

# FOREWORD

*DEATH: THE CULTURAL MEANING OF THE END OF LIFE, THE EVENT FROM WHICH THIS VOLUME ORIGINATES AND AT WHICH I WAS PRIVILEGED TO BE A KEYNOTE SPEAKER, TOOK PLACE IN THE DEPTHS OF WINTER.*

Leiden University, cold but beautiful under a blanket of snow, was animated by the delegates to the second biennial graduate conference organised by PhD researchers at LUCAS, the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society. Young scholars, at the start of their academic lives, created intellectual vitality and personal warmth in the deserted lecture halls and frozen streets.

Death is in some respects beyond or outside representation in that it cannot be consciously experienced in full, remembered personally and communicated retrospectively. In the symposium, it was inspiring to hear and see this incomprehensible thing approached and handled as a source of meaningful human activity. The severance and separation produced by death, together with the human need for contact, are at the heart of our need to reproduce and represent in the symbolic realm. Death is in this respect in the midst of the cultural life that makes us human and thus a vital topic for wide-ranging, interdisciplinary study.

This volume's elaboration of the 'cultural life' of the conference title into 'ritual, representation and resemblance' acknowledges cultural life as an

act of mourning: ritual surrounds the unspeakable with communicative acts, representation reaches towards something that is acknowledged as implacably distant or different and resemblance attempts to draw close to and even touch its object of desire. At the same time, the scholarship and ideas of the authors, the energy and skills of the editorial team under the leadership of Jacqueline Hylkema and the anonymous genius of digital technology combine to form part of the ongoing yet always precarious pulse of cultural endeavour. Handled in this way, death becomes regenerative, a source of hope, not despair.

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