



for friends of J

the merging of fact & fiction binaries within

SUICIDE

by

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Attestation of Authorship

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the acknowledgments'.

13th October 2006.

Paul Steven Chapman.

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Abstract

The Merging of Fact and Fiction Binaries within Suicide.

This explorative research examines a contemporary representation for suicide. Utilizing a **dualistic framework** of biology and technology, I codify diverse theoretical discourses into why people commit suicide. My practical research then merges opposing binaries of 'fact' (the need to understand) within 'fiction' (the need to tell narratives). In context of this study a person who has taken their own life is the 'author' and the researcher is the 'reader' of this event - I investigate how the reader imposes their own narrative upon the author.

Preface

'The status of suicide has always been open to question... The historian of suicide can discern little consensus in any of the issues, which emerge in the course of its 'long history'; rather, the range of social, political and cultural responses with which it has been greeted has reflected, with uncanny accuracy, the shifting patterns of human thought over two millennia. It's representations: tragic, epic, heroic, pathetic, judgmental, moral, didactic, comic and satiric, paint a picture of a European culture grappling with the almost impossible task of understanding and coming to terms with this strangest and most persistent of phenomena'.

Ron Brown. (2001). *'The Art of Suicide'*, page 8.

A definition of suicide seems simple enough; it is the intentional taking of ones own life. Interpretations of this act however are an entirely different matter and have no such static description.

Ron Brown's reflection on representations concerning suicide, demonstrate a myriad of interpretations over the history of humanity. Perhaps the most common denominator about suicide is the vast number of people who would like to understand it. The many discourses into the suicidal mind, inquiries by sociologists, psychologists, psychotherapists, neurologists, suicidologists, philosophers, clergymen, and artists, have helped to de-compartmentalize this topic from a singular to a multifaceted issue.

Anybody who takes their own life becomes the 'author' of their own death, with the 'reader' left to interpret, relive, and reconsider this final irrevocable action. In a sense the author is still omniscient whilst we take the role of voyeur, extrapolating backwards from the event, looking for insight as to why. As Mathew Piantalto writes in his thesis on suicide, 'the problem a suicide leaves is a "*whydunnit*" on one level is glaringly obvious, because for one reason or another, this person chooses to die.'¹

This final ending is seldom witnessed²; leaving a dead body that invites comparisons to a CSI³ scenario, complete with clues that need deciphering in

the best traditions of Sherlock Holmes, inviting narration and fictionalization. Suicide also severs relationships with family, friends, and community, and through this sense of abandonment we also stand accused of inaction, of not knowing and not seeing until it was too late⁴.

The suicide of my friend Jeremy has formulated this project and established a rapport with the subject matter that is part autobiographical. His suicide just prior to my commencement of study came as a total shock and surprise yet simultaneously didn't, with this disparity providing the impetus for my project. Within the broader parameters and key issues of my research, Jeremy's death provides a personal and constant context, from which I have located my research. While this study is ever-changing, evolving as more time has passed since his suicide, nevertheless everything has derived from this one single event.

My research in seeking new metaphors for representation of suicide subverts current investigations. In so doing I need to critique *how* we view suicide today and then *why* this is so. Discussions occur readily throughout this exegesis regarding issues of depression and mental health. Contemporary thought closely intertwines mental illness as a vital part of suicide. It's now a given part of any vernacular regarding suicide. While this research does not have the scope to critique this discourse with any depth, and nor do I have any 'expertise' to do so, I quite simply state that for this research it is treated solely as an idea.

Needing to structure my study within clearly defined parameters, for reasons I will expand on in Chapter One, I have framed my theoretical research within a dualistic metaphor. Chapter One introduces and overviews the Heavens Gate cult, from which I've appropriated this framing mechanism. Within this metaphor I establish the boundaries for my research with representational frameworks as an important component - understanding the

motivations for suicide is an important paradigm in itself. The *need to understand* is a key context for my research.

Chapter Two engages with ethical concerns and outlines my position as researcher. I examine both moral and political frameworks for suicide. In particular I discuss the 'right to die' and also the recently released New Zealand Government Strategy for suicide, both of which provide another context for this study: ethical paradigms.

Chapter Three discusses the role of 'story telling' in historic artworks that have imaged suicide. Within four examples of artworks I examine how we have imposed our own narrative upon suicide. I then draw attention and comparison to Heavens Gate and how this group (even posthumously) has narrative control over their own suicides.

Chapter Four is comprehensive in its scope and begins with several rhetorical questions. Methodology is the primary focus and is discussed in relation to my framing mechanisms, installation of artworks and within the binary nature of individual pieces.

Finally the 'Epilogue' is my succinct conclusion on representing suicide. Also, I offer a celestial overview of this research.

Each of the extensive disciplines and fields that scrutinize and interpret suicide has its own unique perspectives on this rather perplexing human behavior. Philosophers and writers engage with ethical, moral, and conceptual territory, while scientific research provides a biological imperative. Some deal purely with facts and statistics - a compiled list of suicide notes is a haunting read⁵. Others literally detail how not to kill oneself⁶, as an unsuccessful suicide attempt could result in permanent physical injuries, including brain damage. While some studies such as the hypothesized link between country music and metropolitan suicide rates⁷ are entertaining (unintentional on the writer's part I'm sure), we are left to ponder what the results might be for this investigation if conducted in Nashville. As peculiar as such studies appear, research bordering on the fringes of a topic can provide insight through the contestable nature of their claims. It can still be relevant and have something to offer as it is open to discussions as to whether it is valid or not. Research can inhabit a world where validity is not the only goal, but rather engages and provides different frameworks of understanding.

Defining parameters within this diverse and sometimes conflicting body of research is a difficult task. An example here is the debate about the perceived role of depression as either precursor or prerequisite to suicide. While it can be debated whether depressed people who kill themselves are in their '*right mind*', just *how* depressed they actually were can never be determined since they are dead and cannot be asked. A depressed person could still be of '*sound mind*'. A medical view is that the living patient is most certainly not of sound capacity and may be suffering from a psychological disorder, so this profession then sets about "curing" the patient through a program of medication (frequently with anti depressants). In this medical world suicide is

seen as a *failure* to keep somebody alive. From a libertarian point of view depression is not the *issue*, for it is up to the individual to make decisions about his or her own life. Suicide is then viewed as a *successful* outcome of an independent choice.

And remember, perhaps depression is even incidental to suicide. At one time or another having experienced some level of depression, haven't we all then engaged with a thought *process* that might have – but didn't - culminate in suicide? Does this allow us to understand anything about suicide? I haven't yet even touched upon the supposed evolutionary role of depression or other hypothesizes as to why we are all so blue.

As I mentioned in my introduction, a dead body invites questions of 'whydunnit' and comparisons to a criminal investigation. In exploring and referencing many disparate studies and areas to gain a possible 'overall' picture of this 'crime scene' I found the parameters of my research constantly moving. Suicide was proving to be an incredibly multifaceted phenomenon, by its very nature resisting confinement, seemingly malleable, even adaptable for various positions of research. I wanted to comment upon this quality and resist the universality and reductionism of the idea that the 'sum of the parts' is *not* more than the whole. Rather, I preferred to see them simply as parts.

Appropriated from my research into Heavens Gates, I decided on a **dualistic approach** to codify these diverse theoretical discourses. Two areas – Biology and Technology are broad enough to encompass the varied material that I have been reading, but specific enough to contrast and question each other's positions. Akin to dualities such as body/mind, or thought/perception, biology and technology are expansive areas that provide relevant frameworks. Since we are animals, a biological framework seemed obvious, with technology then being the significant opposite.

The biological perspective

Biology is an area in which science describes both nature and behavior; it encompasses all of the sciences that deal with biological, psychological or social processes. Scientific study attempts to comprehend various and sometimes complex phenomena by means of reduction or simplification. Research by scientific methods tends to avoid both anecdotal evidence and using metaphors in evaluations, although some conceptual metaphors have resonance for such study and is significant for my research. An example of this is the 'mechanistic metaphor,' in which Descartes and La Mettriea 'imagined' the body as machine⁸. This description has influenced the way we can view all biological life on this planet and has led to advances in technology and manufacturing. Its implications for medicine and its commerce are not just the physical/physiological decay of the human body - the patient to be *repaired* and its components (organs) *fixed* - but also with the treatment of cognitive/psychological *malfunctions* by the medicating of the physical body.

