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Mark Andrew Scheibmeir

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“CTB: Catch the Bus”
A Theatrical Examination of Cybersuicide and Its Culture

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A Theatrical Examination of Cybersuicide and Its Culture

by

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Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the participants of the cybersuicide subculture. I hope, through further research, the world can come to better understand and support you.
Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of many individuals. First and foremost, I would like to thank my friend and creative collaborator, Michael Waitt. Without his encouragement and creative insight, I would not have been able to find the pulse of this thesis. I hope we will continue to develop the ideas within this project with the vigor and passion they deserve.

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“CTB: Catch the Bus”
A Theatrical Examination of Cybersuicide and Its Culture

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

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A dramatized account of my discovery, research and inclusion into the subculture of cybersuicide.
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INTRODUCTION

The following details my process of creating an original solo-performance about cybersuicide pacts. It explains how I developed the topic, includes a final draft of the script, discusses my rehearsal process and draws conclusions based on post performance feedback and reactions.
SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 1: Discovering the Topic

Cybersuicide Pacts, Online Suicide Forums and the A.S.H. (Alternative Suicide Holiday) subculture represent a small but fascinating part of society. These topics rarely come up in casual conversation. However, this is exactly how I first learned of these subjects. When I was living in Taiwan in the spring of 2004, a friend mentioned that a group of people in Japan had formed a suicide pact with strangers on the Internet. Later, through my research, I came to understand this action as a cybersuicide pact. The notion that people actually sought out an anonymous partner to commit suicide with stunned me. Later that night, I wrote down this concept in my journal.

Part of my fascination with the idea initially stemmed from my strong connection to the Internet and technology at the time. Since I was living overseas, most of my good friends were not easily accessible to me. Talking on the phone was difficult because, in addition to being costly, there was a twelve-hour time difference. While Skype software had already been developed in 2004, it was not widespread and therefore made it harder and more expensive to connect. Email was my best means of communicating with loved ones. At times my personality seemed hardwired. I could understand the desire to connect with others via the Internet whether they were friends or strangers.

The reason I chose this topic for my thesis has changed throughout the course of time. Initially, I thought the topic was fascinating and had such high potential for drama that it solicited being made into a play. The idea had definite potential as the basis for a play, but I felt the format of my thesis performance lacked the structure to do this the way I wanted. The topic also presented an opportunity to convey the humanity among the participants and why they are drawn to cybersuicide pacts. Ultimately, I realized that a
complete understanding of these topics and its participants would be impossible given the time constraints of the performance, but that raising awareness of these issues was something that I could accomplish.

**Finding the Narrative of the Topic**

The idea stayed in my journal for quite a while. At that point in my life, I was not in graduate school and was unconcerned with creating art, so it merely remained an interesting anecdote or a sideshow curiosity. However, as I moved through life and found my calling in the world of theatre, the idea began to shift into something more dramatic. I began writing with a friend of mine. The first story that we wrote was semi-autobiographical. When it came time to write the next script, I approached him with the idea of a story about cybersuicide pacts. His response was overwhelmingly positive and we went to work outlining a story, brainstorming characters for tension and adding turning points that would make the story more dramatic. Initially, our story faded away when I was accepted into graduate school, and our face-to-face writing time was severely diminished. My graduate school education put writing our project on hold, but it encouraged me to research the topic. During “Reading the Canon: Play Analysis,” a class taught by Dr. Stacy Wolf, I was assigned a project in which I was required to research a play, the status of which could be in the development phase. The result was a mass of information on cybersuicide and the surrounding subculture. Deeper analysis about my research process and a discussion on my decisions to include certain materials can be found in Chapter 2. I was not sure if cybersuicide would be the topic of my thesis at this early stage, but I decided that I would not rule it out. During the Spring semester of my second year, my thesis advisor, Pamela Christian, asked for thesis ideas. I presented cybersuicide and a collection of personal stories about my family along with some other ideas. The collection of stories was greeted tepidly, but the response to cybersuicide was
always one of interest. Furthermore, when I discussed the topic with friends and advisors, they were almost always singularly focused on how and why I was interested in this topic. Initially, I was frustrated by the fact that my friends and advisors were more interested in the topic than whatever narrative I was proposing for it. I felt as if I had landed near the right topic, but was terribly far away from a narrative that would satisfy an audience and a way to present it.

