

CDAS conference 2025: Death and transitions

11 – 13 June 2025



Welcome to the 2025 CDAS Conference on the theme of 'Death and Transitions'. As part of our 20th anniversary year celebrations, this year's conference promises to be as interesting, provocative and insightful as ever. We have a wide range of papers, workshops and panels, with an opening plenary and 'meet the authors' session, two keynotes, and 'hands on' evening events. Thank you to all our presenters, participants, and to the conference organising team behind the scenes in making this conference happen and a highlight of our CDAS calendar. We look forward to seeing you at the conference.

Reading the Schedule

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| | Keynote – we'll all be together to listen to our fantastic keynote speakers and ask questions after their presentations |
| | Paper sessions – cameras off, but come ready to listen and ask questions |
| | Roundtable sessions – cameras on and a willingness to take part in discussions |
| | Workshops/interactive sessions – come with your camera on, and a willingness to take part in discussions |

Wednesday

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| 4pm - 5pm | 0. Keynote: Mobilising social science and humanities expertise in palliative and end of life care research - Erica Borgstrom, John MacArtney and Mari Greenfield |
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Thursday

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|--------------------------|--|---|
| 9am-10am | 1. Keynote: Sayendri Panchadhyayi - Thanatopolitics of posthumanism and human-artifice encounters | |
| 10.10am - 11.10am | 2. The Digital Age | 3. Separation and the dead |
| | Tamara Borovica et al - #Unsharable: Exploring the Role of Non-Sharing in Digital Death Practices | Averil Martin - Beyond the Ashes: Exploring the ontological gap in identities of cremated remains |
| | Adela Toplean - Remapping Death and the Sacred in the Digital Age | See Mieng TAN - Transitions in death disposal options in Singapore: where do the dead go next? |
| | Laura Towers - On Sibling Suicide Bereavement: Narrating the Unspeakable using Digital Platforms | Benna Fathima - Graves Across the Sea: Death, Grief and Ethics of Separation in Laccadive Islands |
| 11.10am - 11.30am | Break | |

Thursday

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| 11.30am - 12.50pm | 4. Social justice | 5. Knowledge |
| | Chris Bobel - The Color of Grief turned Grievance: Exploring Racialized Differences among “Accidental Activists” in the U.S. | Edina Harbinja - Law vs. AI Afterlife: Are Current Frameworks Falling Short? |
| | Collin Camille - Towards Equality in Death: Rethinking Post-Mortem Justice | Ella Palmer - Technology-led teaching of anatomy: Will an absence of cadavers increase accessibility to the new medicine course in North Wales? |
| | Laura Jenkinson - No One Talks About Death and Dying: Developing and Evaluating a Serious Game to Facilitate Conversations Around Death Among Non-Religious Individuals | Charlotte Gray - The Impossibility of Defining Death: Challenging Reductive Boundaries |
| | Ahmet Ekren - Necropolitics of Deathscapes: Funeral Practices Among Muslim and Alevi Migrants and Minorities in Vienna | |
| 12.50pm - 1.30pm | 6. Meet the speakers: Erica Borgstrom, John McCartney and Mari Greenfield - Mobilising social science and humanities expertise in palliative and end of life care research | |
| 1.30pm - 2.30pm | 7. Children and death: perspectives from Finland | 8. Creativity and the past |
| | Inka Laisi - Small Politics in the ‘Death Class’ – Enquiring about death in a primary school classroom | Nikki Price - Living creatively & flourishing after a death |
| | Karin Murris - Playful Thinking with Hands and Digital Technology in a Finnish Grade 1 Class | Nicholas Taylor-Collins - The Transition to a Literary Death-Ethics |
| | Renske Visser - Centering children in research on death: a call for transition | Dan O'Brien - ‘She proposes to continue the business’: eighteenth-century funerary businesses in transition |

Thursday

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| 2.40pm - 3.40pm | 9. Roundtable | 10. Roundtable |
| | Jane McCarthy - Transitions towards Breaking Silences: 'race', death and its aftermath, in the climate emergency | Laura Towers - Death, Dying and Bereavement: New Sociological Perspectives |
| 3.40pm - 4.00pm | Break | |
| 4.00pm - 5.20pm | 11. Rights | 12. What remains |
| | Jennifer Riley - Am I Being Ludic(rous)? Exploring the ludic in contemporary British death and grave goods | Jean H. Menezes - Moodography: A case for abstraction over accuracy in digital mementos |
| | Zohreh Bayatrizi - Grief as Transition: Affective Liminality across Political and Ontological Borders | Allison DK Middlebrook - Redefining 'Necromaterials' for Western Culture: The changing influences on necromaterials, remains and significant objects in a materialistic and increasingly secular Western culture. |
| | Niiyokamigaabaw Deondre Smiles - The Contested Geographies of Autopsy and Racialized Groups in the United States | Elizabeth Schandelmeier - Twilight Grief: Grief on a Continuum |
| | Amy Shea & Jillian Olmsted - The Blue Butterfly: Dying with Dignity as a Human Right | |
| 5.20pm - 7pm | Break | |
| 7pm - 8pm | 13. Ain't got time to die - Martin Krafft | 14. Where do we die? Our preferences for our space of death - Virginia Rammou and Erica Borgstrom |

Friday

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| 9am-10am | 15. Keynote: Mary Hodgson - Whose death literacy do you want me to have? ? Exploring over-medicalisation, inequalities and knowledge production as part of community-engaged work at the end of life | |
| 10.10am - 11.10am | 16. What does it mean to die? | 17. More than human loss |
| | Kate Gerber et al - Algorithmic Afterlives: Rethinking Death and Legacy in the Age of AI | Larissa Hjorth et al - Death Studies in Transition: Exploring More-Than-Human Loss in a Time of Permacrisis |
| | Norichika Horie - Experiences of loneliness and death in a society of mass mortality: Findings from the survey in Japan and South Korea | Leanne Downing - Expressing companion animal loss on Facebook: Transitioning hierarchies of grief and grievability |
| | Zhaoxi Zheng - Death of the Self: Grieving the Past and the Future When Caring Ends | Łucja Lange - Mortality exercises in the context of climate change. Combining degrowth with the one-health paradigm |
| 11.10am - 11.30am | Break | |
| 11.30am - 12.30pm | 18. Death and the dead online | 19. Care and control at the end of life |
| | Helen Frisby - Absent presences: from post-mortem photography to deadbots | Min Song - Reverse care at the end of life |
| | Korina Giaxoglou - Death and grief in transition: the case of 'griefbots' | Iline Ceelen - From Planning to Presence: The Power of a '5-to-12 Death' and the Emergence of Meaningful Rituals beyond the Euthanasia Day |
| | Johanna Sumiala - Metadeath: The Social Lives of the Dead and the Digital Transition | Ingvild Lalim Hanseid - Dying in transition: Experiences from considering seeking assistance in dying |
| 12.30pm - 1.10pm | 20. Lunchtime discussion - Do we have a moral obligation to opt for an eco-friendly form of body disposal? Sarah Carter-Walshaw | |

Friday

| | 21. Open stream | 22. Theory |
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| 1.10pm - 2.30pm | Gaudenz Metzger - Aesthetics, Politics and the Sensuous Production of Dying and Death | Bethany Simmonds - The Sociology of Ageing and Death studies: opening conversations and future directions for end-of-life care |
| | Carly Speed - As Though Time Stands Still: Deaths in Psychiatric Detention | Amelia Seraphia Derr - Navigating the Intersection of Ambiguous Loss and Anticipatory Grief: Parental Experiences in the Shadow of Uncertainty |
| | Jagna Feierabend - An autoethnography of voluntarily stopping eating and drinking (VSED) | Georgie Akehurst - A relational turn? New empirical directions in grief studies |
| | Dall'aglio Louis - Cemeteries as ecological laboratories: learning from tombstone mosses | Tal Morse and Paula Kiel - Terror Management Theory in the light of digital immortality |
| 2.30pm - 2.45pm | Break | |
| 2.45pm - 3.45pm | 23. Creative Auto/Biographical Reflections on Death and Loss Across the Lifecourse: some personal reflections and opportunities for engagement - Gayle Letherby | 24. Roundtable - Decolonizing Death Studies - Jyoti Puri |
| 3.55pm - 5.15pm | 25. Where we've been, where we're going | 26. Posthumous Data Donation: The Data Donor Card workshop - Daniel Snow |
| | Renee Beard - Death cafes: A retrospective | |
| | Michael Erard - The future of last words | |
| | Joshua Hurtado Hurtado - Seeds of vibrant mortality for navigating the Anthropocene: A Futures Studies approach | |
| | Chris Miller - Normalizing Decay: The Green Burial Movement as a Response to Ecological Crisis | |

Wednesday 11 June 25 4 – 5pm

00. Keynote

Mobilising social science and humanities expertise in palliative and end of life care research

Erica Borgstrom, John MacCartney, Mari Greenfield

Social science and humanities scholars have a long and vibrant history of seeking to understand death and dying. Their insights and contributions to palliative and end of life care research, practice, and policy are valuable. However, most funded research on palliative and end of life care typically focuses on health services and/or clinical perspectives, and may be oriented to specific conditions, processes, interventions and/or symptoms.

This opening plenary builds on the recent 'To Know Dying' (Greenfield et al., 2025) report that identifies how social science and humanities research can align with the clinical priorities identified through the 2025 James Lind Alliance Palliative and End of Life Care Priority Setting Partnership (JLA PEO-LCPSP). The plenary will focus on how social scientists and humanities scholars can collaborate in innovative and impactful ways to generate research that both responds to the priorities identified by those with lived-experienced, while also showcasing the particular contributions of our disciplines.