Critiquing the mechanistic prototype, Carl Williams writes about how the 'mind' in modern psychology is viewed as computational, an information processor, and that memory for example, can be characterized by information acquisition, storage & retrieval⁹.

In discussing how suicide is viewed as an exception to 'some rule' and of a perceived breakdown of, Mathew Pinalto writes that "the explanations of suicide have a definite cognitive flavor" and, tellingly: "The suspicion is that an error has occurred somewhere in the mind; suicide is error"¹⁰. This term *error* in reasserting the mechanistic, demonstrates how this metaphor has filtered down and influences how we observe and perceive suicide today.

The technological perspective

Technology is a thoroughly human endeavor. It is a result of observation, trial and skill; its uses and applications are wide as they are varied and encompass both entertainment/leisure and scientific industries. The 'technology' I'm interested in here is the imagined kind from science fiction, the stories and ideas of popular culture and space exploration. Science fiction exists within a vastly different paradigm from the sciences; that of story telling. A scientific investigation encompasses a persons *need to understand*; but also intrinsic to human nature is the *need to tell stories*. These narratives, as depicted by the entertainment media can inform and influence our perceptions of reality. According to Barnett and A. Kafka the blurring of fact and fiction happens readily in media, they argue that it is becoming more difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in this increasing visual society¹¹. From cinema and television, the Internet, to games and graphics, the use of images and symbols designed to meet public expectations contributes to this merging of the real and the imagined.

The makers of modern science fiction - or 'medical' or 'crime' CSI-type programs (film and television) - strive to ensure that their depictions of scientific phenomena have a basis in reality so they appear plausible or possible. To achieve 'realism', scientific or medical consultants may be employed that are specific to the program content. 'We are witness' writes D Kirby to a 'virtual witnessing' in fictional media, 'because the intent of its construction is to blur the distinction between virtual witnessing and direct witnessing'¹².

This 'blurring' is also pertinent for suicide, related to the perceived breakdown of rational thought with the skewed logic of a suicidal mind. We extrapolate that they must be depressed or irrational to have taken their own life, and this supposition only reaffirms life for the living and serves to marginalize this type of death.

Heavens Gate

My first year's study looked at the reclusive and much-maligned cult of Heavens Gate. In 1997 this group briefly gained notoriety and the media spotlight with the mass suicide of 39 of their members. Suicide was their means to escape from their earthly 'vessels', to rendezvous with the alien spacecraft that they believed to be traveling in the wake of the Hale-Boop comet. Heavens Gate's original website has been meticulously replicated¹³ and preserved as it was the day they collectively committed suicide; demonstrating a heady mix of religious evangelism, science fiction and bad graphics, they readily used terminology from their favorite science fiction programs such as Star Wars, Star Trek, and the X-Files.

On a farewell tape explaining their eminent departures, one of the members¹⁴ said:

'We watch a lot of Star Trek, a lot of Star Wars, it's just, to us, it's just like going on a holodeck. We've been training on a holodeck . . . [and] now it's time to stop. The game's over. It's time to put into practice what we've learned. We take off the virtual reality helmet . . . go back out of the holodeck to reality to be with, you know, the other members on the craft in the heavens'.

As cited by Wendy Robinson. (1997). *'Heavens Gate: The End'?* page 27.

This identification with popular culture makes it easy for us to dismiss their actions as flakey and to reason they are *not of sound mind*. They are obviously deluded and far removed from our reality.

We reject Heavens Gate because of their penchant for the media franchises that gave birth to the characters of Darth Vader and Spock. While the many difficult grey areas of an individual's suicide may be more pertinent to my research, I am interested in the way Heavens Gate appropriates science fiction terms for explaining their beliefs and rationale for suicide, providing

an uneasy reconciliation of the biological and technological with implications for the Internet (as discussed in Chapter 3).

In seeking new metaphors for suicide I'm looking at frameworks and applications that at best might be remotely plausible and can be considered to sit on the fringe of this topic. Science fiction provides a diverse template and takes us into a thoroughly different environment in which to regard suicide.

In this project and context I view biology as fact, science fiction as fiction; biology is body and science fiction is mind; the body is material, the mind is immaterial. Musings by philosophers, writers, artists and clergymen, I place within the science fiction arena, with all of the scientific endeavours - sociologists, neurologists, anthropologists, psychologists, psychotherapists and the like - I regard as having a biological insight.

I realize I'm taking a few liberties, but my approach to this research is primarily artistic, and places imagination in a crucial, interpretative role.

I hope by adopting such perspectives it allows us to view suicide not primarily as a *problem* or a *solution*, but to critique and question the way we perceive and try to comprehend this phenomenon. It may be possible to garner further understanding of suicide with the use of metaphors that travel beyond the current standard analysis of suicide as the final act of a desperate mind.

Chapter Two: *The Ethical Universe*

'To opt out of a system is effectively to condemn it; even the most oppressed members of society have the power to challenge its assumptions by voluntarily removing themselves from the community.'

Lisa Lieberman. (2003) '*Leaving You*', page xii.

Suicide is not the taboo subject it once was, yet discussions are still subject to censorship on many levels.

Obituaries for people who have killed themselves rarely delve into or allude to the fact that it was by suicide. Our language can demonstrate prejudices towards suicide. A person 'commits suicide' setting it as a violent act invoking moralization, clearly marking it as an 'offence.' Even though it is no longer illegal it is still culpable. There is no divorcing suicide from these moral frameworks; but they can be odd bedfellows. I'm going to die, eventually - just let anyone stop me; but I consider the contemporary notion of the 'right to die' strange, as it's still a question of passing judgments whether favorable or not.

There are many ways of assessing whether a life is worth living, not just by the individual but also accordingly to the parameters given by our legal systems and the debates surrounding euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.

Some believe suicide is not an option under any circumstance; while others will advocate its use in some instances of an assisted suicide, where the quality of life is compromised by terminal illness or constant physical distress. Yet how do we define 'quality of life'? Surely individual cases may vary? Why attempt to validate the distress of *physical* illness and not advocate similar outcomes for people suffering with mental health impasses? Who is in their '*right mind*' when suffering? Suicide polarizes opinions that

run the gauntlet from forced hospitalization with medication, to no intervention at all.

Good Taste & Decency

For this project it is relevant to look at current New Zealand Government policies and parameters for suicide.

Recently the Health Ministry launched the 'New Zealand Suicide Prevention Strategy 2006-2017', which has seven goals for a national coordinated approach for reducing suicide rates. Goal five "promotes the safe reporting and portrayal of suicidal behavior by the media"¹⁵. This favours the monitoring of media coverage as well as encouraging consistent reporting practices. Media listed includes print, television, film, radio, drama and the Internet. The ministry wants to avoid the "normalization of suicide as an acceptable response to adversity"¹⁶. To achieve this it needs to manage the way suicide is represented in both fiction and nonfiction. The implementation of this goal requires consensus with the media and agreement upon codes of practice. Current media parameters are given by the Health Ministry's resource handbook 'Suicide and the Media'¹⁷. It recommends that the media avoid the word "suicide" in headlines; never report the method of suicide as this may lead to copycat suicides; and abstain from using photographs, such as of a funeral. **The Code of Broadcasting Practice** states that 'close-up detail indicating how suicides and hangings might be accomplished must not be shown.'¹⁸ Also in dealing with any factual material, both the broadcasting and printed media must follow **The Coroners Act of 1998**. This Act forbids the disclosure of a method of suicide, except without the express permission of the Coroner concerned. Broadcasters (both television and radio) follow values as set by the **Broadcasting Act of 1989** that sets 'standards which are consistent with the observance of good taste and decency and the maintenance of law and order.'¹⁹

There are many constraints placed upon this topic of suicide; not just for journalistic media and television programming. What we can discuss, write and depict applies to us all collectively. In her book 'Leaving You' author Lisa Lieberman delves into our modern (western) tendency to deprive this act of significance, and with our inclination to view suicides as victims rather than acknowledging authenticity of actions²⁰. The Governments Suicide Prevention Strategy inhabits a vastly opposing position to Lieberman's. Here, the policy formulated to reduce the number of suicides also wants to control its portrayal. Setting an agenda that involves a degree of censorship reaffirms Lieberman's assertion of 'society's interest in restraining suicide's disruptive power and the individual freedom to determine the meaning of his own death.'²¹

The contexts I've just outlined have helped demarcate my position on suicide - to sustain a central position amid the opposing positions and stances on suicide. It is my attempt to negotiate yet reference the many diametrically opposed stances holstered upon this subject of suicide - a topic through which people can promote their own personal interests and political agendas. Mine is not necessary a 'fixed' position and it has required constant reassessment and reflection as my study has unfolded. My aim is to have a project where the audience can critique the values and judgments they bring to this topic, not just my own personal ethos directing the viewer.

