

Reflection Article/Essay

# Symbolic gestures in extraordinary everyday life: on ritual grief

*Gestualidades simbólicas no cotidiano extraordinário: sobre experiências rituais nas perdas e lutos*

Lucidalva Costa de Freitas<sup>a</sup> , Paulo Roberto Nassar de Oliveira<sup>b</sup> ,  
Victor Augusto Cavaleiro Corrêa<sup>c</sup> , Maria Helena Morgani de Almeida<sup>d</sup> ,  
Marina Picazzio Perez Batista<sup>b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Hospital das Clínicas, Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade de São Paulo – USP, São Paulo, SP, Brasil.

<sup>b</sup>Universidade de São Paulo – USP, São Paulo, SP, Brasil.

<sup>c</sup>Faculdade de Fisioterapia e Terapia Ocupacional, Universidade Federal do Pará – UFPA, Belém, PA, Brasil.

<sup>d</sup>Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade de São Paulo – USP, São Paulo, SP, Brasil.

**Como citar:** Freitas, L. C., Nassar de Oliveira, P. R., Corrêa, V. A. C., Almeida, M. H. M., & Batista, M. P. P. (2026). Symbolic gestures in extraordinary everyday life: on ritual grief. *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional*, 34, e4083. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2526-8910.cto415440832>

## Abstract

Ritual manifestations are configured as age-old devices of memory, as they concentrate narratives and modes of transmission that sustain both the act and the effect of ritualization since their ancestral origins. This text proposes a reflection on the relevance and urgency of instituting symbolic gesturalities when significant losses and grief occur. Recognizing the multidimensionality of rites and giving visibility to their functions, compositions, symbolisms, dimensions, and perspectives was the path chosen to pursue this aim. Ritual experiences are configured as eminently heterogeneous human activities. On the one hand, they appear in their general configuration, as constituents of everyday life and as expressions of meaningful human doing. On the other hand, they acquire a singular dimension when they are associated with the complexity of human grief in its various forms, resulting from ruptures already under way or imminent, in which ritualization assumes specific characteristics and developments. Given the plurality of human experiences that require gestures with symbolizing value, it becomes necessary to make explicit the concepts that support this reflection, constructed considering particular rites, funeral rituals, and liminal rites. From this perspective, the notion of *poiesis* stands out as an intervention support, since it makes it possible to understand the creation and production of rituality as inventive gestures. From this perspective, occupational therapy is invited to reflect on ways to institute ritual *poiesis* as a constitutive dimension of its intervention process.

**Keywords:** Ceremonial Behavior, Bereavement, Activities of Daily Living, Life Change Events, Symbolism.

Received on Apr. 1, 2025; 1<sup>st</sup> Revision on Sept. 8, 2025; Accepted on Nov. 10, 2025.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

### Resumo

As manifestações rituais configuram-se como dispositivos milenares da memória, pois concentram narrativas e modos de transmissão que sustentam tanto o ato quanto o efeito da ritualização desde seus marcos ancestrais. Neste texto, propõe-se refletir acerca da relevância e da urgência de instaurar gestualidades simbólicas diante de perdas significativas e processos de luto. Ao reconhecer a multidimensionalidade dos ritos e conferir visibilidade às suas funções, composições, simbolismos, dimensões e perspectivas, buscou-se alcançar esse propósito. As experiências rituais configuram-se como atividades humanas eminentemente heterogêneas, seja em sua conjuntura genérica, enquanto constituintes da vida cotidiana e expressas no fazer humano dotado de sentido, seja em sua singularidade, quando associadas à complexidade do sofrimento humano de distintas naturezas, resultante de rupturas já em curso ou daquelas em iminência, nas quais a ritualização assume características e desdobramentos específicos. Diante da pluralidade das experiências humanas que demandam gestos com valor simbolizante, torna-se necessário explicitar as concepções que fundamentam esta reflexão, construída à luz dos ritos piaculares, dos rituais fúnebres e dos ritos liminares. Nessa perspectiva, destaca-se a noção de *poiesis* como suporte interventivo, pois possibilita compreender a criação e a produção da ritualidade como gestos inventivos. Sob esse horizonte, considera-se que a terapia ocupacional possa refletir sobre modos de instaurar *poiesis* rituais como dimensão constitutiva de seu processo interventivo.

**Palavras-chave:** Rituais, Luto, Atividades Cotidianas, Acontecimentos que Mudam a Vida, Simbolismo.

## Initial Interweavings on Ritual Experiences

This text addresses the relevance and urgency of instituting symbolic gesturalities when significant losses and grief occur. The interface between losses, grief, and ritualities forms an interdisciplinary weave that requires bringing the theme to the forefront, recognizing its singularities, releasing it from the paralysis imposed by the stereotype of saturation, and then restoring its intelligibility and reinscribing it in social legibility.