It is followed by a 'meet the speakers' networking session over lunch the following day, on the first day of the CDAS Conference. We hope you can join us for both, to reflect on how we can enhance the profile and contribution of social scientific and humanities research at the end of life and beyond.

About the speakers

Erica Borgstrom - Erica is a Professor of Medical Anthropology at The Open University (OU), with a specialist interest in end-of-life care and death studies. She uses her anthropological skills to disrupt the normative concepts in end-of-life care and bereavement support by foregrounding people's everyday experiences and the structural and discursive elements that shape how care is provided. She co-chairs Open Thanatology (the OU's interdisciplinary group for death-related research and education), is a co-editor for the Death and Culture book series (published by Bristol University Press) and was recently co-Editor in Chief for *Mortality*, an interdisciplinary, international death studies journal. Erica is a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute and Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (SFHEA). Along with Dr John MacArtney, she led the project to identify social science and humanities research areas for palliative and end of life care research, as featured in the 2025 To Know Dying Report.



John MacArtney - John is a Marie Curie Associate Professor at the University of Warwick. He is a sociologist focusing on dying and its aftermath, with an emphasis on palliative and end of life care. His work informed by and seeks to develop social and political theory. He is involved in several active research studies nationally and internationally. He leads the 'Social Science in Health and Illness Network' in Warwick Applied Health and is the theme lead for 'life-limiting conditions and dying in the community' in the Academic Primary Care network. In 2021 he co-founded the Building a Research Hub for Palliative Care in Birmingham and the West Midlands (BRHUmB) with Prof Cara Bailey and is a member of Research in End of life, Advanced illness, Complex Health and social care (REACH) group. Along with Prof Borgstrom, he led the project to identify social science and humanities research areas for palliative and end of life care research, as featured in the 2025 To Know Dying Report, and is the lead author for the associated protocol.



Mari Greenfield – Mari is a post-doctoral researcher at The Open University, who specialises in qualitative methodologies. She has an interdisciplinary background in the social sciences, with postgraduate degrees in Social Policy, Public Sector Management, and Health. Mari is interested in researching people's experiences of lifecourse events, with a focus on populations whose voices are less often represented in research. She was the lead author for the 'To Know Dying' report and has experienced working on several James Lind Alliance-related projects.



Thursday 12 June 25 9am -10am

01. Keynote

Thanatopolitics of posthumanism and human-artifice encounters

Sayendri Panchadhyayi

Neo-kinship studies are moving beyond the anthropocene or a human-centred narrative in a bid to accommodate the relations(hips) between human and their more-than-human counterparts, and their relative consequences for understandings of filialities, relationalities and intimacies. With the world experiencing a wave of demographic changes including expected longer life expectancy and increases in the size of an ageing population, innovation in care for older people, drawing on non-human support, are increasingly evident. Examples include Assisted-Animal Therapy (AAT) for depression and loneliness, and Horticulture Therapy (HT) for dementia, both of which have proven to be effective for wellbeing, alleviation of suffering, and fostering an alternative reciprocal world for individuals. Alongside these non-human relationships, there is a growing adoption of complex care technologies for older people, such as humanoid care robots to support the dynamic and intimate needs of the older population.

In this keynote, I will explore how rigid boundaries between the human and the artifice obfuscate such encounters between the human/non-human. For example, attachment to care robots could grow intense, evoking a sense of grief and a void in the aftermath of their dysfunctionality. Set against the backdrop of a gradual shift in care arrangements of older people, this theoretical keynote will navigate the intricacies encompassing more-than-human loss, memorialization and bereavement. Framing arguments through feminist technoscience and posthumanism, it will present the trailing continuities, departures, and occlusions in more-than-human entanglements and losses, and their consequences for the thanatopolitical imagination.

About the speaker

Sayendri Panchadhyayi is a Sociologist, and an Assistant Professor in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, RV University, Bangalore. She holds an honorary appointment as an Associate at the Centre for Care, attached to the University of Sheffield and an invited member in its International Partnerships Working Group. She is currently working on her solo-authored book under contract with Routledge, and has publications spanning across Taylor & Francis, Edward Elgar Publishing (Elgar Original Reference Series), Anthropology & Aging, Springer, Penguin Random House India, and (in-preparation) Bristol University Press.



Her areas of interests include ageing and life course, death and bereavement, sociology of care, feminist STS and technologies of care.

Thursday 12 June 25 10.10am - 11.10am

02. The Digital Age

#Unsharable: Exploring the Role of Non-Sharing in Digital Death Practices

Tamara Borovica; Katrin Gerber; Larissa Hjorth

As digital platforms become central to the mediation of life and death, they increasingly shape how death is represented, understood, and socially negotiated. While much attention has been paid to the rise of digital mourning and online memorialisation, this paper addresses an underexplored dimension: the deliberate act of not sharing grief or death-related content online. Using Judith Butler's concept of "grievability" and interview data, this research examines how the digital sphere facilitates both visibility and invisibility of grief, and how non-sharing emerges as a response to cultural, social, and algorithmic pressures.

The presentation discusses how certain deaths—such as those resulting from suicide or disenfranchised forms of loss—are often obscured in digital spaces, whether through social stigma, platform algorithms, or self-censorship. We situate non-sharing as a significant yet overlooked practice within the broader context of death in transition, reflecting evolving attitudes toward privacy, memorialisation, and digital legacy. By highlighting the interplay between visibility and erasure, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms are reshaping the social and cultural frameworks of death in the 21st century.

Remapping Death and the Sacred in the Digital Age

Adela Toplean

This presentation asks whether the experience of dying and death can inform and ground our sense of the sacred in the digital age. Recent pursuits of bold technological immortality projects challenge us to ask whether the Internet brought us closer to the sacred. Drawing from classic sociological perspectives, phenomenological approaches and dialogic relationality (Bakhtin), I argue for the relevance of investigating a renewed sense of the sacred within digital environments in the proximity of digital death.

Using insights from a study of Romanian Facebook users who have experienced loss, I will highlight three key dimensions of sacred experiences: sacred set-aside-ness, relational immediacy, and trust. I will stress the practical and theoretical challenges of tackling a sense of community online, where genuine communication is vital yet often complicated. Ultimately, I advocate for a more precise understanding of how perennial human concerns (mortality, spirituality) evolve amid profound and irreversible technological change.

On Sibling Suicide Bereavement: Narrating the Unspeakable using Digital Platforms

Laura Towers

Referred to as 'forgotten grievers', the experiences of suicide bereaved siblings remain underexplored. As siblings are rarely perceived as 'primary' grievers, it can be difficult for them to lay claim to their loss, while the messy, taboo nature of suicide bereavement can greatly complicate siblings' attempts to process and narrate their grief. Having space and opportunity to make sense of their loss is essential and yet, despite suicide rates rising in

recent years, funding and availability for offline support is in decline (Doyle et al., 2024). As such, people are increasingly turning to online platforms as an alternative outlet for their grief and bereavement (Krysinska and Andriessen, 2017). This paper seeks to follow this digital transition, exploring if and how siblings engage with these online spaces, and questioning whether these digital interactions are shaping the way that people understand and narrate grief in contemporary society?

Thursday 12 June 25 10.10am - 11.10am

03. Separation and the dead

Beyond the Ashes: Exploring the ontological gap in identities of cremated remains

Averil Martin

Death Studies is dominated by westernised perspectives of dying, death, disposition, and aftermath. Knowledge is produced through academic conventions that insist a literature review be undertaken to locate theories and methods of enquiry to establish the need for, and credibility of, the research. I had the privilege of time to wander through the literature prior to commencement. The literature review delivered research frontiers from the other side of the world. The research explores identities associated with cremated remains in Australia, which is multi-cultural, cross and inter-disciplinary and required an understanding of several cultural perspectives of cremated remains. As a Māori (indigenous to New Zealand) PhD student, my cultural practice is a driving force behind my research yet non-westernised knowledges, cosmologies and practices are marginalised in the literature. Information cataloguing uses classification systems to provide a convenient way to access research, however it also determines which knowledge is privileged and whether it can be located. A systematic review was undertaken over an 18-month period that highlighted the limits of this approach when there is a dearth of research. The process provided opportunities to transition through disciplinary boundaries, have interesting conversations, and adapt a research repository classification system for death studies to evolve.

Transitions in death disposal options in Singapore: where do the dead go next?

See Mieng TAN

Singapore experiences perennial land scarcity. To free up land, substantial numbers of cemeteries have been cleared for developments like residential homes and transportation infrastructure. Today, Singapore has only one government-managed cemetery called Choa Chu Kang Cemetery that is open for burials. This cemetery caters to different religions in Singapore and has been reduced in land area due to military defence and residential developments. To manage the demand for land burials within a limited space and allow for optimal land use, a burial lease of 15 years was introduced in 1998 and a crypt burial system in 2007. Cremation is encouraged over land burials with more columbaria being built and fees adjusted. Now, the cremation fee (S\$100) is just one-ninth of the land burial fee (S\$940), and 97% of the deaths in Singapore are disposed via cremation. Sea burial exists as another disposal option but is handled by individual operators, hence its pricing is not formally documented. In mid-2021, ash scattering at designated spots costing S\$320 per deceased was introduced as another disposal option. This paper argues that alternative and novel disposal options need to be considered in the light of a rapidly ageing population and land scarcity in Singapore.