From antiquity to the 20th Century, representations of suicide have always concerned 'story telling'. Within this time period Ron Brown has investigated into past imaging of suicide. His research, he writes, 'is about human death as read through the myriad meanings given to self-slaughter'.²² In demonstrating that suicide has its own visual history he reveals that within these representations are a coexistence of complex messages from cultural, ethical, political and spiritual frameworks. These depictions not only reveal the fluidity of thinking around this topic but also what justification, lesson, or moral for suicide was being demonstrated at the time.

Traditionally suicide was presented in narrative context within historic or biblical episodes. The early religious period of Christianity focused on the depiction of Judas's suicide is 'illustrative of a battle to distinguish the good death of a martyr (witness) from the bad death of suicide: Judas's death offered the most potent of binaries to the death of Jesus'.²³

An etching from the 17th Century depicting the martyring of a Saint would at first glance appear as torture (*fig1*), but to kill oneself by not fleeing persecution was not 'suicide'. It was seen as divine will. This principled self-sacrifice was an occasion for homage: far better to die than live with pagan dishonour.

Suicide in Greek, Roman and Classical history has consistently been reinterpreted over the centuries. A dramatic depiction is 'Cleopatra with Asp' (*fig2*) by Guido Reni. It shows her gazing upwards in a hypnotic-like trance. She is at the moment of death, her left hand delicately positioning the snake to her bosom. This plush and erotic representation is conveyed through Reni's use of colour; the beautiful subtle pinks of the fabric and her

flesh contrast with the darker background. Here, suicide is presented as heroic with connotations of glamour.

Suicide was also abundant in Shakespeare Tragedies²⁴ and embodied within sympathetic terms: given the characters personal circumstances it was clearly conveyed why the person took their own life - and quite reasonable that they did so. From numerous depictions of Shakespeare's Tragedies, 'Ophelia' by Alexandre Cabanel (fig3) is one such example. With her tragic background Ophelia is driven by madness to suicide; she drowns. In this descriptive painting her death is vividly romanticized and she is portrayed angelically. With the metaphor of water representing female emotions, the flowers also suggest a 'de flowering' of herself through suicide and dies a virgin.

Whether fictional or not, these representations did demonstrate that suicide for a higher principle - for virtue and purity, patriotism or faith - was understandable if not commendable. This suicide was no simple 'cause and effect' with the surrender of an individual confronted with reality, but a finale for the benefit of superior ideals or sense of drama.

These representations of suicides - from Judas, Lucretia, Ophelia and Hamlet, King Lear, Romeo and Juliet, Anthony and Cleopatra - present people or characters that are exceptional. They do not represent a norm. Rather they are extraordinary persons with well known stories whose demises are reinterpreted and objectified into artworks.

In the 19th century with the development of psychoanalysis many discourses widened, and the idea of suicide being the end process of mental illness became accepted. This narrative in representations usually depicted suicide as a particular weakness of character and therefore moral judgment. A favourite image of mine is an engraving by English caricaturist and book illustrator George Cruikshank, is titled: *'The maniac father and the convict brother are gone. The poor girl, homeless, friendless, deserted, destitute and gin-mad*

commits self murder' (fig4). This description in itself is a short story, and with typical Victorian embellishment the vice and social lesson prescribed is telegraphed clearly to the reader.

This brief foray into the history of representations demonstrates one thing: a clear narrative for suicide is demonstrated within these artworks. The motive for death is plainly in view, as are the implements of death. No mystery as to why death is embraced. No sense of the unknown. We are given an entire sequence of events that culminates in suicide.

Heavens Gate Reprise

As I mentioned in my introduction a person who commits suicide can be considered the 'author' of their own death. No direct questions can be asked of this author and we have to deduce our answers.

I draw attention again to Heavens Gate, which was in existence in one form or another since 1975. This group's history concluded with the mass suicide of 39 members in 1997. While initially my research into this group served to distance me from my friend's death, I found that within Heavens Gate there were interesting paradigms at play in particular regarding 'authorship'. The public's introduction to this group was through the journalistic media,²⁵ and as the story unfolded of their collective suicides a great deal of sensationalism ensued and they were portrayed as an outrageous fringe cult. Heavens Gate's mass suicide was billed as the '*first great Internet mystery*'²⁶ with a website offering their dialogues and rationales for suicide.

In this regard the website of Heavens Gate can be considered their valedictory text, and quite a comprehensively large one at that. A Frost Benedicts has researched into valedictory texts. She writes that with such texts (suicide notes, last wills or testaments) there is the real consequence to others of the author's absence and such texts require close, cautious reading.²⁷ One obvious paradox about suicide is that you can't inquiry 'why?'

of a dead person. What was the actual trigger that caused suicide to become an option? Can this point be defined? What sort of problem is suicide and who is it a problem for? Indeed, responses to suicide read as one-way traffic and therefore monologue. With Heavens Gate our relationship towards them is certainly our problem. This rapport and its parameters were turned inside out, as we can still have a '*conversation*' with these people as they made themselves omnipresent with the Internet. Any question you would like to ask, anything you need to know is still there for you to read.

Heavens Gate leaders had always foreseen people would have great difficulty comprehending their way of life and beliefs. They understood the scepticism, cynicism and ridicule that would be levelled at them. Their website had many comments about and evaluations of us. In their eyes we weren't 'evolved' and therefore we misunderstood them. They preferred seclusion from us and for most of their existence there were few dropouts and few new members.²⁸

Their website wasn't for recruitment, indeed only one membership was contacted via the Internet.²⁹ Rather it was their strategy before final 'exit' to contact any other 'students' or alien beings (in human vessels) that were here on the planet. Their suicides demonstrated no coercion or fear, and certainly no second thoughts; yet in our view as M. Muesse writes 'the rational way in which they approached their deaths made them seem ever more irrational.'³⁰

Whether you view these people as gullible victims under the sway of deluded charismatic leaders is irrelevant; they had claimed authorship in more ways than one. Suicide was their process to proceed to the next stage of their evolution; and we the primates were left gaping beneath the stars, frenzied in our reaction towards them. We labelled Heavens Gate people as deranged and pathetic and obviously not cognitively proficient or they would be alive today. That is one version of events - not theirs. They left

behind an extensive amount of information that not only included their website, but also video taped farewells, a movie script, writing and documentation of records. This is an extensive archive for any researcher.

Figures (1-4)



Figure 1

'Saint Benjamin diacre'
etching, 1630's
Jacques Callot

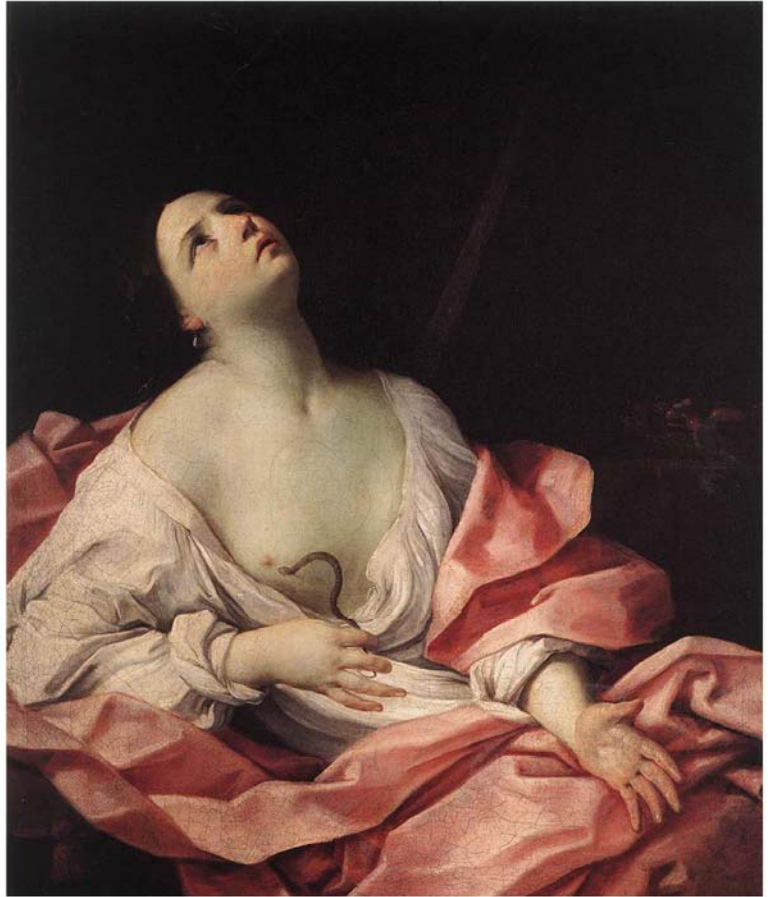


Figure 2

'Cleopatra with Asp'
oil on canvas, 1630
Guido Reni



Figure 3

'Ophelia'
1883
Alexandre Cabanel



Figure 4

*'The maniac father and convict brother are gone. The poor girl, homeless,
friendless, deserted, destitute and gin-mad commits self-murder.'*
engraving, 1848

Plate V111 from *The Drunkards Children*
George Cruikshank

My approach to this project is explorative and open-ended. On one level it is my reaction to my friend's death. Yet it is also a considered response to the many discourses and theories about why people kill themselves. In developing a discourse and narrative to visually present suicide to a contemporary audience, several inherent questions arise:

With the plethora and quality of imagery already representing suicide, is there a substantial new approach that I can add?