The narrative for my thesis fell into place during a performance of Black Snow, a play that centers around a rookie writer’s first-hand account of having a play produced. Similarly, I chose to present my narrative as a direct address to the audience. The narrative would be an account of my journey into the world of cybersuicide. It would include elements of truth, but would also depart from reality to create and maintain dramatic tension. The most beneficial aspect of presenting the story this way is that it would allow the audience to enter the world of cybersuicide as I experienced it, from beginning to end via my research process.

Chapter 2: Research

Approximately eighty percent of my performance script is a non-fictional account of my research process and the presentation of particular research to the audience. Some of the chronological order of this research is fictionalized to allow the audience to follow the story with greater ease. My actual research process followed an inductive approach. Since I was aware of the phenomena being specific to Japan, I started researching cybersuicide events in Japan first. The articles I found about Japanese cybersuicide pointed me to instances of cybersuicide throughout Asia and then subsequently

\[http://www.newprophecy.net/japansuicide.htm\]
throughout the world. Several of these articles led me to research the sites that supported cybersuicide. Finally, I began searching for an expert on the subject. This is when I solicited information from Doctor Rajagopal, who authored an article discussing the causes of cybersuicide\(^2\). Several areas of my research did not make it into my performance script and other areas were condensed because of the twenty minute time limit on our thesis performance. The following chapter outlines why certain subjects were included and why I chose a particular order in which to discuss them.

**SIGNIFICANCE AND REASONING BEHIND INCLUDED RESEARCH**

The Methods File\(^3\), an online document that details various ways to commit suicide, was included for shock value. I needed something that would expose the audience to dangerous cybersuicide web content. I placed this first, believing it would keep their attention and allow me to justify further research into cybersuicide. The inclusion of an A.S.H. webpage\(^4\) (Alternative Suicide Holiday website) was necessary since it detailed how ASHers view outsiders in their subculture. This created an element of danger for my character in the research process that was important for the narrative to work. A.S.H. lingo\(^5\) was included primarily for the purpose of explaining the frequently-used suicide metaphor “Catch the Bus.” Since the metaphor was used so often in posts online, I felt it was necessary to include a section that defined it clearly for the audience. The next section of research I included focused on web articles highlighting cybersuicide death tolls in Japan and elsewhere in the world. The progression of these pages kept cybersuicide out of North America as long as possible. Finally, I revealed an article that


highlighted a foiled cybersuicide pact in Oregon\textsuperscript{6}. I followed the articles and headlines with actual posts from ASHers. I specifically chose posts from outside the United States again to start the section, then I included posts from major United States metropolitan areas, followed by the Midwest, and then I finally read a post from someone in Texas. I believe keeping cybersuicide out of proximity early on increased tension in the script, by essentially allowing the audience to think that they were safe from this phenomenon only to later be informed otherwise. The last bit of research that I included was Doctor Rajagopal’s letter\textsuperscript{7} responding to a list of questions that I sent him in hopes that he could explain why people were drawn to cybersuicide. His brief letter in response to mine highlighted the fact that little is known about the participants of cybersuicide and that more research is needed in order to properly understand their reasoning for creating this subculture. This letter served as an opportunity in the script for my character to depart from passive research to an active role participating within the subculture.

I made one actual post online in an attempt to develop a profile for a cybersuicide participant. Following this post, I quickly ceased trying to communicate further with ASHers after I received several responses that made me feel unwelcome and fear for my safety.

\textbf{Chapter 3: Audiovisual Elements}

Early in my process, I recognized the need for audiovisual elements. It would be impossible to establish a credible Internet subculture without displaying their web pages to the audience. Since my script mirrored my research process, it could help establish a

\textsuperscript{7} Dr. Rajagopal. "Re: Cybersuicide and Internet Suicide Pact Research." Email from the author. 4 Dec. 2007.
rhythm of facts and commentary. I created webpage visuals by using PDF versions of the actual WebPages and inserted them into PowerPoint slides. However, I felt that projecting just WebPages without any audio element would sabotage the momentum of the performance. Therefore, voiceover was needed. Additionally, I saw the inclusion of Michael Waitt as an opportunity to establish video in the performance. This would compliment the final video that was needed in order to give the piece closure.