Graves Across the Sea: Death, Grief and Ethics of Separation in Laccadive Islands

Benna Fathima

Drawing on the anthropology of proximity, this paper examines the ethical, emotional and economic negotiations surrounding death of the patients who are medically referred to Indian mainland from the islands of Laccadives, seeking advanced healthcare facilities. For the Muslim-majority islanders, embalment and post-mortem procedures are religiously discouraged, and the imperative for swift burial often prevents the return of the deceased to their homeland. This results in a rupture: the body is interred in a distant land, while grief remains anchored in the island. How do islanders reckon with loss, when the material remnants of the dead are permanently distanced? How are care and care acts enacted across these shifting terrains of life, death, mourning and memory across regions? Through oral narratives, ethnographic fieldwork, and archival analysis of burial and medical records, this paper examines how do these separated graves and grief produces discursive, historical and political proximities and coexistences, which disrupts the claims of belongingness, autochthony and identity. The paper explores how burial sites, rather than being fixed anchors of memory, become dispersed material markers of rupture and continuity, entangling mourners in questions of good death, proper mourning and economic precarity, in process mediating between the living and the dead.

Thursday 12 June 25 11.30am - 12.50pm

04. Social Justice

The Color of Grief turned Grievance: Exploring Racialized Differences among “Accidental Activists” in the U.S.

Chris Bobel

In her oft-cited essay “The Condition of Black Death is One of Mourning” Claudia Rankine powerfully shows how grief becomes grievance in the shape of the Black Lives Matter movement. It is, she writes “an attempt to keep mourning an open dynamic in our culture because black lives exist in a state of precariousness.” Expressing grievance, then, operates not only as explicit resistance to anti-Blackness, it is also a refusal of the normalization of this racist violence with a deep past. In this paper, I contextualize how grief-induced activism, what I call, “accidental activism” must be read using a race-sensitive lens. In contrast with activists of color, white activists are driven not by race-based traumatic stress (RBTS), but the conditions that led to their loved ones’ deaths, such as mass shootings, drug overdoses, vehicular crashes, suicides, natural disasters, and medical errors. For them, the untimely and preventable death is the trauma of their lives, and their work fights to end the conditions that gave rise to it. Alternatively, for accidental activists of color, especially Black activists, the trauma began long before the death that spurred their activism. Thus, their battle is not only for justice for their dead, but also for recognition of the ongoing generalized damage incurred by the system of white supremacy.

Towards Equality in Death: Rethinking Post-Mortem Justice

Collin Camille

While death studies have increasingly addressed the ethics of end-of-life care and post-mortem practices, few works consider equality in death as a legitimate normative issue. My research argues that death studies must more explicitly engage with post-mortem justice, focusing on access to dignified treatment and the political recognition of the dead. I contend that traditional justice frameworks often overlook death, implicitly prioritizing living subjects and bio-centric views that exclude the dead from moral and political concern.

By drawing on the claims of marginalized groups regarding the commodification, violence, and unequal treatment of their bodies after death, I demonstrate the need for justice theories to address these post-mortem injustices. This shift would allow for a more inclusive approach that recognizes the dead as political subjects and ensures equitable treatment in post-mortem decisions, from funeral practices to body donation.

Addressing these questions, I argue, is essential for building a more just framework for post-mortem life. In doing so, death studies can help shape policies that foster greater equity in death and challenge the boundaries between the living and the dead as sites of ethical and political concern.

No One Talks About Death and Dying: Developing and Evaluating a Serious Game to Facilitate Conversations Around Death Among Non-Religious Individuals

Laura Jenkinson

Contemporary societal norms render conversations about death challenging, particularly for non-religious individuals who may lack the structured frameworks traditionally provided by religion. Secularisation in England has driven a significant demographic shift; for the first time in the 2021 Census, less than half of the population identified as Christian, with 37% now identifying as "No religion." This transition has significant implications for how people approach death and underscores the need for innovative tools to engage a diverse nonreligious population in conversations about death.

This PhD research addresses these challenges through the development and evaluation of a serious game designed to facilitate conversations about death among nonreligious adults. A systematic mapping review on nonreligious perspectives on death highlights gaps in current understanding and informs the project. Underpinned by the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Self-Determination Theory, and informed by public advisory input, the game, "Cemetery Paths", creates a supportive environment for exploring personal beliefs and navigating end-of-life topics. Pre/post surveys and follow-up interviews will be analysed to evaluate the game and capture insights that enrich our understanding of how nonreligious people navigate death, which may inform more inclusive death care practices that respect the diverse beliefs and values of individuals.

Necropolitics of Deathscapes: Funeral Practices Among Muslim and Alevi Migrants and Minorities in Vienna

Ahmet Ekren

This study examines the transformations and transitions in deathscapes and cemeteries as home-place-identity makers among Muslim migrants and minorities in Vienna, Austria. It focuses on how recent refugees from predominantly Muslim countries compared to earlier but ongoing labor migrations, converts, and other minority groups practice death rituals. Utilizing the mobilities and infrastructure framework, it investigates the transnational funeral industry's role as a form of care work by revealing how modern secular governance, characterized by post-Christian dominance, has exacerbated religious tensions and inequalities rather than alleviated them, especially among diverse Muslim sects, communities, and their Alevi counterparts. Grounded in ethnographic fieldwork centered on mortuary practices and shadowing five mortuary workers, the research explores how these workers and funeral facilitators in Viennese Muslim and Alevi communities mediate funeral preferences, mourning practices, and sociocultural bereavement processes. By looking at the experiences of recent refugees, ongoing labor migrants, converts, and other minorities, the study highlights complex relational ambivalences in burial preferences tied to lived religious experiences, migration historicities, social inclusion/exclusion, transnational family dynamics, and intersections of sovereignty and intimacy. Addressing these questions, the research intersects migration and refugee studies, work and organization, care and aging, the anthropology of Islam and Alevism in Europe, and other relevant disciplines.

Thursday 12 June 25 11.30am - 12.50pm

05. Knowledge

Law vs. AI Afterlife: Are Current Frameworks Falling Short?

Edina Harbinja

We are witnessing the rapid advancement of 'AI death technologies' and 'existential AI' —AI-driven tools that manage digital remains, create memorial chatbots ('ghostbots'), and simulate the deceased. AI death tech includes memorial chatbots, 'ghostbots', 'deathbots', 'thanabots', voice replication tools, personality simulators, and other technologies designed to manage or recreate digital identities after death (e.g. Eternos, Project December, HereAfter AI, StoryFile).

These technologies are reshaping societal understandings of identity, memory, and mortality, while posing profound challenges across legal, ethical, regulatory, and social domains. From the unauthorised use of a deceased person's persona to commercial exploitation, AI death tech introduces unique harms, including social, psychological, economic, and ethical risks, as well as fundamental questions about personhood, dignity, consent, and legacy.

Despite their growing significance, regulatory responses remain scarce. To evaluate these initiatives, the paper critically considers existing legal frameworks and their applicability and suitability for AI death technologies. It discusses the regulatory rationale behind significant initiatives such as the EU AI Act, the UK's AI strategies, and US attempts to protect digital replicas and performers. The paper demonstrates how current approaches fall short of addressing AI death tech's unique risks and harms by exploring the limitations of data protection laws, online safety regulations, competition laws, and consumer protections. The

paper also challenges the current predominant approach to regulating AI and technology, i.e. risk-based regulation, questioning its usefulness and suitability for AI death tech regulation.

Technology-led teaching of anatomy: Will an absence of cadavers increase accessibility to the new medicine course in North Wales?

Ella Palmer

Historically, the study of anatomy has been taught often using cadaveric material. However, there has been a gradual shift towards teaching anatomy using technology. I want to uncover the impact from students in higher education learning anatomy from technology-enhanced educational methods in North Wales.

Last September, Bangor University opened its new medical school. Whilst considering the additional challenges in teaching Anatomy using traditional cadaveric dissection, a decision was made to instead teach using the Anatomage table, which enables students to dissect digitally through a touch screen format, amongst various other functionalities. For my PhD thesis, I am undergoing an exploration of the similarities and differences in the student experience when learning from two main pedagogical practices; cadaveric, and technology-led. To do this, I have chosen to visit three field sites in Wales; Swansea University and Cardiff University, both of whom have established medical schools that teach anatomy using a multi-method approach, including cadaveric based learning. The third site being Bangor University, who utilise a technology-based approach to teaching anatomy.

My focus is from a sociological perspective; seeking to uncover phenomena relating to the sociology of emotion and the hidden curriculum when students are learning through their universities' chosen pedagogy.

The Impossibility of Defining Death: Challenging Reductive Boundaries

Charlotte Gray

Aim: To explore the fundamental challenge of defining death, arguing that any attempts to confine death within rigid, reductive frameworks fundamentally misunderstand the complex nature of human existence.

Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from philosophy, medical ethics, and existential thought, the paper demonstrates the futility of creating a singular, comprehensive definition of death.

Discussion: The paper critically examines various approaches to defining death, from medical-biological models to philosophical interpretations, revealing a consistent pattern of inadequacy.

Through challenging the biomedical tendency to categorise and compartmentalise, the paper argues that death cannot be reduced to a simple, measurable state. Instead, it is a deeply complex, contextual experience that defies straightforward definition.

Researchers, including Gert (2006) and Lizza et al. (2024), are cited to support the view that death transcends technical medical or scientific terminology.

Conclusion: The paper proposes that our understanding of death must embrace ambiguity, recognising it as a multifaceted transition that cannot be contained within rigid definitional

boundaries. By rejecting reductive approaches, we open up a more nuanced, holistic understanding of what it means to die.

Thursday 12 June 25 12.50pm - 1.30pm

06. Meet the speakers

Bring your lunch and come and chat to the speakers from our Wednesday keynote, Erica Borgstrom, John MacCartney and Mari Greenfield, about their work on mobilising social science and humanities expertise in palliative and end of life care research.