Accepting that this topic resists universality and does not benefit from such an approach, how can I then claim to represent a narrative for suicide that avoids a reductive outcome?

Who is the representation on behalf of? The audience is essential, but also my personal catalyst for researching into suicide - my friend's death.

There is an element of contradiction in what I have set out to achieve. Instead of being problematic I view these quandaries as components to be exploited, for within these dilemmas is the basis for making insightful artwork.

My practical research is informed by hunches, whims and intuition and these can be difficult to explain. The unintentional has always been an important component of my art practice. By this I extrapolate that in any artwork there may be other paradigms at play not immediately obvious to myself. Once reflected upon, these new frameworks can refocus my practice in new directions. With this model there is no direct path between my intentions and outcomes, but simply the ongoing repositioning of my research. Within this variation is the constant tension and interplay between my chosen binaries -

relationships of science and science fiction, fact and fiction, author and reader, faith and truth, God and Adam, God and Alien, and the Earth and the Moon.

My initial research in 2005 examined suicide via Heavens Gate. The eclectic nature of my practical submission included a variety of objects, with text and image (*fig5*).

The bizarre manner of the Heavens Gate death scene created a reciprocal relationship of mutual frenzy between the media and the public. We eagerly watched and read in amazement that members were found to be wearing identical outfits and identical sneakers, all with a purple cloth over their face. That many male members had undergone voluntary castration led to jokes upon this. Their deaths were demeaned and subjected to ridicule. People logged onto Heavens Gate website to discover more of their unique belief systems that blended an evangelical faith in aliens referenced with science fiction programs. My placing of graphic images upon everyday objects such as postcards, coffee mugs, coasters and plates questions how we trivialized their suicides. My research into this group was solely via the Internet and conversely all images were sourced from cyberspace. My graphics were a combination of photographic images, religious illustrations and jargon from Heavens Gate. The use of objects and accompanying installation offered tangible artifacts for my digitally constructed and virtually sourced images. The terminology used in many artworks is appropriated from Heavens Gate website, an example being 'Next Level' (*fig6*). This in combination with the Nike slogan '*just do it*', alludes to the fact they were all wearing identical white Nike sneakers when they committed suicide. The font of 'next level' appearing as opening credits to a science movie is 'taking off' into the heavens, the beginning of their journey. Heavens Gate members believed that the human body was a stage in their evolution to the 'next level', a 'container' discarded upon suicide.

My interest in Heavens Gate went well beyond their suicides. It was the blending of science fiction from popular culture into their reality that held and sustained my interest. Many television programs and films readily achieve an illusion of reality with visual effects that have grounding in the sciences. That Heaven Gates members were fans of the television show 'X-Files' is ironic, for within this program was the adept merging of binary opposites:

'The tension between scientific certainty and mythic imagination are positioned at odds with one another. Yet throughout the show we are given clear signs that the two collapse into one another. The boundary between science and superstition, fact and fiction, certainty and uncertainty diffuse and permeate one another such that there is little distinction.'

Charlton D. McIlwain. (2005). *'When Death Goes Pop'*, page 151.

This quote from McIlwain summarizes my approach of exploring suicide through a dualistic metaphor, in which I codified theoretical discourses into opposite positions of 'fact' and 'fiction'. My practical research this year reemerges selected paradigms of fact within a fictional narrative. My intention is to 'de-compartmentalize' the research into suicide by the sciences, philosophy and the arts.

My initial installation of object-based artworks was constructed with spatial requirements in mind and was configured in a tight yet considered manner (fig7). In more recent practical work objects have ceded to digital prints. Many of these photographic images are of objects; the original relationship of photographic images to objects is now reversed, the objects are re-objectified into print. The installation of this work is expansive with groupings or 'clusters' of works adding to the prevailing sparseness. There are several main groupings of photographic images, each consisting of several prints of contrasting size. In one of the main groupings, the prints have matt

black backgrounds. Within this field of black, inanimate objects float and appear as islands against a pitch-black void. This 'blackness' not only informs the sense of sparseness within the installation, but isolates an object within the print. Another grouping is a diptych; in both, a circular object is displayed against a black field. One object is suspended in front of this field and the other is isolated and surrounded by it.

Another paradigm at play within this body of work is *depth*. The object of the foreground is totally isolated *from* and *by* the background field, this being more evident against the black. The smaller prints are framed and this adds a physical layer of 'depth' to the installation. These framing mechanisms are reminiscent of those used for portraits of family and friends, invoking notions of memory and nostalgia but also defining a moment or event.

In another grouping the subject matter is of hands, which are dismembered from the body by the edge of the print. In one sizeable photograph, a pair of hands is in the foreground against a black colour, with smaller prints a single hand is in front of a field of monochromatic colour. The gesticulation of the hand is in 'exchange'. Yet it is isolated from any reciprocity and there is only recital.

Within these grouping of artworks sits an individual piece, how it situates in relation to the overall body of work can create multiple conversations. My intention with this research is to treat artworks in a singular manner - not closely bound to a single predetermined format. Each piece has been printed to a dimension that best conveys that image, with the weighting of the composition taken into consideration. This has allowed for the variation sizes of works, differing framing mechanisms, colour prints, black & white prints, as well as two light boxes. In practical terms this had lead to several 'clusters'

of work relating to different aspects of my research. I've positioned myself not to provide one succinct definition or discourse into suicide but rather to provide multiple levels of engaging this topic. The title for this practical exhibition is 'Clinical Practice'^{*}.

The Final Frontier

The works titled 'I.D' (fig8) '1,500mg' (fig9), and 'Swiss Vacation' (fig10), directly comment on a medical response to mental illness and its supposed role as an indicator of suicide[†].

The New Zealand Suicide Prevention Strategy states that 'all suicidal behaviors, regardless of medical severity, are indications of severe emotional distress, unhappiness and/or mental illness'³¹. Suicide is viewed as the end point of these paradigms and therefore demonstrating some type of cognitive dysfunction. This is a narrative I certainly want to avoid, as it imposes a passive and firmly ensconced sequence of '*the person has succumbed to suffering*'³² upon the viewer. My own opinion is that regardless of the role of mental illness, the suicide of a person needs to be represented in a more subversive light: for within the finality of action suicide confronts and challenges us with its consequences. This reading does not negate any supposition about mental health, but instead turns the clinical 'gaze' on itself. Even the term 'mental illness' has implications, as Carl Williams reminds us

^{*} All Documentation of the installation 'A Clinical Practice' is located in the 'Appendix- documentation' beginning on page 52.

[†] Two other works— *Mothership* and *Medicated Signs* are not discussed in this section as they were completed at a much later date from the writing. *Medicated Signs* uses anti-depressant powder to form geometric patterns similar to crop circles. The illuminated sign *Mothership* appropriates a graphic image from the video game *Space Invader*. Images of both these works are in the 'Appendix- documentation'. The light-box works (*Mothership* & *Adaptation Posthumous*) hover above the sight line in the installation. The intention is to invoke notions of divinity and knowledge beyond rationale scientific explanation.

that while it is currently used in the literal sense it was originally intended as a metaphor; in this context the literal is in a subclass of the metaphorical.³³ This I see as pivotal for representing suicide; *mental illness is a metaphor*.