**THE AUDIO AND VISUAL COLLABORATORS**

My friend and roommate, Martin Pedersen, is a location sound recordist for feature films and commercials. He has extensive knowledge regarding all areas of sound recording and the equipment needed to record sound. I enlisted his technical expertise for the voiceovers. I solicited the help of several friends and family members to do the voiceovers for the piece. After Martin recorded and converted the raw sound files into a data file, I used an open source audio editing software called Audacity to rework them appropriately. The longer voiceovers were simple to manipulate, and required very little editing. Regarding the various posts that needed to overlap in the script, I accomplished this by staggering the start times in the PowerPoint presentation and inserting additional silence between sentences in certain posts. The result was a layered soundtrack in which each voice could demand attention at particular times.

The featured video clips in which Michael Waitt appeared were entirely produced by Michael himself. I asked him early on if he would be willing to make some video recordings for the performance. When he agreed, I sent him a final script that included dialogue between the two of us. I asked him to incorporate pauses between his lines that would allow me to respond to him during the actual performance. He came up with the concept to record the clips in different locations, with different costumes and other changes in physical appearance (i.e. beard length). We debated what sort of equipment to
tape the clips with, but ultimately we decided that a web cam would be the right choice because it would bring emphasis back to computers and the Internet.

The final video of the script, in which I fictitiously interacted in a cybersuicide pact, was filmed using a personal camcorder owned by my brother Luke Scheibmeir. In order to get the equipment, I had to travel to Sherman, TX. Since I was already there and the date of the performance was quickly approaching, I thought it was the best time to go ahead and shoot the final scene. I contemplated asking several different people, but chose Lauren Whitney Scheibmeir, Luke’s wife. Lauren was similar in age to me and has a non-threatening stature that I felt would read well on camera. I knew that I didn’t want to use dialogue in this final clip, so her level of acting expertise was not an issue. I rented a motel room for the shoot so I could have plenty of time to tape the scene if any obstacles arose. Fortunately, the videotaping went smoothly. Afterwards, I edited the clip together using iMovie on my computer. Since the final clip contained no dialogue, I began considering which song I should use for the duration of the scene. While researching potentially relevant songs, it occurred to me that I should use the M*A*S*H theme song referenced at the end of the Methods File. I searched iTunes and found various versions of the theme song, but chose one that felt similar in tone to the project. Additionally, I thought the instrumental version was not as heavy-handed as many of the others that included the lyrics.
USE OF TRAINING

When I started graduate school in Acting, I had very little training and no real acting process. Now, three years later, I am fortunate to have a variety of tools at my disposal to create a dynamic performance. This particular script is interesting, because while it called on only a few of these tools, I relied heavily upon them.

Chapter 1: Vocal Training

No aspect of my training has been more important than the vocal training I have received. In order to carry the burden of a solo show, I had to keep a dynamic voice throughout the performance. Changes in pitch, rate of speaking and volume (just to name a few) were necessary to keep the audience engaged. Discovering these changes naturally throughout the text was incredibly important. The training I have received allowed me to uncover the places in the text that were vocal turning points. Furthermore, a certain amount of vocal dexterity is needed in a piece that requires you to perform for an extended period of time without a break. The training I received was not simply a warm-up or an exercise that gave me this dexterity, but also included a long-term workout of my vocal instrument. In addition to these elements, the importance of articulation and diction cannot be overestimated in such a performance. The Lab Theatre space is not a large one, and any unclear or slightly mumbled dialogue is lost quickly in the space.

Another element in my vocal training at the University of Texas at Austin has been extensive accent and dialect training. My thesis gave me the opportunity to display a British accent, which I also honed during productions of An Ideal Husband and Pride
and Prejudice. Dr. Rojagopal’s response letter could have been read in my own voice, but I thought it was an opportunity to display characterization via voice work.

Since my thesis puts me as the central character in the story, the greatest vocal demand is speaking effectively from self. A strong sense of grounding and ownership of the words is necessary. Any vocal “theatricality” would make the audience question the sincerity of my character’s role in the thesis. Furthermore, when the thesis deviated from my actual research process to fiction, maintaining the same vocal quality was imperative for consistency. I can and will continue to improve upon this aspect of my vocal training, but I am already aware of a vast improvement in this skill as a result of my training at the University of Texas at Austin.

