – rendering sexuality under control through both discourses' and sexual categories' plurality instead of their lack – to be shielded by the "repressive hypothesis": the historically ungrounded conception that sexuality had been repressed and silenced before the advent of modernity. Foucault argues that the repressive hypothesis has helped establish new technologies of knowledge production by introducing them as revolts against the old model of "repression" and "taboo."²¹² This is related to the double-edged nature of the discourses and representations pertaining to sexuality, which are recognized as participating in the subjugation of individuals under their facade of liberation as a "productive network which runs through the whole social body" and "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse":²¹³

²⁰⁷ Foucault (1990: 92–93).

²⁰⁸ Mirzoeff (1995: 103).

²⁰⁹ Mirzoeff (1995: 3).

²¹⁰ Foucault (1990).

²¹¹ Foucault (1990: 36).

²¹² Foucault (1990: 15–50).

²¹³ Foucault (2000: 120).

It seems to me now that the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. In defining the effects of power as repression one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law that says no, power is taken above all as carrying the force of a prohibition.²¹⁴

As I discuss in the next section, biopower is significant in relation to the taboo. While Foucault does acknowledge the decline of the discursive taboo's role in modern systems of power and control that operate through the aforementioned normative discourses affecting human beings' embodied lives, biopower simultaneously recognizes the elevated role of other technologies of power that are pertinent to the taboo when approached from the theoretical background offered by anthropology.

As noted, biopower has been shown to regulate not only sexuality and reproduction but also death; of necessity, then, it is also targeted at suicide through the normative forces seeking to regulate how, when and where individuals die. For Foucault, it is precisely voluntary death's subjection to Western knowledge production that represents the transition from sovereign power to biopower:

One might say that the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death. [...] Now it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its dominion; death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most "private." It is not surprising that suicide – once a crime, since it was a way to usurp the power of death which the sovereign alone, whether the one here below or the Lord above, had the right to exercise – became, in the course of the nineteenth century, one of the first conducts to enter into the sphere of sociological analysis: it testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life. This determination to die, strange and yet so persistent and constant in its manifestations, and consequently so difficult to explain as being due to particular circumstances or individual accidents, was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life.²¹⁵

The role of biopolitical knowledge production in the prevailing understanding of suicide has been directly acknowledged by some suicidologists, with Katrina Jaworski (2014) and Ian Marsh (2010) studying how the prevailing understanding of suicide has been shaped by conceptions of gender and the regimes of truth that govern medicine and psychiatry. Marsh recognizes suicide's regulation precisely in the transition from the religio-moral discourses and juridical punishment to the power of medical and then psychiatric institutions, with their proliferating "discourses and associated technologies concerned with identifying, examining, confining, watching, restraining, diagnosing, and treating the suicidal":²¹⁶

Such deaths are not read as inevitable, and the problem of suicide now is that it is an unnecessary death – it is, and should be, avoidable and preventable. Suicide therefore represents a failure of power to preserve life, and further, it is a waste of life – the loss of an asset to power, and in the final analysis, a tragedy. Within such a biopolitical rationality certain strategies emerged to deal with the problem of suicide as it came to

²¹⁴ Foucault (2000: 119-120).

²¹⁵ Foucault (1990: 138-139).

²¹⁶ Marsh (2010: 99).

be conceived, and these were different solutions from those developed to punish the transgression of sovereign laws.²¹⁷

Marsh argues that, with the "increasing weight of authority afforded to medicine and science," these discourses "acted to form certain subjects and experiences in relation to suicide,"²¹⁸ enmeshing the suicidal individuals into the web or their "condition's" knowledge-production as an abnormality of the mind and of the biochemical body.²¹⁹ He studies both the genealogical origins of these psychodiscourses,²²⁰ and the extent to which they have pervaded the discursive field, managing to even affect how suicide is represented, for instance through the media guidelines for preventing suicides.²²¹ This is particularly manifested in the wealth of different kinds of discourses presenting suicide as the "tragic act of a mentally unwell individual,"²²² with the suicidal person characterized, in the words of Timothy Hill, "as in some way morbid, anguished, isolated and driven to end their life by some peculiarly internalized torment."²²³

As Marsh suggests, suicide's medical and psychiatric knowledge production is not any more devoid of moral evaluation than the religious and juridico-political knowledge productions preceding it; it functions as a "moral enterprise," and a mission of "public hygiene and control of dangerous individuals."²²⁴ He also argues that the entire field of psychiatry, the foundations of which were laid in the middle of the nineteenth century, is established "by reference to suicide"²²⁵ as both individually and socially dangerous and as the most extreme form of madness. Instrumentally, suicide thus held "strategic utility [...] for the consolidation and extension of psychiatric power."²²⁶ Lastly, Marsh argues that suicide's medicalization offered a way to regulate suicidal individuals through their imprisonment in mental asylums and other medical institutions; he sees this regulation to have continued in the contemporary suicidological efforts of suicide prevention, which include media guidelines for representing suicides (see chapter 5.1):

Now the discovery of premonitory medical signs of a disposition to suicide opened up the possibility of intervention before a suicidal act could be committed [...] Medicine not only claimed expertise and authority, but also promised a more effective solution to the problem of suicide through prevention.²²⁷

However, as Marsh recognizes, suicide-related knowledge's deconstruction as constructed and affected by medical discourses is relatively rare within the sciences, because of the topic's sensitivity, direness and level of naturalization:

²¹⁷ Marsh (2010: 99).

²¹⁸ Marsh (2010: 11).

²¹⁹ Marsh (2010).

²²⁰ Rose (1998).

²²¹ Marsh (2010).

²²² Marsh (2010: 27).

²²³ Hill (2004) quoted in Marsh (2010: 27).

²²⁴ Marsh (2010: 135).

²²⁵ Marsh (2010).

²²⁶ Marsh (2010: 224).

²²⁷ Marsh (2010: 10).

Those ways of thinking and acting that produced and reproduced truths of suicide in terms of its pathology. [...] However, the comprehensive histories of the medicalization of madness already available have, arguably, explored similar territory in great detail [...] whereas analysis of specific historical texts that relate to suicide are notable by their absence.²²⁸

Foucault's primary concern [...] was [...] of making strange, or unfamiliar, that which had come to feel most true, most natural, most necessary and most real. Again, this task is rendered difficult with respect to the current subject, as the "truths" of suicide tend to feel particularly real – after all there are dead bodies and grief; to describe people who take their own lives as having acted "while the balance of their minds was disturbed" appears a natural, almost self-evident, truth. To seek to prevent suicide by any means available, given the above, would seem to be an absolute necessity.²²⁹

Like both Jaworski and Marsh, I am interested in the practices of biopower, specifically the normative discourses shaping our understanding of suicide, especially in the context of representations in audiovisual media culture.

3.2.3 Approaching taboo in the field of visual culture

Unlike my use of theories related to biopower, my decision to rely on anthropological theories related to taboo diverges somewhat from earlier studies of visual culture. Although cultural and visual studies have historical roots in the examination of how social reality is constructed and regulated, the analysis of how the taboo in particular has participated in these processes has been limited. I suspect this to be related to the taboo's conceptual history within a science accused for its pastoral gaze and later affected by the movement toward magico-religious concepts' secularization and decolonization.²³⁰

Generally viewed, the taboo's life cycle in the theories following those in colonial era anthropology has been relatively short, and thus the latest oft-cited sources continue to originate from the 1980s, while most of the most popular sources were written in the 1960s. According to my analysis, this cross-disciplinary commonplace, reflected also in the field of visual studies, can be divided into three different strains:

- 1) "Bourdiesian" (or Leachian-Bourdiesian), which recognizes the taboo in social (and other) silences in the legacy of anthropological linguistics;
- 2) "Freudian" (or Freudian-Kristevan), which places the taboo in the realm of the unconscious through psychoanalytic inquiry built on the colonialist study of the taboo as sympathetic magic;
- 3) "Douglasian" (or Leachian-Douglasian), in which the taboo's short history culminates in the analysis of the functionalist and structuralist schools of anthropology,²³¹ where the taboo's relationship to socio-cultural classification and, more popularly, to anomaly and dirt are emphasized.

²²⁸ Marsh (2010: 8).

²²⁹ Marsh (2010: 6).

²³⁰ Foucault (1979) and Tremlet (2003).

²³¹ Originating in the first half of the twentieth century, structuralism in French academia and functionalism (sometimes also structural-functionalism) in British anthropology.

The cultural and visual studies that my dissertation represents are strong in their Bourdieusian legacy with regard to the taboo. Because of this, visual studies has been interested in taboos mostly insofar as visual culture's absences and censorious forces and these taboos' transgressions are considered.

For instance, a brief content analysis in the archives of two most prominent journals of visual studies, *The Journal of Visual Culture* and *Visual Studies*, finds 38 separate items with the search word "taboo."²³² The 18 items in *Visual Studies* are symptomatic in that not a single one offers either definitions or references for the concept. The 20 items in *The Journal of Visual Culture*, meanwhile, reflect the discrepancies in the discussions of definitions that I recognize to be inspired by the Bourdieusian definition. In some instances the taboo topics discussed are examined in relation to the Freudian and Douglasian theories. In the journal articles, taboos related to death and mourning represent the majority of the topics, but sexual taboos and taboos related to a variety of other topics such as race or tattoos also appear.²³³ Suicide does not appear among the search results. Of the 38 items, only 10 feature the search word more than once.²³⁴

Taken together, the articles discuss visual taboos and visual transgressions of social taboos.²³⁵ This reflects the paradoxes in taboo topics' discussion, evident also in the media treatment of suicide. I connect this to the so-called modernist ethos, according to which taboos have become "hunted" by transgressive institutions: espousing an antagonistic relationship toward the past, modernist cultural institutions launched an attack against conservatism and suppression, two things that the taboo had come to signify in its conceptual history.²³⁶ In this regard, transgression – the violation of first religious norms and boundaries and later profane ones – has been studied as "a cliché of modern culture," where it has been elevated into a key position in the modernist project of progress.²³⁷

The ongoing scholarly interest in transgressions of taboos (at the expense of taboo topics' in-depth analysis) also reflects the ethos of the so-called contemporary therapeutic era, which seeks pleasure over salvation (as Philip Rieff condenses it),²³⁸ and for which reason, unrepression has, according to Ernst

²³² *The Journal of Visual Culture* (a SAGE journal) and *Visual Studies* (a Taylor & Francis publication) were both consulted on 12.12.2018.

²³³ In addition to Godel (2008), death and mourning are discussed in relation to the taboo by scholars like Fédida (2003) and Graham, Constable and Fernando (2015). Sexual taboos are brought up by Kleinhans (2004), Barounis (2009) and Azoulay (2018), among others. Apel proposes race as a taboo (2009), and Kosut discusses tattoos as a response to bodily appearance taboos (2000).

²³⁴ Barounis (2009), Benin and Cartwright (2006), Coxal, Skelton and Fletcher (2003), Godel (2008), Jacobs (2004), Kraynak (2014), Larson (1999) and Thompson (2018). Of these 10 articles, both Fédida (2003) and Stone-Richards (2003) are higher in relevance because they cite Freud's *Totem and Taboo*.

²³⁵ See, e.g., Margaret Godel's discussion of images of stillbirth (2008), Adair Rounthwaite's discussion of photographic representations of veiled Muslim women (2008), Janet Kraynak's discussion of Rosemarie Trockel's feminist art (2014), Drew Thompson's discussion of José Cabral's photographs (2018) and Anna Everett's discussion of new genre formations in *Transformation TV* (2004).

²³⁶ Foster (1983) and Julius (2002).

²³⁷ Julius (2002: 17); see also Jenks (2003) and Tauchert (2008: 15–42).

²³⁸ Rieff (1966: 25–26).

Becker, "become the only religion after Freud."²³⁹ This "modernist crusade" is echoed in these articles' focus on visual transgressions, by which a number of taboo phenomena from social taboos to media silences have been reiterated in frames that see taboos as "transgressed" or "broken." Similar rhetoric is used in the 2006 article collection *The Last Taboo: Women and Body Hair*, edited by Karin Lesnik-Oberstein.

Although these kinds of analyses, studying the visual sphere's regulation on one hand and illuminating visual representation's subversive power on the other, have their own advantages, they reflect conceptions that I need to look beyond in my research. As mentioned, this dissertation was triggered by the recognition of suicide's simultaneous position as a pornified topic, as a death regulated by modern biopower and as a socially stigmatized phenomenon, which encouraged me to analyze its socio-cultural taboo and visual cultural regulation from a novel perspective.

Although the prevalent interest in the taboo as manifested in social and other silences and in restrictions on free speech can be traced to actual Polynesian taboo customs, the conceptual history of the taboo reveals several possibilities that compete with the popularized and often unchallenged definition. In the variety of theoretical analyses of the taboo within anthropology, the taboo is reflected in a wide range of customs, including verbal restrictions, and sees more than just words and names (or topics) marked off as taboo. It also impinges upon people and activities by seeking to regulate human bodies in areas where these bodies subject either individuals or community to a threat.²⁴⁰ The following chapter, focused on taboo's definition and conceptual history within anthropology, seeks to highlight the theoretical approach I have chosen to use in this dissertation.

3.3 Taboo, an anthropological concept

3.3.1 Taboo('s death) in its contemporary conceptions

I consider it best to start this section on taboo with a brief historical introduction of the concept that, according to anthropologist Franz Steiner, had in its discovery suffered from the colonialist past of the discipline.²⁴¹ Anthropology has been accused of having been built on "pastoral power" that subjugates "the other" in the service of "the self," and the discovery of the taboo fits well with the cultural-evolutionist comparative period of this discipline.²⁴² According to Steiner, through its discovery on British and French expeditions the taboo had come to constitute a "repository" for the "inexplicable" customs of the Third World. In

²³⁹ Becker (1973: 268).

²⁴⁰ See, e.g., Mead (1937: 502-503).

²⁴¹ Steiner (1999a: 103-109).

²⁴² Foucault (1979, 1988b), Latour (1993) and Tremlet (2003).

the amalgam of foundation-laying theories and ethnographic reports, the phenomenon had also been sought in a wide range of value-laden explanations that mirrored taboo customs with Western ones.²⁴³ This is verified by a look at early works like James Frazer's *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul* (1911) and Claude Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitives and the Supernatural* (1931), which reveal contradictory catalogues of the exotic with rather surface-level descriptions of the primitive beliefs of the other, set against Western civilization.

While studying the reports and theories with which I started my research into the taboo, it was easy to believe in Steiner's argument, according to which early anthropology had merely made the Polynesian loan concept of taboo a repository for "all that remained inexplicable" in the preliterate phases of cultures.²⁴⁴ Lévy-Bruhl's definition of taboos as "prohibitions of different kinds," for instance, is quite revealing of the continuum in two monographs devoted to a socially and culturally Darwinist survey of the supernatural beliefs in the "primitive mentality."²⁴⁵ His catalogues of taboo customs include taboo acts, words, persons and things, animistic beliefs, rituals, rites, transgressions, punishments and the ritual avoidance of "negative magic" all appear under the "taboo" rubric.²⁴⁶

Steiner's *Taboo* remains the last comprehensive survey on the taboo before the beginning of the twenty-first century and the publication of Valerio Valeri's *The Forest of Taboos* in 2001.²⁴⁷ In this sense, it can help us understand taboo's status even in our day, which is remarkable in the sheer number of headlines and studies describing a variety of taboos as having been "broken" or as the "last" taboo. An analysis of the historical discourses alongside contemporary ones suggests that taboo's "death," as suggested by these frequent last and broken taboos, has been achieved in the accumulation of different kinds of definitions, myths and prejudices that have affected the reputation and reception of the taboo in the West.

This conceptual history has affected the reception of taboos through both prejudices and the rather arbitrary definitions for the varied customs found in early reports and theories. The evolutionist repertoire connects exotic taboo customs to magic and vehement emotion with no rallying point or intelligible social

²⁴³ Steiner (1999a: 108).

²⁴⁴ "Unfortunately, the term was interpreted by early anthropologists such as William Robertson Smith and James Frazer as a form of superstition, or magic, and became a repository for all that remained inexplicable in preliterate cultures" (Holden, 2000: ix.) This statement reflects Franz Steiner's critique of the patronizing attitude of early anthropologists in *Taboo* (1956).

²⁴⁵ Lévy-Bruhl (1987: 292).

²⁴⁶ "Negative magic" is James Frazer's definition of the taboo: "[...] taboo is so far a negative application of practical magic. Positive magic or sorcery says, 'Do this in order that so and so may happen.' Negative magic or taboo says, 'Do not do this, lest so and so should happen'" (Frazer, 1993: 19). Introduced in his *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* (1905), it continues to be repeated almost verbatim all the way to his final 12-volume edition of *The Golden Bough* (1993: 12–37). This definition has garnered much criticism; see, for instance, Robert Marett's *The Threshold of Religion* (1941).

²⁴⁷ Holden (2000: ix) and Valeri (2000).

function. In the next stages of theory, the anthropological literature on taboo scatters in different directions under the functionalist and structuralist paradigms and even in other disciplines, until post-colonialism renders the concept volatile. Therefore, in elaborating the social functions of the taboo, the source material is somewhat disparate and can help explain taboo's reduction into a repository of repressed topics in its contemporary uses.

Here one of the dominant discourses, prevalent in both popular and academic contexts, connects the taboo phenomenon exclusively to inhibitions and prohibitions of speech and representation, considering it to be a range of topics treated with social and media silences. The axiomatic status earned by this definition, perhaps a legacy of Bourdieu's sociology and Freud's ideas of repression, may be one explanation for why a full analysis of a variety of taboos has been obstructed.²⁴⁸ In the prevailing discourses, it appears that when something is named a taboo in our cultural texts, it is often accepted at face value that the taboo is something defined by its silence, ineffability, unspeakability, unrepresentability or even censorship, without paying attention to what other kinds of restrictions surround the taboo topics in social life beyond media or social silences. With both the explosion of discursive technologies of regulation and Western media's liberation, taboos with this definition are threatened. Yet taboo's definition through silence is a distinctly Eurocentric interpretation, in addition to which the phenomenon cannot be understood without considering its status in social life and interaction, which authorized discourses in particular may not reflect well.

In contrast to the accepted paradigms related to the participation of discourses in systems of power and control, popular media discourses in particular are expected to merely reflect the silenced ontology of taboo topics instead of participating in the tabooed phenomena's regulation and domestication. This has been facilitated by the taboo phenomenon's reduction into two things: first into taboo subjects, then into taboo topics, as is illustrated, for instance, by death's subjection under restrictions as a permanent rather than context-specific taboo subject, and its further reduction into a discursive topic treated with silence and censorship. The persistent reduction of taboos into such entities is mirrored from the postwar view that sees the taboo as a complex societal structure in which these taboo(ed) subjects cannot be distinguished from the highly specific mechanisms that produce them. In addition, as anthropologists Roger Keesing and Franz Steiner argue, the reason that Westerners generally view the taboo primarily as taboo *subjects*, either averted or silenced, lies in a common mistranslation made by the early explorers and anthropologists. In its discovery, taboo was categorized as a subject instead of a stative verb, which changed the taboo from an act of "marking off" into "marked-off" taboos.²⁴⁹

Beyond the circulation of labels like "last" and "broken" in relation to many contemporary taboo topics that is facilitated by taboo's association with silence

²⁴⁸ Allan and Burridge (2006), Bourdieu (1977, 1991) and *The Oxford English Dictionary*, XVII, (1989: 521-522).

²⁴⁹ Keesing (1985: 204-205) and Steiner (1999a: 107).

and censorship, taboos in these contemporary discourses are often regarded as reactionary and anti-Western. This, too, can be connected to taboo's conceptual history; since its discovery at the end of the eighteenth century, discussions have been fraught with widely circulated stereotypes pertaining to the taboo that continue to associate the phenomenon with superstition, conservatism and hypersensitivity. On the one hand, the conceptual history has built into it the pastoral conception that the taboo is a "mechanical" form of solidarity, characteristic of magic and religion and thus a primitive equivalent to more rationally informed "organic" systems of law and morality.²⁵⁰ On the other hand, and facilitated by this connection to superstition, the conceptual history sees the taboo related first to neurosis and then to trauma in Western culture's psychological turn.²⁵¹ With the idea of cultures' evolution, the latter trajectory makes sense of the taboo as a tool of institutionalized suppression, a stale and conservative force that causes neuroses.²⁵² Eventually it sees the taboos severed from social customs as responses to trauma, triggered by individual life events. Both trajectories are remarkable in their characterization of the taboo as "affective" in relation to other possible phenomena that have similar functions but are perceived as "rational." In the first phase, entire communities are viewed as driven by their emotions; in the second, it is only individuals who are so affected.

The prevalence of these many problematic conceptions related to taboo is illustrated by Finland's most prestigious newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, which interviewed 13 high-profile thinkers – from researchers to journalists and politicians – about taboos in Finland in 2016.²⁵³ The article's framing renders the taboo as a social rather than an individual phenomenon, and in the lead paragraph taboos are defined broadly, with a certain air of mystery, as "something forbidden to be avoided," as "bearers of cultural and social meanings" and as something touched by "contradictions, paradoxes and mythical conceptions." The axiomatic silenced state of taboos is, remarkably, brought up only after this gambit as a "frequent" – but not necessary – manifestation of taboos.²⁵⁴ In the article's headline, however, this silence has been symptomatically elevated into the taboo's determining factor, and from this position it both frames the article and guides the reader's expectations and interpretations of the taboo. The headline asks, "What topics are prohibited as unspeakable in Finland?", and the sub-headline complements the headline by promising "a list of twelve Finnish taboos catalogued by the experts."²⁵⁵

²⁵⁰ Durkheim (1994); see also Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, where the incest prohibition is reported to "persist in modern societies as a mechanical model" (1969: xxxix), although it is seen to maintain its importance (1969: 81).

²⁵¹ Freud (1998).

²⁵² See also Onishi's criticism of the differences between the discussions of Western and Japanese taboos (1999).

²⁵³ Vainio (2016).

²⁵⁴ "Tabu on jotakin kartettavaa ja kiellettyä. Tabut kantavat kulttuurisia ja sosiaalisia merkityksiä. Ne sisältävät ristiriitoja, paradokseja ja myyttisiä käsityksiä. Usein tabuista myös vaietaan" (Vainio, 2016). Unless otherwise noted, translations from Finnish in this dissertation are my own.

²⁵⁵ "Mistä Suomessa ei saa puhua? Asiantuntijat listasivat 12 suomalaista tabua" (Vainio, 2016).

The choice to highlight taboo silences in the headline is grounded in the interview passages, in which 9 of the 13 experts base their analyses on the popularized definition of taboos precisely as silenced topics. Before offering their analyses, three even express doubt as to whether any real taboos exist in twenty-first-century Finland. The doubt they express, which is reflective of a public opinion shaped by the myths circulated about taboo's conceptual history, is clearly grounded in taboo's unquestioned definition, which holds silence to be taboo's most important denominator. However, whether these experts are describing social silences or media taboos and whether they consider these two to be correlated or of equal value are not explicitly discussed. The remaining four experts instead ground their analyses on other possible criteria, such as the taboo's relationship to the sanctity, unquestionability or unbreakability of particular cultural categories and their positions. One expert even subjugates the axiomatic taboo silence to the experience of stigma and shame in a victim-blaming rape culture, which not only stands out from the others by offering tangible causes for the social silence surrounding a taboo but also takes a stance against the myths related to neoliberal trauma culture.²⁵⁶

Next to the emphasis placed on the role of silence, the article's illustration highlights the established link to religion: in the image, drawn by Ville Tietäväinen, the blue cross of the Finnish flag has been inventively rotated into three crosses, with the centermost featuring the crucified Christ. The other two crosses are incomplete, with their arms facing the center missing,²⁵⁷ and involve two figures that recognizably relate modern-day Finnish taboos to persistent taboos familiar from the Judeo-Christian past. The cross on the left is adorned by the silhouette of a woman leaning against it, identified as a stripper or prostitute by the figure's posture and by a skimpy, high-heeled outfit, while the cross on the right has a figure of a suicide, identifiable as a male businessman, hanging from the cross in a noose. Both sex work and suicide are also mentioned in the lead paragraph, which reveals them to be prevalent Finnish taboos alongside euthanasia, the killing of animals, homosexuality, mental illness and religion. In addition, the list gathered by the experts for the article contains topics as varied as rape, gender, social class, racism, the collective will, technologization, difficult filial relationships and the use of power in the art world.

²⁵⁶ Berlant (1999) and Kaplan (2005); see also Seltzer (1998) on "wound culture."

²⁵⁷ These two outermost crosses are in the illustration image exhibited in the wrong order from the order requested by the artist (personal correspondence with Tietäväinen 24.8.2020)



Figure 1 The Finnish unspeakables: sex, religion, and killing. An illustration by Ville Tietäväinen in *Helsingin Sanomat* (11.9.2016) in the order displayed in the newspaper.

No matter how the taboo is ultimately defined, its relationship to social customs, ideals and norms in postwar anthropology recognizes that, as societies change, some existing taboos are rendered void or broken, with new ones emerging to take their place. Although the article in *Helsingin Sanomat* in principle recognizes the ever-changing nature of taboos with its wide-reaching list featuring both historical and universal taboos and those that are more specific to twenty-first-century Finnish society, in our cultural texts this turnover is most often taken as a sign of the taboo's disappearance in the postmodern Occident.

The extent of the taboo structure's alleged demise is exemplified in Yehudi Cohen's 1978 assertion about the incest taboo, which has often been cited as the archetypal, indomitable and most universal taboo by leading cultural anthropologists and psychoanalysts alike. Many anthropologists have seen the incest taboo as the very cornerstone of society²⁵⁸ and, what is more, have tended to generalize incest taboo as a model for all taboos, as Valerio Valeri notes.²⁵⁹ Opposing this indexical position, Cohen argues that the incest taboo is facing extinction in industrialized societies, having outlived its original purpose.²⁶⁰ A close examination reveals that Cohen's proposition, which is easily viewed as outrageous when public opinion related to incest and particularly its stereotypical manifestations in intergenerational adult-child relationships are considered, is rooted in taboo's

²⁵⁸ See Lévi-Strauss (1969: 478–497), Foucault (1990: 108–110), Holden (2001: 31–38), Parsons (1954), Thody (1997: 37–44) and Twitchell (1987).

²⁵⁹ Valeri (2000: 83).

²⁶⁰ Cohen's hypothesis does not challenge incest's silenced position but rather its prohibition itself: in the modern world, he argues, sexual organization is guaranteed by other means than the traditional cross pressure between the rule of exogamy and the taboo prohibition against incestual sexual relationships. Cohen (1978: 76).

conceptual history. Cohen's claim reiterates the pastoral discipline of anthropology's colonialist conceptions that civilized Western cultures had mechanisms of social control that were superior to the primitive organization of taboo-thinking societies. As such, Cohen's proposition is representative of the social scientific strain of theory, which for over a century struggled to see in the taboo a Western phenomenon.

This is also reflected in the analysis of death and sexuality, which historically are the exemplary "last Western taboos" and are also subjected to biopower in their Foucauldian analysis. Despite this, their taboos are frequently seen as threatened by their subjection to the attention economy. The emancipation of sexuality, the penultimate Western taboo, from the realm of the taboo can be characterized as a kind of axiom: the roots of the currently prevailing conception of its liberation can be traced all the way back to the repressive hypothesis that divides the historical and modern eras in Foucauldian theory.²⁶¹ Since this watershed moment, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed many further ostensible revolutions pertaining to the liberation of varied discourses in their representation of sex and sexualities. The celebrated (or lamented) liberation of sexuality's general media representation, for instance, has been conjoined with the media's coming out of the proverbial closet with regard to a variety of sexualities, sexual practices and gendered ontologies that have historically been treated as medical perversions and anomalies of nature: homosexuality and sadomasochism are but two examples.

The expansion of all the aforementioned discourses is certain, but under their critical analysis, their "liberation" has remained uncertain both content-wise and with regard to the repressive hypothesis that their discourses would previously have been suppressed.²⁶² For instance, the continuing marginalization of LGBTQI+, recognized by queer activists and scholars studying gender and sexuality, is testimony that "liberation" has been mostly skin-deep for non-heteronormative genders and sexualities: the stock characters, tropes and narratives available to a variety of discourses have not yet offered them full liberation in either visibility or normative regulation.²⁶³ Gregory Woods comments on homosexuality's status as the "last taboo": "From the start, I found the idea as ridiculous. People kept identifying the last of something that seemed still to proliferate, at least in my own life as a gay man."²⁶⁴ Woods problematizes these kinds of discourses by pointing toward sexuality's biopowered regulation in noting that "the fact is, of course, that behaviour which is subject to a rigorous taboo is regulated not by silence at all, but by regular and strategic mention."²⁶⁵

That death would have replaced sexuality as the last stronghold of the Western taboo is, instead, a mid-twentieth-century invention, presumably conditioned into the still ongoing discourse discussed in Geoffrey Gorer's sociological analysis. In observing British mourning customs in the 1950s, Gorer discovered

²⁶¹ Foucault (1990: 3–13).

²⁶² Foucault (1990).

²⁶³ See, e.g., Dyer (2002), Herek (2004) and Karkulehto (2007).

²⁶⁴ Woods (2016: 200).

²⁶⁵ Woods (2016: 208).

that the increased mediation of violent death correlated with a thicker veil of taboo silence around natural death, dying and mourning. In an influential hypothesis, he concluded that the phenomenon he was witnessing was – like its predecessor, sexuality – a “pornography of death,” whose frantic description and fictionalization of violent death had made a taboo of natural death – not merely *a* taboo but the *last* taboo in the West.²⁶⁶ Since Gorer, many scholars from Philippe Ariés to Norbert Elias and Ken Arnold have mused on death’s having replaced sexuality as the last Western taboo; some, like sociologist Tony Walter, even deny its tabooed state of being.²⁶⁷

Like sexuality, the grounds for the death taboo’s liberation is discovered in death’s increased media visibility, the same grounds that are reflected in the interviews for the *Helsingin Sanomat* article on Finnish taboos. Yet like sexuality, death’s discursive liberation has not been unconditionally reflected in social life, where a number of deaths considered particularly shameful remain largely un-discussed, leaving the dying individual’s experiences unheard and rendering the deceased and their deaths invisible. Walter himself recognizes this in pointing out that the publicly available ways for talking about death often exclude the experiences and emotions of the dying and the bereaved.

When individuals who are dying or bereaved complain that ‘death is a taboo subject’, this does not mean that there are no publicly available languages for talking about death but that these languages do not make sense of the experiences and feelings of the individuals and his or her friends, family and neighbours.²⁶⁸

Like Walter, Georges Minois sees the discourses on suicide as governed by abstract reflections that are devoid of individual experience: “The more individual suicides are treated with silence, the more talk there is about suicide in the abstract,”²⁶⁹ he notes, framing these abstract discourses as “instruments for creating the new morality.”²⁷⁰ In relation to Minois’s notion that suicide has always been discussed in the abstract, A. A. Alvarez proposes in his study of suicide that “the idea of death as an unmentionable, almost unnatural, subject is a peculiarly twentieth-century invention.”²⁷¹ In addition, suicide’s social stigma and silence are still prominent beyond the media discourses studying it, as Alison Chapple and her colleagues suggest: “several of those bereaved by suicide used the word ‘stigma’ to describe attitudes to suicide.”²⁷²

In many ways, the contemporary understanding of the taboo appears to direct and in places even complicate the assessments we make in relation to the taboo phenomenon itself and to a variety of specific taboos, suicide included. I am not alone in recognizing the inconsistencies in how the taboo in general and different taboos are discussed. Gregory Woods and Tony Walter refer to certain

²⁶⁶ Gorer (1965: 173).

²⁶⁷ Ariés (1974), Arnold (1997) quoted in Tercier (2005: 22), Elias (1985: 44) and Walter (1994); see also Gilmore et al. (2013).

²⁶⁸ Walter (1991, 1994: 23–24).

²⁶⁹ Minois (1999: 321).

²⁷⁰ Minois (1999: 302).

²⁷¹ Alvarez (1970: 53).

²⁷² Chapple et al. (2015: 619).

problems in how the taboos related to homosexuality, dying and mourning are discussed; namely, without considering the effects of the Foucauldian strategic mention on a gay man's experience and with languages that have no place for the experiences and emotions of the dying and the bereaved.



Figure 2 Last taboos found and broken: A collage of headlines found via Google searches, 2016–2017.

The breaking of taboo, insinuated in the many discourses discussed in this section and reiterated in different taboos that are frequently called “last” or “broken,” is achieved despite these testimonies and despite taboo’s striking similarities to biopower. As discussed in the previous chapter, Foucauldian analysis recognizes sexuality’s and death’s subjugation to biopower through cultural discourses, which exerts great power over attitudes to and values of sexuality and death, over dying and mourning, and over violent deaths such as suicide. For contemporary researchers, however, the conceptual history of the taboo complicates taboo’s analysis in the same domains. In order to be able to study how the taboo might have participated, alongside biopower, in suicide’s regulation, I strive in the chapters that follow to define the phenomenon, aided by a number of anthropological theories.

3.3.2 Defining taboo: danger and contagion

The task of defining the taboo for the purpose of this dissertation has been made difficult by the fact that over the years – and in different disciplines and paradigms – the taboo has signified vastly different things to the scholars studying it

or the phenomena related to it. In this dissertation, I utilize the “Douglasian understanding” introduced as one of the three main strains in taboo’s definition in subchapter 3.2.3. It considers the taboo as situated in the entry points of both the social and corporeal body, as well as highlights its connection to the cultural system of classifications as an affective structure related to conceptions of danger, anomaly, dirt and contagion. This approach rests on the theories of earlier anthropologists, such as Edmund Leach and Émile Durkheim, and on the work of the relatively unknown Jewish cultural anthropologist Franz Steiner, whose lecture series on the taboo deeply influenced Douglas.²⁷³ Valerio Valeri has later expanded on this theory. All these theories are important for the in-depth understanding of the taboo from the chosen perspective.

As Steiner notes in this lecture series on both the conceptual history and social functions of the taboo, in dealing with the concept of taboo, postwar anthropologists (not to speak of the later scholars, including those from other fields) are faced with a variety of definitions:

A warning is necessary at the very outset that several quite different things have been and still are being discussed under the heading of “Taboo”. [...] We are thus in the position of having to deal, under “Taboo”, with a number of diverse social mechanisms expressed in forms which, from the psychological standpoint, stretch beyond this one category.²⁷⁴

After having introduced the plurality of meanings that inform anthropological study (referring to a multitude of diverse social mechanisms collected from different cultures under various paradigms and agendas), Steiner argues that the taboo is a social structure that plays a necessary role in any community. He proposes the taboo as a form of societal danger behavior that expresses attitudes to values, a general ideological apparatus with a function of preserving the dominant order.²⁷⁵ Steiner builds on Radcliffe-Brown’s theory of the taboo’s societal function, where something being established as a taboo points to the “ritual value” assigned to something that holds a central position in the community’s moral structure.²⁷⁶ Later, Steiner’s pupil Mary Douglas condenses taboo’s function and significance as follows: “A taboo system upholds a cultural system and a culture is a pattern of values and norms; social life is impossible without such a pattern.”²⁷⁷

The term “taboo” is a Polynesian loanword originally describing something ‘being marked off’; that is, prohibited, avoided, abstained from and thus set aside from everyday profane use and experience. In this sense, taboos are social customs or rules of conduct that are situated within the general domain of morality. When a number of Western dictionaries are consulted, we see the concept referring to a variety of either cultural or psychodynamic ‘avoidances,’ ‘inhibitions’

²⁷³ Douglas (1999: 3–15).

²⁷⁴ Steiner (1999a: 107–108).

²⁷⁵ Steiner (1999a: 107–109).

²⁷⁶ Radcliffe-Brown (1979: 52–56).

²⁷⁷ Douglas (1979: 76).

or ‘prohibitions’ that cause particular kinds of subjects to be set aside as tabooed.²⁷⁸

As regular dictionaries and most authors report, the origins of the taboo concept reach back to the era of British expeditions. To be specific, the concept was introduced to Western audiences in 1784, with the publication of the journals kept by Captain James Cook and his successor, James King. In origin the Tongan word “taboo” (its sister languages have similar terms: *tapu*, *tabu*, *tambu*, *tabou*, *kapu*) was attached to the mysterious “religious interdictions” that the travelers of the *HMS Resolution* encountered in the social life of several Polynesian tribes.²⁷⁹ Once it was adopted into anthropological theory, the Polynesian term soon grew into an umbrella concept for similar religious prohibitions observed in other cultures around the world. Within roughly a century after its discovery, the taboo had become established as a “universal institution” pertinent to the evolution of cultures.²⁸⁰ The taboo was determined to be so widespread that it covered most cultures around the world, under related concepts and in varied forms; indeed, the Polynesian taboo customs were appropriated as the oft-referenced prototype for similar customs elsewhere.

Since its introduction to Western thought in the eighteenth century, the concept of taboo has been used to signify various magico-religious customs that were regarded as pertinent to the primitive stages in the evolution of cultures and religious systems, especially moral prohibitions characteristic of religion, and later to secular customs related to traits like politeness and virtue. Eventually, in the early twentieth century, traces of both taboo and taboo thinking were found from the cultural past and hereditary traditions of the Occident. After its full incorporation into Western vocabularies, taboo was rendered an essentially discursive phenomenon that was manifest in discursive omissions of varied kinds, including social silences and censorship.

Using its original, non-Western etymology, Roger Keesing categorizes the Polynesian concept as a stative verb that refers to varied acts of ‘marking off’ tabooed entities.²⁸¹ In Keesing’s analysis, this function connects to taboo’s ritual origins in excluding sacred things from profane use because they are special.²⁸² In the Polynesian context these ritual acts and interdictions are often connected

²⁷⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, XVII (1989: 521–522), “Taboo”, *The Free Dictionary* (consulted 05.01.2016), Steiner (1999a: 116–131) and Valeri (2000: 43–113).

²⁷⁹ Cook and King (1788: 10–11) and Steiner (1999a: 109–113). The first mention of the word “taboo” appears in the logbooks from 1777. The journals of Cook and King were published in three volumes. The concept was thus introduced to the British audiences in the publication of the journals of the third voyage in 1784. (Williams, 1997: xxxii, 2008: 20–21.)

²⁸⁰ Franz Steiner dates the expansion to James Frazer’s essay in the ninth edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1888), which featured an important transition from the “scant lines” on the subject offered in the previous 1859 edition (Steiner, 1999a: 164). In the eighth edition, the taboo, or *tabu*, appeared only in the chapter on Polynesia, before Frazer had come to believe, against common doxa, that the taboo was a universal custom instead of one pertinent to the “brown and black races of the Pacific” (Ellis, 1859: 271–276; Frazer, 1888: 15–18, 1911: preface). A similar development has been recorded by

²⁸¹ Keesing (1985).

²⁸² Keesing (1985: 204–205).

to the inviolable, forbidden and sacralized yet simultaneously dangerous quality of that which is marked off.²⁸³ This has been reported to result from Polynesian natives' belief in the "sacred" but "unclean" - "cursed," "defiling" and thus "dangerous" - nature of what has been subjected to taboo.²⁸⁴

What particularly continues to mark the taboo apart from related social systems of power and control is the idea of "sacred contagion" motivating the taboo. In anthropological theories, the tabooed is often defined as contagious²⁸⁵ or to include negative *mana*.²⁸⁶ Particularly in the Polynesian prototype, the taboo has been tied together with the latter, the exotic concept of mana, the sacred life-force that inhabits substances, places and even individuals, marking them as ritually powerful, simultaneously dangerous and sacred.²⁸⁷ As most anthropological accounts of the taboo report, the threat of contagion here points to the perceived incompatibility between "the profane" and "the sacred,"²⁸⁸ when the purpose of the Polynesian taboo interdictions is to prevent two incompatible elements, or two incompatible planes of existence, from mixing. As Lévy-Bruhl notes, the "taboo acts as a kind of barrier, a sort of mystic sanitary cordon which arrests an infection that is of equally mystic nature."²⁸⁹

The roots of taboos lie in the ambiguous, or fluid, conception of sacredness connected to "pollution" and "contagion" that is part of animistic Oceanic religions. In its ambiguity, this perspective on the nature of sacredness has been largely incomprehensible to Western interpreters, who approach taboo customs from a worldview shaped by monotheism.²⁹⁰ Thus Polynesian taboo's connection to the sacred contagion has ended up haunting the taboo with labels of superstition, irrationality and affectivity that have tended to mark the structure as primitive, first in relation to Occidental religions and then in relation to secularizing Western society, as we see in Frazer's influential description of taboo as "negative

²⁸³ Douglas (1975), Steiner (1999a); see also Durkheim (1961), Smith (1901) and Frazer (1905).

²⁸⁴ Douglas (1975: 48-49).

²⁸⁵ Smith (1901: 146).

²⁸⁶ Marett (1941: 74).

²⁸⁷ See, e.g., Douglas (2002: 117-140), Durkheim (1961: 214, 221-227), Marett (1941: 73-98) and Steiner (1999a: 120-124, 182-185). The Melanesian concept of mana, associated with concepts like the Australian *arungquiltha*, the Native American *wakani*, *orenda* and *manitu*, *malete* in the Philippines and *saka* in Guinea (Durkheim 1961: 221-227, Malinowski 1948: 19-20, Radcliffe-Brown 1979: 310), was introduced alongside taboo by James Frazer and popularized by Sigmund Freud, who picked up the concept from Northcote's 1910 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry, which elaborated on the previous essay by James Frazer (Freud 1955: 19-21, Northcote 1910: 337-341, Frazer 1888).

²⁸⁸ Caillois (2001), Durkheim (1961) and Eliade (1987). For criticism of this model, see Douglas (1975: ix-xxi) and Valeri (2000: 43-58).

²⁸⁹ Lévy-Bruhl (1987: 292); see also "Le tabou agit à la façon d'une barrière d'un cordon sanitaire mystique, qui arrête une infection, également mystique" (Lévy-Bruhl 1963: 361.)

²⁹⁰ Mary Douglas, for instance, points out that, whereas cultures deemed civilized tend to draw a clear distinction between the polar categories of holiness and impurity, those judged primitive are marked off by the ambivalence of the sacred and the lack of a clear holy/impure distinction (2002: 7-8.) Thus, as Michael Mack points out, the "anthropologist imposes a European translation on a Polynesian word which is too complex for a one-way translation" (1996: 202.) Today, this division appears as one of the most criticized elements in Eurocentric taboo translation.

magic,"²⁹¹ or in Freud's connection of the taboo to modern neuroticism.²⁹² Both Polynesians and Westerners infected by taboo-thinking have seen the regulations and vehement reactions resulting "from an insufficient understanding of causality" as particularly emotional and demonstrating deeply flawed logic.²⁹³

However, functionalist definitions proposed by later anthropologists starting with Anthony Reginald Radcliffe-Brown have emphasized the social function of the ritual structure, the foreign connection to sacred contagion and the ambivalence of emotions marking the taboo apart in many earlier theories.²⁹⁴ Looking past what had been easy to call superstition or religious sentiment in the earlier theorists' approaches to the taboo, Radcliffe-Brown defends the powerful emotions connected to the taboo as a response to symbolically represented social values. He renders the taboo a ritual structure that plays a significant role in restricting access to what has inherent value in a given society:

The usages of a society work or 'function' only through their effects in the life, i.e. in the thoughts, sentiments and actions of individuals.²⁹⁵

The primary basis of ritual, so the formulation would run, is the attribution of ritual value to objects and occasions which are either themselves objects of important common interest linking together the persons of a community or are symbolically representative of such objects.²⁹⁶

Radcliffe-Brown's theory rests on the Durkheimian premises of the study of religion, where sacred rules are connected to social needs²⁹⁷ and where the rules have "disappeared in their symbols," as Valeri aptly writes, describing similar semantic chains in which cultural constructs are naturalized as myths, as products of nature.²⁹⁸ In the Durkheimian study, magical and religious rituals, myths, mores, interdictions and classifications pertain to "society writ large," transfigured and symbolically expressed.²⁹⁹ In this theory, the purpose of the taboo prohibition – marking something off based on the aforementioned feared contagion – is to prevent members of the community from needlessly accessing that which in some manner reflects shared social ideals and threats and which has for this

²⁹¹ Frazer (1993: 19).

²⁹² Freud describes what he sees to be a malady of the compulsion neurosis *Tabukrankheit*, translated both as 'taboo disease' and 'taboo sickness' (1920: 36, 1955: 26, 1998: 23). In addition to drawing from Frazer and Smith, Freud was influenced by Wilhelm Wundt, their contemporary in continental Europe, who had traced the evolution of taboo in folk psychology (Frazer 1888; 1911: preface, Freud 1955: 23–35, Smith 1901: 140–164, Steiner 1999a: 197, Wundt 1916.)

²⁹³ Frazer (1993: 20).

²⁹⁴ Monica Wilson writes that this "sense of pollution, and the horror of madness with which it is linked among the Nyakyusa, is an expression of fear, and comes very close to the sense of awe [...]" (1954: 237.) See also Freud's analysis in *Totem and Taboo* (1920). Radcliffe-Brown (1952a: 185).

²⁹⁶ Radcliffe-Brown (1979: 56).

²⁹⁷ Durkheim (1961, 1974).

²⁹⁸ Valeri (2000: 54). See also Wilson (1954: 238).

²⁹⁹ Durkheim (1974: 52).

reason been consecrated (or in later times, stigmatized).³⁰⁰ A symbolic communication seeking to constrain social behavior, the ritual system dresses this incompatibility up as an idea of dangerous contagion that taboos are needed to curb.³⁰¹

As, for instance, Radcliffe-Brown and Valeri suggest, the taboo here has a normative edge to it. Meyer Fortes defines the taboo as a medium of morality that makes moral obligations visible in social behavior:

Taboos are a medium for giving tangible substance to moral obligations. More than that, they are a means of keeping the feeling of moral obligations active all the time, so that whenever occasion arises to translate the duty into performance we are in a state of readiness for that. [...] Taboos refer to observable behaviour.³⁰²

If Radcliffe-Brown's division between juridical, moral and religious systems of power and control is applied, the taboo could be salvaged from its status as a magico-religious structure and imbued with the sanctions of morality that are related to those of public opinion:

Law, morality and religion are three ways of controlling human conduct which in different types of society supplement one another, and are combined, in different ways. For the law there are legal sanctions, for morality there are the sanctions of public opinion and of conscience, for religion there are religious sanctions.³⁰³

Following Radcliffe-Brown, Franz Steiner defines the entity of taboo danger behavior, or a social structure in which "attitudes to values" are expressed in the setting apart and avoiding of what has been marked off, whether an act, thing, being or individual.³⁰⁴ In Steiner's theory, the taboo is focused on protecting society from the dangers that threaten it, its values, its order and its continuity, as a set of social customs seeking to do "identify," "categorize" and "localize" such dangers.³⁰⁵ Included within said dangers are individuals who transgress taboos or who otherwise come into contact with that which has been marked off as taboo (menstruating women, for example), as Steiner enumerates:

Taboo is concerned (1) with all the social mechanisms of obedience which have ritual significance; (2) with specific and restrictive behaviour in dangerous situations [...] (3) with the protection of individuals who are in danger, and (4) with the protection of society from those endangered - and therefore dangerous - persons.³⁰⁶

In our day, it has become common to see the taboo as a structure that seeks to domesticate that which is "injurious to the whole community."³⁰⁷ Mary Douglas, following in the footsteps of Franz Steiner's view of the taboo as dealing with the "sociology of danger," connects taboo to the concept of "risk."³⁰⁸

³⁰⁰ Durkheim (1961).

³⁰¹ Douglas (1979, 2002).

³⁰² Fortes (1962: 82-83).

³⁰³ Radcliffe-Brown (1945: 41).

³⁰⁴ Steiner (1999a: 213-214).

³⁰⁵ Steiner (1999a).

³⁰⁶ Steiner (1999a: 107-108).

³⁰⁷ Brown (1952: 142); see also Davies (1982: 1033) and Valeri (2000: 44).

³⁰⁸ Douglas and Wildavsky (1983) and Douglas (1996).

3.3.3 Bodies and classificatory dangers

If taboo can be considered a danger structure, what specific kinds of dangers come to be regulated by taboos? Very often, cultural taboos are connected to sexuality, death and culinary nutrition, all of which involve the social body through individual *somas*, the individuals' corporeal bodies, and also connect the taboo to the reign of modern biopower.³⁰⁹ These "principal" taboos, connected to "eating, touching, and penetrating, as in killing or having sex," entail something entering the human body, often through its vulnerable margins, the orifices set apart by ritual restrictions.³¹⁰ On the other hand, taboos related to death, nutrition and sexuality render the social body vulnerable at its margins: being closely related to population's strength, life-sustaining nutrition, reproduction and the end of life they all pose societal in addition to physical dangers.

In these key domains, taboos serve to guard the entry points to society by regulating individual behavior at their physical danger points. Yet nutrition, sexuality and death are also important to both individuals and social collectives in their psychological, moral and symbolic significations. Featuring dangers to the individual, sexuality, nutrition and death can also be faced with fears and dangers that surpass merely physical concerns. Moreover, in *Natural Symbols* (1979), Mary Douglas views the physical body as a model around whose skin and orifices the moral and symbolic borders that are pertinent to the immaterial social body are reinforced and protected.³¹¹ For instance, nutrition is important as a building point for social identities through which the exterior borders of the group are constituted and policed, which makes it morally vital. Thus, as Valerio Valeri eloquently notes, "the whole field of taboo is characterized by the blending of the physical and the moral."³¹² The moral significance of these borders also makes them and the taboos regulating them symbolically central.

Beyond Steiner's theory, which situates taboo's relationship to danger in a manner that can also explain suicide's tabooed and biopower-regulated status, this dissertation on suicide is influenced by the classificatory model of the taboo. Most anthropological theories come together in viewing the taboo as a question of social classification in such borders that are vital for the community and its survival. According to "classificatory theories," taboos specifically protect the prevailing axiological "natural-cultural matrix": the classifications of phenomena, people and other kinds of entities into hierarchically ordered categories that link with symbolic and physical dangers in that they have been constituted to reflect society and its moral values.³¹³

³⁰⁹ Valeri (2000: 48).

³¹⁰ Valeri (2000: 101). Of course, as Douglas notes, each "primitive culture makes its own selection of bodily functions which it emphasizes as dangerous or good. The problem then is to understand the principles of selection" (1975: 60).

³¹¹ See also Douglas (1970).

³¹² Valeri (2000: 45).

³¹³ Douglas (2002) and Leach (1979).

As Valerio Valeri notes in *The Forest of Taboos* (2000), “whether taboo is magic or morality, or both, it cannot be explained without reference to the cosmological ideas and the classification of things that exist in particular societies.”³¹⁴ These classifications pertain to both nature and culture and reflect the values that Radcliffe-Brown and Steiner argue the taboo to manifest and protect as a system related to moralities. Thus, as Valeri writes, the “starting point of the classification is thus not a decontextualized taxonomic impulse. There is a basic, mythically expressed ideal [...] taboo is generated by a normative classification by means of prototypes [...]”³¹⁵ In particular, originating from Edmund Leach’s and Mary Douglas’s analyses of cross-cultural taboos, the generally accepted anthropological theory (occasionally called the Leach theory of the taboo) recognizes taboo customs to be centered around “anomalies,” those things that are uncategorizable or in-between. Mary Douglas explains them:

No doubt the first essential procedure for understanding one’s environment is to introduce order into apparent chaos by classifying. But, under any very simple scheme of classification, certain creatures seem to be anomalous. Their irregular behaviour is not merely puzzling but even offensive to the dignity of human reason. We find this attitude in our own spontaneous reaction to ‘monstrosities’ of all kinds.³¹⁶

Inspired by Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of totemic classification, Radcliffe-Brown’s notion of the taboo’s ritual value and Douglas’s early work with the anomaly, Leach argues that taboos attend to the many ambiguous phenomena that threaten the cosmos in not conforming to a classificatory structure, whether taxonomic or social.³¹⁷ Anomalous phenomena, which Leach labels “classificatory deviations,” presuppose a breach in the natural-normative order in that they deviate from it and thus, in the words of Douglas, defy the “local consensus on how the world is organized.”³¹⁸ As Leach writes in his *Anthropological Aspects of Language* (1964), the “general theory is that taboo applies to categories which are anomalous with respect to clear-cut category oppositions.”³¹⁹ In the 1971 text “Kimil,” he clarifies the way the taboo also generates the very classifications it governs: “Taboo serves to discriminate categories in men’s social universe [...] in so doing it reduces the ambiguities of reality to clear-cut ideal types.”³²⁰

The literature on many archetypal taboos also appears to emphasize the ambiguous phenomena we might title anomalous,³²¹ where the taboo is involved with the protection of the classificatory order – normative, morally constituted and socially expressive. In considering suicides as differentiated from natural

³¹⁴ Valeri (2000: 58).

³¹⁵ Valeri (2000: 77–79).

³¹⁶ Douglas (1957: 49).

³¹⁷ Leach (1979: 157), Lévi-Strauss (1966) and Radcliffe-Brown (1922, 1979).

³¹⁸ Douglas (2002: xi).

³¹⁹ Leach (1979: 159).

³²⁰ Leach (1971: 44).

³²¹ See, e.g., Barfield (1997), Douglas (1955, 1957, 2002), Durkheim (1961), Frazer (1888, 1911, 1993), Gennep (1904, 1965), Girard (1986), Holden (2000), Leach (1958, 1964), Lévy-Bruhl (1931), Malinowski (1948), Mead (1937), Radcliffe-Brown (1952b, 1979), Shortland (1854), Tregear (1891), Turner (1967, 1969) and Wilson (1954).

deaths, we appear to be dealing with a classificatory danger that is simultaneously a “crime against nature” and a “crime against the collective morality” that threatens society. Although contested in places,³²² the theory makes sense in considering, in addition to suicide, the gendered nature of many taboos or the closed and stigmatized position of LGBTQI+ individuals around the world. The taboo structure can be elucidated by presenting it as something that seeks to keep things as they are, as it protects the hierarchical order from the anomalies that deviate from what is perceived as “natural” and “normal” and thus question the order’s naturalized position. For instance, through the barrier that the taboo in the “tribal societies” studied by comparative anthropologists establishes between the profane and the sacred,³²³ Steiner sees taboo as sustaining the order of things, striving to keep everything the way it is.

