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In his essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", Michel Foucault (1984, 88) makes a somewhat enigmatic claim: "…knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting." In making this statement, Foucault (1984) is, in part, contrasting an "effective" history with forms of history that offer chronological or linear account of events and developments in knowledge, ones that smooth over disagreements, discontinuities and disruptions. Such an "effective" history seeks to reverse epistemic relations of power, by uprooting traditional foundations to disrupt the force of continuity, and by appropriating a vocabulary only to turn it against those who once used it to regulate knowledge (Foucault 1984, 88). It is, as Derek Hook (2005, 4) argues, primarily "a methodology of suspicion and critique," one that offers ways to defamiliarize and reconceptualize not just objects of knowledge but also the procedures and processes of knowledge production, and to critically engage with the uses to which such knowledge is put. It seeks to study events as "unique characteristics" or "acute manifestations", rather than specific decisions or acts in time only (Foucault 1984, 88). An event is important for Foucault, because it signals "the entry of a masked 'other'" (1984, 88).

In many ways, this special issue of *Social Epistemology* represents one entry of a masked "other", namely, critical suicidology, or more recently, critical suicide studies. Arguably, critical suicide studies has been in the making since the 1980s. Different scholars and researcher such as Silvia Canetto, Michael Kral, Howard Kushner and David Lester persistently raised concerns about the way suicidology, or the field committed to the study of suicide and suicide prevention, generated knowledge about suicide and suicide prevention, and the uses to which this knowledge was put. In this sense, the masked "other" was already present, working out its own suspicions and critiques of the field, making "cuts" or disruptions, while mainstream suicidology

continued its advancements as a field of study. Perhaps then, it is not surprising that

critical suicide studies, as an intellectual movement, came together in March 2016, at

the first critical suicide studies conference, called *Suicidology's Cultural Turn and*

Beyond, at the Vila Lanna, Prague, Czech Republic, sponsored by the Institute of

Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences[1] The conference was composed of scholars,

researchers, practitioners and activists who – because they could not, or would not call

suicidology their intellectual home – began to forge spaces for a critically oriented

suicidology over a decade ago, with the intention to broaden the way suicide was

researched and suicide prevention put to action. Articles in this issue, with the exception

of one, have been developed from papers presented at this very first conference.[2] They

represent another series of "cuts" into the way suicide and suicide prevention are

understood in different contexts, be it in relation to history, theory, knowledge

production and its approaches and related practices, and more recent examples of how

suicide is represented, both publicly and personally.[3] The "other" is no longer entirely

masked, and the suspicions and critiques have grown and developed.

Historically, suicidology as a field of knowledge and practice came to be

constituted as a 'formal' discipline in the 1940s thanks to the pioneering efforts of

figures such as Edwin S. Shneidman and Norman Farberow, with the former

establishing the American Association of Suicidology in 1968. The roots of this

'disciplinary' suicidology can be traced to nineteenth-century medical-scientific thought

and practice, which saw medicine, psychiatry, and later, psychology constitute suicide

as primarily a question of pathology. This approach challenged the dominance of

disciplines such as theology, religious studies and moral philosophy, and sought,

arguably, to shift the moralistic view of suicide as sinful. The study of suicide became a

science, and suicide was framed as an internal pathology, with mental illness as the

predominant cause and risk factor (Fitzpatrick 2014, 2015; Hjelmeland and Knizek 2017; Marsh 2010, 2018). Unfortunately, as Fitzpatrick et al. (2015) argue, suicidology's efforts to shift focus away from suicide as sinful led to the introduction of another moral standard: the reinforcement of the scientific approach as *the* way of researching suicide.

Critical suicide studies' response has been, and continues to be, as follows. It views the scientific framework of research as too narrow. In so doing, it critically examines the content of knowledge generated by suicidology through a contextualist, historical, subjective, political, cultural, linguistic and social perspectives. Critical suicide studies seriously considers first-person accounts of having been suicidal or having grieved as a result of suicide. Critical suicide studies recognises the impact of colonial histories on Indigenous peoples around the globe. It recognises the importance of community-driven suicide prevention initiatives, and creative alternatives to thinking through what it means to make meaning as a result of suicide (White, Marsh, Kral and Morris 2016). Collectively, critical suicide studies argues against universalizing assumptions and applications of ideas about suicide, which often centre on Western notions of psychopathology, and individualist accounts of agency and suicidal subjectivity (Jaworski 2014; Marsh 2018; Taylor 2015). This kind of critique is not about denying the possibility of different cultures sharing common ideas of what it means to be suicidal or grieve someone lost through suicide. Rather, the critique is about the insistence that there is something completely universal about suicide as a phenomenon as if context, history, time and culture are of no substantial significance to the way suicide is experienced and interpreted, and knowledge about it generated.