Chapter 2: Acting Technique

I was new to acting training before I came to the University of Texas at Austin’s Master of Fine Arts program. My undergraduate education was in Radio, Television and Film. My courses were not geared towards acting, but any discussions we had about acting always involved emotion. There was little to no discussion of the actor’s craft. As a result, when I arrived at graduate school my acting relied solely on instinct and emotion. I honed these instincts during my three years of training, but also developed a greater understanding of the craft of acting. The training familiarized me with Meisner, Stanislavski, Viewpoints, Laban, and many other techniques for approaching a role. It improved my ability to analyze a scene, choose strong actions, find physicality and implement all these aspects into performance. However, since I wrote the script and was the central character of my performance, the bulk of my work was honestly connecting with my audience and speaking from self. All the aforementioned techniques have been invaluable in my process of maturing and understanding my acting as a whole over the past three years. In addition, I have grown to understand myself as a person and bring
my vulnerability to the stage. Possibly the most important result of my graduate school education has been an increase in confidence on stage, which I have realized is now present no matter what the role. I know I have all the tools necessary for any role, and that I will only continue to become a better actor through more performance work.
REHEARSALS AND REFLECTIONS

Chapter 1: Rehearsal Process

My rehearsal process was relatively brief. I had a few rehearsals with my thesis advisor to work on staging and to pare down the script. After this, I began the work of memorization. Once memorization was complete, I got on my feet and began playing and discovering. Many of these initial rehearsals were without any outside eyes and did not include any of the audiovisual elements. It was helpful for me talk through the audiovisual elements during these rehearsals so that I could keep the flow of the piece. Finally, I invited a friend, Jourdan Gibson, to watch a rehearsal. She helped me finalize my blocking and how I would relate to the audiovisual elements. During the week of technical rehearsal, I was allowed in the performance space; that was when the performance started to take a concrete shape. I had the chance to see my audiovisual elements projected onscreen and to hear the voiceovers through the speaker system. My technical rehearsal was short and didn’t allow for many elaborate cues. This was not a problem since I didn’t think extensive lighting served my story, and since my music and sound cues were built into my PowerPoint. I opted for a simple lighting plot, which highlighted the downstage and darkened the upstage. I hoped this would enable the audience to see the projections clearly. My thesis advisor attended my final dress rehearsal. She gave me technical notes regarding my slide projections, adjustments to how I interacted with the slides, and an acting note to keep my fascination with the topic palpable from the beginning. I went home that evening, changed a few of the technical elements, and reconnected with why I was drawn to this topic in the first place. I realized that I had become apologetic for presenting such a dark idea to the audience. I knew that I needed to reestablish my commitment to the topic. I reworked the beginning several
times that night and the following morning. I felt nervous, but prepared when it came time to perform.

Chapter 2: Post Performance

My performance went smoothly. There were no technical issues. However, it was difficult to gauge my performance since I was essentially playing myself. I believed I accomplished my goal of educating the audience about cybersuicide. There were several moments throughout the performance when I heard audible gasps at some of the material I was presenting. I know the Methods File shocked at least one person since I heard an “Oh my god” when I mentioned it. I chatted with several people after the show who were concerned for my safety. I explained that all the content was based on facts, but I did not participate in particular events (i.e. meeting up for a cybersuicide pact). I felt that their investment into my security was a good sign that I performed all elements believably onstage. I also took the fact that many weren’t sure when the script departed from my actual research process as a positive signal that the performance maintained integrity throughout. I am satisfied with the performance, but also found several ways to improve the show in the future if I remount. I received a number of questions, which highlighted areas for progress. For example, I was asked, “Why were you so invested in the research?” and “Why did your character have to continue to follow this narrative to the end?” As a result, I understood my script lacked motivation for why I would continue researching something that was so dangerous. In a previous draft, I was fascinated by cybersuicide because of my own desperation and desire to connect with others. I plan to go back and include this aspect along with a fictional desire to save participants of cybersuicide pacts. I think this objective could be accomplished through slight tweaks in the script or through some dialogue with Michael. Another area for enhancement is the
technical side. I was limited to what technical elements I could feature because I had a short technical rehearsal, and the geographic distance from my collaborators made communication about audiovisual elements difficult. If I am going to continue with this project, I will incorporate more technical elements (lighting, music and sound) and enhance or replace some of the video and slides.