However, it must be noted that this theory, which ties the taboo to classification on the one hand and to its anomalies on the other, has been argued to be neither inclusive nor exclusive enough. It privileges what is irregular and fails to account sufficiently for the contextual specificity of taboos, which in certain cultures and eras renders some classificatory borders more vital than in others,³²⁴ as Valeri makes clear:

[...] If there were a taboo for every categorical distinction, then the number of taboos in any culture would be enormous, which is clearly not the case. In fact taboos cluster around certain areas of categorization [...] and their importance and extent vary considerably from culture to culture.³²⁵

Christian Davies limits the scope by tying taboos only to such constructed categories that are crucial for the particular societies in which they are witnessed; for Davies, a thing’s perceived deviation from these categories merely as an anomaly is not sufficient to invoke a taboo.³²⁶ As he argues, taboo customs require that borders and the categories they separate be culturally significant. He likens the powerful taboos against homosexuality and bestiality to acts that are seen to erode the boundaries between the fundamental categories of Judeo-Christian culture:

There are all forms of sexual behavior which break down the boundaries between some of the most fundamental categories of human experience – the categories of male and female and human and animal.³²⁷

[...] It is clear that the strong taboos that exist against homosexuality, bestiality, and transvestism in the West are the result of attempts to establish and defend strong ethnic, religious, or institutional boundaries.³²⁸

³²² See, e.g., Bulmer (1967) and Tambiah (1969).

³²³ See, e.g., Caillois (2001) and Durkheim (1961).

³²⁴ Meigs (1978, 1988: 125–136) and Valeri (2000: 83–113).

³²⁵ Valeri (2000: 64).

³²⁶ Davies (1982).

³²⁷ Davies (1982: 1035–1036).

³²⁸ Davies (1982: 1060).

Valeri then suggests that anomalies are related to a set of ideals.³²⁹ Therefore, if taboos can be connected to threats to cultural classification, it is precisely because the taboos relate nature to society in an impulse of normative classification that “reflects the way the world should be rather than the way it is,” in Valeri’s words.³³⁰ Here, it is deviation from *ideals* rather than other kinds of prototypes that causes these deviations to be perceived as anomalous and subjects them to taboos. Victor Turner summarizes the relationship of anomalies to taboo as a ritual structure:

[...] One often finds in human cultures that structural contradictions, asymmetries and anomalies are overlaid by layers of myth, ritual and symbol, which stress the axiomatic value of key structural principles with regard to the very situations where these appear to be most inoperative.³³¹

Lastly, both Davies and Valeri relate taboos to the natural-cultural matrix as customs that seek to safeguard the constructs and borders that are vital for identification and for interpersonal, intergroup or even interspecies differentiation between like and unlike, between self and other.³³² Criticizing the Leach-Douglas view of anomaly, Valeri writes that the “exclusive linkage of taboo with categorical intermediacy or anomaly leaves out precisely what epitomizes taboo in both popular and anthropological discourse: the taboos of incest and cannibalism.”³³³ He then suggests that the interplay between prototypicality and anomaly “must be conjoined with other values which are of more direct human interest and which point to a classification based on degrees of closeness to SELF rather than cosmological zones or taxonomic principles.”³³⁴

Valeri’s theory widens the classificatory theory of taboo in points where anomaly and its association with ideals are not enough to explain cross-cultural taboo customs and interdictions; rather, social points of reference are needed to explain these taboos. As Valeri suggests, taboo “seems often to be concerned with a hierarchical conflict between identity and contrariety (or simply difference) in the various relationships that exist between terms.”³³⁵ On these occasions, these natural-cultural liminalities that govern the borders of individual and social bodies are also reflected in the social grid that structures human society.³³⁶ As Steiner writes, the taboo “provided the means of relating a person to his superiors and inferiors” as an instrument of hierarchy and a protector of social classification.³³⁷

³²⁹ “Prototypicality [...] seems a more plausible candidate than anomaly as a source of taboo. [...] If this is so, it is possible to conclude that taboo contributes to the life of categories not only indirectly, by focussing on the species that straddle them and thus seem to threaten them, but also directly, by focussing on the species that are prototypical of them” (Valeri 2000: 69).

³³⁰ Valeri (2000: 79).

³³¹ Turner (1969: 47, 128–129).

³³² Davies (1982: 1034), Leach (1979: 163) and Valeri (2000: 86).

³³³ Valeri (2000: 83, 91).

³³⁴ Valeri (2000: 69).

³³⁵ Valeri (2000: 86); see also Gell (1996) and Gomez da Silva (1983).

³³⁶ Douglas (1970).

³³⁷ Steiner (1955: 122); see also Douglas (1979: 74) and Genep (1965: 83).

Valeri continues: "Taboo creates a 'signification' which is reduced to the creation of a social difference, or rather a difference of social units."³³⁸

This is emphasized in the agglomerated collection of taboo customs around the world, which are often born in relation to particular social groups and bound up with specific taboos' sacralization or stigmatization. This is especially true in the food taboos considered by Leach and Valeri, which often review the edibility of food not only in relation to its taxonomic prototypicality but also according to its distance from and its totemic significance to human culture,³³⁹ and where food often also comes to mark a community's social identity in relation to other communities.³⁴⁰ Valeri also draws attention to the fact that taboos are often strictest at times when the need for drawing borders between self and others, between us and them, is strongest and in cultures that are based on strong "grids" and "groups," Douglas's terms for powerful inner and outer borders, respectively, in a given society.³⁴¹

In an influential theory posited in *Purity and Danger* (1966), Mary Douglas notes taboo's association with affective ideas of contagion and filth that reflect the ultimately persuasive momentum of the taboo and are, in Douglas's theory, related to anomalies in particular.³⁴² She here famously describes the taboo as "a spontaneous device for protecting the distinctive categories of the universe," based on the belief in the defiling, polluting nature of anomalies;³⁴³ like Davies, Douglas connects taboos to the significant prototypes that are central to a given society's system of values:

In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.³⁴⁴

Hence, pollution beliefs protect the most vulnerable domains, where ambiguity would most weaken the fragile structure.³⁴⁵

Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion [...].³⁴⁶

Pollution and its avoidance are of course among the most recognizable characters of the taboo in its general conceptual history, as Valeri notes: "As we have seen, a possible minimal definition of taboo is 'avoidance of pollution.'"³⁴⁷ On the one hand, these beliefs pertain to the sacred contagion that epitomizes the taboo, rendering it a magico-religious phenomenon in evolutionist theories or a danger

³³⁸ Valeri (2000: 95).

³³⁹ Leach (1979) and Valeri (2000: 69).

³⁴⁰ See, e.g., Arens (1979) on cannibalism.

³⁴¹ Valeri (2000: 86) and Douglas (1970, 1996).

³⁴² Douglas (2002); see also Gomez da Silva (1984).

³⁴³ Douglas (2002: xi).

³⁴⁴ Douglas (2002: 48).

³⁴⁵ Douglas (1975: 58).

³⁴⁶ Douglas (2002: 3).

³⁴⁷ Valeri (2000: 69).

structure in the later functionalist ones. On the other hand, symptomatic pollution can be connected to the very classificatory anomalies that defy a given society's natural-cultural constitution in the Leach-inspired classificatory theories.

It is precisely these beliefs that Douglas plugs into in her attempt to cross the divide between primitive cultures and the secularizing West. In hygiene and etiquette alike, Douglas writes, Westerners share ideas of contagion and defilement similar to the magico-religious ideas of pollution marking the taboo, making it easy to connect the taboo to normative biopower.³⁴⁸ In particular, Douglas proceeds to dissect the fear of pollution as a response to the "residue" of normative classificatory processes.³⁴⁹ She applies Lord Chesterfield's definition of dirt as "matter out of place" and defies dirt's naturalized status by rendering it as a social construct among others or, more specifically, by rendering "dirtiness" as a quality of the anomaly:³⁵⁰

Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.³⁵¹

In reiterating Steiner's view of the taboo as a danger structure protecting the cultural constitution, Douglas makes the taboo into a shield mechanism against the threat of contagion, connected to anomalies that are read as dirty:

For us dirt is a kind of compendium category for all events which blur, smudge, contradict, or otherwise confuse accepted classifications. The underlying feeling is that a system of values which is habitually expressed in a given arrangement of things has been violated. [...] Dirt avoidance is a process of tidying up, ensuring that the order in external physical events conforms to the structure of ideas [...] we would expect to find that the pollution beliefs of a culture are related to its moral values, since these form part of the structure of ideas for which pollution behaviour is a protective device.³⁵²

Douglas's theory has been widely influential. Feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva used its effect on her to introduce the concept of abjection as a response to "what disturbs identity, system, order" and "what does not respect borders, positions, rules." As Kristeva suggests, abjection, which in this theory refers to the processes of casting something off from the symbolic order, is inherent in cultural meaning-making.³⁵³ The abject refers to what is excluded from the symbolic order and is directly linked to Douglas's theory of classificatory residue dirt. As Kristeva summarizes the issue, the abject is of a label of impurity that is produced in the symbolic order and comes to mark those who defy pure categories and the

³⁴⁸ Douglas (1975: 50).

³⁴⁹ Douglas (2002: x-xii; 1-6); see also Douglas's predecessors Genep (1904, 1965), Turner (1969: 47-49) and Wilson (1954: 228-241).

³⁵⁰ Douglas (2002).

³⁵¹ Douglas (2002: 44).

³⁵² Douglas (1975: 51, 53-54).

³⁵³ Kristeva (1982: 4).

order of things that those categories constitute: “The pure will be that which conforms to an established taxonomy; the impure, that which unsettles it, establishes intermixture and disorder”:³⁵⁴

The abject, sickening and repulsing to the beholder, has only the one quality of “being opposed to I”. [...] The pure/impure opposition represents [...] the striving for identity, a difference. [...] The taboo implied by the pure/impure distinction organized differences, shaping and opening an articulation that we must indeed call metonymic, within which, if he maintains himself there, man has a share in the sacred order. As to sacrifice, it constitutes the alliance with the One when the metonymic order that stems from it is perturbed.³⁵⁵

Douglas’s theory is also relevant when cultural theories of the “affective economies” that maintain social hierarchies are considered. In Sara Ahmed’s theorization of the stickiness of emotions are the symbolic processes under scrutiny, where certain emotions’ power over individuals rests in their potential to stick from one object to another in cultural representations and their chains of associations.³⁵⁶ Valeri condenses this kind of logic in taboo and its transgressions:

The argument is that what is rejected acquires some rejecting power of its own. The repelled becomes repulsive and makes repulsive by contact [...] thereby punishing those who enter into contact with it.³⁵⁷

The step from the association between anomaly and dirt to the threat of contagion is summed up in dirt’s aforementioned power to make something or someone dirty, infecting what it touches with its dirtiness. In Radcliffe-Brown’s analysis of magico-religious pollution beliefs, this contagion is related in particular to social sanctions for those who transgress taboos:

The most widespread form of the religious sanction is the belief that certain actions produce in an individual or in a community a condition of ritual pollution, or uncleanness, from which it is necessary to be purified.³⁵⁸

In addition to having endangered that which is inviolable, the transgressors are thus seen to become infected in their breaching the order of things and becoming dangerous in and of themselves, which Steiner also notes in his recognition of the four kinds of dangers that the taboo is built to curb.

In being centered on the ideas of anomalies and contagion, the taboo system is in a figurative sense driven by the fear of an epidemic, a virulent contagion that is interconnected with the fears of stigma and seclusion resulting from the breach of taboos. According to social theories on stigma, it is an attribute that “sticks,” so to speak, and in sticking causes “ostracism, infamy, shame and condemnation.”³⁵⁹ It is a label of deviance, disgrace or infamy that affects the social status

³⁵⁴ Kristeva (1982: 98).

³⁵⁵ Kristeva (1982: 1, 82, 94–95).

³⁵⁶ Ahmed (2014: 1–16).

³⁵⁷ Valeri (2000: 70; see also Douglas (1975: ix–xxi).

³⁵⁸ Radcliffe-Brown (1945: 42).

³⁵⁹ Herek (2004: 14); see also Plummer (1975).

and classification of persons and disqualifies them “from full social acceptance.”³⁶⁰ Fear of contagion here works as a powerful deterrent. In Margaret Mead’s analysis of the taboo, the deep fears she sees in defining the taboo are caused not only by supranormal beliefs related to specific taboos but also by the negative sanctions that await the transgressor. She cites the anxiety and embarrassment arising from the breach of a strongly entrenched custom and the edicts of chiefs or priests that represent the fear of punishment and of being stigmatized through contact with the taboo.³⁶¹ Even early anthropologists recognized the social function of these contagion beliefs on occasions of transgression, where the sacred contagion unleashed in the transgression of the taboo is regarded as affecting and endangering the entire community. Lévy-Bruhl, for instance, notes that we “see that the violation of an ‘avoidance’ not only is important for the parties interested, but for the whole group.”³⁶²

According to this strain of theory, which highlights the taboo’s connection with contagion beliefs through its classificatory function, the taboo becomes a sort of normative structure that seeks to protect society from the various dangers to suicide’s constitution through the affective economies related to dirt and contagion, stigma, fear and disgust. In some instances, these dangers are categorizable as anomalous in that they do not fit the classificatory matrix; in others, they are related to the interpersonal and intergroup differentiations between self and other, while in still others, they specifically respond to the breaching of taboos by associating with transgressors. Empowered by value-laden ideas of dirt and defilement, taboo customs guard the classificatory borders and the collectively agreed values where they are particularly vulnerable, threatened or already breached. In Douglas’s *Purity and Danger*, these borders are established against the contagion that, like the twofold, “hermaphrodite” socio-physical body in question, seesaws between the symbolic and the material.³⁶³

The aforementioned theories on the taboo’s attachment to anomalies and related beliefs of contagion that apply to both taboos and their transgressors can also help explain the taboo’s relationship to suicide: we readily see similar elements in the historical knowledges produced about suicide, which is recognized as representing the transition point from sovereign power to biopower.³⁶⁴ As mentioned, suicide’s historical seclusion manifests not only in the social silences and prohibitions surrounding it, but also in the public condemnation of the suicidal.³⁶⁵ As anthropologists note, the tabooed things often threaten the natural-cultural constitution by falling in between its distinct categories, by deviating from it, or by challenging it, and suicide as “unnatural death,” kept at bay through deterrents created in the punishment of the transgressors, certainly qualifies. In this dissertation, the challenge is to see what could be applied from these

³⁶⁰ Goffman (1963: 9) and Becker (1966).

³⁶¹ Mead (1937: 502–503).

³⁶² Lévy-Bruhl (1987: 222); see also “Nous voyons par ce récit que la violation d'une avoidance importante n'intéresse pas seulement les parties en cause, mais le groupe tout entier.” (Lévy-Bruhl, 1963: 263).

³⁶³ Douglas (2002).

³⁶⁴ Foucault (1990: 138–139).

³⁶⁵ See, e.g., Jaworski (2014: 65) and Minois (1999: 9–32).

theories when looking at the contemporary discourses and representations that reflect the Foucauldian recognition of sovereign power's replacement with biopower.

In his foundational *Anthropological Aspects of Language* (1964), Edmund Leach sees two types of taboos, linguistic and behavioral, as interrelated but discourages readers from considering their relationship in simplistic terms:

Linguistic taboos and behavioral taboos [...] are very much muddled up [...]. But this association of deed and word is not so simple as might appear. The relationship is not necessarily causal.³⁶⁶

In light of Leach's statement, my intention is to understand how our popular cultural representations of suicide might reflect this death's regulation *through* biopower and *as* taboo, without letting suicide's visibility in contemporary culture affect the assessments I offer for its tabooed position. The research task is to understand specifically what pervasive cinematic representations do to suicide and our understanding of it when suicide's historical subjugation to two systems of power and control, biopower and taboo, are examined.

For this purpose, I adopt the Foucauldian concept of biopower in referring to some of the practices that can also be related to the taboo, such as the normative regulation emphasized in anthropologists' theories. Here, the recognition of such normative functions that unite taboo and biopower under theories and concepts related to biopower might facilitate the understanding of the relationship of taboo subjects and silences to the extant social structures and values often forgotten in contemporary discourses.

In studying suicide's tabooed position, I emphasize the elements recognized as characteristic of the taboo in the previous chapters. I detect the evaluations made of suicide and the suicidal in looking at their classifications and associations with danger, anomaly, dirt and contagion, which have been cited as characteristic of taboo in this chapter, and study the social and other differentiations in which suicide is employed.

³⁶⁶ Leach (1979: 154).

4 SUMMARIES OF THE ARTICLES

This dissertation consists of an introduction and four original research articles, in which I study suicide cinema in its general tendencies in a corpus of 50 Anglophone feature films and in three case studies featuring the films *Unfriended* (2014), *Vanilla Sky* (2001) and *The Moth Diaries* (2011), and the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* (2017).

The following subchapters summarize the contents and key findings of these articles, which are presented in chronological order starting with the earliest. Ordering them chronologically exposes the stages through which my dissertation has evolved into its current form from the original research constellation dealing with the concept and mechanisms of taboo in a corpus consisting of the representations, both normative and controversial, of death and sexualities.

The research process finalized in this dissertation has specifically witnessed the evolution in my engagement with the relevant theories, which is reflected in my conceptual choices and the theoretical considerations presented in the discussion chapters. The chronological order also reflects my engagement with suicide's polysemic representations, which has been facilitated by the later articles' focus on case studies instead of a quantitatively large corpus.

Because of their background in publications and collaborations, the articles contain overlaps in their focus on suicide and gender (and femininities in particular). The overlap is also explicable through suicide's prevalent gendering on-screen that I argue to be related to suicide's position as a taboo and a biopower-regulated phenomenon. I suggest it facilitates building a deeper understanding of the prevalent cinematic conventions of representing suicide, although only focuses on one of the possible regimes in suicide's representation, with also other regimes related to suicide's marginalization, medicalization and pornification discoverable.

In each article, this gendered regime is related to different theoretical frameworks and linked to the general considerations of biopower and taboo. The questions of othering, domestication and stigmatization are brought up in the first article, marginalization and pornification in the second and medicalization in the

third. Whereas the first two articles focus on suicide's tabooed position, the third and fourth also reflect suicide's and taboo's relationship to biopower.

4.1 Article I: Narratives of otherness in suicide cinema from transgression theories

The first original article, "The Death of the Others and the Taboo: Suicide Represented," was published in *Thanatos* (a Finnish-language journal published by the Finnish Death Studies Association) in 2014 (volume 4, issue 1). The article examines the kinds of representations and naturalizing myths of suicide that shape Anglophone suicide cinema. The materials consist of 50 feature films produced between 1985 and 2014 that are examined in relation to suicide's art historical past (see Appendix A).

The article focuses particularly on the representations of otherness that Ron Brown has noted to be prominent in the visual artistic canon of suicide in terms of the characters' ethnicity, social class, madness, gender and sexuality.³⁶⁷ In my readings, I notice suicidality to be epitomized by female characters who are often culturally and chronologically distanced and marked by their deviant sexuality. I pay special attention to these states of otherness in looking at the suicidal characters' gender and sexuality and reflect briefly on the role of madness in suicide's representation.

In the discussion, I reflect on how these characterizations of madness and projections of suicide upon the states of otherness in the films and in suicide's art historical past participate in the stigmatization and cultural tabooing of suicide. I see these states of otherness as "clustered,"³⁶⁸ arguing that the representations could thus be seen to both domesticate and stigmatize suicide, as they "sanitize" the death by rendering it safer to look at,³⁶⁹ even as they sustain social hierarchies and the symbolic order. In positioning the taboo death into other cultures, marginalized states like madness and lower-level categories like femininity in the gender hierarchy, suicide can be argued to be distanced, demoted and marginalized as a death.

The article's theoretical background to this idea of suicide's othering comes from Brown's reflection on the differentiation between suicides as self-willed deaths and as murders of the self in their antique representations.³⁷⁰ Brown recognizes these two as differentiated on the cultural scale by the violence of the representations, with bodily violence being depicted mostly in representations of the suicides of besieged enemy kings (*suicides obsidionaux*) and in illustrations of the mythic hero Ajax going mad.³⁷¹ The breaking of the body in these depictions

³⁶⁷ Brown (2001).

³⁶⁸ Hall (2013c) and Stallybrass and White (1986).

³⁶⁹ Brown (2001: 32).

³⁷⁰ Brown (2001: 21–48); see also Daube (1972).

³⁷¹ Brown (2001: 21–48).

can be argued to also reflect the mind's breaking in the Platonic views that emphasize the connection between the mind and the body³⁷² and to counter the antique ideals of harmony reflected on the moral scale between good and bad.³⁷³

The other way Brown's *The Art of Suicide* contributed to my analysis was its witnessing of suicide's gendering as feminine in its medicalization, which I saw reflected both in my corpus and in Steven Stack and Barbara Bowman's psychiatric analysis of 800 Anglo-American films, from which I mirrored my discoveries.³⁷⁴ In addition, drawing from Lynda Nead's analysis of suicide's role in the moralizing depictions of the prostitute's downward path in Victorian representations,³⁷⁵ I pay attention to suicide's connection to sexuality in my article, both in heterosexual female characters and non-heterosexual male characters. I also briefly visit the "victim trope" that Daniel Marshall, Eric Rofes and Rob Cover have argued prevails in the representations of LGBTQI+ characters' suicides,³⁷⁶ by which a person's sexuality – instead of social reasons – is itself the source of their suicidality.³⁷⁷

The differentiation between suicides of white male figures in positions of power and "suicides of the others" that I draw in my article is connected in particular to the Durkheimian division between altruistic and egoistic suicides, and the gendering of which Stack and Bowman also note in their analysis. This article's division between egoistic, less well-accepted suicides embodied in films by feminine and marginalized/othered characters and altruistic suicides connected to martyrdom and rendered masculine is a tentative attempt to make sense of the many differences I witnessed in my corpus. It continued to puzzle me even after the article was finished, and I am thankful that I was able to fine-tune it in my other articles.

This article largely reflects the interdisciplinary nature of my research at its early stages, based on a slightly different kind of research constellation. Situated between the disciplines of art history and social anthropology, this article employs concepts and definitions that made sense when viewed from both disciplines. Even at this stage, my definition of the taboo shows the influence of its anthropological conceptual history, in addition to which I rely on transgression theory and on the concept of myth, which I saw to be situated in the common ground between visual studies and anthropology. The concept of myth, which I do not employ in my later articles to make them less complicated, is adopted from Roland Barthes on the one hand and from anthropological discussion on the other, especially the work of Ernst Cassirer.³⁷⁸ It refers to naturalized cultural

³⁷² Miles (2001).

³⁷³ Van Hooff (2002).

³⁷⁴ Stack and Bowman (2012).

³⁷⁵ Nead (1984, 1988).

³⁷⁶ A note must be added on the differences between the initialisms used in this introduction and in my article, written in 2015. Although all the queer communities referred to by this abbreviation are not necessarily reflected in my materials, I here choose to use LGBTQI+ to include the Queer/Questioning and Intersex communities alongside Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans communities. In my 2015 article, the more common initialism LGBT is used, with the complexities related to its exclusiveness yet unknown to me.

³⁷⁷ Cover (2012: 3), Marshall (2010) and Rofes (1983).

³⁷⁸ Barthes (2009: 131-187) and Cassirer (1979a, 1979b).

constructions like suicide's morality or its origin in individual qualities that are reiterated to ensure that the social collective remains essentially unchanged.

Transgression theory is central to my argumentation of represented suicide's otherness and its connection to both suicide's domestication and society's and the symbolic order's hierarchical constitution. In cross-disciplinary theory, transgression has been situated in the taboo structure as a necessary counterpart to the taboo prohibition as something that can "suspend a taboo without suppressing it."³⁷⁹ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's analysis of the role of literary transgressions in the modernizing West was particularly influential on my article; they show how transgressions, which represent the low end of the symbolic hierarchy, are tendentiously tied to characters representing otherness to the reading "I" as an attempt to purify the cultural sphere.³⁸⁰ Similarly, Stuart Hall recognizes the clustering of characteristics expelled from this ideal figure into racialized figures and sees their eroticizations as a "spectacle of the other,"³⁸¹ which intrigues me in this article, especially in relation to my earlier notions of suicide's pornification and suicide's feminization and sexualization in both its art historical past and its cinematic representations.

With these theories, I propose that the "taboo itself is [...] tamed for discourse but continuously made taboo as a practice," which takes a stance on suicide's simultaneous prohibition through stigma and the fascination that Sigmund Freud and Georges Bataille connect with the taboo.³⁸² In my later articles I have sought to refine this idea by bringing in normative biopower in instances where I wish to speak of suicide's regulation, instead of suicide's prohibition, so that I may delimit the conceptually difficult entity of taboo to the phenomena thus classified.

4.2 Article II: Suicide cinema's gendered marginalization from theories of necromanticism and pornification

The second article, "Hollywoodin nekromanssi: Naisen ruumiisen kiinnittyvä itsemurha elokuvien sukupuolipolitiikkana" [Hollywood's gendered politics of Death: Suicide's necromantic embodiment through female figures], was published in the Finnish-language article collection *Sukupuoli ja Väkivalta: Lukemisen Etiikkaa ja Poliittikkaa* [Gender and Violence: The Ethics and Politics of Reading]. The article collection, edited by Sanna Karkulehto and Leena-Maija Rossi and published in 2017, studies gendered violence as a contemporary cultural phenomenon. It studies the ways that representations of gendered violence "can be read, viewed and received," along with "how they affect their audiences." It also

³⁷⁹ Bataille (2002: 36); see also Caillois (2001), Foucault (1977), Girard (1986) and Jenks (2003).

³⁸⁰ Stallybrass and White (1986).

³⁸¹ Hall (2013c: 232–237).

³⁸² Freud (1913) and Bataille (2002).

discusses "what kind of politics the violent representations implement and actualize."³⁸³

As my contribution to the collection, my second article, written in 2015, investigates how violence's gendering and the power structures contributing to it are manifested in representations of suicide, of reflexive violence directed toward the self.³⁸⁴ I discuss suicide's cinematic embodiment in young female characters, through which suicide is connected to girlhood, and study this death's connection to sexuality in contemporary cinema's didactic, necromantic or moralizing narratives through two exemplary films: *Unfriended* (2014) and *Vanilla Sky* (2001). In my closing chapter, I discuss how this gendering, which in this article I also see as representing suicide's othering or marginalization, is connected to taboo and biopower.

Besides these aims, the article represents an attempt to better understand the nature and mechanisms of suicide's gendering and othering in contemporary Anglophone cinema and to better make sense of these gendered narratives' relationship to suicide's cultural position as a taboo. In this article, I also study suicide's gendering on the scale between altruism and egoism, with egoistic suicide differentiated from the altruistic and sacrificial masculine deaths that are often removed from egoistic suicides proper. In addition, I study the gendered conventions that affect how genders can be depicted in cinema and are rooted in history, which I see as creating gender differences within suicide cinema and thus contributing also to suicide's gendering on-screen as a feminine or effeminate phenomenon.

In my reading of *Vanilla Sky*, I focus in particular on cinema's parallel narratives, where suicide is gendered in heteronormative narratives of the relationships between male protagonists and female side characters and these narratives' gendered differentiations between these characters and their self-destructive storylines. I detect the differentiations between male subjects and female objects, masculine reason and feminine emotion and/or irrationality, male characters' social and females' psychological motivations, the former's symbolic suicides and the latter's corporeal ones and males' narrated and females' depicted suicides; ultimately, male characters' surviving at the expense of female characters dying. I therefore argue that egoistic suicide is gendered as feminine in suicide's visible embodiment through female characters and in the feminization of suicidal male characters through their marginalization, infantilization and homosexualization.

As a result, I propose that egoistic male suicide remains invisible, in contrast to female suicide's visibility, in Anglophone suicide cinema, even if it features a roughly even number of suicidal male and female characters. I build my consideration upon film scholar Michele Aaron's theoretical concept of necromanticism, which reveals cinema's tendency to portray the "to-be-dead woman" as "spectacle, muse and the reflection of male desire and despair."³⁸⁵ Necromanticism does

³⁸³ Karkulehto and Rossi (2017: 9–28).

³⁸⁴ Pickard (2015).

³⁸⁵ Aaron (2014: 54).

not merely maintain the gender binary with its differentiation between male subjects and female objects,³⁸⁶ with the latter characterized by their desirability; it also reflects Western culture's ongoing fascination with death.

This fascination also justifies my decision to approach suicide cinema's gendering through the slasher-style horror film *Unfriended* in this article. As a body genre, horror films often employ suicide as a transgressive death that is instrumental to their goal of affecting viewers in various ways.³⁸⁷ At the same time, horror films facilitate the inventive treatment of cultural fears. Suicide in *Unfriended* is connected to young people's sexuality, as in most slasher films,³⁸⁸ and to youth culture's antisocial tendencies, such as bullying. Furthermore, next to featuring the transgressive death of suicide, this film has elements of sexual violence and slut-shaming that motivate the protagonist's self-directed reflexive violence, which represents suicide's close connection with sexuality and its instrumental use in sexual morality tales.

In this article, I consider the possible functions and causes of suicide's historical connection to sexuality not only through Aaron's necromanticism and Stuart Hall's "spectacle of the other" discussed in the first article in relation to suicide's pornification but also using Geoffrey Gorer's analysis from the 1950s. In his analysis, Gorer pointed out that the increase in representations of violent deaths in Western fiction represents death's pornification in an age seeking to deny death.³⁸⁹ This raises interesting questions related to the relationship between the pornography of suicide and its tabooed status, which I consider by examining such theories of pornography (and transgression) that see pornographies, as "scriptures of the forbidden" that maintain the taboos of the topics they depict through their forbidden, shameful and low status.³⁹⁰

In my discussion section, I argue that suicide cinema participates in suicide's subjugation and tabooing and especially in its marginalizing and pornifying tendencies. I bring in the concept of marginalization to refine and complement my earlier analysis of suicide's othering in a situation where those who perish in an egoistic suicide in cinematic representations are often young women, homosexual men and characters marginalized either in social status or in the medicalization of their motivations to commit suicide. I propose that the cinematic processes, which reiterate these marginalizing narratives, render women's suicide a visible spectacle and represent suicide's gendering on-screen as a demoted effeminate deed, both reflect suicide's domestication and its stigmatization as a bad death in pornographies left unnoticed in the visual sphere's pornification and death's subjugation under biopower.

³⁸⁶ Mulvey (1989).

³⁸⁷ Cherry (2009).

³⁸⁸ Clover (1992).

³⁸⁹ Gorer (1965).

³⁹⁰ See, e.g., Gorer (1955) and Paasonen (2011).

4.3 Article III: Suicide contagion and suicide cinema's medicalization from theories of taboo and biopower

The third original article is entitled "Itsemurhatartunnan taikauskosta: *The Moth Diaries* (2011) ja *13 Reasons Why* (2017)" [The superstition of suicide contagion in *The Moth Diaries* (2011) and *13 Reasons Why* (2017)]. It was published in 2018 in the Finnish journal *Tahiti*'s special volume on magic and superstition (volume 8, issue 2). This interdisciplinary journal, focused on art history and contemporary visual culture, is published by Taidehistorian seura, the Finnish art history association.

My article is a consideration of the relationship between the suicide taboo and suicide contagion, which is also known as the Werther effect,³⁹¹ as manifested in the reception to the controversial Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*. It is also a reflection of taboo's position in the Occident as a phenomenon categorized as a system of magic and superstition in its Western conceptual history. In my article, I examine the controversy surrounding the series in relation to its representation of suicide from this perspective and draw comparisons to the Irish-Canadian film *The Moth Diaries*, a fairly low-profile production that is uncontroversial but in many ways similar to the series. The film also provides an interesting counterpoint to the controversy in its supernatural storyline, in which a young woman's suicidality is studied as vampiric influence over other predisposing factors, such as a parent's suicide and "disenfranchised mourning."³⁹²

13 Reasons Why caused a controversy in April 2017 in its representation of sexual violence and youth suicide. The series, developed by Brian Yorkey, is a televisual adaptation of Jay Asher's 2007 young-adult fiction novel of the same title. Its 13 episodes deconstruct the 13 titular reasons that lead a 17-year-old teenage girl, Hannah Baker (Katherine Langford), to commit suicide in the closing episode of the season. In most of its elements, the series does not diverge from the conventions that facilitate suicide's representations both historically and elsewhere on-screen.

As is common in suicide's cinematic representations, in *13 Reasons Why* a female character's fatality is conjoined with, and eventually defied by, the male protagonist's voyage through mourning his high school crush, a journey complicated by guilt, longing and disenfranchised grief. In this parallel narrative, as is common, a side character's suicide is revealed in flashbacks that are veiled by elements of nostalgia and eventually defied by the protagonist, who travels through a similar trajectory to the "suicide victim" – and yet survives, as is often vital. Survival also takes place in *13 Reasons Why*, whose 17-year-old protagonist Clay Jensen (Dylan Minnette) struggles to get over Hannah's suicide but eventually finds a new love in a happy ending to the first season.

³⁹¹ Phillips (1974); see also Furedi (2019) and Gould et al. (2003).

³⁹² Doka (1999).

Despite these similarities with most cinematic fiction, the show was condemned for its depiction of suicide, which was widely deemed graphic.³⁹³ It was also argued to glorify and romanticize self-accomplished death³⁹⁴ by, for instance, dispelling self-willed death's fatality and finality in its "survivor-blaming" narration³⁹⁵ and by allegedly ignoring the fictional suicide's origin in the protagonist's mental health problems, which should have been treated with accurate diagnoses by a professional, according to the critics.³⁹⁶ In this, the series was argued to encourage suicide contagion among the audiences, and actions were taken: warning letters were sent to parents, trigger warnings with mental service hotline numbers were added and Netflix age limits were successfully raised; in places, even discussions of the series were curbed by schools. In summer 2019, the suicide scene was deleted from the series after two years of streaming.

Unlike cinematic fiction, in which suicide is habitually treated in subplots as a stock narrative ploy, an instrument or an index, *13 Reasons Why* offers a variety of motivations that trace the teenage girl's suicide to the accumulated feeling of hopelessness brought about by a sequence of social setbacks – no doubt facilitated by the televisual format. Some of those setbacks are unquestionably serious, such as her sexual harassment and rape, whereas some appear more insignificant, at least at face value. Taken together, though, they portray the girl's gradual slide into a state of depression that is well represented in the diegesis and that makes the girl feel there is no way out except death. In the twelfth episode of the season, Hannah's intoning voice accurately makes sense of this hopelessness:

It seemed whatever I did I kept letting people down. I started thinking how everyone's lives would be better without me. And what does that feel like? It feels like nothing, like a deep, endless, always blank nothing. And for those of you who will now be looking for signs everywhere, what does it really look like? Here's the scary thing, it looks like nothing.

In the article, I analyze *13 Reasons Why* in relation to the arguments presented against it during the controversy. I itemize the most evident ways, depicted above, in which the criticism appears to misinterpret the series but focus in particular on the arguments centered on suicide's relationship to mental health issues and reasoned thinking, which strike me as having the closest relationship to biopower and taboo. Reflecting suicide's general marginalization and medicalization in Anglophone films, the authorities attacking the series criticized it for depicting suicide "as something resulting from reasoned thinking."³⁹⁷ I note such normative views to demonstrate suicide's biopowered regulation and taboo, both in similar views' prevalence in suicide cinema generally and in this partic-

³⁹³ See, e.g., Fallon (2017).

³⁹⁴ Curtis (2017) and Tolentino (2017).

³⁹⁵ Guillaume (2017) and Skehan (2017).

³⁹⁶ Serani (2017) and Jacobson (2017).

³⁹⁷ Office of Film & Literature Classification, 27.4.2018.

ular controversy, which involved attacking a series that seeks to understand suicide's causes through familiar conventions and even includes medical diagnoses but will not stigmatize suicide.

The Moth Diaries was chosen to serve as a counterpart to the Netflix series due to its similar narrative of a young woman recovering from a suicidal state, where the only actualized (if graphically depicted) suicides are committed by side characters in flashbacks. Both are rare in featuring suicide in central storylines, unlike the more common instrumental representations, and both are also focused on young women's self-harm, with gendered representations and madness participating in suicide's marginalization. The biggest difference between the two is – besides the evident format (cinema versus television) – the controversy surrounding *13 Reasons Why* and *The Moth Diaries*'s supernatural narrative of a vampire tempting a young girl with suicide, which is interesting as a fictional yet historically accurate account of the suicide contagion that *13 Reasons Why* was accused of.

I argue in the article that biopower and taboo are reflected not only in suicide's homogenous cinematic canon but also in the unquestioned status of the theoretical model of the Werther effect, which is related to the contagious logic detected by Mary Douglas³⁹⁸ in other taboo topics and thus reflected in *13 Reasons Why*'s reception. Although suicide contagion is relatively widely accepted in the general discourse, in the scientific community it has faced both epistemic and methodologic criticism, in addition to which the hypotheses specifically dealing with fictional representations' effects on real-world suicides remain contested. For instance, from the point of view of the medical humanities, the medicalizing representations of suicide can be as equally dangerous as the glorifying ones through shame, stigma and the subjugated identifications they offer.³⁹⁹ Interestingly for my research, Gijin Cheng et al. have also assailed the many theories mapped under suicide contagion for their use of the affective metaphor of contagion, which they see as hiding a failure to understand the causal relations between a predisposition to and actualized suicides.⁴⁰⁰

By reading *The Moth Diaries* in relation to modern vampire fiction and European vampire folklore, I point out that suicide as a death has long been treated as unnatural and feared for its contagious nature, which is also manifested in the vampire folklore deployed in Harron's film. As William Patrick Day argues, the vampire as a monster, which is linked to suicide's pre-modern genealogy, was used to explain unnatural deaths before the understanding of infectious diseases developed.⁴⁰¹ I see this analogy as making the power of the contemporary theories of suicides contagion particularly noteworthy in a situation where the fear of suicide's contagion through fictional representations homogenizes the visual sphere and is used to censor particular kinds of representations. Due to the nature of the special volume in which the article appears, I close it by considering

³⁹⁸ See, e.g., Douglas (1979, 1996, 2002).

³⁹⁹ Lyons and Dolezal (2017).

⁴⁰⁰ Gheng et al. (2014).

⁴⁰¹ Day (2015: 4).

the conceptual history of the taboo, which has been reported to operate with similar fears of contagion, for which reason Steiner sees the taboo as "othered" as a system of magic and superstition.⁴⁰²

4.4 Article IV: Countering gendered representation and heteronormative rescue in a feminist film of young women's self-harm

The fourth article, "My Mother, She Butchered Me, My Father, He Ate Me: Feminist Filmmaking Resisting Self-Harm's Gendering in *The Moth Diaries*" (which has been submitted to *Screening the Past*), is a collaboration with Pauline Greenhill, a feminist folklorist studying gender and sexuality in the context of fairytale films. We discovered our mutual interest in Canadian director Mary Harron's 2011 film *The Moth Diaries* at a conference in January 2017. In our collaborative article, we explore its critical possibilities as a film created by a feminist filmmaker.

This more reparative reading of the film, which takes into account the polysemic nature of its representations of gender, sexuality and suicide and especially Harron's take on female friendships and their role in the protagonist's recovery, adds to my earlier readings of the film. In my first article, my reading of the film focuses on critical aspects of the lesbian undertones of the vampiric storyline and the intense female friendships. In looking at the prevalent canon of suicide, the film does participate in the regime that makes it so difficult to find a committed egoistic suicide that is not effeminized or embodied through female or homosexual characters. However, it does defy some of the sexist conventions in female characters and the necromantic depiction of their self-harm.

In particular, in approaching the film from feminist theories of patriarchal culture and cinema, we argue that *The Moth Diaries* defies these conventions in offering the lesbian female vampire as a character that offers the protagonist, Rebecca, a figure for woman identification as she supplants her over-identification with the father. The father's suicide haunts the girl as a death disenfranchised in its mourning. In the film's key scene, we interpret the vampire's temptation as spurring Rebecca to rise into action as a genuine agent rather than a passive victim and eventually to liberate herself. Her action counters suicide cinema's prevalent conventions of necromantism and female passivity,⁴⁰³ and her self-willed recovery goes against the many cinematic conventions that depict female figures as surviving through heteronormative rescue. We argue that the film thus counters stereotypical notions of gender, resisting both necromantic objectification and medical victimization.

In our view, this plays out not only in the protagonist Rebecca's storyline of suicide but also in her best friend Lucy's succumbing to anorexia, a related form

⁴⁰² Steiner (1999a).

⁴⁰³ Aaron (2014) and Gonick (2006).

of self-harm. Fatal anorexia is connected to suicide as a passive form of self-inflicted death in Durkheim's typology,⁴⁰⁴ and is similarly gendered as a feminine illness that victimizes the women struggling with it against alternative models.⁴⁰⁵ In altruistic suicide, gendered as masculine, and in feminist readings of eating disorders, both are attempts to gain individual autonomy in a biopowered society by acts of resistance enacted through self-starvation and voluntary death. Both anorexia's and suicide's biopowered regulation is evident not only in the normative views against which both are positioned in the material world but also in their gendering in a variety of discourses, including the necromantic discourse of cinema.

I am the joint article's first author, but it is a collaborative work throughout that arose from fruitful discussions. Its different sections have thus been written and edited together. However, I played a larger role in grounding the analysis with a section on suicide cinema and taking charge of construing self-harm's relationship with female agency and biopower. Pauline Greenhill led the way in offering Mary Harron's biography as a feminist director, grounding the theoretical analysis on lesbian vampires and preparing the detailed reading of the key scene presented in the last section of the article, on which our reparative reading rests.

⁴⁰⁴ Durkheim (1966: 44).

⁴⁰⁵ Counihan (1999: 70).

5 DISCUSSION

This dissertation's objective has been to understand how cinematic representations participate in suicide's biopowered regulation and how they both reflect and renew this death's tabooed position – presumed to do so according to the two hypotheses guiding the research objective. As outlined in the introduction, the research objective and hypotheses are rooted in several paradoxes related to suicide's representation, status and ontology in contemporary culture.

Reading stories of suicide in real life reveals that it is surrounded by stigmas and the deep-rooted emotions of shame and guilt that easily envelop suicidal experiences into silence, whether in suicidal struggle or in bereavement.⁴⁰⁶ Especially egoistic suicide, referring to deaths against society in the Durkheimian typology,⁴⁰⁷ have a long history in being treated as feared and dishonorable deaths in the West. Despite these qualities that work as testimonies to suicide's tabooed position, self-willed death is visibly and in a sense even frenziedly represented in the Western cultural discourses. In studying the vast wealth of commercial films in which suicide is featured in one way or another, a variety of theories and concepts challenging suicide's status as a taboo in commenting on Western culture's pornification⁴⁰⁸ or its increased violence become relevant. Yet against these representations, suicide remains “the last Western taboo,” as it has been called in the media,⁴⁰⁹ even after many last taboos have been recognized and broken on the grounds of being similarly represented. Against this background, my research into suicide's representation in Anglophone cinema has been driven by the desire to understand suicide as a taboo.

One part of my theoretical toolkit has been the theories on taboo that I discussed in chapter 3.3. Anthropological theories discuss the taboo as a social structure and taboos as different kinds of customs focused on the protection of the

⁴⁰⁶ See, e.g., Chapple et al. (2015) and Huttunen (2019).

⁴⁰⁷ Durkheim (1966: 152–170).

⁴⁰⁸ See, e.g., Nikunen, Paasonen and Saarenmaa (2011: 7–29).

⁴⁰⁹ See, e.g., Tatz (2017); see also Woods (2016).

social body from both the symbolic and corporeal dangers that threaten it, especially in the domains of death, sexuality and nutrition.⁴¹⁰ In the influential classificatory theories on the phenomenon, taboos are viewed as dealing with the cultural classifications of a variety of phenomena related to the hierarchical differentiations between entities, social groups, selves and others. In Edmund Leach's and Mary Douglas's theories, taboos are connected to anomalies,⁴¹¹ whereas Christian Davies and Valerio Valeri see taboos as protecting symbolic and social borders and as prototypes that have been assigned special cultural value.⁴¹² Steiner argues that it is a danger structure seeking to identify, classify and localize dangers to the community.⁴¹³ The collective values that are crystallized in particular kinds of classificatory configurations and threatened by deviations from them are essential to these theories: the tabooed entities are often symbolically significant in collective mores.⁴¹⁴ Douglas further connects the taboo to the affective ideas of dirt and contagion that also characterize the taboo in early evolutionist theories, through which the taboo was discovered.

Facilitated by taboo's colonialist conceptual history and the concept's sensitive position in post-colonial academia, the taboo is today connected to social silences and to the prohibitions and repression of speech and representation.⁴¹⁵ In this study, suicide is shown to be noteworthy as a death rendered unnatural and dangerous and an experience that is often stigmatized and shameful. Like most tabooed phenomena, suicide can also be argued to bear the marks of an anomaly, of a nature-defying deviation, because it threatens the social collective and its values.

In approaching suicide from the field of visual culture, I have been interested in how these qualities are produced in its globally inseminated, meaning-making cinematic representations. As I discussed in chapter 3.2, it is accepted in cultural studies that cultural discourses and representations, including popular ones, have the power to affect human beings' conceptions and behavior, with culturally constructed ideas, emotions, differentiations and norms guiding their attitudes toward other people and worldly phenomena and influencing their self-image and identification. Representations can even affect the hierarchical constitution of society and the symbolic order, as their production often reflects cultural hegemony and the division of power between groups of people.⁴¹⁶ Based on the theories of visual culture, it is a given that a popular medium like cinema both reflects and generates meanings, definitions and explanations of and for suicide from particular kinds of power-infested and value-laden positions. These meanings, definitions and explanations are particularly sensitive because one could easily view the suicidal as Gramscian subalterns, social groups excluded

⁴¹⁰ Douglas (1979, 2002) and Steiner (1999a: 107–109).

⁴¹¹ Douglas (1975, 1979, 1996, 2002) and Leach (1979).

⁴¹² Davies (1982) and Valeri (2000).

⁴¹³ Steiner (1999a: 107–109).

⁴¹⁴ Radcliffe-Brown (1979: 56) and Steiner (1999a: 107–109).

⁴¹⁵ Keesing (1985) and Steiner (1999a).

⁴¹⁶ See, e.g., Hall (2013b).

from participation⁴¹⁷ that have no real power to influence the definition of suicide against the authorized institutions of suicide's knowledge production.

Next, under the Foucauldian understanding of biopower (chapter 3.2.2), it is accepted that cultural discourses participate in the regulation of sexuality, death and nutrition through normative processes that contain the institutional efforts of knowledge production, signification and objectification.⁴¹⁸ The key to modern biopower is, in Foucault's analysis, privileging knowledge over repression and signifying and objectifying processes in which individuals are turned into "docile bodies" who participate in biopower's processes through their own acts. Shielded by the repressive hypothesis of the regulated topics' once-suppressed ontology, the explosion of power-infested discourses is easily masked as liberation, which makes visibility, as Foucault puts it, a "trap."⁴¹⁹

Biopower is particularly relevant for my research because it is aligned with the taboo in its focus on sexuality, death and nutrition. It is also relevant because it has succeeded the divinely justified sovereign power as a system of power and control that is better suited for the regulation of both individual and social bodies in an era known for its secularization and for the expansion of the regulated masses. It could also be approached as a modern taboo practice with its institutionalized and ritualistic differentiations between purity and impurity, sacred and profane, as also Mary Douglas proposes in connecting the taboo to the modern practices of hygiene and sociology of danger.⁴²⁰

In Foucault's theory, suicide is cited as a key domain in the transition from the sovereign power's "right to kill" to modern biopower's discursive and normative processes, which seek to "infest life through and through."⁴²¹ Despite this, suicide's knowledge production is only rarely investigated. This is no doubt because of suicide's sensitive status and because the human suffering involved continues to make such an investigation difficult, especially against the authorized medical and sociological approaches that tie the analysis of suicide to suicide prevention. As Ian Marsh laments in the introduction to *Suicide* (2010) about studying biopower in suicide's knowledge production:

This task is rendered difficult with respect to the current subject, as the 'truths' of suicide tend to feel particularly real – after all there are dead bodies and grief to describe people who take their own lives as having acted while the balance of the minds was disrupted appears a natural, almost self-evident, truth. To seek to prevent suicide by any means available given the above, would seem to be an absolute necessity.⁴²²

Against this background, my research objective has been to study the kinds of cultural meanings of suicide that are made through its cinematic representations, with different kinds of values and conceptions related to suicide relayed and created in them. By analyzing the reiterating representations in suicide cinema, my

⁴¹⁷ Gramsci (1971).

⁴¹⁸ Foucault (1990).

⁴¹⁹ Foucault (1990).

⁴²⁰ Douglas (1975: 50; 1996). See also Douglas and Wildavsky (1983).

⁴²¹ Foucault (1990: 141).

⁴²² Marsh (2010: 6).

research question has been to study how cinema participates through these representations in the practice of biopower and how it reflects and renews suicide's tabooed position, whose theoretical domains were discussed in the introduction. Biopower is particularly relevant to my research because taboo's conceptual history makes it difficult to find visual cultural theories and concepts suited to analyzing taboo beyond the ideas of silence and repression. In this sense, with this dissertation primarily interested with suicide as a tabooed death, biopower functions as a tool to make connections between suicide and the taboo, which is lacking in the vocabulary beyond its silenced ontology.

I have investigated suicide's cinematic processes of meaning-making and practices of power through feature films produced after 1985, using a variety of theoretical frameworks to aid in drawing the connections between suicide cinema and suicide's tabooed ontology. My initial materials consisted of 50 feature films and expanded during the process. In addition to this large-scale analysis, discussed in a research article published in 2015, I executed three case studies of three films and one season of a Netflix series; these were published in three additional original research articles that are detailed in chapters 2.1.2 and 4. In the following sections, I discuss my findings and suicide's relationship to taboo and biopower, first through the notions of suicide's gendering and medicalization and then through the concepts used to make sense of suicide's tabooed position in my articles, which include othering, marginalization, stigmatization, domestication and pornification.

5.1 The gendering and medicalization of suicide cinema

Influenced by the theoretical notions that emphasize reiteration as the source of representation's power over individuals' conceptions and lives,⁴²³ I pay attention in my analysis of suicide cinema to the recurring elements in voluntary death's representations. These conventions include narrative and visual strategies, motivations for suicide and the characters available for filmmakers; they pervade both the somewhat rare films that can be argued to be *about* suicide and the more frequent films *with* suicide, in which suicide is utilized as a narrative or other type of instrument.

Of the various recurring elements, I seek to understand in particular the gendered differences in suicide's representation, which are particularly prominent in studying suicide cinema and its cultural past.⁴²⁴ Looking at the cinematic representations qualitatively reveals that, in our reiterating portrayals of it, suicide is both gendered as a feminine death and in other ways rendered an effeminate deed, despite the statistics showing that suicides are primarily committed by men.⁴²⁵ It is also in other manners rendered an effeminate deed, according to

⁴²³ E.g. Hall (2013abc) and Butler (2011).

⁴²⁴ E.g. Brown (2001); Bronfen (1992); Gates (1988) and Higonnet (1986).

⁴²⁵ Canetto (1993), Jaworski (2014: 23). See also Rob Cover's (2012: 110–115) analysis of the relationship between statistical knowledge production and biopower.

media's "negatively-stereotyped effeminate men" often signifying a status in the sexual minority.⁴²⁶ I address this difference through the Durkheimian division between egoistic and altruistic suicides. As I discuss in my articles, the latter are often glorified as sacrificial deaths, whereas the former are more easily assigned attributes that are routinely associated with the egoistic type of suicides: "bad," "violent" and "effeminate."⁴²⁷

In my articles, I discuss suicide's gendering in Leo Gabriadze's 2014 horror *Unfriended*, Cameron Crowe's 2001 sci-fi *Vanilla Sky*, Mary Harron's 2011 horror/drama *The Moth Diaries* and Brian Yorkey's 2017 Netflix drama *13 Reasons Why*, though which I seek to better understand this gendered ontology's forms and possible meanings. Specifically, I see gender as intertwined in the division between individualistic egoistic suicides that are "against" society and masculine altruistic deaths carried out *for* society or for social benefit⁴²⁸ and argue that this division participates in the constitution of the egoistic suicide proper as a demoted weakness. In this tendency toward suicide's demotion in gendered webs of knowledge production, suicide's status as a dangerous death subjected to biopower and taboo appears to be at least *reflected* – and may well be produced – in popular culture.

Of the aforementioned films, Gabriadze's *Unfriended* focuses on the visual spectacle of sexualized female suicide, Crowe's *Vanilla Sky* differentiates between symbolic and actual suicides and Mary Harron's *The Moth Diaries* incorporates the suicides of two male artists into a narrative centered on the suicidality of the daughters, a living girl and a lesbian vampire. The controversial *13 Reasons Why*, by contrast, studies suicide in a parallel narrative in which a male protagonist lives with a teenage girl's suicide. The film juxtaposes males outliving their self-destructive adventures with females dying in their stead,⁴²⁹ which is surprisingly common in cinematic fiction, in whose parallel narratives suicide and gender are often constituted.

As I argue in particular in relation to *Vanilla Sky*, in its representations of suicidality and its frequent parallel narratives between male characters living at the expense of female characters dying by their own hands, suicide cinema makes a distinction between men's reason and women's emotion, men's agency and women's passivity and men's verbalized and women's embodied suicides, thus

⁴²⁶ Nicholas and Howard (1998: 31), quoted in Cover (2012: 44).

⁴²⁷ The representations of other altruistic suicides of interest to Western audiences may also be of interest here, from suicide bombings and mass shootings to *seppuku*; they are similarly pervaded by a connection between altruism and (hyper)masculinity that is far from egoistic suicide's representations. See, for instance, Gronnvoll and McCauliff (2013) on the gendering media frames that discuss female suicide bombers.

⁴²⁸ John Saddington (2010: 67) writes, "Although most heroic suicides are by male characters, there are a small number of female cases" before listing female suicides from horror films *Blade* (1998), *The Descent: Part 2* (2009) and *Final Destination II* (2003). In addition to these, my own materials reveal altruistic female suicides in *Alien* (1979), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (season 5, episode 22, 2001) and *Stranger Things* (season 1, episode 8, 2016). See also Kosonen (2017b). It might be worth considering why these representations are united by their appearance in the horror genre.