In a sense, critical suicide studies represents an intervention into what can be termed as epistemic injustice, which to borrow from Miranda Fricker (2007, 1), refers to

"…a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower." In this collection, the articles respond to the hermeneutic form of epistemic injustice, which occurs when, "a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences" (Fricker 2007, 1). In this sense, hermeneutical epistemic injustice is caused by frameworks and structures in the economy of collective interpretive and meaning-making collective resources. Therefore, attention is cast not only to theories and approaches to research which might render some perspectives more intelligible than others, but also to the way knowledge functions to frame some perspectives as more intelligible, and thereby as more important in the way we understand suicide.

The articles in this special issue of *Social Epistemology* represent an intervention in relation to the unjust epistemic effects generated by suicidology. In so doing, the articles pay attention to how knowledge has been generated in the past to understand the problems in present times. Yampolsky and Kushner begin this task by demonstrating how suicide became the intellectual property of the medical sciences from a historical perspective, showing the degree to which suicide prevention was (and is) dependent on pathology. In so doing, the authors analyse how moral values were at the heart of the so-called scientific assumptions about suicide, the very values that shaped psychiatric knowledge in the past, and continue to do so in the present. "Oppositions between life and death," Yampolsky and Kushner write, "reasons for dying reasons and reasons for living, positive and negative thinking, hopefulness and hopelessness, are driven by underlying moral values." In this way, context and how knowledge of suicide is generated through intellectual power are shown to play a key role in what is rendered as truthful in medical sciences.

Ian Marsh continues the focus on the far-reaching consequences of

pathologizing suicide by examining the power of "psychocentric" (Rimke 2000, 2010a, 2010b, 2016; Rimke and Brock 2012) framings of suicide, and the way this framing is sustained despite efforts of critical suicide studies and activists to widen the disciplinary and theoretical base for suicidology. Like Yampolsky and Kushner, Marsh shows how suicidology mostly draws on a vocabulary of pathology, abnormality detection, diagnoses and treatments to describe suicide and to theorise its origins, causes and best means of prevention. This kind of psychocentrism forms an epistemological ground for what Marsh sees as a "compulsory ontology of pathology" – an ontology which restricts with what authority suicide can be spoken of, rendering some aspects of suicide as visible and others as invisible. Psycho-political work done more recently in critical suicide studies is one way, according to Marsh, to challenge the deterministic power of psychocentrism. This is because psycho-political analysis can examine the processes by which suicide and suicidality come to be seen as arising from, and located within, the interiority of a separate, singular, individual subject, and also, at the same time, make visible the relationship between experiences of distress, suicide and social, political, economic and historic contexts and forces.

The need to question how knowledge of suicide is made available and the effects this knowledge might have is approached differently by Scott Fitzpatrick. Examining what critical suicide literacy might mean in theory and practice, Fitzpatrick argues that everyday material and social practices of suicide prevention education and communication restrict testimonial and hermeneutic activities, which lead to silencing interpretations and expressions of suicide that do not fit established understandings. The use of narrow medical frameworks is part of the problem, despite research showing that medical responses to suicide often lead to discriminatory, culturally inappropriate interventions incongruent with what people really need. Therefore, as Fitzpatrick writes,

"suicide literacy…needs to be regarded more than simple deficiencies in information transfers and comprehension to consider the power imbalances, institutional practices, and social and cultural imperatives that unjustly deny credibility to alternative explanations of suicide" – explanations that are experiential instead of clinically based. Reflecting on the critical role of values and interest groups in making judgements about what comes to be counted as evidence-based practice is crucial to ensuring that suicide prevention education becomes more than a personal resource to improve behaviour, and instead becomes a powerful tool for social awareness, change and political action.