Chapter 3: Conclusion

The process of creating a solo performance show was difficult and exercised many different areas of my skill set. However, it also developed abilities I did not already possess. It gave me a greater appreciation for solo artists and the work that is needed to produce one-person performances from start to finish. I have a personal understanding of the roles within the creative process and have improved my ability to work with collaborators as a generative artist. I know firsthand the demands of research in creating text and I now recognize more opportunities to use facts in conjunction with fiction in theatre. My thesis helped me to discover all these concepts, but not all of the long-term lessons from it have been revealed. My graduate education has taught me that my thesis will be of value beyond the scholarship that I already acknowledge. It has taught me that the horizon of my learning is not always immediate. I will continue to unearth skills that the thesis process planted in me years from now. Patience and persistence in my craft will continue to grow these abilities in ways that I cannot yet imagine.
Appendix A: Script

My staging was simple and organic throughout the script. I moved between the stool, a desk, and a chair maintaining direct address with the audience. Color coding is used to delineate audiovisual elements. Gray and blue highlights are videos and slides. Yellow highlights are voiceovers.

“CTB: Catch the Bus”

I. THE SEED

Brent the Aussie: Greaaat trip. Acupuncture convention was intense - the Japanese are crazy into technology, not like most of us punkies. A bit overdone at times, but amazing. Everything’s on the web, everything. I even heard of students who are getting online and making suicide pacts with each other. I don’t know if it is grades or what not, but disturbing nonetheless. (pause) Luke, see you when I see you at Ellen’s later.

In 2004, I found myself living in Taipei, Taiwan. I was in culture shock, I didn’t know the language and, honestly, had trouble making friends. Luke, my brother, was with me, but he was constantly traveling while I stayed put in Taipei. My best friend became technology. I called. I emailed. I skyped. I texted. I blogged. I uploaded photos. I myspaced. I facebooked. Twitter wasn’t around back then.

I couldn’t help but overhear my brother’s friend Brent talking about his trip to Japan. I understood the comfort of the internet and its anonymity.

Eventually, I moved back to my hometown and then…luckily…I landed. I found a friend.

Michael Waitt - We were friends in high school, but this was when we became close. We were drinkin’ buddies. By the way, he’s 5’7”, wears a beard. We just look odd when we stand next to each other.

(SLIDE Pictures Michael and Me)

---

Play VIDEO 1

Michael: Everything happens for a reason.

Me: (to Michael, with a smile) I fucking hate that. I fucking hate that with a passion. I tell you something and you come up with a catch all truism to ease my pain. Thanks for your creativity.
Michael: Well it does.

We became best friends. Somewhere along the way we wrote a screenplay together. It was some of the most fun I have ever had. The screenplay is…well its bad. Or at least it might be – I’m not sure. It was about our lives at the time. And our lives were pretty boring. We wrote, drank, and went golfing occasionally. I think the scene we wrote with golfing in it is good. After we finished the script we started working on a new topic…or rather one than had been in my head for a while.

ME: Did I ever tell you about the online suicide pact thing that I heard about? Ya know when I was over in Taiwan?

MICHAEL VO: The what?

ME: I know it sounds sort of strange, but really fucking interesting. People chat online with others. They form these –

Cybersuicide pacts. We outlined the story on a napkin. Our story in thirty seconds. Various people, a real estate agent, a pharmacist, a waiter, a whatever form a suicide pact online. They meet in some deserted brownstone in Chicago, but are waiting for the last person to come. He never does, which gives them ample time to fuck, fight, commit suicide or change their mind. The kicker is that one of them signed up twice, as two different people on the pact, so that he could have a way out in case he didn’t want to go through with it. So our story, well our story stayed on the napkin. Not too long after this little brainstorm, I got accepted into grad school.

Soooo…Grad School.

While Grad School put writing our project on hold, it did give me the opportunity to do some research.

II. RESEARCH
One of the first things I found was the Methods File. It is a twenty-nine page long document including over 40 ways to kill yourself. Number one on the list is Poisoning. It alone is thirteen pages long. It is exhaustive – it has household cleaners, traditional poisons and even breaks down sleeping tablets by kind. Here’s just one example:

**<Slide Poison>**
Potassium Chloride
Dosage: Not known (try 20cc injection of strong solution)
Time: Seconds to minutes
Availability: Widely Available
Certainty: Certain given correct dosage

There are some notes. Causes heart attack (which is painful). May be difficult for coroner to realize it was a suicide rather than a natural heart attack. An excess of potassium in the blood interferes with nerve signals and stops muscles and nerves from working. So when it reaches your heart, the heart stops.