Depending on dosage and type of medication '**1,500mg**' is a month's supply of antidepressant medication. Systematically I've photographed this entire month's supply of anti-depressants, the powder within each capsule emptied into a single pile, documenting each increment.

This work also reflects how I approached my theoretical research with a dualistic framework that then merged seemingly unaligned elements as demonstrated by the discussions of Heavens Gate. Displayed in mass against a black backdrop, this sequence of mounds appears as an armada of UFOs. This is an alien invasion and not the beneficial benevolent encounter as envisaged by Heavens Gate.

'**I.D**' (intelligent design) shows a coffin like plastic pill box, the type in which a person would keep their medication. Hovering within black space, this pillbox is akin to a '*mothership*' vessel for '**1,500mg**'.

This work theoretically merges two contrasting discourses, one a proponent of Darwinism (*science*), the other essentially advocating God (*science fiction* in context of my research). Intelligent design is a belief that naturalistic explanations of some biological entities are not possible and such entities can only be explained by intelligent causes and not by undirected processes such as Natural Selection.³⁴ Advocates of ID maintain that their belief is scientific and provides empirical proof for the existence of God or, as some believe Extraterrestrial Aliens. In contrast to I.D the Social Navigation Hypothesis (SNH)³⁵ is informed by natural selection. This premise is that depression is an adaptation.³⁶ In removing one's self from any equation or situation, the suicide by a depressed individual can be seen as the ultimate form of '*Adaptation Posthumous*' (*fig11*). This was most certainly the case for Heavens Gate.

'Swiss Vacation' (fig10) references the famed alpine vistas of Switzerland, a country where assisted suicide is legal.³⁷ Much topical and recent debate has centered on the Swiss 'right to die' group Dignitas. For in aiding the suicides of people who are not Swiss citizens³⁸ this organization has gained international media coverage of its activities. With each recent headlines such as 'Death Tourism' and 'Suicide Tourism' focusing attention on a Swiss law of 1942 that allows *anyone* (as long as there are no ulterior motives) to help patients die. Viewing their own motives as altruistic, Dignitas believe they are within this law. Indeed, this group wants the current law expanded as it only allows them to assist people with terminal illness. Recently in Switzerland's Supreme Court they have argued that people suffering from depression or who are 'tired of life' should be able to end their life legally. This latest development has drawn comment from the Director of Canada's Euthanasia Prevention Coalition, that Dignitas is advocating a "death on demand culture."³⁹

In allowing non-physicians to assist the terminally ill to die, the Swiss law challenges and raises debates not just within its own borders⁴⁰, but in many other countries. With citizens traveling to Switzerland to die, the debate in Great Britain focuses around its own laws regarding this type of death. This includes whether any existing British laws are being contravened. This has drawn comment from the British group Dignity in Dying:

'Each case that occurs is emphatically underlining that the government is content for people suffering from terminal illnesses to have help to die elsewhere, but not in their own country surrounded by their friends and family'.

Deborah Annetts. *Chief executive of Dignity in Dying.*
Sun 17 Sep 2006. Scotland on Sunday Newspaper.

Live Long & Prosper

'Benediction' (*fig12*) appropriates the 'Live Long and Prosper' hand signal. It is used as a farewell gesture by the Vulcan People from the science fiction program Star Trek.⁴¹ It serves as a symbol for a fictional Vulcan race of logic-based humanoids that have repressed and subdued all emotional thoughts and feelings. This levelling of emotions is comparable to the anti-depressant induced balancing out of highs and lows. This hand gesture is actually an abbreviated version of a traditional Jewish religious blessing.⁴² It is based on the ancient hand symbol used by the Kohanim⁴³ and is symbolic of divine immanence. During filming of an early Star Trek episode⁴⁴, actor Leonard Nimoy (who is Jewish) used the gesture while adlibbing the line 'live long and prosper'.

In contrast with any notions of divinity the hand gesture of **'Contagion'** (*fig13*) is rude. At first glance it appears defiant. Yet shown from the viewer's stance any confrontation is somewhat negated as the gesture is turned upon itself. The diptych of a finger takes on an almost plant-like quality (*science*) when compared to **'Benediction'** (*science fiction*).

'Contagion' (*fig13*) and **Contagion 1'** (*fig14*) offer a critique upon society and how it misrepresents suicide. The New Zealand Suicide Prevention Strategy references 'contagion'. It states 'a suicide by one individual within a group may lead to further suicides.' Although it says the reasons for contagion are unclear, it suggests factors such as grief, imitation, even glorification of the suicide victim and sensationalism of their death as possible contributing factors.⁴⁵ In promoting the 'good practice in the portrayal and reporting of suicide behaviour', the Strategy hopes to minimize the potential for imitation.

My other take on contagion is akin to a medical diagnostic. **'Contagion 1'** (*fig14*) permeates with notions of infection, contamination, and pollution. The gesture is lost through the x-ray process, its impact negated through the visual bleaching effect of the bone. This 'contagion' is not the kind of physical decay, rather the manner in which 'images' and 'ideas' can be considered

infectious and dangerous. Indeed the finger appears to be pointing at us, perhaps telling us off - analogous to our Government's Suicide Prevention Strategy of influencing the way suicide is portrayed.

The Health Ministry's Strategy of lowering New Zealand's suicide rates is wholly admirable. Ultimately, its role as 'censor' sets a limited agenda about what is open for discussion. Conversely, the debates around the Swiss law and its consequences are openly vigorous, and all opinions are valid and ultimately democratic.

Binary relationships

Suicide can bring about polarization of territory. It can be viewed as the ultimate denial of self, or interpreted as 'life affirming'. Tension and interactions between such opposite discourses are fundamental to my research. '**Interface**' (*fig15*) attempts to address this. Appropriated from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, this work references God and his creation Adam. Representing a boundary, edge or crossing point '**Interface**' denotes a relationship between a problem and the problem solver, where parameters are not easily defined.

In my CSI scenario, God the creator shoddily wears disposable surgical gloves while Adam wears pristine white cotton gloves (*fig15*). This work references unequal dual relationships; in this instance God appears ambivalent towards Adam who is tentatively seeking enquiry or contact with his significant other. This relationship is tantalizing close to 'first contact.' Yet this inquiry is in permanent stasis, no further exchange can take place⁴⁶.

In examining why UFOs and aliens are suitable symbols in new religions, Ryan Cook critiques their prophetic 'role of intermediary between human and divine.'⁴⁷ Through their collective suicides Heavens Gate merged two elements: the combination of deliverance by UFO (*science fiction*) with the arrival of the Hale-Boop comet (*science*).

Another unequal dual relationship is that of the Earth with its satellite the Moon. In this case the moon is a small disco ball **‘Earthshine’**[‡] (fig16) and **‘Earth Portrait’** (fig17) is quite simply the Earth. Earthshine occurs due to a double reflection of sunlight. In this phenomenon light from the sun is reflected off the Earth onto the Moon, which then is reflected back towards the Earth. My straightforward picture of the Earth is a view that few people have physically experienced. Only a small number of astronauts and cosmonauts have ventured far enough out into space to view our planet in its entirety. The following quotes describe the Earth in terms of artefact as well as theological vision.

‘The Earth was small, light blue, and so touchingly alone, our home that must be defended like a holy relic. The Earth was absolutely round. I believe I never knew what the word round meant until I saw Earth from space.’

Aleksei Leonov, (USSR).

‘My view of our planet was a glimpse of divinity’

Edgar Mitchell, (USA).

How we view any phenomena denotes our position in relation to it. Suicide is an action that is usually never directly observed and its actions are keenly felt. With any suicide, relationships are severed by the choice of one person. There is a gulf between me and my deceased friend, researcher and research, topic and subject. Most investigations into suicide are aimed at finding solutions for prevention; my research is essentially about how we interpret and misrepresent suicide. It is about *us* and our response to it.

[‡] An alternative title for *‘Earthshine’* – *‘Narcissism’* was used in *‘A Clinical Practice’*.
‘Narcissism & ‘Earth Portrait’ also formed part of a casual diptych arrangement within this show –collectively titled *‘Co – Dependency’*.

