

# COMM 3011: Media, Medicine, and the Arts of Mortality

Fall 2023 Tuesday/Thursday 12:00-1:30pm Room: ASC (3620 Walnut Street) 224	Instructor: Arthur Wang (he/him) arthurzw@upenn.edu  Office: ASC 348 Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-3:00pm and by appointment
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## Description

This seminar explores how death has shaped and been shaped by modern communication, healthcare, and the arts. We'll examine the politics, ethics, and aesthetics of mortality in film, television, journalism, digital media, and literature. Our methodological approach will build on insights from media studies and medical humanities. Topics may include the emergence of the "end-of-life" as a life stage in popular culture and medical care; protest, activism, and other political movements against deadly injustice; and the creation of knowledge, media, and art in the wake of mourning and loss.

## Schedule

### Part 1

#### Terminal: Media and Care at the End of Life

Mortality can perhaps best be dealt with in story form.

Peter Brooks

### Week 1

#### Introduction: Mortality and the Limits of Communication

- Meeting 1
  - Introduction
- Meeting 2
  - Roger Cooter, "The Dead Body," in *Medicine in the Twentieth Century* (Taylor & Francis, 2000), 469–485

- Tamara Kneese, “Data Infrastructures of the Dead,” *Heliotrope*, September 28, 2022, 1–5
- Johanna Sumiala, “A Brief History of an Idea,” in *Mediated Death* (Newark: Polity Press, 2022), 25–42

## Week 2

### Writing Life at the Edge of Death 1: Mediating Prognosis

- Meeting 1
  - Ian Hacking, “Making Up People,” *London Review of Books*, August 17, 2006 (9pp.)
  - S. Lochlann Jain, “Living in Prognosis: The Firing Squad of Statistics,” in *Malignant: How Cancer Becomes Us* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 27–45
- Meeting 2
  - “Pilot,” *Breaking Bad*, January 20, 2008 (58m)
  - Jenny Diski, “Who’ll Be Last?” *London Review of Books*, November 19, 2015 (6pp.)
  - Stephen Jay Gould, “The Median Isn’t the Message,” *AMA Journal of Ethics* 15, no. 1 (2013): 77–81
  - Karla F. C. Holloway, “Their Bodies, Our Conduct: How Society and Medicine Produce Persons Standing in Need of End-of-Life Care,” *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 19, no. 2 (February 2016): 127–28
  - Paul Kalanithi, “How Long Have I Got Left?” *The New York Times*, January 24, 2014 (6pp.)

## Week 3

### Writing Life at the Edge of Death 2: Medicine and Memoir

- Meeting 1
  - Thomas Laqueur, “Nothing Becomes Something” (review of *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi), *London Review of Books*, September 21, 2016
  - Excerpts from Anne Boyer, *The Undying*
    - Prologue
    - “The Incubants”
    - “The Sickbed”
- Meeting 2
  - Excerpts from Boyer, *The Undying*
    - “How the Oracle Held”
    - “The Hoax”
    - Epilogue

- Audre Lorde, “Breast Cancer: A Black Feminist Lesbian Experience,” in *The Cancer Journals* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1980), 19–49

## Week 4

### Last Words

- Meeting 1
  - Peter Brooks, “Dying Declarations,” in *Fictional Discourse and the Law*, ed. Hans J. Lind (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 117–123
  - Edward W. Said, “Timeliness and Lateness,” in *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 3–24
  - Oliver Sacks, “**My Own Life**,” *The New York Times*, February 19, 2015
- Meeting 2
  - Derek Jarman, *Blue* (1993)
  - James Merrill, “Christmas Tree,” *Poetry* 166, no. 6 (1995): 313
  - **The Tweet Hereafter**, December 23, 2018
  - Optional: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Christmas Effects,” in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 5–9
  - Optional: blog post by Kamran Javadizadeh about his podcast conversation with Langdon Hammer on “Christmas Tree”

## Week 5

### Pedagogies of Care for the Dying

- Meeting 1
  - Nicole M. Piemonte and Shawn Abreu, first four chapters in *Death and Dying* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2021), 1–113
- Meeting 2
  - **Special guest lecture by Professor Nicole Piemonte**, prepare 1–2 questions

## Week 6

### Making Space for Death

- Meeting 1
  - Nitin Ahuja, “**End Stages**,” *Places Journal*, May 15, 2018
  - Alexander K. Smith and Vyjeyanthi S Periyakoil, “**Should We Bury ‘The Good Death’?**,” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 66, no. 5 (2018): 856–58
  - Ken Worpole, “A House at the End of Life,” *New Statesman* (London, United Kingdom: New Statesman Ltd., May 24, 2019)
- Meeting 2
  - Ken Worpole, “A Walk in the Paradise Gardens,” in *Last Landscapes: The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West* (London: Reaktion, 2003), 133–150 (18pp.)