Here are some other Highlights from the Method List:

**<Slide Jumping>**
#3 Jumping off buildings
Time: Instantaneous if you are lucky, minutes/hours otherwise
Availability: You need ten stories or higher and access to the top floor, windows or roof. Bring a bolt cutter to get onto the roof
Certainty: 90% for 6 stories, increasing after that

Totally painless if high enough, but very frightening. Note that it may take a while for many of those 90% to die.

**<Slide Bullet>**
#5 Bullet
Time: Microseconds unless you are unlucky or a bad shot
Certainty: Certain
Availability: Difficult in UK, easier in the USA (Get a shotgun)

The list originated in the UK. The notes section is rather lengthy. It tells which kind of ammunition to use and also suggests that this method is really messy.

My old neighbor shot himself with a shotgun. Fucking awful. Seemed like a happy guy. Didn’t even seem like the type to own a gun.

**<Slide Drowning>**
#10 Drowning

**<Slide Driving into Bridge>**
#17 Driving into bridge support at 100mph

<Slide Enlist>
#19 Enlist
Don’t feel guilty if you laughed or wanted to laugh (I did).

<Slide Dehydration>
#27 Dehydration

<Slide AIDS>
#38 AIDS

And finally, they end the list with lyrics to the M*A*S*H theme song:
The Chorus:
Suicide is Painless
It Brings on Many Changes
And I Can Take or Leave it if I Please

I found the methods file on the web via the ASH newsgroup website. ASH stands for Alternative Suicide Holiday. It seems like an odd coupling of words to many. It is designed to reflect some of the core values of ASHers. The idea that death is sort of the last holiday. It’s not to be feared. In fact, it’s viewed as the gracious end to the monotony or pain.

Projections - The opening page of ASH and several other pages from the web site

BOSS: I’ll try to explain what this newsgroup is generally about. See ASH is sort of likes Death’s Bus Stop. We’re all sitting around, waiting for the bus, shooting the shit. Eventually, we all intend to get on (occasionally one of us does), although its not exactly an easy thing to do, for various reasons. So while we’re waiting, we discuss ways to make it easier, among other things. But here’s the deal: this newsgroup is for the people have already decided that, at some point, we are gonna GET ON THAT BUS. We’re not the least bit interested in being talked into getting up off the bench and going home. And we don’t care if that seems sad, or pathetic, or whatever.

It’s a good idea to read the FAQ for a newsgroup before posting to it. To determine which types of posts are appropriate and which aren’t. Obviously, no one is holding a gun to your head and forcing you to do this – you can tromp right in and post whatever you want, wherever you want. But if you do, then be prepared for responses like this:

Take your direction, your advice, your tough love and your reality doses, blow them out your ass, and light a match. O.H.

ASHers are a bit protective. I applied to some websites during my research. Online clubs similar to ASH that were not newsgroups. I had to fill out forms, answer questions to my intentions.
You think that maybe it’s just a cry for help. But if it’s a cry for help they don’t want anyone to hear it that doesn’t understand it.

The more I read, I developed a strange, for lack of a better word, admiration for ASHers. They were fearless when it came to death, calculating in a manner that was impressive and scary.

Some ASH Lingo for you:

SLIDE
Suicide vs. attempt
“Catch/climb on/board the bus aka CTB”
Shiny-happy people
Come Out/come out of the closet
Cuts

Suicide versus attempt - Obvious but important

CTB - This is the most commonly used ash metaphor for committing suicide. “Does anyone know if so and so caught the bus?” means that “Does anyone know if so and so committed suicide?”

Shiny-happy People – Shamelessly stolen from the REM song. People who don’t really know how to sympathize with being unhappy.

Come out/Come out of the closet - To tell someone that you are suicidal

Cuts - It’s a play on hugs. A sign of support.

So when does it happen…

Projected: WebMD Medical News
Death Hyperlink: Internet Suicide Pacts
Medical Journal Warns of “Cybersuicide Trend”
and several other webpages to follow

PAUL: December 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2004 – The car had its windows taped shut from the inside. In the car were small charcoal burners – and the bodies of seven people. The suicide victims were five men and two women in age range from 20 to 34. They came from all over Japan. What drew them together was an Internet posting from the 34-year-old woman offering a suicide pact.

