Dr Liz Powell died peacefully at home on June 24th, 2022. The personal grief I felt from losing a very dear friend prevented me from fully comprehending the loss she is to our academic community. When news of her death spread, colleagues shared their memories of Liz, who had worked as a Lecturer in the Humanities at the University of East Anglia (until her medical retirement in 2018). In reading these messages I was reminded of her incredible contribution to our discipline and it prompted me to revisit her work.

Liz completed her PhD at the University of East Anglia in 2011 under the supervision of Professor Yvonne Tasker and Professor Sarah Churchwell. Her thesis, “The Trauma Aesthetic: (Re)mediating Absence, Emptiness and Nation in Post 9/11 Film and Literature,” provided a conceptual framework with which to categorise and analyse a series of post 9/11 texts. These texts, she argues, can be identified by their refusal to reproduce the dominant narratives constructed by mainstream media regarding the attacks. Her nuanced analysis identified the shared thematic terrain between disparate texts such as Michel Gondry’s *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* (2004) and Cormack McCarthy’s novel *The Road* (2006). In identifying the characteristics of what she termed, the ‘trauma aesthetic’, Liz distinguishes those texts which could be termed as ‘post 9/11’ and those which simply came after September 11, 2001.

Developed from one of the chapters, her article “The Good, the Bad and the American: Interrogating the Morality of the Western in *A History of Violence*,” was published in *Cinema Journal* in the Autumn of 2011. Her incisive analysis of Cronenberg’s 2005 film serves to illuminate how narrative cinema can provide a space in which to explore difficult questions regarding the US’s culpability in the attacks, and subsequent war on terror; questions that were largely absent from mainstream media coverage.

Liz’s sophisticated understanding of mediated trauma allowed for her research to move beyond 9/11 as a case study, and in the latter part of her career she began to explore the ways in which personal, familial trauma is (re)presented on screen. Prior to her own diagnosis in 2014, she published a book chapter and an article examining the cultural construction of breast cancer within popular culture. Her chapter ‘Diagnosis Disaster: Cultural Narratives of Cancer and Femininity in *Stepmom* and the *Family Stone*,’ published in 2013, uses these two examples of popular Hollywood film to explore the narrative function of cancer, which she argues served to police boundaries of idealised femininity and motherhood. In the same year, her article, ‘Re-Fashioning the Post-Mastectomy Body in *How to Look Good Naked*,’ examines the role of reality television in neutralising the threat that cancer poses to gendered norms and Western beauty standards. Her central critique developed within both pieces is that the material realities of cancer are erased in order to bolster problematic gender ideals.

Following her diagnosis, she completed an, as yet, unpublished article examining the construction of cancer narratives in promotional discourses for MGA’s *True Hope* dolls (a collection of bald dolls designed for children undergoing cancer treatment). Part discourse analysis, part autoethnography, this article skilfully draws on her personal experiences of the disease and its gruelling treatment to highlight the disjuncture between the more sanitised construction of cancer within mainstream media and the day-to-day experience of living with the illness.

As I revisit her work, I am reminded of the incredible contribution she made in such a short time. Her eminently readable work reflects her courage and generosity, her compassion and her wit. I have no doubt that her earlier work will have continued resonance, as many will turn to it to understand the mediated cultural trauma of our current (numerous) global crises: e.g. the pandemic, the subsequent failures of our political leaders, and the war in Ukraine. In addition, her latter research on the cultural
construction of cancer will certainly provide those working in the field of feminist disability studies with the tools to understand the relationship between gender, illness and popular culture.

Indeed, in returning to her work at this difficult time, I find the nuance and sophistication of her writing allows me to better make sense of my own personal feelings of anger and sorrow at her passing. I, and I suspect all those who knew her, will never be able to fully accept the fact that Liz’s life was cut so short by this cruel disease, but we endeavour to practice gratitude for the time we did have. Thus, the intention of this obituary is in part to honour her life and work, but also ensure that others, who did not have the privilege of knowing her, can discover and appreciate the brilliance of Dr Liz Powell.