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The Death of the Others and the Taboo: Suicide Represented

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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 obsidionaux* 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 feminity 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.

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[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 it 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; Krysinska 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 Rosts'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.

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[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; Krysinska 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.

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[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.)

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

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[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 obsidionaux: an enemy about to kill himself rather than suffer capture* (Brown 2001, 33; Halbwachs 1978).

Durkheim's typology categorises these *suicides obsidionaux*, 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

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[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 Hoof 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

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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*

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[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; Higonnet 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

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(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 obsidionaux* 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 *déshabille* 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. Lucrezia 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

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[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).

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[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; Higonnet 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 effeminised 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 effeminised, 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

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[39] Canetto has seminally 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 haunt 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

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[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

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[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 de-masculinised 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

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[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 quilt 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

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[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, ¾ x 28 ½ 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 a 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).

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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).

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[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,

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[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; Krysinska 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 inevitability 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 though 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

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[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

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[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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