

Debra Ferreday (Department of Media, Film and Cultural Studies, Lancaster University)

ESCHATOLOGIES OF THE FLESH: THE SPECTACLE OF ONLINE SUICIDE

This paper will examine the moral panics surrounding so-called 'internet suicide.' From early 'suicide pacts' in Japan, through the alleged Bebo suicide cult that caused panic in the British media in 2008, to the recent case of the unnamed American teenager who filmed his successful suicide attempt after being urged to do so by other users, the internet suicide is a powerful focus of cultural anxieties concerning digital media. Similarly, one focus of the debate on euthanasia has been the exchange of information about methods and practices for carrying out acts of self-destruction.

This paper will show how internet suicide becomes a boundary figure, recorded forever yet haunted by the inevitability of his own future death. Writing in another context, Abigail Bray has used the term 'eschatologies of the flesh' to examine the temporality invoked by bodies that are imagined as poised on the threshold between life and death (1996: 423). By bringing together this idea of the body-bound-to-die with theories of haunting, the paper will explore what the elusive spectacle of online suicide reveals about the collective fears, desires and longings that circulate through narratives of digital culture. It will examine what it might mean to read visual digital media, including YouTube and social networking sites, as haunted/uncanny spaces and as spaces of mourning