## Fall Break

### Friendship, Love, and Finishing What They Started

- Tom Joslin and Peter Friedman, *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (1993)

## Part 2

### Postmortem Communication

#### Separation

by W.S. Merwin

Your absence has gone through me  
Like thread through a needle.  
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

## Week 7

### Activism and Visualization

- Meeting 1
  - Elizabeth Alexander, ““Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?”: Reading the Rodney King Video(s),” *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (1994): 77–94
  - Ken Gonzales-Day, Erased Lynchings project
  - Susan Sontag, “Looking at War,” *New Yorker*, December 1, 2002
- Meeting 2
  - John Emerson et al., “The Challenging Power of Data Visualization for Human Rights Advocacy,” in *New Technologies for Human Rights Law and Practice*, ed. Molly Land and Jay D. Aronson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 162–187
  - Jacqueline Wernimont on data visceralization, “Pandemic Death Counts are Numbing: There’s Another Way to Process” *Wired*, July 21, 2022
  - Optional: Catherine D’Ignazio, “A Toolkit for Restorative/Transformative Data Science,” *Counting Feminicide: Data Feminism in Action* (Cambridge: MIT Press, preprint)

## Week 8

### Forensic Media

- Meeting 1
  - Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, “**Mengele’s Skull: From Witness to Object**,” *Cabinet*, Fall 2011

- First third of Michael Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) (up to the end of “The Grove of Ascetics”)
- Meeting 2
  - Middle third of *Anil's Ghost* (up to the end of “The Mouse”)
  - Eyal Weizman et al., eds., “Lexicon,” in *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth* (Berlin: Sternberg Press and Forensic Architecture, 2014), 743–752\

## Week 9

### Forensic Media (con't) and Death, Ethics, and Technology

- Meeting 1
  - Saidiya Hartman, “**Venus in Two Acts**,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14
  - Finish *Anil's Ghost*
- Meeting 2
  - Tamara Kneese, “Social Memorials,” in *Death Glitch: How Techno-Solutionism Fails Us in This Life and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023)
  - **Special guest lecture by Dr. Tamara Kneese**

## Week 10

### Grief's Forms: The Psychology of Mourning and Trauma

- Meeting 1
  - Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 14, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 243–258
  - Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, “The Five Stages of Grief,” *On Grief and Grieving* (New York: Scribner, 2014), 7–28
  - Katherine Walsh, “Normal and Complicated Grief,” in *Grief and Loss: Theories and Skills for the Caring Professions* (Boston: Pearson, 2021), 64–76
- Meeting 2
  - Cathy Caruth, “Trauma and Experience,” in *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings* ed. Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 192–198
  - Marianne Hirsch, “Connective Arts of Postmemory,” *Analecta Politica* 9, no. 16 (2019): 171–176
  - Lore Segal, “The Reverse Bug,” *The New Yorker*, May 1, 1989

## Week 11

### Memorialization

- Meeting 1

- Jonathan Lohman, “A Memorial Wall in Philadelphia,” in *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death*, ed. Jack Santino (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2006), 177–214
- Marita Sturken, “The Memory of Racial Terror: The Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice,” in *Terrorism in American Memory: Memorials, Museums, and Architecture in the Post-9/11 Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 221–264 (44pp.)
- Meeting 2
  - “Pilot,” *Six Feet Under*, June 3, 2001 (63m) (optional screening on 11/8)
  - Alison Bechdel, “A Happy Death,” in *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 25–54
  - Jessica Mitford, “Death, Incorporated,” *Vanity Fair*, March 1997.

## Week 12

### Memorialization (con’t)

- Meeting 1
  - Jay D. Aronson, “Who Owns the Dead?” in *Who Owns the Dead?: The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 227–256
  - Kinjal Dave and Jake Nussbaum, “How the Possession of Human Remains Led to a Public Reckoning at the Penn Museum,” *Hyperallergic*, October 31, 2021
  - Maura Judkis, “A Museum’s Historic Human Remains Are Now the Center of an Ethics Clash,” *Washington Post*, July 27, 2023
- Meeting 2
  - Thanksgiving Break

## Weeks 13 & 14

### Final Project Presentations

- Meeting 1
  - Student Presentations
- Meeting 2
  - Student Presentations
- Meeting 3
  - Student Presentations
- Meeting 4
  - Student Presentations