Thursday 12 June 25 1.30pm - 2.30pm

07. Children and death: perspectives from Finland

Small Politics in the 'Death Class' – Enquiring about death in a primary school classroom

Inka Laisi

In my doctoral research, I examine the politics and practices of children's resistance that emerged in a research project about multispecies death and dying. In this paper, I will present the 'Death Class', which consisted of 6 weeks of bi-weekly philosophical enquiries about death in a primary school in Finland. During these sessions, 7-year-old children explored death and dying through picture books, artwork and different art-based materials, such as plasticine and paint. Death as a topic of discussions started to materialise in the classroom and many different ideas about, for example, how someone dies and what happens to humans after death, emerged. Simultaneously we were creating a space where different modes of participation were embraced; verbal or nonverbal, small or big, embodied and relational. In this presentation, I will further develop the concept of 'small politics' to include the more-than-human in thinking about childhood, death and resistance. This broadens the human-centred understandings of agency and death in today's world imbued with global necropolitics, such as extinction, wars and the accumulating climate crisis.

Playful Thinking with Hands and Digital Technology in a Finnish Grade 1 Class

Karin Murris

In my paper presentation I re-turn to the field work of Small Matters – a project funded by the Research Council of Finland (2023-2026). It investigates young children's animistic and other beliefs about multispecies death and dying. Although dying features in young children's everyday lives, many (in)formal educators avoid it as too sensitive to discuss in school.

For the Small Matters project, Philosophy with Children combined with arts-based methods was used as the pedagogy for the teaching of a small group of first graders in a Finnish school over a period of six weeks (twice a week). This internationally well-established democratic pedagogy (Gregory et al, 2017) starts by inviting children's own questions from, in this case, a picturebook as a starting point for philosophical enquiries. With the help of a short video clip and images from this 'death class', I experiment with a posthumanist analysis of the experiences of one child during the first year of our field work. In the video he is making a grave with plasticine and by slowing down (MacRae, 2020) some parts of the

video and speeding up other parts (Menning & Murris, 2023) I explore his philosophical exploration of death when thinking with his hands. Inspired by Heraclitus' notion of time, aion, this kind of use of the camera articulates a particular intensive relationship with, and experience of, time as associated with play and childhood (Kohan, 2015). Such childing techniques encourage the viewer to be affected by image(s) not only intellectually, but also affectively. Unlike reflection, performative videography as a diffractive methodology traces objects and bodies (including humans), not as individually existing entities, but as relational phenomena across multiple (non)human agencies (Barad, 2007, 2018).

Centering children in research on death: a call for transition.

Renske Visser

Both the conceptualisation of child and the conceptualisation of death have gone through drastic changes in the past century. Whilst death studies as a field is increasingly growing, surprisingly, little research has been done with children. The invisibility of child/ren in death studies is something that needs to be addressed, particularly as myriads forms of loss and death are part of children's everyday lived reality. In this paper we highlight how making space for death and dying in the lifeworlds of children, and to include children's own philosophical and other ideas is of utmost importance given the political climate that we are in.

This paper critically examines the current literature and theories that focus on children and death. Many studies focus on adult perspectives about whether it is "appropriate" for children to engage with the topic of death. There is relatively little research available that explores children's own perspectives on death and dying. Research available is often from a psychological perspective, employing a developmental approach concerned with whether children have a 'mature' understanding of death. We use this paper as a starting point for conversations and an invitation to other researchers to include the "small" in research.

08. Creativity and the past

Living creatively & flourishing after a death

Nikki Price

The transitional period after a death can be an opportunity to reflect, rewrite, reimagine and reinvent our lives. This can be achieved through new or existing creative practices, with or without homage to the deceased.

My individual paper based on my PhD thesis is an empirical exploration of self-directed creative practices, such as photography, installation, writing, puppetry, gardening, singing after the death of a family member. Through creative non-fiction writing and photo and object elicitation, join me and my 14 participants in our experiences after a death.

The liminality that creativity affords us in holding moments, we give ourselves permission and trust in self-directed creative endeavours, enabling the period after a death for individuals to live well and flourish.

The Transition to a Literary Death-Ethics

Nicholas Taylor-Collins

In 1969 Michel Foucault drew attention to the proximity of death to literature. He identified a new phenomenon in which, rather than literature being a stay or protection against death—think of 'A Thousand and One Nights'—the text kills its author and sacrifices life itself (Foucault, 1969). Barthes's 'Death of the Author' essay (1967) demonstrates this phenomenon. Foucault uses the opportunity to pursue the vacant space left by the author's death, adumbrating an 'author-function', still significant today.

Now is the time to revive Foucault's conundrum about death's inevitable shaping of literature. Rather than describing a (post-)structural authorial absence, however, I propose that, after the ethical turn and recent rise of postcritique that threatens the metaphysical outreach of literature, it is important to transition to an understanding of a literary death-ethics. If the transcendental Law commanding us all is 'Thou shall die', then literature has a particular responsibility to respond to the Law.

My task in this paper is to outline what this might look like, considering:

- How death circumscribes all literature
- How literary death-ethics respond through practices of Reading, Writing, and Criticism
- How literary death-ethics model an extra-textual poise in the face of the reader's inevitable death

'She proposes to continue the business': eighteenth-century funerary businesses in transition

Dan O'Brien

This paper examines how death prompted transition in the funerary business of eighteenth-century England. The undertakers of the period operated without formal qualifications but could trade on their reputations which were cultivated through years of successful funerary work. When an established undertaker died it was the responsibility of his family and employees to secure the future of the business. In this period of transition it was important to demonstrate ability and promise continuity, ensuring that customers could expect the service they previously trusted. The bereaved families had to navigate the transition of the business through different relatives; mothers managed businesses until sons had learned the trade. In some cases the uncertainty following a death led to entrepreneurial moves by former staff members who wanted to establish their own businesses. Death within a funerary business was a challenge which prompted undertakers to define their own product and explain what made it important.

Thursday 12 June 25 2.40 - 3.40pm

09. Roundtable

Transitions towards Breaking Silences: 'race', death and its aftermath, in the climate emergency.

Jane McCathy, Remi Martin, Lystra Hagley-Dickinson, Joanne Jordan, Catherine Pestano

This panel presents new work on Breaking Silences regarding the lived experiences of racially minoritised people in the aftermath of death. Building on this work, the panel will consider the transitions needed to break silences concerning issues of 'race' and minoritisation, death and its aftermath, on a planet facing climate and nature emergencies. The panel will address the current disconnections of these three themes and how to enable spaces for exploring the transition that brings these themes into mutual connection.

Yet these are all difficult topics, and each is a major source of challenge, discomfort and sensitivity. In considering these challenges, contributions will include: narratives from Breaking Silences, supported by the Open University student internship scheme (Remi Martin); a critique of race studies in light of personal experiences of bereavement as a racialised subject, and the implications of the lived experiences of the Global Majority for all three themes (Lystra Hagley-Dickinson); major challenges and dilemmas in hearing from minoritised voices in the aftermath of death in the UK (Joanne Jordan); and strategies of significant creativity and networking for transitioning towards new connections between these themes for the study of death and its aftermath going forward (Catherine Pestano).

10. Roundtable

Death, Dying and Bereavement: New Sociological Perspectives

Laura Towers, Sharon Mallon, William McGowan, Samantha Fletcher, Michael Brennan

This roundtable presents the opportunity to hear some of the innovative arguments found in a new co-edited collection titled 'Death, Dying and Bereavement: New Sociological Perspectives'. Through presentation and discussion, we seek to revive sociological consideration of death, dying and bereavement, outlining a way forward that empowers sociology to reassert its contribution to the transitioning field of death studies.

This round table will begin with an introduction from the book co-editors, Laura Towers and Sharon Mallon, before hearing a preview of following three book chapters:

First, Samantha Fletcher and William McGowan will explore how the financial imperatives now attached to the funeral industry globally may be shaping our ethics towards death, death work and bereavement practices.

Next, Michael Brennan will apply a sociological focus to raise questions about the function of narrative, the politics of representation and the potential uses of pathographies for self, society and policy formation.

Finally, Ruth McManus will answer the question of how to dispose of the dead in an environmentally sustainable way, recognising that body management practices are shaped by both sociocultural and material constraints that change over time.

Thursday 12 June 25 4pm - 5.20pm

11. Rights

Am I Being Ludic(rous)? Exploring the ludic in contemporary British death and grave goods

Jennifer Riley

“We put insulin, hypodermic needles and plenty of Mars bars in his coffin with him, to make sure that he stayed well. Despite the fact he was dead. I never said any of this made sense.”

Thus comedian Angela Barnes, as part of her BBC Radio 4 show ‘You Can’t Take It With You’ (2016, 2019) explains the ‘grave goods’ she selected when her dad died.

Barnes is not alone. Drawing on semi-structured interviews from two recent studies, this paper argues that many in contemporary Britain transition between two apparently incongruous modes when discussing death: one whereby they richly, emotively describe the significance of particular mourning practices; and another wherein they laugh at how ludicrous these could be considered.

This paper argues that this dual, unsettled way of approaching death is not so much ludicrous as ludic, evidencing a fundamental human ‘capacity to deal simultaneously and subjectively with two or more ways of classifying reality’ (Droogers and van Harskamp 2014). It develops Davies’ suggestion that exploring play - this ‘ludic aspect of life’ – can illuminate mourning practices (2022; Davies 2024) particularly in contemporary contexts wherein many feel unsure about whether anything lies beyond death (Rozario and Shimada 2023).

Grief as Transition: Affective Liminality across Political and Ontological Borders

Zohreh Bayatrizi

Grief is a liminal and transitional affective state, bordering attachment and detachment, disaster and normalcy. Diaspora life is also liminal. One crosses political borders without ever completely crossing cultural and identitarian boundaries. The politics of homeland and memories of home haunt the diaspora.