On November 28 four men were found dead in a Tokyo apartment where they had gassed themselves. The next day, two men and two women were found dead in a car parked near a dam outside Tokyo. Police suspect the two unrelated groups met over the internet.
Could it happen outside of Japan?

The Age.com
- UK Records First Online Suicide Pact

San Francisco Chronicle
Virtual Path To Suicide
- Depressed student killed herself with help from online discussion group

Looking for a CTB partner in Melbourne Aus
- Hi, I’m looking for a partner in Melbourne, if interested please email me

Looking for partner(s) in Holland
- Hi, I’m a 21-year-old girl who is looking for 1 or more people who want to catch the bus with me. Contact me by email plz.

CTB Partner in NY
- I’m 30 looking to ctb with anyone in NY or willin to travel. Email me to talk details

CTB in Washington, DC
- Looking for CTB partner in Washington, DC. Respond by email.

CTB in Florida ASAP
- Anyone willing to CTB with me in Florida or near. Want to do it within the next 2-3 weeks. Only if you are 100% serious. Btw am 36 y/o please be at least 18.

Suicide Pact
- Looking for suicide partner in California or close by. Email me please.
- I’m in Indiana. What did you have in mind?

Looking For Partner in Indiana
- I am 23 years old, recently diagnosed with HIV I have a number of other problems but have decided I don’t want to live anymore. I don’t that I have it in me to kill myself, so I’m looking for someone with a gun or something that would be willing to shoot me first.

- Hi, I’m looking for a partner in Melbourne, if interested please email me

- Hi, I’m a 21-year-old girl who is looking for 1 or more people who want to catch the bus with me. Contact me by email plz.

- I’m 30 looking to ctb with anyone in NY or willin to travel. Email me to talk details

- Looking for CTB partner in Washington, DC. Respond by email.
- Anyone willing to CTB with me in Florida or Near. Want to do it within the next 2-3 weeks. Only if you are 100% serious. Btw am 36 y/o please be at least 18.

- Looking for suicide partner in California or close by. Email me please.

Response:
- I’m in Indiana. What did you have in mind?

- I am 23 years old, recently diagnosed with HIV I have a number of other problems but have decided I don’t want to live anymore. I don’t that I have it in me to kill myself, so I’m looking for someone with a gun or something that would be willing to shoot me first.

This one scared me:

Texas Coast Camping Trip
- I am planning a camping trip to the coast of Texas, near the border of Mexico. This is a trip from which I will not be coming back. I am a 33 year old white male, for as long as I can remember the thought of wanting out of this has been in my brain. For the past 3 years I have walked in a quiet slumber. At this point in my life, I have no more dreams except to be free. My only hope is that someone would be there, man or woman to hold hands with as we lay in a tent and fall asleep near the charcoal grill, the sound of waves will ease the exit from our shells, never to return…

The more I perused articles and journals discussing cyber-suicide, the more I came across a particular British Doctor’s name in my research. Let’s call him Dr. Y. I sent the doctor a list of questions, hoping that he would be able to shed some light on the people involved in cyber-suicide pacts, so that I could better write their characters.

(Grab Stethoscope and Clipboard)

**Doctor:** I am herewith attaching information on Cyber-suicide in the form of Q&As. This summarizes the current state of knowledge in this topic. I am also attaching the PDF version of my article published in the British Medical Journal 3 years ago. Hope they give you a good overview of this issue. If any of your queries still remain unanswered, it is because information is not yet available, as this is only an emerging issue that has still not been properly and fully understood. Also, as this is quite a sensitive topic, I would not wish to speculate or generalize, without evidence. Hope the information is useful.

Best wishes with your project.

(Remove Stethoscope and Clipboard)

I read through his response and his Q and A sheet (which I had already read online). I was disappointed. It wasn’t that the doctor didn’t try to answer my questions – it was just that he admitted that there is no expert on the subject. I am just as much an expert as anyone is on the subject. I took to the web again. This time, I posted on the forums…

**III. THE EXECUTION**
I think I understand, but I’m here to better understand. I am finishing my last year of grad school, working on a thesis project, and as much research I have done on ASH, I still have not interviewed any ASHers. So, would anyone be willing to let me ask you questions? You can always decline to answer any of them. I could do this via email, the forum, over the phone or even in person. Thanks, and I am sorry if this was an intrusion.