⁴²⁹ See also Aaron (2014).

enforcing the gender binary. Sylvia Canetto describes similar attitudes as prevalent in popular opinion:

Even in their suicidal action, women are not viewed as tragic or heroic, but rather as dependent, immature, weak, passive, and hysterical. Women's love and suicide are labeled neurotic.⁴³⁰

A similar differentiation between heroic male agency and feminine passivity was also identified by Katrina Jaworski, who, in a scrutiny of suicide's scientific discourses, notes that "in stark contrast to women's overexcited sensibilities, male deaths were associated with heroism, bravery and courage."⁴³¹ Like Canetto's and Jaworski's recognition that men are presented as dying for rational reasons (such as glory) and women for irrational ones (such as love) in reiterating cultural discourses,⁴³² men's suicides in cinema also often respond to honor and shame, while women's suicides mark their vulnerability, irrationality, romanticism or sexual missteps. As a result of these differences and the structures of power in film production, the cinematic gaze often focuses on male minds and female bodies.⁴³³

These gendered differences in the representation of suicide are revealed by comparing the films *Network* (1976) and *Christine* (2016), both of which were inspired by the suicide of the American television news reporter Christine Chubbuck in 1974. Chubbuck shot herself on a live broadcast and used the moment to criticize her spectacle-seeking channel's policy to "bring the viewers the latest in blood and guts [...] in living color." *Network* is Sidney Lumet's award-winning rendering of Chubbuck's death, with Peter Finch playing Howard Beale, "the mad prophet of the airwaves" who uses his anger, desperation and the spectacle caused by the live-broadcast suicide threat to rail against the social ills of the era; he is ultimately assassinated on live television instead of by his own hand. *Christine* is a biographical drama by Antonio Campos, which tells the story of a female reporter struggling with depression, professional frustrations, a difficult maternal relationship, setbacks related to her love life and her desire to have a family. The gendered difference is illustrated not only by the rapid pace with which a female reporter's suicide was first transformed into a fictional story of a male news anchor's glorious struggle tilting against the network windmills. The difference in the two renderings of the same event is also evident in their storylines and cinematography: a masculine story (that does not end in suicide) set entirely in the professional world is juxtaposed with a story preoccupied with a female character's relationships and an ovarian cancer that crushes her dreams of conceiving a child.

⁴³⁰ Canetto (1993: 5).

⁴³¹ Jaworski (2014: 22).

⁴³² Canetto (1993).

⁴³³ e.g. New York Film Academy (2018) and Mulvey (1989).



Figure 3 The gendered difference in two renderings of the same story, *Network* (1974) and *Christine* (2016), is evident in the former's focus on the masculine mind through deistic cinematography, and in the latter's preoccupation with female relationships and a cinematography featuring lingering shots of the protagonist's body.

These differences are of the sort that Jaworski recognizes as resulting from the "masculinist conditions" of suicide's knowledge production, which she unpacks in a critical analysis of the gender of suicide:⁴³⁴

⁴³⁴ Jaworski (2014: 43–44). It must be recognized that, contrary to my analysis, Jaworski argues that suicides are produced as masculine deaths against failed female suicide attempts. This view departs from my findings and Aaron's analysis of the cinematic

There is something deeply gendered about suicide and this relates to how we understand masculinities and femininities. On the other hand, gender comes across as an attachment, a structural add-on to how knowledge of suicide is constructed. Suicide is made sense of – intelligible – via binaries such as male-female, masculine-feminine and active-passive. The body is not entirely absent. It too is neutral yet gendered in the interpretation of lethality and violence.⁴³⁵

Next to being gendered in a way that could be argued to participate in egoistic suicide's production as a condition of the emotional and the irrational, egoistic suicide is most often presented as a desperate, irrational solution pertinent to the vulnerable, the weak and the "mentally ill"⁴³⁶ in the few readily available stereotypes of a suicidal individual. In a study of suicide's cinematic representations, psychiatrists Steven Stack and Barbara Bowman witness its colonization by vague, often unpronounced markers of psychopathology and mood disorders, while John Saddington recognizes the abundance of "melancholic suicides" in the films that closely examine suicide.⁴³⁷

Something similar is also found in the films I examine, with psychopathology often connected with the suicides of villains, and depression or other mood disorders used to "explain" the suicides of the more likeable characters, as is exemplified by such high-profile films as M. Night Shyamalan's 1999 horror film *The Sixth Sense* or James Mangold's 1999 drama *Girl, Interrupted*.⁴³⁸ Shyamalan's film opens with a murder-suicide committed by a former patient of the protagonist, an award-winning child psychologist. Corresponding with media stereotypes of madness,⁴³⁹ the suicidal character is a hysterical and dangerously unpredictable figure. *Girl, Interrupted* is a coming-of-age story of a "wounded adolescent girl," and, in Elizabeth Marshall's terms, a manifestation of a "broader cultural curriculum that links adolescent girlhood to vulnerability."⁴⁴⁰ Set in a psychiatric institution, the story follows the protagonist's recovery from a borderline disorder by juxtaposing it with a suicide of another girl with bulimia and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

As with suicide's connection to femininity, in these conventional representations suicide is marginalized, demoted and rendered aberrant from the viewpoint of a rationalist culture that reflects on suicide as an individualized, detached symptom and an extreme manifestation of vulnerability, madness and even villainy. Suicide's medicalization, so clearly notable in the analysis of suicide cinema, appears to be characteristic of the understanding of suicide in general, for Ian Marsh comments on suicide's medicalization in his Foucauldian analysis of suicide's knowledge production:

gender difference in particular; it can be partially explained by differences in our materials.

⁴³⁵ Jaworski (2014: 34).

⁴³⁶ See also Stack and Bowman (2012).

⁴³⁷ Stack and Bowman (2012: 29–101) and Saddington (2010: 62–106).

⁴³⁸ See Saddington (2010: 65) for similar results.

⁴³⁹ See, e.g., Shapiro and Rotter (2016).

⁴⁴⁰ Marshall (2006: 118–119).

Suicide is now mostly constituted as the tragic act of a mentally unwell individual and other ways of conceiving self-accomplished death possess relatively limited currency.⁴⁴¹

Suicide is most often taken to be pathological in nature, with the suicidal person usually represented as a tragic and tormented figure.⁴⁴²

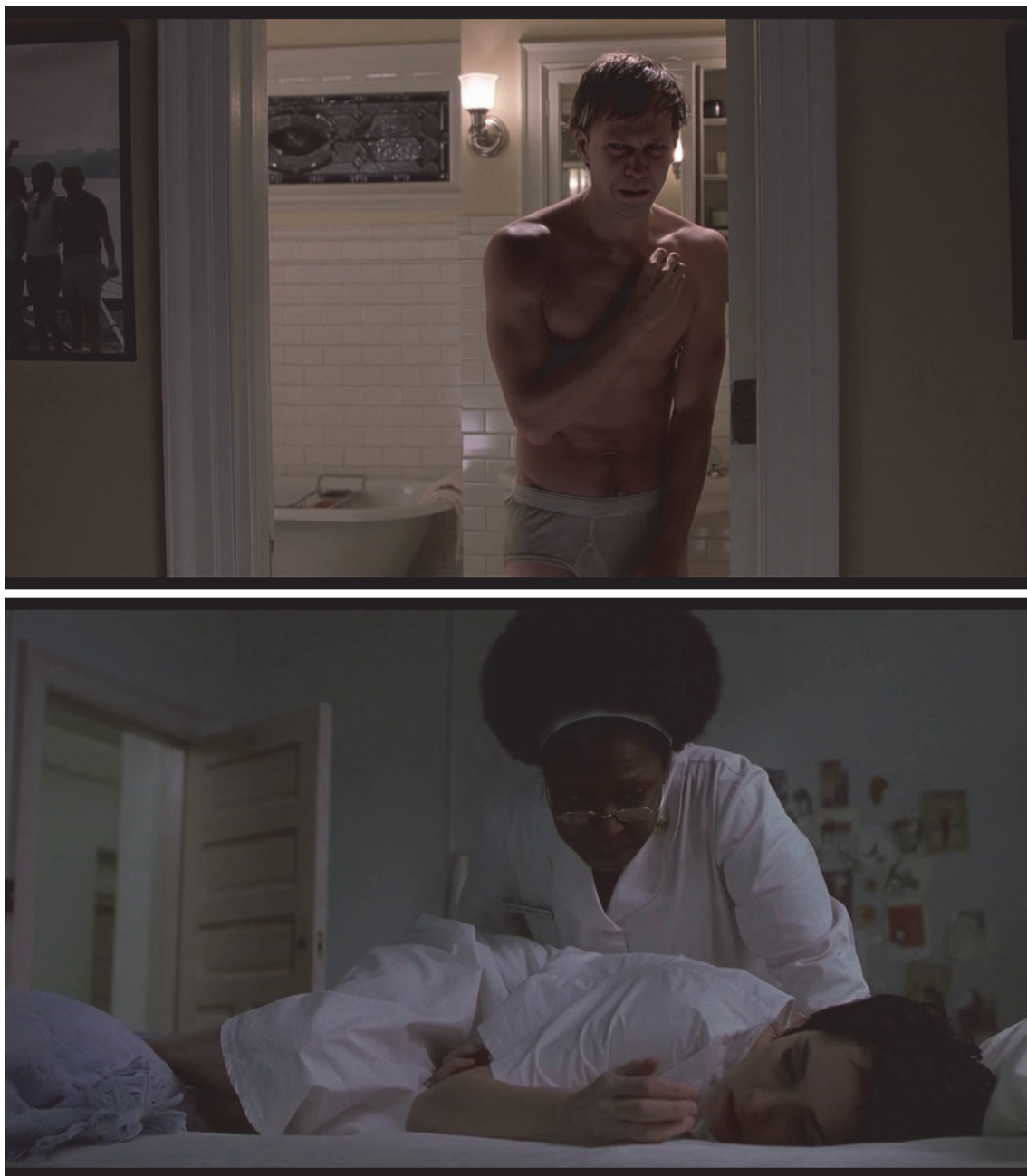


Figure 4 Visualizations of madness and vulnerability in *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and *Girl, Interrupted* (1999).

⁴⁴¹ Marsh (2010: 223).

⁴⁴² Marsh (2010: 9).

In addition to Marsh, essayist Siri Hustvedt also recognizes the “contemporary ring”⁴⁴³ of the discourses relating suicide to depression or other mental disorders and criticizes this “dubious truth,”⁴⁴⁴ which easily extends from texts and scholarly books to suicide’s more entertaining representation constituted by my cinematic materials:

I read hundreds upon hundreds of times that more than 90 percent of all people who kill themselves have a mental disorder, but there was never a note explaining where this statistic comes from.⁴⁴⁵

Like Marsh and Hustvedt, Margaret Pabst Battin comments on suicide’s position from the discipline of philosophical ethics:

For much of the twentieth and on into the twenty-first century, thinking about suicide in the West has been normatively monolithic: suicide has come to be seen by the public and particularly by health professionals as primarily a matter of mental illness, perhaps compounded by biochemical factors and social stressors, the sad result of depression or other often treatable disease – a tragedy to be prevented. With the exception of debate over suicide in terminal illness, the only substantive discussions about suicide in current Western culture have concerned whether access to psychotherapy or improved suicide-prevention programs, or more effective antidepressant medications should form the principal lines of defense.⁴⁴⁶

Suicide is here not only medicalized, as Hustvedt and Marsh recognize, but, in the fictive forms this medicalization takes on the silver screen, appears to be narrated on a continuum with the chains of knowledge-production that Marsh calls suicide’s “compulsory ontology of pathology.”⁴⁴⁷ As I discussed in chapter 3.1, since its secularization, suicide has been connected to mental illness, particularly depression. This association is achieved through medical discourses and the other discourses classifiable as “psy-knowledge,” the discourses of the mind like suicidological analysis, through which the definitions, causes and recourses of and for suicide are sought.

The extent to which suicide is viewed as the culmination or most extreme form of mental illness is, in Marsh’s analysis, directly connected to suicide’s regulation through modern biopower. As introduced in the opening chapters, biopower seeks to sustain the socio-cultural order and organization through a variety techniques of normative regulation directed at individual bodies, through which the lives and deaths of the symbolic bodies of entire populations can be rendered controllable.⁴⁴⁸ As Marsh argues and as discussed in chapter 3.2.2, suicide’s medicalization in this “compulsory ontology of pathology” represents a solution to the problem suicide poses as “an act of provocation to a bio-power that sought to foster life and manage, maintain and maximize all aspects of life at both individual and population level.”⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴³ Hustvedt (2016: 417).

⁴⁴⁴ Hustvedt (2016: 418).

⁴⁴⁵ Hustvedt (2016: 418).

⁴⁴⁶ Battin (2005: 164).

⁴⁴⁷ Marsh (2010: 219).

⁴⁴⁸ Douglas (1970) and Foucault (1990).

⁴⁴⁹ Marsh (2010: 220).

Marsh relies on the Foucauldian turn between sovereign power and biopower:

Such a “medicalization” of suicide can be understood by reference to shifting economies of power. Whereas sovereign power had constituted self-killing as a negation of the right of the king, or God, to take life or let live, now numerous techniques that sought “no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through” emerge in the eighteenth century.⁴⁵⁰

An examination of suicide’s discursive history reveals that it is precisely the authorization of *medical* knowledge and its notions of pathology and abnormality that embodies the transition from suicide’s constitution as a sin, crime or transgression to be punished to a discursively and normatively regulated “defect to be diagnosed, managed, treated or corrected.”⁴⁵¹ Marsh does not see medical institutions as domesticating suicide only through these techniques of knowledge production, where suicide is identified and its containment to medical institutions justified.⁴⁵² In referencing Ian Hacking, Marsh also discusses the techniques of the objectification of individuals as patients and their involvement in the regulation of themselves through the “‘looping effect’, whereby people come, albeit imperfectly, to resemble descriptions of themselves and their categorization.”⁴⁵³

Although lacking the same level of authority and truth value as psy-discourses, suicide’s cinematic representations can also easily be connected to biopower, especially in terms of suicide’s normative knowledge production. Thus, in my articles I refer to the wealth of representations motivating a character’s suicide with a variety of conditions of “madness” as their “colonization” by medical diagnoses, as it reflects the extent to which this knowledge has already been solidified.⁴⁵⁴ In addition, it must also be remembered, that madness also motivates suicide in suicide’s philosophical and art historical past, with differentiations drawn between rationality and irrationality and reason and emotion even before suicide’s medicalization as a disease began in the nineteenth century.⁴⁵⁵

Beyond this medicalization, biopower is apparent in the normative “masculinist conditions of knowing” under which suicide is produced.⁴⁵⁶ And, although it is not strictly related to suicide’s regulation, it is also easy to see representations as participating in the regulation of sexuality and gender. As I argue in my articles, films use suicide to propagate norms for sexuality and gender, to construe masculinity and femininity in hierarchical oppositions to each other and to tie suicide to heterosexuality through pairings between heterosexual lovers,

⁴⁵⁰ Marsh (2010: 220).

⁴⁵¹ Marsh (2010: 224).

⁴⁵² Marsh (2010: 222).

⁴⁵³ Marsh (2010: 195).

⁴⁵⁴ In two of my articles, I discuss suicide cinema’s increased subjection to representations of medical knowledge and diagnoses as their “colonization” by these medical explanation models, which is problematic in post-colonial analysis. I have sought to correct my mistake in this introduction by discussing suicide’s cinema’s domination by these explanation models under different terms.

⁴⁵⁵ Minois (1999) and van Hooff (1990).

⁴⁵⁶ Jaworski (2014).

fathers and daughters and male doctors and female patients,⁴⁵⁷ along with forms of sexuality that defy these conventions. For instance, in narratives about LGBTQI+-characters, suicidal myths and gendered stereotypes are used in the creation of “victim tropes,”⁴⁵⁸ whereas in the suicides of (heterosexual) female characters the narratives often conflate excessive sexual desire with suicidality by having suicides appear in moral tales about sexual deviance.⁴⁵⁹

The 2017 backlash against *13 Reasons Why* is particularly interesting in studying the manifestations of biopower and taboo in suicide cinema. First, it is interesting that a work of fiction would be rendered so controversial by the same logic one would expect about a newspaper report studying suicide. It is thus a telling illustration of the extent of the compulsory ontology of pathology that Marsh discusses. The 2000 World Health Organization media guidelines for reporting suicides encourage reporting that explicitly connects suicide to questions of mental health:

- Reporting suicidal behavior as an understandable response to social or cultural changes or degradation should be resisted,
- Sensational coverage of suicides should be assiduously avoided, particularly when a celebrity is involved. The coverage should be minimized to the extent possible. **Any mental health problem the celebrity may have had should also be acknowledged,**
- Listing available mental health services and helplines with their up-to-date telephone numbers and addresses,
- Conveying message that depression is often associated with suicidal behavior and that depression is a treatable condition,
- Offering a message of sympathy to the survivors in their hour of grief and providing telephone numbers of support groups for survivors, if available. This increases the likelihood of intervention by mental health professionals, friends and family in suicidal crises.⁴⁶⁰

Like the WHO, the UK-based Samaritans encourage referring “to the wider issues associated with suicide, such as risk factors like alcohol misuse, mental health problems and deprivation”;⁴⁶¹ in their 2002 guideline booklet, they recommend against suicide’s romanticization, glorification or glamorization:

- Don’t romanticize or glorify suicide. Reporting which highlights community expressions of grief may suggest that the local community is honouring the suicidal behavior of the deceased person, rather than mourning their death.

⁴⁵⁷ Doctors and patients are also discovered in opposite gendered formations, for instance in *Lethal Weapon* (1985), where a female shrink’s decision to pair the self-destructive male cop protagonist with a family-oriented Afro-American police officer offers the protagonist a route to recovery.

⁴⁵⁸ Marshall (2010).

⁴⁵⁹ See, e.g., Campbell (2006).

⁴⁶⁰ World Health Organization (2000: 7–8, emphasis added); the issue is also discussed by Marsh (2010: 45–47). In its 2017 version of the guidelines, the WHO’s emphasis on mental health appears to have declined.

⁴⁶¹ Samaritans (2013: 8–11), quoted in Marsh (2010: 46).

- Encourage discussion by health experts on the possible contributory causes of suicide.⁴⁶²

As I discuss in my third article, *13 Reasons Why* was deemed problematic for its romanticization and glorification of suicide and in its survivor-blaming elements, but especially for representing suicide as a rational or reasoned solution to the suicidal character's life situation. In the words of the authority on film classifications, suicide should never be presented "as something resulting from reasoned thinking"⁴⁶³ but should instead be presented as a question of mental health with a suitable array of medical solutions, and this is what was also demanded of *13 Reasons Why* in its reception.⁴⁶⁴ Arguing that biopower is made manifest in this anonymous authority's demand and in the series's reception is supported by the fact that medical diagnoses and means of prevention were already present in the series' diegesis. They can be seen, for instance, in the amount of widely circulated and thus recognizable symptoms of depression in Hannah, in the display of a bottle of duloxetine (a medication used to treat major depressive disorder) offered to Clay, the protagonist, and in the dialogue discussing the protagonist's well-being.

It is appropriate to quote Marsh, who comments on the effects of suicide's ontology on the exclusion of other forms of meaning-making that might have better effects on the health of the diagnosed:

[...] A discourse of pathology has come to not only frame (and largely constitute) the topic but also to determine what counts a responsible practice in preventing such deaths – the increasing dominance of such a reading has also led to the marginalization or foreclosure of many other ways of understanding and responding to self-accomplished death. In addition, the promises of medical science in relation to suicide [...] have remained largely unfulfilled, but more than this [...] the formation and maintenance of a 'regime of truth' (one centering on a compulsory ontology of pathology) has led to 'truth' effects that are complex, often hard to discern and not necessarily benign.⁴⁶⁵

Thus, in my third article, I study cinema's tendencies to medicalize suicide and its gendering as feminine in relation to suicide's tabooed ontology before tentatively proposing that these phenomena contribute to suicide's silenced status through the stigma and shame attached to suicide by its production as a feminine condition of vulnerability and irrationality.

The general response to *13 Reasons Why* is, beside biopower's regimes of knowledge production, especially interesting in relation to the taboo.⁴⁶⁶ As I discuss in chapter 3.3, the taboo has historically protected the social body and its values through affective myths of dirt and contagion. Taboos can be explained by viewing them as a form of societal danger behavior that expresses attitudes to collective values that are reflected in the natural-cultural grid, in relation to

⁴⁶² Samaritans (2002: 10–11) quoted in Marsh (2010: 46).

⁴⁶³ Office of Film & Literature Classification (27.4.2018).

⁴⁶⁴ See, e.g., Bostan (2017).

⁴⁶⁵ Marsh (2010: 12).

⁴⁶⁶ Tatz (2017).

which some things appear as anomalous and unnatural.⁴⁶⁷ In the societal contexts studied by anthropologists, this fear of contagion is used to justify many of the ritual customs and prohibitions in the taboo,⁴⁶⁸ which has helped to earn the taboo its reputation as superstition.⁴⁶⁹

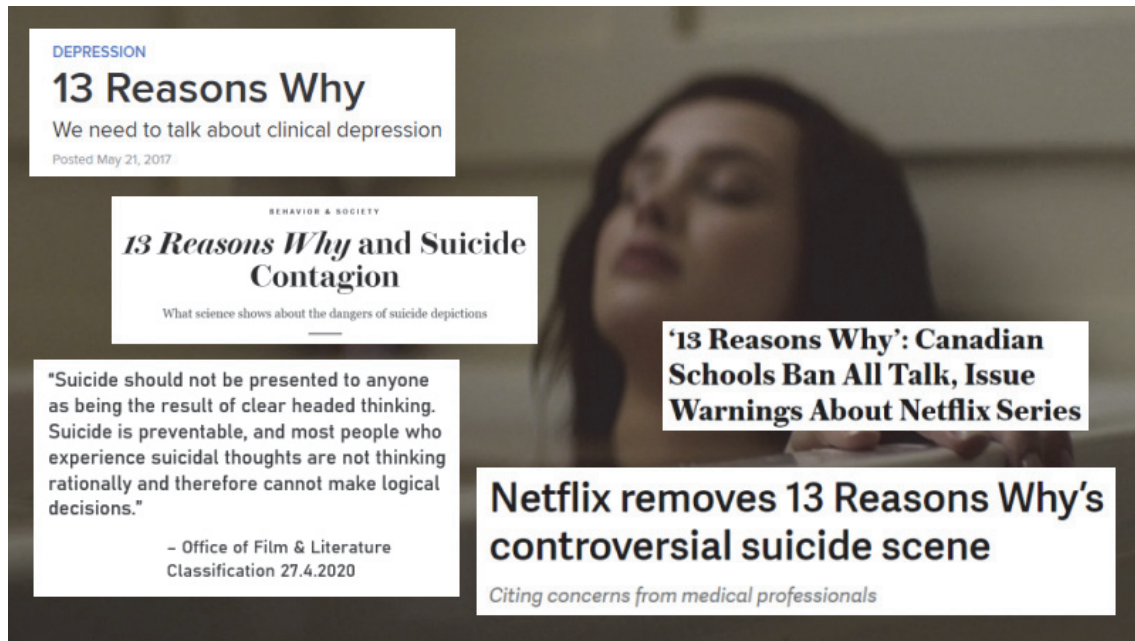


Figure 5 Elements related to both taboo and biopower are reflected in headlines about the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*.

As I argue in my third article, the medical model of suicide contagion that was attached to the series's breach of the codes of "safe" representation has qualities analogous to the taboo. The medical model discussed by sociologists, psychologists and public health specialists was used in the controversy as a reason for censorship: age limits were added to the series, and discussion of the series was curbed in schools.⁴⁷⁰ By the time of this writing, the power the suicide contagion notion had justified the deletion of the visual representation of suicide from the final episode of the first season.⁴⁷¹ The decision to delete the suicide scene after two years of streaming is more symbolic than pragmatic: it makes a point and sets an example for what kind of representations of sensitive death are to be avoided and censored in the future.

It is remarkable in this regard that suicide contagion, which was related with fear of a copycat effect based on a fictitious suicide, is far from uncontested in the scientific field.⁴⁷² As several commentaries following the scene's removal noted, mere correlation between a fictitious representation and an increase in

⁴⁶⁷ Douglas (2002) and Steiner (1999a: 107-109, 214).

⁴⁶⁸ See, e.g., (Mead, 1937: 502-503) and Smith (1901: 146).

⁴⁶⁹ See, e.g., Frazer (1911).

⁴⁷⁰ See, e.g., Knapp (2017) and Roy (2017).

⁴⁷¹ See, e.g., Marshall (2019).

⁴⁷² See, e.g., Cheng et al. (2014: 1-9).

real-world suicides does not necessarily imply causality.⁴⁷³ Studies of this sort are especially complicated and continue to provide conflicting results.⁴⁷⁴ Thus, when Qijin Cheng et al. study “suicide contagion” as a metaphor that has established the field of study based on its affective currency, it is tempting to draw connections to the taboo as characterized by the same fear of contagion.⁴⁷⁵ Marsh similarly recognizes that some of the authority of medical knowledge is grounded on the fear of epidemic:

Critique can thus be met by recourse to ‘the real’, ‘the true’, ‘the natural’, and ‘the necessary’, and fears can be raised that any loosening of the ‘conventional’ grip will lead to more suicides.⁴⁷⁶

Analogous elements to the taboo are also present in Marsh’s analysis of the transition from one economy of power to another, from sovereign power to biopower.⁴⁷⁷ Beyond viewing suicide’s medicalization as a moral enterprise, Marsh argues that psychiatry was defined and justified in the mid-nineteenth century by reference to “public hygiene” and the “control of dangerous individuals,” where the taboo-ridden elements of dirt and contagion are on a continuum in medicine; Mary Douglas has theorized the taboo’s transition into modern era along similar lines.⁴⁷⁸ It is reasonable to assume suicide contagion testifies of this transition from taboo to biopower as one of its contemporary institutional and ideological forms.

Underlying my research articles is the idea that suicide’s cinematic representations are more often instrumental than thematic in the first place, a notion that Saddington and Aaron also employ in their analyses of suicide cinema.⁴⁷⁹ As I note in my articles, some of the ways that suicide is subjugated to the systems of power and control regulating it are the scarcity of films that are genuinely *about* suicide in comparison to films *with* suicide and the surprisingly monolithic nature of the numerous representations of suicide. Saddington draws a telling distinction in introducing “melancholic” and “occasioned” suicides as two different types of filmic representations of suicide.⁴⁸⁰ Melancholic suicides “concern those suicides which do not come as much of a surprise to the viewer, given the explicitly laid out circumstances in the film and the overt behaviour of the character concerned”;⁴⁸¹ these films often feature a storyline of depression and mental illness. Saddington argues that occasioned suicides appear as merely “one element

⁴⁷³ See, e.g., Berman (1988: 982–985).

⁴⁷⁴ Baron and Reiss (2005: 193–200).

⁴⁷⁵ Gheng et al. (2014: 1–9).

⁴⁷⁶ Marsh (2010: 6).

⁴⁷⁷ Marsh (2010: 135).

⁴⁷⁸ Douglas (1975: 50).

⁴⁷⁹ Aaron (2014: 47) and Saddington (2010).

⁴⁸⁰ Saddington (2010).

⁴⁸¹ Saddington (2010: 62).

in the narrative rather than its focal event” and characterizes them as often “based on circumstances ‘thrown at the characters’ in the film.”⁴⁸² Particularly in its instrumental uses, suicide often continues to carry the signifying potential of a violent, effeminate and bad death.



Figure 6 Violent and bad suicides in the films *Cloud Atlas* (2012) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994); the first features an LGBTQI+ character and the second a corrupt prison warden.

Film scholar Michele Aaron connects the qualitative limitations in suicide’s cinematic reconfigurations to self-willed death’s status as a death that is dangerous to society – a similar division that I seek to understand using Durkheimian concepts:

⁴⁸² Saddington (2010: 63).

The seismic proportions of suicide's affront to society when it is not for society, on society's terms, mean that cinema keeps suicide at bay, relegated and reduced to [...] very specific social, moral and narrative uses.⁴⁸³

Suicide cinema's moral and instrumental uses are manifest not only in the films themselves and the many differentiations they draw, but also in the controversy surrounding *13 Reasons Why* and thus in the discourses that surround and seek to regulate this regime of representation. In relation to this, it is notable that the study by Stack and Bowman⁴⁸⁴ that I discuss in my first article is driven by precisely the type of pathologizing truth regime that Ian Marsh has analyzed. In enterprises like Stack and Bowman's work, or the attack launched against *13 Reasons Why*, the medicalization of suicide's fictive presentations, according to the diagnostic framework and thus its normative regulation, is recommended as a means of suicide prevention.

5.2 Marginalization and pornification of on-screen suicide?

In contemporary West dominated by a Eurocentric definition of the taboo, there are certain paradoxes in suicide's discussion as taboo. For instance, recent headlines calling suicide a taboo and surfacing in relation to *13 Reasons Why* might have made suicide's taboo visible precisely through censorious acts of regulation related to taboo's connection to repression of speech and representation.⁴⁸⁵ Yet, as discussed in chapter 3.3.1, this is a fairly limited view of taboo's function.

Within visual studies, the theoretical domain of biopower can help make better sense of suicide's taboo. In the previous section, I discussed suicide's gendering and medicalization, which are exemplary as biopolitical forms of knowledge production. However, calling something a taboo also requires particular kinds of criteria to be met. According to contemporary conceptions, these include social silences and stigma. In the anthropological literature, included is the cultural classification according to which something can be described as anomalous, filthy and defiling – three things that characterize the taboos in both Douglas's theory and the prewar anthropological conceptualization.⁴⁸⁶ In Douglas's and Steiner's theories, such views are reduced to the taboos' perceived dangerous quality.

In the previous section, I entered into a discussion of suicide contagion, which seeks to regulate how suicide can be represented, and also reiterates suicide's association with danger and contagion. Beyond this, in this dissertation – more interested in what suicide's representations *do* than what they *are like* – I have sought to use theoretical and conceptual work to understand suicide as a taboo that is characterized by these kinds of qualities. In my articles, I approach

⁴⁸³ Aaron (2014: 47).

⁴⁸⁴ Stack and Bowman (2012).

⁴⁸⁵ Tatz (2017).

⁴⁸⁶ Douglas (2002) and Valeri (2000).

the relationships between suicide cinema and the taboo of suicide through several concepts in order to understand the ways that this taboo can be argued to be manifested in cinema beyond the regular variety of normative regulation related to biopower. The concepts and theories used for this purpose are, however, still grounded in the gendered and medicalized representations discussed in the previous chapter.

I have come to divide the theories into two categories that can be argued to make better sense of suicide's taboo by taking two separate perspectives: its "ontology" and "status" as a taboo. Ontology here refers to the characteristics of a taboo: anomalous position, stigma, perhaps even silence. In this study, which arises out of visual studies, the question is the ways by which visual culture can be argued to produce an ontology of suicide as a taboo-ridden death. In this regard, I discuss suicide cinema in the articles in terms of its marginalizing, othering and stigmatizing tendencies. Status, meanwhile, refers to suicide's widely accepted position as a taboo. In my research, the question is the ways in which visual culture can be argued to respond to this status – reflecting suicide's historical position as a taboo and perhaps even participating in the renewal of suicide's tabooed ontology through this reflection. In this category, my articles examine suicide cinema's domesticating and pornifying tendencies.

I see the aforementioned trajectories of suicide's medicalization and its gendering as feminine in self-willed death's cinematic representations as reflecting the wider tendency of what my articles term suicide's othering and marginalization. As I note in relation to my analysis of the 50 feature films, egoistic suicide is often constructed as an act characteristic of on-screen characters who are not representative of the hegemonic culture and that frequently manifest otherness in relation to those who, as the desired objects of viewer identification, better represent the construction of "us." Here, suicide's frequent representation through female characters can also be considered a manner of suicide's othering, a view reiterated by Barbara Gates:

They (women) too were made into 'others' – and suicide was displaced to them much as it was to demonic alter egos. For the most part, fictions about women and suicide became more prevalent and seemed more credible than did facts. In the main they did so because they wanted and expected suicide, like madness, to be a "female malady".⁴⁸⁷

Beyond women and the medically diagnosed, the feature films I study offer also feature kinds of marginalized positions for gendered and medically classified suiciding figures. These range from LGBTQ figures⁴⁸⁸ to artists, who can also be glorified in their "social marginality," as in Tom Ford's acclaimed 2009 drama *A Single Man* or Bradley Cooper's recent 2018 romantic drama *A Star Is Born* illustrate. A small number of films also feature ethnic characters as suiciding others.

⁴⁸⁷ Gates (1988: 125).

⁴⁸⁸ See, e.g. Dyer (2002) and Russo (1981: 52).



Figure 7 Marginalized male characters in the films *A Single Man* (2009) and *A Star is Born* (2018). Suicidal thoughts make Colin Firth's gay professor blue in Tom Ford's acclaimed *A Single Man*, while Bradley Cooper's Jackson Maine is a country rock star struggling with alcoholism.



Figure 8 Essentializing vulnerability in *According to Greta* (2009) and *The Virgin Suicides* (1999).

Beyond the films' othering suicide through gendered, sexualized, diagnosed or racialized characters, it is not uncommon for suiciding figures to deviate from the social norms in ending their lives as villains, delinquents or artists or that they are associated with foreign cultures or the cultural past.⁴⁸⁹ When studied through Stuart Hall's framework, the analysis of suicides cinema even reveals "clusters of

⁴⁸⁹ Or, as Gates writes in an analysis of suicide's depiction in Victorian poetry: "displaced [...] if not to another time, then to another culture" (1988: 92).

otherness" or "spectacles of the other," in which a variety of pejorative attributes are often combined in a single representation.⁴⁹⁰ In my first article, this tendency harks back to suicide's art historical past, which has been mapped by Ron Brown, and evokes my interest in relation to Brown's proposition of suicide's representations being instrumental in the differentiation between groups of people: "The story of suicide's representation does not presuppose an order, but argues instead that visual representations might in themselves produce the social hierarchy [...]"⁴⁹¹

Furthermore, many suicidal figures are stereotypical in their self-destruction. Richard Dyer and Stuart Hall describe stereotypes as tools for bringing order into the world.⁴⁹² As they are often one-dimensional characters of madness and self-destruction,⁴⁹³ suicidal and suiciding characters in cinema can be argued to participate in this process. These stereotypical figures include marginalized people whose self-destruction is easily reduced to essentializing notions of difference and vulnerability.⁴⁹⁴ The recent trend of studying suicide as a problem of female adolescence, for instance, introduced as a tool of constructing neoliberal girlhood by Marnina Gonick, is reflected in many filmic characters.⁴⁹⁵

In two articles, I approach this phenomenon through transgression theory. In discussing Victorian literature's depictions of transgressions, Stallybrass and White suggest that in the Victorian era the literary mode of carnivalesque, which is characterized by transgressions of social taboos, "mediates between a classical/classificatory body and its negations, its Others, what it excludes to create its identity as such."⁴⁹⁶ In their theory, literature demotes the other in order to elevate the "I":⁴⁹⁷

A recurrent pattern emerges: The low-Other is despised and denied at the level of political organization and social being whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture."⁴⁹⁸

In addition to the participation of literary depictions of tabooed behavior in the constitution of the social hierarchy, Stallybrass and White argue that the social sphere is purified of transgressions by representing them through these others.

In suicide cinema, self-willed death's representation through others also appears to achieve many things. First, most films with suicide are created by heterosexual males and white Americans, in relation to which suicide and the suicidal

⁴⁹⁰ Hall (2013c).

⁴⁹¹ Brown (2001: 16).

⁴⁹² Dyer (2002: 11–18) and Hall (2013c: 247–248).

⁴⁹³ See also Shapiro & Rotter's 2016 framework differentiating between one-dimensional, two-dimensional and three-dimensional depictions of madness and their storyline functions in videogames.

⁴⁹⁴ On the victim trope, Cover (2012: 1–16) and Marshall (2010).

⁴⁹⁵ Gonick, 2006. Gonick conceptualizes such as "reviving Ophelia" -narratives, where neoliberal girlhood is produced in the juxtaposition between media's many self-destructive girl figures and the ideal of girl power (2006). See also: Marshall, 2006, for the construction of vulnerable girlhood in Susanna Kaysen's 1993 novel *Girl, Interrupted*.

⁴⁹⁶ Stallybrass and White (1986: 26).

⁴⁹⁷ Stallybrass and White (1986: 19).

⁴⁹⁸ Stallybrass and White (1986: 5–6).

can be argued to be, quoting Stallybrass and White, "reduced to a frightening or comic spectacle set over against the antithetical 'normality' of the spectator" when they are presented through othered characters.⁴⁹⁹ In the previous section, I referred to suicide's instrumentality in the biopowered economy, where one of self-willed death's functions is maintaining the gender difference. The representations of suicide elevate the white male heterosexual characters as rational agents not only in opposition to passion-driven suiciding females but also in relation to other groups of people.

The othering of suicide and the suicidal is interesting in comparing these instrumental representations of the self-willed death with the anthropological theory of the taboo. The taboo could also be argued to participate in the processes by which both social and symbolic hierarchies are constructed around "ideal prototypes," as they are attached to the borders and hierarchies between entities and groups of people in the form of different customs. Christie Davies distills the issue well: "The taboos help to maintain and reinforce the boundaries of the group and enable it to retain its distinctive identity under adverse circumstances".⁵⁰⁰

Similarly, reiterating the words by Valeri, "the relationship with the other presents the self with an image of himself in which a social relation is entailed."⁵⁰¹ The social identities are established in relation to others who do not abide by similar taboos or to those who transgress them. Thus "by carving out a part of the world," the taboo "carves out the self," as Alfred Gell and Valerio Valeri make sense of the processes in which self is constituted through ideals and their negations, relational restrictions and their transgressions.⁵⁰² From a distance, it is easy to see a similar effect in the pre-modern juridical punishment of suicides, which served as cautionary examples through their public humiliation and bodily mutilation. However, it is also possible to propose a similar effect in cinema's representations, which favor othered (and often medically diagnosed) characters when depicting the suicidal.

In looking at the representations' relationship to suicide, by contrast, the anthropological theory of taboo considers anomalies to be entities that challenge the good, natural, normal and desired order of the world. They are set in that sense against the ideal prototypes; the tabooed anomalies also function as complementary categories to the desired entities and behaviors, whence the normal and the anomalous, the good and the bad, the ones to be identified with and the others to be eschewed are all "defined in relation to the other."⁵⁰³ These qualities speak of the tabooed entities' perceived dangerousness and both reveal sources for these perceptions and illuminate the ways with which their dangers have been tamed. In their anomalous quality, tabooed entities are often considered to be unnatural, yet this unnaturalness has also been constructed and, so to say, naturalized through cultural myths where the natural order is purified of the signs of its construction.

⁴⁹⁹ Stallybrass and White (1986: 40–41).

⁵⁰⁰ Davies (1982: 1033).

⁵⁰¹ Valeri (2000: 92).

⁵⁰² Gell (1996) and Valeri (2000: 101).

⁵⁰³ Steiner (1999a: 133) and Davies (1982: 1036).

In my second article, I adopt the concept of marginalization to consider the relationship between suicide's representation through otherness and suicide's taboo. In the theory chapters, I discuss the taboo as dealing specifically with the dangers posed to the collectively agreed order by anomalies that, in essence, are something reduced into their deviations from the classificatory-normative order. Valerio Valeri contends to this in proposing of the taboo: "Expression in taboo is perhaps less a function of a morality based on fear alone than a phenomenon of markedness".⁵⁰⁴ In my article, I tentatively propose that contemporary discourses also participate in the formation of suicide as an unnatural, anomalous death in opposition to good, normal and natural deaths and lives, not so simply reflecting its historically anomalous position but also generating it.

In Mary Douglas's theory, the defining elements of the taboo are the ideas of dirt and contagion, which are related to these anomalies' perceived "filthy" and "defiling" qualities.⁵⁰⁵ These elements can certainly be seen in the suicide contagion, but they are also found in the two regimes in which suicide is represented through othered characters and connected to madness. Presenting suicide as a marginal phenomenon through characters and medicalized storylines can be seen to relate to suicide's ongoing production as an abnormal, unnatural and in this sense anomalous condition. Rendering something as anomalous is, of course, characteristic of normative regulation, so it is fairly easy to propose that suicide bears the effects of not only taboo but also of biopower, which seeks to subjugate and regulate the bodies of individuals and populations through diverse techniques and technologies centered around ideas of normality and abnormality.

Related to this, in my first article I see suicide's representations as participating in its stigmatization. According to the social theories on stigma, it is an attribute that "sticks" and, in sticking, causes "ostracism, infamy, shame and condemnation."⁵⁰⁶ It is a label of deviance, disgrace or infamy that affects the social status and classification of a person and disqualifies them "from full social acceptance."⁵⁰⁷ In relation to the taboo, stigma is relevant to both taboo's theories and its etymological origins, where the taboo, which is derived from Polynesian words signifying 'marked-off,' is connected to the concept of stigma, which signifies a 'mark of disgrace.'⁵⁰⁸ The link between taboo and stigma has been evoked throughout the conceptual history of the taboo. It was first applied by the early anthropologists, who noted the connection between the fear of social judgment and the fear of one's becoming taboo through transgressions of taboos.⁵⁰⁹

Suicide's connection to stigma also tends to be replicated in contemporary representative politics, where particular kinds of conventions often direct how suicide can be represented. A reading of the media regulations discussed above reveals that the protocols that have historically governed the representations of

⁵⁰⁴ Valeri (2000: 46).

⁵⁰⁵ Douglas (2002).

⁵⁰⁶ Herek (2004: 14); see also Plummer (1975).

⁵⁰⁷ Goffman (1963: 9) and Becker (1966).

⁵⁰⁸ Goffman (1963: 11-15), Herek (2004: 14) and *The Oxford English Dictionary*, XVI (1989; 689-690).

⁵⁰⁹ Marett (1941: 73-98) and Mead (1937: 503).

the tabooed death shy away from any frames that are feared to glorify (or romanticize, or glamorize) egoistic suicide. This fear of glorification is even inscribed into journalistic codes,⁵¹⁰ justified in the discussion over suicide contagion⁵¹¹ and manifested in the cinematic spectacle of suicide, which features a tendency to represent suicide as irrational and weak through its gendering as feminine and female and its connection to mental illness. Recalling taboo's relation to transgression in Stallybrass and White's theory, I thus argue in my first article that suicide's medicalization, gendering and the projections of suicide upon states of otherness all participate in the stigmatization and cultural tabooing of suicide. In my view, they domesticate and stigmatize suicide and sustain the symbolic order in which suicide's threat to society is inscribed in its anomalous position.

It is also worth considering suicide's instrumentalized regime of representation in relation to Samuel Shapiro and Merrill Rotter's framework of the representations of mental illness in videogames, which are divided into one-dimensional, two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations of a range of mental illnesses.⁵¹² Like suicide's representations, those of mental illness range from often pejorative and easily removed without affecting the experience through those where mental illnesses are only stereotypical elements in characters, stories or settings to the notably rare in-depth considerations of mental illness.⁵¹³ In discussions of the videogame medium, the stigmatizing stereotypes of mental illness have raised concern about the harmful nature of such narratively instrumental stereotypes.⁵¹⁴ In cinema, however, there is no similar discussion of the stigmatizing effects of the representations of suicide, pervaded though they be by stereotypical notions of mental illness. Paradoxically – and as testament to suicide's dangerous status – it appears that the compulsory ontology of pathology of suicide demands that stigmatizing stereotypes are considered necessary for suicide's safe representation by the same medical authorities who criticize similar representations in videogames.

Beyond these concepts and theories, which have been used to study suicide's relationship to its ontology as an anomalous and thus taboo death, I have sought concepts that will help make sense of these representations' relationship to suicide's tabooed status. In my first article, I propose that, while suicide's othering can be explained by the aforementioned processes of suicide's stigmatization, this representative regime cannot be studied without accounting for the ways in which it simultaneously domesticates suicide as a taboo. Both suicidal characters and their medicalized motivations are involved here; in the first article, I propose that madness provides a motive and explanation for the characters' suicides, while the invocation of others from outside the borders of the social inside it distances and secures the representation of a taboo topic, making it more safe to represent and more pleasurable to watch. This domestication serves as a reflection of suicide's cultural status as a taboo.

⁵¹⁰ Samaritans (2013) and World Health Organization (2000).

⁵¹¹ See, e.g., Devitt (2017) and Phillips (1974).

⁵¹² Shapiro and Rotter (2016).

⁵¹³ Shapiro and Rotter (2016).

⁵¹⁴ See, e.g., Ferrari et al (2019).

This is related in particular to suicide's gendering as female, and its close connection to Michele Aaron's concept of necromanticism in *Death and the Moving Image* (2014), which refers to cinema's obsession with the transcendent yet quite corporeal "to-be-dead" female figures who function in their suicidality as "beloved spectacle, muse and [...] inevitable projection of [heterosexual] male desire and despair."⁵¹⁵ In Aaron's book, the necromantic economy that pervades suicide cinema is illustrated by Sofia Coppola's 1999 cult-drama *The Virgin Suicides*;⁵¹⁶ it is manifested in my articles considering the films *Unfriended* and *Vanilla Sky*. I link necromanticism to suicide's art historical canon in particular; its sexualization of female suicides illustrates the concept better than the spectacle of the other I borrow from Stuart Hall for this purpose in my first article. This notion grounds the analysis of the horror/drama *The Moth Diaries* in my co-authored article with Pauline Greenhill; we see it as defying suicide's traditional necromantic canon.



Figure 9 Necromanticism at its most blatant in the suicide of a pornographic actress in Richard Donner's 1987 buddy cop action film *Lethal Weapon*.

In my second article, I discuss the same regime of representation in terms of death's pornification, as conceptualized by Nikunen, Paasonen and Saarenmaa, and originally discussed in relation to death (as pornography of death) by Geoffrey Gorer;⁵¹⁷ I initially used it to illustrate the nature of my research problem. As I write in my first article, judging by the richness and popularity of suicide's representations, visual culture has not really reflected suicide's status as a deep-rooted cultural taboo *when* we study taboos as unspeakable, unrepresentable topics to be omitted from cultural discourses. However, suicide continues to be labeled a taboo, despite being one of the both "hypersexual" and "hyper-violent"

⁵¹⁵ Aaron (2014: 52).

⁵¹⁶ Aaron (2014: 52-57).

⁵¹⁷ Nikunen, Paasonen and Saarenmaa (2005, 2007) and Gorer (1965).

domains of representation cited by philosopher Paul Virilio, who studies extremist tendencies in postmodern media.⁵¹⁸

Suicide's pornification is especially well illustrated the body horror genre, where suicide is often featured as a transgressive domain that seeks to shock and even revolt audiences. Yet unlike the scholars who comment on the visual sphere's pornification as a problematic phenomenon related to its sexualization or even its liberation from taboos, I use the concept inspired by the theories of transgression offered by Bataille, Foucault and Jenks, where transgressions of taboos help produce these taboos as prohibitions and as prohibited acts.⁵¹⁹ In Geoffrey Gorer's theory, the concept of pornography is used in a similar fashion, as referring to the "description of tabooed activities to produce hallucination or delusion."⁵²⁰ In Gorer's theory, the hallucination of death's liberation from fear and taboos is achieved in the representation of violent deaths, which he sees as hiding natural death from sight. I focus, of course, on the effects of suicide's pornification on that form of death's cultural position; I comment on suicide's pornification in its cinematic representation as a manifestation of self-willed death's prevailing status and ontology as taboo rather than as an expression of its taboo's relaxation.

Like the earlier concept of domestication, pornification also connects suicide's representations to its tabooed ontology as a mechanism of representation with which a feared, dangerous death can be rendered visible in a manner that can be described as safe (and exciting all at once). Yet unlike domestication, pornification also considers this regime in suicide's conspicuous instrumentality in its cinematic representations and other similar cinematic conventions that can be argued to strip suicide of its "realness" and render it merely a shocking death to be instrumentalized. In considering my materials now, suicide's gendering as female might be at its most influential at this point, as it speaks of the transgressive and thus taboo-ridden status that allows suicide to be linked to female characters in their nudity and sexual deviance. Overall, besides cinematic representations that domesticate suicide ("keeping suicide at bay" as Michele Aaron describes it),⁵²¹ pornified representations can be argued to here cast the egoistic self-accomplished death into the very category of unnatural bad death that it had long occupied in Western discourses before the discursive turn.

If the practices of biopower can be argued to be evident in suicide cinema's gendering and medicalization, the concepts connected to these trajectories and introduced in this section are tentative attempts to draw links between suicide's representation and its tabooed ontology and status, despite the frenzy with which self-willed death is depicted in the cinema. These concepts, proposed in my articles, take into account different aspects of how taboos can be seen to be manifest in suicide's representation: othering is more related to the constitution of the suicidal individual as opposed to the ideal citizen, and marginalization

⁵¹⁸ Virilio (2006) and Zurbrugg (1996).

⁵¹⁹ Bataille (2002), Foucault (1977) and Jenks (2003).

⁵²⁰ Gorer (1965: 49).

⁵²¹ Aaron (2014: 47).

also considers suicide's presentation as a condition that is not normal. Stigmatization can be regarded as a preliminary attempt to conceptualize what these kinds of conventions of representation do to suicide and the suicidal. Domestication and pornification, meanwhile, are more involved with mechanisms of representation that treat a taboo topic without breaking its taboo status. In most of these tendencies, suicide's representation can also be argued to be instrumental in relation to other phenomena, such as the constitution of the ideal order.

Finally, I am left to consider which of the explorations described in this dissertation most needs further analysis: the regime of stigmatization and its relationship to suicide's tabooed ontology. In reports by mental health organizations like the World Health Organization, Samaritans and Surunauha, it is often the stigma attached to suicide and mental illness that is said to hinder the suicidal and the bereaved from seeking help.⁵²² Stigma can also be regarded as one of the manifestations of suicide's tabooed status through the connection of taboos with dirt and contagion and through the seclusion of transgressors who dare to breach the taboos.

According to Erving Goffman, stigma is concerned with the discrediting reduction of a wholesome person into a person defined and tainted by his or her deviance, whether this deviance is corporeal, is connected to individual character or is a result of lineage or affiliation (religion, ethnicity, etc.).⁵²³ In essence, stigma works to reduce the individuals to whom it is attached to only their flaws and shortcomings. This corresponds with the visual cultural theories of stereotypes and their function.⁵²⁴ In the representation of suicide, this touches upon suicidal figures in Daniel Marshall's and Rob Cover's proposition of the victim trope present in the representations of the suicides of queer youth. In the victim trope, both suicide and queerness work to produce "an essentializing notion of victimhood",⁵²⁵ whereas their resilience and survival are rendered "external and to be fostered socially";⁵²⁶ representations of queer youth suicide have "the tendency to remove any sense of agency from that group as a whole".⁵²⁷ As my examination reveals, such victim tropes are also readily observed in egoistic suicide's medicalized and effeminized regime.

Within this research constellation, it has not been my task to study the ways that suicide's representations help suicide achieve its stigmatized status, yet as I write in my theory chapters, it is accepted in cultural studies that representations affect their viewers in varied ways, which is particularly important when studying a topic like suicide. In thinking of the possible effects of suicide's representation on its taboos, however, I connect them precisely to the classificatory theory

⁵²² See also Maier et al. (2014) and Shapiro and Rotter (2016) for a similar discussion on the effects on media representations on both self-stigma and impaired help-seeking behavior.

⁵²³ Goffman (1963), Herek (2004: 14) and Plummer (1975).

⁵²⁴ e.g. Dyer (2002); Hall (2013b)

⁵²⁵ Marshall (2010: 70).

⁵²⁶ Cover (2012: 3).

⁵²⁷ Meyer (1996: 102), quoted in Cover (2012: 3).

endorsed by Douglas and Leach and the stigmatizing effect that designates something abnormal, unnatural or bad. In Valeri's words, the taboos are defined by their markedness,⁵²⁸ which is related to their anomalous status and which can be argued, when suicide is represented, to have repercussions beyond suicide's ontology.

Beyond the theories and concepts proposed in my articles, Nicholas Mirzoeff's analysis in *Bodyscapes* (1995) is thought-provoking. Mirzoeff studies the representation of the human body along Foucauldian lines, suggesting that the regulation of "monsters" of varied kinds is executed through their "abortion" from the ideal order by means of visible representation:

Postmodern reading of the modern is now sufficiently flexible to incorporate such elements into its story, which previously have been repressed or ignored.⁵²⁹

[...] While Neo-classicism tried to give birth to the ideal form haunted by the fear of monsters, postmodernism simply aborts its monsters.⁵³⁰

It would be appropriate to connect suicide's marginalization to its abortion from the ideal order and thus also to the taboo by using the theories of Butler and Ahmed. In my eyes, the performative reiteration of the existing affective dichotomies, myths and conceptions related to self-accomplished death in suicide's cinematic representation "stickily" assign to self-willed death attributes and qualities that help push it beyond the borders of the thinkable in similar affective, performative chains that the aforementioned thinkers theorized. As mentioned, suicides tend to be personified in their cinematic representations through what we might call, echoing Ahmed, "sticky others,"⁵³¹ and they are often so in the clustering of many undesirable or marginalized attributes.⁵³² In this manner suicide's representations, which can be described as othering, marginalizing or stigmatizing, appear to continue depicting that death as anomalous, as abnormal.

Suicide's cinematic representations play with Steiner's argument that the taboo includes processes by which the dangers threatening the social order (taboos) and the transgressions of taboos are "identified, categorized and localized."⁵³³ Representations can be studied through the connection Kristeva draws between the anomaly and abjection, the process of casting something off from the symbolic order as impure.⁵³⁴ In the Bataille view, abjection refers not only to the processes of casting off but also to those processes where the social cast-offs affirm their abject identities and the cultural meanings that are created of them.⁵³⁵ In both theories, the processes of abjection produce subjects and objects expelled from the ideal constructions of the "I." In the representations of suicide, suicide's

⁵²⁸ Valeri (2000: 46).

