

DIGITAL AFTERLIVES CONFERENCE

Digital Afterlives

AI, memory, mourning

10 OCTOBER 2025 | UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

Programme



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Against the background of a cultural crisis of mourning, a new industry is leveraging generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) to address grief. So-called “ghostbots” are trained on data from a specific deceased person, like text messages, emails, and videos, to create an interactive digital companion that simulates them. Proponents claim that such AI might better address grief than traditional practices or even allow for the continued existence of the dead. Our project, “Digital Afterlives: AI, Memory, and Mourning,” is an international and interdisciplinary collaboration between the Digital Ethics Laboratory of Universidade Católica Portuguesa, the IBM Tech Ethics Lab of Notre Dame University, and the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. It examines the reasons behind the rise of ghostbots and the ethical and religious concerns raised by the technology. At a deeper level, the project explores the place of grief and mourning in a flourishing life and what might be the proper role of technology in contemporary mourning.

Morning

9.30 **Registration**

9.45 **Welcome and Introduction | William Hasselberger** _ *Universidade Católica and Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, Virginia*

PANEL 1 – CHANGING CONTEXTS AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR GRIEVING

Chair: Prof. William Hasselberger

10.00 **Joseph Davis** _ *Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia*
The New Work of Mourning: Individualized Grief and the Reception of AI

10.35 **Davide Sisto** _ *University of Turin*
Thanabots: the achievement of immortality or a new way of remembering?

11.10 **Anne Allison** _ *Duke University*
Redesigning Grief for Those Without Others to Grieve Them: A Japanese Case Study

11.45 **Response | Vânia Sousa Lima** _ *Universidade Católica, Porto*

12.30 **Lunch**

Afternoon

PANEL 2 – PASTORAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON REMEMBRANCE AND GRIEF-TECH

Chair: Prof. Micah Lott

- 14.00 **Cass Sever** _ *Lumin Christi Institute* & **Joseph Davis** _ *Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia*
AI and the Human Dimensions of Care: Lessons from Counselors
- 14.35 **Paul Scherz** _ *Notre Dame University*
Blessed Are They Who Mourn: Christian Perspectives on Griefbots
- 15.10 **Laurie Zoloth** _ *University of Chicago*
Seeking the Witch of Endor: Grief and the Presence of Absence in Jewish Thought
- 15.35 **Response** | **Alexandre Palma** _ *Universidade Católica, Auxiliary Bishop of Lisbon*
- 16.30 **Coffee-break**

PANEL 3 – PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AI GHOSTBOTS AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

Chair: Prof. Joseph Davis

- 17.00 **Micah Lott** _ *Boston College* & **William Hasselberger** _ *Universidade Católica and Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture*
The Ghost(bot) at the Banquet: the Ethics of AI-mediated Connections with the Dead
- 17.35 **Remarks from the Rector of Catholic University of Portugal** | **Isabel Capelo Gil**
- 17.45 **Keynote Lecture** | **Charles Ess** _ *University of Oslo*
A Critique of Artificial Life: Growing up stories for an AI-saturated era
- 18.00 **Response** | **Carla Ganito** _ *CECC, Universidade Católica, Lisbon*
- 18.45 **Event ends**

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