Drawing on conversations with immigrants in Canada, this paper sketches the affective contours of this double liminality. Framed by sociological theories of diasporic political identity and collective trauma, our research asks: What do immigrants lose when they experience loss? How does the diasporic landscape of loss look like? How do people travel in it, across it, beyond it and back within it? How do the liminal affective experience of immigration and grief intersect? How do they amplify each other? What strategies do people use in order to make sense of this double liminality and to make it livable?

The research project is ongoing and the presentation will offer preliminary analysis of coded interviews.

The Contested Geographies of Autopsy and Racialized Groups in the United States

Niiyokamigaabaw Deondre Smiles

Since 2015, there have been a series of controversies surrounding autopsies of Black and Indigenous peoples in the United States. In one case, several Indigenous peoples were

slated to undergo autopsy against the cultural and religious wishes of their family members. In another, more well-known case, the body of George Floyd underwent a first autopsy that was challenged on political grounds, as it potentially absolved the Minneapolis Police Department of culpability in his murder. These cases laid bare the controversial nature of the coroner/medical examiner position, which is poorly understood in the United States, and has varied roles based on the specific geographies that the position serves. This talk will delve into these complex geography, and will contemplate what this means for Black, Indigenous, and other racialized and marginalized Americans.

The Blue Butterfly: Dying with Dignity as a Human Right

Amy Shea & Jillian Olmsted

The future of end-of-life care must focus on amplifying the voices of the underserved. Contrary to popular belief, the majority of people dying on the streets succumb to similar causes as housed individuals, including heart disease and cancer. This paper highlights the important work of providing hospice and palliative care for unhoused individuals with compassion and dignity and the end of life, using the exemplary model of The INN Between, the largest hospice for unhoused people in the United States. We'll discuss the services included in health care for the unhoused, focusing on two primary populations within the unhoused community that find themselves in need of hospice. The first, being older individuals who have aged into homelessness and/or have found themselves homeless for the first time. The second, being younger, unhoused individuals who are dying of diseases at an earlier average age of 56 years old compared to their housed counterparts whose average age of death is 72. Dying can be messy and complicated, but it can also include moments of joy and be a meaningful, reflective experience. Either way, access to a dignified end to life should be a human right for all regardless of their housing status.

12. What remains

Moodography: A case for abstraction over accuracy in digital mementos

Jean H. Menezes

While digital technologies have become ubiquitous, they often fail to align with the delicate and emotionally charged rituals of bereavement. The challenge of memory representation has shifted from issues of technical storage and accuracy to the creation of narratives that restore the reverence once inherent in memory-making. Although what makes an event or artifact meaningful is deeply subjective, rareness, the passage of time, and perceived effort remain consistent indicators of significance. Mediating interactions that allow the bereaved to explore impermanence and abstraction through an ongoing relationship with the digital memories of the deceased offers a promising direction. This paper examines this landscape through the case study of Moodography, a speculative design approach that emphasizes mood-oriented abstraction of an image and its accompanying narrated text or description. By incorporating unpredictability into these interactions, Moodography seeks to reimagine the experience of engaging with digital memories as an emotional and reflective process, privileging transience and fluidity over accuracy. Ultimately, the paper explores the potential of Moodography alongside other thanatechnology products to foster a sense of ongoingness and renewed connection in meaning-making rituals, considering how design strategies might better support remembrance by embracing the ephemeral in an increasingly digital age.

Redefining ‘Necromaterials’ for Western Culture: The changing influences on necromaterials, remains and significant objects in a materialistic and increasingly secular Western culture.

Allison DK Middlebrook

he examination of the changing interdisciplinary definition of what a modern Western Culture necromaterial is and how the term is applied to the transitional landscape of death care and death studies now and in the future. Focusing on how the terms necromaterials, human remains and significant death-related objects are defined and how those definitions have changed and continue to evolve and transition into the future. Proposing a new definition of the term necromaterials as it applies across a larger scope than it has traditionally and interweaving emergent technologies into this newly defined linguistic infrastructure. Investigating the traditional usage of the term necromaterials while paying homage to and building on the original meaning from its Eastern countries of origin and comparing how a new definition would apply to non-Western Cultures.

Twilight Grief: Grief on a Continuum

Elizabeth Schandelmeier

This session suggests that expanding our concept of grief into a continuum that often begins long before death, through treatment, at end-of-life and through bereavement and developing language to describe this continuum is an important transition for acknowledging the changing landscape of living with, and dying from, chronic and terminal disease. This session will introduce twilight grief, a term used to describe the ongoing emotional and existential grief experienced by individuals living with chronic or terminal illnesses, and their caregivers. While terms like anticipatory, preparatory, and pre-death grief capture aspects of the grief process, they fail to encompass the full scope extended physical decline. By presenting twilight grief as a new term within the continuum of pre-death grief, we introduce the need for expanded perspective and more precise and relatable language to describe these experiences and highlights the gap between the growing need for long-term emotional support in chronic illness care and the insufficient societal recognition of this form of grief. Further, improving long term support for the dying, and those who will mourn after, has implications for the introduction of artificial intelligence in bereavement as well as for end-of-life planning.

Thursday 12 June 25 7pm - 8pm

13. Ain't got time to die

Ain't Got Time to Die

Martin Krafft

How does someone who desperately wants to be alive face death? How do they engage in the transition to death? These are the questions at the heart of the feature-length documentary, “Ain’t Got Time to Die,” created by Martin Krafft. Join us as part of the 2025 CDAS Annual Conference to watch the film and hear from Martin himself in a Q&A after the screening.

“Ain’t Got Time to Die” film follows the story of Rachel Heisham, a rural American nomad living in her RV with terminal cancer. Even as her body starts to fall apart, Rachel adventures around the American West, a landscape also in transition due to the devastating effects of climate change. As the pain in her body grows even greater, Rachel must return to a complicated past in her hometown. The film looks with tender candor at the harsh reality of dying from cancer, sharing the story of someone whose perspective as a low-income nomadic woman often gets overlooked. Join us as filmmaker Martin Krafft presents this 68-minute film and hear from Martin himself in a question and answer session after the screening.

Want to watch the trailer? You can find it here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyBSwUhVRHM>

14. Where do we die?

Where do we die? Our preferences for our space of death

Virginia Rammou

How do we understand the space we inhabit for our own death? Who decides where we die? And does it matter? Much of current UK end-of-life care practice and policy discussions centre on the location of one’s death. Whilst these discussions may focus on particular (care) settings and illuminating people’s choices, the nuances of what influences space, place, and preference offer much to still explore and understand.

Join us for our CDAS Conference evening workshop led by architect Virginia Rammou (University of Glasgow) and supported by anthropologist Professor Erica Borgstrom (Open University), where you will discuss your existing knowledge and own preferences on places and spaces of death. Prompts will include considering what places and spaces are considered possible for death and the historical, socio-economic, demographic, and cultural influences which shaped how and why certain places and spaces are considered more or less preferable.

Free and open to members of the public, the workshop will explore with participants what preconceptions or misconceptions there may be about such preferences, and how preferences for space of death may change over time. Given the practice and policy focus on ‘place of death’, the workshop will invite participants to formulate ideas about the possibility of rethinking the places and spaces of our death.

Virginia is a registered architect and an academic with a career spanning over two decades teaching in Higher Education. She is currently Head of Architectural Technology at the Mackintosh School of Architecture, Glasgow School of Art and has previously worked at the Liverpool School of Architecture, the Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction, UCL and the University of Westminster in London.

Friday 13 June 25 9 – 10am

Whose death literacy do you want me to have? Exploring over-medicalisation, inequalities and knowledge production as part of community-engaged work at the end of life

Mary Hodgson, St Christopher's Hospice

In this keynote I will examine the concept of over-medicalisation and what it might mean to address by examining how we produce and exchange knowledge about the end of life. I will ask, what role could interrogating knowledge production play in tackling inequalities and over-medicalisation and how could it lead to change?

To explore this, I will look at how a community action team in a hospice in South East London is using a death literacy approach as a way to produce and share knowledge. This approach sets out to facilitate an exchange of viewpoints and voices on death, dying and loss; make visible polyvocal representations of death and dying; and, ultimately, amplify how community members in different settings identify what contemporary dying looks like in order to make meaning out of the end of life.

Through critiquing contemporary approaches to knowledge production about end of life and what is 'wrong' with it, along with a range of projects and depictions of dying from community settings, in this keynote I will challenge the audience to reflect on the possibilities of generative and potentially more democratic ways to share knowledge about end of life issues, and their associated challenges and opportunities.

About the speaker

Mary Hodgson is Director of Inclusion & Social Innovation at St Christopher's Hospice in South London. She is responsible for St Christopher's work with community members and people with lived experience to improve and change the way we respond to death, dying and loss, and for our work improving health equity. Mary's background is in community-centred and transdisciplinary partnership working, focused on research and innovation around tackling inequalities, and she has worked in various social change agencies such as The Young Foundation and Shelter. She has a PhD in Anthropology (2007) from Goldsmiths College, University, UK.



Friday 13 June 25 10.10am - 11.10am

16. What does it mean to die?

Algorithmic Afterlives: Rethinking Death and Legacy in the Age of AI

Kate Gerber; Jed R. Brubaker; Tamara Borovica; Caitlin McGrane; Larissa Hjorth

Artificial intelligence is increasingly reshaping how we engage with death, legacy, and memorialisation. While AI-based systems such as chatbots simulating interactions with the deceased have captured public and commercial interest, they often reflect narrow conceptions of what is possible. This presentation explores how AI might reimagine our relationship with death, informed by a speculative design workshop conducted with experts in AI, media, design, and death studies.

The workshop challenged participants to envision the cultural and social possibilities of AI in death, moving beyond conventional digital memorials to consider broader futures. These included AI engaging with non-human entities, collective histories, and personalised interactions. The session also highlighted critical ethical and logistical concerns, such as data limitations, commercial influences, and the implications for grief literacy and continuing bonds.