⁵²⁹ Mirzoeff (1995: 6).

⁵³⁰ Mirzoeff (1995: 191).

⁵³¹ Ahmed (2014).

⁵³² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, I (1989: 492).

⁵³³ Steiner (1999a: 107–109).

⁵³⁴ Kristeva (1982, 1999).

⁵³⁵ Bataille (1999).

marginalization could also be seen to be emitted from the demotion of suicide to the othering of the suicidal.

Abjection has already been discussed in relation to suicide. Hustvedt, for instance, makes a touching point in commenting the effects of suicide's medicalization in British playwright Sarah Kane's words in *4:48 Psychosis*, which is recognized as the author's last play before her suicide:

The heartbreaking anxiety of the "I" in relation to the "you" in the play, the terror of being shamed and belittled, the aggression and the abjection are so raw that when I read the text, I felt I was listening to a scream.⁵³⁶

It is also central to Marita Gronnvoll and Kristen McCauliff's analysis of the media frames through which Western audiences are invited to view the acts of female suicide bombers, whose violence in many ways challenges Western ideas of gender and violence, as "insane acts of uncontained sociopaths."⁵³⁷

Thus, considering the relationship of the representations of suicide to the taboo through the theoretical notions of abjection would also make sense in this dissertation, particularly in considering how the stigmatization I discuss in my articles might be related to the classificatory position of suicide as an anomaly and to the demoted experience of the suicidal. In relation to my analysis of the gendered ways that suicidal female characters are depicted, Gronnvoll and McCauliff's analysis of the processes of abjection at work in gendered media frames is also interesting; they pay attention to the female suicide bombers' gender, emotions, bodies and fateful effects of their acts on children.⁵³⁸ As they illustrate, male suicide bombers are discussed without a similar spectacle of gender, passion, flesh and violence; only the female characters are abjected through it: "knowing what *they* are simultaneously constructs what *we* are not [...]."⁵³⁹

Table 1 The relationships between the central concepts of this dissertation and examples of representative films:

Related to:	Including (taboo):	Including (biopower):	Examples in films:
Suicide's ontology as a taboo.	Othering: Suicide's representation as an act pertinent to such characters that do not represent the prevailing construction of "us."	Suicide's gendering as a feminine act in the	Diagnosed, racialized and LGBTQI+ characters, villains, delinquents and artists: <i>The Sixth Sense</i> (1999), <i>The Private Lives of Pippa Lee</i>

⁵³⁶ Hustvedt (2017: 423). In addition, Ian Marsh (2010: 193–216) discusses *4:48 Psychosis* as a testimony to the subjugation of the suicidal to the compulsory ontology of pathology, although he also considers the play an act of resistance to this regime of truth.

⁵³⁷ Gronnvoll and McCauliff (2013).

⁵³⁸ Gronnvoll and McCauliff (2013)

⁵³⁹ Gronnvoll and McCauliff (2013: 350).

		<p>differentiations between egoistic and altruistic suicides; suicide's gendering as condition of vulnerable female adolescence and of youth.</p>	<p>(2009), <i>Dead Poets Society</i> (1989), <i>The Shawshank Redemption</i> (1994), <i>Filth</i> (2013), <i>A Star is Born</i> (2019).</p> <p><i>Christine</i> (2016) vs. <i>Network</i> (1974), <i>Girl, Interrupted</i> (1999), <i>The Dreamers</i> (2003).</p>
	<p>Marginalization: Suicide's representation as an anomalous condition.</p>	<p>The prioritization of medical forms of knowledge production in cinematic representations of suicide and in their reception.</p>	<p>Connected to the aforementioned.</p> <p>Psychopathological and depressed characters, settings in mental or other types of institutions, suicide contagion in parent-child relationships, in vertical relationships or in inexplicable epidemics:</p> <p><i>The Black Dahlia</i> (2008), <i>A Single Man</i> (2009), <i>Veronica Decides to Die</i> (2009), <i>Hunger</i> (2008), <i>The Moth Diaries</i> (2011), <i>Bridgend</i> (2015), <i>The Happening</i> (2008).</p>
	<p>Stigmatization: Suicide's value-laden representation as an anomalous condition and as a bad death, abjection of the suicidal.</p>	<p>Suicide contagion prohibiting storylines feared to glorify, glamorize or romanticize suicide.</p>	<p>One-dimensional (pejorative or comical) characters, stereotypical or instrumental storylines:</p> <p><i>Silence of the Lambs</i> (1991), <i>I Love You, Phillip Morris</i> (2009), <i>According to Greta</i> (2009), <i>Inception</i> (2010).</p> <p><i>13 Reasons Why</i> (2017) as a modern</p>

			example of the literary Werther effect.
Suicide's status as a taboo	Domestication: suicide's representation through sanitized, distanced and pleasurable representations. Avoiding bodily violence, displacing suicide to the past or to different cultures, taming suicide through heterosexual romance.	Suicide's gendering through female embodiment in parallel narratives; suicide's gendering as a condition of vulnerable female adolescence; suicide's gendering as a feminine (necromantic) spectacle.	Parallel narratives where a side character suicides and the protagonist lives, rescue through (often heterosexual) romantic or doctor-patient relationships: <i>Vanilla Sky</i> (2001), <i>Hannah and Her Sisters</i> (1996), <i>Ordinary People</i> (1980).
	Pornification: suicide's representation in order to produce a delusion of liberation; shocking, necromantic and transgressive uses.	Suicide's gendering as a feminine (necromantic) spectacle (which has deep roots in suicide's art historical past). Narratives of rape.	Suicide's shocking and transgressive uses: <i>Possession</i> (1981), <i>Heathers</i> (1989). <i>Lethal Weapon</i> (1987), <i>Cleopatra topos</i> . <i>Unfriended</i> (2014), <i>Lucretia topos</i> .

5.3 Last words: on this research

The mutability of research, with cul-de-sacs and unexpected discoveries leading to places one had not intended to go, is part of every research process, but it is harder to manage in an article dissertation, with changes embodied in articles that appear over the years, than in a monograph dissertation. This is even more true when the research constellation goes through a large upheaval in the middle of the effort. Thus, if the articles I include in this dissertation are somewhat repetitive in content, appear to hang together by only a loose thread or cite research constellations that differ from the ones referred to in the introduction, that is because they were intended for a quite different dissertation than the one I am now finishing. For the most part, the articles work as testimony to the growth of my

knowledge and skill. I have attempted to balance their shortcomings in this introduction. Some defects are, however, such that they must be left for further studies to repair. I discuss them below.

As I reflect on the whole that my dissertation constitutes today, the fact I started with a different kind of research constellation is written over especially in the scarcity of theories through which I approach suicide's representations in my articles. Had suicide rather than taboo been my primary interest, I would have chosen different frameworks to make sense of the different ways in which my materials discuss suicide. In this dissertation, I am heavily tied to the Durkheimian typology, which has not avoided criticism in suicidology,⁵⁴⁰ but which answered my needs in seeking to study the normative in suicide and which offered a simple enough framework for analyzing suicide's gendering in its cinematic representations as it was combined with an approach and theories pertinent to gender studies. However, if suicide were to be approached from other perspectives, this classification would be only one among many for studying suicide cinema, as I discuss in chapter 3.1, with Douglas's, Baechler's and Shneidman's frameworks introduced as some of the other typologies available. I chose to stay with the Durkheimian typology for a reason: in my view, in its focus on social integration and benefit it offered a better theoretical framework for making sense of the gendered dynamics in the representation of suicide and for understanding gendered knowledge-production's relationship to the normative regulation of suicide.⁵⁴¹

In terms of the concepts and theories I introduce in my articles to make sense of the relationship between suicide's representations and the taboo, they are somewhat imbricated and represent a work in progress. The task of finding suitable concepts and theories is made difficult by the taboo's conceptual history and its status in post-colonial academia, as discussed in chapters 3.3 and 3.4. The concepts I discuss in my articles and in chapter 5.2 are related to the literature and theoretical domains through which I tried to find bridges for approaching the phenomenon in contemporary culture, especially in its visual fields. I feel this conceptual effort remains a work in progress, so in many ways I do not consider the concepts and theories conclusive, but I still consider that I have made a contribution to analyzing how suicide is manifested in its cinematic representations.

I slightly lament that I somewhat overlooked other aspects in suicide's representation in my extensive focus on the trends of suicide's gendering and medicalization. Class and ethnicity offer particularly promising intersections to examine when suicide's representation is approached from the perspectives of othering or marginalization. The same could be said of suicide's prominent representation through LGBTQI+ characters, which is touched upon but not extensively addressed in the articles. Yet, unlike suicide's connection to class and ethnicity in its representations, cultural narratives of LGBTQI+ suicides have already been studied by other researchers like Rob Cover (2012) and Dustin Goltz

⁵⁴⁰ eg. Jaworski (2014), from the perspective of suicide's gendered knowledge production.

⁵⁴¹ e.g. Foucault (1990, 2006); Jaworski (2014).

(2013).⁵⁴² It remains for the further study to involve also class and ethnicity among similar analyses.

In my articles I focused on female femininities at the expense of both male femininities and female and male masculinities. The focus on female femininities is justified by my necessary focus on egoistic suicide as the more taboo-ridden form of voluntary death and by femininity's prominence here in terms of both suicide cinema and self-willed death's art historical past. Suicide's gendering as a feminine condition also proved interesting to me through the ideas of suicide's pornification, othering and marginalization. Furthermore, this focus on femininities offered the possibility of reflecting on the gendered webs of production behind suicide's polysemic representations in greater depth in the fourth article, where I study suicide's representation in a feminist director's film. However, in a different kind of research constellation, it would be valuable to look at masculinities, especially as I am growing increasingly interested in the role of toxic masculinity in suicide's stigmatized ontology.⁵⁴³

The possibility of eventually examining a film from a reparative-critical perspective instead of the paranoid one was particularly important to me. As I mention in my second article, in many ways I am not satisfied with the way I consider gendered representations in my first article: on their own, films' representations of suicide are polysemic and can be considered sites of resistance to the gendered norms that prevail. Paranoid reading does not do justice to the critical possibilities of auteur-films like *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), *Cloud Atlas* (2012) or indeed *The Moth Diaries* (2011), which I consider in my first article because of their depictions of a lovelorn male suicide and the suicides of a bisexual character and of a lesbian vampire. In my paranoid reading of suicide cinema, such films that are predominantly resistant to suicide's gendered knowledge production, such as *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *The Black Swan* (2010) in depicting female suicide or *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995) and *The Fall* (2006) in representing male suicide, were overlooked. As a mass, contemporary Anglophone films might reveal egoistic suicide's cinematic representations to be ruled by this trend, in which cinema others suicide by portraying it as an act of the characters that deviate from the heteronormative gender binary. However, there could be many reasons for this, in addition to which these types of representations might have more complex meanings than the ones I propose in my article.

In my second article, I comment on the sense of discomfort experienced in describing some of the male characters "effeminized" in the films' depictions of their suicides. I am now left thinking of suicide's representation as an LGBTQI+ phenomenon in a real-world cultural situation where suicide is genuine demo-

⁵⁴² These topics are also touched upon in gender studies researcher Varpu Ala-Suutari's recent doctoral dissertation (2020) on death and loss as part of queer and trans lives in Finland.

⁵⁴³ Honkasalo (2014) has earlier touched this in an article considering Finnish men's suicide notes in relation to the culture of male violence and the cultural script of the Finnish cultural ethos of "coping no matter what".

graphic problem for those who do not fit the heteronormative (or homonormative)⁵⁴⁴ matrix. Precisely these types of representations, where gender and sexuality are not viewed within a strict binary, might both reflect the perilous situation in the real world and offer tools for dealing with it. For instance, the lessening of the Western culture's normativity and marginalization, as with recent laws enacting marriage equality or with the broadening of the varieties with which gender and sexuality are represented in the media, has been connected to the decline in suicidal mortality among the LGBTQI+.⁵⁴⁵ However, the tropes through which these characters are depicted matter, as Daniel Marshall and Rob Cover show in their analyses of the victim trope, where suicide is directly related to a character's sexuality rather than to the complex socio-cultural factors that often make living within the margins unbearable.⁵⁴⁶ I think my reading in the first article could in many ways have been more complex, thoughtful and considerate of the polysemic representations and their many possible interpretations, so I am glad that at least with *The Moth Diaries* (2011) I had an opportunity to correct the situation with a reparative close reading.

In relation to gendered knowledge production's relationship to suicide's tabooed ontology, I wish to also devote a few lines to the different conclusion I draw compared to Katherine Jaworski in *The Gender of Suicide* (2014). As I do, Jaworski sees suicide as formed through gender and in "masculinist conditions of knowing."⁵⁴⁷ She uses similar theories and recognizes similar binary oppositions between masculinity and femininity, agency and passivity, reason and emotion, but – contrary to my conclusions – proposes that suicide is produced as a masculine condition.

I see our different deductions as related, first, to our materials: hers are primarily cultural and suicidological *texts*, whereas mine are cinematic representations and, before this dissertation, visual artistic works.⁵⁴⁸ Second, our approaches differ: Jaworski differentiates between value-laden attitudes toward fatal suicides (masculine) versus suicide attempts (feminine), whereas I look at the value-laden representations differentiating altruistic suicides (masculine) from egoistic suicides (feminine). Like all other media, cinema has affordances that distinguish it, so the possible media specificity in cinema's treatment of suicide must be recognized before firm conclusions can be drawn. Here as elsewhere, though, I see the critical possibilities of using the simpler Durkheimian framework, which helps to distinguish the glorified male suicides carried out for society or for social benefit from the female suicides undertaken for emotional reasons.

In addition to these differences in research constellations, I see something else behind the opposing conclusions that Jaworski and I draw, something that must be recognized especially when research ethics are considered: our personal

⁵⁴⁴ Rob Cover (2012: 117–138) eloquently makes this point.

⁵⁴⁵ Erlangsen et al. (2019) and Cover (2012: 38–55).

⁵⁴⁶ Marshall (2010) and Cover (2012: 17–36).

⁵⁴⁷ Jaworski (2014: 40); see also Salmela (2017, 2018).

⁵⁴⁸ Like me, film scholar Michele Aaron views cinematic suicide pervaded with femininity through what she terms "necromantism" (Aaron, 2014).

experiences. Based on Jaworski's introduction,⁵⁴⁹ we both have been affected by paternal suicides, with our lives and ways of thinking shaped by these experiences, which are traumatic and hold, at least in my experience, an uncomfortable place in the eyes of the rest of the world. I know for certain that my interest in suicide's tabooed position has been affected by my experiences of growing up with the stigma and silence surrounding my father's death. It has been also affected by the amount of discomfort and exclusion I have faced when trying to discuss the topic, when writing about it or when struggling with depression in my youth; self-harm remains inscribed on my arm. Yet, in my opinion, neither my theoretical interest nor my capability for objective analysis is lessened by these experiences. By contrast, I am certain that I can thank them for opening my eyes to the particular systems of power involved in the knowledge production of suicide around which this research constellation is built and for making me sensitive to nuances in the representation of suicide that might be harder to see without my personal experiences.

Fortunately, the fields in the humanities that have educated me – ethnology, art history and cultural studies – are favorable to emic and hermeneutic approaches, to which also my qualitative analysis rests upon. Like most cultural researchers, I feel objectivity, inasmuch as it is considered to require detachment of self, is not only an unattainable but also a misleading goal when working with qualitative inquiry. In the words of Kathy Charmaz, the “myth of silent authorship is false but reassuring.”⁵⁵⁰ However, personal experience with one's research topic makes it important to position oneself as a particular kind of reader or as a researching subject with a particular kind of background. As visual cultural scholar John Berger writes, we “never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.”⁵⁵¹ The interpretation of cultural discourses and representations, in particular, is always a “dialogue” between “texts,” their producers and their interpreters, all burdened by histories, as popular cultural scholar John Fiske writes: “The history of cultural studies, my academic history, and my personal history all intersect and inform one another, and introduce me as a speaking and writing voice [...]”⁵⁵²

It is important that research be accompanied by constant introspection and a sense of modesty, which I have tried to attain through the hermeneutic process⁵⁵³ and through trying to remain honest with myself about the motivations and patterns of thought that drive my research and affect the conclusions that I draw. I am sure both my research constellation and many of the conclusions that I present in this dissertation are affected by my position and my many histories, with the history of suicide being only the most obvious.

⁵⁴⁹ Jaworski (2014: 1-2).

⁵⁵⁰ Charmaz and Mitchell (1996: 299).

⁵⁵¹ Berger (1972) quoted in Rose (2007: 5-16). Rose continues: “Images work by producing effects every time they are looked at. Taking an image seriously, then, also involves thinking about how it positions you, its viewer, in relation to it” (2007: 10).

⁵⁵² Fiske (1995: x).

⁵⁵³ Gadamer (1957; 1977).

Thus, returning to the differences in the conclusions that Jaworski and I draw, I think also they are, to some extent, explicable through our different experiences, inasmuch as they have directed us to approach suicide's gendering from different perspectives. As Jaworski acknowledges, there are curious "gender paradoxes" in suicide's knowledge production, by which suicide is "dependent on the principles of rationality and autonomy, and their simultaneous denial," which also emphasizes the perspectives from which one studies the subject.⁵⁵⁴ When studying these paradoxical knowledges as they are reiterated through inherently polysemic representations, there are no objective truths hidden. I believe my deduction that suicide is constructed as feminine and Jaworski's argument of suicide's production as masculine and masculinist open equally accurate perspectives on the same phenomenon and merit further investigation. In my articles, I propose that egoistic suicide's gendering has repercussions beyond cinema through the association of femininity with vulnerability, emotion, passivity and irrationality. In this conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the effect of also other types of gendered forms of knowledge production on how suicide, suicidality and the suicidal are perceived and experienced.

My experiences, and this belief in the existence of several "truths" in looking at suicide and its knowledge production, is also reflected in my criticism of the compulsory ontology of pathology, which in this dissertation I show is reflected in suicide cinema through suicide contagion and its colonization by medical explanatory models. As Ian Marsh writes, it is hard to resist these truths because human lives are in question, with suffering involved, and taking a critical stance on these knowledges can easily be made to appear to be risking the human lives rendered vulnerable.⁵⁵⁵ To write about suicide is thus to perpetually balance on what can be said of it or of the authorized webs of its knowledge production, promising as they do to save lives. This, to me, is the fundamental ethical challenge in my research, not the personal experiences affecting my analysis.

For this reason, I must also clarify that, with my dissertation, I do not wish to criticize either suicidology or the institutions of mental health per se: I know therapy helped me go on living when I was young, but it was neither the only nor the most important factor contributing to my recovery. However, I do need to take a critical stand on the position accorded to these institutions and their truths of suicide, in particular when both are built on suppressing the stories of the suicidal, and seek to infiltrate the fiction, where different rules from other media are in play. For instance, in studying the decision to censor *13 Reasons Why's* suicide scene, some recent studies have also reported that *13 Reasons Why* has decreased thoughts related to harming or killing oneself,⁵⁵⁶ even as it increased empathy among its viewers and augmented respondents' willingness to discuss mental health issues with others.⁵⁵⁷ Similarly, in response to the backlash against the series, the novel's author, Jay Asher, recollects a reader's feedback on his book, which was controversial even without the headline-grabbing series:

⁵⁵⁴ Jaworski (2014: 48).

⁵⁵⁵ Marsh (2010: 6).

⁵⁵⁶ Arendt et al. (2019).

⁵⁵⁷ Northwestern (2018).

The very day I found out 'Thirteen Reasons Why' was the third most challenged book, I received an e-mail from a reader claiming my book kept her from committing suicide. I dare any censor to tell that girl it was inappropriate for her to read my book.⁵⁵⁸

Thus the headline-making increase in suicides among boys aged 12-17 after viewing *13 Reasons Why* is not to the only report worth citing.⁵⁵⁹

Based on what we know of the lives of the suicidal, people struggling with suicide also struggle with the stigmas attached to it, which makes it vital to critically study both the systems of control and power that affect suicide's representation and the representations with power over how suicide is understood and experienced. For instance, Barry Lyons and Luna Dolezal propose that the medicalizing representations of suicide should be seen as equally dangerous as the glorifying ones through shame, stigma and the objectified identifications they offer.⁵⁶⁰ Ian Marsh similarly discusses biopower's dangers in the "looping effect", whereby people come [...] to resemble descriptions of themselves and their categorization."⁵⁶¹ This dissertation has been my attempt to offer a critical analysis of suicide's representations from the perspectives of two systems of power and control, taboo and biopower (after my initial struggles in wanting to write a third thesis on suicide). I hope I have been able to write it with the sensitivity that I regard a topic such as suicide to demand.

558 Collins (2017).

559 Bridge et al. (2019).

560 Lyons and Dolezal (2017); see also Lester (1997).

561 Marsh (2010: 195).

YHTEENVETO

Tämän taidehistorian oppialaa ja visuaalisen kulttuurin tutkimusta edustavan artikkeliväitöskirjan tutkimusaiheena on omaehtoinen kuolema, itsemurha. Itsemurhaa on tarkasteltu ja käsitelty läpi länsimaisen historian epänormaalina, luonnottomana ja pahana kuolemana. Analysoin omaehtoista kuolemaa käsitteleviä elokuvarepresentaatioita itsemurhan tabuluonteesta näkökulmasta ja biovallan alaisen säätelyn viitekehityksessä. Itsemurhasta on viime vuosiin saakka keskusteltu erityisesti länsimaissa tabuna, jolla viitataan monesti itsemurhan vaiettuun asemaan. Tämän lisäksi Michel Foucault on määritellyt omaehtoisen kuoleman avainkäsitteeksi siirryttäessä valistusta edeltäneen ajan "suvereenista vallasta" moderniin biovalttaan. Pyrin artikkeliväitöskirjassani selvittämään itsemurhan representaatioiden, biovallan ja itsemurhan sosiokulttuurisen tabuaseeman suhdetta. Visuaalisen kulttuurin tutkimuksen ymmärryksen mukaan arvolutautunutta kuolemaa kuvaavien populaarikulttuuristen esitysten voi nähdä heijastelevan ja uusintavan vallitsevia käsityksiä itsemurhasta. Toisaalta elokuvan polyseemiset representaatiot voivat myös vastustaa näitä käsityksiä sekä omaehtoiseen kuolemaan kohdistettua säätelyä ja sen tabuluonnetta.

Väitöskirja yhdistää visuaalisen kulttuurin tutkimusta ja antropologiaa, ja sen tutkimusasetelma perustuu kahdelle lähtöolettamukselle, jotka liittyvät tutkimuksen monitieteisyyteen. Ensimmäinen lähtöolettaus nousee visuaalisen kulttuurin tutkimuksesta, jossa kulttuuristen diskurssien ja representaatioiden nähdään osallistuvan niihin prosesseihin, joissa sosiaalinen, sekä materiaallinen että mentaalinen, todellisuus muovautuu. Diskurssien ja representaatioiden voidaan nähdä muovaavan vallitsevia käsityksiä, uusintavan yhteisöllisiä ja kulttuurisia valta-asetelmia ja vaikuttavan yhteiskunnallisen elon kirjolle paikantuviin yksilöihin monin tavoin. Monet visuaalisen kulttuurin tutkijat myös ymmärtävät kulttuuristen diskurssien ja representaatioiden olevan biovallan läpäisemiä. Biovalta käsitetään foucault'laisessa teoriaperinteessä normatiiviseksi teknologioiksi, jotka suuntautuvat ihmisen ruumiiseen ja osallistuvat yksilöiden elämän ja kuoleman säätelyyn. Foucault'n näkemyksen mukaan tällaisia tekniikoita edustavat etenkin seksuaalisuutta, kuolemaa ja ravitsemusta koskevat normatiiviset keskustelut, jotka vaikuttavat ihmisten ruumiisiin, tunteisiin ja identiteetteihin. Siten ne muovaavat myös yhteiskuntia ja kulttuureita affektiivisin ja arvolutautunein käsityksin.

Toinen tutkimusasetelmaa muovannut lähtöolettaus nousee antropologisesta tabun tutkimuksesta. Antropologiassa tabua on etenkin 1950-luvun jälkeisissä suuntauksissa tarkasteltu sosiokulttuurisiin moraaliasetelmiin, luokittelujärjestelmiin ja valtarakenteisiin kytkeytyvänä kollektiivisesti välttämättömänä rakenteena. Tämän tutkimuksen keskeiset teoreetikot Franz Steiner, Mary Douglas ja Valerio Valeri lähestyvät tabua sellaisena normatiivisena rakenteena, jonka funktiona on suojella yhteisöä tietynlaisilta sekä sosiaaliseen ruumiiseen että yksilöiden kehoihin kohdistuvilta vaaroilta. Heidän teorioissaan tabu kytkeytyy lisäksi likaa ja tartuntaa koskeviin käsityksiin ja pelkoihin. Ne ruokkivat tabua tilanteissa, joissa yhteisön luokittelujärjestelmän rajat ja kollektiiviset arvot tulevat

rikotuiksi tai ovat uhattuina tulla rikotuiksi. Biovallan ja tabun välistä suhdetta ei ole tarkasteltu valtaa ja kontrollia käsittelevissä tutkimuksissa. Kuitenkin myös antropologinen teoria kytkee tabun seksuaalisuuteen, kuolemaan ja ravitsemukseen, siis alueisiin, joissa biovallan vaikutusvaltaa yksilöihin on tarkasteltu.

Väitöskirjassa tabun ja biovallan teoreettinen tarkastelu yhdistyy englanninkielisten nykyelokuvien visuaaliseen analyysiin. Visuaalisen analyysin kohteina ovat erityisesti fiktiiviset, kansainväliseen levitykseen suunnatut englanninkieliset elokuvat. Pääasiallinen tutkimusaineisto käsittää viisikymmentä vuosien 1985 ja 2014 välillä tuotettua kokopitkää draamaelokuvaa. Aineisto sisältää tämän korpuksen lisäksi kolme tapaustutkimusta, jotka olen tehnyt elokuvista *Unfriended* (2014), *Vanilla Sky* (2001) ja *The Moth Diaries* (2011) sekä Netflix-sarjan *13 Reasons Why* ensimmäisestä kaudesta (2017), joka poikkeaa kansainvälisesti esitettynä televisiotuotantona muusta tutkimusaineistosta. Tutkimusmetodini ovat erilaisten visuaalisten analyysin metodien lisäksi diskurssianalyysi ja semiologia.

Väitöskirjan tutkimuskysymykset ovat (1), kuinka elokuvarepresentaatiot osallistuvat itsemurhan säätelyyn biovallan alaisuudessa ja (2), kuinka ne heijastelevat ja uusintavat itsemurhan tabuluonteisuutta: sen asemaa tabuna ja *tabuointuna*, yhä tabujen hallitsemana kuolemana. Tutkimuksen hypoteesina on ensinnäkin, että biovalta säätelee myös itsemurhan esittämistä normatiivisina diskursseina. Toinen hypoteesi on, että itsemurhan tabuasema ja sen luonne tabujen hallitsemana kuolemana näkyvät niissä käsityksissä, joita elokuvat toistavat ja kierättävät itsemurhaa tai itsemurhan valitsevia yksilöitä kuvatessaan. Käytännön tasolla tutkin, millaisia kulttuurisia merkityksiä nykyelokuvat rakentavat itsemurhalle, ja miten ne kytkevät nämä merkitykset niihin biovallan ja tabun prosesseihin, jotka osallistuvat sekä sosiaalisten ja fyysisten ruumiiden että symbolisten rakenteiden säätelyyn ja joiden on nähty olevan sekä *normatiivisia* että *luokittelevia*.

Väitöskirja koostuu johdannosta ja neljästä tutkimusartikkelista. Johdannossa esittelen väitöskirjan rakenteen, tutkimusasetelman, tutkimuksen lähtökohdat ja tutkimukselle oleelliset teoriasisällöt. Väitöskirjan artikkeleissa tarkastelen itsemurhaelokuvia yhtäältä niiden yleisten piirteiden kautta ja toisaalta analysoiden yksittäisiä elokuvia tapaustutkimuksina. Ensimmäinen artikkeli keskittyy englanninkielisten itsemurhaelokuvien yleispiirteisiin erityisesti toiseuden perspektiivistä. Nykyelokuvaa taiteen historiaan peilaavassa analyysissäni havaitsen itsemurhan ruumiillistuvan erityisesti naishahmojen välityksellä ja kytkeytyvän tiiviisti seksuaalisuuteen. Pohdin lyhyesti myös itsemurhan historiallista kytkeytymistä hulluuteen. Näen sekä hulluuden kuvausten että seksualisoitujen naishahmojen edustavan elokuvissa toiseutta, jonka itsemurhan taidehistorialliseen kaanoniin perehtynyt Ron Brown on esittänyt toistuvan tarkastellessa itsemurhan esityksiä etnisyyden, luokan, hulluuden, sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden näkökulmista. Artikkelin päätöksessä reflektoin, kuinka itsemurhan projisointi erilaisiin päällekkäin asettuviin "toiseuksiin" osallistuu itsemurhan stigmatisointiin ja tabuointiin. Esitän, että itsemurhan esitysten voidaan nähdä "kotoistavan" eli kesyttävän itsemurhaa tabuluonteisena kuolemana ja

osallistuvan sekä itsemurhan alentamiseen ja stigmatisointiin. Tällöin näen sen osallistuvan myös yleisemmän symbolisen järjestyksen ylläpitämiseen, johon itsemurha tietynlaisena kuolemana asettuu.

Toisessa artikkelissani analysoin tarkemmin itsemurhan kytkeytymistä naiseuteen ja seksuaalisuuteen analysoimalla kahta elokuvaa: kauhuelokuvaa *Unfriended* (2014) ja scifi-elokuvaa *Vanilla Sky* (2001). Itsemurhaa kuvaavien elokuvien voidaan nähdä olevan sekä seksuaalisioivia että didaktisia. Tarkastelenkin itsemurhaan liitettyjä merkityksiä erityisesti Émile Durkheimin kehittämän typologian kautta. Durkheimin erottelu ”egoistisiin” ja ”altruistisiin” itsemurhiin auttaa ymmärtämään sen sukupuolitettujen ja seksuaalisoitujen esitysten sekä omaehtoiseen kuolemaan liittyvien arvolatautuneiden käsitysten välistä suhdetta. Toinen artikkelissa hyödyntämäni käsite on elokuvatutkija Michele Aaronilta suomentamani ”nekromantiikka,” joka selittää itsemurhan kytkeytymistä naiseuteen tietynlaisessa heteronormatiivisessa halutaloudessa, jossa itsemurhaavat naishahmot toimivat Aeronia mukailleen sekä speaktaakkelina että miehisen halun ja epätoivon ilmentyminä. Päätännössä pohdin, miten itsemurhan sukupuolittuminen ja kytkeytyminen seksuaalisuuteen on kytkettävissä tabuun ja biovaltaan. Tässä artikkelissa pohdin näitä funktioita marginaalisuuden näkökulmasta ja suhteessa kuoleman pornoistumiseen.

Kolmannessa artikkelissani tarkastelen itsemurhatabun, biovallan ja sosiologiassa, psykologiassa ja kansanterveystieteessä käsitteellistetyn itsemurhatartunnan välistä suhdetta. Analysoin kiistanalaisen vastaanoton saaneen Netflix-sarjan *13 Reasons Why* ensimmäistä kautta (2017) suhteessa sen vastaanottoon. Pohdin sarjan vastaanotossa noussutta pelkoa itsemurhan tarttuvuudesta myös suhteessa *The Moth Diaries* -elokuvaan (2011), jossa tätä itsemurhaan herkästi liitettävää tartunnan pelkoa lähestytään yliluonnollisen vampyyritarinan keinoin. Artikkelini on julkaistu magiaa ja taikauskkoa käsittelevässä erikoisnumerossa. Pohdin siinä itsemurhatartunnan käsitettä ja asemaa sekä tabun tarttuvasta logiikasta että sen toiseutetusta asemasta käsin. Lähestyn Netflix-sarjan herättämää tartunnanpelkoa suhteessa itsemurhan asemaan selittämättömänä ja pelättynä kuolemana. Esitän, että tämä sekä eurooppalaista vampyyrifolkloreaa että *13 Reasons Why* -sarjan vastaanottoa yhdistävä tartunnanpelko on kytkettävissä tabuun, joka on läntisessä käsitteenmäärittelyssään määritelty taikauskoon perustuvana rakenteena, maagisena ajatteluna. Kommentoin myös Netflix-sarjan tartunnanpelon värjäämää vastaanottoa suhteessa itsemurhan medikalisoitumiseen ja biovaltaan.

Neljäs artikkeli on kirjoitettu yhteistyössä professori Pauline Greenhillin kanssa ja tarjoaa ”reparatiivisen” luennan aiemmissa artikkeleissani kriittisemmin käsittelemästäni *The Moth Diaries* -elokuvasta. Otamme artikkelissamme huomioon elokuvarepresentaatioiden polyseemisen luonteen ja analysoimme *The Moth Diaries* -elokuvassa esiintyvän itsemurhan sukupuolittunutta ja seksuaalisuuteen kytkettyä luonnetta suhteessa ohjaaja Mary Harroniin feministisenä ohjaajana. Keskitymme erityisesti elokuvassa esiintyviin tyttöjävälistä ystävyksiin ja niiden rooliin päähahmon toipumisessa, joka haastaa monien itse-

murhaelokuvien heteronormatiivisia ja naishahmoja passivoivia toipumistariinoita. Artikkelissa pyrimme näin syventämään ymmärrystä väitöskirjani keskeisimmästä tutkimustuloksesta eli tapaa, jolla itsemurha kytkeytyy naiseuteen, sukupuolittuu ja seksualisoituu. Yhtäältä osoitamme, miten hankalaa vallitsevaa kuvastoa on haastaa ja toisaalta valotamme niitä pisteitä, jotka tämän kuvaston sisällä mahdollistavat hieman toisenlaiset versiot ja luennat naiseuteen kytkystä itsetuhosta.

Omaehtoisen kuoleman sukupuolittumisen ja seksualisoitumisen ohella väitöskirjan toinen merkittävä tutkimustulos on itsemurhaan liittyvän tartunnan pelon vaikutus sen esittämiseen ja vastaanottoon. Johdannossa pohdin pelkoa itsemurhan tarttuvuudesta suhteessa omaehtoisen kuoleman medikalisoitumiseen ja biovaltaan. Esitän, että itsemurhan sukupuolittuminen, tartuntaan liittyvät käsitykset ja itsemurhan määrittely ja diagnosointi suhteessa hulluuteen ovat kytkettävissä omaehtoisen kuoleman asemaan biovallan säätelyä kuolemana. Kyseenalaistan näiden tiedontuotannon tapojen valta-asemaa elokuvan fiktiossa. Esitän myös, että tarkastelemani aineisto heijastelee itsemurhan asemaa ja olemusta tabuna paitsi tartunnanpelossa myös tätä kuolemaa toiseuttavissa, marginalisoivissa ja stigmatisoivissa sekä sen tabuutta ”kotoistavissa” ja ”pornoistavissa” taipumuksissa. Johdannossa pohdin näitä taipumuksia etenkin suhteessa tabun, kulttuurisen luokittelujärjestelmän, tätä järjestelmää haastavien anomalioiden ja liian välisiin kytköksiin.

Itsemurhan tarkasteleminen elokuvassa tabun ja biovallan käsitteistä käsin on mielekäs, koska itsemurhaa ympäröivät sosiaaliset hiljaisuudet ja stigma kielivät sitä käsittelevien arvolatautuneiden keskustelujen ja käsitysten vallasta itsemurhan kokemiseen aikana, jolloin itsemurhan tabuus helposti typistyy, kuten muidenkin länsimaisten tabuaiheiden osalta, ilmiötä ympäröivään hiljaisuuteen. Tämä hiljaisuus on keskeinen osa itsemurhan eurosentristä määrittelyä. Tämän oletuksen vastaisesti omaehtoista kuolemaa kuitenkin käsitellään läntisessä mediassa ja viihteessä hyvin näkyvästi ja runsaasti. Englanninkielisillä markkinoilla julkaistaan vuosittain satoja elokuvia, joissa omaehtoinen kuolema muodossa tai toisessa esiintyy, ja nämä elokuvat myös kiertävät laajasti kansainvälisissä elokuvateattereissa ja suoratoistopalveluissa. Samankaltaisten representaatioiden toistuessa elokuvien tavalla käsitellä ja merkityksellistää omaehtoista kuolemaa on suuri vaikutusvalta siihen, miten itsemurha ymmärretään ja miten siihen suhtaudutaan.

Tabun ja biovallan teoreettinen tarkastelu suhteessa itsemurhan representaatioiden erityispiirteisiin auttaa hahmottamaan tätä dynamiikkaa, jossa itsemurha voi olla hyvinkin näkyvässä roolissa mediassa ja silti hiljaisuuden kätkemä silloin, kun katse käännetään valkokankailta itsemurhan sosiaaliseen kokemiseen. Tutkimustulos, että itsemurhaa käsittelevät elokuvat stigmatisoivat omaehtoista kuolemaa, on merkittävä etenkin suhteessa esimerkiksi WHO:n ja Surunauhan kaltaisten itsemurhien estämiseen pyrkivien tahojen huomioon siittä, että häpeän kaltaisten negatiivisten tunteiden tarttuminen omaehtoiseen kuolemaan ja sen stigma vaikeuttavat avun hakemista itsemurhaan liittyviin ajatuksiin.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF FILMS

Main corpus of analysis:

13 Reasons Why. Created by Brian Yorkey. Netflix, 2017-.
The Moth Diaries. Directed by Mary Harron. Edward R. Pressman Film, 2011.
Unfriended. Directed by Leo Gabriadze. Universal Pictures, 2014.
Vanilla Sky. Directed by Cameron Crowe. Cruise/Wagner Productions, 2001.

The corpus of 50 feature films (produced between 1985 and 2014) included for the first stage of analysis.

A Single Man. Directed by Tom Ford. Artina Films, 2009.
About a Boy. Directed by Chris Weitz and Paul Weitz. Universal Pictures, 2002.
According to Greta. Directed by Nancy Bardawil. Whitewater Films, 2009.
Black Swan. Directed by Darren Aronofsky. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2010.
Boogie Nights. Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson. New Line Cinema, 1997.
Cloud Atlas. Directed by Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski. Cloud Atlas Productions, 2012.
Cocktail. Directed by Roger Donaldson. Touchstone Pictures, 1988.
Control. Directed by Anton Corbijn. Momentum Pictures, 2007.
The Craft. Directed by Andrew Fleming. Columbia Pictures, 1996.
Dead Poets Society. Directed by Peter Weir. Touchstone Pictures, 1989.
Elizabethtown. Directed by Cameron Crowe. Cruise/Wagner Productions, 2005.
The Fall. Directed by Tarsem Singh. Googly Films, 2006.
Forrest Gump. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Paramount Pictures, 1994.
Franklyn. Directed by Gerald McMorrow. Film4 Productions, 2008.
Gattaca. Directed by Andrew Niccol. Columbia Pictures, 1997.
Girl, Interrupted. Directed by James Mangold. Columbia Pictures, 1999.
Gran Torino. Directed by Clint Eastwood. Matten Productions, 2008.
Groundhog Day. Directed by Harold Ramis. Columbia Pictures, 1993.
Happiness. Directed by Todd Solondz. Good Machine Releasing, 1998.
Hard Candy. Directed by David Slade. Vulcan Productions, 2006.
Heathers. Directed by Michael Lehmann. New World Pictures, 1989.
Hollywoodland. Directed by Allen Coulter. Focus Features, 2006.
The Hours. Directed by Stephen Daldry, Miramax Films, 2002.
I love you Phillip Morris. Directed by John Requa and Glenn Ficarra. LD Entertainment, 2009.
In Bruges. Directed by Martin McDonagh. Blueprint Pictures, 2008.
Inception. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Legendary Pictures, 2010.
Inside Llewyn Davis. Directed by Joel Cohen and Ethan Cohen. Mike Zoss Productions, 2013.
Little Children. Directed by Todd Field. New Line Cinema, 2006.
Magnolia. Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson. New Line Cinema, 1999.

The Moth Diaries. Directed by Mary Harron. Edward R. Pressman Film, 2011.
The Prestige. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Touchstone Pictures, 2006.
Pretty Persuasion. Directed by Marcos Siega. REN-Mar Studios, 2005.
The Private Lives of Pippa Lee. Directed by Rebecca Miller. Grand Army Entertainment, 2009.
Prozac Nation. Directed by Erik Skjoldbjærg. Miramax Films, 2001.
The Reader. Directed by Stephen Daldry. Mirage Enterprises, 2008.
The Royal Tenenbaums. Directed by Wes Anderson. Touchstone Pictures, 2001.
Secretary. Directed by Steven Shainberg. Lions Gate Films, 2002.
Shame. Directed by Steve McQueen. See-Saw Films 2011.
The Shawshank Redemption. Directed by Frank Darabont. Columbia Pictures, 1994.
Shutter Island. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Paramount Pictures, 2010.
The Sixth Sense. Directed by M. Night Shyamalan. Hollywood Pictures, 1999.
Sylvia. Directed by Christine Jeffs. Focus Features, 2003.
Up in the Air. Directed by Jason Reitman. Dreamwork Pictures, 2009.
Uptown Girls. Directed by Boaz Yakin. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2003.
Vanilla Sky. Directed by Cameron Crowe. Cruise/Wagner Productions, 2001.
Veronica Decides to Die. Directed by Emily Young. Entertainment One Films, 2009.
Virgin Suicides. Directed by Sofia Coppola. American Zoetrope, 1999.
Where the Truth Lies. Directed by Atom Egoyan. Serendipity Point Films, 2005.
White Oleander. Directed by Peter Kosminsky. Warner Bros., 2002.
Wristcutters: A Love Story. Directed by Goran Dukić. Autonomous Films, 2006.

The corpus of 25 Scandinavian films (produced between 1996 and 2015) examined for a conference presentation 05/2016.

21 tapaa pilata avioliitto. Directed by Johanna Vuoksenmaa. Dionysos Films, 2013.
Aavan meren täällä puolen. Directed by Nanna Huolman. Tre Vänner, 2007.
Bridgend. Directed by Jeppe Rønde. Blenkov & Schønnemann Pictures, 2015.
Danser i mørket. ['Dancer in the Dark']. Directed by Lars Von Trier. Fine Line Features, 1998.
Far from the Madding Crowd. Directed by Thomas Vinterberg. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2015.
Festen ['The Celebration']. Directed by Thomas Vinterberg. Nimbus Film, 1998.
Fucking Åmål ['Show Me Love']. Directed by Lukas Moodysson. Sonet Film, 1998.
Hip Hip Hora! Directed by Teresa Fabik. Sandrew Metronome, 2014.
Hymypoika. Directed by Jukka-Pekka Siili. Helsinki-Film, 2003.
Joki. Directed by Jarmo Lampela. Lasihelmi Filmi, 2001.
Kekkonen tulee! Directed by Marja Pyykkö. Solar Films, 2013.
Leijat Helsingin yllä. Directed by Peter Lindholm. Kinoproduction, 2001.

Levottomat ['Restless']. Directed by Aku Louhimies. Solar Films, 2000.
Levottomat 3: Kun mikään ei riitä. Directed by Minna Virtanen. Solar Films, 2004.
Lilja 4-ever ['Lilya 4-ever']. Directed by Lukas Moodysson. Sonet Film, 2002.
Melancholia. Directed by Lars Von Trier. Nordisk Film, 2011.
Miss Farkku-Suomi. Directed by Matti Kinnunen. Periferia Productions oy, 2012.
Populaarimusiikkia Vittulajänkältä. Directed by Reza Bagher. Happy End Filmproductions, 2004.
Postia Pappi Jaakobille. Directed by Klaus Härö. Kinotar oy, 2009.
Prinsessa. Directed by Arto Halonen. Art Films Production, 2010.
Putoavia enkeleitä. Directed by Heikki Kujanpää. Blind Spot Productions, 2008.
Saippuaprinssi. Directed by Janne Kuusi. Helsinki-Filmi, 2006.
Sisko Tahtoisin Jäädä. Directed by Marja Pyykkö. Solar Films, 2010.
Submarino. Directed by Thomas Vinterberg. Nimbus Film, 2010.
Vuosaari ['Naked Harbour']. Directed by Aku Louhimies. First Floor Productions, 2012.

Films considered for comparison or analyzed in later stages of research:

Alien. Directed by Ridley Scott. 20th Century Fox, 1979.
Almost Famous. Directed by Cameron Crowe. Dreamworks Pictures, 2000.
Anna Karenina. Directed by Joe Wright. Universal pictures, 2012.
Annihilation. Directed by Alex Garland. Paramount Pictures, 2018.
Armageddon. Directed by Michael Bay. Touchstone Pictures, 1998.
The Artist. Directed by Michel Hazanavicius. Warner Bros., 2011.
The Beach. Directed by Danny Boyle. 20th Century Fox, 2000.
The Big Short. Directed by Adam McKay. Paramount Pictures, 2015.
Bird Box. Directed by Susanne Bier. Bluegrass Films, 2018.
Birdman. Directed by Alejandro G. Iñárritu. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2014.
The Black Dahlia. Directed by Brian De Palma. Universal Pictures, 2006.
Blade. Directed by Stephen Norrington. New Line Cinema, 1998.
The Breakfast Club. Directed by John Hughes. Universal Pictures, 1985.
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: "The Gift" (Season 5 episode 22). Directed by Joss Whedon. The WB, 22 May, 2001.
Cake. Directed by Daniel Barnz. Warner Bros., 2014.
Calvary. Directed by John Michael McDonagh. Momentum Pictures, 2014.
Carrie. Directed by Brian De Palma. United Artists, 1976.
Carrie. Directed by Kimberly Peirce. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2013.
Cast Away. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. 20th Century Fox, 2000.
Chatroom. Directed by Hideo Nakata. Revolver Entertainment, 2010.
Christine. Directed by Antonio Campos. The Orchard, 2016.
Constantine. Directed by Francis Lawrence. Warner Bros., 2005.
Cookies Fortune. Directed by Robert Altman. October Films, 1999.
A Cure for Wellness. Directed by Gore Verbinski. 20th Century Fox, 2016.
Cyberbully. Directed by Charles Binamé. Muse Entertainment, 2011.

- Cyberbully*. Directed by Ben Chanan. Channel 4, 2015.
- Darjeeling Limited*. Directed by Wes Anderson. Indian Paintbrush, 2007.
- Deep Impact*. Directed by Mimi Leder. Paramount Pictures, 1998.
- Delicatessen*. Directed by Marc Carot and Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Miramax Films, 1991.
- The Descent: Part 2*. Directed by Jon Harris. Warner Bros., 2009.
- The Dreamers*. Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2003.
- Elephant*. Directed by Gus van Sant. Fine Line Features, 2003.
- Event Horizon*. Directed by Paul WS Anderson. Paramount Pictures, 1997.
- Fatal Attraction (Adrian Lyne, 1987, USA)*
- Fight Club*. Directed by David Fincher. 20th Century Fox, 1999.
- Filth*. Directed by John S. Baird. Steel Mill Pictures, 2013.
- Final Destination II*. Directed by David R Ellis. New Line Cinema, 2003.
- Le Feu Follet [‘The Fire Within’]*. Directed by Louis Malle. Gibraltar Productions, 1963.
- The Forest*. Directed by Jason Zada. Gramercy Pictures, 2016.
- Frank*. Directed by Lenny Abrahamson. Magnolia Pictures, 2014.
- Full Metal Jacket*. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Natant, 1987.
- Ginger & Rosa*. Directed by Sally Potter. Artificial Eye, 2012.
- Ginger Snaps*. Directed by John Fawcett. Motion International, 2000.
- The Great Gatsby*. Directed by Baz Luhrmann. Warner Bros., 2013.
- Hannah and her Sisters*. Directed by Woody Allen. Orion Pictures Corporation, 1996.
- The Happening*. Directed by M. Night Shyamalan. 20th Century Fox, 2008.
- Harold & Maude*. Directed by Hal Ashby. Paramount Pictures, 1971.
- House of Mirth*. Directed by Terence Davies. FilmFour, 2000.
- Hunger*. Directed by Steve McQueen. Film4 Productions, 2008.
- Ida*. Directed by Paweł Pawlikowski. Artificial Eye, 2013.
- The Imitation Game*. Directed by Morten Tyldum. The Weinstein Company, 2014.
- Interview with Vampire*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Warner Bros., 1994.
- Jisatsu Sākuru [‘Suicide Club’]*. Directed by Sian Sono. Earthrise, 2001.
- Kate Plays Christine*. Directed by Robert Greene. Grasshopper Film, 2016.
- Last Days*. Directed by Gus Van Sant. Picturehouse Films, 2005.
- Leaving Las Vegas*. Directed by Mike Figgis. United Artists, 1995.
- Lethal Weapon*. Directed by Richard Donner. Warner Bros., 1987.
- Le Locataire [‘The Tenant’]*. Directed by Roman Polanski. Marianne Productions, 1976.
- Looper*. Directed by Rian Johnson. TriStar Pictures, 2012.
- Les Misérables*. Directed by Tom Hooper Universal Pictures, 2012.
- Little Miss Sunshine*. Directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris. Big Beach Films, 2006.
- Le Magasin des suicides [‘Suicide Shop’]*. Directed by Patrice Leconte. ARP Sélection, 2012.
- Maps to the Stars*. Directed by David Cronenberg. Entertainment One, 2014.
- Midsommar*. Directed by Ari Aster. A24, 2019.

- Milk*. Directed by Gus Van Sant. Focus Features, 2009.
- Million Dollar Baby*. Directed by Clint Eastwood. Warner Bros., 2004.
- Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*. Directed by Paul Schrader, 1985.
- A Most Violent Year*. Directed by J. C. Chandor. FilmNation Entertainment, 2014.
- Mulholland Drive*. Directed by David Lynch. Universal Pictures, 2001.
- Mustang*. Directed by Deniz Gamze Ergüven. Ad Vitam, 2015.
- The Neon Demon*. Directed by Nicolas Winding Refn. Wild Bunch, 2016.
- Network*. Directed by Sidney Lumet. United Artists, 1976.
- 'night, Mother*. Directed by Tom Moore. Universal Pictures, 1986.
- The Omen*. Directed by Richard Donner. 20th Century Fox, 1976.
- One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Directed by Milos Forman. United Artists, 1975.
- Only Lovers Left Alive*. Directed by Jim Jarmusch. Soda Pictures, 2013.
- Ordinary People*. Directed by Robert Redford. Paramount Pictures, 1980.
- Penelope*. Directed by Mark Palansky. Momentum Pictures, 2006.
- The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Directed by Stephen Chbosky. Summit Entertainment, 2012.
- The Piano*. Directed by Jane Campion. Miramax Films, 1993.
- Possession*. Directed by Andrzej Żuławski. Gaumont, 1981.
- A Quiet Place*. Directed by John Krasinski. Paramount Pictures, 2018.
- Romeo + Juliet*. Directed by Baz Luhrmann. 20th Century Fox, 1996.
- Rules of Attraction*. Directed by Roger Avary. Lions Gate Films, 2002.
- Scent of a Woman*. Directed by Martin Brest. Universal Pictures, 1992.
- Der Siebente Kontinent* ['The Seventh Continent']. Directed by Michael Haneke. 1989.
- Silence of the Lambs*. Directed by Jonathan Demme. Orion Pictures, 1991.
- Sin City*. Directed by Robert Rodriguez, Frank Miller & Quentin Tarantino. Miramax, 2005.
- Soylent Green*. Directed by Richard Fleischer. Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, 1973.
- Spellbound*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. United Artists, 1945.
- A Star is Born*. Directed by Bradley Cooper. Warner Bros., 2019.
- Stay*. Directed by Marc Forster. 20th Century Fox, 2005.
- Stranger Things: "The Upside Down"* (Season 1, Episode 8). Directed by The Duffer Brothers. Netflix, 15 July 2016.
- Suicide Room*. Directed by Jan Komasa. Studio Filmowe Kadr, 2011.
- Sunset Boulevard*. Directed by Billy Wilder. Paramount Pictures, 1950.
- Suspiria*. Directed by Luca Guadagnino. Amazon Studios, 2018.
- Thelma & Louise*. Directed by Ridley Scott. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1991.
- Titanic*. Directed by James Cameron. Paramount Pictures, 1997.
- Der Todesking* ['The Dead King']. Directed by Jörg Buttgerit. Manfred Jelinski Film & Fernsehproduktion, 1990.
- To The Bone*. Directed by Marti Noxon. Netflix, 2017.
- Trois Couleurs: Bleu*. Directed by Krzysztof Kieslowski. MK2 Diffusion, 1993.
- Vertigo*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures, 1958.
- Vicky Christina Barcelona*. Directed by Woody Allen. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2008.

Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself. Directed by Lone Scherfig. Zentropa Entertainment, 2002.

The Wrestler. Directed by Darren Aronofsky. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008.

APPENDIX B: IMAGE RIGHTS

- I The Finnish unspeakables: sex, religion, and killing. An illustration by Ville Tietäväinen in *Helsingin Sanomat* (11.9.2016) in the order displayed in the newspaper. Courtesy of Ville Tietäväinen.
- II Last taboos found and broken: A collage of headlines found via Google searches, 2016–2017. Collage created by Heidi Kosonen.
- III The gendered difference in two renderings of the same story, *Network* (1974) and *Christine* (2016). NETWORK © 1974 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Courtesy of Warner Bros. CHRISTINE © 1983 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures
- IV Visualizations of madness and vulnerability in *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and *Girl, Interrupted* (1999). THE SIXTH SENSE © 1999 Spyglass Media Group LLC. GIRL, INTERRUPTED © 1999 Global Entertainment Productions GmbH & Co. Movie KG. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures.
- V Elements related to both taboo and biopower are reflected in headlines about the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*. Collage created by Heidi Kosonen. 13 REASONS WHY © 2017 Netflix, Inc.
- VI Violent and bad suicides in the films *Cloud Atlas* (2012) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994). CLOUD ATLAS © 2012 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Courtesy of Warner Bros. THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION © 1994 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Courtesy of Warner Bros.
- VII Marginalized male characters in the films *A Single Man* (2009) and *A Star is Born* (2018). A SINGLE MAN © 2009 Artina Films. A STAR IS BORN © 2018 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Courtesy of Warner Bros.
- VIII Essentializing vulnerability in *According to Greta* (2009) and *The Virgin Suicides* (1999). ACCORDING TO GRETA © 2009 Whitewater films. THE VIRGIN SUICIDES © 1999 American Zoetrope.
- IX Necromanticism in Richard Donner's 1987 buddy cop action film *Lethal Weapon*. LETHAL WEAPON © 1987 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Courtesy of Warner Bros.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

THE DEATH OF THE OTHERS AND THE TABOO: SUICIDE REPRESENTED

by

Heidi Kosonen, 2015

Thanatos vol. 4, no 1, 25-56

[https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/
kosonen_the_death_of_others1.pdf](https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/kosonen_the_death_of_others1.pdf)

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Thanatos

ISSN 2242-6280, vol.4 1/2015

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https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2015/6/kosonen_the_death_of_others1.pdf**The Death of the Others and the Taboo: Suicide Represented****Heidi Kosonen**

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Abstract

The visual representations of suicide have a lengthy history in Western culture, within which self-annihilation is considered a taboo form of death. In the long reach of the established traditions, the images of suicide have done more than simply *illustrate* the moral attitudes of their time. Through the versatility of existing templates and signs, images of suicide have posed as vehicles of ideological change; and, within inter-discursive mythologies, they have participated in *cultural meaning-making processes* around the conceptions of suicide, from the ethics of suicide to its agents, methods, and causes.

