



The Second International Queer Death Studies Workshop:
Coming to Terms with Death, Dying, and Mourning Differently?

27-28 November 2017

**Karlstad University
Room: Minerva**

27th November (Monday):

16:00 - 16:15 - Welcome and practicalities

16:15 - 16:45 - Introduction to the network and the workshop: *Coming to Terms with Death, Dying, and Mourning Differently?*

16:45 - 17:00 - Coffee/tea break (Fika)

17:00 - 19:00 - Panel I:

Annika Jonsson, *What Is Queer About Death, Dying and Bereavement?*

Varpu Alasuutari, *Overcoming Heteronormativity in Finnish Death Practices*

20:00 - ... Dinner downtown (Clarion restaurant)

28th November (Tuesday)

9:00 - 10:00 - Panel II:

Magdalena Górka, *Living in Proximity of Death*

10:00 - 10:15 - Coffee/tea break (Fika)

10:15 - 12:15 - Panel III:

Tara Mehrabi, *Queer Ecologies and Queer Intimacies of Death in the Lab*

Marietta Radomska, *Queering Boundaries: On Death, the Non/Human and the Environment*

12:15 - 13:30 - Lunch break

13:30 - 15:30 - Paper IV:

Ida Hillerup Hansen, *Embodied Reading Through Loss: (Re)opening and Beyond Epistemological Foreclosures*

Nina Lykke, *Queering Death: Opening to New Feminist Materialist Ways of Thinking-Feeling-Imagining Death*

15:30 - 16:15 - Closing panel (with coffee/tea at 15:30)

Abstracts and bios

Annika Jonsson, What Is Queer About Death, Dying and Bereavement?

Abstract

Death studies, or Thanatology, is not a new tradition/area of investigation. Indeed, if we wanted to, we could trace the origin back several thousand years. Today Death Studies is blooming in various parts of the world and riding this wave, we should seek to utilise pre-existing knowledge from other fields as well as create new research paths. The queer concept has morphed quite a bit since it was formulated and the question is not only how it has been defined in the past, but how it should be defined specifically in relation to Death Studies. The aim of this presentation is twofold: I want to map out current trends in Death Studies (primarily in social science) and make a couple of suggestions as to where different versions of queer theory could make a contribution. How Queer Death Studies should be conceptualised is a complex question – how we choose to answer it probably depends on what attracted us to these traditions in the first place.

Bio

Annika Jonsson is lecturer in sociology at Karlstad University. She's doing research on continuing bonds, social agency for the dead, the life-death binary and bereavement.

Varpu Alasuutari, Overcoming Heteronormativity in Finnish Death Practices

Abstract

In my presentation I will discuss the various ways in which practices around death and burial are heteronormative in Finland. These practices include e.g. death notices, rituals in funeral ceremonies and the tradition of burying people in family graves. I also point out how heteronormative rituals have been queered or done differently by LGBTQ individuals. The data consists of interviews with bereaved LGBTQ people living in Finland, an expert interview of a queer cemetery tour held in Helsinki in 2002 and Finnish laws and guidelines defining death practices. Theoretically the presentation draws on Judith Butler's theory of (un)grievability and Thomas R. Dunn's theory of queer monumentality. Death practices, which are largely defined by the state, Evangelical Lutheran church and heteronormative definition of family, appear as a monolith that changes slowly. However, bereaved LGBTQ people have still found ways of queering practices of death and burial to better suit their needs.

Bio

Varpu Alasuutari is a doctoral student in Gender Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. She is currently working on her doctoral dissertation on death, bereavement and remembering in the lives of LGBTQ people in Finland from the 1980s to the modern day. Alasuutari is particularly interested in queer kinship, rituals of remembering and heteronormative practices around death and bereavement.

Magdalena Górski, Living in Proximity of Death

Abstract

In this presentation Magdalena Górski will introduce her new research entitled *Living in Proximity of Death*. Situated in the context of the Netherlands, the project investigates the phenomenon of suicide as a social and political matter. Based on in-depth conversations with research participants who attempted to or consider committing suicide the project analyzes if and what social and political norms and power relations may be participating in making one's own life unliveable. Instead of understanding suicide as a merely psychiatric, moral or legal issue, the project foregrounds individuals' experiences and asks what does an individual's decision to end one's own life tell about a specific society? The project aims to de-stigmatize and de-individualize suicide, and to analyze the role of power relations in enacting suffocating ways of living and making some lives unliveable.

Bio:

Magdalena Górski is Assistant Professor at the Graduate Gender Program at Utrecht University. Her research focuses on feminist politics of vulnerability and on developing a non-universalizing and politicized understanding of embodiment where human bodies are conceptualized as agential actors of intersectional politics. Her work offers anthropo-situated while posthumanist discussions of human embodiment and agency and focuses on the quotidian bodily and affective practices of living as political matters. She is an author of a dissertation book *Breathing Matters: Feminist Intersectional Politics of Vulnerability* and a founder of the *Breathing Matters Network*.

Tara Mehrabi, Queer Ecologies and Queer Intimacies of Death in the Lab

Abstract:

In this paper I explore human fly relation within the context of laboratory sciences. I rely on my ethnographic material collected from one year of participatory observation in an Alzheimer's laboratory in Sweden in which scientists work with *Drosophila Melanogaster*, commonly known as fruit flies. Drawing on new materialism, posthuman theories and queer theories I explore queer ecologies of death. In other words, I explore how flies bodies as waste crosses the boundaries of natural/artificial, inside/outside, nature/laboratory, safe/hazardous and life/death. I argue that thinking with queer ecologies of death suggests understanding of nature, agency, non/human, and intimacy in ways that goes beyond the limits of human exceptionalism and hierarchical binary logic.