By embracing speculative methodologies, this presentation considers AI's role in disrupting and reshaping normative practices around death. Just as digital platforms sequestered death through online memorials, AI technologies offer new possibilities for transforming grief and memorialisation. This discussion positions AI as a driver of cultural transition, presenting both opportunities and challenges for how societies understand and engage with death in an evolving, technologised world.

Experiences of loneliness and death in a society of mass mortality: Findings from the survey in Japan and South Korea

Norichika Horie

This paper identifies changes in views and practices regarding death in Japan and South Korea, based on the Survey on Views of Life and Death (SoVoLaD) conducted in 2019 and 2024 and SoVoLaD-COVID-19 conducted in 2021 in the two countries.

The statistical analysis identified common and opposite changes. The former are items that have significantly increased or decreased in both countries. The latter are items that increased in one country but decreased in the other.

In both countries, more people accepted lonely deaths and fewer people said they had experienced bereavement or grief, despite the societies experiencing high numbers of deaths. It is possible that because of loneliness, the death of an acquaintance is not recognised as a significant bereavement or grief.

The number of people who said 'none' increased in religious belief and practice. Even ancestral rituals and funerals, which are deeply rooted in East Asian societies, have declined in importance. In addition, the experience of being infected with COVID-19 has increased, but this has led to a decrease in fear of COVID-19 and a rise of conspiracy theories.

In terms of differences, there was an increase in fear of the future, suicidal thoughts and the taboo of death in Japan, while the opposite change was observed in South Korea. This is

probably due to the fact that the economic situation in South Korea is not as bad as in Japan.

Death of the Self: Grieving the Past and the Future When Caring Ends

Zhaoxi Zheng, Emma Kirby

All informal caring come to an end. Though specific circumstances may vary (e.g., bereavement or otherwise), such experiences are punctuated by experiences of grief and loss. Across the care and caring scholarship, such losses have tended to be characterised by a focus on the loss of another, namely the care recipient; yet a burgeoning literature points to the 'post-caring void', highlighting how carers see and 'find' themselves in post-caring lives. This paper complexifies grief through a focus on the temporalities and intra-relationality of self-grief/loss. Drawing on interviews with Australian informal caregivers, we explore carers' loss and grieving of (past and future) self/selves when transitioning out of caring roles. Our examination of carers' accounts seeks to not reduce them to mere care provision instruments but recognise the relationality between carers' sense of loss and their caring roles. Our findings reveal that informal caregiving is often performed at the cost of the carers' selfhood, where pasts are erased and futures become unfathomable within the end-of-caring milieu. Through our analysis, we draw on scholarship on slow death, to explore how carers' loss of symbolic selfhood and practical futures in the caring present, entangled with institutional and biopolitical violence of neglect of caring transitions.

17. More than human loss

Death Studies in Transition: Exploring More-Than-Human Loss in a Time of Permacrisis

Larissa Hjorth; Tamara Borovica; Katrin Gerber

What does it mean to think about Death Studies in a time of transition? This presentation focuses on Death Studies in the context of the permanent crisis (permacrisis) around climate change. Environmental humanities scholars have explored the role of "more-than-humans" in human experiences of loss and death. For example, the profound unanticipated loss of a pet can challenge conventions around human and more-than-human kinship distinctions. As Sarah Whatmore notes, the "more-than-human" marks a shift away from human centrism (2006). Jamie Lorimer adds that this category captures the embodied and affective dimensions of multispecies worlds (2013), while Anna Tsing frames humans as part of "interspecies" relationships, evident in mobile media mourning rituals (2012).

From ecological grief ("ecogrief"; Cunsolo and Ellis, 2017) to anticipatory grief (Furberg, 2011), unresolved loss (Randall, 2009), and solastalgia—a homesickness for destroyed nature (Albrecht, 2007)—new forms of grieving ecological degradation continue to emerge. Drawing on a four-year fellowship on mobile media affective witnessing, this presentation explores practices of more-than-human loss, including witnessing ecogrief online, sharing climate disaster stories, and posting pet loss eulogies on social media. By investigating these ethnographies, this presentation rethinks Death Studies as an entanglement of human and more-than-human relationalities.

Expressing companion animal loss on Facebook: Transitioning hierarchies of grief and grievability.

Leanne Downing and Professor Larissa Hjorth

The practice of expressing grief and bereavement in online environments has become a worldwide phenomenon that is commonly referred to as 'digital mourning'. Although considerable scholarly attention has focused on how digital media is used following the loss of other humans, a comparative dearth of research exists on how individuals use digital media to express their grief following the loss of companion animals. Drawing on qualitative research interviews into grieving individuals' interactions with an Australian Facebook pet loss support group, this paper reveals pet loss to be a profoundly emotional and, at times, physical experience that often exceeds the boundaries of contemporary death studies research and digital media scholarship.

In this presentation we will consider how online expressions of companion animal loss offer opportunities to reconsider human/animal hierarchies around death, grief and grievability. Specifically, we will focus on how a particular Facebook group's pet loss support page was used by individuals who wanted to assuage their grief via posts and conversations around their deep and continuing bonds with their deceased pets. The key themes of this presentation will be elucidated through the conceptual frameworks of digital media mourning, continuing bonds, and inter-species affinities.

Mortality exercises in the context of climate change. Combining degrowth with the one-health paradigm

Łucja Lange

The core question of my presentation is: How can death and grief studies contribute to the well-being of contemporary and future societies, especially if we want to survive as a species? Drawing from the one-health paradigm, which is rooted in indigenous wisdom, I aim to illustrate how our struggle to accept mortality can hinder our lives. Grief often disrupts us instead of transforming our experiences and enabling us to live with the losses we face.

Traditional indigenous methods of confronting our mortality—such as using metaphorical approaches to manage change—could pave the way for discussions on ecological grief, solastalgia, and climate change. This perspective not only helps us seek solutions for ourselves but also allows us to consider the impact on other species during this process of transformation.

The integration of degrowth concepts with the one-health paradigm and knowledge from the field of death and grief studies presents an intriguing avenue for exploring and identifying more effective approaches to aid individuals and non-human animals who are experiencing loss in the context of climate change.

Friday 13 June 25 11.30am - 12.30pm

18. Death and the dead online

Absent presences: from post-mortem photography to deadbots

Helen Frisby

Digital technology is not only transforming how we live – it's transforming how (and whether?) we die, and how we remember.

All very exciting – or maybe disturbing, depending upon one's viewpoint. Either way, novelty and innovation permeate the scholarly narrative on deadbots to date. Here, however, I will propose that deadbots are actually the latest evolution in a much longer, older and deeper story of post-mortem absent presence, and more broadly that technology has in fact been shaping our relationships with the dead for many decades and even centuries. In particular, I will contend that the conceptual roots of digital memorialisation tools, and most lately generative AI embodiments of the dead, may be traced as far back as the nineteenth century practice of post-mortem photography – perhaps even further.

As well as looking back, this talk also looks forward to some of the potential (intended or otherwise) consequences of the shift deadbots 'embody' from ritualisation to memorialisation.

Please note: this presentation includes examples of Victorian post-mortem photography.

Death and grief in transition: the case of 'griefbots'

Korina Giaxoglou

In the era of artificial-intelligence (AI)-empowered conversational agents (CAs), a new type of 'companion' known as the 'griefbot' or 'memorialising chatbot' (Vlahos, 2019) is being promoted as a way of maintaining a sense of illusory presence of the dead in the lives of those left behind. The design of griefbots opens up a set of questions around the aftermath of death and grief as well as around control over digital data traces. In this paper, I examine the affordances, limitations, and potential risks of griefbots, by focusing on the case of an early griefbot, known as the 'Dadbot'. The chatbot was created by tech-journalist, James Vlachos, based on the recording of his dad's life stories before his death and it has since served as the prototype for the associated griefbot-creator company, Hereafter. Drawing on small stories and affective positioning (Giaxoglou, 2021), I examine the claims made in the company's discourse against the modes of narrative, memory and intimacy that can be performed in sample interactions with this technology of 'talking memories'. The paper sheds light into the new thanatological imaginations about the aftermath of death in the transition to AI-powered interactions.

Metadeath: The Social Lives of the Dead and the Digital Transition

Johanna Sumiala

This paper builds on the following idea; how we as the living collectively organise our relationship with the dead lays the very foundation of human society (see also Laqueur

2016; Harrison 2010). In other words, the dead are an essential part of the social contract (Öhman 2024). Today, thanks to rapidly changing digital realm and development of AI, this relationship is under fundamental transition and needs urgent scholarly attention.

This paper takes up a challenge to explore the social lives of the dead in today's digital society and places special emphasis on the agency of the dead; in other words, the paper asks how the dead remain present in digital forms in the affairs of the living and how their presence influences the very foundation of the contemporary digital society.

The paper draws on a bundle of academic sources and intellectual traditions including media anthropology, death studies, and digital studies. Conceptual analysis is illustrated by empirical case studies that draw on digital ethnographic research on deathbots and their users in digital platforms. The paper suggests a new analytical framework to better understand the shifting meaning of the dead in today's digital society.

