The Life of Images: Death, Materiality and Animist Cinema (Lisbon, 11-13 Feb 27)

NOVA FCSH (Lisbon, Portugal), Feb 11–13, 2027
Deadline: Nov 8, 2026

FILM AND DEATH

The FILM AND DEATH project is organizing an international workshop on The Life of Images: Death, Materiality and Animist Cinema at NOVA FCSH, Lisbon, on 11-13 February 2027.

A face that breathes beyond itself, a maid who buries herself in the earth, a man dissolving into the river: these are the kinds of moments this workshop takes as its starting point. What does it mean to think of a cinematic image as alive? Cinema has long been understood as a technology that gives life to what is still, absent, or dead. The workshop builds on a broader history of thinking about cinema as a medium in which matter becomes strangely animated. Jean Epstein's notion of photogénie, for instance, describes the capacity of the cinematic apparatus to reveal in things something that ordinary perception leaves concealed. More recent approaches to cinematic animism have taken this question further, towards the non- human, materiality and the formal conditions through which films construct relations between human and non-human worlds.

The workshop asks whether animism might describe an operation of the cinematic image itself, one that makes the continuity or coexistence of life and death perceptible, rather than a theme or worldview represented by certain films.

This also means attending to the material conditions of cinematic images. What roles do bodies, objects, landscapes, gestures, light and movement play in producing forms of vitality and presence? And what happens to these arrangements when death enters the frame? Framing and montage build continuity, but they can also break it. Duration holds a body in time. Projection brings an image that has already been made back into the present each time it is screened. In each of these operations, presence and absence, persistence and disappearance, are brought into contact.

Seen in this way, death is a transformation of a particular organisation of matter. What appears as a fixed, self-identical unit is in fact part of wider material processes. Death is the moment when this becomes visible: the relations between bodies, matter and their environments are exposed. Life and death can then be approached as different configurations within one continuous material process.

The workshop proposes animism as a possible mode of existence of the cinematic image. Here, life and death, human and non-human, organic and inorganic, transcendence and immanence are no longer separate orders but phases of the same material and temporal process. Cinema then

works as a threshold where bodies and their traces, presence and absence, enter into relation, and each projection does not represent this passage so much as perform it again.

We welcome contributions that explore these questions through films, filmmakers, periods, theoretical traditions or forms of cinematic practice. We are especially interested in approaches that test or challenge the notion of animist cinema itself.

Possible areas of discussion include (but are not limited to):
- Animist cinema and death
- Animist cinema and materiality
- Animist cinema and the body, gesture and ritual
- Animist cinema and animals, plants and landscapes
- Animist cinema and human/non-human relations
- Animist cinema and traces, absence and spectrality
- Animist cinema and repetition, reenactment and the projected image
- Animist cinema and spectatorship, agency and belief
- Animist cinema and contemporary image-making

The workshop is conceived as a space for collective discussion and conceptual exchange. It invites researchers in film studies, philosophy, art history, visual culture and related fields, including doctoral students and early-career researchers, to a three-day programme of paper presentations, a keynote lecture and discussion on the ways in which cinema mediates, repeats and makes perceptible the passage between life and death.

FORMAT:
The workshop will take place over three days at NOVA FCSH - Colégio Almada Negreiro (Campus de Campolide), Lisbon. Each speaker will have 20 minutes to present, followed by 10 minutes of discussion. The workshop will be held in English.

ORGANISERS:
Patrícia Castello Branco (CineLab, IFILNOVA)
Lucas Ferraço Nassif (CineLab, IFILNOVA)
Susana Viegas (NOVA FCSH)

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:
Adrian Ivakhiv (Simon Fraser University)

SPECIAL FILM SCREENING:
The Dead and the Others (2018), followed by a conversation with filmmakers João Salaviza and Renée Nader Messora.

CALL FOR PAPERS:
Please send proposals to: thelifeofimagesworkshop@gmail.com. Submissions should be sent as a single PDF file and include:
- an abstract (max. 350 words, references excluded);
- a short biographical note (max. 150 words), including institutional affiliation.

Abstracts will be used for selection and to organise the sessions thematically, so they should

clearly state the film(s), filmmaker(s) or theoretical question the paper will address. The deadline for submissions is 8 November 2026. Notification of acceptance will be sent by 15 November 2026.

Registration is free. Selected papers may be invited for publication in an edited volume or journal special issue.

FUNDING:
Funded by the European Union (ERC, FILM AND DEATH, 101088956). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Reference:
CFP: The Life of Images: Death, Materiality and Animist Cinema (Lisbon, 11-13 Feb 27). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 14, 2026 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54578>.