   As important as it is, we must move beyond acknowledging and arguing for the importance of context. Instead, we need to examine the complexity and specificity of context to then think through how such complexity and specificity can contribute to the way universalizing givens silently yet pervasively continue to shape how different experiences of suicide are understood. Rob Cover's article takes the universalizing power of stereotypes to task in relation to discourses of minority youth suicide. Cover examines how the popularized 1980s representations of "lonely, queer and suicidal" stereotypically affect the relationship between connectivity, belonging and liveability in the lives of contemporary LGBTQ young people. These stereotypes are problematic, because as Cover argues, they contribute to the maintenance of a deficit model through which queer youth are expected to be lonely or alone – an expectation that not only problematically collapses loneliness into social isolation, but also presumes that loneliness is a negative the product of queer identity formation. This kind of collapse overlooks the fact that a lot of queer young people nowadays are more networked thanks to their use of the internet and different forms of media, increased representations of queer sexualities on the screen, be it films, TV, television on demand, or social media. It also overlooks the fact that social isolation and loneliness may not be

a cause of unliveability, as it has been done since the late 1980s, but as "the affective sensibility through which unliveability is experienced."

How do we make sense of unliveability, especially when it refuses to be articulated coherently? Katrina Jaworski and Daniel Scott respond to this complex question by examining how poetry may help us to understand what is ineffable about suicide, namely, that which is indescribable, feels as if it is beyond words and language yet no less real. By analysing the significance of the dead body and time in poetry, Jaworski and Scott make a bold claim: poetry bears witness to the gift of suicide, which is an uncomfortable demand placed on the living to honour what is vulnerable and visceral in death as it is in life. This kind of gift speaks of ethics, as something that we do (or not do) to ourselves and for ourselves as means of knowing who we are. This kind of gift also speaks to responsibility as being about responsive rather than being in charge, or in control. Like Cover, Jaworski and Scott's analysis demonstrate that vulnerability in suicide is not always about a lack of agency, passivity or voice.

Finally, Katrina Jaworski brings this special edition to a close by critically evaluating the philosophical roots of suicidology – positivism and structural determinism – which not only influence the kinds of research done and valued, but also how suicide, as an epistemologically unruly phenomenon, continues to be interpreted. Jaworski suggests that we need to come back to the question of ethics, especially since suicidology partly developed as a response to the problematic moralising views on suicide. Her suggestion, however, is not concerned with reinstating old views of suicide. Instead, Jaworski proposes that we begin the difficult task divorcing ethics from morality. For Jaworski, a reformulation of philosophical concepts of wonder and generosity is one way of beginning this divorce. Where wonder provides the basis for accepting differences, generosity provides the basis for recognizing fundamental

similarities between human beings. In the context of suicide, this can mean honouring the choices of the dead without forgetting the needs of those who survived suicide, be it in relation to an attempt or grieving for someone lost through suicide. Jaworski discusses the practical implications of wonder and generosity in the context of conducting research with queer young people on their experiences with suicide.

As this collection of articles illuminates, appropriating the vocabulary of a dominating discipline with the intention to make hermeneutical cuts reveals limits in knowledge, which can offer different ways of theorising, analysing, and envisioning suicide and suicide prevention. As such, the arguments and analyses offered in this collection do not represent a collection of -isms, but rather pose deeper epistemological questions. Will this make a difference to the complex realities experienced by those facing suicidal distress or grieving for someone they lost through suicide? In the immediate sense, the answer must be no, because something besides questioning the epistemological conditions on which knowledge of suicide is generated needs to happen, such as interventions at practical social, cultural and political levels, as discussed in the special issue on critical suicidology published in the journal, *Death Studies* more recently (Kral, Morris and White 2017). At the same time, interventions at more immediate levels always presuppose ideas, theory and epistemology in one way or another, for without them interventions would not make sense.

Notes

[1] The term, critical suicidology, was used a few years earlier prior to 2016 as a number of publications attest (see Jaworski, 2014, 2016; Kral 2015; White, Marsh, Kral and Morris 2016, Marsh 2015; Widger 2015; White 2015). Increasingly, the term, critical suicide studies, is now used. We use both terms given that this special issue contains papers presented at the 2016 conference in Prague, Czech Republic.

2 Scott Fitzpatrick contribution in this volume is the exception. However, we intentionally invited Fitzpatrick to be part of this collection, as his 2014 co-authored paper began a series of responses in *Social Epistemologies Review and Response Collective*. The article and the responses were a prologue to what would be articulated and discussed in the very first conference.

3 This issue is a companion to an earlier special issue on the topic of critical suicidology published in 2017 by the journal, *Death Studies*. Papers published earlier retain a greater focus on what critical suicidology can do more practically without forgetting the importance of theory in the way practice is understood and analysed (Kral, Morris and White 2017).

Disclosure statement

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