19. Care and control at the end of life

Reverse care at the end of life

Min Song

This study explores the phenomenon of reverse care at the end of life, where terminally ill individuals, despite their own suffering, care for others and society. While end-of-life care has been extensively studied, reverse care remains underexplored, even though it reflects autonomy, compassion, and social responsibility. Drawing on the Buddhist concept of merit transfer, we analyzed 146 interviews with family caregivers and healthcare professionals in China in 2023 to examine how terminally ill people express concern for others. Using qualitative analysis with NVIVO software, we coded the data into reference points, primary codes, axial codes, and a core code focused on events, anecdotes, interpersonal reflections, and end-of-life situations. Reverse care was found in 25% of interviews. Of 83 reference points, 61 related to caring for family, and 22 involved concern for society, fellow patients, or medical staff. While most reverse care was protective towards family, many individuals showed a strong sense of social responsibility, exemplified by compassion for others, gratitude to medical staff, eco-friendly burial choices, and organ donation. This study emphasizes how terminally ill individuals engage with the world in meaningful ways, maintaining dignity and purpose in their final days.

From Planning to Presence: The Power of a '5-to-12 Death' and the Emergence of Meaningful Rituals beyond the Euthanasia Day

Iline Ceelen

The planned nature of euthanasia, also described as a "5-to-12 death," grants individuals and their loved ones a unique sense of agency, allowing them to actively prepare for the day itself. This agency can foster a deep engagement with the process, enabling the creation of meaningful experiences that reflect personal values and relationships. However, many of the post-euthanasia rituals arise out of spontaneous acts during the euthanasia day itself. Unplanned gestures and words, ordinary objects used in these moments, often acquire profound symbolic meaning, becoming anchors for grief rituals and facilitating a sense of transformed but continuous bonds with the deceased. In a secularised society like the Netherlands, where traditional religious frameworks decreased in importance, these

emergent practices take over, offering a way to navigate loss and sustain connection through deeply personal and context-specific expressions of meaning. My research shows how the interplay of planned and spontaneous actions during euthanasia serves as a foundation for evolving ritual behaviour, highlighting their capacity to provide comfort, continuity, and agency to the bereaved in a secular context. These practices reveal the transformative potential of the euthanasia process, bridging the moment of death with enduring rituals that support grief and memory.

Dying in transition: Experiences from considering seeking assistance in dying

Ingvild Lalim Hanseid

Research on experiences with assistance in dying is an emerging field – also because of the political debates in many European countries. Exploring assistance in dying helps us understand contemporary approaches to death – how society “do” death. In my ongoing ph.d.-project, I explore experiences from the process of considering seeking assistance in dying through a qualitative research project. I have interviewed 13 individuals living in Norway who are considering applying for assistance in dying abroad, and plan on doing follow-up-interviews in 2025. I explore themes as relations, interactions with institutions and identity formation. This is analyzed and discussed in light of theories addressing contemporary death culture, for example individualization of death, institutionalization of death and medicalization of death. I believe the topic is highly relevant for the conference theme, as attitudes towards assistance in dying is a field in transition – and because the topic addresses central elements in how people approach and experience death and dying. Also, being in a state of considering choosing death or waiting for death can be viewed as a transition between life and death with interesting features.

Friday 13 June 25 12.30pm - 1.10pm

20. Lunchtime discussion

Do we have a moral obligation to opt for an eco-friendly form of body disposal?

Sarah Carter-Walshaw

The environmental cost of common approaches to body disposal, such as traditional burial and cremation, are greater than many realise. Fortunately, more eco-friendly forms of disposal such as natural burial, aquamation, and human composting are available, or are likely to become available in the future.

Generally, we recognise that we have a responsibility to make eco-friendly decisions where we can: taking the train to work, recycling what we can, and so on. Similarly, it would seem reasonable to suggest that we should opt for these greener approaches to body disposal when making postmortem arrangements for ourselves or others.

However, making postmortem arrangements are a different matter to deciding whether to commute by car or train, or whether one should invest in insulation for the home. There is a moral dimension to body disposal decisions that does not factor into other contexts (with which we are more familiar) in environmental ethics and decision-making.

In this presentation, I explore the ethical arguments and considerations relevant to environmental decision-making and to making postmortem arrangements for oneself or

others, with a view to identify whether there could indeed be a moral obligation to opt for eco-friendly forms of body disposal.

Friday 13 June 25 1.10pm - 2.30pm

21. Open stream

Aesthetics, Politics and the Sensuous Production of Dying and Death

Gaudenz Metzger

Depending on the theory, aesthetics is either regarded as the autonomous sphere of art, separate from everyday life, or as the organisation of the senses and the way we see, feel, and experience the world. In the latter perspective, advanced in recent years by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, aesthetics is intertwined with politics and ideology, which shape how individuals sense everyday situations. Dying and death are also subject to this sensuous production, which has ontological and epistemological implications in that it defines what is visible and invisible, present and absent in a place such as a hospice or a cemetery. Intervening in the sensorium of these environments through research has the potential to alter them, enabling new knowledge and subjectivities to emerge. Drawing on my ongoing multisensory ethnography at St Christopher's Hospice in London, this paper argues that future death studies should explore the multiple ways in which the aesthetic politics of death are produced and articulated. To understand the changing conditions of dying and death and to reorganise existing hierarchies, it is necessary to move beyond the study of isolated practices, actors and objects to an analysis of the overarching organisation of the senses in specific social contexts.

As Though Time Stands Still: Deaths in Psychiatric Detention

Carly Speed

This paper relates to the deaths of detained patients in England and Wales, from the 'lunatic asylums' of the 1800s through to the psychiatric hospitals of the present day. When one considers the length between the two time periods there could well be an expectation that there has been significant change in the issues and failings that emerge in relation to these deaths. However, this has not been apparent in many cases and the issues of denial, dismissal and a lack of accountability emerge from present day cases as they did centuries ago. This paper will therefore critically examine the complexities which arise when studying deaths, hundreds of years apart, but as though time has often stood still. In order to do so the paper will draw upon findings from archival research alongside the voices of bereaved families, coroners and legal practitioners. Of particular interest is failings in relation to the circumstances surrounding the deaths themselves, the subsequent investigation process, the role of the coronial system and the response to bereaved families.

An autoethnography of voluntarily stopping eating and drinking (VSED)

Jagna Feierabend

Many voices in the UK demand that when life has become insufferable

there need to be humane options available to exit. While assisted suicide currently remains illegal there is another humane option which is not illegal - voluntarily stopping eating and drinking (VSED). While VSED is uncommon in the UK, it is seen more frequently in other countries such as Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands. My paper will explore why that is the case, who chooses VSED, in what setting it is performed and with what support. It will demonstrate some of these points through the specific example of my dad who died by VSED in Germany at the age of 52. My personal account of his dying journey will have a focus on the importance of establishing a committed team of family members, carers and health professionals. This will shine a light on the difficulties faced by people in the UK trying to access VSED. In a society voicing its wish to transition to different ways of dying interest in VSED is only set to grow. With the proposed assisted dying bill being narrow the topic is especially relevant to the many people who the bill would exclude.

Cemeteries as ecological laboratories: learning from tombstone mosses

Dall'aglio Louis

This contribution aims at presenting the results of a study conducted in France on cemetery mosses. This study was conducted in over 21 cemeteries as a way to get a better understanding of the ecological strategies and characteristics of urban mosses, as part of a PhD project dedicated to the value of cemeteries as natural spaces within metropolises.

French cemeteries reveal to be stimulating places of ecological inquiries, as their highly mineral landscape mirror the increasingly urbanized landscape of the city, a landscape that is becoming the norm for most of this planet's inhabitants. While one could argue this implies we live in cemetery-like ecological landscapes, a sentiment echoed in the literature dedicated to the feeling of solastalgia (Albrecht, 2005), this inventory reveals that there are a lot of unknown ecological processes going on even in the most artificial landscapes. Drawing on reflexions by R. W. Kimmerer (2003) and J. T. Barnett (2017 ; 2022), this paper tries to show how cemeteries could help fostering new ecological imaginaries by renewing our perception of what nature now is in the Anthropocene: the interlocking of resilience, ruins and community.

22. Theory

The Sociology of Ageing and Death studies: opening conversations and future directions for end-of-life care

Bethany Simmonds

The Sociology of Ageing, and Death studies, have been traditionally siloed and understood as discrete corpuses of knowledge / fields. Discussion about the quality of end-of-life care for older people has recently been highlighted in the COVID-19 pandemic, and the assisted suicide bill in the United Kingdom. These moments of debate could provide impetus and fora to discuss the intersecting disciplines of ageing and death; to consider questions like what is a 'good death'? What is 'care' at the end of life? Issues of consent, capacity and overarching ethical principles are fundamental to these discussions. However, the potential for learning and collaboration between the sociology of ageing, and death studies remains underutilised. For instance, when intersectionally exploring the hermeneutics of death and care, identity and inequality issues of gender / sexuality, ethnicity and disability, are still relatively under researched in both the Sociology of Ageing, and Death Studies. This paper discusses the

insights these two traditionally separate fields of study can offer each other and the increasingly pertinent discussions of end-of-life care for older people.

Navigating the Intersection of Ambiguous Loss and Anticipatory Grief: Parental Experiences in the Shadow of Uncertainty

Amelia Seraphia Derr

The lived experiences of parents whose children have life-threatening diagnoses that could result in sudden, unpredictable death reveal a profound tension between ambiguous loss and anticipatory grief. This paper offers a theoretical and autoethnographic exploration of this unique intersection, drawing on personal narratives and interdisciplinary frameworks from death studies, psychology, and sociology.

Ambiguous loss arises from the uncertainty of whether the child will survive or succumb to their condition, creating a suspended state of mourning that disrupts traditional processes of grief. Anticipatory grief, on the other hand, forces parents to preemptively grapple with the potential loss of their child while simultaneously navigating their ongoing role as caregivers. These two forms of grief coexist, producing a complex emotional landscape that challenges normative understandings of loss and mourning.

Using autoethnographic insights, this paper examines how parents navigate this liminal space, highlighting coping strategies, the impact on familial relationships, and the broader implications for healthcare and bereavement support. By situating these experiences within the broader theme of "Death in Transition," this work seeks to illuminate how uncertainty and unpredictability reshape traditional boundaries of death, grief, and resilience.

