

# **CAN ROBOTS DIE?**

## **Possibilities and Limitations of Animism in Human-Machine Relationships**

**09 December 2022 | 13:00-17:30 (Paris Time)**

**Online**

**EHESS 54, Boulevard Raspail 75006 PARIS**

**Registration : <https://forms.gle/akJ2wqurR5DnWytj6>**

**Contact: [events\\_ffj@ehess.fr](mailto:events_ffj@ehess.fr)**

Can robots die? The common-sense answer is that only things that were once alive can be called dead. But if the distinction life/non-life is binary, then machines have a similar binary opposition between 'on' and 'off' states. The aim of this workshop is to approach the question of the death of the robot/machine/object pragmatically; that is, by foregrounding ethnographic and phenomenological perspectives over conceptual and theoretical concerns.

Questions about animism usually revolve around beliefs, concepts of life and how a sense of aliveness is nurtured. But in everyday life, we often act as if machines and robots do have agency, intentionality, consciousness or other indicators of 'being alive', not in a consistent but in an ad-hoc manner. Furthermore, as Denis Vidal (2007) has shown in his work on "sub-anthropomorphism", the threshold of meaningful interaction with a non-human entity may not be based on any discernible human quality at all. A meaningful distinction could thus be made between 'behavioural animism', the acting as-if something does have a life or personhood, and 'ideological animism', an elaborated system or cosmology in which inanimate objects are considered to be alive. The discipline of social robotics, especially as it has been developed in Japan, has provided a methodological framework to ask such questions pertaining to animism of a broader range of objects/contexts, specifically those beyond the strictly controlled environment of the laboratory. By focussing on the question of death rather than life, I hope that we can access the problem of life in a recursive manner.

# Programme

## **13:00 | Opening Remarks**

Sébastien Lechevalier (EHESS-FFJ)

## **13:10 | Introduction: Can robots die?**

Fabio Gygi (FJJ-Air Liquide Fellow, University of London)

## **Session 1 (FRENCH)**

### **13:30 | On achève bien les persos : La mort des partenaires numériques au Japon**

Agnès Giard (Paris-Nanterre University)

### **14:15 | Qui peut mourir?**

Paul Dumouchel (Ritsumeikan University)

*Break*

## **Session 2 (ENGLISH)**

### **15:30 | Human-like remains and their animation**

Joffrey Becker (Collège de France)

### **16:15 | Animate to kill? Some thoughts on the paradoxes of life/death in social robotics**

Fabio Gygi (FJJ-Air Liquide Fellow, University of London)

### **17:00 | Final Comments and Roundtable**

Denis Vidal (IRD, EHESS)

## **Participants** (alphabetical order)

**Joffrey Becker (Collège de France)**

**Paul Dumouchel (Ritsumeikan University)**

**Agnès Giard (Paris-Nanterre University)**

**Fabio Gygi (FJJ-Air Liquide Fellow, University of London)**

**Sébastien Lechevalier (EHESS-FFJ)**

**Denis Vidal (IRD, EHESS)**