This article studies the representations of *otherness* in the suicide depictions of contemporary Anglo-American cinema, in connection to the Western artistic canon from its *suicides obsessionaux* in classical antiquity to the imagery of the prostitute in Victorian England. In his research Ron Brown (2001) has noted that the artistic canon of suicide reveals frequent overlaps between several constructions of otherness, from ethnicity to social class, madness, gender and deviant sexuality. Focusing particularly on the representations of gender and sexualities, the article studies the differentiations *employed* and *enforced* by the representations of egoistic suicide. I connect Anglo-American contemporary cinema to the continuum of meaning-making visual representations initiated in the artistic canon, and reflect on how characterisations of madness and projections of suicide upon states of otherness participate in the stigmatisation and ‘cultural tabooing’ of suicide. Drawing links to a quantitative research by Steven Stack and Barbara Bowman (2012), my qualitative, small-scale analysis of Anglo-American cinema reveals not only the endurance of many suicidal myths and gendered stereotypes in the cinematic representations, but also shows that these myths and stereotypes are utilised in the creation of victim tropes, which continue to posit suicide into femininity and effeminacy, and conflate sexual marginality with suicidality, having suicides appear, ultimately, in moral tales about sexual deviance.

In this regard, the author discusses the relationship between the tabooed death and the cultural representations that present suicide as ‘the other.’ By combining art history and visual cultural research

with social anthropology and transgression theory, I contend that representative regimes of otherness both domesticate *and* stigmatise suicide. Forged in cultural representations of suicide, the link between ‘the other’ and ‘the low’ sanitises represented suicide, while sustaining social hierarchy and enforcing the symbolic order at the core of social order. As suicide defiles the spectacular ‘other,’ the link to otherness marks suicide with the stigma of taboo.

Introduction

The history of suicide, a violent death traditionally seen as a bad death and a taboo, is as long and rich in the Western visual culture as its history at the centre of an ideological debate. Its art historical roots can be traced back as far as to classical antiquity, and they feature in several canonical traditions, some of which have sustained their popularity even after the fall of academic painting in the nineteenth century. In the rupture between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ worlds, a number of historical conventions, archetypes and stereotypes familiar from the canon of art have migrated into the popular media of contemporary visual culture. These cultural templates for depicting the tabooed death, forged in the inter-discursive formations between visual artistic and other discourses, still persist in the cultural gallery of ‘modern’ and ‘post-modern’ representations of suicide – particularly in the thousands of cinematic portrayals of self-annihilation.¹ In this respect, the canonised conventions continue to present safe manners for portraying suicide, securing the repetition of age-old myths and stereotypes pertaining to it – often even when they are challenged and played with.

In this article I will tie the representations of suicide circulated in the contemporary Anglo-American cinema into the continuum initiated in the canon of Western art.² Judging by the richness and popularity of the representations *and* representative traditions on suicide, visual culture has not mirrored its status as a deep-rooted cultural taboo – at least not in the sense the taboo has been understood in the Western world, as an unspeakable, unrepresentable topic to be omitted from cultural discourses. Rather it seems that the taboo status of suicide has been moulded in the discourses and representative regimes that have historically presented it as stigmatised and *verboten*. In this regard, I will reflect on the creation of the stigma of taboo through the representations of *otherness*, focusing here on those of gender, sexuality and madness, in the contemporary imagery of suicide. I will start by presenting briefly the forms of meaning-making in the Western artistic canon and will then approach the recurring theme of otherness in a qualitative sample of Anglo-American contemporary cinema. Whereas the visual observations rise from positions in art history and visual cultural research, the theory is also enlightened by social anthropology, transgression theory, and my ongoing doctoral research in the concept and mechanisms of taboo.

¹ According to the Internet Movie Database alone, 5848 feature films produced all over the globe have been tagged with the keyword ‘suicide’ and 1400 feature films with the keyword ‘suicide attempt.’ (IMDB, online, 7.5.2015.) A closer look at the numbers would appear to signify a rise in the cinematic representations of suicide, at least partly because of the overall growth and globalisation of the film industry.

² The concept of ‘representation’ may require extra clarification. Although representation might, particularly in an article dealing with visual images, associate to the *visual embodiments* in images and media products relying heavily on image, such as moving pictures, it is here wielded as an umbrella concept for *any representative entity* signifying suicide, be it visual, verbal, audio-visual, or other. When convenient, it is substituted by *depiction*, here understood as any kind of descriptive cultural entity, or *image*, which more explicitly refers to the visual state of matter of the representation.

Suicide, the art historical canon and power

The taboo death of suicide has held a place in the Western visual cultural imagination ever since antiquity.³ The visual representations have tended to occupy both the official and domestic spaces, with the conceptions of suicide thus negotiated in the interactions between public and private, between formal and informal, between high and low visual discourses. In the Greco-Roman antiquity, the suicides familiar from the oral tradition were captured in domestic wall paintings, seals and kitchenware decorations, and paired with the depictions of the suicides of enemy warriors in the sculptural motifs of victory monuments. In the medieval era, the Judas motif, regularly represented in ecclesiastical art, was accompanied in manuscripts by less popular Old Testament suicides. (Brown 2001; Camille 1989; Cutter 1983; van Hooff 1990.) While the Renaissance made suicide ‘high art proper’ through countless reinterpretations of suicides by ancient heroines and heroes, it was the invention of the printing press that facilitated the further spread of suicidal art which would eventually lead to its splitting into the discourses of *art* and *non-art* that still prevail today: of high culture separated from mass media and news media, of art separated from illustration and documentary, and of art separated from reality and lowbrow fantasy. Not just the number of representations as such, but their prevalence, tone, and subject matter within the aforementioned official arts can be seen as a kind of ‘mirror of tolerance’ in the pre-modern period: for instance, after the proliferation of the ‘high art of suicide’ from the Renaissance to Romanticism, the cooled moral climate of the nineteenth century saw more depictions of suicide in didactic lowbrow narratives and tabloid news illustrations than in the official sphere of academic art.

The visual depictions of suicide have always reflected the moral attitudes and philosophies of their time, yet from a position of power over the cultural attitudes and imagination. The representations have not only reflected the prevailing attitudes, or a mixture of them, as simple illustrations, but in the versatility of the existing templates and signs, they have also posed as vehicles of change. Examining the conventions of the visual representations of suicide reveals both continuous traits and context-specific variations in the visual representations themselves, in the representative regimes they compose, and in their mechanisms of meaning-making. Historically, commentators have attended closely to the ‘affectiveness,’ or emotional charge, of the visual narratives, seeing it as the primary form of meaning-making involved (Cutter 1983; Kryszynska 2009, 15–47; Retterstøl 1993, 23–24). In this regard, *the tenor* of the regimes of imaged suicide has tended to alternate from glorifying to stigmatising. Especially the pre-modern history of suicidal art sits heavy with such emotionally – and therefore also morally – coded images in which suicide is often presented as lamentable tragedy, as a road to virtue or glory, or as a befitting end to a morally compromised character. Antiquity, the Renaissance and the age of Romanticism have been coded as cradles of heroic and tragic suicide, and the Middle Ages and the Age of Reason, by contrast, have been branded as cradles of stigmatising and didactic representations of self-slaughter. Through the archetype of Judas Iscariot, whose self-slaughter is juxtaposed with the martyrdom of Christ, suicide is marked a damnable sin and a sign of moral degradation in the dominant visual regime of the Middle Ages. The moral

³ There is a considerable scarcity of qualitative large-scale research on ‘the art of suicide.’ While case studies on some of the most popular traditions, such as on Seneca or Lucretia, exist in abundance, Ron Brown’s *The Art of Suicide* (2001) has so far been the only work to observe the recurring patterns in suicide representations all the way from classical antiquity to artistic modernism. Hans Rost’s *Bibliographie des Selbstmords* (1927) and Erika Tietze-Conrat’s manuscript *The Patterns of Suicide in Literature and Art* (1957–58) are either rudimentary or unfinished; most of the completed studies approach the subject from the view point of psychiatry and psychology, with the focus on suicide prevention. For such, see Fred Cutters *Art and the Wish to Die* (1983), Thomas Bronisch’s and Werner Felber’s *Der Selbstmord in der Kunst* (2014), and Stephen Stacks and David Lesters article collection *Suicide and the Creative Arts* (2009). No full-bodied studies other than my own master’s thesis (Kosonen 2011) would seem to reach past artistic modernism.

tales of the Age of Reason, in turn, are often composed to evoke empathy for characters from lower classes and social margins, and to ridicule those belonging to a higher class.

A constant form of meaning-making, subtler than that of ‘affective didacticism,’ is the accumulation of representations and their regimes into myths that naturalise the stereotypes and the stories they present.⁴ The importance of *the regime*, the established system of representation, needs to be stressed here: while representation itself can be seen as a meaning-making agent of power, a single instance of representation is inherently ambivalent. In representative regimes the ambiguous representations are organised and stabilised through repetition, whereupon their meaningfulness arises from their predominance over other representations and regimes. While ‘affective regimes’ are also dominant regimes, with their influence resting on their power over emotions, their didacticism, in transforming suicide into retribution for turpitude and sin, does not represent the sole form of meaning-making wielded by the images of suicide. Quite the contrary, the entire canon can be seen as an agent of power forming the cultural imagination on suicide. Due to the long-lasting lifespan of many of the visual regimes and their conventional narratives, the suicidal traditions can be seen to have provided infectious patterns for the processes of cultural meaning-making. An examination of the artistic canon reveals that visual traditions, their motifs and aesthetic conventions have been slow to change, therefore often having a longer-lasting cultural influence than moral regimes. Considering the motifs, for instance, the oral traditions that first gave shape to the ancient illustrations as ‘history’ would later inspire Renaissance art in the form of exotic legends. These images would, in turn, provide templates for the future generations of image-makers (Brown 2001; Cutter 1983; Donaldson 1982; Edwards 2005; Ker 2009).

Moreover, crossovers between visual arts and other forms of discourse have turned many literary legends and true stories of suicides into cultural *mythologies* through their inter-discursive treatment, thereby lending validation to existing narratives and creating new ones. In the Renaissance traditions, virtuous heroines – such as Lucretia and Cleopatra – would grow into the epitomes of feminine weakness vital to the medicalisation of suicide, while the romantic tradition surrounding Sappho would help establish the myth of the suicidal leap of the lovelorn poet from the Leucadian cliffs, an act deemed unhistorical by later scholars (Brown 2001; Donaldson 1982; Rofes 1983, 127–129). Even when illustrating topical suicides, visual conventions have often participated in the circulation of ancient stereotypes and myths pertinent to suicide and its victims. In Romanticist art, the visual reinterpretations of the literary suicides of Romeo and Juliet – paraphrasing the Ovidian tale of Pyramus and Thisbe – alongside the deaths of the contemporary poet Chatterton, and his Greek predecessor Sappho, gave a shape to the age-old myths regarding the double suicides of lovers and artists crowned in death. Such recurrence of representations in different forms and regimes, and in other discourses, from other fields and times, tends to hide the constructed nature of representations, transforming them into mythologies. As inter-discursive practices established through repetition, the dominant regimes transform the constructions of suicide – its agents, methods and causes – into ‘eternal truths’: into constants rising from the order of the immutable nature. The discourses of visual art and culture can be seen to have participated in the creation of such inter-discursive myths regarding suicide, particularly in connection with the discourses of non-visual arts and cultures, science and journalism, medicine and crime.

⁴ Myth is here understood as a Barthesian ‘type of speech’ which naturalises the ideological and constructed. My definitions of mythologies, representations and discourses here owe to: Barthes 2009; Butler 1990; Donaldson 1982; Dyer 1993; Foucault 1990; Hall 2013a; Nead 1988.

Suicide in contemporary visual culture

Following the rupture between the ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ worlds, pre-modern canonical conventions regarding suicide have migrated into the present-day visual cultural circulation of art, media culture, cinema and television. The transition to modernism and further into post-modernism has not only revealed an increase in the *number* of visual representations of suicide. Also the diversity of perspectives, not to be taken for granted in the historical coverage of the taboo form of death, appears to have escalated even further in the culturally fragmented, multi-mediated post-modernism (Kosonen 2011; Brown 2001, 194–214; Kryszyska 2009).⁵ The historical templates for imaging suicide – the symbols, characters and narratives – are now accompanied by new ones in the expressive, attention-hungry post-modern visual sphere. However, the stereotypes and myths pertaining to suicidal characters persist, from lovelorn self-murderesses to melancholic artists and even to the recycling of an occasional canonical character such as Ophelia or Chatterton.

Although the sanitised pre-modern canon has given way to the attention-capturing violence of contemporary representation, the affectively engaging moral narratives that would historically deem the self-killer a hero or sinner have waned from the *visual arts* with the transition into modernism, and shifted into more popular media.⁶ Yet, within both spheres, the images of suicide appear often to execute an *instrumental* role. The shock evoked by an imaged suicide often serves a social cause or – following the shift to post-modernism in particular – appears to create an attention-capturing spectacle for the sake of spectacle itself. Such instrumentally employed images of suicide now form the majority; fewer are the explicit approaches to suicide as a social phenomenon or a source of personal trauma.⁷ A shift towards the sensational and consumable ‘pornography of death’ can in this sense be detected in the explosion of increasingly violent suicidal representations. (Kosonen 2011).⁸ Since the imagery of suicide is relayed to the masses as a pleasurable fiction, it is vital to ask, *what kind of representations* the contemporary pornography of suicide consists of, and what kind of naturalising *suicide myths* these representations – acting necessarily as agents of power – maintain.

⁵ The controversial concept of ‘post-modernism’ is here utilised as a general delineation for the visual material that cannot be seen to position into ‘modernism’ While the delineation is primarily temporal, it necessarily also entails a socio-artistic characterisation of the content and context of the material at hand. Therefore, in discussing post-modernism, I am referring to the globally and instantaneously mediated visual culture with hybrid and eclectic content, which, considering the visual arts, has moved beyond the clear ‘isms’ that mark modernism as an artistic era. In talking about post-modernism, I am also talking about the historical time-frame the visual culture sets itself into and which sees not only its content but also its societal context and audience as structurally and ideologically fragmented.

⁶ Since the initiation of modernism, the visual arts have leered from this kind of didacticism into new directions with novel emphases on artistic expression and social criticism (Kosonen 2011).

⁷ The representations of suicide are in this particular context considered as explicit *images of suicide*, whose predominant ‘instrumentality’ can be explained in part by the visual artistic reliance on abstraction and closed symbolism, which, particularly after the initiation of modernism, defy collective signification within artistic representations of suicide ideation or suicide loss. (Kosonen 2011.)

⁸ The ‘pornography of death’ is a concept coined by the British sociologist Geoffrey Gorer. In his essay, *The Pornography of Death* (1955), Gorer argues that violent death has hidden natural death from sight in the industrialising West, and that the increased prominence of violent deaths accumulated into a titillating fantasy of fiction relayed in the mass-media has created a form of death-denial, in which the spectacular fiction of violence “smothers” natural death, grief and mourning “into silence and prudery”. (Gorer 1965, 170, 169–175; Ariès 1974.)

Sample study: Contemporary Film

Because there exists an embarrassment of riches in terms of the contemporary visual representations of suicide, their representative body is in this study approached through a small sample of contemporary mainstream Anglo-American cinema. As global commodities, Anglo-American films have for decades had an impact beyond their immediate cultural context. Moreover, as an immediate and somewhat more democratic and approachable art form than contemporary fine art, the popular cultural medium of film can be seen to function as an ideological tool.⁹ Film also appears to have adopted many of the meaning-making functions of suicidal images from the preceding traditions.

Whereas a remarkable portion of earlier research on suicide portrayals in film consist of a medically-oriented study on the contagion effects of suicidal depiction, Steven Stack and Barbara Bowman's statistical analysis in *Suicide Movies* (2012) aspires to build a more comprehensive picture. Stack and Bowman study the representations of suicide in American cinema from its early days to the present, examining the correspondence between the cinematic representations and the know-how of contemporaneous medical suicidology.¹⁰ Although also *Suicide Movies* is from the viewpoint of cultural research somewhat problematic in basing its analysis on a wide sample and on such a study of representation that disregards the principles of fiction at play, I have warily utilised the results of Stack and Bowman's sizeable quantitative research to supplement my small-scale qualitative analysis.

This article stands on my analysis of fifty Anglo-American drama films produced between 1985 and 2014, whose suicide representations I have analysed as an amalgamation of their narrative and audio-visual elements. My analysis is based on a fairly small sample from a pool of potentially suitable films, estimated to revolve around one thousand in number.¹¹ Conversely, the analysis by Stack and Bowman – although it ignores a number of aspects vital to qualitative research, such as style, genre and cinematography – covers the entire history of American cinema. In this manner, Stack and Bowman have been able to discover significant statistical anomalies and trace the changes from the first half of the twentieth century to the second. The two analyses thereby supplement each other, and, despite their different materials, methods, and defects, have unearthed similar results.¹² The comparison between my material, the statistical data of

⁹ See for instance: Fiske 1995; Rafter 2006.

¹⁰ While writing this article, I have found out about a chapter devoted to the cinematic renditions of suicide in a recent, qualitative, monograph by Michele Aaron (2014), but have not yet gotten my hands on the book.

¹¹ As I have targeted contemporary mainstream cinema, I have settled into using the Internet Movie Database, the largest of online film databases. According to IMDB, 1681 feature films classifiable as 'drama' released since 1985 are tagged with the keyword 'suicide' and 506 with the keyword 'suicide attempt.' (IMDB, online, 7.5.2015.) There is substantial overlap between the films in the two categories, and the tagged films also contain a number of suicide missions and other false positives, which makes the number of films tagged larger than the amount of films actually containing a representation of a suicide. Also, since IMDB does not allow for a refined search based on the country of origin, the results contain films from all over the world. According to my estimation, from forty to sixty per cent of the films found through the IMDB keyword search are Anglo-American productions. Assuming that around fifty per cent of the films tagged with 'suicide attempt' overlap with those tagged with 'suicide' and with the omission of foreign productions, there should be from around 800 to 1200 Anglo-American films altogether – without the omission of false positives. My data of fifty Anglo-American films compares to the 780 American films Stack & Bowman have analysed from the amount of 1158 films that met their criteria for inclusion from the films produced within the time frame of 1900–2010. (Stack & Bowman 2012, 14–16.)

¹² In addition to volume (50 to 780) and time frame (1985–2014 to 1900–2010), our materials differ also in terms of genre. While Stack & Bowman have omitted science fiction on the basis of reality principle (mortality), I have omitted war films on the same grounds (normalcy). This reflects the differences in our research interests and definitions of suicide. Since I am interested in representations as the reflectors and *refractors* of attitudes, my interests in this article are on such representations of suicide that display it as an actively sought solution under the 'normal conditions' of a Durkheimian egoistic society with a low level of integration. (Durkheim 1966.)

Stack and Bowman, and the traditional canon of visual art has in this sense proved enlightening. In the following chapters, I will discuss the results through illustrative summaries of my qualitative analyses.

The constructed otherness of suicide

From the beginnings of their history, suicidal images acted not simply as a sign of suicide itself but also, and essentially, as a sign of otherness. -- On the other [hand] they offer a vivid template for differentiation. (Brown 2001, 21.)

In addition to the affective moral stories told by the cinematic representations of suicide, films appear diffused with many naturalised myths about suicide. One such myth concerns the inherent *otherness* of the self-slaughterers. As revealed by my sample of fifty feature films, the cinematic representations, instead of having fully appropriated the ‘democratic’ explanatory models of medical suicidology, tend to project the condemned aspects of suicide into something we might call ‘the suicidal others.’ That is, the egoistic suicide, dissociated from altruism and martyrdom, is often constructed as an act distinctive of such onscreen characters that are not representative of the cultural hegemony. Moreover, these characters frequently manifest otherness in relation to those who, as desired objects of viewer identification, better represent the construction of ‘us.’ In case of Anglo-American film, the representations of self-annihilation posit otherness in relation to the homogeneous group of cultural creators who are frequently heterosexual males and white Americans, and in relation to the social norm, the deviance from which is often signified through a portrayal of madness and delinquency.

Surveying the representational history of suicide, I contend that the tendency to depict egoistic suicide as ‘the death of the mad other’ has been appropriated from the history of Western visual culture. In terms of the art historical canon, this line of inquiry was initiated by Ron Brown, who in his *The Art of Suicide* (2001) observes the artistic representations of suicide from antiquity to modernism, noting that the representations of *the other* – including constructions of national identity, social class, gender and sexuality – have functioned as vehicles of differentiation.¹³ My study of the representations of suicide in contemporary cinema, in relation to the representations in the artistic canon, reveals a frequent overlap in several constructions of otherness. This kind of projection of suicide onto ‘clustered othernesses’ – in which madness provides a motive and explanation for suicide, and the invocation of others from outside the borders of ‘social inside’ distances and secures the representation – can be seen to have migrated from the pre-modern canon to the modern and post-modern visual cultural depictions of suicide. In contemporary film, this is evident particularly in the characterisations regarding femininity, madness and the deviances of gender and sexuality. These representations often bow to historical convention, from stereotypic characters to tropic narratives, thereby repeating and enforcing age-old myths about suicide. In their projections of otherness, the cinematic representations also function as a

¹³ Of the aforementioned, the connections between suicide, femininity, and sexuality have been subject to particularly widely theorisation, in terms of the Victorian discourses on deviant feminine sexuality in particular. Margaret Higonnet’s *Speaking Silences* (1986), Lynda Nead’s *Myths of Sexuality* (1988), Barbara Gates’s *Victorian Suicide* (1988) and Elisabeth Bronfen’s *Over Her Death Body* (1992) focus on canonical cultural representations, while Silvia Canetto’s *She Died for Love and He for Glory* (1993) and Katrina Jaworski’s *The Gender of Suicide* (2014) study the myth in contemporary discourse. While studies on the conflation of queer sexualities and suicide in visual representation are fewer in number, Eric Rofes’s *I Thought People Like That Killed Themselves* (1983) and Rob Cover’s *Queer Youth Suicide, Culture and Identity* (2012) touch upon visual cultural in their studies of the tendency of queer lives to end in suicide in cultural representation.

mechanism of differentiation, as I will now illustrate by a brief discussion of the divided visual regimes of classical antiquity.

Differentiation through otherness: a case study of antiquity

The first chapter of this article proposed that visual culture has participated in the dissemination of ideologies by formulating and enunciating ideas about suicide through affective regimes and inter-discursive myths. Yet not only *ideas* but also *definitions* of suicide have been moulded in Western visual cultural production. Representations and representative regimes of self-killing have, since their initiation in antiquity, participated in the differentiation between the varieties of voluntary death, drawing distinctions between the accepted and condemned forms of suicide. It is in this differentiation between the ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms of voluntary death that ‘suicide proper,’ suicide as egoistic self-murder, has tended to be defined, often delineated as a moral ill through the *conceptual expulsion* of altruism and martyrdom.

Brown’s analysis suggests – and I concur – that constructions of otherness have often participated in this process of differentiation (Brown 2001). The process of aesthetico-philosophical ‘polarisation,’ by which voluntary death is constructed into the categories of ‘suicide’ and ‘martyrdom,’ which are then juxtaposed as moral binaries, proliferated in particular in the medieval iconography of Judas Iscariot. Within it, Judas’s effeminate and stigmatised suicide by hanging was paired with the martyrdom of Christ – the passive suicide on the cross – often on the same pictorial plane (Brown 2001, 49–55; Cutter 1983, 131–163; Minois 1999, 25–27; Schnitzler 2000; van Hooff 1990, 72, 93, 196–197). In this manner the representative regimes of suicide have functioned as instruments for differentiation and ostracism, and, as these stigmatising images from the Middle Ages demonstrate, as rudimentary vehicles of suicide prevention (Brown 2001; Camille 1989). Yet, despite the medieval canon being the *clearest* example, the divergent visual field of antiquity reflects the mechanisms of differentiation through its omissions, aesthetic solutions and connections to the prevailing discourses better than the monolithic imagery of the totalitarian Middle Ages.

Although they explicitly speak of natural and cultural destruction, the remains of the suicidal images from Greco-Roman antiquity reflect the bifurcation of moral views on suicide in the differentiated regimes of public and domestic images.¹⁴ As Brown writes,

[I]n both Greek and Roman culture, public imagery [of suicide] tends to fall into the category of what Durkheim and Halbwachs termed suicides obsessionaux: an enemy about to kill himself rather than suffer capture (Brown 2001, 33; Halbwachs 1978).

Durkheim’s typology categorises these *suicides obsessionaux*, the suicides of the besieged, as anomic suicides in an altruistic honour society (Durkheim 1966, 288–289). Yet when their depictions as described appear on victory monuments, their characters are clearly marked as ethnically other: Trajan’s column features the Thracian king Decebalus; the victory

¹⁴ The surviving pictorial depictions of suicide are somewhat scarce and clearly represent a mere fragment of the original representations. Findings have been made both in public and domestic domains, which display differences in convention. (Brown 2001, 21–48; Cutter 1983, 69–71; Rost 1927, 350–360.)

monument of Attalos features the ethnic stereotype of ‘The Gaul.’¹⁵ As these monuments function as building blocks in the articulation of national identity, they exalt the artificial ‘us’ with their depictions of the enemy thrusting themselves against their own swords.¹⁶ Such depictions appear, therefore, to simultaneously participate in the differentiation of the accepted and condemned forms of *voluntaria mors*. More specifically, the regime of the *suicides obsidionaux*, as Brown discovers, appears to be a tool by which self-slaughter, motivated by a rash *desparata salus* and contrasted with the philosopher’s rational suicide, is first made abominable in the violence of the depiction, and then foreign by its projection onto the enemy warrior, the other, as one of his qualities: a quality of otherness.¹⁷

To weigh the *suicides obsidionaux* of public art on an appropriate scale, one must consider the link of these imaged suicides to contemporary philosophy. In terms of the Greek and Roman worlds, one can best describe the moral atmosphere regarding voluntary death by the term ‘plurality,’ which reflects both the lack of a fixed concept and the differences of opinion between philosophical schools (Brown 2001, 21–48; Griffin 1986a; 1986b; van Hooff 1990).¹⁸ Yet, one can divide this multitude of glorifying, lenient and stringent views roughly into views promoting *acceptance* or *opposition*, depending on the moral values of the era. In the visual oeuvre in particular the key questions appear to ask the observers to consider individual freedom versus social proprietorship, and contemplation versus whim. Accounting for both linguistic nuance and philosophical sect, one might consider a suicide as having gained approval when committed by a free citizen as a rationally justified, thoroughly reasoned act, therein reflecting the intellectual aspirations of antiquity and complying with the Stoic ideal of *eulogos exagoge*, the ‘sensible removal of self.’ Conversely, suicide faces disapproval when, as an agitated, distraught, and emotionally influenced deed, it breaches cosmic harmony, neglects proprietorship either in the social or divine sphere, and fails to abide to the ancient virtues of rationality. (Alvarez 1970, 51–58; Brown 2001, 21–48; Daube 1972, 392–393, 400; Griffin 1986a; Minois 1999, 42–56; van Hooff 1990.)

Such values are also reflected in the visual sphere, which appears to have been gendered in both its male-orientation and its portrayal of methods considered masculine and graceful.¹⁹ While the gender disproportion makes sense when

¹⁵ The ancient sculptures have of course been sites of dispute. For instance the *Ludovisi Gaul*, nowadays reconstructed as a part of the victory monument of Attalos, erected in honour of the victory of the Pergamonians over the Galatians, has been interpreted to display what-is-not-Greek based on the divergent physique and appearance of the characters. The differing appearance – hair, moustache and collar – of the figures drove the scholars to recognise them as portrayals of the Gauls around the eighteenth century. (Arensberg 2013, online, 16.12.2014; Bazin 1968, 27; Brown 2001, 35–37.)

¹⁶ These ‘victory monument suicides’ consist of the following works: *Ludovisi Gaul*, or, *Gaul Slaying Himself And His Wife*, or, *The Galatian Suicide*, c. 230–220 BCE, attributed to Epigonos, is one of the three statues (*The Dying Gaul*, the third one missing) of the Attalos Victory Monument in Pergamon. Originally of Hellenistic origins, it was later reproduced (and discovered) in Roman marble in the 2nd century CE. Germain Bazin argues that in the late antiquity the proliferation of the reproductions of the suffering and self-slaughtering Gauls was initiated by the monument. *The Death of Decebalus*, attributed to Apollodorus of Damascus, is a Roman relief from Trajan’s Column, c. 113 CE. In addition to the relief, the motif of Decebalus has also been found in a 3rd century CE earthenware cup from the Southern Gaul with the signature of a Lucius Cosius, which attests to the spread of the motif. The monuments were erected to honour the national victory over a foreign nation – of Pergamon over Galatia, Rome over Thrace – and would attach a certain amount of ‘shame’ to the besieged suicides of the enemy warriors, habitually exalted. (Arensberg 2013, online, 16.12.2014; Bazin 1968, 27, 32–33, 178–179; Brown 2001, 33–38; Haskell & Penny 1981, 224–225, 282–284; van Hooff 1990, 7, 87, 173–174.)

¹⁷ *Desperata salus*, despairing of deliverance. (van Hooff 1990, 7, 85.)

¹⁸ Contrary to the common belief, the all-embracing concept of ‘suicide’ is not of Latin origin, but a *Latinism* from a seventeenth century English author, presumably Walter Charleton or Sir Thomas Browne. Like most terminologies, also the Latin and Greek ones are versatile and nuanced. According to David Daube, they reflect a rudimentary division of *different kinds* of voluntary death and reflect the prevalent ideological atmosphere in alternating between condemnation and ‘a measure of tolerance.’ (Daube 1972, 421–422; Alvarez 1970, 50; Minois 1999, 181–183.)

¹⁹ The male-oriented ancient visual regime of suicide is in stark contrast with the prominence of tragic female suicides in the oral tradition. (Brown 2001, 42–47; Donaldson 1982, 14; Grisé 1980, 16–46; van Hooff 1990, 21, 287.) As of weapons: deaths by sword or poison are represented more often than deaths by ungraceful methods such as hanging – which was not only stigmatised, but also considered as feminine (Brown 2001, 23–25, 43–44; Cantarella 1986; van Hooff 1990, 164–165). The method depicted might have

approached as a manifestation of the question of freedom and social proprietorship – with women being devoid of similar political freedom over their own lives as free men – the methods depicted also tend to comply with the social values that stress and valorise masculine agency (Brown 2001, 21–48; Minois 1999, 48–51; van Hooff 1990, 130–132, 181–197).²⁰ Moreover, the images in question are sanitised. The majority of suicides are imaged in the stage of *suicide ideation*, stressing the cogitated, planned *eulogos exagoge* of those with freedom, and a few images of the apotheosis of the dead exalt the suicidal hero. Viewed in relation to the zeitgeist of the ancient art world, it is of little wonder that the pictorial field – prone to idealisation and in terms of public art, dependent on patrons of both the official and private domains – for the most part omits ‘the unspeakable’ (Brown 2001, 32–40; Bazin 1968, 19–35; Elshtain 1981, 19–54; Minois 1999, 48–49).

The public predominance of *suicides obsidionaux* gains importance in relation to this predominantly permissive pictorial field by diverging from its celebration of virtue. This divergence is marked, in particular, by differences in the temporal stage in which suicide is depicted, and in the state of the depicted body. One can view both, the temporal stage and the bodily state, as indicative of the integrity of the self-killer. (Brown 2001, 21–48.)²¹ Therefore, the representations of the disturbed, impaled body, absent from the majority of suicidal images, define the morality of such deaths in relation to the aestheticised deaths of intact bodies. Here, reflective of the ideological bifurcation, the visual representations of suicide in classical antiquity can be divided into two regimes, which reflect the categories of suicide as a *mode of dying* and a *mode of killing*, which the linguist David Daube has analysed as universally prevalent in the terminological constructions of voluntary death (Daube 1972).²² As the images of calm cogitation diverge from the violence of action, and the depictions of an unharmed body marginalise the stigmatised bloodiness of self-impalement and bodily violation, the visual sphere participates in the differentiation of suicide into ‘death’ and ‘murder.’

To reiterate, the depictions that oppose the criteria of simple heroism as violent depictions of ‘murder’ are portrayals of the ethnic other, the enemy warrior embodying the other for the intended Greek or Roman spectator (Brown 2001, 21–48). Notable in this regard is the prolific tradition begun with the suicide of Sophocles’ tragic hero Ajax, whose disgraceful suicide has made the visual tradition prone to drastic reinterpretations, and which, in its regime of

been indicative of the decency of the motive: “If the method was bad, it is suggested, then so was the motive. The sword connoted an honourable way of dying, and an honourable return to earth, but the rope left the body hanging between heaven and earth and was therefore an unseemly death” (Brown 2001, 44).

²⁰ Regarding the legendary origins of suicidal characters, which dramatise the reality and mythologise the connection between motive, method and gender, it is notable that the apparent majority of female heroines depicted are admired for their *masculine spirit* as is revealed by their weapons of choice. Brown writes of a few female representations, nowadays lost: “Van Hooff cites Philostratos’s appreciative references in *Eikones* to paintings of self-killing near Naples, images which are now lost or which may never have existed in the first place. -- Philostratos, for instance, inscribes Euadne’s death on the funeral pyre with a heroic and gendered meaning. Preferring as she did the pyre to the rope, Euadne earned the writer’s commendation, since she did not hang herself as ‘other women’ did in response to loss.” (Brown 2001, 25; van Hooff 1990, 66.)

²¹ The deviant images presenting suicide in the middle of action, besides reflecting the havoc of war relevant to their subject matter, point to the rashness of suicide as acted out in desperation. So do their portrayals of the abused and broken, occasionally even disproportioned and asymmetrical bodies, whose mutilated state might function as a sign of the mental instability of the self-slaughterer (Brown 2001, 26–28).

²² Daube argues that the semantic gradation is in Greek and Latin – as in most other languages – created by the differentiation of suicide into a *mode of dying* and a *mode of killing*. Verbalised as an active ‘murder’ instead of the passive ‘dying’ the criminal nature and the violence of suicide are emphasised, and the referenced form of *mors voluntaria* accumulates negative connotations. As Daube notes, the prevalence of the expressions of self-murder over more neutral expressions signals, for its part, the near-universal tendency to view suicide as a moral ill. Although the Greek and Latin verbalisms express exceptional lenience towards voluntary death, corresponding with the image of antiquity as a generally *suicide-positive* era, the differentiation between the respectable ‘mode of *dying*’ and the dramatic ‘murder of the self’ can be detected in the multiple Greek and Latin verbal expressions just like in the majority of other world languages. (Daube 1972.)

representations of Ajax succumbing to madness, is similar to the representations of the *suicides obsidionaux*.²³ The self-killing, committed in anomic desperation either to avoid capture under siege, like the warrior king Decebalus, or as a ‘melancholic’ honour murder after a grave mistake done in a bout of madness, such as the self-slaughter of Ajax, is portrayed as the negative equivalent to the suicide as a *mode of dying*. In this fashion, the philosophically perceived *negative qualities* of suicide are projected via representations of self-slaughter onto ‘the ethnic other’ and ‘mad other.’ Together, such images epitomising otherness participate in the bifurcation between modes of *voluntaria mors*, and are used as vehicles in the process of twofold differentiation. This tendency of images of otherness to participate in the constitution of not only moral judgements but also of what is considered ‘suicide’ in the first place permeates the canon of art. The element subject to change in this recurring visual pattern would appear to be whether the visual cultural body stresses ‘death’ or ‘murder’ as the primary form of suicide.

The represented otherness of suicide drama

In a manner similar to the ethnic others and the tragic character of Ajax – which, in Greco-Roman representations of voluntary death, embody the negative constructions of self-killing – the contemporary others are, in Anglo-American mainstream film, used to differentiate between suicides accepted as altruistic – in essence constructed as non-suicides – and ‘suicides proper,’ that are marked by their socially problematic nature. The following chapters will discuss the forms of otherness that, according to my sample, permeate the cinematic representations of the more negatively perceived ‘egoistic’ suicide.²⁴ I will begin by examining the gender disproportion, in addition to my own research also pinpointed by Stack and Bowman.

Gender

To begin with, itemised according to a division between ‘egoistic’ and ‘altruistic’ suicides, the quantitative film data by Stack and Bowman reveals gender stereotypes, that are reflected in the moral evaluation of the ‘entitlement’ of the suicide.²⁵ According to Stack and Bowman, the two categories of altruistic and egoistic, here crudely drawn according to the famous Durkheimian types to describe the ‘social benefits’ of suicide, reflect judgements of self-killing as a ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ event (Stack & Bowman 2012, 249–258). From the viewpoint of cultural research, the positivity or negativity of a representation is of course ambiguous by definition, and cannot be decided upon by a simple examination of the social benefit as depicted in the narrative. Nonetheless, the data accurately implies a regime within which the altruistic and heroic cinematic suicide is monopolised by masculine male characters.²⁶ Considering the *egoistic*

²³ The tradition of Ajax is particularly prolific and versatile, and has been subject to change in tenor according to the changes in social values, as van Hooff demonstrates. (van Hooff 1990, 49, 99, 108–109, 143–147; Basile 1999, 15–22; Brown 2001; 21–48; Higonet 1986, 73; Minois 1999, 42–56; Shapiro 2002, 137–143.)

²⁴ The field of the ‘egoistic suicides’ – and the division between ‘egoistic’ and ‘altruistic’ – is here approached within the Durkheimian societal frame, as a quality of the situations marked by a low-level of social integration (Durkheim 1966), thus leaving out most evaluations regarding possible social benefits.

²⁵ While Durkheim’s categories pay little attention to the social benefit of suicide and instead draw the line according to the social structure, egoistic and altruistic are in the study by Stack and Bowman distinguished from each other according to ‘social benefit.’ (Durkheim 1966; Stack & Bowman 2012, 249–258.)

²⁶ The assessment by Stack and Bowman presented here is based on the aforementioned perception of the social benefits of the represented suicide, according to which the self-slaughterers are divided either into heroes or villains (positive event) or objects of pity

suicide, the majority of representations appear to concern, *one*, suicide caused primarily by depression and other mental instabilities; *two*, suicide caused by love and relationships, often manifesting as madness and melancholia; and *three*, suicide caused by physical or social calamities, often characterized as depressed or mad but occasionally also as calm and courageous.²⁷ The ‘internal psychiatric’ motivations of type one tend to feature both sexes equally, although with *gendered* forms of madness and corresponding displays of agenthood, as we shall see. Type two is, instead, dominated by female characters and type three by male characters, thereby indicating the persistence of a historical myth, according to which women die for love and men for glory (Canetto 1993; Jaworski, 2010; 2014). In these constructions of the causes of suicide contemporary cinema maintains the ancient differentiation between rationally cogitated and emotionally influenced suicides, involving otherness into the equation by formulating the latter as ‘mad,’ feminine, and effeminate.



Figure 1. The recurring femininity of the representations of egoistic suicide: the suicidal girlhood in *The Virgin Suicides* (1999).²⁸

Cinematic representations continue the historical tendency to portray the egoistic suicide as a gendered ailment: since the Renaissance, female characters have dominated the canonical visual cultural representations of suicide. The Western world saw the formerly male-oriented ‘canon of suicide’ as permanently transformed when women appeared as popular personifications of a suicidal nature in the *quattrocento* painting. The launching event for this transition in the Western visual canon was Giotto’s early fourteenth-century female personification of one of the seven vices, *Despair*, which borrowed from the medieval tradition of depicting Judas by portraying the character hanging from the

(negative event) (Stack & Bowman 2012, 249–258). With a minor modification – the relocation of the ‘psychopath villain’ that from the outset rather corresponds with the ‘share of the evil’ of the traditional moral narratives, from ‘altruism’ to ‘egoism’ – the differentiation would appear to consider altruistic suicides as more monolithically masculine.

²⁷ The division at hand is a melange of the qualitative and quantitative analyses. To see the results of the quantitative analysis alone, see: Stack & Bowman 2012, 249–258.

²⁸ *Virgin Suicides* (1999) by American Zoetrope was directed by Sofia Coppola, and is based on a novel of same name by Jeffrey Eugenides, adapted for the screen by Sofia Coppola. *Virgin Suicides*, in itself, is admittedly a diverse and at times subversive study on suicide, the joys and lows of youth, and repressive parenting.

stigmatised rope with a demon sitting on her shoulder, and then juxtaposed the vice with the virtue of hope.²⁹ Although the didactic moralism of the Middle Ages soon subsided, the female personifications persisted. By the time of the high Renaissance, the previously dominant male traditions of suicide had fallen into the margins as a consequence of the increasing popularity of the tragic female heroines on the brink of suicide (Brown 2001, 88–123; Cutter 1983, 131–196).



Figure 2. Lucretia, one of the suicidal heroines of Renaissance in: Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio, Italian, active ca. 1483–1520) – *Lucretia*, c. 1508–1510. Pen and brown ink over black chalk, 39.7 x 29.2 cm. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. www.metmuseum.org

Unlike Giotto's morally determined, didactic female portrait, situated in the transitional phase between two distinguishable eras, the early Renaissance traditions were morally ambivalent. The then popular representations of the beautiful, *beautified* suicidal heroines, cogitating their suicides while holding weapons in their hands, in a state of bodily sanctity and mental resolution, were seen to adorn their characters and to elevate them to the level of masculine heroism (Brown 2001, 88–123; Donaldson 1982; Minois 1999, 64; van Hooff 1990, 21–22). In the widely popular tradition of Lucretia, for instance, the raped Roman noble woman regains her tarnished virtue by killing herself and, through her

transgression, restores the honour of her family.³⁰ Lucretia's weapon is notably a knife, a recurring detail that, while faithfully reiterating the literary origins of the myth, could also be associated with masculine heroism (Donaldson 1982, 3–67, 147–148; van Hooff 1990, 47–78). In the traditions pertaining to Cleopatra and Sophonisbe, the queens of Egypt and Carthage display fortitude as they face death, not defeat and humiliation. Also their methods of suicide, snake bite and poison chalice respectively, diverge from the infamy of hanging, which was traditionally perceived as feminine

²⁹ Giotto di Bondone, *Despair (Disperazione)*, c. 1305, a fresco in Cappella degli Scrovegni, Padua. *Despair* belongs to a set of fourteen allegorical frescoes depicting the seven vices and virtues. It is paired with *Hope (Speranza)*, as was the convention. For more on Giotto's *Despair*, see: Brown 2001, 74–78; Cutter 1983, 137–138; Lackey 2005; Stubblebine 1996; van Hooff 1990, 93. The persistent stigma of the femininity of hanging is also considered in the footnotes no. 19 & 20. It is worth noting how, in drawing from the Judas tradition which had utilised the feminine stigma of the rope in its didacticism, *Despair* presented the ancient myth in what would appear to be its state of origin, previously perceived too much of a *taboo* for visual culture.

³⁰ Donaldson and van Hooff record Lucretia to have often been described to possess 'a man soul in a female body.' As Ian Donaldson has noted, the virtuousness of Lucretia's transgression lies in the societal context, according to which she, as a woman, was regarded as property of the male line, and in which the transferred shame of her rape, undistinguished from adultery, could only be annulled by her own hand. Also Elisabeth Bfonfen and Margaret Higonnet approach suicide as a subversion of culturally posited female objecthood. (Bronfen 1992, 141–167; Donaldson 1982, 11; Higonnet 1986, 68–83; Penny Small 1976; van Hooff 1990, 21–22.)

(Brown 2001, 82, 112; Cantarella 1986; Cutter 1983, 165–196; Hughes-Hallett 1990; 2006a; 2006b; Minois 1999, 64–68, 102–105).³¹ In their depiction of both material and spiritual beauty, untarnished by the chosen method of self-annihilation, and in their focus on the moment of resolution, the Renaissance traditions painted an aestheticised, sanitised image of suicide. Yet, while the images were glorifying in their new kind of presentation of female heroism, the visual regime itself was not free from moral ambiguity; rather, it participated in the general discourse on suicide from a safe distance, with a disproportioned representation of gender.

If the popularity of suicidal heroines were explained in a manner similar to the coevally popular images of rape, merged with the theme of suicide in the iconography of Lucretia, the grim myths could be seen to contain the potential for manifold symbolic images with functions in both edification and erotica (Wolfthal 1999, 10–24). While the theme of heroic female suicide provided symbolically rich metaphors for social topics such as marriage, and could be circulated in the public sphere as didactic tableaux promoting virtue and fortitude, the theme also offered motifs for the paintings of the private cabinet and their images of female beauty. The heroines' liminality – their gender, pagan origins in mythology and socio-geographic distance – excused their nudity *and* their suicides (Brown 2001, 88–123; Donaldson 1982; Wolfthal 1999, 10–24).³² As the sexual liberation advanced, the suicidal characters eventually excused explicit eroticism, and the paintings were reproduced almost as kitsch erotica for the cabinets of collectors (Brown 2001, 88–123; Donaldson 1982, 13–15; Hughes-Hallett 1990; 2006a; 2006b, online 24.1.2015). In this manner the images of suicide were aestheticised and sanitised, not only through visual décor and retinal eroticism, but also by the distance provided by their gender and origins in the pagan legends of classical antiquity; the characters were *suicidal others* in a manner not too different from the ethnic *suicides obsessionaux* of antiquity.

This distance, vital to the Renaissance regime, can be observed particularly clearly in Lorenzo Lotto's *Portrait of a Woman Inspired by Lucretia* (c. 1530–32), in which Lucrezia Pesaro, a contemporary noble woman, points out her relation to the classical forebear depicted in the painting she holds in her hand. According to Ian Donaldson's analysis, the two Lucretias are dissociated from each other not only by the words involved – “*NEC VLLA IMPVDICA LVCRETIAE EXEMPLO VIVET*”³³ – but also by the physical distance between the two characters and the disparity of their state of dress: the Roman Lucretia is nude, the contemporary one respectably clothed (Donaldson 1982, 16). This painting does not only mark the chastity and courage that can and *must be* shared without sharing the fate of Lucretia. It also makes visible the implicit logic in the Renaissance depiction of suicide: it is necessitated by the distance and the divergence held by *the other* in relation to the social ‘inside.’ The Renaissance heroines participate in the discourse of suicide as the

³¹ According to the legend, Cleopatra had herself bit by a poisonous asp and Sophonisbe emptied a chalice of poison given to her by his husband, both in a situation in which their deaths can be perceived as suicides under siege: Cleopatra at the fall of Alexandria to Octavian, and Sophonisbe captured by Romans. Both were also perceived as displays of loyalty towards their lovers: Marc Antony and Massinissa, the King of Numidia. While there are no monographs devoted to the legend of Sophonisbe, Lucy Hughes-Hallett has written extensively about the changing symbolic value of the myth of Cleopatra. (Hughes-Hallett 1990; 2006.)

³² In the patriarchal Renaissance art world, in which art was largely commissioned, created and extended by men, the suicidal traditions, which derive almost entirely from ancient classical mythology and history-inspired folklore, could be seen to allow the breach from the literary origins in terms of *deshabille* and nudity (Donaldson 1982, 13–19; Nead 1992; Wolfthal 1999). On the pagan influence on the increase in nudity in the Italian Renaissance, see for instance: Clark 1956.

³³ “Never shall Lucretia provide a precedent for unchaste women to escape what they deserve,” as translated by Donaldson (1982, 16).

gendered pagan others of a patriarchal society, and are thereby distanced for all viewers.³⁴ Their suicides can therefore be seen as the death of the other, albeit a glorified one at that.



Figure 3. Lucretia Pesaro points to her relation to Lucretia Romana in: Lorenzo Lotto – *Portrait of a Woman Inspired by Lucretia*, c. 1530–1532. Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 110.6 cm (Painting bought with contributions from the Benson family and the National Art Collections Fund, 1927). Photo © The National Gallery, London. Any form of reproduction, transmission, performance, display, rental, lending or storage in any retrieval system, without the consent of the copyright holders is prohibited.³⁵

Over the course of the subsequent centuries of gendered representation, suicide was transformed from masculine heroism into feminine weakness and malady. The ancient myth of the ignominy of female suicide was thus first subverted and then restored, and eventually

established in a form from which the contemporary film representations can also be seen to draw. In the popularity of the pictorial traditions of the heroic Lucretia, Cleopatra, Sophonisbe, and others, such a strong link was forged between self-slaughter and femininity on the one hand and self-slaughter and the dominance of emotion on the other, that they can still be seen to live on in the iconography and ‘stereotypology’ of suicide.³⁶ As Brown suggests, the visual feminisation of suicide in the Renaissance can also be seen to have provided grounds for its subsequent medicalisation (Brown 2001, 94).³⁷ The sinful despair, which since the Middle Ages had been seen to culminate in the condemnable suicide, was revived in the Catholic reformation and during the Renaissance transformed into a disposition of the weak-minded. Suicide was thereby rationalised as a sin that a woman, a member of the weaker sex, was more prone to succumb to committing. (Brown 2001, 88–123; Higonnet 1986, 70–72; Minois 1999, 68–80; van Hooff 1990, 86–94, 178.) Through the feminine associations which the glorifying Renaissance monolith fed into the discourse, suicide was steered under the scrutiny of psychiatry as an outcome of not only despair and melancholia, but also of the gendered forms of madness: *luxuria*, the sin of lust, and *hysteria*, female melancholia (Brown 2001, 88–123; Minois 1999, 241–247).³⁸ The age of Romanticism added to the mythology through its worship of suicide as a romantic climax of the *dolor* of tragic love, of artistic genius, and of the fashionable melancholy of *vague à l’âme*, all admired as youthful and

³⁴ As Barbara Gates accurately describes: “They [women] too were made into ‘others’-- and suicide was displaced to them much as it was to demonic alter egos. For the most part, fictions about women and suicide became more prevalent and seemed more credible than did facts. -- In the main they did so because they wanted and expected suicide, like madness, to be a ‘female malady’ ” (Gates 1988, 125).

³⁵ Any form of reproduction, transmission, performance, display, rental, lending or storage in any retrieval system, without the consent of the copyright holders is prohibited.

³⁶ The other popular Renaissance characters here feature not only other legendary females, such as the valiant widows Dido and Porcia, but also lovers united in death, the forebears of Romeo and Juliet: Pyramus and Thisbe, Paetus and Arria. (Brown 2001; Cutter 1983.)

³⁷ See also: Gates 1988; Higonnet 1986; Nead 1982; 1988.

³⁸ Minois describes the sudden popularity of the thematic of madness in the high Renaissance, borrowed by the intellectual circles from peasant folklore: “The problem of suicide was also raised indirectly through madness, a topic much in fashion from the late fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century” (Minois 1999, 77). While madness, despair and melancholia were essentially explanations familiar from antiquity, they were in the Renaissance recycled and relocated into the cluster of femininity. The medicalisation of these conditions was initiated in the eighteenth century. (Foucault 2006; Minois 1999; van Hooff 1990.)

effeminate (Brown 2001, 124–145; Cutter 1983, 197–222; Gates 1988, 23–37; Higonet 1986, 70–72; Minois 1999, 248–277).

Although the contemporary film representations of suicide are not homogeneously *female*, they draw from the gendered stereotypes built into the history of representation, and, in drawing distinctions between types of voluntary death, utilise the persistent myth of women dying for love and men dying for glory: “Whereas women’s suicidal behavior is often viewed as indicating weakness and dependence, men’s is frequently interpreted as a sign of tragic courage and fierce independence” (Canetto 1993, 5).³⁹ Altruistic martyrdom is presented as masculine; and the gendered stereotype is featured and utilised in the representations of egoistic suicide, which tend to feature female characters typed lovelorn, dependant and clingy, and which characterise the males as either effeminated or ‘besieged.’ Therein surfaces also the differentiation that, in different forms, has marked visual representation since antiquity. My sample reveals that the secondary or instrumental cinematic suicides in particular tend to proliferate the gender-normative stereotype: while masculine men are tendentiously marked either as heroes or villains, women and effeminate men often appear as victims, even in their villainy.⁴⁰ Yet these instrumental representations tend to feature a more diverse array of characters than the primary suicide representations. A remarkable proportion of suicidal *protagonists* in such films that approach suicide as a social issue would appear to be teenage girls, male characters marked either effeminate or homosexual, or artists of either gender.⁴¹ Besides few independently financed or ‘auteur’ films, few Anglo-American films seem to exist that study suicide through male characters untouched by the prevailing artist myth or by the stigma of deviance of gender or sexuality.⁴² Therein the primary suicide representations reveal the persistence of a ‘victim trope’ in which the suicidal protagonists are effeminated, infantilised and marginalised.