This study offers critical insights into the transformative nature of grief and its implications for both academic discourse and practical care.

A relational turn? New empirical directions in grief studies

Georgie Akehurst

It is understood in sociology, and more widely, that grief is a social emotion (Jakoby 2012; Jacobsen and Petersen 2019). That is, it is continually negotiated and navigated between people, rather than existing solely as an independent and individual experience. Although, much of what we know about the lived experience of grief has emerged from individual narrative accounts. In 2008, Goodrum called for a focus on the 'other side' of the interaction to explore how grief is negotiated in social settings. In other words, those who help to shape the expression of grief in interaction should be considered. Recent publications in the social sciences have begun to consider relational grief experiences (Bartel 2019; Laperle et al. 2023; Rosenblatt 2017), exploring beyond individual narratives in attempts to consider complex emotional webs. In this paper, I attempt to trace the beginnings of a relational empirical turn in grief studies which attempts to incorporate multiple voices surrounding the same death. Drawing on my own PhD work, in which I interviewed multiple participants within social networks concerning their relational grief and support experiences following traumatic bereavements (suicide, traffic collisions and COVID-19), I will consider what these transitions in empirical research can tell us about how grief is experienced relationally.

Terror Management Theory in the light of digital immortality

Tal Morse and Paula Kiel

Terror Management Theory (TMT) explores how awareness of mortality affects collective identity. According to TMT research, mortality awareness drives individuals to strengthen collective identity aspects perceived as eternal, such as national or religious identity. The rapidly growing Digital Afterlife Industry represents a significant shift in contemporary technologies offering individuals new ways to symbolically endure, promising an eternal digital existence. This transition requires re-thinking existing death-related theories, specifically TMT, as it proposes an alternative to traditional group-based defence mechanisms against death anxiety.

This study examines whether awareness of digital immortality services can mitigate the fear of death by focusing on individual perpetuity rather than collective transcendence. Unlike prior TMT studies priming mortality salience, this research highlights the choice between collective and individualistic paths to symbolic immortality.

The persistent reality of violence and war in Israel serves as a reminder of life's transience and thus functions as a condition of mortality salience. Findings indicated that the hypothesis was validated for Israeli women but not for Israeli men. These results illustrate how themes of death, heroism, and masculinity intersect in public discourse and commemorative culture. Further, these results suggest the importance of re-evaluating death awareness amid technological advancements, especially in societies conflict-stricken societies.

Friday 13 June 25 2.45pm - 3.45pm

23. Creative Auto/Biographical Reflections on Death and Loss Across the Lifecourse

some personal reflections and opportunities for engagement

Gayle Letherby

Auto/Biographical sociological fiction, non-fiction and memoir, written for academic and non-academic audiences is a way to express intellectual, emotional and political imaginations, drawing on the writer's and on others' experience. This way of working, of writing, of storytelling, explicitly blurs the boundaries of 'fact' and 'fiction' (arguably true of all narratives, whether made explicit or not). In addition to challenging traditional understandings of 'good', 'valid' and 'tidy' research and scholarship it also has implications for definitions of engagement and impact, within, besides and beyond the academy. A personal loss resulted in me finding Sociology and in turn Sociology has affected the way I understand and experience loss. Having always worked auto/biographically, I have for the last 15 years, alongside my academic writings, also been writing fiction and memoir; about loss and other issues that concern me. I now regularly include such pieces within academic outputs.

In addition to reflecting on my own experience of working this way, in this session, I will guide participants through some short creative writing exercises. Additionally we will discuss possibilities for inclusion in – Auto/Biographical Reflections on Death and Loss Across the Lifecourse – a publication I am editing on behalf of CDAS.

24. Roundtable

Decolonizing Death Studies

Jyoti Puri, Ara Francis, Becky Hsu, Jane McCarthy

As CDAS celebrates its 20th anniversary, this roundtable explores transitions in death studies, focusing on the need to challenge Eurocentric and universalizing paradigms that have long dominated the field. Four participants will engage in a conversation reflecting on the future of death studies while addressing the urgency of broadening its scope. The discussion will emphasize moving beyond individualized health perspectives and narrowly defined types of death to include decolonial, Indigenous, feminist, queer, and critical race theoretical frameworks. These perspectives are essential for expanding the conceptual and theoretical tools central to the field.

Anchoring the conversation are areas of research and scholarship that include: the climate crisis and its colonial, capitalist, and racialized roots; critiques of the death positive movement; positivist and rationalist assumptions shaping death studies in the social sciences; and the intersections of immigration, race, and death. Participants will highlight the need for relational, social, cultural, and transnational analyses that situate death studies within the broader context of global histories of inequity and oppression, particularly in relation to capitalism, religion, race, and gender. By integrating diverse perspectives across disciplines, this roundtable reflects on the future of death studies, underscoring the importance of epistemological and ontological justice.

Friday 13 June 25 3.55pm - 5.15pm

25. Where we've been, where we're going

Death cafes: A retrospective

Renee Beard

The first "Death cafe" was developed by Jon Underwood and psychologist Susan Barsky Reid in 2011 and took place in London. This gathering of strangers involves drinking tea, eating cake and an unscripted candid discussion of death. The stated goal is "to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives." When the cafés went remote during the Covid-19 pandemic, people across the globe united under the common cause of talking about death. As part of the so-called death positive movement, this unique social phenomenon warrants attention from sociology and social gerontology alike. Based on over 100 hours of participant observation, I analyzed who attends them, why they participate, and the subjective experiences of attendance. Positioning death cafés as a burgeoning social movement, I will discuss the framing of death cafés, their potential/pitfalls, and the "emotion work" the format simultaneously requires of and remediates for attendees. As a 'social franchise,' the death café offers the potential for social solidarity in the most intimate of our shared human experiences: death and dying. Like any social movement, however, there are obstacles to adhering to the founding ideals, threats of co-optation, and barriers to inclusion.

The future of last words

Michael Erard

Conventionally the last words that a person produces before they die are objects of fascination for spiritual, personal, and other reasons, and if they occur they can become intimate keepsakes, topics of stories, and tools for grieving. But what is the future of last words, and what is the future of the closing interaction window at the very end of life? To follow the theme of the conference, these futures are in transition. In my talk I will describe how. Societal factors, changes in the causes of death and life expectancy, medical practices (such as increasing sedation rates), and technologies (such as brain-computer interfaces and generative AI) will all affect what actually happens and the meanings that are made of these final articulations of consciousness. I also bring insights from the Netherlands, where assisted medical dying appears to create more opportunities, rather than fewer, for last words.

Seeds of vibrant mortality for navigating the Anthropocene: A Futures Studies approach

Joshua Hurtado Hurtado

The Anthropocene is marked by an increasing speed, severity and interconnectedness of death events that affect humans and multiple other species. In this sense, the Anthropocene constitutes an era of transition from a reasonably stable period to one characterised by uncertainty, crises and suffering. Yet, the crises of the Anthropocene conceal opportunities that hold the potential to guide people in navigating this transition. Drawing on the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes project (Raudsepp-Hearne et al., 2020) and recent research on Death Studies that highlights innovations in the way people deal with mortality (e.g., Dawdy & Kneese, 2022; Gould et al., 2024; Sabra & Troyer, 2018), I propose that seeds of vibrant mortality offer people the capacity to redefine the Anthropocene from an era of devastation to one of new flourishings. Seeds of vibrant mortality consist of new developments – initiatives, technologies and collective actions – that orient people to new ways of addressing human and nonhuman death and call for a renewed engagement with mortality that resists despair. I adopt a Futures Studies approach to develop three scenarios that show how these seeds can flourish and interconnect, presenting plausible futures that illustrate how seeds of vibrant mortality can anchor just and sustainable systems.

Normalizing Decay: The Green Burial Movement as a Response to Ecological Crisis

Chris Miller

Green burial describes an alternative to conventional burial that seeks to minimize environmental impact. Principles of natural, full body burial include no embalming, no grave liners, and using only biodegradable materials for caskets and grave markers. Many other alternatives – including aquamation, terramation, and interring cremated remains – are also framed as green because they are either less harmful, or put one in closer contact with nature.. Drawing on conversations with a range of stakeholders, including cemetery staff, activists, and people interested in having a green burial, this paper explores the diverse terrain of green death practices.

The death industry is currently amid a period of transition. People are increasingly dissatisfied with conventional practices such as embalming and cremation. Reflecting awareness of ecological crisis, many express a desire to adopt more 'green' or eco-friendly death rituals. While many yearn for such options, the current state of green alternatives on the ground is defined by both confusion and inaccessibility. This paper first outlines the logistical and economic barriers that both providers and clients face in navigating their options. Second, I explore the ideal rituals of interment and remembrance that people envision, and how these come up against the principles of natural burial.

26. Posthumous Data Donation

The Data Donor Card workshop

Daniel Snow

This interactive workshop invites participants to explore the ethical and societal implications of posthumous data donation through a critical design artefact - the Data Donor Card. Drawing from organ and blood donation schemes but challenging conventional speculative design approaches, the Data Donor Card is a tangible entry point into discussions about digital legacies and data rights after death.

Through 90 minutes of guided activities, participants will engage with the Data Donor Card, examining how this mundane speculation creates space for critical discourse without relying on distant futures or diegetic prototypes. After an introduction to posthumous medical data donation and its current challenges, participants will work to map their perspectives on data ownership, consent, and collective knowledge across different temporal frames. Participants will explore how time influences ethical considerations in posthumous data donation using mapping techniques. The workshop concludes with the collaborative development of themes for responsible posthumous data use.