Bio:

Tara Mehrabi holds a PhD in Gender Studies from Tema Genus, Linköping University. She has a master's degree in Science, Technology and Society (STS) from the same university. Her PhD thesis titled *Making Death Matter* is a study of ethics and politics of knowledge production practices in the laboratory within the context of Alzheimer's disease. In her thesis she writes about molecularization of death,

killability and human and flies relation, and biological waste within the theoretical frame works of new materialisms, feminist technoscience studies, human and animal studies, and STS.

Marietta Radomska, Queering Boundaries: On Death, the Non/Human and the Environment

Abstract:

This paper is set against the backdrop of the ways in which Western philosophy and cultural imaginaries comprehend death: either – following religious (yet often secularised) tradition – as a step towards afterlife, or – in a biomedical perspective – as something to be eliminated/worked against. Such a dual thinking about death is paralleled and simultaneously fortified by a strong division and hierarchy between the human subject and its nonhuman others characteristic of Western thought. These dualisms are, nonetheless, challenged by both theory and art emergent in the context of contemporary environmental crises, global climate change and ‘the sixth great extinction’. While employing feminist Deleuzian philosophy/queer vitalism and queer eco-criticism as my theoretical ground, I focus on the following questions: how do contemporary practices of bio/eco-art that deal with death and dying influence our understanding of death? What kind of conceptual/material queering do they mobilise? And finally, what does it mean to Death Studies?

Bio:

Marietta Radomska is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Thematic Studies, unit Gender Studies, Linköping University (SE). She is a holder of The Swedish Research Council International Postdoc Grant and her current research focuses on ecologies of death in the context of contemporary art. Radomska is the founder of The Eco- and Bioart Research Network, co-convenor of The Posthumanities Hub, a founding member of Queer Death Studies Network and co-coordinator of GEXcel International Collegium research strand ‘Death Studies: Queerfeminist Materialist Perspectives’. She is the author of *Uncontainable Life: A Biophilosophy of Bioart* (2016).

ida Hillerup Hansen, Embodied Reading Through Loss: (Re)opening and Beyond Epistemological Foreclosures

Abstract:

Drawing insight from queer and affective reading strategies, this paper sets out to situate a critique of the contemporary biomedical discourse on bereavement in the context of literary theory to reflect on the effects of its narrative structure and closure. Beginning from Karen Barad’s ‘agential realist ontology’, I briefly delineate my point of departure in the biomedical literature on bereavement. In this, I propose that *through* the pathologisation of the ‘bereaved subject’ and the analogy of grief as ‘wound healing’ is enacted a Western dualist ontology to which death constitutes the ultimate end and, through which, the epistemological limits of the subject are enforced according to the representational production of “reality”

as the realm of life. Drawing from personal and other auto-ethnographic writings, from the method of affective reading and, theory in new materialisms, I move to assemble an alternative methodology to approach loss and death. Thus, suggesting that *reading through loss* embodies a critical awareness to the narrativised epistemological foreclosures the discourse on bereavement effectuates and, a re-ontologised approach to experience of loss, I enact this methodology in a tentative reading of a representation of suffocation from the movie *The Piano* (Champion 1993) to explore the range of relations death may otherwise entail.

Bio:

ida Hillerup Hansen – Phd student at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. Their work, embedded in biopolitical, queer literary and new materialist theories, focuses on affective and corporeal experiences of loss and grief as sites offering alternative narratives to the contemporary pathological discourse on bereavement.

Nina Lykke, Queering Death: Opening to New Feminist Materialist Ways of Thinking-Feeling-Imagining Death

Abstract:

To approach the open-ended question of what queering of death may mean, I shall take an autophenomenographic point of departure, mapping out my personal inroads. These inroads are related to my encounters with layers of normativities, when my life partner died from cancer some years ago, and I became a mourning queer femme-inist widow. I shall draw a cartography of these normativities, spanning from heteronormative expectations inscribed into the figure of widow to the Western master narratives of death, paradoxically co-authored by Christian-philosophical soul-body-dualisms and secular scientific nihilisms. I shall discuss my situated need to resist these normativities from intertwined queerfeminist/femme-inist, posthuman and new materialist perspectives, and against this background suggest a multi-layered understanding of what "queering death" and "doing queer death studies" may mean. The presentation is aligned with an over-arching aim of this second international queer death studies network workshop: in transversal conversations to reflect on both shared grounds and differences regarding how and what "we" who feel attracted to network under the banner of "Queer Death Studies" think-feel-imagine "we" are doing here, and perhaps want to do together in the future.

Bio:

Nina Lykke, Professor Emerita, Gender Studies, Linköping University, Sweden. Co-founder of the International Network for Queer Death Studies. Has published extensively within feminist theory and intersectionality studies. Current research: queerfeminist, autophenomenographic, poetic explorations of cancer cultures, death, mourning and queer widowhood. Some recent publications: "Queer Widowhood". *Lambda Nordica* (2015:4); "When death cuts apart: On affective difference, compassionate companionship and lesbian widowhood" (in: Juvonen & Kohlemainen: *Affective Inequalities in Intimate Relationships*. Routledge, 2018).