I shall now illustrate these points, by comparing two films in which female protagonists struggle with suicidality while recovering from suicide-related loss with two films that could be considered their closest generic equals, works that study the recovery from suicide-related loss through male protagonists. These are, respectively, the teenage dramas *According to Greta* (2009) and *The Moth Diaries* (2011), and the action dramas *Vanilla Sky* (2001) and *Inception* (2010). *According to Greta* is a light romantic drama, which depicts a summer in a life of an out of control teenage girl, Greta (Hilary Duff), and which sees her grow from an immature suicidal youth, affected by her father’s suicide, onto the brink of maturity.⁴³ *The Moth Diaries*, while also a coming of age story, has elements of a Gothic supernatural mystery, set as it is in a British boarding school, and follows Rebecca’s (Sarah Bolger) struggle with suicidal wishes, also launched by the suicide of her

³⁹ Canetto has seminaly noted that the prevalent myth of the gendered nature of suicide has even permeated the contemporary suicidological research, which is affected by an ingrained researcher bias, and the neglect of the effects of socialisation and the *quality* of the relationships (female) or the lack thereof (male). (Canetto 1993.)

⁴⁰ What is here meant with the secondary, or instrumental, suicide is the appearance of its representation in an instrumental usage regarding the narrative, the character presentation, or some other external cause which renders the portrayal metaphoric. As already mentioned, the instrumental functions tend to outnumber the representations that primarily deal with suicide as a social phenomenon.

⁴¹ As has been theorised within queer studies, the victim trope is a representative mechanism rendering the subject, here ‘queer youth,’ into an object to be rescued by external agents. (Marshall 2010, 65; Rofes 1983.) The trope corresponds with the process of ‘infantilisation’ that, as Hall has argued, befalls most minorities (Hall 2013a.) The myth of the suicide predisposed by the artistic temperament is instead one of the most persistent naturalised myths about suicide, having a strong footing also in contemporary visual representations. Read: Wittkower & Wittkower 1969; Stack & Bowman 2009c. 215–228.

⁴² For deviant representations, see for instance *The Fall* and *Hollywoodland*, which study the suicide of their protagonists with a depth that defies gender conventions – albeit notably at the borderlines of the artist myth, as both of the suicidal protagonists work in the film industry. *The Fall* (2006) by Googly Films was directed by Tarsem Singh and written by Tarsem Singh in collaboration with Dan Gilroy, Nico Soultanakis and Valeri Petrov. *Hollywoodland* (2006) by Focus Features was directed by Allen Coulter and written by Paul Bernbaum.

⁴³ *According to Greta* (2009) by Whitewater Films was directed by Nancy Bardawil and written by Michael Gilvary.

father, and which haunts her in the form of a vampiric double.⁴⁴ The suicide ideation of Greta and Rebecca contrasts with the narratively integral suicides of female supporting characters in *Vanilla Sky* and *Inception*, whose male protagonists are drawn into delusional adventures by the suicides of their female love interests. In *Vanilla Sky*, David (Tom Cruise) descends into paranoid madness in a cryogenic nightmare, haunted by the attempted murder-suicide of her possessive one-night stand Julie (Cameron Diaz).⁴⁵ In *Inception*, ‘dream extractor’ Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) attempts to gain back a life lost through the suicide of his wife Mal (Marion Cotillard) by embarking on a desperate mission of dream-manipulation.⁴⁶

The juxtaposition of these four films speaks, firstly, of the recurring portrayal of suicide as a feminine condition permeated by the victim trope. Whereas the female protagonists of the two teenage dramas are depicted as young girls suffering from hereditary suicidality, having been infected by their suicidal fathers, the male protagonists dealing with guilt and trauma, by contrast, show no similar signs of being at risk to succumb to suicidal thoughts or intentional self-harm.⁴⁷ In this sense *According to Greta* and *The Moth Diaries* are primarily suicide survival *dramas* with victimised female characters, whereas *Vanilla Sky* and *Inception* are action adventures with active male characters. Therein, they re-draw the distinction between heroes and victims, agents and objects. Similarly, what is emphasised in and omitted from the on-screen imagery reveals the femininity of cinematic suicide. In *According to Greta* and *The Moth Diaries*, the suicides of the male characters, the fathers, are discussed but scarcely shown. In that matter, these films concern themselves essentially with female suicide, just like *Vanilla Sky* and *The Inception*, which both stress the struggle of male protagonists with suicidal female romantic partners. Onscreen suicide is – I suggest – made to appear female, stemming from feminine vulnerability, even when committed *and* brought about by men.

Moreover, historical stereotypes and widely dispersed myths of suicidal women proliferate in the examples in question. In *Vanilla Sky*, we see in the character of Julie the archetypal lovesick ‘self-slaughteress.’ The film presents Julie as a romantic obsessive, an erotomaniac who works herself into a mad fury in the unrequited condition of her love, taken advantage of by the self-indulgent David. *Inception*, instead, juxtaposes Mal’s suicide with the survival of the male protagonist Cobb as another condition of female vulnerability. While Cobb has the strength of mind to maintain his perception of reality in a dream mission gone wrong, Mal epitomises a weakness of mind culminating in her paranoid suicide. While both action films, *Inception* and *Vanilla Sky*, deal with the internalised guilt of the male protagonists, casting

⁴⁴ *The Moth Diaries* (2011) by Edward R. Pressman was directed by Mary Harron, and is based on a novel of the same name by Rachel Klein, adapted for the screen by Mary Harron. See also footnote 62, in which the suicide representation in question is studied in connection to a representation of non-conformist sexuality.

⁴⁵ *Vanilla Sky* (2001) by Cruise/Wagner Productions was directed by Cameron Crowe, and is based on Alejandro Amenábar’s and Mateo Gil’s film *Abre Los Ojos* (Open Your Eyes, 1997), adapted for American screens by Cameron Crowe.

⁴⁶ *Inception* (2010) by Legendary Pictures was written and directed by Christopher Nolan. Another one of Nolan’s films, *The Prestige*, also showcases a stereotypical feminine suicide in the hanging of the lovelorn Sarah (Rebecca Hall). *The Prestige* (2006) by Touchstone Pictures is based on a novel of the same name by Christopher Priest, adapted for the screen by Christopher in collaboration with Jonathan Nolan.

⁴⁷ As we – of course – learn at the end of *Vanilla Sky*, the cryogenic coma of David is self-imposed and both his ‘death’ and ‘awakening’ suicidal in their iconographies. The entire film might even be approached as a metaphor of the suicidal struggle between life and death. Yet David’s pseudo-suicides are distinguishable from the vulnerable suicidality studied here, not least in the cinematography that, even in its spectacular revelation, stresses the rationality of David’s decision and presents the coma as a result of his will to live.

The representations of hereditary suicidality in themselves cannot be adequately addressed here the exemplifying films being so disparate. In my sample the parental suicide, a somewhat rare motivation to begin with, only appears in one film concerning itself with a suicidal male protagonist, this time as suicide ideation of a mother of a homosexual male. See: *The Hours* (2002) by Miramax Films that was directed by Stephen Daldry, and is based on the novel of the same name by Michael Cunningham, adapted for screen by David Hare.

their suicidal heroines as vulnerable and dependent, tragic and pitiable, these films simultaneously portray their female characters as villainous. Julie's hysterical act destroys David's life of privilege, leaving him disfigured and traumatised, and Mal is presented as the arch villain. As Cobb struggles with the guilt manifested in Mal's hostile, violent figure in the dream sequences of the story, her suicide is turned into the initiating *and* the jeopardising force of the narratively central dream-altering mission. Thus in a vengeful, possessive madness Julie and Mal endanger not only their own lives but those of the males. In this sense, while both films lend diverse and ambivalent meanings to suicide, their female characters continue to manifest the old myths of the weaknesses of the female psyche, as predisposed to hysteria and suicide. Barbara Gates describes this mythology of self-destructive hysteria as follows: "When suicidal women were not feared as wilful Medusas, they were usually disdained or pitied as the yearning lovelorn" (Gates 1988, 131).⁴⁸



Figure 4. The 'wilful medusa': lovelorn Julie (Cameron Diaz) moments before the crash in *Vanilla Sky* (2001).

Although the aforementioned instrumental suicides, along with the majority of representations of suicide, stress the influence of gender, both *According to Greta* and *The Moth Diaries* also encompass characterisations of the 'deficiency' and 'deviancy' of gender, similarly employing the gender stereotype. The female protagonists are deficient as women in their immaturity, their suicidality presented as a condition of youth to which the films both ridicule and display empathy, while the fathers in question are depicted as deviant men in the effeminate sensibility, linked to the romanticised artist myth. Depictions of gender deviancy are also detectable in an increasing number of representations that defy the stereotype of masculine men dying for glory and honour, a paradigm that used to dominate the male imagery of suicide, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, but has witnessed a clear decline.⁴⁹ While such imagery is still

⁴⁸ Sylvia Canetto writes, similarly: "Even in their suicidal action, women are not viewed as tragic or heroic, but rather as dependent, immature, weak, passive, and hysterical. Women's love and suicide are labeled neurotic" (Canetto 1993, 5).

⁴⁹ Stack and Bowman record the gendered nature of portrayed motivations and tie the masculine characters to 'glory' and 'honour,' which are particularly easy to detect in the depictions of altruistic suicides, whose percentage has in the second half of the twentieth century diminished. Moreover, Stack and Bowman calculate all in all about 25 per cent of the representations to feature shame – as resulting from loss of honour – as a motive. I estimate this number could also be larger under qualitative analysis. (Stack & Bowman 2009a; 2012, 258.) On the violent masculinity of film read: Rafter 2006.

occasionally repeated, it is now accompanied by films that oppose the conventional image of violent masculinity by feminising the suicidal characters.⁵⁰ Films like *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Boogie Nights* (1997) and *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) deviate from the masculine expectations.⁵¹ In *Dead Poets Society*, the gender ambiguous teenager Neil (Robert Sean Leonard), who dreams of becoming a stage actor, kills himself because he is unable to meet the expectations of ‘tradition, honour, discipline, and excellence’ imposed by his father and the society; in *Boogie Nights*, the cuckolded Little Bill (William H. Macy) executes a double murder before killing himself in a bout of madness; and in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Richie (Luke Wilson) deviates entirely from the stereotype of men dying for honour, attempting to kill himself for the unrequited love he feels towards his adopted sister. All these characters are in some manner marked as *effeminate*: Neil’s storyline is a subtle study of repressed homosexuality, his suicide similarly characterised; Little Bill is demasculinised by adultery and treated as a comic relief; and Richie subversively fails his attempted suicide conducted in the name of love, with both the failure and the motivating love not solely inherent to the feminine stereotype; in Richie’s case, the love is also incestuous. This appearance of stigmatised sexual desire leads us the next prevailing mode of otherness in contemporary film, one linked closely to the deviance of gender: the deviance of sexuality.

Sexuality

While gendered depictions of suicides caused by love and characterisations of gender deficiency continue to present egoistic suicide as feminine and effeminate, storylines motivated by the struggle with depression in particular reveal another myth of otherness, one in which suicide is expelled into *the others* marked by an anomalous state of sexual desire. Although Stack and Bowman see the representations of ‘internal psychiatric motifs’ as divided equally between genders, the qualitative scrutiny of the male suicides of the category, in particular, reveals a recurrent tendency to portray the suicidal characters as deviant in terms of sexuality – which, in cultural representations, tends to be conflated with a deviance in gender. I have already noted deviant sexual desire as marking the effeminate suicide attempt in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, the motive for which – incestuous desire – precedes also the suicide attempt in *Shame* (2011), in which it is committed by an archetypal suicidal female.⁵² On a wider scale, one can view sexual behaviour perceived as nonconformist as marking a number of representations featuring ‘maddened’ women, including, for instance, the suicide of the promiscuous Julie in *Vanilla Sky*. These cinematic representations of compromised sexual morality leading to suicide are heirs to the nineteenth century transformation of ‘the Renaissance monolith,’ the feminine representative

⁵⁰ In films such as *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *In Bruges* (2008), male characters still either execute or attempt suicide as a traditional ‘shame murder.’ Consider the suicide of Private Pyle (Vincent D’Onofrio), after repeated humiliations in one of the most violent suicide scenes in the history of cinema, in Stanley Kubrick’s critique of the American war machine, or the suicide attempt of the assassin Ray (Colin Farrell), after having lost his honour and burdened by the guilt of having killed a child. *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) by Natant was directed by Stanley Kubrick, and is based on the novel *The Short-Timers* by Gustav Hasford, adapted for the screen by Stanley Kubrick in collaboration with Michael Herr and Gustav Hasford. *In Bruges* (2008) by Blueprint Pictures was written and directed by Martin McDonagh.

⁵¹ *Dead Poets Society* (1989) by Touchstone Pictures was directed by Peter Weir and written by Tom Schulman. *Boogie Nights* (1997) by Ghoulardi Film Company was written and Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson. *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) by Touchstone Pictures was directed by Wes Anderson, and written by Wes Anderson in collaboration with Owen Wilson. Wes Anderson has portrayed also another subversive male suicide attempt in his *Darjeeling Limited* (2007) by Indian Paintbrush. It was directed by Wes Anderson and written by Wes Anderson in collaboration with Roman Coppola and Jason Schwartzman.

⁵² *Shame* (2011) by See-Saw Films was directed by Steve McQueen and written by Steve McQueen in collaboration with Abi Morgan. Steve McQueen has also directed another film featuring a passive altruistic suicide: *Hunger* (2008) by Film4 Productions was written by Steve McQueen and Enda Walsh.

regime, into a myth of the suicide of the prostitute, which posited suicide as a consequence of the excessive sexual desire marking deviant womanhood.

As the infatuation of Romanticism with death and degradation subsided at the dawn of the Age of Reason, suicide resurfaced as not only a feminine, effeminate, youthful, artistic sensibility, but as a medicalised weakness to which women were particularly susceptible. Barbara Gates and Lynda Nead contend that the newly emerging myth of suicide as a feminine disposition and ailment – created, circulated and enforced by representations in many a field – was in such stark contrast with reality that it took the co-operation of science and investigative journalism to explain the discrepancy between myth and reality, where suicide continued to be a predominantly male phenomenon. Suicide was explained as the inevitable outcome of deviant female sexuality, that is, of a deviance of femininity (Gates 1988, 125–150; Nead 1988). With the prostitute marked as a possible source of suicidal contagion, one could view the ‘pandemic’ of suicide as reaching outside the relatively well contained lower class femininity, through contamination and miasma.⁵³ Charity and the relocation of such scapegoats into mental asylums helped deal with the threat of this contagion which in the prostitute found a controllable form (Nead 1988). The visual representations of suicide participated in the creation of the moral narrative of ‘the fallen woman,’ which tied the woman together with deviant sexuality and the suicidal contagion originating in the lower classes and social margins, and which thereby functioned as a repository for the social ills of the Victorian society (Anderson 1987, 41–73; Brown 2001, 88–145; Campbell 2006; Edelstein 1983, 202–212; Gates 1988, 125–150; Higonnet 1986; MacDonald & Murphy 1990, 260–300; Nead 1982; 1984: 1988; Nicoletti 2004, online, 25.1.2015).

Here the Renaissance visual regime can be seen to have influenced the Victorian suicide myth through the link forged in the Renaissance ‘quasi-erotica’ between sexuality and suicide. As I have suggested, the Renaissance cult of beauty increased the demand for renditions of human body, thereby increasing the popularity of the sanitised images of suicide committed by beautiful heroines.⁵⁴ Diane Wolfthal records the growing eroticism in the tradition of Lucretia’s rape and suicide in the high Renaissance as follows:

[R]eflecting the changes that occur in Northern European art beginning in the late fifteenth century -- Women are increasingly depicted as seductresses. Even models of chastity become temptresses. -- Lucretia, a traditional paragon of virtue, is likewise transformed into a semi-nude sex object (Wolfthal 1999, 122).⁵⁵

While Lucretia, Cleopatra and others underwent a transformation from paragons of virtue to sex objects, it was through this stabilising link between femininity, sexuality and suicide that the transforming opinions of suicide and its causes – from *luxuria* to *hysteria* – were exhibited and established (Brown 2001, 88–123). In Victorian England these associations culminated in the moral narratives of prostitution and moral degradation, in which the visual culture participated in

⁵³ The term ‘prostitute’ is here understood in a broad sense: as deviance from respectable femininity, in relation to which it is formulated as its negation. As Lynda Nead defines it: “The ‘prostitute’ was the broadest and most complex term within the categorisation of female behaviour during the nineteenth century. -- Prostitution stood as a metaphor for immorality in general; it represented a nexus of anxieties relating to class, nation and empire” (Nead 1988, 90–95).

⁵⁴ On the Renaissance cult of beauty – and the cult of the nude – see: Clark 1956; Nead 1992; Wolfthal 1999.

⁵⁵ Originally the suicidal heroines were depicted as having one breast bare, a religious symbol of nourishment, perchance as an indication that the characters, masculine in bravery, partook in proper femininity. Their eroticisation also reflects the secularisation of the body, studied by Margaret R. Miles, in which the female breast and the body were transformed from a religious symbol into a secular erotic sign. (Miles 1986; 2008).

academic art and yellow paper illustration by depicting both the feminine ideal and the dangers of deviating from it (Brown 2001, 88–145; Gates 1988, 125–150; Nead 1982; 1984; 1988).



Figure 5. The changing attire of Lucretia in: *Il Giampietrino* (Giovanni Pietro Rizzoli, Italian, active ca. 1495–1540) –*Lucrezia Romana*, c. 1500–1540. Oil on wood panel, 37, $\frac{3}{4}$ x 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Courtesy of Chazen Museum of Art.

In illustrating the climax in the moral narrative of the prostitute, told in the discourses of medicine and of tabloid and investigative journalism, visual culture completed the circle initiated in the Renaissance. Having helped establish suicide as predisposed by feminine weakness, the *quattro-* and *cinquecento* depictions of anomalous female virtue eventually transformed into the nineteenth century depictions of deviant female madness.⁵⁶ This inter-discursive morality tale of the prostitute bound suicide into moral degradation as its pitiable but well-earned outcome, and provided a warning of the multiple

transgressions that, in prostitution, extended past the boudoir to threaten the home, the nexus of nation-building. As a liminal, marginal creature, the lower class prostitute wandering the city streets doubled as a safe, useful stand-in for the problem of suicide itself, de-romanticising the romantic suicide myth while continuing to play out the spectacle of suicide and sexuality, towards which people continued to have a nearly pornographic interest. Moreover, the mythology of the suicidal prostitute and the visual representations of the fallen and drowned women stepped in to alleviate the moral panic, the roots of which lay in the social restlessness of the time. While the fallen woman personified suicide as *the other* of a tameable middle class femininity, it also functioned as a scapegoat containing the moral panic related to the infrastructural challenges brought about by industrialisation, urbanisation, and colonial instabilities that shook the nation and the empire (Nead 1988).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that the characters were now depicted either in the middle of action or in the wretched glory of corpses washed ashore, as anonymous figures stripped of social status. (Brown 2001, 88–145; Edelstein 1983, 202–212; Gates 1988, 125–150; Higonnet 1986; Nead 1982; 1984: 1988; Nicoletti 2004, online, 25.1.2015.)

⁵⁷ The tale of the suicide of the prostitute was a moral tale, as Nead describes: “[T]hrough these acts of representation particular beliefs and values are reproduced; firstly, the adulteress is defined in terms of her deviation from the feminine ideal, and secondly, deviancy in woman is organised around concepts of weakness, fall, guilt and punishment” (Nead 1988, 67). Her transgression, as

Given that suicide was historically instrumental in the moral panic centred on sexual deviance, it should be no surprise that a notable portion of the contemporary film representations appear to posit suicidality within sexual margins, particularly male homosexuality. The cinematic myth of the suicidal queer has its origins in the mid-twentieth century Hollywood depictions of characters marked by luxury.⁵⁸ The film historian Vito Russo notes an escalation in the representations of the ‘obligatory suicide of the gay character,’ the closer we come to the post-modern: “In twenty-two of twenty-eight films dealing with gay subjects from 1962 to 1978, major gay characters onscreen ended in suicide or violent death” (Russo 1981, 52). The contemporary array of representations does not invite complex tableaux about the causes of ‘queer suicide,’ either, but caters to suicide myths in a similar manner. Eric Rofes and Rob Cover speak of a lack of resilience, of presumed homosexual vulnerability, which posits non-heterosexuality itself as a primary factor in suicidality: “This myth asserts that -- a person’s homosexuality is itself the source of self-destructiveness” (Rofes 1983, 1).⁵⁹ While the array of representations of the suicidal queer serves the victim trope by conflating sexuality with suicidality, it also creates stereotypes connecting sexuality with criminality.⁶⁰ For instance, in the ‘who-dunnit’ *Where the*



Figure 6. Queer victims: lesbian sexual temptation and suicidality meet in *The Moth Diaries* (2011).

remarked both by Nead (1988, 90–109) and Higonnet, is essentially economic: “[T]he woman who attempts to escape from the patriarchal economy of sexual exchange becomes entangled in the symbolic nets of the new consumer economy. Her struggle to liberate herself emotionally is overlaid by signs of profligacy; these in turn are interpreted as symptoms of a degeneracy whose only cure is death” (Higonnet 1986, 71).

⁵⁸ We see therefore that *luxuria* has had a notably long lifespan, having seeped into contemporary cinematic representations as a signifier of the degeneracy of homosexuality (Dyer 1993; Russo 1981). While Morris and Russo speak of the ‘suicidal queer’ as a subgenre of the 1960s Hollywood, we can assume that a link between the luxurious queer and suicide would also be visible already in earlier ‘film noirs,’ if we were to look for it. (Dyer 1993, 19–70; Morris 2007, online, 27.1.2015; Russo 1981, 52.)

⁵⁹ Although one may view queer youth and adolescent girls (and perhaps, in reference to the previous chapter: victims of parental suicide) as veritable risk groups for suicidal behaviour, their cinematic treatment has been considered as serving the victim trope instead of addressing the societal framework, which would need to be addressed in order to avoid essentialist explanatory models. As Cover writes: “Lived experience, self-perception, and diverse ways of conceiving of sexual selfhood tend -- to be written out of consideration or drawn upon to support the statistics by arguing that all queer youth lives are ‘vulnerable lives’.” (Cover 2012b, 1180). Dustin Goltz argues that queer suicides can, in this manner, be rendered ‘sensible’ in relation to ‘heterosexual suicides’ perceived and depicted as selfish and unreasonable (Goltz 2013). See also: Canetto 1993; Cover 2012a; 2012b; 2013; Jaworski 2010; 2014; Marshall 2010; Sevim 2009.

⁶⁰ The intricate, award-winning *A Single Man* (2009) appears quite exceptional in ‘dissecting’ the myth of inherent ‘queer melancholia’ that homosexual characters often play out. The film invites viewers to sympathise with the protagonist as it follows college professor George (Colin Firth) going about the last day of his life, organising matters in preparation for his death. It also consciously plays with references to ‘blueness,’ subverting the myth by giving George’s melancholia an external reason by having him mourn the death of his long-time partner. *A Single Man* (2009) by Artina Films was directed by Tom Ford, and is based on a play with the same name by Christopher Isherwood, adapted for the screen by Tom Ford.

Truth Lies (2005) an inquiry into the mysterious death of a hotel maid reveals a cover-up of the repressed homosexuality of a showbiz duo, leading one of them, Vince (Colin Firth), who is saturated in *luxuria*, into committing suicide. In *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013), a similar connection between a vagabond folk musician and his late partner is hinted at by other characters and by the subtle cinematography.⁶¹ On one occasion, in *The Moth Diaries*, the cinematic representations even conflate suicide with the less usual lesbian seduction.⁶²

Last but not least, the reincarnation epic *Cloud Atlas* (2012) presents an ambitious and morally fickle bisexual composer, Robert Frobisher (Ben Whishaw), in the first stages of the karmic journey recounted in the film.⁶³ The character builds on the historical conflation of suicide and homosexuality in a manner that appears to break the marginal sexuality down



Figures 7 & 8. Historical stereotypes of deviance reimagined: the promiscuous queer in *Cloud Atlas* (2012).

⁶¹ *Where the Truth Lies* (2005) by Serendipity Point Films was directed by Atom Egoyan, and is based on a novel of the same name by Rupert Holmes, adapted for the screen by Atom Egoyan. *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013) by Mike Zoss Productions was written and directed by Joel and Ethan Cohen.

⁶² The protagonist, Rebecca, simultaneously recovers from a suicidal youth and from a ‘crush’ on her best friend Lucy (Sarah Gadon). Her struggle is paralleled in the character of Ernessa (Lily Cole), who has succumbed to vampiric lust after her suicide and fulfils Rebecca’s sexual desires with Lucy, thereby doubly embodying the temptation Rebecca must resist. Although I have not encountered the vampiric seduction in Victorian visual imagery and am only familiar with its literary versions, the contemporary screen version would appear to be a pastiche of Gothic fantasies and the visual trope of ‘contaminated femininity and the vampiric suicide’ mentioned by Brown (Brown 2001, 146–193). For *The Moth Diaries*, see footnote 44.

⁶³ Although the film speaks for the abolishment of all ostracism and artificial natural orders, Frobisher’s role is quite ambiguous. He appears to be both a prophet and an anti-hero. The decision not to feature Whishaw in other notable parallel roles, unlike other actors in the film, speaks of the cessation of Frobisher’s karmic journey and appears to comment on the condemnable nature of not only Frobisher’s suicide but his actions as well. *Cloud Atlas* (2012) by Cloud Atlas Productions was directed by Tom Tykwer, Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski, and is based on a novel of the same name by David Mitchell, adapted for the screen by Tom Tykwer, Andy Wachowski, and Lana Wachowski.

into its acceptable and deviant forms, or possibly to rank ‘solid’ homosexuality and ‘liquid’ bisexuality within a hierarchy. The contrast between the monogamous, nearly sexless character of Rufus Sixmith (James D’Arcy) and the ‘omnisexual,’ opportunistic Robert Frobisher forges a link between Frobisher’s suicide and his deviant sexual behaviour, this time in a moral story that sees suicide as causally connected to the form of *promiscuity* perceived as socially threatening. In this manner, the cinematic representations of the suicide of the ‘queer other’ might also show signs of the gradual diminishing of the synecdochical queer suicidality, as the other is fragmented into a condition of otherness within the other, as in the transformation of the Renaissance representative regime into Victorian suicide mythology.⁶⁴

Madness

As my tracing of suicidal depictions from antiquity to the Victorian era and to contemporary film has revealed, a persistent tendency exists to characterise either the suicidal deed or the suicidal *other* as ‘mad.’⁶⁵ The ancient suicide of the enemy warrior under siege is affiliated with the *desperata salus*, which Caesar used to describe the hopelessness that made his men commit suicide under siege. The suicide of the tragic hero Ajax is, in a cooling moral climate, labelled as mad through its unusually violent representation – and possibly also by the disproportionate bodily state involved. These causes of despair and madness are maintained throughout Middle Ages and resurrected in the Renaissance, in the transformation of the suicide myth into the gendered conditions of madness. The responses to the forms of insanity have altered with the social climate. Sometimes insanity has been condemned as diabolical and at other times sympathised with, or used to reclaim the self-slaughterer as *non compos mentis* (Gates 1988, 1–22; Minois 1999; van Hooff 1990).⁶⁶ Both depression and the gloom of melancholia and the frenzy and furore of madness *proper* can be seen to persist in contemporary representations, which feature both ‘mood disorders’ and ‘psychiatric personality disorders,’ to borrow from Stack and Bowman’s categories.⁶⁷ The roots of suicide in ‘madness’ – forms of mental aberration best reflecting the zeitgeist of the time of interpretation – thereby continue to abound: the contemporary representations of madness range from descriptions of the emotionally rampant condition familiar from myth and tragedy to the diagnostic tool forged in medicine and psychiatry. As a consequence of the continued development of psychiatry, the most often represented cause for the madness of suicide is depression, and representations often sympathetic towards this ‘sad’ suicide.⁶⁸ Yet, although prevalent twenty-first century representations of suicidal madness take the form of this ‘democratic’ temporary madness resulting from a mood disorder, instead of such a restrictedly gendered, class-specific,

⁶⁴ Synecdoche, a verbal device, refers here to a tendency to conflate the subject into one of its characteristics. On its prevalence in discourses on gender and sexuality, see for instance: Fuss 1989; Cover 2012a.

⁶⁵ Van Hooff also notes the historical existence of a need to paint an image of insanity over the suicide myths: “The development of the story about Ajax’s suicide shows how the ancients wanted to see the role of insanity” (van Hooff 1990, 99).

⁶⁶ *Non compos mentis*, not of sound mind and therefore not responsible for ones actions.

⁶⁷ While Stack and Bowman approach the representations of mental aberration via two categories, one of which focuses on personality disorders under the heading of ‘psychopathology’ and the other on mood disorders as ‘internal psychiatric motifs’ (Stack & Bowman 2012, 18–23), popular entertainment rather hierarchises all its unscientific representations of madness into threatening and sympathetic forms of internal otherness.

⁶⁸ Material on modern and post-modern art is similarly saturated with the ‘sad suicides’ and references to depression. Overviews of the canon of suicide tend to detect a rise in the representations of ‘sad suicide’ following the Victorian depictions of Ophelia and locate the launch of depression proper into post-war expressionism. (Brown 2001, 188–189, 201–207; Cutter 1983, 121–130; Kryszynska 2009, 15–47.) A particularly strong testimonial comes from the print media, in which recent representations and disputes following – for instance – the Germanwings tragedy or the suicide of Robin Williams continue to testify of the conflation of depression and suicide.

and ‘retributed’ form of deviance than that linked to prostitution, the constructions are not fully free of the burden of history.

The madness of suicide, changing faces from one otherness to another, has tended to correspond with contemporary ideas of the form of consciousness perceived as irrational or otherwise inferior.⁶⁹ As van Hooff, too, points out, despair, perchance common to all suicides, has tended to be projected on ‘the others’ rather than regarded as a universal condition. “They prefer to attribute despair to the losers, those who do not write history” (van Hooff 1990, 93). *Luxuria* and *hysteria* are telling examples of the gendered causes forged in the medicalisation of suicide in the eighteenth century. Even the idolising depictions produced in the age of Romanticism – when depicting the problematic Durkheimian egoistic suicide – rely on the distance created by vulnerable femininity in its valorising portrayals of the socially marginal and effeminately sensitive artist (Chatterton), the pagan poet killed in the throes of lesbian *dolor* (Sappho), or the mythical lovers of stage fiction (Romeo & Juliet), although melancholia is here romanticised and Shakespeare’s criticism of the madness of youth forgotten. Today also, representations, more often ambivalent and empathetic than not, feature gendered forms of madness in their characterisations of the self-slaughterer. While maintaining gender stereotypes, imaged suicides often mark deviance from norms of gender and sexuality, creating both synecdochical victim tropes and morality tales.

Finally, it must be added that the representations and mythologies of suicide that give expression to the ‘madness’ of the deed cannot be treated as an ‘unnatural’ reaction to the mystery of suicide. As has been noted by theorists, Western culture is accustomed to treating life as intrinsically good and death as intrinsically bad, rendering the idea of an anomalous *voluntary* death – a voluntary exit from the influence of the intrinsically good – as something that must inevitably spring from a lower level of reason, lower than the reason of those who bow to the implicit norm of the intrinsic goodness of life. The unthinkable is thereby controlled in identification. Consider for instance the invention of the physical condition of an excess of black bile in *melancholia*.⁷⁰ Representations of suicide tend also, therefore, to seek different sources, causes, and explanations for such madness. In doing so, they present self-annihilation as ‘mad’ according to the prevailing standards. In this context it is therefore quintessential, that representations of suicide present this ‘otherness of madness’ as linked explicitly to the others constructed in relation to the self; that madness provides a motive and explanation for the suicide; and that the mad suicidal nature is projected onto the others outside the borders of ‘social inside’ and its containable identity – foreigners, social minorities and those on the margins – or into a condition of otherness within the self, as when the medicalisation of suicide did when it broke the gendered disposition down into a deviance from proper femininity.

Conclusion: Othered & Mad or Sad

Ron Brown writes, “From the beginnings of their history, suicidal images acted not simply as a sign of suicide itself but also, and essentially, as a sign of otherness” (Brown 2001, 21). While the canon of suicidal depictions is not as straightforward as this article, providing a cross-section of it, may suggest, the majority of visual representations have

⁶⁹ According to the Foucauldian theory of power, we can surely see this tendency in most qualities deemed *irrational*. (Foucault 2006.)

⁷⁰ As Georges Minois describes: “Simply entertaining such a thought [of life not worth living] for no precise reason was in itself a symptom of madness, of the mental imbalance that was beginning to be called melancholia” (Minois 1999, 38).

tended to use characterisations of *the other* as instruments of differentiation. In particular, cinema appears to continue the historical tendency initiated in the Renaissance as it portrays the so-called egoistic suicide as feminine and effeminate.⁷¹ In linking suicide to the deviances from normative gender and sexuality, modern cinema appears to retell the moral tales of the consequences of deviance, the tale of the retributed suicide of the prostitute which, in the Age of Reason, was constructed to contain the woman as the keystone of home and nation. Contemporary film suicides also continue to be characterised as ‘mad’ or ‘sad,’ as is visible in the clusters of mad love and femininity, and of melancholia and homosexuality.⁷²

Discussion: creating the taboo through otherness

The story of suicide’s representation does not presuppose an order, but argues instead that visual representations might in themselves produce the social hierarchy-- (Brown 2001, 16).

As may be observed from the link between forms of madness, criminal tendencies, and the disposing weakness of the other, suicide often appears in a cluster of othernesses in which marginal, alien, and suppressed elements are joined together as a multifunctional *spectacle of the other*.⁷³ From the aestheticised, sanitised, and eroticised representations of the artistic canon to the contemporary imagery of suicide in popular cinema, the self-slaughterer appears to be predominantly depicted as *the other* of the male heterosexual ‘inside,’ and marked with the stigma of mental aberration. Theorising the functions of the link forged between suicide, otherness, and madness reveals an overlap of functions, from domestication to stigmatisation.

To begin with, the amalgamation of otherness and madness in suicidal representations can be seen as a patent manner of domesticating suicide for its socially necessary coverage. Like syphilis, opened for discourse as the ‘French pox’ in England and as ‘the English disease’ in France, suicide is opened for cultural meaning-making processes under the hallucination of distance, as ‘the death of the irrational other.’ Distancing is not an unfamiliar method in the history of suicidal depiction. Barbara Gates speaks, for instance, of a methodical distancing in connection to the romanticised suicide in the nineteenth century: “[M]ore often than not Victorian poetry of suicide involved displacement—if not to another time, then to another culture” (Gates 1988, 92). Similarly, the suicide images of the Renaissance were tableaux

⁷¹ Although the early suicidal representations of American film as studied by Stack and Bowman appear to contain a small amount of ethnic characters – an early suicidal trope commented on in more recent cinema by the teenage satire *Pretty Persuasion* (2005) – the de Beauvoirian others of gender and sexuality are the leading types in my sample. This is most likely because of the increase in political correctness in the cinematic depictions of ‘the ethnic other.’ Instead of ‘ethnic others,’ some cases in my sample instead feature a ‘suicidal foreigner’: Consider the French and British characters in *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee* and *Gattaca*. Consider also the foreign implications of the name Julianna Gianni in *Vanilla Sky*, and the frequent featuring of British actors as suicidal characters in American films. *Pretty Persuasion* (2005) by REN-Mar Studios was directed by Marcos Siega and written by Skander Halim. The film is a satire of the superficial neo-liberal culture of tolerance, which seems also to acknowledge the instrumental use of the trope of the ‘suicidal primitive.’ “Every war has its casualties, just ask my brother,” the protagonist retorts after her Arab friend commits an honour suicide because of a lie she wove. *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee* (2009) by Grand Army Entertainment was written and directed by Rebecca Miller, and is based on a novel by the director. *Gattaca* (1997) by Jersey Pictures was written and directed by Andrew Niccol.

⁷² In addition to ‘mad,’ or insane, and ‘sad,’ or depressed, there is also ‘bad,’ which I have not discussed in this article. As a characterisation of criminal tendencies and liminal status, ‘bad’ often coincides with other forms of otherness and madness, as for instance in Robert Frobisher’s delinquency. This antisocial behaviour may appear as part of such represented others as a side-effect of the same madness that drives their suicides. However, the suicidal ‘bad’ are often those who, as white men, belong to a dominant majority, whose suicide thus requires extra justification, and who are then turned into villains or prophets, arch enemies or artists; that is, pushed into the social margins.

⁷³ Stuart Hall has coined the term in his discussion on the representations of race. (Hall 2013b.)

of honour that, in a regime ‘othered’ by its femininity and mythic origins, allowed the admiration of the liminal characters they portrayed from a distance. Moreover, Brown speaks of the visual aestheticisation and sanitisation that can be seen to mark, in particular, the heroic traditions of classical antiquity and the Renaissance. It might be argued that how suicide is transformed into a symbol through its visual aestheticisation and sanitisation – by the bodies rendered ideal and intact – is echoed in the projection of the suicidal act onto effeminacy. The persistent shrouding of suicide in otherness appears simultaneously a protective measure shielding the viewer and a cultural form of denial. Suicide is made pleasurable to observe through its formal aestheticisation, a distance brought about by the ‘fictitiousness’ of representation and the ‘otherness’ of the suicidal other, and the exceptional nature of the characterising madness. The space created therein, between suicide and its representation, makes ‘the suicide of the other’ a domesticated social ill, perchance even a fictionalised social ill.⁷⁴

The visual regimes of suicide also act as instruments in the fantasy of the forbidden. As has been noted, a taboo is always simultaneously a fetish and a taboo. The visual regimes devoted to the taboo of suicide reveal the taboo’s Freudian emotional ambivalence of fascination and repulsion (Freud 1998), insofar as they function as a safe screen for fantasies. As has been argued by Stuart Hall, *the other* that is differentiated from the ‘I’ in an amalgamation of the characteristics expelled from the ideal of ‘I’ is often eroticised (Hall 2013b). This is evident in particular in the late-Renaissance and Victorian pictorial traditions. The depictions of the self-slaughtering hysteric and the suicidal prostitute display the ‘pornographic’ use of the taboo by providing a ‘site for pleasure’ in its canvas consisting of ‘pre-corrupted’ and tainted female flesh. Many a suicidal representation in contemporary film also brilliantly demonstrates the scopophilic fantasies evoked by what is prohibited. Although such sites of pleasure have diversified in post-modern media, the link between sexuality and death persists both as a moral narrative and as a narrative ploy through which the trauma caused by suicide is cushioned by a sex scene. Also in itself the contemporary ‘pornography of suicide’ – “the description of tabooed activities to produce hallucination or delusion” (Gorer 1965, 170, 169–175) – allows the viewer to marvel at the horror of the fictitious self-slaughter, increasingly graphic and spectacular, as it is expelled onto the image of *the other*. The fictive transgression projected into the other is, in this sense, a safe way of ‘indulging’ in the taboo.

Yet it must be remembered that suicide *is* also a social taboo, a form of death marked as *off-limits* and surrounded by the stigma of ‘bad’ death. Therefore, to continue with Ron Brown’s argument of the instrumental nature of suicide, the tabooed suicide has functioned as a vessel for differentiation. One can view images of suicide as having been used instrumentally to draw the line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in representations ranging from the subtle mockery of the self-slaughtering enemy in Greco-Roman victory monuments to Victorian illustrations of the *grande finale* to improper femininity, and to the effeminacy of the modern male homosexual in contemporary drama. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue in their literary carnival theory, *The politics and poetics of Transgression* (1986), those aspects that are considered ‘low’ in the cultural hierarchy are tied tendentiously to *the other* in cultural narratives, so that the ‘I,’ the protagonist with which the reader identifies, and which represents the ‘average’ class to be controlled, may walk out as untarnished as possible (Stallybrass & White 1986). Similarly, my small sample of contemporary films reveals it to be more than common to parallel the struggle of the protagonist with the suicide of a minor character marked and considered an ‘other’ in relation to him or her. The survival of the sexually ambivalent Rebecca is paralleled with the self-destruction of the sexually active, girl-devouring Ernessa in *The Moth Diaries*. In *The Reader* (2008), instead, the

⁷⁴ I have also talked about the fictionalisation of death in a previous article, that time as a cultural form of death-denial in which natural death is rendered as fictitious through an excessive imagery of violent death. (Kosonen 2014.)

healing of the sexually vitiated minor, grown up to become a lawyer, is paralleled with the eventual suicide of his abuser, a woman his senior, one accused of Nazi crimes.⁷⁵ The transgression of the other does not simply mark the other and elevate the 'I.' The parallelism is also didactic. I have noted how the Renaissance regime, consisting entirely of mythical characters as self-slaughterers, established a necessary distance by which the visual traditions marked suicide as off-limits to contemporary noble ladies. The inscription "Never shall Lucretia provide a precedent for unchaste women to escape what they deserve" encloses both the unchaste and chaste alike within its prohibition; the chastity of Lucretia has been bought in exchange for death *only* because of her paganism. While 'bad death' stigmatises 'the other,' and 'the low' marks otherness, the social hierarchy with its order and power relationships is reproduced and reinforced.

Finally, I contend that as suicide is made to mark otherness in domesticated representations of the taboo topic, and in differentiations between 'us' and 'them,' the recurring otherness of its representations also mark suicide. The link between *the other* and 'the low' sustains the social hierarchy, keeping the other at the bottom of the hierarchy and working at the same time to enforce the symbolic order at the core of the social order, thus marking the taboo with the stigma of *taboo*.⁷⁶ Stallybrass and White have noted the systematic abstraction of transgression in the class reformation of the nineteenth century, remarking on the use of transgressive others paralleled to 'us' in the literary narratives, in a process of purification and elevation of the newly formed urban middle-class (Stallybrass & White 1986). One may view the same abstracted transgression as having functioned in the fantasy of the sexually deviant suicidal prostitute of the same era, affecting social attitudes in a manner leading to the quite tangible social purification described by Lynda Nead (1988). In this manner, one may see the stigma of the taboo as having been formulated in the inter-discursive mythologies stressing the otherness – ethnicity, femininity, effeminacy, madness, sexual deviance, or other social anomaly – of the self-slaughterer. I suggest that the stigmatising function of the visual representations of suicide persists today, with suicide pushed into the fringe as the death of the marginal others – especially those of deviant gender and sexuality – as sad or fitting ending for the morally loose 'Robert Frobishers.' By presenting a connection to mental illness, to effeminate vulnerability, and to crime, the otherness of the self-slaughterers offers a secure distance to suicide, which in turn formulates self-annihilation as a paragon of bad death. In this abstract carnival, the taboo itself is domesticated and stigmatised, tamed for discourse but continuously made taboo as a practise.

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⁷⁵ Donaldson also notes how such parallel narratives appear in the eighteenth century literary versions of Lucretia after the ideological climate had cooled down. (Donaldson 1982, 40–102.) *The Reader* (2008) by Mirage Enterprises was directed by Stephen Daldry, and is based on a novel of the same name by Bernhard Schlink, adapted for the screen by David Hare. For *The Hours*, an earlier film with represented suicide from the same director, see footnote 47. For *The Moth Diaries*, see footnote 44.

⁷⁶ The problematic contemporary concept of the taboo omitted from the discourse could perchance be approached through a division, utilised here, between taboo and *taboo*, of the extra-discursive subject of the prohibition and the discursive labelling activity that marks it as such.

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II

HOLLYWOODIN NEKROMANSSI: NAISEN RUUMIISEEN KIINNITTYVÄ ITSEMURHA ELOKUVIEN SUKUPUOLIPOLITIIKKANA

['Hollywood's Gendered Politics of Death: Suicide's
Necromantic Embodiment through Female Figures']

by

Heidi Kosonen, 2017

Sukupuoli ja väkivalta: Lukemisen etiikkaa ja poetiikkaa
['Gender and Violence: The Ethics and Politics of Reading']

Edited by Sanna Karkulehto & Leena-Maija Rossi.

Helsinki: SKS, 2017, 95-118

<http://dx.doi.org/10.21435/skst.1431>

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Hollywoodin nekromanssi

Naisen ruumiiseen kiinnittyvä itsemurha elokuvien sukupuolipolitiikkana

Heidi Kosonen

Istun elokuvateatterissa, valmiina säikkymään M. Night Shyamalanin kauhuelokuvan *The Visit* (2015) äärellä, kun huomioni kiinnittyy otokseen teatterin tulevasta ohjelmistosta. Trendikästä näennäisdokumenttaarisuutta tavoittelevan *Unfriended*-kauhuelokuvan (2014) trailerissa mielenkiintoni herättää verkkokiusaamisen tähden itsensä surmaava hahmo, teinityttö, joka palaa kuolinpäivänään hautomaan kosta haudan takaa. Trailerin puhuttelu varoittaa: ”Online, your memories last forever. But so do your mistakes”¹ mutta jättää määrittelemättä, kenen virheistä se puhuu – koston kierteestä itsensä löytävien verkkokiusaajien, itsensä surmanneen Laura Barnsin (Heather Sossaman) vai kenties katsojien. Barnsin monet harha-askeleet juopumustilasta kevytkenkäisyyteen on tallennettu kulovalkean lailla leviävään YouTube-videoon, ja ne johtavat elokuvan kauhistuttavaan, yhtä lailla viraalisti leviävään alkulaukaukseen.

Olen viettänyt aikaa pohtien ja tarkastellen itsemurhaa ja sen kuvallisia esityksiä – milloin taiteellisia, milloin populaareja – kutakuinkin

¹ ”Verkossa muistosi elävät ikuisesti, mutta niin elävät myös virheesi.” Kaikki artikkelin suomennokset ovat omiani.

vuodesta 2007 saakka niin etnologiatieteiden kuin taidehistorian näkökulmasta. Siten myös *Unfriended*-elokuvaa minulle myyvässä trailerissa on paljon tuttuja ja välittömästi paikannettavia elementtejä, jotka kytkevät elokuvan esityksen itsemurhaa käsittelevään ja kuvaavaan historialliseen jatkumoon. Itsemurha itsessään on kauhugenren vakioaiheita, sillä sitä perinteisesti ja liki-universaalisti määrittänyt ”pahan kuoleman” leima tekee siitä juuri sopivan numeron hirvitysten spektaakkeliin: tilapäistä transgressiota eli rajanylitystä ja järkytetyksi tulemisen hekumaa myyvälle kauhuelokuvalla itsemurhan kaltaiset tabut ovat käypää valuutaa. Mikäli pornografia ymmärretään kielletyn hedelmän kiihotushakuiseksi esitykseksi, solahtaa kielletyksi ja vaietuksi mielletty – ja juuri sellaisena kiehtova – itsemurha oivallisesti osaksi väkivaltaisen kuoleman pornografisesti kutkuttavaa valtamediaspektaakkelia. Geoffrey Gorerin (1965, 170) ”kuoleman pornografia” onkin toimiva käsite paikannettaessa kuvastoja, joiden paljous lyö helposti ällikällä itsemurhan tabuasemaan tottuneet.

Itsemurhan kuvaaminen tai kuvallistaminen kuitenkin vaatii omat näyttämönsä ja näyttämökohtaiset norminsa. Kauhuelokuvan itsemurhaesitykset edustavat aihettaan kenties vapaimmillaan, tai pikemminkin: ne onnistuvat ylläpitämään uskottavimmin normeista vapaan säännöttömyyden illuusiota. Toki elokuvien itsemurhakiinnostukselle voisi väittää olevan myös muita syitä kuin puhdas ”pahan kuoleman” tabuluonteella mässäily. Juuri kauhun voi esimerkiksi nähdä työstävän ja kuvittavan sellaisia pelkoja, joita on historiallisesti liitetty kuolemaan ja väkivaltaisesti ennen aikojaan kuolleisiin vainajiin ja näiden vaarallisiin ”energiajäämistöihin”.

Itsemurha on varsin näkyvässä roolissa myös kauhugenren ulkopuolella, jossa sen traumaa käsitellään usein toisista näkökulmista ja toisenlaisin sisällöin. Itsemurhaa vakavasti otettavana ilmiönä tarkastelevat elokuvat ovat kuitenkin harvassa, ja useammin ”pahan kuoleman” shokkiarvo ja stigma palautuvat palvelemaan elokuvaa metaforana tai instrumenttina. Tällaisissa valtavirtaa edustavissa, itsemurhaa instrumentiksi ja metaforaksi pelkistävissä esityksissä itsemurha typistyy nimenomaan tabuksi, merkiksi, allegoriaksi tai narratiiviseksi strategiaksi eikä tule käsitellyksi moniulotteisena ilmiönä (Kosonen 2011,

35–94; 2015, 29). Itsemurhan konventioiden kumouksellisesta ympäri kääntämisestä kiinnostuneelle katsojalle otollisempia kohteita tapaa-
vat olla kauhun ulkopuoliset genret, joten tartun myös *Unfriended*-
kauhuelokuvaan itsemurhan välineellistämisen ja kotoistamisen käy-
töntöjen malliesimerkkinä.²

Elokuva kuitenkin pyörittää trailerinsa lupauksen itsemurhan ”nekro-
manttisesta” speaktaakkelista ja tuo mielenkiintoisella tavalla näkyväksi
genrerajat ylittävää, vuosisatoja vanhaa kulttuuriperinnettä, jossa itse-
murha kiinnittyy monimerkityksellisellä tavalla seksiin ja seksuaalisuu-
teen. Samalla se syventää itsemurhan sidosta feminiinisyyteen, ja teon
epäkypsyyttä painottavassa nykykontekstissa se liittyy kuolemanhalun
ja itsetuhon tyttöyteen. Tarkastelenkin tässä artikkelissa *Unfriended*-
elokuvan tarjoamien yhtymäkohtien välityksellä itsemurhan kytkeyty-
mistä feminiinisyyteen ja sitä myötä seksiin ja seksuaalisuuteen kuva-
kulttuurin historiallisessa jatkumossa sekä nykyelokuvan didaktisissa,
nekromanttisissa ja moraalisisissa tarinoissa. Tavoitteenani on lopulta
kytkeä feminisoitu itsemurha tabuun, jonka kuvakulttuuriset mekanis-
mit havainnollistuvat nähdäkseni juuri itsemurhan naiseutetuissa ja
toiseutetuissa kuvastoissa.

Itsemurhan eroottinen talous

Elokuvatutkija Michele Aaron on hahmottanut elokuvallista kuoleman
politiikkaa teoksessaan *Death and the Moving Image* (2014) ja sanallista-
nut Hollywoodin kiinnostuksen kuolleiden naisten ruumiisiin ”nekro-

2 Itsemurhan välineellistämistä puhuessani viittaan yleiseen tapaan valjastaa itsemurhan shokkiarvo ja sen ”pahan kuoleman” leima palvelemaan yhtäältä huomiotaloutta ja toisaalta esimerkiksi vaikka-
pa didaktiikan tai sosiaalisen kritiikin välineenä (ks. Kosonen 2011, 75–86; 2015, 29). Kotoistamisen
käsitteen olen puolestani lainannut Sanna Karkulehdolta, joka määrittelee tämän seksuaalisuuden
julkiseksi kesyttämiseksi (Karkulehto 2011, 105–122). Kotoistaminen käytäntönä säätelee myös mui-
den tabuaihioiden käsittelyä, vaikka sen käytänteet paikoin vaihtelevatkin. Itsemurhan kuvastoissa
yleisiä (usein ryppäinä esiintyviä) kotoistamisen käytäntöjä ovat esimerkiksi estetisointi, esteettinen
härmistäminen (alentaminen, ylevöittäminen vastakohta, vrt. Black 1991; Ylönen 2016, 21), fiktivisointi
(Kosonen 2014) ja, kenties paradoksaalisen kuuloisesti: etäännytytys ja toiseuttaminen (Kosonen 2015,
50–52), joista kahta jälkimmäistä sivuan myös tässä artikkelissa.

mantismiksi”, jonka suomennan tässä kuoleman halutaloudeksi.³ Aaronin kuvaileman elokuvan ”nekromanttis-eroottisen” halutalouden voi nähdä sekä romantisoivan kuolemaa että erotisoivan naista tämän vartalon välityksellä tuotetussa kuoleman speaktaakkelissa – myös vastaavassa itsemurhan speaktaakkelissa (Aaron 2014, 40–68).⁴ Jos objektin asemaan tuomitun naisen pääasiallinen tehtävä Hollywood-elokuvan taantumuksellisilla valkokankailla on näyttää hyvältä, hän toimii kuolleenakin miehisen halun ja melankolian nuoruuteen jähmetettynä kiinnittymiskohteena. Siten kuoleman elokuvallinen halutalous toistaa visuaalisen kulttuurin sukupuolittunutta jakoa katsojiin ja katsottuihin, miestoimijoihin ja naisobjekteihin (esim. Mulvey 1989; de Lauretis 1987).

Toisaalta elokuva flirttailee juuri itsemurhan kanssa sitomalla sen traagiseen rakkauteen liki säännönmukaisessa troopissa⁵, jossa nainen valitsee kuoleman onnettoman rakkauden ja mies kunnian tähden (Canetto 1993; Kosonen 2015; Stack & Lester (toim.) 2009; Stack & Bowman 2012). Vastavuoroisesti molemmat syöksyvät kuolemaan häpeästä, joskin eri syistä: nainen siveytensä ja mies kasvojensa menetyksen tähden. Tällöinkin sukupuolieroa tuottavalle ja vahvistavalle elokuvateollisuudelle tavanomainen jako miehen aktiiviseen toimijan rooliin ja naisen miehestä riippuvaiseen objektiasemaan säilyy, ja nekromanttisen itsemurhatalouden voi väittää osallistuvan oleellisella tavalla kaksinapaisen sukupuolijärjestelmän ylläpitämiseen samalla, kun se muovaa kuolemaan ja itsemurhaan liittyviä käsityksiämme.

Elokuvan ilmentämä viehätys naisten kuolleisiin ruumisiin ja romantiikalle alttiisiin mieliin ei ole uusi ilmiö, vaan juurtuu (kuva)kulttuu-

3 Halutalouden, eroottista halua tuottavan ja hyödyntävän talouden, käsite mahdollistaa mielestäni ”ikiaikaisen” nekromantismien paikantamisen osaksi nykykontekstia. Kuoleman halutaloutena käsite on toki siinä mielessä harhaanjohtava, että kuoleman itsessään ei toivota tuottuvan elokuvan halutaloudessa ”thanaattiseksi vietiksi”. Kuolema toimii pikemminkin halutaloudessa kuin halutaloutena: yhtäältä se välineellistyy eroottisen halun instrumentiksi ja toisaalta tulee eroottisen halun myötä kotoistetuksi.