'Your funeral, my trial'

- Nick Cave



Figure 5

'Home is Where the Heart Is'
installation detail, 2005

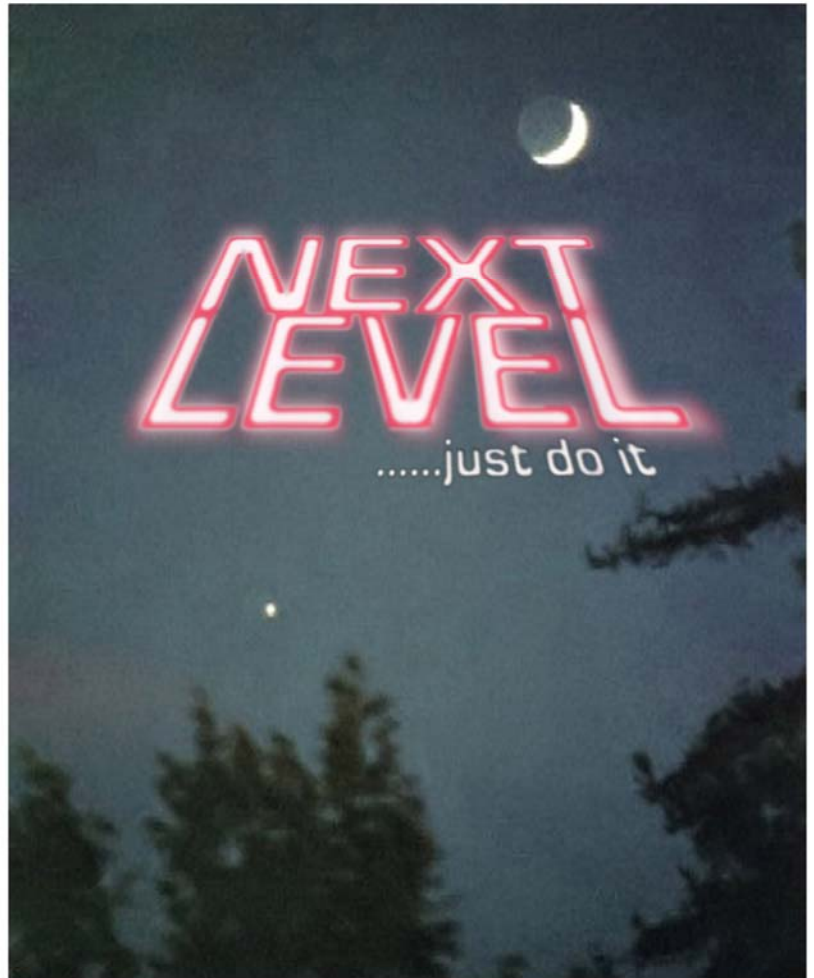


Figure 6

'Next Level'
digital print, 2005



Figure 7

'Home is Where the Heart Is'
installation, 2005



Figure 8

'I.D'
digital print, 2006

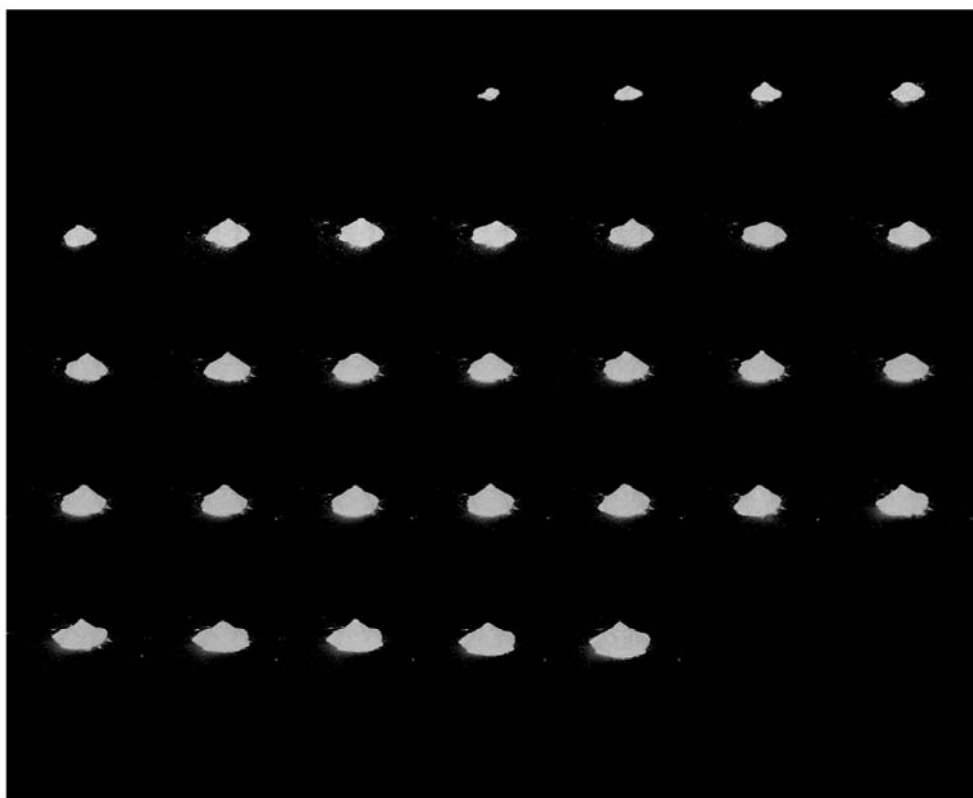


Figure 9

'1,500mg'
digital print, 2006



Figure 10

'Swiss Vacation'
digital print, 2006



Figure 11

'Adaptation Posthumous'
lightbox with vinyl cut image, 2006



Figure 12

'Benediction'
digital print, 2006



Figure 13

'Contagion'
digital print, 2006



Figure 14

'Contagion 1'
digital print, 2006



Figure 15

'Interface'
digital print, 2006



Figure 16

'Narcissism' / 'Earthshine'
digital print, 2006

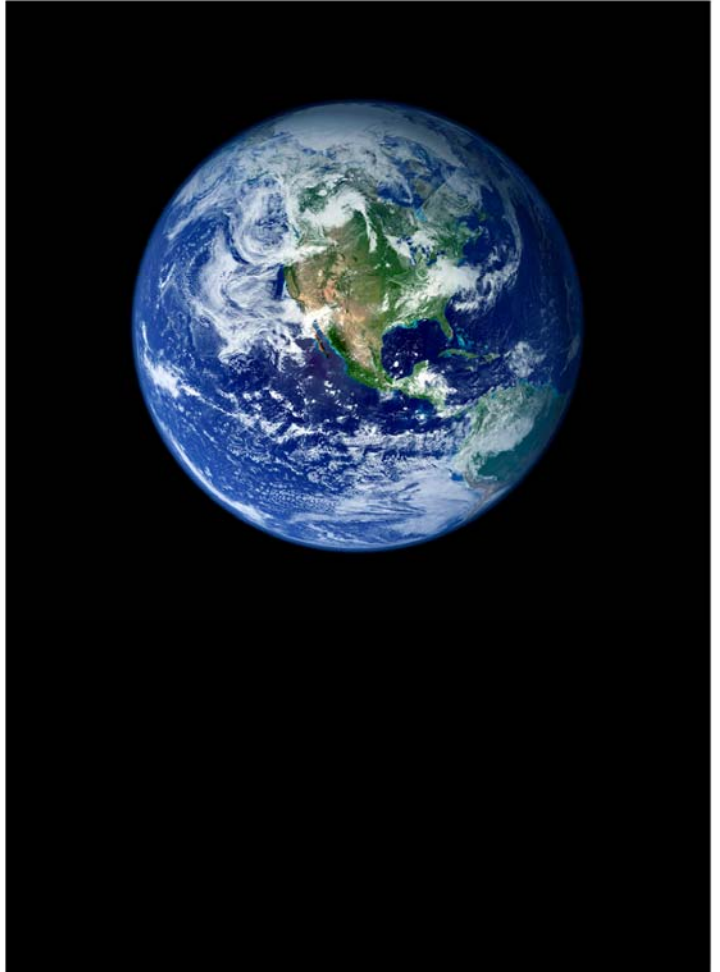


Figure 17

'Earth Portrait'
digital print, 2006

Epilogue

Utilizing a celestial metaphor for my practical research, I compare Jeremy's death to the 'Big Bang' that is theorized to have begun the universe that we perceive today. The Big Bang is not a theory but rather a 'suspect' in the implication of beginning our universe, with the necessary implements to do so but no apparent motive. Inquiries of cause and effect can then be viewed in the context of story-making with the usual plot development and endings that inhabit such narratives. Therefore, as a contemporary 'CSI' researcher I've investigated suicide through the problematic relationship that exists between the 'author' and the 'reader' of this event. In questioning how we impose a narrative upon the author, I've merged binary positions of 'fact' and 'fiction' within my artworks. This demonstrates (for me) that there are no ultimate truths waiting to be discovered within suicide, or indeed with my representations of suicide; only the difference provided by the variance of interpretation. The following one is mine: suicide is a birth and death of 'defiance' not solely within the boldness of its action, but in the way it confronts and challenges us with its consequences.

