

Deliberate taking: the author, agency and suicide

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Abstract

In the essay, 'What is an author?', Michel Foucault (1984, pp. 118–119) contended that 'the author does not precede the works'. If this is the case, then what happens when the notion of the author as never outside discourse is grafted to suicide? What happens when suicide – most commonly defined as a deliberate taking of one's life – is read through the idea that the one who is doing the taking does not precede it? Does this not obliterate agency in suicide: the key ingredient necessary to marking the individual as the sole author of their death? I respond to these questions by first considering what Foucault's contention might offer to understanding the constitution of agency in the act of suicide. I then draw on elements of Judith Butler's work to consider a way of thinking of suicide that furthers Foucault's contribution. I suggest that positioning suicide as already part of discourse does not undermine the individual as the author of death, or make the act of taking one's life any less deliberate. I conclude with a comment on Foucault's position on death being power's limit, and what this might mean for understanding suicide.

Biography

Katrina Jaworski works as a research fellow in the Division of Health Sciences, University of South Australia. Her research interests include gender, bodies, death and dying, and suicide in particular. katrina.jaworski@unisa.edu.au