4 Aaron selvittää itse käsitettä seuraavasti: ”Nekromantismilla en tarkoita pelkästään tapaa kuvata naista houkuttelevan ja enteellisen eteerisenä, vaan – jopa suoraviivaisemmin – viitataan siihen tapaan, jolla naisessa ruumiillistuu tietynlainen romanssi kuoleman kanssa. Huomiomme on tällöin pysyvässä, kiertävässä ja kierratetyssä eroottisessa taloudessa, jossa ’kuoletettava’ nainen toimii rakastettuna speaktaakkelina, muusana ja etenkin miehisen halun ja epätoivon heijastumana.” (Aaron 2014, 52.)

5 Troopin käsite kuvaa sellaisia elementtejä ja kerronnallisia mekanismeja, jotka ovat toisteisia ja tunnistettavia, tietyllä tavalla luku- ja katselukokemusta normalisoivia (vrt. klisee).

riseen historiaan, jonka voidaan nähdä naisistuneen itsemurhakuvas-
ton osalta keskiaikaisen kuvakiellon hellittäessä (Brown 2001, 88–123;
Krysinska 2009, 23–26; vrt. myös Bronfen 1992; Higonet 1986). Yksi
todennäköinen syy itsemurhan esitysten vaivihkaiselle naisistumiselle
on löydettävissä mielen medikalisaatiosta. Renessanssin aikana itse-
murha alkoi siirtyä kirkon huomasta tieteellisen tarkkailun alaiseksi,
ja juuri lääketieteen opit muovasivat paheksutun kuolemanhalun seu-
raukseksi mielen feminiinisestä heikkoudesta. Itsetuhon motiiveiksi
löydettiin sellaisia sukupuolittuneita ”syntejä” kuten *luxuria*, himon ja
turhamaisuuden punos, joka näyttäytyi sekä epäsovinnaisena seksuaa-
lisuutena että feminiinisenä koreiluna, ja *hysteria*, melankolian femiini-
ninen ja alennettu vastine (Brown 2001, 88–123; Minois 1999, 241–247;
vrt. Uimonen 2000). Kuvakulttuurin voidaan puolestaan nähdä naisis-
taneen käsityksiä itsemurhasta edelleen.

Tässä prosessissa halutaloudella on eittämättä ollut roolinsa: femi-
niininen itsemurhakuvas-
to monine saavuttamattomine fantasioineen
on vaikuttanut läntiseen eroottiseen talouteen ja sen auliiseen ruu-
miin speaktaakkeliin aina renessanssista lähtien (Brown 2001, 88–123;
Wolfthal 1999). Yhtäältä juuri antiikista lainatut itsemurhatopokset
osallistuvat alastoman ruumiin uuteen tulemiseen taiteessa. Toisaalta
tämä ruumiin speaktaakkeli ”steriloi” itsemurhan kuvaa naiskauneuden
välityksellä (ks. myös Kosonen 2015, 50–52). Etenkin Stuart Hallin
(1997b) huomiot ”eksotisoidun toisen” vartaloon kiinnittyvästä spek-
taakkelistä ovat tässä kontekstissa osuvia: uudesta aikakaudesta lähtien
kiellettyyn kuolemaan ryntäävät etenkin vieraisiin kulttuureihin ja aika-
kausiin etäännytettyt naiset, jotka ovat helppoja kohteita halutaloudelle
toiseutensa, ”syntisyytensä” ja myös itsemurhakohtaloidensa tähden
(ks. myös Kosonen 2015, 50–52; vrt. Gates 1988, 22).

Tämän historiallisen – itsemurhan, sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden
välisen – punoksen voi nähdä toistuvan nykyelokuvan hahmoissa,
narratiiveissa, troopeissa ja kuvaamisen konventioissa jopa siinä mää-
rin, että itsemurha määrittänyt elokuvassa feminiiniseksi. Väitettä oma-
ehtoisen kuoleman feminiinisydestä on tosin pohjustettava muutamin
tarkennuksin. Ensiksikin, puhuttaessa feminiinisenä näyttäytyvästä
itsemurhasta puhutaan egoistisen itsemurhan kuvauksista suhteessa

altruistisiin. Jaottelu nojaa kuuluisaan durkheimilaiseen erontekoon (Durkheim 1966, 145–240), joka määräytyy vallitsevan sosiaaliseen rakenteen kautta ja arvioi itsemurhan ”itsekkyyttä” tai ”epäitsekkyyttä” suhteessa yksilön rooliin yhteisössä eikä niinkään suhteessa kuolemaa arvottavaan moraaliin ja hyötyajatteluun, kuten usein tulkitaan. Tiukan yhteisösidoksiseen ja yhteisön normikoodistoon kytkeytyvään altruistiseen itsemurhaan on kuitenkin kautta aikain liittynyt sellaisia sosiaalisia rakenteita ja kuvaamisen konventioita, jotka paikantavat sen moraalisesti arvottavaan viitekehykseen: heroisen maskuliinisuuden areenoille. Paikoin nämä konventiot jopa määrittelevät sen marttyrikuolemaksi poissulkevassa suhteessa itsemurhaan (Brown 2001, 49–55; Camile 1989; Kosonen 2011, 22–25; 2015, 32–35). Tällöinkin altruistinen kuolema on usein miehinen.

Altruistisen tai toisten puolesta uhrautuvan viitekehyksen toistensa puolesta kuolevia ”aseveljiä” asetellaan yhä nykyelokuvassa marttyrikuoleman kuvastoon (Stack & Bowman 2009c; 2012). Tämä häivyttää heidän kuolemiensa kytköksiä itsemurhaan. Altruistinen itsemurha on kuitenkin nykykulttuurin kuvastoissa melko harvinainen suhteessa egoistisen itsemurhan kuvauksiin, joka tapaa näyttäytyä eri tavoin naisisena vastapainona altruistisen viitekehyksen heroiselle maskuliinisuudelle. Koska löyhästä sosiaalisesta rakenteesta kumpuava yksilökeskeinen, egoistinen itsemurha on usein määrittynyt selittämättömäksi suhteessa altruistiseen, se on kerännyt itseensä itsemurhan mysteeria selittäneiden instituutioiden kierrättämiä demonisoivia ja patologisoivia määreitä. Monet näistä määreistä onkin kytketty naissukupuoleen jo mainitussa renessanssista käynnistyneessä lääketieteellistymisen prosessissa – ellei jo sitä edeltäneessä kansanperinteessä.

Kuvattaessa itsemurhan kuvauksia feminiinisiksi puhutaan siten ensinnäkin juuri itsekkään, naisiseksi määrittyneen itsemurhan kuvauksista suhteessa uhrautuvan itsemurhan kuvauksiin. Toisekseen kyse on vaaralliseksi koetun kuoleman kuvaamista säätelevistä konventioista ja normeista, jotka ovat historiallisesti rakentuneita ja tapaavat nojata sukupuolijärjestelmään. Kuvaamisen konventiot säätelevätkin sekä itsemurhan näkyvyyttä että sen näkyvyyden muotoja: itsensä surmaavia, itsemurhaa suunnittelevia ja yrittäviä mies- ja naishahmoja

lienee valkokankaan narratiiveissa kutakuinkin sama määrä, mutta elokuvan konventiot sekä keskittyvät enemmän naishahmoihin että värittävät itsemurhaan sortuvia mieshahmoja eri tavoin feminiinisiksi. Kulttuuristen representaatioiden historia antaa tässä malleja itsemurhan esittämiseen feminiinisenä ja alennettuna, ja niiden jalanjäljissä kovin monet nykyelokuvan esitykset paitsi feminisoivat myös marginalisoivat, infantilisoivat ja ”homosoivat” itsensä surmaavia hahmoja erilaisin juonikuvioin, rinnastuksin ja ominaisuuksin (ks. myös Kosonen 2015).

On tavallaan epämurkavaa määrittää nykyelokuvassa ”itsekkäästi” tai ”itsekeskeisesti” itsensä surmaavaa tai itsensä surmaamista harkitsevaa mieshahmoa feminisoiduksi tai homosoiduksi. Tämä määrittäminen välttelee sellaista vastakarvaista luentaa, joka sallisi elokuvan miesfiguurien vaikkapa kuolla rakkaudesta, ilmaista sensitiivisyyttään tai työskennellä naisvaltaisella alalla vailla sukupuolijärjestelmään sisäänrakennettua arvottomuutta. On kuitenkin selvää, että suhteessa kunniakuoleman vakiintuneisiin konventioihin ja nykyelokuvassa vallitsevaan, yhtäältä ”äijäilyn” ja toisaalta nekromantismin muodostamaan kontekstiin esimerkiksi legendaarinen *Kuolleiden runoilijoiden seura* (1989) tai tuoreempi *Elizabethtown* (2005) hakevat itsemurhahalun kanssa kamppaileville mieshahmoilleen oikeutusta niitä joko tilapäisesti tai pysyvästi alentavasta seksuaaliambivalenssista.⁶

Toki tähänkin sääntöön on poikkeuksensa. Miestaiteilijoita, jotka voisi tässä yhteydessä nähdä sukupuolianaomaalisen sensitiivisyytensä ja marginaalisen sosiaalisen asemansa pelastamiksi, puetaan egoistisissa kuvastoissa yhä glorifioidun sijaiskärsijän rooliin (Kosonen 2015, 49; Brown 2001, 138–141; Stack & Bowman 2009d). Itsemurhaan päättyvä taiteilijaneromyytti (ks. Lepistö 1991, 42–46; Wittkower & Wittkower 1969) linkittyy muiden puolesta uhrautuvan kunniakuoleman lailla kristilliseen kärsimysnäytelmään ja marttyyriuden ajatukseen, ja siten se osallistuu itsemurhaa feminiinisenä tekona tuottavaan kuvakulttuurin valtavirtaan pikemmin kunnian kuin arvonalennuksen välityksellä.

6 *Kuolleiden runoilijan seurassa* paljastavasti Puck-keijun rooliin asetellun päähahmon, Neilin, itsemurhaa selitetään usein kaappihomoseksuaalisuuden motiivilla (ks. esim. Burt 1997, 263–274; Hammond 1993). *Elizabethtownin* Drew puolestaan ajautuu itsemurhan partaalle muotimaailmaan sijoittuvan uraepäonnistumisen myötä ja lopulta pelastuu itsemurhalla heteroromanssin välityksellä.

Paitsi että itsemurhan kanssa kamppaileviin mieshahmoihin liitetään kulttuurisesti rakentuneita naiseuden piirteitä, itsemurha sukupuolittuu myös elokuvan tavoissa kuvata mies- ja naihahmojen itsemurhakuolemia ja -halua. Elokuvasa tätä halua tavalla tai toisella ilmentävien hahmojen kohtalot kiertyvät usein toisiinsa rinnastuksissa, joiden avulla itsemurha etäännytetään sivurooleihin päähenkilöiden vastavuoroisesti pelastuessa. Vaikka tilastojen perusteella miehet onnistuvat naisia useammin itsemurhayrityksessään, elokuvan fiktiossa miehen voi väittää useammin toipuvan tilapäisestä itsetuhostaan ja naisiseksi esitetystä heikkoudestaan kuin naisen.⁷ Nainen syöksyykin varsin usein kuolemaan miespäähenkilön asemesta.

Usein elokuvan rinnasteinen itsemurha syntyy juuri sukupuolisen vastakkainasettelun kierteissä ja suhteessa heterohaluun. Elokuvan narratiiveissa naisen rakkaudella on usein valta pelastaa miehet itsemurhalta ja syöstä naiset itsemurhaan. Miehen järjellä, niin lääkäreiden kuin rakastajien rooleissa, on puolestaan valta ohjata syöksykierteessä olevat ”maaniset keijukaistytöt” (*manic pixie dream girls*)⁸ oikealle raiteelle. Toki sukupuolittunut vastakkainasettelu toimii toisinkin päin: romanttisten tunteiden kohteena olleen naisen itsemurha saattaa ajaa miehen allegoriseen itsetuhon kierteeseen, ja isän omaehtoinen kuolema selittää nuoren naisen itsemurha-alttiutta (ks. myös Kosonen, 2015, 40–43). Riippumatta siitä, miten sukupuolet on pää- ja sivurooleihin sekä rinnasteisiin positioihin asemoitu, kameralla on tapana tehdä speaktaakkeli juuri naisen itsetuhosta. Niin myös kauhuelokuvassa *Unfriended*, jossa kohdattava – kauhuelokuville ominainen ja monesta folkloresta tuttu – pahantahtoinen itsemurhaajan henkiolento on teini-ikäinen tyttö.

7 Itsemurhakuolemien tilastointi on kuitenkin hankalaa, joten myös tilastojen rakentamaan sukupuoli-asetelmaan tulee suhtautua epäillen. Sylvia Canetto onkin tarkastellut tilastoihin rakennettavaa kuvaa itsemurhasta kulttuurisena mytologiana, joka ”palkitsee” miehiä itsemurhassa onnistumisesta ja ”rankaisee” naisia siinä epäonnistumisesta (Canetto 1993; ks myös. Jaworski 2010; 2014).

8 Termi viittaa elokuvakriitikko Nathan Rabinin (2007) tunnistamaan ja nimeämään ”manic pixie dream girlin” hahmotyyppiin.

Unfriended: häväistyn teinitytön itsemurha ja kosto

Pseudodokumentaarinen *Unfriended* on siinä mielessä oivaltava kauhu-elokuva, että se sijoittuu kokonaan nuoren päähenkilönsä kannettavan tietokoneen näytölle. Tarina etenee tietokoneen sovelluksissa: seuraamme ”reaaliajassa”, kun päähenkilö keskustelee ystäviensä kanssa Skypeissa, iChatissa ja Facebookissa, katsoo videoita LiveLeakista ja YouTubeista, suorittaa hakuja Googlessa ja kuuntelee musiikkia Spotifyssa. POV-näkökulma kutsuu katsojaa samaistumaan nuoren käyttäjän kokemukseen.⁹ Dialogi on usein äänetöntä, ja hahmon vuorosanat hapuilevat sovellusten tekstikentissä ennen kuin tulevat lähetetyiksi, jos tulevat lähetetyiksi laisinkaan. Samalla kun *Unfriended* kuvittaa väkivaltaisen kuoleman traumaa, se heijastelee ja hyödyntää uuteen teknologiaan liitettyjä pelkoja: elokuvassa henkiolento ei vaani tienristeyksessä vaan internetissä ja sosiaalisessa mediassa.

Elokuva alkaa tuntemattoman käyttäjän myöntyessä LiveLeakin ikätodennukseen ja siirtyessä katsomaan käsivaralla kuvattua videota, jossa pikselöitynyt hahmo ampuu itsensä koulun urheilukentän laidalla. LiveLeakista puolestaan johtaa linkki YouTubeen, jonne ladatun videon montaaasissa tiivistyy teini-ikäisen tytön häpeään päättynyt ilta nuorten bileissä. Humaltuneena ja niukasti pukeutuneena tämä pelehtii poikien kanssa ja haastaa riitaa. Kumpaakin videoista yhdistää nimi Laura Barns, ja kuten LiveLeakin kuvausteksti vihjaa, videot viittaavat traagiseen syy-seurausketjuun.¹⁰ Häpäisyn voi helposti kuvitella johtaneen tytön itsemurhan partaalle: videoista jälkimmäisen huomattavan julmana nimenä on ”LAURA BARNS KILL URSELF”,¹¹ ja sen kommenttiketju huokuu samanhenkistä vihapuhetta. Verkossa surffaavaa hahmoa asemoidaan itsemurhauhrin sydänystäväksi, ja kuten Facebookin ja LiveLeakin päivämäärät paljastavat tarkkasilmäiselle katsojalle, on kulunut täsmälleen vuosi Laura Barnsin kuolemasta.

9 POV (Point of view -shot) on varsinkin kauhugenrelle yleinen ”näkökulmaotos”, jossa kamera asemoidaan mallintamaan halutun henkilöhahmon kuvakulmaa.

10 Molemmat sivuista, joilla tuntematon käyttäjä on vierailut (Laura Barns Suicide; Laura Barns Kill Urself) – kuten muutkin elokuvassa vierailut verkkosivut – löytyvät edelleen internetistä. LiveLeakin video on kylläkin poistettu.

11 Julma otsikko on suomennettavissa puhekielellä: LAURA BARNS TAPA ITTES.

Päähenkilö on edennyt noin puoliväliin Youtuben häpäisyvideota, kun videon keskeyttää Skype-puhelu nuorukaiselta nimeltä Mitch Roussel (Moses Storm). Videopuhelu mahdollistaa myös toistaiseksi POV-näkökulman taakse piiloutuneeseen päähahmoon tutustumisen: tämä on teini-ikäinen tyttö, käyttäjätunnukseltaan Blaire Lily (Shelley Henning). Puhelulla on intiimin seksuaalinen vire, joka antaa ymmärtää, että tietokoneella operoiva Blaire ja tälle soittanut Mitch eivät ole pelkkiä ystäviä. Puhelu hipookin jo esileikin rajoja kunnes keskeytyy häpeään Blairen juuri katsoman häväistysvideon lailla: yhtäkkiä intiimiin keskusteluun liittyvät Blairen ja Mitchin kolme ystävää. Nuoret säntäävät videonäkymästä puolipukeissa, kokoavat itsensä ja palaavat sitten keskusteluun – vain löytääkseen keskusteluringistä ylimääräisen, kasvottoman Skype-profiilin.

Outo profiili hämmentää ystävyksiä. Luullen sitä toimintavirheeksi he sammuttavat Skype-yhteyden korjatakseen ongelman, mikä antaa Mitchille ja Blairelle aikaa prosessoida nolostustaan. Virheprofiili ei kuitenkaan häviä keskustelusta korjaustoimenpiteillä, vaan ystäväysten keskustelu jatkuu oudon profiilin läsnäollessa. Tilanteen pahaenteisyyttä painottaa Mitchin ja Blairen tekemä johtopäätös, että jos kumpikaan heistä ei hyväksynyt kolmen ystävänsä soittopyyntöä, heidän kokemansa nolostuksen taustalla on ulkopuolinen toimija. Pian Blairen inboxiin myös ilmestyy yksityisviesti vuosi sitten kuolleen Laura Barnsin Facebook-tililtä: kuin Lauran vuosipäivän kunniaksi avatar tiedusteleo Blairelta häpäisyvideon lataajan identiteettiä. Varmana siitä, että Lauran käyttäjätili on hakkeroitu, Blaire yrittää Mitchin yllyttämänä muuntaa Lauran sivun muistosivuksi, mutta törmää outoihin teknisiin ongelmiin. Lopulta hän päätyy poistamaan Lauran kaverilistaltaan. ”Pois-frendaus” ei kuitenkaan estä Laura Barnsin nimimerkin taakse piiloutuvaa hahmoa jatkamasta Blairen kiusaamista viesteillään.

Blaire tulkitsee tilanteen uudelleen käytännön pilaksi ja kutsuu Skypen puhelurinkiin myös kuudennen osallistujan, elokuvista tuttua stereotyyppiä mukailevan teinikuningatarhahmo Valin, jonka hän epäilee piileskelevän tilanteen taustalla. Val ei vaikuta olevan ystäväysten suosiossa, mutta kiistää kuitenkin olevansa syyllinen. Oudot verkko-

tapahtumat vain jatkuvat. Ensin ystävyksistä ilmestyy Facebookiin noloja bilekuvia, joita kukaan heistä ei myönnä julkaisseensa saati pysty poistamaan. Sitten Skypen kasvoton profiili rikkoo hiljaisuuden ja alkaa kiusata keskustelua vihamielisillä viesteillä, jotka saavat ystävysten välit rakoilemaan. Sekä Skype-profilin että Laura Barnsin Facebook-käyttäjätilin takaa paljastuukin itsensä surmanneen Lauran henkiolento, joka on palannut vaatimaan vastuunottoa kuolemaansa johtaneesta verkkokiusaamisesta.

Lauran julkitulon myötä ystävysten Skype-sessio muuttuu slasher-elokuvan konventioita mukailevaksi yliluonnolliseksi ajojahdiksi.¹² Armotoman totuusleikin ohessa Lauran räyhähenki etsii syyllistä häpäisyn kierteen laukaiseen videon lataamiselle internetiin ja vaatii samalla ystävyksiä tilille näiden tekopyhyydestä. Vielä kuolleenakin Lauran virheet elävät yhä verkossa; nyt verkossa saa elää myös hänen kostonsa. On hänet pettäneiden ystävien aika päätyä virheistään ”nettiin” ja maksaa Lauran kuolemasta omalla kuolemallaan. Verkkoteknologioita yliluonnollisesti halliten Lauran poltergeist niittää ystävyksiä yksi kerrallaan, toinen toistaan hirvittävämmiin tavoin, kunnes yksikään ei jää eloon – ei edes puhtoisena näyttäytynyt Blaire. Tämän neitseellinen ulkokultaus onkin elokuvan kuluessa rapissut, kaikkien transgressioiden tultua julki. Juuri perinteisen ”jäljelle jääneen tytön” (*final girl*) rooliin aseteltu Blaire paljastuu lopussa kuolemaan johtaneen videon kuvaajaksi. Viimeisessä kuvassa kameraan ilmestyyvä haudantakainen kammotus, ainoa näkyvämmme tuonpuoleiseen Laura Barnsiin, palaa vielä vaatimaan Blairea – ja elokuvakatsojaa – vastuuseen ja virittää samalla odotukset elokuvan jatko-osalle.

12 *Unfriended*-kauhua onkin aiheellista tulkita myös slasher-elokuvan kontekstissa, sillä siinä toteutuvat monet lajityypin formalistisen määritelmän mukaiset elementit murhien toisteisuudesta niiden menneeseen aikaan sijoittuvaan motiiviin, jonka vuosipäivä aktivoi. Pinnalla ovat etenkin ne klassiset seksuaalisen ja sukupuolisen esittämisen konventiot, joissa seksuaalisuus rinnastetaan kuolemaan ja joilta yksinomaan ”jäljelle jäävä tyttö” onnistuu pakenemaan. Näillä *Unfriended*-elokuvan kauhukin tietoisesti ja jälkimodernin slasherin kapinalle ominaisesti leikittelee, ennen kuin kääntää ne ylösalaisin (Clover 1992; Dika, 1985, Petridis 2014).

Laura Barns, Julie Gianni ja elokuvan oppi seksuaalimoraalista

Teinitytön itsemurhan ympärille kiertyvä *Unfriended*-elokuva kytkeytyy paitsi itsemurhan naisisen kuvahistorian pitkään jatkumoon myös topoksen 2000-luvulla tuotettuja elokuvia yhdistävään ”trendiin”, joka paikantaa itsemurha-alttiuden nuoruuteen. Nykyelokuvassa nuoruus tarkoittaa liki poikkeuksetta tyttöyttä tai homoseksuaalista nuoruutta, ja tämänkaltaisiin hahmoihin liittyvän feminiinisuuden ja nuoruuden epäkypsyyden stigmojen kerronnallistaminen on usein nähtävissä yrityksenä opettaa mahdolliseen riskiryhmään kuuluvia nuoria katsojia elämään.¹³

Nuorisoa ei kuitenkaan opeteta yksinomaan elämään, vaan elämään normin mukaisesti. Rinnakkaisten narratiivien välityksellä itsemurhaelokuvien nuoret hahmot löytävät oman sosiaalisen lokeronsa ja omakusuvat siihen liittyvät, käyttäytymistään säätelevät koodit. Tiukimmat opit koskevat usein sukupuoliperformanssia ja siihen tiiviisti linkittyvää seksuaalista normikoodistoa. Siten elokuvat myös vahvistavat sukupuoli-järjestystä ja toimivat seksuaalisuuden moraalinvartijoina. Myös tämänkaltaisessa itsemurhakuoston välityksellä siirrettyssä ”seksuaaliopissa” kulttuurihistoria toistuu. Jo renessanssin naisistuvat kuvaperinteet lupasivat nekromanttisen kiihokkeen lisäksi tietyille yleisöilleen moraalisia oppitunteja siveydessä (Donaldson 1982; Wolfthal 1999).

Nykykontekstisissä on huomattavaa, miten monet nykyelokuvat – eivät pelkästään edellä mainitut nuorisoelokuvat – muovaavat itsemurhasta seurauksen ja rangaistuksen ”vääränlaiselle” seksuaalisuudelle. Tässä ne versioivat etenkin viktoriaanisen aikakauden moraalitauluja,

¹³ Nuorisoelokuvan enemmän tai vähemmän didaktiset yritykset liittyvät teini-ikäisten tyttöjen ja homoseksuaalisten nuorten riskiryhmiksi tulkittuun asemaan. Huolella homoseksuaalisten nuorten itsemurhakuolleisuudesta on jo pidemmät juuret (ks. esim. *It Gets Better* -kampanja, 2010–), kun taas tyttöjen globaalisti lisääntyneet itsemurhamäärät ovat vastikään nousseet uutisotsikoihin. Ottaen huomioon nykyesitysten alkujuuren ja luonteen lienee silti todennäköisempää, että elokuvan kiinnittyminen *jeuneen* asettuu itsemurhaa alentavaan jatkumoon osana yleistä myyttiä (Alvarez 1970, 79–86). Tällöin elokuva asettuu vastakkain printtimedian otsikoiden heijasteleman huolen kanssa, osin siihen vastaten, mutta kenties osaltaan huolta myös tuottaen. HLBT-nuorisoa uhriuttavia itsemurharepresentaatiota kritisoivatkin muun muassa Rob Cover (2012a, 2012b, 2013), Dustin Goltz (2013), Katrina Jaworski (2014) Daniel Marshall (2010) ja Eric Rofes (1983).

joissa halutaloudessa muovautunut ”häpeäkuolema” näyttäytyy rangaistuksena prostituutiosta, seksuaalisten harha-askeiden väistämättömänä seurauksena (esim. Anderson 1987; Gates 1988; Higonet 1986; Nead 1982; 1988; Nicoletti 2004). Osa elokuvien narratiiveista toistaa tarinaa prostituoidun itsetuhosta sellaisenaan (Campbell 2006, 360–80), mutta itsemurhan representaatiot vahvistavat heterosuhteeseen sidottua normatiivista halua myös muilla tavoin. Itsemurha muun muassa alentaa naisia asettumalla rajaksi hyvän ja huonon vanhemmuuden välille (esim. *Poika*, 2002; *Cake*, 2014). Se myös rankaisee kielletystä halusta, joka saattaa olla liiallista (*Melkein julkkis*, 2002; *Vanilla Sky*, 2001), homoseksuaalista (*The Moth Diaries*, 2011; *Alaston totuus*, 2005), pedofiilistä (*Little Children*, 2006; *Lukija*, 2008) tai inestuaalista (*Shame*, 2011; *The Royal Tenenbaums*, 2001). Elokuvien yleiset kliseehahmot hullusta hysteerikosta melankoliseen homomieheen ovatkin usein seksuaalisesti aktiivisia ja siitä rangaistavia. Elokuvan prostituutionarratiiveja tarkastelut Russell Campbell kuvaa elokuvan toistamaa kohtaloa seuraavasti: ”Kerta toisensa jälkeen elokuvat ohjaavat patriarkaalista järjestystä vastustavan naishahmon kohti rituaalista kuolemaa. – Jos elokuvan mikä tahansa naishahmo on avoimen seksuaalinen, hänen kevytkenkäinen käytöksensä kuvataan kutsuna väkivaltaan (Campbell 2006, 361–362).”

Muun muassa raiskauksen ja kevytkenkäisyyden kuvastoilla pelaavan *Unfriended*-elokuvan voi rinnastaa useaan sellaiseen kuvaperinteeseen ja lajityyppiin, jotka järjeistävät itsemurhaa seksuaalisten rajanylitysten seurauksena. Seksuaalioppi ei kuitenkaan hallitse elokuvan kerrontaa aivan totunnaisella tavalla. *Unfriended* romuttaa ilahduttavalla tavalla trailerinsa virittämän odotusarvon elokuvasta tiettyjen liki normatiivisten konventioiden toistona: toisin kuin viktoriaanisissa moraalitarinoissa ja niiden tuoreemmissa vastineissa, elokuvassa jaeltu ”paha kuolema” ei suoraviivaisesti rankaise hahmoja seksuaalisesta aktiivisuudesta tai poikkeavuudesta. Nämä elokuvien luentaa säädelleet historialliset motiivit jopa kirjoitetaan tiettyssä mielessä uusiksi. Jo elokuvan genre puolestaan estää itsemurhaa hahmottumasta sellaisten intervention ja parantumisen kuvastojen välityksellä, jotka ovat ominaisia draamapohjaisille, kuolemanhalua ja itsetuhoa käsitteleville nuorisoelekuville (vrt. *Vuosi Nuoruudestani*, 1999; *According to Greta*, 2009).

Seksuaalisuus nousee *Unfriended*-elokuvan keskeiseksi teemaksi sekä slasher-lajityypille että itsemurhan intermediaalisille kuvastoille klassisella tavalla jo aivan alussa. Elokuvan ensimmäiset kohtaukset asettavat heti vastakkain seksuaalisuuden ja pidättäytymisen esitellessään seksuaalisen Lauran ja neitsyeksi tunnustautuvan Blairen hahmot. Videota Lauran humalaisista transgressioista kehystää kommenttiboksin huoritteleva retoriikka, ja video puolestaan rinnastuu Blairen ja Mitchin Skype-esileikkiin. Modernin teknologian välittämä flirtti tuo näkyviin fantasian ja toden välillä vallitsevaa etäisyyttä: esileikin asettamasta odotusarvosta huolimatta nuorten odotus päättyy (kliseisesti) vasta koulun päätöstanssiaisten iltana. Itsemurha näyttäytyykin elokuvassa nimenomaan rangaistuksena seksuaalisuudesta, kunnes odotuksemme tehdään elokuvan kuluessa tyhjiksi.

Väkivaltaisen itsemurhan rinnalla kulkee myös toinen häpeän ja rankaisun teemoihin kytkeytyvä elementti. Alun rinnastukset hämärtävät halukkaan antautumisen ja raiskauksen rajaa. Blairella ja Mitchillä on Skypen riisumisleikissään rekvisiittana puukko, eikä YouTuben videoaineistosta selviä, kuinka vapaaehtoisesti Laura on lähtenyt leikkiin mukaan: videolla hän työntää päällään makaavaa poikaa pois ennen kuin montaasin seuraavassa klipissä löytyy asuntovaunualueen hämärästä makaamasta vatsaltaan. Laura vaikuttaa saaneen kolminkertaisen rangaistuksen raiskauksessa, sen aiheuttamassa julkisessa häpeässä ja niin ikään häpeällisessä itsemurhakuolemassa, ennen kuin on siirtynyt itse jakelemaan rangaistuksia sarjamurhaajana. Olenkin jo ennen varsinaisen elokuvan tarjoamia rinnastuksia tulkinnut trailerin häpäisyvideossa esiintyviä Lauran tahraisia reisiä veren läikittämiksi ja lukenut kuvaamerkinä raiskauksesta, jonka Steven Stack ja Barbara Bowman (2009b; 2012) ovat havainneet suhteellisen yleisesti motivoineen itsemurhaa elokuvien toistamassa mytologiassa 1900-luvun alkupuoliskolla.

Raiskauksen tematiikka avaa oven mielenkiintoiselle kontrastille suhteessa menneeseen aikaan: renessanssissa suosittuun Lukretian kuva-perinteeseen ja elokuvahistoriaan. Lukretiaanisisessa perinteessä kuvitetaan antiikin aikaista tarinaa itsemurhallaan raiskauksen tahraaman siveytensä sekä perheensä kunnian takaisin lunastaneesta nuoresta naisesta (esim. Bal 1996; 2001; Donaldson 1982; Wolfthal 1999). Aikanaan

lukretiaaninen perinne toimi miltei nykyiseen nuorisoelokuvaan rinnastuvana oppituntina siveydessä: Lukretian kohtalon liian konkreettisesti noudattelusta toki varoiteltiin, mutta metaforana tämän itsemurha saattoi toimia hyveen maskuliinisena mittarina. Raiskausta seurannut ”lunastus itsemurhassa” mahdollisti poikkeuksellisen naisherooisuuden ja havainnollisti nuorille neidoille hyveen merkitystä.

Psykiatrian ja medikalisaatiossa muovautuneen feminiinisen heikkouden painolastin myötä egoistista itsemurhaa ei kuitenkaan ole enää tapana pitää ylevöittäväna vaan uhriuttavana ratkaisuna. Nykyelokuvassa raiskauksen ja itsemurhan stigmaat tuottavat uhriuden kaksoisallon, joka mahdollistaa miehisen koston ikään kuin ”ulkoistettuna lunastuksena”. Lukretiaaninen narratiivi saattaa toistua, mutta muodossa, jossa se asemoi naisen miehisen koston instrumentiksi ja alttiiksi uhriksi sekä seksuaaliselle turmelukselle että kunniattomalle kuolemalle. Tällöin kuvaston ylevöittäminä marttyyreinä toimivat naishahmojen sijaan mieshahmot, jotka raiskauksessa ja itsemurhassa menettävät, kärsivät ja kostavat, mutta jäävät silti ”vajaiksi”. Itsemurhaa motivoivan raiskauksen motiivi onkin muuttunut huomattavassa määrin harvinaisemmaksi 1900-luvun loppupuolelle siirryttäessä (Stack & Bowman 2009b, ks. myös Campbell 2006, 367).

Unfriended-elokuva voikin lukea mielenkiintoisesti toisin, sillä elokuva leikittelee näkyvästi Lauran seksuaalisella promiskuiteetilla ja hänen asuntovaunujen taakse hylätyn ruumiinsa häväistyksellä, mutta asemoi hahmon haudan jälkeisen hengen elokuvallisessa raiskauskuvastossa epätavanomaiseksi autonomiseksi toimijaksi. Lauran voikin tulkita näyttävätyvän elokuvassa tietynlaisena vinksahaneena Lukretiana, joka lunastaa välitulassa kunniansa paljastamalla ystäviensä teko-pyhyiden – ja asettaa samalla kyseenalaiseksi näiden käyttämän huora-diskurssin. Elokuvassa Lauran humaltunut käytös ja hänen niukkoihin vaatteisiin puettu vartalonsa perustelevat raiskaukseen, häväistykseen ja itsemurhaan johtanutta vihapuhetta, joka toistuu myös valkokankaan ulkopuolella.

Feministinen teoria on pyrkinyt tuomaan näkyviin huora- ja raiskauskurssien taustalla vallitsevaa sukupuoliasetelmaa, jonka valossa naisten koetaan ansainneen seksuaalisen häpäisyn omalla olemuksellaan

ja toiminnallaan: houkuttelevalla pukeutumisella, juopumustilalla, kevytkenkäsillä käytöksellä. Tähän kontekstiin myös *Unfriended*-elokuvassa itsemurhaa selittävä pysäytyskuva Lauran alennustilasta ja elokuvan alun rinnastukset Lauran ja Blairen välillä tuntuvat asettuvan. Päähenkilö Blaire esitetään Lauran puhtoisena vastapuolena, joka saattaa virtuaalimaailmassa paljastaa hiukan ihoa poikaystävänsä mieliksi mutta joka reaali maailmassa yhä vaalii neitsyyttään. YouTuben montaasi puolestaan vihjaa, että uskaliaisuutensa seurauksena Barns kokee kah-talaisen häpeän: ensin seksuaalisen hyväksikäytön ja sitten itsemurhan. Vallitsevan diskurssin mukaan Laura Barns on huorittelunsa ja kohta-lonsa ansainnut, ja elokuvassa tuttua diskurssia toistavat Lauran ystävät – mutta saavat siitä rangaistuksen.

Onkin raikasta, että lopulta *Unfriended* romahduttaa viktoriaanisessa hengessä, slasher-kaavaa mukaillen rakentamansa opettavaisen asetel-man jalustaltaan. Elokuvassa omaehtoiseen kuolemaan johtava häpeä ei lopulta palaudu raiskaukseen vaan Lauran kaveripiirin verkossa suo-rittamaan kiusaamiseen, joihin myös *slutshaming*, huoritteleva häpäisy, kytkeytyy. Itsemurhan motivaationa näyttäytyy erityisesti internetin viha-puhe, jonka aiheuttamaan itsemurhariskiinkin elokuvat ovat 2000-luvulla olleet miltei kärkkäitä tarttumaan (vrt. *Chatroom*, 2010; *Cyberbully*, 2011; *Suicide Room*, 2011; *Cyberbully*, 2015). Elokuvan tuomion kohteeksi tuntuu asettuvan juuri huorittelevan vihapuheen kaksinaismoralismi. Lauran totuusleikissä kyberkiusaajat eivät ole häntä parempia. Häväis-tysvideon ladanneen Blairen salaisuutena on jopa syrjähyppy poikaystä-vän parhaan ystävän kanssa. Silti häntä ja hänen ystäviään rangaistaan nimenomaan kyberkiusaamisesta, sen ”banaalista pahasta”. *Unfriended* tuntuukin kehottavan lasitalossa asuvia pidättäytymään kivien heittelystä pikemmin kuin tuomitsevan nuoria heidän seksuaalisista rajanylityksis-tään, sillä se muistuttaa kaikkien tekevän sellaisia virheitä, jotka saatta-vat ”elää verkossa ikuisesti”.

Elokuva kääntää lopulta ympäri myös lukretiaanisen potentiaalinsa torjuessaan raiskauksen kuvaston, josta käsin vertauskuvallista ja tun-nistettavaa kuvaa näyttään yleisesti luettavan. Elokuvan lopussa Lauran rusehtavan eritteen läikittämät reidet paljastuvat ulosteen tahraamiksi. Anaalisen häpäisyn tapa kommentoida hahmon ”itsehillintää” ei toki

sekään ole aivan viaton. On myös lisättävä, että tietyllä tasolla raiskauksen tematiikka aktualisoituu elokuvassa: Lauran käytöstä ”selitetään” lapsuudessa koetun seksuaalisen hyväksikäytön kiertelevin ja kaartelevin sanastoin: ”kun hän oli lapsi... hänen enonsa...”. Epäsovinnaiselle promiskuiteetille on siis myös *Unfriended*-elokuvassa kliseiset syynsä (ja seurauksensa), vaikka sen hahmogalleriassa yksikään ei ole seksuaalisuudessa toista tuomittavampi.

Jotta *Unfriended*-elokuvan poikkeavuus valtavirrasta kävisi ilmi, sitä on hyvä verrata totunnaista kaavaa seuraavaan *Vanilla Sky* -elokuvaan (2001).¹⁴ *Vanilla Sky* on scifin suuntaan nyökkäävä psykologinen trilleri, joka kertoo auto-onnettomuudessa kosmeettisesti vaurioituvasta ja traumatisoituvasta yläluokkaisesta David Amesista (Tom Cruise). Kuten elokuvan lopussa paljastuu, elokuvan tapahtumat sijoittuvat painajaiseksi muuttuneeseen kryogeenisen koomaan, jossa David prosessoi onnettomuutta edeltävää itsekeskeistä elämäänsä ja auto-onnettomuudessa menettämänsä mahdollisuutta todelliseen rakkauteen. Kuten monessa muussa itsemurhan teeman ympärille kiertyvässä elokuvassa, myös tässä itsetuhoa käsitellään rinnakkaiskerronnalla. Elokuvan ainoa varsinainen itsemurha nähdään, kun sivuroolissa itsensä surmaava stereotyyppinen naishahmo, Julie Gianni (Cameron Diaz), sekoaa Davidin torjunnasta: hän sylkee rakkaudentunnustuksensa miehen kasvoja vasten ja ajaa autolla alas sillalta.

Julien auliissa kehossa ruumiillistuva opetus irtoseksin vaikutuksista kiertyy fatalistisesti koskettamaan myös Davidia. Tunneköyhää ja itsekeskeistä elämää viettänyt David saa välillisen rangaistuksen: Julien kyytiin vielä kerran noustessaan hän menettää rakastamansa naisen, etuoikeutetun elämänsä ja varsin metaforisesti kasvonsa, identiteettinsä ja sosiaalisen asemansa komean peilin. Julie heijastuukin Davidin madonnamaisesta ihastuksesta (Penelope Cruz) arkkityyppisenä viettelijättärenä, huonona naisena. Silti, vaikka Julie aktiivisesti aiheuttaa sekä oman kuolemansa että päähenkilön kooman, hänet asemoidaan

14 *Vanilla Sky* (2001). Ohjannut Cameron Crowe oman käsikirjoituksensa pohjalta Alejandro Amenábarin ja Mateo Gilin *Avaa silmäsi* -elokuvaan (*Abre Los Ojos*, 1997) perustuen. Tuotantoyhtiönä Paramount Pictures.

stereotyyppiseksi rakkaudesta kuolevaksi uhriksi. Sanojensa mukaanhan Julie on ”niellyt Davidin spermaa” luullen sen ”tarkoittavan jotakin”. Juliessa havainnollistuu elokuvan toistaman stereotyypin ydin: ”Jopa silloin kun naiset aktiivisesti aikansaavat itsemurhansa heitä lähestyttään riippuvaisina, epäkypsinä, heikkoina, passiivisina ja hysteerisinä, pikemmin kuin traagisina tai heroisina. Naisten rakkaus ja itsemurha määritellään neuroottisiksi.” (Canetto 1993, 5.)

Myös Julien uhriuden ja syyllisyyden kaksoissilmukka on tuttu viktorianisesta prostituutiodiskurssista, jossa hulluuteen ja itsemurhaan johtanut vääränlainen, perverssi, miehiseksi koettu halu rajattiin säälitäväksi esittämällä se myös heikkoudeksi houkutuksen edessä (Anderson 1987; Gates 1988; MacDonald & Murphy 1990; Nead 1988). Suhteessa erotomaanisen naisen hahmon avulla tuomiota jakavaan *Vanilla Sky*-elokuvaan ja sen edustamaan valtavirtaan *Unfriended* vastustaa itsemurhaelokuvien totunnaista moraalitarinaa ja toistaa toisin nekroman-tisoiden kuvattujen naisstereotyyppien houkutusta kohti heittäytyvää tunnetta. Tietyllä tavalla Laura Barnsin hahmo todella on vinksautanut Lukretia: egoistisille itsemurhakuvastoille harvinainen ”naissankari”. Lauran kuolemanjälkeinen kostajuus, joka yleensä varataan mieshahmoille, muovaa hänestä jopa miehisen. Niin tekee myös itsemurhan maskuliininen väline: ampuma-ase (ks. esim. Stack & Bowman 2009a).

Itsemurhan (sukupuoli)politiikka

Kuten Aaronia (2014) mukaillen voitaisiin esittää, elokuvan monien itsetuhoisten muusien opettaessa mieshahmoja elämään elokuvateollisuus jatkaa länsimaiselle kuolemankulttuurille ominaista kuolemanpelon ja -halun projisointia toiseutettujen ruumiiden pintaan. Myös ilahduttavan poikkeuksellisessa *Unfriended*-kauhussa kulkee väistämättä mukana nekromanttinen halutalous, joka on renessanssista lähtien hyödyntänyt naisia ja näiden ruumiita tehdessään kielletystä näkyvän speaktaakkelia.

Argumenttia naisen objektiasemasta itsemurhan taloudessa voi toki kritisoida jo osin vanhentuneeksikin, sillä itsemurha ei kiinnity yksinomaan naisten ja tyttöjen seksuaalisiin ja eroottis-viattomiin

vartaloihin. Jopa halutaloutensa osalta nykyelokuva huomioi edelleen myös ”pinkin rahan” queer-yleisöään, joskin elokuvassa on jo varhain rangaistu homoseksuaaleja ”pahalla kuolemalla”.¹⁵ Itsemurhan voitaisiinkin kuvailla naisistuvan hieman eri tavalla suhteessa Aaronin kuvailemaan nekromantismiin ja sen tapaan esineellistää naisruumiita katseensa kohteiksi ja opetuksensa välineiksi. Elokuva valitseekin monesti kohteikseen sellaisia mies- ja naishahmoja, joiden sukupuoli- ja seksuaaliperformansseissa on liukuvuutta ja poikkeavuutta suhteessa normatiivisiin konstruktioihin ja joiden itsemurhahalu määrittänyt tätä kautta feminiiniseksi. Niin naisvihana kuin melankolian romanttisena kiinnittymiskohtana tarkasteltua ilmiötä voitaisiin lähestyä turvalliseksi koettuna tapana käsitellä tabua paitsi mielihyväperiaatteen myös toiseuttamisen välityksellä. Siten on syytä palata vielä hetkeksi elokuvassa vallitsevaan eroon maskuliinisten ja feminiinisten itsemurhien välillä.

Kuvailin jo artikkelin alkupuolella egoistisen itsemurhan väritymistä feminiiniseksi valkokankaan fantasiassa, jonka representaatioita säätelevät tiukan sukupuolittuneet konventiot. *Vanilla Sky* -elokuvaa tarkastelemalla itsemurhan elokuvallista sukupuolipolitiikkaa on kenties helpompi purkaa tekijöihinsä. Silmämääräisesti itsemurhan kuvastot toistuvat elokuvassa kolmeen otteeseen, mutta varsinaisena omaehtoisena kuolemana voi näistä tarkastella vain yhtä: Julien kuolemaa. Davidin kahdesta ”itsemurhasta” ensimmäinen asemoidaan väliaikaiseksi ratkaisuksi ja toinen pelkistyy metaforaksi: David vaipuu koomaansa ottamalla yliannoksen lääkkeitä ja herää lopulta välitilastaan heittäytymällä pilvenpiirtäjän katolta äitelän pastellisten pilvien, ”vaniljaisen taivaan” huomaan. Kohtaukset reunustavat elokuvan kertomaa painajaisunta mutta sijoittuvat aivan elokuvan loppuun, osaksi sen paljastuksen ja kliimaksin retoriikkoja. Molemmat Davidin itsemurhakuolemista ovat kuvastoiltaan tunnistettavia, mutta niitä asemoidaan ihmisen kehityskulun ja

15 Richard Dyerin analyysin mukaan homoseksuaalisuuteen sidottua itsemurhaa on kuvattu viimeistään film noir -elokuviissa, joissa rappiollisen ylellisyyden, itsemurhan feminisoiduista kuvastoista tutun *luxurian*, voidaan paikoin nähdä johtavan homoseksuaaliset hahmot kuolemaan (Dyer 2002). Vito Russo puolestaan kommentoi itsemurhalla olleen merkittävä osuus homoseksuaalisten hahmojen ”pakollisen kuoleman” troopissa 1960- ja 1970-luvulla (Russo 1981, 52; Morris 2007). Ks. myös Dollimore (1998).

sen siirtymätilojen kuvajaisiksi, sosiaalisiksi ja symbolisiksi kuolemiksi. Nämä symbolisiksi riisutut kuolemat tuntuvat mallintavan vanhakan-
taisia siirtymäriittejä, joissa sosiaalisesta statuksesta toiseen siirrettävä yksilö kuljetetaan kuoleman symbolisten esitysten välityksellä väli-
tilaan ja siitä uuteen syntymään uudessa statuksessa (ks. esim. Gennepe 1960; Turner 1969). Kuolemia ajaa Davidin halu elää – halu elää pa-
remmin, toisia kunnioittavammin ja uusin kasvoin, uutta elämää. Eten-
kin Davidin jälkimmäistä itsemurhaa tuntuu mielenkiintoisella tavalla
kehystävän kierkegaardilainen filosofia, jonka hengessä Davidin meta-
forinen loikka katolta kuvataan reitiksi ”pelastukseen”, uskon hypyksi
(Kierkegaard, 1998/1846; 2003/1844), joka ihmisen on tehtävä elääk-
seen rakkaudessa.

Julien itsemurha eroaa Davidin ”pseudoitsemurhasta” monella eri
tavalla, joista osa on varsin konventionaalisia, säännönmukaisiakin.
Tavanomaista on etenkin elokuvan rakentama rinnastus, jossa femi-
niininen heijastuu maskuliinisesta, monisyisestä ja motivoituneesta itse-
murhasta yksiselitteisenä ja stereotyyppisenä mysteerinä. Suhteessa
Julien spontaaniin ja yllättävään kuolemaan elokuvan loppuun sijoite-
tut, Davidin anomian¹⁶ ja paranoian pohjustamat kuvastot selittävät tä-
män pseudoitsemurhaa ja erottelevat maskuliiniseksi miellettyä järkeä
feminiiniseksi ymmärretystä tunteesta. Myös elokuvan kuvasto toistaa
järkeä tunteesta erottelevaa sukupuolistereotyyppiä. Julien kohtaaminen
on poukkoileva niin visuaalisten elementtensä kuin hysteerisen, itkusta
nauruun vaihtelevan tunneilmaisun osalta. Davidin kohtaukset taas ovat
tyynen harkitsevia: vakaita ja rauhallisia jo värimaailmoistaan lähtien.
Näin Julie surmaa itsensä pakkomielleisen rakkautensa sokaisemana
”hulluna”, kun taas David selviää kahdesta symbolisesta kuolemasta, joi-
den taustalta on löydettävissä monivivahteinen kimppu niin sosiaaliseen
kontekstiin kuin yksilöön itseensäkin sitoutuvia motivaatioita.

16 Anomian käsitteellä viitataan yhteen Durkheimin luomista selitysmalleista. Käsite pyrkii selittämään
itsemurhan esiintymistä sääteleviltään matalissa individualistisissa kulttuureissa ja kuvaa radikaalien
sosiaalisten muutosten, kuten vaikkapa talouskriisin, koettelemien yksilöiden kokemusta voimatto-
muudesta uudessa sosiaalisessa lokerossa. (Durkheim 1897, 241–276; Schneidman 1985, 24.) Yhtäältä
juuri anomia selittää myös aiemman sosiaalisen statuksensa menettäneen Davidin valintaa ja siihen
johtavaa epätoivoa. Samalla unitila sallii elokuvan käsitellä Davidin traumaa.

Tunteen ja järjen lisäksi *Vanilla Sky* -elokuvassa asettuvat vastakkain feminiinisiä ja maskuliinisia itsemurhakuvastoja erottelevat passiivisuus ja aktiivisuus sekä uhrius ja sankaruus. Huomionarvoista on etenkin Julien itsemurhan opettavainen välineellisyys, joka heijastuu Davidin ”itsemurhan” ylevöitetystä metaforisuudesta. Samalla kun uni-tila sallii elokuvan käsitellä Davidin traumaa, Juliesta heijastuva hulluus järkeistää hänen kuolemanhaluaan. Uneen etäännytetty, naishahmoon sitoutettu ja osin neuropsykologisesti tarkasteltu hulluus, paranoia, ei tällöin uhkaa miehisen sankarinsa anomisen, tilapäisen kuoleman järkevyyttä. Jos aiemmin on siis ollut puhe egoistisen ja altruistisen itsemurhan kuvausten sukupuolittuneisuudesta, *Vanilla Sky* ei niinkään rakenna tämänkaltaista erontekoa vaan pelkistää egoistisen kuoleman kuvaa niin pitkälle, että miehisessä itsemurhassa on loppujen lopuksi kyse vain symbolista tai symbolisesta itsetuhon kuvaelmasta. Ei siten voida väittää, ettei elokuvien maailmasta löytyisi miehisen itsetuhon – ja jopa itsemurhan – kuvauksia. Itsemurhakuvausten feminiinisyydessä on pikemminkin kyse siitä, että omaehtoisen kuoleman kuvaamisen kulttuurihistoria ja mekanismit pitävät huolta siitä, ettei mieshahmo useinkaan selviä ”itsekeskeisestä” itsemurhasta miehekkäänä.¹⁷

Muun muassa sukupuolentutkimuksen parissa on tullut tavanomaiseksi tarkastella toiston luonnollistavaa, niin kutsutusti ”näkymättömäksi” tekevää voimaa (esim. Butler 1990; Foucault 1990; Rossi 2003). Feminiinisten ja feminisoitujen kehojen ”itsetuhon speaktaakkelissa” on eittämättä tämän kaltainen ulottuvuus. Barthesilaisen myytin käsitteen (1957, 131–187) läpi tarkasteltuna feminisoitu itsemurhan kuvaperinne on samalla tavalla rakentuneisuuden jäljistä tyhjäksi pyyhitty, luonnollistettu. Renessanssista saakka ylläpidetty, flirtillä silattu itsemurhan ja naisellisuuden yhteys onkin historian syövereissä ladattu yhtäältä niin monilla symboleiden kerrostumilla ja toisaalta luonnollisuuden paino-

17 Silloin kun puhtaan egoistisen itsemurhan suorittavaa aikuista miestä ei feminisoida tavalla tai toisella, tämän itsemurhaa näyttäisi useimmiten selittävän patologinen hulluus, joka melko usein esiintyy suhteessa rikollisuuteen ja väkivaltaiseen maskuliinisuuteen (Kosonen 2015, 42–43; ks. myös Stack & Bowman 2012). Suhteellisen harvinaisissa fyysisen vammautumisen kuvastoissa, joita Stack ja Bowman ovat tarkastelleet, miehuuden kuitenkin voidaan tietyllä tavalla nähdä säilyvän (Stack & Bowman, 2009c; 2012). Toki maskuliinisuutta ylläpitävät (raivo)hulluus ja fyysinen vamma merkitsevät mieshahmoja tällöinkin ”marginaalisiksi toisiksi,” vaikkakin eri tavoin.

lastilla, että yksittäisen toisin toistavan elokuvan on hankala tyhjentää egoistista itsemurhaa feminiinisyiden stigmastaan. Juuri feminiinisenä tekona itsemurha on niin näkyvä, että se on jo näkymätön.