Appendix –documentation



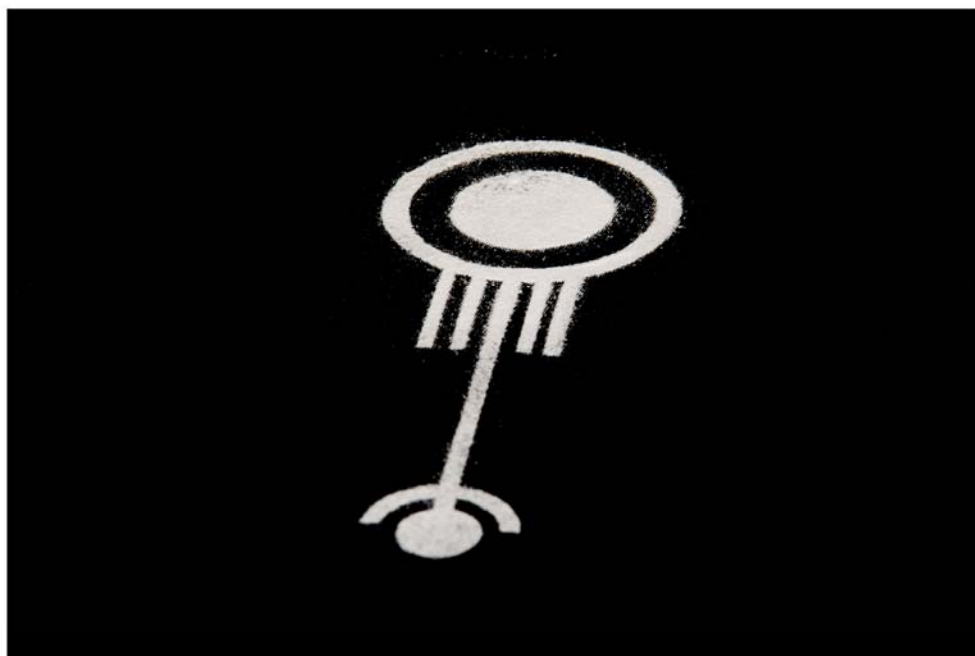
'Invitation to A Clinical Practice'



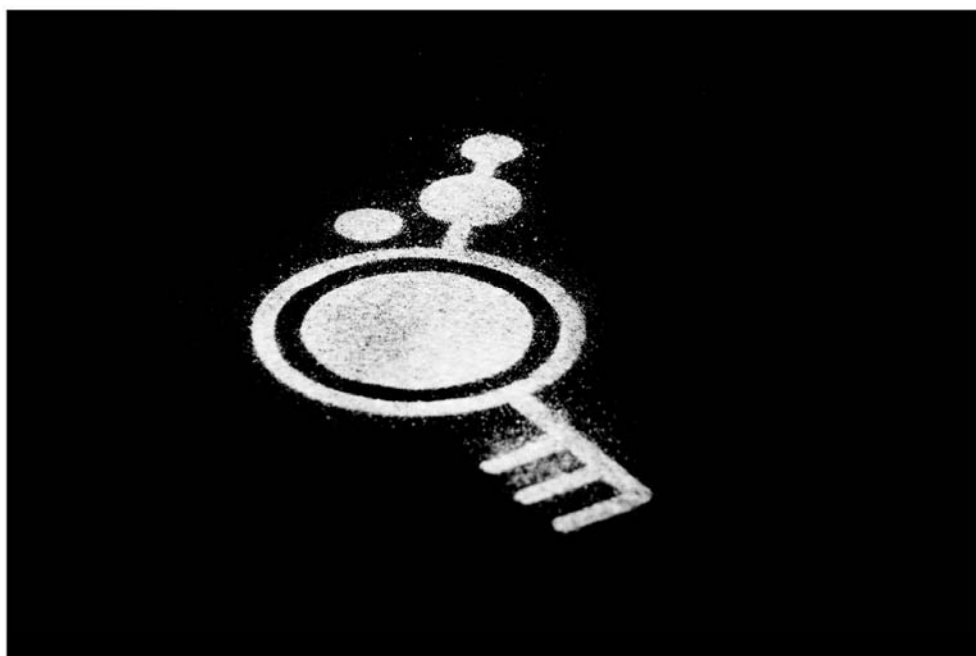
'A Clinical Practice'
installation image, 2006



'Mothership'
exit sign lightbox, 2006



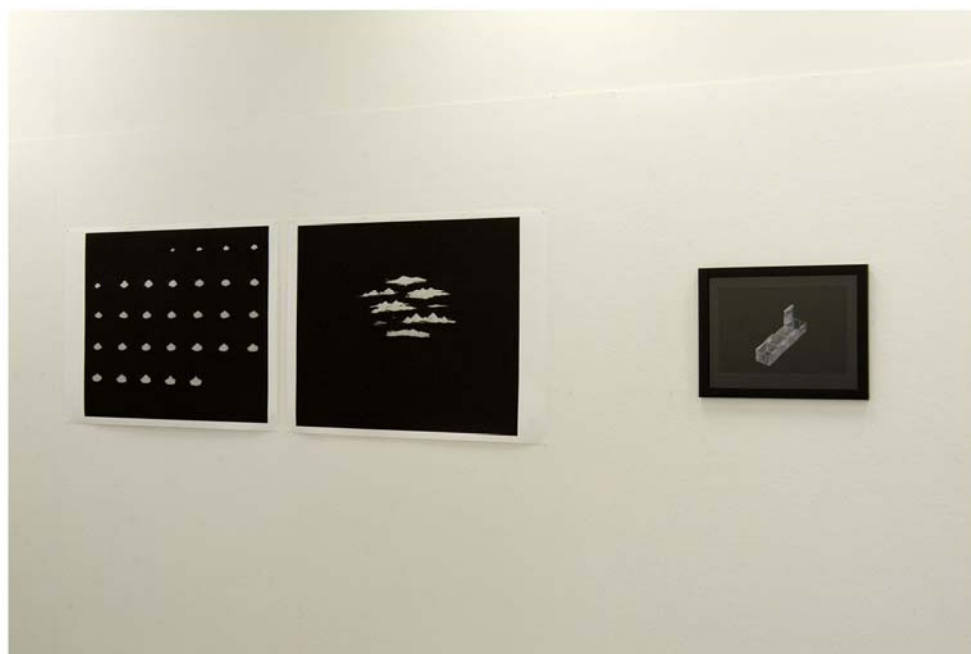
'Medicated Sign'
digital print, 2006



'Medicated Sign'
digital print, 2006



'A Clinical Practice'
installation image, 2006



'A Clinical Practice'
installation image, 2006



'A Clinical Practice'
installation image, 2006



'A Clinical Practice'
installation image, 2006



'A Clinical Practice'
installation image, 2006



'A Clinical Practice'
installation image, 2006



'A Clinical Practice'
installation image, 2006



'Co-dependency'
from *'A Clinical Practice'*, 2006

Referencing & notes

¹ Matthew Christopher Piantalto. (2002). *'Suicide and the self'*, page 6. Doctoral Thesis University of Arkansas.

² The vast majority of suicides are carried out in private. Political acts of martyrdom (such as suicide bombers) are carried out in public; both are suicide. I've defined the word 'suicide' just once – in the opening sentence of the Preface. It is my intention to defer to the reader in defining their meaning of the word.

³ Crime Scene Investigation, CBS television series.

⁴ Lisa Lieberman. (2003). *'Leaving you'*, page x. Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, publisher.

⁵ An American psychiatrist compiled this list of suicide notes and edited out all identifying details. Retrievable at <http://www.well.com/~art/suicidenotes.html> as of October 2006, or via the URL address in footnote 6.

⁶ The article 'How Not to Commit Suicide' by Art Kleiner has many ethical paradigms for suicide. It discusses what can go amiss when using certain methods to commit suicide. Medical health professionals talk about the lasting physical injuries (including brain damage) that such a failed suicide attempt can bear. Methods that are more 'fool proof' are outlined. Such articles draw criticism - due to the view that access to this type of information might give a suicidal person the necessary tools for implementing an attempt. Retrievable at <http://www.well.com/~art/suicidepage1.html> as of October 2006. First published in CoEvolution Quarterly (1981).

