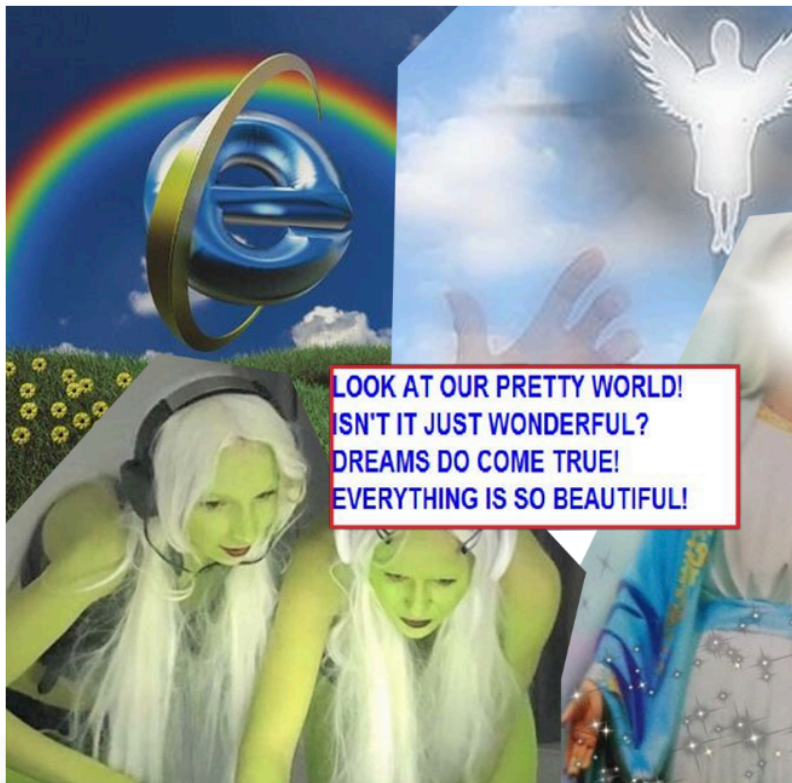


# *Digital Remains: Techno Spiritualism, AI Seances and The Evolution of Mourning in the Virtual Age*

Words: Isabella Greenwood



The boundaries between life and death, once firmly delineated by spiritual and religious beliefs, are now increasingly blurred by digital technologies. AI-driven algorithms, virtual reality environments, ghost-hunting apps and even the way our technological devices store our data, create deeper ontological and epistemological changes, reshaping how we conceptualise death, the afterlife, and our connection to the unseen.

The world of AI-driven séances, with apps like Seance AI or Replica, use chat GPT to mimic the voices, personas or even bodies with holographic simulations, of deceased individuals to simulate interactions with the dead. While intended as a sentimental offering, even the curation of the deceased's speech to fit contemporary needs and desires, complicates notions of grief, memory, and authenticity underscoring the tension between genuine mourning. In 2020, Kanye West famously gave Kim Kardashian a hologram of her late father, Robert Kardashian, exemplifying not only the unsettling power of digital resurrection but raising several ethical dilemmas about the nature of sentience, existence and death – it becomes unclear who the hologram is, if it is Kanye West's countertransference, the spirit of the late Rob Kardashain or someone else entirely.

Such technological interventions blur the line between reverence and appropriation, inviting reflection on whether these virtual reincarnations offer meaningful engagement with the past or a commodified simulation of closure. This spectacle of "bringing back" the dead through digital means forces a reconsideration of how far technology should go in mediating our most intimate and existential experiences.

Other forms of digital mediation are also changing the way we mourn. AI-generated filters or apps like *Capcut*, offer an AI-generation of two figures embracing: used in viral videos where users "embrace" images of their deceased grandparent.

This all points to a broader trend in which AI-driven technologies are allowing users to maintain ongoing, albeit virtual, relationships with lost loved ones. Apps like HereAfter use machine learning to allow the living to interact with digitised versions of the dead, who respond based on pre-recorded interviews and digital data. These practices reframe mourning, turning it from a finite process into a continuous one that is endlessly extended through digital interaction. Yet though they might offer respite, the lines between genuine connection, or spirit communication, with simulation produced by data becomes complex.

At the heart of these digital spirit communication practices lies the algorithm, which undoubtedly affects our relationship with the past. Exemplified by social media posts that resurface old memories - prompting users with notifications such as "This day three years ago" - triggering emotional responses. What might seem like a benign feature can induce unexpected grief, as these algorithmic reminders collapse the temporal distance between past and present, reminding us that the dead exist in a perpetual state of digital afterlife.

The phenomenon of digital mourning has become part of the broader cultural landscape, as people interact with the profiles of deceased loved ones online platforms. Social media accounts

that remain active after their users' deaths serve as digital memorials, allowing friends and family to continue leaving comments, or interact with a virtual trace of the deceased. This form of mourning, though deeply personal, is technically mediated by technological systems that dictate how and when these traces resurface. The algorithms do not simply store memories; they manage them, often without human intent: As death becomes data, the dead live on in the cloud, raising important questions about the ethics of digital afterlife management.



*Pas pu saisir la mort*  
de Sophie Calle

*Pas Pu Saisir la Mort 2007*  
("El último aliento, imposible de capturar")  
Video DVD 13'

[Left: Max King, Right: Sophie Calle]

*“These practices reframe mourning,*



*turning it from a finite process into a continuous one that is endlessly extended through digital interaction.”*

This shift reveals a deeper structural transformation in our relationship to death itself. No longer confined to the physical rituals of burial or memorialisation, death is now subject to algorithmic curation and circulation within networked systems. Artists grappling with death’s place within the oddities of the technological ether include [Max King](#) whose work *Votive Watching* features a screen playing out the least funeral services online, using a raspberry Pi programme. Or [Sophie Calle](#) who looped her mothers final moments in *Couldn’t Capture Death*.

As the traces of the deceased are resurfaced in new contexts, mourning becomes a perpetual process embedded within the logic platforms. Works like King’s and Calle’s call to the notion that within the digital ether, mourning becomes a perpetual and public rite. The dead, transformed into data points, become part of the attention economy within digital capitalism, and thus boundaries between mourning and the market-driven logic become easily transgressed. Digital afterlife management necessitates new ethical considerations around autonomy, consent, and the ownership of one’s posthumous digital identity in an era where human mortality is increasingly entangled with the persistence of data.

The rise of digital meditations of the dead raises significant ontological and epistemological concerns: As spiritual experiences are increasingly mediated through technological interfaces,

the nature of communication with the deceased itself is altered. In traditional spiritualist practices, communication with the dead was often seen as a metaphysical encounter, one that transcended the physical realm and defied scientific explanation. However, as digital technologies increasingly claim to mediate these experiences, they render the metaphysical into something measurable, data-driven, and reproducible. What was once considered the realm of mystery is now being translated into algorithms and code.

By framing death as data, techno-spiritualism reframes the afterlife as something that can be accessed, catalogued, and analysed - an archive of the dead rather than an unknowable metaphysical state. Similarly, the concept of [hauntology](#) — the idea that the past continues to haunt the present through spectral traces — becomes a fitting framework for understanding these digital afterlives. The dead, in this context, are not truly gone; they linger in the background of our digital networks, haunting us through data.

As technologies evolve, they force us to reconsider what it means to mourn, to communicate with the afterlife, and to confront death itself. Techno-spiritualism is not merely a trend; it is a profound reconfiguration of our cultural imaginaries surrounding passing, pointing to a future where death becomes data, and the boundaries between life and the afterlife become ever more fluid.