Yleisesti ottaen voidaan tiivistää itsemurhan kuvastojen paikantavan käsittelemäänsä paha kuolemaa eri tavoin marginaaliin. Jos on jo puhuttu egoistisen itsemurhan feminisoituneiden kuvastojen miehiä emaskuloivasta, jopa ”homosoivasta” vaikutuksesta, heikkouteen ja hulluuteen kytkeytyvä feminiinisyiden konstruktio paikantaa itsemurhaa ja itsemurhaajia myös muilla tavoin anomaalisiksi. Taiteilijoiden anomaa-lisuus saattaa olla sosiaalista ja ylennettyä, mutta tavanomaisempaa on sosiaalisen marginaalisuuden sitoutuminen ruumiilliseen, joko tilapäiseen tai pysyvään liminaliteettiin eli siirtymätilaan. Kun mittarina on mieheys, itsemurha-altista hahmoa alennetaan tällöin joko primitiivisenä suhteessa järkeen tai anomaalisena suhteessa miehen ”luontoon”. Etenkin säännönmukaisesti toistetuissa hulluuden kuvauksissa on kyse itsemurhan marginalisoinnista, joka rakentaa egoistisista itsensä surmaajista hauraita uhreja ja psykopaattisia pahan ilmentymiä. Tällöin elokuvateollisuus jakaa sekä diagnooseja että rangaistuksia rakentaen jatkumoa kirkon ja lääketieteen määräysvallan alla muotoutuneille historiallisille käsityksille. Itsemurhaaja on tällöin parantumattomalla tavalla toinen, jota elokuvan etäännyttävät esitykset asettelevat vastakkain ”meidän normaalien” katsojien kanssa. Myöskään *Unfriended* ei kokonaan pääse pakoon tätä elokuvan toiseuttavaa toistoa: jäämme edelleen odottamaan tarinaa, jossa itsemurhan ilmeisin uhri ei olisi nuori nainen tai homoseksuaalinen mies.

Tabulle mediakarnevaalinsa

Lähestyin artikkelini alussa itsemurhaa tietynlaisen pornografian kohteena, jonka kuvastojen paljous saattaa edustaa tabukontrollin heltiämistä, vaikka esitykset itsessään ovat kovin kontrolloituja esitysmuotojensa osalta. Gorerin kehittämä ”kuoleman pornografia” -ajatus on tilanteen hahmottamisessa siinä mielessä oivallinen, että pornografian ymmärretään ammentavan voimansa kuvaamansa kohteen kielletystä statuk-

sesta.¹⁸ Pornografian tarjoama kiihotus on aina kiellosta riippuvainen, ja matalana ja häpeälliseksi konstruoituna se ylläpitää jo genren tasolla niitä kieltoja, joita esityksissään rikkoo (Ks. esim. Hunt 1996; Kalha 2007; Kendrick 1987; Paasonen 2011a; 2011b, ks. myös ”transgressios- ta” Bataille 1986; Caillois 2001; Foucault 1963, Jenks 2003; Stallybrass & White 1986). ”Pornoistunut” (Nikunen ym. 2005) kuvakulttuuri on useasti kuitenkin asia erikseen. Palaammekin tabun käsitteeseen, jonka voisi tässä yhteydessä väittää kärsineen 1900-luvulla muotoutuneesta määritelmästä, jonka myötä tabut mielletään usein tukahdutetuiksi puheenaiheiksi ja ”kuvakiellon” kohteiksi (ks. esim. Freud 1998; Allan & Burrige 2006).

Pyrkiessäni ymmärtämään ja purkamaan länsimaisen kulttuurin ristiriitaista suhtautumista tabuihinsa olen havainnut, että muoto- keskeisessä määritelmässä uhkaa usein unohtua se, kuinka tabu on pohjimmiltaan sosiokulttuurinen kontrollirakenne. Edistyksen hidasteena näyttäytyvän ”puhekiellon” ideasta innostuneiden retoriikka jättääkin huomiotta, että jopa puhekieltona tabu on aina sidoksissa valtaideologiaan ja sen ylläpitämään sosiaaliseen järjestykseen. Käsitteen juurilta nykypäivään liikuttaessa tabu hahmottuu kontrollijärjestelmäksi, joka paimentaa vaaralliseksi koettua, kulttuurista luokittelua rikkovaa ja siten sosiokulttuurista valtaideologiaa uhkaavaa toiseutta (Douglas 1996; 2002; Steiner 1956). Arkkityyppisessä muodossaan se osallistuu normaalin ja epänormaalin, oikean ja väärän rajaa tuottavaan ja uusintavaan prosessiin normien, uskomusten sekä pelkojen avulla – ja niitä ilmentäen. Olenkin päätenyt tarkastelemaan myös tässä artikkelissa erittelemääni itsemurhan kuvastojen feminisoivaa ja marginalisoivaa toistoa sellaisena tabujärjestelmää ylläpitävänä mytologiana, joka ei pelkästään ilmennä vaan aktiivisesti tuottaa tabuaiheensa stigmaa uusintaen itsemurhan statusta ”pahana kuolemana”.

Yksityisiä, kiellettyjä ja marginalisoituja ilmiöitä karnevalisoivan ja tabuja myllyttävän median voi varsin usein arvioida heijastelevan ”vinoon”

18 Gorer tosin tulkitsee väkivaltaisen kuoleman pornografian sellaiseksi ”luonnollisen” kuoleman kätkeväksi tekijäksi, joka – väkivaltaisen kuoleman itsensä asemesta – muovaa tabua luonnollisesta kuolemasta (Gorer 1955, 170).

sen ulkopuolella vallitsevaa vapautuneisuuden astetta. ”Tabua murtavina” mainostetut ”edistykselliset” representaatiot kun usein vaikuttavat osallistuvan uhkaavien toiseuksien hallintaan ”stigmatisoitujen identiteettien” välityksellä (Ks. esim. Becker 1963; Dyer 2002; Goffman 1963; Hall 1996; 1997a, vrt. Kellehear 2007, 219–224). Juuri stigmatisoitujen myyttien toisteisuus antaa mielestäni aihetta tarkastella nykykulttuurin formaalia tabukarnevaalia sellaisena tabukontrollia synnyttävänä tekijänä, joka on rinnasteinen arkkityyppisten tabujärjestelmien toiseuksia ylläpitävälle ja luovalle uskomusjärjestelmälle. Nykykulttuurin karnevaalista tabua vain muovataan puhe- ja kuvakiellon kontrollin ylittävien metodein: etuoikeutetuina representaatioina, kuten queer-seksuaalisuuskien ja itsemurhan kuvaukset havainnollistavat. Tuntuukin siltä, että tabu muotoutuu valtamediassa sen kautta, millä tavalla sen kohdetta on luvallista ja mahdollista esittää, eikä niinkään diskursiivisessa hiljaisuudessa.

Foucault’ta taajaan siteeraavassa tutkimuskeskustelussa on mielestäni oireellista, ettei tabua ole joko osattu tai haluttu sovittaa hänen kuvaamaansa biopolitiikan koneistoon, jonka diskurssit toimivat uuteen aikaan sovitettuna kontrollin muotona pikemmin kuin merkinä kontrollin heltämisestä. Nykyinen tabujen loputtomalla murtumisella hekumoiva vapautumisen retoriikka kätkee usein alleen muun muassa stigmatisoivissa esityksissä näyttäytyviä rakenteellisen väkivallan muotoja, jotka eivät täytä puhetaulun edellytyksiä mutta jakavat silti tabun arkkityyppisen funktion. Esimerkiksi itsemurhan kuvastoissa toistuvat käsitykset itsemurhasta ”pahana kuolemana” ja oman käden kautta kuolevista henkilöistä heikkoina, feminiineinä, homoseksuaalisina tai marginaalisina ”hulluina” tuntuvat pikemmin vahvistaneen itsemurhan itsensä asemaa sosiaalisena tabuna kuin haastaneen sitä. Näkymättömyyden suojakuoren alla feminiinisyyden voi väittää muovanneen ”itsekkäästä”, egoistisesta itsemurhasta sellaista negatiivisten merkitysten ampieispesää, jonka perin pohjin naiseutettuun esityshistoriaan limittyvät heikkouden ja hulluuden juonteet säätelevät yhä itsemurhan esittämistä – ja siitä puhumista.



III

**ITSEMURHATARTUNNAN TAIKAUSKOSTA:
THE MOTH DIARIES(2011) JA *13 REASONS WHY*(2017)**

['The Superstition of Suicide Contagion
in The Moth Diaries (2011) and 13 Reasons Why (2017)']

by

Heidi Kosonen, 2018

Tahiti vol. 8, no 2, 35-49

<https://doi.org/10.23995/tht.76559>

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Itsemurhatartunnan taikauskosta: *The Moth Diaries* (2011) ja *13 Reasons Why* (2017)¹

Heidi S. Kosonen



Kuva 1: Mary Harronin *The Moth Diaries* -elokuvassa (2011) vampyyri Ernessa (Lily Cole) houkuttelee teinityttö Rebeccaä itsemurhaan.

The Moth Diaries on kanadalaisen Mary Harronin vuonna 2011 ohjaama nuorten aikuisten kauhudraama, jossa vampyyri houkuttelee teinityttöä kuolemalla. Tyttö on toipumassa isänsä itsemurhasta, ja elokuvan keskeisessä kohtauksesta vampyyri yhyttää hänet koulun kirjastosta. ”Sinun on tullut aika vapauttaa itsesi,”² se kuiskaa ja viiltää ranteensa saaden ylikuonnollisen veren valumaan tytön päälle. Kuoleman vetovoimaa edustava vampyyri ilmentää elokuvassa paitsi fiktiivisen nuoren pelkoja ja toiveita myös itsemurhatartuntana tunnettua ilmiötä.³ Omaehtoista kuolemaa on historiallisesti pelätty vaarallisena ja epideemisesti leviävänä kuolemana⁴ ja vanhemman itsemurha on määritelty yhdeksi tämän tartunnan lähteistä.⁵

Perhepiirissä ja ikäryhmässä tapahtuvien itsemurhien lisäksi omaehtoisen kuoleman on nähty tarttuvan myös sen mediaesitysten myötä. Tässä merkityksessä itsemurhatartunta on esiintynyt esimerkiksi Brian Yorkeyn sovittaman *13 Reasons Why* -sarjan ensimmäisen kauden vastaanotossa keväällä 2017. Nuorten suosioon noussut Netflix-sarja kohosi tällöin otsikoihin vaaralliseksi speaktaakkeliksi määriteltynä⁶ ja kohtasi



vaatimuksia sekä sarjan että siihen liittyneiden keskustelujen sensuurista.⁷ Kohu johti uudenlaisiin ikärajoituksiin, jotka suosivat sarjan kieltämistä kaikilta sitä ilman aikuisen seuraa katsovilta alaikäisiltä.⁸ Sarjassa seurataan likeisesti teinitytön itsemurhaan päättyvää tarinaa, ja kerronnassaan sen pelättiin vaarallisella tavalla romantisoivan ja glorifioivan tätä tarttuvaksi miellettyä kuolemaa. Sosiologien, psykologien ja kansanterveystieteilijöiden 1970-luvulla nimeämää mediavälitteistä tartuntaa, Werther-efektiä,⁹ koskevassa keskustelussa näillä termeillä viitataan itsemurhaa kaunisteleviin ja sitä muilla tavoin ylentäviin esitysmuotoihin.

Artikkelissani lähestyn tätä mediavälitteistä tartuntaa pelkoon pohjaavana kuolemanhallintamekanismina tarkastelemalla näitä kahden populaarikulttuurin tapausta. Valitsemani tapausesimerkit ovat narratiiviansa, kohdeyleisöjensä ja itsemurhan visuaalisen kerontansa osalta huomattavan samanlaiset ja myötäilevät monia valtavirtaistuneita konventioita. Huomionarvoista tapausesimerkeissä on näiden poikkeava vastaanotto, joka mahdollistaa *13 Reasons* -sarjaan vaikuttaneen tartunnan kriittisen tarkastelun. Toisaalta, koska *Moth* kuvaa itsemurhahalua juuri vam-

pyrifiktioin keinoin, se mahdollistaa tämän tartunnanmallin tarkastelun niistä peloista käsin, joita selittämättömäksi jääneisiin kuolemiin on historiallisesti liitetty. *Mothin* ikään kuin voisi väittää valottavan samoja pelkoja, joita *13 Reasons* -sarjaa ympäröinyt kohu ilmentää.

Vaikka ajatus itsemurhatartunnasta on juurtunut syvälle julkiseen mielipiteeseen, sen vallitsevat selitysmallit eivät ole ongelmattomia. Niiden on muun muassa nähty rakentuvan aiheettomasti tunteisiin vetoavan tartunta-metaforan ympärille.¹⁰ Yksioikoisena kritisoitua Werther-efektiä taas ei ole onnistuttu vahvistamaan.¹¹ Puutteistaan huolimatta se vaikuttaa median representatioihin, ja siten vihjaa asemastaan biovallan rattaissa. Biovalta on yksilön ruumista kohtaan suuntautuvaa, normatiivista ja diskursioiden välityksellä operoivaa valtaa, jonka on nähty jäsentävän erityisesti seksuaalisuutta ja kuolemaa.¹² Voitaisiin väittää, että tarve kontrolloida etenkin itsemurhan kaltaista omaehtoista, yksilöä yli yhteisön korostavaa kuolemaa on jokseenkin universaali, ja että läntisissä diskursseissa toistuva ja näitä diskursseja jäsentävä itsemurhatartunta on yksi tällaisen vallan metodeista.

Itsemurhan kohdalla ilmeistä on myös biovallan päällekkäisyys tabujärjestelmään. Kiinnostava aspekti itsemurhatartunnan selitysmalleissa on tällöin niiden hyödyntämissä affektiivisessa tartuntametaforassa, joka Gijin Chengin ja kollegoiden mukaan kätkee puutteellista ymmärrystä tämän tartunnan syy-seurausketjuista.¹³ Mary Douglas asemoi tabun tartunnanpelon voimalla toimivaksi rakenteeksi, joka osallistuu siokulttuurisen järjestyksen ja siihen sidotun moraalijärjestelmän ylläpitämiseen.¹⁴ Tartunnan logiikkansa tähden tabu on tullut toisetuiksi primitiivisenä järjestelmänä niissä kolonialistisissa differentiaatioissa, joissa esimodernien siirtomaiden kulttuuria ja käytänteitä alennettiin irrationaalisina suhteessa rationaaliseksi miellettyyn länteen.¹⁵ Tällöin tabu määriteltiin taikauskoksi muun muassa antropologi James Frazerin toimesta, joka näki taikauskon edellyttävän väärinymmärrystä kausaliiteetista ja esitti tartunnanpelon varaan pingotetun tabun täyttävän tämän määritelmän *negatiivisena sympaattisena magiana*.¹⁶

Samanlainen puute kausaliiteetissa toteutuu nähdäkseni myös kyseenalaistamatta käyttöön omaksutussa Werther-efektissä,



joka edustaa itsemurhatartunnan tieteellisiä selitysmalleja ja esittää itsemurhan tarttuvan median välittämien mallien ja niille altistumisen myötä. Toisin sanoen, kuten artikkelisani esitän, raja tieteen ja taikauskon, rationaalisen ja irrationaalisen välillä näyttäytyy häilyvänä tarkasteltaessa sitä, miten itsemurhan kaltaista vaaralliseksi luokiteltua kuolemaa kotoistetaan mediakulttuurissa.¹⁷

Valitsemieni tapausesimerkkien välillä vallitsevan laadullisen eron tähden luentani niistä on epäsymmetrinen. Aloitan artikkelini tarkastelemalla *Mothin* avainkohtauksien avulla sen tapaa kuvata tarttuvaksi miellettyä itsemurhaa ennen tieteellisinä hyväksytyjä selitysmalleja. Tämän jälkeen erittelen *13 Reasons* -sarjan vastaanottoa. Keskityn sarjan sisältöön kursorisesti, niiltä osin kuin se on sarjaa ympäröineen keskustelun osalta oleellista, kommentoidakseni sarjan vastaanottoon vaikuttaneen Werther-efektin suhdetta vallitsevaan itsemurhakuvastoon.

Itsemurhatartunta vampyyrimetaforassa

Itsemurha on visuaalisessa kulttuurissa hyödynnettävänä indeksinä yleinen, vaikka aiheen temaattinen käsittely on suhteessa harvinaista.¹⁸ Toisin kuin *13 Reasons*, joka

edustaa harvinaisempaa temaattista linjaa, valtaosa itsemurhaa sivuavista tai tarkastelevista esityksistä julkaistaan ja vastaanotetaan vailla kohua. Aiheen temaattisen käsittelyn saralta tällaista vailla polemiikkia populaarikulttuuriin hyväksytyä itsemurhakuvausta edustaa vuonna 2011 julkaistu *The Moth Diaries*. Elokuva on kanadalaisen Mary Harronin adaptaatio Rachel Kleinin samannimisestä romaanista (2002), jossa itsetuhon kanssa kamppailee 16-vuotias päähahmo Rebecca (Sarah Bolger).

Elokvassa toistuvat monet niistä elementeistä, joiden olen tulkinut audiovisuaalisessa viihteessä mahdollistavan arkaluontoisen teeman käsittelyn: aihetta tarkastellaan muun muassa rinnakkaiskerronnan, nostalgian ja romantiikan välityksellä, mikä sallii itsemurhan näyttäytyä tietynlaisen rauhoittavan etäisyyden takaa.¹⁹ Elokvassa itsemurhahalua myös tarkastellaan nuoren naishahmon välityksellä ja itsemurhan uhka asemoidaan koulukontekstiin, mikä on yleistä etenkin 2000-luvun puolella ilmestyneille esityksille.²⁰ Tämän lisäksi populaarikulttuurin kierrättämässä esityksissä toistuvat sukupuolitetut ”hulluuden” kuvaukset. *Mothin* voi kuitenkin nähdä tulkitsevan itsemurhaa kan-

sanperinteeseen nojaten: vampyyrifiktion pikemmin kuin diagnoosien välityksellä.

Elokuvan kerronnassa päähahmo palaa kesälomalta toisen vuoden opintoihinsa sisäoppilaitoksessa ja huomaa tulewansa arvoituksellisen uuden oppilaan Ernessan (Lily Cole) syrjäyttämäksi suhteessaan parhaaseen ystävään Lucyyn (Sarah Gadon). Luku-kauden edetessä Lucylle kehittyä anoreksia, minkä lisäksi Rebeccan ystäväpiiri kapenee muun muassa selittämättömien kuolemien johdosta. Rebecca syyttää sekä kuolemista että ystävänsä sairaudesta Ernessaa, jota epäilee vampyyriksi kirjallisuuden kurssinsa vaikuttamana. Ernessan taustatarina, joka selviää tytölle vähä vähältä, vahvistaa epäilyt ja kytkee hahmot toisiinsa: Rebecca suree runoilijaisänsä itsemurhaa, ja Ernessa ei koskaan toipunut muusikkoisänsä omaehtoisesta kuolemasta. Tytön toipuminen peilautuikin Ernessan tarinasta: Ernessa surmaa itsensä surussaan, kun taas Rebecca lopulta kieltäytyy jakamasta tämän kohtalon.

Elokvassa kuvataan yhteensä kuutta itsetuhoa. Kerronnallisessa keskiössä on protagonistipari Rebeccan ja Ernessan itsetuhoisuus, joista kumpikin selittyy itsemurhatartunnalla. Itsemurhan on tunnistettu



”tarttuvan” myös ikäluokan sisällä ja vanhemmilta lapsille,²¹ ja protagonistiparin alttiuden taustalla vaikuttavat isien itsemurhat. Näistä toinen jopa tuotetaan graafisesti näkyviin elokuvan visuaalisessa kerronnassa. Mainittujen neljän tapauksen lisäksi itsetuho nostaa päätään Rebeccan ystävän puotamiskuolemassa ja Lucyn anoreksiassa. Vampyyri-Ernessan välityksellä sekä Rebeccan tila että Lucyn passiivisen itsemurhan²² kriteerit täyttävä anoreksia kytkeytyvät kulttuurihistoriaan, jossa molempia on selitetty demonien viettelyllä.²³

Eryteisesti itsemurhatartunnan tarkastelemaan vampyyri on perusteltu metafora historiallisten juurtensa tähden: eurooppalaisessa folkloressa tämä monien eri termien alla kuolleista heräävä hahmo on usein syy-pukki selittämättömille kuolemille.²⁴ Hahmoa määrittelevänä ominaisuutena toimii sen ”epäluonnollinen suhde kuolemaan,”²⁵ mikä ilmentyy paitsi hahmon kuolemanjälkeisessä levottomuudessa myös sen olotilaa selittävässä luonnottomassa kuolemassa. ”Vampyyriksi” määriteltävien levottomien kuolleiden syntyä on usein selitetty joko ennen aikaisella kuolemalla tai epäonnistuneilla hautajaisriiteillä,²⁶ jotka yhdistyvät käytän-

teissä haudata itsemurhakuolleet kirkon pyhittämiin hautapaikkojen ulkopuolelle. Siten levottomia itsemurhavainajia ja kuolemaa levittäviä ”vampyyreita” on tulkittu osana samaa ilmiötä.

Elokvassa vampyyrin hahmo indikoi kuoleman houkutusta kahdesta näkökulmasta. Sen lisäksi, että vampyyri edustaa epäluonnolliseksi määräytyvää kuolemanhalua, fiktion seksualisoima hahmo²⁷ näytetty useinkin seksuaalisesti transgressiivisena.²⁸ Myös Ernessan transgressiivisuus on eskplisiittisesti seksuaalista. Suhteessaan Lucyyn tämä määräytyy lesbiseksi vampyyriksi, joka on yksi vampyyrikuvastomme kierrättämistä vakiohahmoista.²⁹ Tästä asemasta vampyyri horjuttaa päähahmon merkittävintä ihmissuhdetta ja sidettä elämään. Seksuaalinen houkutus sulautuu itsetuhoon vampyyrin aiheuttaessa Lucyn kuoleman ja houkutellessa Rebeccaa itsemurhalla: ensimmäisen syömishäiriön vihjataan olevan Ernessan vaikutusta ja jälkimmäisen öisin hyväilemän partaterän vampyyrin tälle antama.

Eskplisiittisemmin vampyyrin voi elokuvassa nähdä ilmentävän vanhempien lapsilleen ”tartuttamaa” kuolemanhalua. Elokuvan

kohtauksissa itsemurhatartuntaa käsitellään tietynlaisena verenperintönä, ja niissä vanhemman aiheuttamasta itsemurhahalusta toipuminen kytkeytyy muistamiseen sekä Elizabeth Kübler-Rossin teorisoiimiin suruprosessin vaiheisiin,³⁰ mikä käy ilmi sekä kohtausten dialogista että dramatisoinnista. Vampyyri vihjaa itsemurhaan esimerkiksi puhuessaan molempien perimistä taiteellisista lahjoista, minkä tyttö pyrkii kieltämään samalla tavalla kuin elokuvan muissa kohtauksissa kieltää muistavansa isänsä itsemurhan.

Kahden avainkohtauksen toisteisessa sisällössä tyttö istuu koulun kappelimaisessa kirjastossa lukemassa ja kirjoittamassa päiväkirjaansa, kun vampyyri keskeyttää tämän ja houkuttelee tätä itsemurhalla, ensin verbaalisesti, sitten esimerkillään. Ensimmäisessä kohtauksista Ernessa kuvailee kuolemaa ihannoivasti:

Älä sääli isääsi. Eräät aikamme suurimmista taiteilijoista tulivat hulluiksi ja tappoivat itsensä. Jotkut ihmiset saavat suurta iloa kuoleman ajatuksesta. Pelkästään sen ajattelu voi tuntua lohdulliselta, samalla tavalla kuin peiton vetäminen päälleen silloin kun makaa sängyssään.



Kuoleman hetki on ekstaattinen, se on mitä riemukkain tunne. Silloin synnyttään uuteen olemassaoloon.

Vampyyrin puhe keskeyttää tytön itsemurhaan kytkeytyvän pohdinnan: “Henkilö saattaa muuttua vampyyriksi, mikäli kuolee tulematta nähdyksi. Isäni halusi kuolla tulematta nähdyksi, aivan kuten eläin, joka haluaa ryömiä nurkkaan kuolemaan yksin.” Molempien avainkohtausten lopussa Rebecca myös löytää pöydältä partaterän, jonka voimme olettaa vampyyrin tälle jättämäksi. Yöllä Rebecca tarkastelee terää sängyssään: *“Onko isäni sairaus myös omassa veressäni?”*, hän pohtii ja teeskentelee viiltävänsä terällä virheetöntä rannettaan: *“Kuinkahan paljon se sattui, kun hän teki sen? Veikö se kivun todella pois?”*

Toisessa kahdesta avainkohtauksesta itsemurhatartunta ilmentyy sen visuaalisessa kerronnassa. Kohtaus seuraa taikamaa, jossa Rebecca viimein muistaa hautaamansa muistot: muistossaan tyttö pakottaa lukitun kylpyhuoneen oven auki ja löytää isänsä ruumiin lysähtäneenä ammetta vasten – isä on viiltänyt ranteensa, verta on kaikkialla. Avainkohtauksen aloit-

tava Ernessan puhe tuntuukin asemoivan tämän graafisesti kuvatun kuoleman myös Rebeccaa itseään uhkaavaksi kohtaloksi. Dialogin päättää Grimmin sadusta ”Kataja” lainattu laulu, joka tuntuu niin ikään kuvailevan jatkumoa, jossa vanhemman itsemurha uhkaa myös lasta. Se viittaa tarinaan, jossa paha äitipuoli tappaa ja tietämätön isä hyvällä ruokahalulla syö lapsensa.³¹

– “[I]säsihän aiheutti sinulle kaiken tämän vai-
van.”

– ”Olet väärässä. Kaikki ne hyvät asiat, jotka
muistan hänestä, kävelyretkemme, ne sadut,
joita hän luki minulle, kaikki se oli totta.”

”Hän luki sinulle myös toisenlaisia satuja, jot-
ka olet unohtanut. Äitini mun tappoi, isäni
mun söi, Marianna siskoseni kaappi kokoon-
luuni kaikki, silkki-vaatteenen net kiersi, hee-
mä-puulle käärön viersi.–”



Kuva 2: Rebecca (Sarah Gadon) pohtii isänsä itsemurhaa.



Laulua seuraavassa väkivallanteossaan Ernessa edustaakin Rebeccan pelkojen ja haaveiden lisäksi tämän isää, jonka kuolemaa hahmo toisintaa: hän kohottaa hihaansa ja paljastaa viiltohaavat ranteessaan, sitten viiltää itseään kehottaen: *“sinun on aika vapauttaa itsesi.”* Ernessa levittää kätensä sivulle kuin ristiinnaulittu Kristus, kasvonsa ekstaattiseen ilmeeseen sulaen, kun pöytänsä ääressä Rebecca yrittää suojella itseään haavoista satavalta vereltä. Kun Rebecca tointuu, hän istuu tahrattomassa kirjastossa yksin ja löytää taas partaterän edestään.

Elokuvan lopussa tytön voidaan nähdä ”vapauttavan” itsensä itseään uhanneelta itsetuholta: Rebecca tarkastelee terää sängyssään, kunnes sysää sen inhoten pois. Löydettyään Ernessan ruumisarkun koulun kellarista tyttö sytyttää sen tuleen. Elokuva päättyy poliisiasemalle kuljetettavan Rebeccan hankkiutuessa terästä eroon. Tässä mielessä *Mothin* voi mieltää turvalliseksi tavaksi käsitellä tarttuvaksi määriteltyä itsemurhaa: vampyyrimetaforan avustamana se kuvaa itsemurhahaluja, joka tulee päihitettyksi.

Itsemurhatartunta mediakohussa

Vaikka Netflix-draama *13 Reasons Why* tarjoaa monilta osin samanlaisen esityksen itsemurhasta kuin *Moth*, se on tästä poiketen määritelty itsemurhatartunnan aiheuttajaksi. Sarjassa tarkastellaan syitä 17-vuotiaan tytön, Hannah Bakerin (Katherine Langford), kuoleman taustalla, ja sen ensimmäinen kausi perustuu Jay Asherin samannimiseen kirjaan (2007). Kohun taustalla vaikuttaa sosiologi David Phillipsin nimeämä ”Werther-efekti,”³² median välittämäksi esitetty itsemurhatartunta, joka on tehnyt tulenarkoja sellaisista esityksistä, joiden voidaan tulkita glorifioivan ja romantisoivan³³ itsemurhaa. Tartunta juontuu Goethen klassikkoteoksesta *Nuoren Wertherin kärsimykset* (1774), jonka on tulkittu aiheuttaneen Euroopan yli pyyhkineen itsemurha-aallon julkaisuajankohtanaan.³⁴

Pääasiassa Anglo-Amerikkalaista maailmaa ravistellut kohu syntyi, kun sarjan ensimmäinen kausi julkaistiin maaliskuussa 2017. Sarjan argumentoituihin ylentävään itsemurhaa ja siten toimivan laukaisevana tekijänä tosielämän itsemurhille, jonka johdosta sarjalle muun muassa vaadittiin korkeampia ikärajoja ja sitä koskenutta keskustelua pyrittiin sensuroimaan erityisesti

mielenterveysalan toimijoiden, koulujen ja vanhempien toimesta. Mieliopidekirjoituksissa ja viihdejulkaisuissa kritiikin kohteeksi asettuivat etenkin sarjan graafiset kohotukset ja taipumus kuvata itsemurhahaluja vailla masennusdiagnoosin selitysvoimaa ja viittausta ammattiavun sallimiin toipumismahdollisuuksiin. Keskustelu oli kiivaimmillaan huhti-toukokuussa 2017, mutta se on jatkunut myös yli toisen kauden julkaisun toukokuussa 2018, jolloin luvattua kolmatta kautta vaadittiin peruttavaksi.

Sarjan visuaalisen kerronnan osalta kohu oli ennakoitavissa: siinä yhdistyivät kaksi tabua, seksuaalinen väkivalta ja itsemurha, joita kuvataan raa’asti ja kaunistelematta. Graafisuus ei ole harvinaista viihteen itsemurhakuvauksille ylipäänsä, mutta se on poikkeuksellinen sekä genrensä sisällä että narratiivinsa osalta, jossa omaehtoinen kuolema päättää toiseksi päähahmoksi mielletyn hahmon tarinan sarjan huipennuksessa.³⁵ Nämä ongelmallisiksi määritellyt tekijät myös korostuvat, kun huomioidaan sarjan huomioarvo sosiaalisessa mediassa ja sen nuorista aikuisista koostuva kohdeyleisö, joka on katalysaattorina tuttu muis-takin moraalipaniikeista.³⁶ Tällöin sarjan



tuottanut ja sitä markkinoinut ja puolustanut Selena Gomez näyttäyty tietyntulaisena ”ärsykkeenä”. Sekä irrationaalisuuden värittämä itsemurha että pelätty tartunta näyttäytyvät juuri nuoruuteen sijoittuvana ongelmana,³⁷ ja tässä tapauksessa Disney-tähti Gomez houkuttelee nuoret suoraan ruutujen äärelle.

Sarjan ensimmäisessä jaksossa sen 17-vuotias päähenkilö Clay Jensen (Dylan Minnette) löytää kotiportailtaan pahvilaatikon, jonka sisältämällä C-kaseteilla itsensä surmanneen Hannahin ääni johdattaa poikaa ymmärtämään selittämättömäksi jäänyttä kuolemaansa. Tytöstä otettu pikkupöksyotos ja kuvaa kehystävä vale aiheuttavat tytölle huonon maineen, joka kimpoilee huhuista ja pilkanteosta säröihin tämän ystävyssuhteissa ja kulminoituu lopulta tytön kokemaan raiskaukseen, josta – kuten Hannah huomaa – patriarkaalinen kulttuuri tapaa syyllistää väkivallan uhria väkivallantekijää enemmän.

Hannah on Clayn toivottoman kouluhastuksen kohde, ja sarjassa Hannahin fataali tarina lomittuu Clayn toipumisprosessiin. Hahmot määrittyvät affiineiksi sekä rinnakkaiskerronnassa että leikkauksissa, joissa hahmojen surut ja vauriot (fyysisetkin) seuraavat toisiaan.

Lopulta hahmot eriävät toisistaan tekemisään valinnoissa: viimeisessä jaksossa Hannah kääntää selkensä sekä rakkaudelle että elämälle, kun Clay taas ojentaa molemmille kätensä. Samalla tavalla kuin *Mothissa*, päähahmolle affiiniksi merkityn hahmon fataali taustatarina siis pakottaa päähenkilön kohtaamaan itsemurhakuoleman aiheuttamat padotut tunteet ja mahdollistaa tämän toipumisen.

Sarjaa ympäröinyt kohu on ollut kriittisensä varsin monivivahteinen, ja monet näistä argumenteista on osoitettavissa aiheettomiksi sarjan sisältöjä tarkastelemalla. Yhdeksi sarjan kiistanalaisemmista elementeistä on tuomittu Hannahin postuumi kertojanaäni, jonka on tulkittu romantisoivan itsemurhaa koston välineenä ja häivyttävän kuoleman lopullisuutta.³⁸ Sarjan viraaliin kieltoon yltäneessä alkulauseessa Hannah lausuu:

Hei, Hannah täällä. Hannah Baker [...] livenä ja stereona. Ei toista keikkaa myöhemmin, ei encorea – ja tällä kertaa: ei missään nimessä toivebiisejä. Hae purtavaa, rentoudu, sillä aion kertoa sinulle elämäntarinani. Tarkemmin sanottuna: miksi elämäni päättyi. Ja mikäli kuuntelet tätä kasettia, olet yksi syy siihen.

Hannahin ääni tuntuu puhuttelevan niin katsojaa kuin surunsa ja syyllisyytensä kanssa kamppailevaa Clayta henkilökohtaisesti. Jokainen kasetti, ja jokainen sarjan kolmetatoista jaksosta, yhtä kasettia ja jaksoa lukuun ottamatta, keskittyy eri henkilöihin. Clay on kymmenes puhutelluista kahdestatoista ihmisestä, jotka koostuvat ihastuksista, ystäivistä, vihamiehistä ja koulun opinto-ohjaaja Mr. Porterista (Derek Luke). Sarjan edetessä Clay kohtaa kaseteilla nimettyjä hahmoja, ja näiden osuuksia tarinassa avataan syvemmin kuin sarjan alkuteoksessa. Tämän myötä Clay alkaa paremmin ymmärtää hahmojen toimia: näiden syyllisyys ei näyttäyty yhtä mustavalkoisena kuin Hannah esittää, minkä voisi nähdä asettuvan vastakkain sarjan kohtaaman kritiikin kanssa.

Vaikka sarjan on pelätty nimenomaan ylentävän itsemurhaa, siinä viipyillään useiden päähahmon omaehtoista kuolemaa kyseenalaistavien teemojen äärellä. Oleellisessa roolissa ovat erityisesti elonjääneiden suruun keskittyvät juonikaaret, jotka osoittavat tytön hiljaisuudessa kasvaneen ratkaisun piittaamattomuuden. Hannah kummittelee etenkin vanhempiensa (Kate Walsh ja Brian d’Arcy James) surussa, jota



tarkastellaan sarjassa raadollisen likeltä. Ta-
kaumissa ja haavekuvissa kuvattu romanssi
Clayn ja Hannahin välillä taas de-romantiso-
i tytön kuolemaa. Viimeiseksi sarjan tulokul-
ma seksuaaliseen väkivaltaan horjuttaa ty-
tön ratkaisua vaikka ymmärtää niitä yhteis-
kunnallisista rakenteista johtuvia kynnyksiä,
jotka hankaloittavat seksuaalisen väkivallan
uhreja hakemasta itselleen oikeutta toisin.

Toisin sanoen, narratiivinsa osalta sarjan ei
yksiselitteisesti voida väittää ylentävän it-
semurhaa: paitsi että siinä on havaittavissa
enemmän elämänmyönteistä kuin itsemur-
hapositiivista tematiikkaa, se ei suoranaises-
ti ”hyväksy” Hannahin valintaa.

Yksioikoiseen luentaan perustuvan ko-
hun taustalla paistaa itsemurhan asema
länsimaisessa moraalijärjestelmässä pa-

haksi määriteltynä kuolemana, joka edel-
lyttää ruumiiseen suuntautuneen biovallan
interventioita.³⁹ Myös sen kohtelu tabuna
voitaisiin mieltää osaksi samaa ilmiötä. It-
semurha on paitsi tabua määrittelevän hil-
jaisuuden ja eufemististen puheentapojen
ympäröimä sensitiivinen aihe, se on myös
luonnonvastaiseksi määritelty kuolema,
josta erityisen vaarallisen tekee siihen lii-
tetty tartunnan pelko. On huomattava, että
itsemurha määrittyy myös tarttuvaksi niissä
diskursiivisissa prosesseissa, joissa sitä kä-
sitellään ja kotoistetaan poissulkevassa suh-
teessa luonnolliseen, hyvään kuolemaan.

Itsemurhan kotoistaminen tarttuvana kuo-
lemana yltää sen asemaan mediassa ja
populaarikulttuurissa. Vaikka sensitiivinen
aihe on kulttuurissamme varsin näkyvässä
roolissa, sen tabuus näyttäytyy olemassa
olevan kuvaston yksipuolisuudessa ja käsi-
tyksissämme siitä, miten omaehtoista kuo-
lemaa voi kuvata. Olen toisaalla ehdottanut,
että itsemurhaa kehystävissä narratiiveissa
on nähtävissä pyrkimys tarttuvaksi ja pelot-
tavaksi mielletyn ”pahan kuoleman” kesyt-
tämiseen.⁴⁰ Audio-visuaaliselle viihteelle
ominaisten, naisiseksi sukupuolitettujen⁴¹ ja
hulluuden kehystämien narratiivien voi näh-



Kuva 3: Netflixin tuottaman *13 Reasons Why* -sarjan ensimmäisellä kaudella (2017) päähahmo Clay (Dylan Minnette) toipuu kouluihastuksensa itsemurhasta. .



dä osallistuvan omaehtoisen kuoleman alentamiseen naiseuteen ja hulluuteen liitettyjen heikkouden ja irrationaalisuuden attribuuttien välityksellä, jotka korostavat itsemurhan alhaista luonnetta. Voitaisiinkin esittää, että mediaesitysten kavalkadi on olemassa olevasta etiketistä ja omaehtoiseen kuolemaan liittyvistä käsityksistä johtuen valtaosin stigmatisoiva, niin sanotusti biovallan alla kesytetty.

Tältä osin *13 Reasons* -sarjan kohtauksissa kohussa oireellista on etenkin ongelmalliseksi tulkittu tapa kuvata hahmon itsemurhaa psykiatristen diagnoosien ja terapeuttien apukeinojen ohi.⁴² Erityisesti kun huomioidaan, että Hannahin masennus on vastaanotossa vaadittujen verbaalisten indikaattorienkin puuttuessa ilmeinen: mielialahäiriön kulttuurisesti tunnistettavat merkit ovat läsnä sekä Hannahin alakulossa että Claylle hankitussa lääkityksessä, minkä lisäksi diagnostiikka ja hätälinjat esiintyvät sekä jaksoja edeltävissä varoituksissa että sarjaa täydentävässä dokumentissa.

Kritiikki tuntuisi oirehtivan tabun määrittämää moraliteettia etenkin siinä, että se kytkee pelon itsemurhan glorifioinnista sarjan tapaan kuvata tätä kuolemaa rationaalisena

päätöksenä. Kuten tiukempia ikärajoituksia suosittanut auktoriteetti perustelee: ”Itsemurhaa ei pitäisi esittää kenellekään jonakin, mikä seuraa selväjärkisestä ajattelusta.”⁴³ Psykologit ovat kuitenkin esittäneet, että vaikka itsemurhan taustalla usein piilee jonkinlainen ”psykkinen kiputila,” tekona se edellyttää tietoista päätöstä,⁴⁴ jota tunteen lisäksi ruokkivat usein myös monenlaiset sosioekonomiset, järkeenkäyviksi määriteltävissä olevat tekijät.⁴⁵ Tältä osin sarjan kuvaus yksinäisyyden ja monen takaiskun vaikutuksesta kumulatiivasta ratkaisusta on realistisempi kuin valtaosa viihteen epämääräisen ”hulluuden” motivoimista itsemurhakuvauksista.

Juuri tämän itsemurhan ylentämiseen kohdistuvan huolen taustalla vaikuttavassa Werther-efektissä huomionarvoista taas on se, että efektiä on ollut yhtä hankala kiistää kuin todentaa: kuten mallin kohtaama kritiikki huomauttaa, alkujaan uutismedian puitteissa tarkasteltua tartuntaa fiktiivisiin esityksiin sovitettaessa ei ole riittävästi huomioitu esimerkiksi fiktiivisyyden, genren tai muiden laadullisten seikkojen vaikutusta.⁴⁶ Tutkimukset ovat myös kohdanneet epistemologista ja metodologista kritiikkiä,⁴⁷ minkä lisäksi löydettyjä korrelaatioita ei ole

kyetty todentamaan.⁴⁸ Mediapaniikkien ja Werther-efektiä tarkastelleiden tutkimusten taustalla näyttäisi myös vaikuttavan simplistinen käsitys sekä itsemurhasta että televisiota katsovista nuorista.⁴⁹ Toteutuessaan itsemurha edellyttää monien altistavien tekijöiden yhteisvaikutusta jopa silloin, kun kyseessä ovat vaikutteille alttiiksi mielletty yleisöt.⁵⁰ Kuten muidenkin mediaväkivallan esitysten,⁵¹ myös itsemurhan representaatioiden vaikutuksia tarkasteltaessa olisi syytä kyseenalaistaa huolen taustalla hämmäyttävä injektioneulamallinen käsitys mallioppimisesta.⁵² Toisin sanoen: vaikka omaehtoisen kuoleman voisi nähdä tarttuvan ideana, se ei tekona selity yksinomaan itsemurhan mahdollisia järkisyitä tarkastelevilla representatioilla, toisin kuin Werther-efektiin tukeutuvat diskurssit esittävät.⁵³

13 Reasons -sarjan kohtaama kritiikki asettuu mittasuhteisiinsa, kun sarjaa tarkastellaan kokonaisuutena ja suhteutetaan vallitsevaan kuvastoon: on huomionarvoista, että ruutumme ovat medikalisoituneet siinä määrin, että niiden itsemurhanarratiivien voisi väittää olevan lääketieteellisten diagnoosien ja terapia-avusteisten parantumiskertomusten kolonisoimia.⁵⁴ Myös näiden narratiivien



voisi esittää olevan omalla tavallaan ongelmallisia: lääketieteellisiin diagnooseihin on havaittu liittyvän paljon häpeää,⁵⁵ ja niiden on esitetty jopa olevan yksi samaistumispiintaa rakentava tekijä.⁵⁶ Siten myös diagnooseja ja itsemurhan poikkeuslaatua korostavat esitykset saattavat ”tartuttaa” häpeän,⁵⁷ stigmaan pohjaavan identifi kaation tai näiden aiheuttaman eristyneisyyden kautta. Tällöin populaarikulttuurin valtavirrasta puuttuvien, itsemurhahalua ymmärtävien esitysten voisi väittää jopa lievittävän itsemurhan kanssa kamppailuun liittyvää häpeää.

Itsemurhatartunta pelonhallintamekanismina

Huomionarvoista *13 Reasons Why* -sarjassa on etenkin sen ero *The Moth Diaries* -elokuvaan, joka eroaa edellisestä vastaanotossaan, vaikka on sisällöllisesti huomattavan samankaltainen: molemmat toistavat sellaisia valtavirtaistuneita trooppeja, jotka yleensä mahdollistavat itsemurhan käsittelyn viihteessä. Tällöin vampyyrifiktioita kautta itsemurhaa tarkasteleva *Moth* sekä avaa sarjan aiheuttamaa kohua että sallii Werther-efektin rinnastamisen niihin samansisältöisiin uskomuksiin, jotka ovat sitä edeltäneet.

Ensinnäkin, jos Netflix-sarjassa on koettu ongelmalliseksi sen empaattinen tapa kuvata itsemurhaan päätyvän nuoren naisen motivaatioita, *Mothin* voisi väittää olevan tietyissä piirteissään ongelmallisempi. Harronin tekemien rakenteellisten ratkaisujen tähden elämä voittaa elokuvassa kuoleman yksiselitteisemmin kuin romantisoinnista syytetys sarjassa, mutta sen esitystä itsemurhasta voi pitää edellistä romantisoivampana: siinä omaehtoista kuolemaa ylentävät sekä sek-

sualisoitu vampyyrin hahmo että avainkohdauksissa hyödynnetyt kristillinen ikonografia ja taiteilijaitsemurhaa ylentävä dialogi. Kuvauksessaan *Moth* ja *13 Reasons* ovat yhtä graafiset. Tuntuukin oireelliselta, että sarjan korotettujen ikärajojen taustalla valitsee huoli siitä, että irrationaalisuuden kautta määritellylle itsemurhalle löydetään sarjassa järkisyitä. Huoli osoittaa, millaista arvolatautuneista tausta-asetelmista käsin sosiokulttuurista järjestystä uhkaavan



Kuva 4: Hannahin (Katherine Langford) masennus tuotetaan näkyviin sarjan visuaalisessa kerronnassa. .



itsemurhan esityksiä tuotetaan ja säädel-
lään.

Mothin irtaantumista Netflix-sarjaa kos-
keneessa kohussa peräänkuulutetuista
diagnooseista avustaa sen paikoittuminen
kahden genren väliin: etenkin kauhun itse-
murhakuvauksissa kiertävät diagnooseista
poikkeavat selitysmallit.⁵⁸ *Mothissa* hyö-
dynnetty on vielä harvinaisen osuva. Vam-
pyriuskomukset ovat folkloristien mukaan
tarjonneet keinon hallita kuolemaan liittyviä

pelkoja, minkä lisäksi Mary Hallab rinnas-
taa niiden funktion tieteellisiin selitysmal-
leihin: ”Kansanperinteen vampyyri tarjoaa
käytännönläheisen ymmärryksen sellaisiin
elämään liittyviin ilmiöihin, kuten sairauten
tai kuolemaan, jotka tuntuvat karttavan jär-
kevää selitystä, ja tarjoaa keinon niiden kä-
sittelyyn”.⁵⁹

Voitaisiin esittää, että vampyyrin kaltainen
metafora koetaan edelleen turvalliseksi ta-
vaksi käsitellä itsemurhan kaltaista, elämän

ja kuoleman rajalla ”luonnottomasti” häily-
vää ihmismielen arvoitusta. Hahmo on yksi
suosituimmista ”välitilaisista” hirviöstämme,
ja Tony Thornen mukaan se muuntautuu in-
dikoimaan mitä hyvänsä, mitä yhteiskunta
karttaa, mutta salaa kaipaa.⁶⁰ Vampyyrin on
nähty osallistuvan etenkin sosiokulttuurista
kesyttämistä edellyttävän kuoleman hallin-
taan.⁶¹ William Patrick Day ehdottaakin, että
elämän ja kuoleman, ihmisyyden ja toiseu-
den rajamailla häilyvä hirviö auttaa ymmär-
tämään ihmisyyttä turvallisen etäisyyden
takaa: folkloresta tutut vampyyrit edustavat
menneisyyttä.⁶² Siten vampyyrin avulla voi-
daan käsitellä sellaisia perustavanlaatuisia
tarpeita, haluja ja pelkoja⁶³ sekä yhteiskun-
nallisesti relevantteja aiheita, joita ei voida
tarkastella eksplisiittisissä muodoissa, kuten
itsemurhaa.⁶⁴

Toiseksi *Mothin* vampyyri jakaa historialli-
sen kytköksen *13 Reasons* -sarjaa kohdan-
neeseen Werther-efektiin. Kansanperinteen
vampyyritapausten on ehdotettu selittyvän
tartuntataudeilla, jotka ovat aiheuttaneet
paljon kuolemaa yhteisön sisällä.⁶⁵ Day eh-
dottaa, että vampyyrin hahmo on alun perin
selittänyt kuolettavien sairauksien nopeaa
leviämistä aikana, jolloin tartunnan meka-



**Kuva 5: Sarjaa kohdannut kritiikki asettuu vastakkain sen elämänmyön-
teisen viestin kanssa.**



nismit ovat vielä olleet hämärät. Näin ollen vampyyri on toiminut ”metaforana, joka antoi ihmisen hahmon viruksille ja bakteereille”.⁶⁶ Siten, kuten Outi Hakola kuvaa, sekä alkusijoillaan että nykymuodossaan vampyyri edustaa pelkoa siitä, että kuolema aiheuttaa lisää kuolemaa.⁶⁷ *The Moth Diaries* -elokuvasssa tämä historia oirehtii ”transgressiivisessä, subversiivisessä ja jopa vallankumouksellisessa” vampyyri-Ernessan hahmossa, joka uhkaa ”muuttaa elävät kaltaiseksi”⁶⁸ asetuttuaan itsemurhassaan vallitsevaa järjestystä vastaan. *13 Reasons Why* -sarjassa sama historia taas ilmenee valtavirrasta poikkeavaan itsemurhaesitykseen liitettyssä tartunnanpelossa ja tämän pelon herättämässä mediapaniikissa.

Kuten Werther-efektin kohtaamasta kriitikistä voidaan kuitenkin päätellä, omaehtoisen kuolemaan reagoidaan toistaiseksi pahimpien mahdollisten uhkakuvien pohjalta ja sellaisten olettamusten varasta, joita ei ole onnistuttu vahvistamaan. Qijin Cheng kollegoineen jopa kritisoi itsemurhatartuntaa käsitteenä, joka on ”sallinut tutkijoiden siteerata toisiaan omien argumenttiansa tueksi joutumatta paneutumaan niihin eroihin, jotka heidän tutkimuksiaan erottavat.”⁶⁹ Cheng

kollegoineen huomauttaa, että suurimmassa osassa tapauksia tartunnaksi määritelty siirtymä ei toteuta tartunnan kriteereitä vaan pelkästään hyödyntää termiä affektiivisena metaforana, mikä on mahdollistanut laadullisesti varsin erilaisten mekanismien sekoittumisen yhteen ja auttanut selitysmallia juurtumaan.⁷⁰

Tämä tekee aiheen kiinnostavaksi myös tieteen ja taikauskon, irrationaalisen ja rationaalisen väliseen kahtiajakoon liittyen. Kritisoitua itsemurhatartuntaa voisi selitysmallina määritellä taikauskoksi, mikäli määrittelemme taikauskon kuten tabua tarkastellut Frazer: pelkoon pohjaavana tulkintana, jonka pohjalla operoi väärinymmärrys kausaliteetista.⁷¹ Esitys muuttuu erityisen relevantiksi, kun tarkastelun kohteena on kuoleman kaltainen ilmiö, joka mielletään psykologisesti pelottavaksi ja yhteisön kannalta vaaralliseksi, ja joka siksi vaatii sen vaaraa kesyttäviä toimenpiteitä. Itsemurhatartunta heijastuu tällöin samankaltaisista, etäisyyden suojaamista kansanperinteen uskomuksista, joita populaarikulttuurimme nykyään kierrättää fiktiona.

Eryyisesti se, että itsemurhatartunnan voi väittää operoivan mediassa tartuntaan liitet-

tyjen pelkojen voimalla antaa todistuksen niistä arvolatautuneista eronteista, jotka yhä auttavat rakentamaan kuvaa lännestä kehityksen pinaakkelina. Tartunnanpelkoon kytketty tabujärjestelmä ei vastaa läntistä ideaalia rationaalisesti toimivasta yhteiskunnasta, minkä tähden se on historiassaan tullut määritellyksi ”magiaksi” ja nykyään tulee monesti yksilöidyksi trauman ja uskonnollisen vakaumuksen kaltaisten tekijöiden kautta. Tästä huolimatta tabulle ominaisen tartunnanpelon voisi nähdä vaikuttavan useiden tabuilmiöiden vastaanotossa lännessä aina institutionaaliselta tasolta lähtien. Esimerkiksi kuvaamani itsemurhatartunta vaikuttaa siinä populaarikulttuurisessa kuvastossa, josta *13 Reasons* tietyiltä osin poikkeaa, vaikka se muuttuukin eksplisiittisesti näkyväksi vasta tämänkaltaisissa sensuurivaatimuksissa, jotka poikkeavaan esitykseen välittömästi liitetään.

Loppuun on todettava, että vaikka artikkelini suhtautuu kriittisesti Werther-efektiin, tarkoitukseni ei ole kiistää ilmiötä vaan problematisoida ristiriitaisia tuloksia tuottavien hypoteesien valtaa mediakoneistossa, joka vaikuttaa sekä itsemurhaesityksien muotoon että vastaanottoon. Tarkoitukseni



ei myöskään ole syyttää aiheeseen liittyviä keskusteluja irratiionaaliseksi siinä arvolutauneessa asetelmassa, jossa irratiionaalinen usein tulee erotelluksi ratiionaalisesta. Lähtökohtani on uskomuksessa, että taikauskoiiksi määrittelemämme, vaaralliseen kuolemaan liitetyt uskomukset ja niitä seuranneet selitysmallit ovat osa samaa jatkumoa, jossa kuoleman kaltaista yleismaallisesti pelottavaa ilmiötä on pyritty selittämään. Nykyään vaaralliseksi määriteltyä itsemurhakuolemaa pyrkivät kaitsemaan diagnoosit, Werther-efektin kaltaiset hypoteesit, ja näiden kolonisoimat sekä säätelemät viihteen esitykset, joissa itsemurhatartunnan kohteina toimivat usein nuoret, irratiionaalisuuden määrittelemät naiset ja psykopatologian kourissa kamppailevat ”hullut”. Entisten vampyyriuskomusten lailla näiden voisi nähdä toimivan keinoina hallita tarttuvaksi määriteltyä kuolemaa juuri tietyistä lähtökohdissa kumpuavina pelonhallintamekanismeina.

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FM Heidi S. Kosonen toimii väitöskirjatutkijana Jyväskylän yliopiston musiikin, taiteen ja kulttuurin tutkimuksen laitoksella. Hän viimeistelee tabua käsittelevää väitöskirjaa, jonka tarkastelun kohteena on erityisesti seksuaalisuuteen ja kuolemaan kohdistuvan biovallan ilmeneminen jälkimodernissa kuvakulttuurissa. Erityisesti itsemurhan visuaalisia representaatioita Kosonen on tarkastellut etnologiatieteisiin laatimastaan kandidaatintutkielmasta (2007–2008) lähtien. Vapaa-ajallaan Kosonen muun muassa ylläpitää tutkimusblogia osoitteessa: <https://theoryoftaboo.wordpress.com/>.





IV

**'MY MOTHER, SHE BUTCHERED ME, MY FATHER,
HE ATE ME: FEMINIST FILMMAKING RESISTING
SELF-HARM'S GENDERING IN THE MOTH DIARIES'**

by

Heidi Kosonen & Pauline Greenhill, 2020

Submitted to *Screening the Past*

Request a copy from the author.