⁷ Steven Stack & Jim Gundlach. (1992). *'The effect of country music on suicide.'* Retrievable as of October 30, 2006, JSTOR - The Scholarly Journal Archive. From The University of North Carolina Press Social Forces. (Sept. 1992) Vol.71, No.1, pages 211-218.

⁸ Carl Williams. (1996). *'Metaphor, parapsychology and psi: an examination of metaphors related to paranormal experience and parapsychological research.'* page 2. Retrievable at <http://hopelive.hope.ac.uk/psychology/para/METAPH1.pdf> as of October 2006. From Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, Vol.90, pages 174-201.

⁹ Carl Williams. (no date). *'Metaphors: a meaning-orientated approach for parapsychology'*, page 10. Retrievable at <http://72.14.253.104/search?q=cache:xUFQ192j9f8J:www.hope.ac.uk/ssss/psychology/pages/para/MEANING2.pdf+Metaphors:+A+meaningorientated+approach+for+parapsychology&hl=en&gl=nz&ct=clnk&cd=1> as of October 2006.

¹⁰ Matthew Christopher Piantalto. (2002). *'Suicide and the self'*, page 33. Doctoral Thesis University of Arkansas.

- ¹¹ Michael Barnett & Alan Kafka. (no date). *'Using science fiction scenes to support critical analysis of science'*, page 3. Retrievable at http://www2.bc.edu/~barnetge/urslg/papers/jcst_movie_paper06-27-05f.pdf as of October 2006.
- ¹² David A. Kirby. *'Science consultants, fictional films, and scientific practice'*, page 236. Retrievable at <http://sss.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/33/2/231.pdf> as of October 2006. From *Social Studies of Science*. 33/2, (April 2003), pages 231-268.
- ¹³ Heavens Gate original website has been replicated several times. Retrievable at <http://www.heavensgate.com/> as of October 2006, another at <http://www.wave.net/upg/gate/> as of October 2006.
- ¹⁴ From a farewell tape by 'Students of heavens gate expressing their thoughts before exit.' (March 21, 1997). As cited by Wendy Robinson. (1997). *'Heavens gate: the end?'*, page 25. University of North Carolina. Retrievable at <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue3/robinson.html> as of October 2006.
- ¹⁵ New Zealand Ministry of Health. (2006). *'New Zealand suicide prevention strategy 2006-2017'*, page 26.
- ¹⁶ New Zealand Ministry of Health. (2006). *'New Zealand suicide prevention strategy 2006-2017'*, page 26.
- ¹⁷ New Zealand Ministry of Health. (1999). *'Suicide and the media – the reporting and portrayal of suicide in the media'*. The New Zealand Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy.
- ¹⁸ Code of Broadcasting Practice. *'Portrayal of violence'*, Section V7.
- ¹⁹ Broadcasting Act 1989. Section 4.
- ²⁰ Lisa Lieberman. (2003). *'Leaving you'*, page x. Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, publisher.
- ²¹ Lisa Lieberman. (2003). *'Leaving you'*, page xii. Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, publisher.
- ²² Ron Brown. (2001). *'The art of suicide'*, page 8. Reaktion books ltd, publisher.
- ²³ Ron Brown. (2001). *The art of suicide'*, page 50. Reaktion books ltd, publisher.
- ²⁴ Characters who committed suicide; Brutus ('Julius Caesar'), Cassius ('Julius Caesar'), Cleopatra ('Antony & Cleopatra'), Goneril ('King Lear'), Juliet ('Romeo & Juliet'), Lady Macbeth ('Macbeth'), Mark Antony ('Antony & Cleopatra'), Ophelia ('Hamlet'), Othello ('Othello'), Portia ('Julius Caesar'), Romeo ('Romeo & Juliet').

- ²⁵ Web resource maintained by CCN that links to news stories about Heavens Gate. It offers a sequenced overview of their suicides as the story emerged and evolved. Retrievable at <http://www.cnn.com/US/9703/28/mass.suicide/links.html> as of October 2006.
- ²⁶ D.Potz. (March 1997). As cited by Wendy Gale Robinson. (1997). *'Heavens gate: the end?'* page 2. University of North Carolina. Retrievable at <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue3/robinson.html> as of October 2006.
- ²⁷ Amelie Frost Benedikt. (n.d). *'On reading valedictory texts: suicide notes, last wills and testaments'*, page 1. University of Texas, at Austin. Retrievable at <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Cont/ContBene.htm> as of October 2006.
- ²⁸ The University of Virginia, *'The religious movement's home page project'*, page 4. Retrievable at <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/hgprofile.html> as of October 2006.
- ²⁹ Wendy Gale Robinson. (1997). *'Heavens gate: the end?'* page 15. University of North Carolina. Retrievable at <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue3/robinson.html> as of Oct 2006.
- ³⁰ Mark W. Muesse. (1997). *'Religious studies and heavens gate: making the strange familiar and the familiar strange'*, page 1. Retrievable at <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/pdf/heavensgate.pdf> as of October 2006. First published in Chronicle of Higher Education. (April 25, 1997).
- ³¹ Beatus et al. (2005). As cited New Zealand Ministry of Health. (2006). *'New Zealand suicide prevention strategy 2006-2017'*, page 4.
- ³² Jean Amery. (no date). As cited by Lisa Lieberman. (2003). *'Leaving you'*, page 5. Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, publisher.
- ³³ Carl Williams. (1996). *'Metaphor, parapsychology and psi: an examination of metaphors related to paranormal experience and parapsychological research.'* page 3. Retrievable at <http://hopelive.hope.ac.uk/psychology/para/METAPH1.pdf> as of October 2006. From the Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, Vol.90, pages 174-201.
- ³⁴ Wikipedia offers a good overview of the Intelligent Design (I.D) theory. Retrievable at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligent_design as of October 2006. An overwhelming majority of the scientific community views I.D as unscientific. The Discovery Institute are proponents for this theory; their rationales can be assessed through <http://www.discovery.org/csc/topQuestions.php#questionsAboutIntelligentDesign> as of October 2006.
- ³⁵ The Social Navigation Hypothesis (SNH) is a premise regarding the evolutionary role of depression. SNH suggests that depression has evolved to perform two complimentary problem solving roles. It induces cognitive changes that enhance capacities for analysis and solution of key social problems, and can persuade reluctant social partners to obtain help.
- ³⁶ Amongst evolutionary theorists, depression has usually interpreted as maladaptive.

³⁷ Assisted suicides are also legal in Belgium and the Netherlands, requiring a close relationship between the patient and Doctor. In New Zealand voluntary euthanasia is illegal. Aiding, abetting or in any way assisting the suicide of a person is subject to heavy penalties. However, a clause in our **Bill of Rights Act 1990** gives an explicit right to refuse medical treatment therefore making passive euthanasia legal.

³⁸ Dignitas has assisted the suicides of at least 54 British clients.

³⁹ Alex Schadenberg. (2006). As cited by LifeSiteNews.com. (Sept 22, 2006). '*Swiss euthanasia group demands assisted suicide for the depressed.*' Retrieval at <http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2006/sep/06092204.html> as of October 2006.

⁴⁰ Much discussion about assisted suicides in Switzerland has revolved around Dignitas. Some people wanting the existing law re-examined and tightened in regard to foreigners seeking suicide. Dignitas is unequivocal in response, viewing it as discriminatory *not* to help foreigners.

⁴¹ The Star Trek character 'Mr. Spock' was the first Vulcan on the program. He is a hybrid of the Human and Vulcan race, but identifies with his non emotive Vulcan side.

⁴² Wikipedia offers a comprehensive survey of the fictional Vulcan race. The trivia section has information about the traditional Jewish religious blessing. Retrieval at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek/Vulcan as of October 2006.

⁴³ Temple priests, who historically were descendants from Moses brother Aaron.

⁴⁴ The episode 'Amok Time' from the second season of Star Trek.

⁴⁵ New Zealand Ministry of Health. (2006). '*New Zealand suicide prevention strategy 2006-2017*', page 17.

⁴⁶ To the best of my knowledge there have been no vindicated contacts with extraterrestrial life and therefore its existence is still fictitious.

⁴⁷ Ryan J. Cook. (2001). '*Why ufo's are ideal for new religions and why they fail*,' page 3. University of Chicago. Retrieval at http://home.uchicago.edu/~ryancook/download/cook_kysu.pdf as of October 2006.