I received a variety of responses. At first, I got no response. Nothing for days, a week passed. Finally I got a hit from someone whose posting name was ‘. The poster said that they wanted 10% of my income. I guess he or she thought that an agency fee was deserved. Or maybe it he wanted me to tithe. I waited for some time. I got another response from Slacker, who said he would settle for a subway sandwich. Finally…Finally, a post from Contrast.

**SLIDE CONTRAST**

**Contrast:** I’m willing to answer your questions.

I didn’t know if I should be relieved. I sent questions over.

Age. Gender. Occupation.

I sent the same ones I had sent the Doctor slightly modified. Maybe Contrast could help me understand.

I sent…I waited… I never heard back. Not one word. Did I ask the wrong questions? Did I hurt him/her by something I had done? I felt sick. I went through my questions tearing myself to shreds. I was worried so I searched for his posts online and finally saw one. It was in a group discussing guitars.

I experienced the same thing three times again. Each time, I changed the questions, started pulling punches. I asked if they had pets. I asked what their favorite curse word was. What sound do you love? What sound do you hate? I couldn’t get any more trivial I thought. Nothing. It’s a small group. When it comes down to it. There are a small group of people that could respond to this and an even smaller group of people who will respond to it. I came to the realization that there were none.

I went home for Thanksgiving and I talked with Michael.

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**PLAY MOVIE 6**

Michael: I am thinking about going back to school for Medicine. Possibly PA school.

Me: That’s great.

Michael: How’s the research going?

Me: It’s not. No one will respond to it. I am just gonna have to make it all up.

Michael: Why not just meet them?
Me: Hell, I’ve offered that. They’re not exactly a social bunch. I think the only time they see people is when they are buying groceries or about to stick their head in an oven.

END MOVIE 6

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Just a look from Michael. That’s all he did.

I went home that evening, created two new profiles for people who didn’t exist. One I called Hawkeye and one was named Emily.

I am 28 years old. Male. Live in Austin. I’ve been watching this site for years. I have finally had enough. Looking for an understanding CTB partner or partners. Open to methods. – Hawkeye

I wait 2 hours then I responded to Hawkeye with my other alter Emily:

32-year-old female. Live in Tulsa. Have access to pharmacy. Will meet. Email me to discuss particulars. – Emily

I received three additional responses. Two from men and one from a woman. I ignored the men and chose the woman out of fear. I imagined two 7 feet tall 300 pound men. Terror. I booked a motel room and sat there for two different people. One who I knew wouldn’t show up and another that I became increasingly hopeful wouldn’t show up either. I took precautions. I didn’t have any means - that was going to be brought by Emily, my alter ego. I let Michael know – he was next door in another room in case I got into any trouble.

PLAY VIDEO 7

Me waiting in motel room...shuffling about...someone at the door...in comes woman...we sit...we wait...we talk...we wait...we talk......she leaves...I sit and cry.
Glossary

**A.S.H.** – Short for Alternative Suicide Holiday. This is one of the founding Internet suicide forums. The ASH website had a number of resources for those considering cybersuicide including a means list that gave a significant number of ways to kill yourself, a message board to post back and forth with other members, a glossary of terms and a history of ASH. ASH has since disbanded, but many other websites and newsgroups have taken on where this site left off.

**CYBERSUICIDE** – the term used to discuss a person who used the Internet to obtain information or support on how to commit suicide.

**CYBERSUICIDE PACTS** – the term used to describe a suicide pact that is made online between people who initially did not know each other.

**ONLINE SUICIDE FORUMS** – These include but are not limited to newsgroups that discuss suicide. Other websites that have a forum section are also included, but their popularity has declined due to legal concerns.
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Vita

Mark Scheibmeir was born in Colby, Kansas on October 4th, 1981, the son of Alan Scheibmeir and Barbara Scheibmeir. After receiving his diploma from Sherman High School, Sherman, TX in May of 2000, he entered the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, IN before transferring to the University of Texas at Austin in 2001. He received a Bachelor of Science in Radio, Television and Film from the School of Communication. In 2007, he entered The Graduate School at The University of Texas at Austin. During this time in The Graduate School, Mark served as a teaching assistant for sections of “Introduction to Theatre” and “Topics in Voice.” He was also employed as an Assistant Instructor for “Fundamentals of Acting” and “Training the Speaking Voice.”

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