Didi-Huberman (2018) defines legibility as the production of new relations, an openness to assemblages of possibilities, the emergence of critical images, and modes of existence in the symbolic field.

The articulation of different bodies of knowledge helps clarify the multiple layers of ritual experiences, interwoven through functions, compositions, and symbolisms. It is pertinent to approach ritual experiences through an expanded framework in which more permeable boundaries allow access to their dimensions and perspectives (Bell, 1997) and support understanding them as heterogeneous human activities. These activities are general, as they are part of everyday life, yet they become particular amid the complexity of human grief caused by real ruptures or imminent threats, when ritualization unfolds in singular ways.

Ritualistic behavior, permeated by symbolisms, is constitutive of the human condition and operates as a mechanism for transmuting the ordinary into the extraordinary (Douglas, 2012; Bell, 1997; Segalen, 2002; Van Gennep, 2014; Turner, 1974). It integrates the repertoire of ritual experience, manifesting itself through symbolic choices that involve clothing, scents, colors, significant people, times and places, spaces of remembrance, and communicative gestures.

According to Didi-Huberman (2018), emotion plays a central role in ritual experience; it catalyzes meanings and transforms practices into experiences endowed with symbolic density and communicative potency.

The rite can be understood as a narrative through which an act acquires singular meaning for individuals or collectivities, enabling participation in collective memory through the persistence of gestures and symbolic actions (Douglas, 2021). Its potency stems from the nature of the ritual, its ties to specific temporalities and spatialities, and to memory built both individually and collectively. Ritual perception implies recognizing functions, subjects, material and immaterial elements, languages, gesturalities, meanings, values, and the need for repetition within the context of reference (Han, 2021), constituting an intergenerational process of creating and transmitting complex information (Assmann, 2011).

Ritual manifestations constitute devices of memory that, since their ancestral foundations, combine personal, collective, and institutional dimensions by concentrating narratives and modes of transmission (Durkheim, 2020; Kellehear, 2016; Douglas, 2012; Bayard, 1996; Van Gennep, 2014; Turner, 1974). For this reason, they remain central in cultural anthropology and in contemporary analyses, revealing responses to current demands (Assmann, 2011; Segalen, 2002). Thus, the rite acts as a temporal marker of meaningful doing, prolonging the presence of the past through intergenerational practices that ensure motivation, cohesion, and continuity (Assmann, 2011).

Ritualization, however, is traversed by power relations that structure the social fabric and condition the meaning of everyday practices (Certeau, 2012), which can pose a risk for bereaved people when ritual experience is delegitimized (Casellato, 2020). The rite, as a social fact that constitutes society, acquires collective significance (Durkheim, 2020) and, depending on the historical moment, may include or exclude different subjects and collectivities (Douglas, 2021).

The multidimensional nature of the rite implies that it is traversed by forces that maintain, transform, recreate, or extinguish it. Certain rites may disappear when they lose their primordial function or when confronted with emergent paradigms (Segalen, 2002; Bell, 1997), whereas others arise as new forms of ritual inscription.

The attribution of meaning to symbolic representations derives from the human capacity to recognize elements as bearers of value. Thus, metaphors, gestures, languages, objects, or ceremonies acquire meaning when socioculturally legitimized (Douglas, 2012; Assmann, 2011). Reiterated in ritual practices, symbols become existential, relational, and collective markers (Van Gennep, 2014; Turner, 1974).

Ordinary objects also assume ritual value, configuring what Eliade (1957) termed hierophany. Thus, flowers accompany birth, marriage, and death (Segalen, 2002); rings consecrate academic achievements, affective bonds, or intergenerational memories (Assmann, 2011); badges symbolize institutional belonging or the rupture of bonds, and they may also become memorial relics (Douglas, 2012); candles illuminate vigils and demonstrations, and garments encode mourning in varied ways across cultures (Segalen, 2002). Social time is ritualized in biographical passages, such as the first day of work or retirement (Turner, 1974). Spaces also acquire sacrality or memorial value: homes, schools, temples, cemeteries, and memorials (Douglas, 2021; Assmann, 2011). More recently, the digital sphere has emerged as both an extension of and a substitute for in-person farewells, reconfiguring rituals and articulating presence, absence, and memory on a global scale (Freitas et al., 2025; Assmann, 2011).

Time, social space, and digital space have become inseparable dimensions of ritualization, as symbolic categories that organize experiences and produce meanings, thus revealing the plasticity of rituals when confronted with cultural and technological transformations (Segalen, 2002). Thus, ritualization can be understood as a structuring language of continuity, intergenerational transmission, and transformation (Van Gennep, 2014; Turner, 1974; Assmann, 2011).

The rite is not a hermetic device; rather, it is permeated by multiple social, historical, cultural, religious, economic, and technological dimensions (Bell, 1997; Douglas, 2021; Freitas et al., 2025). Therefore, it cannot be reduced to canonical formulations and must be analyzed in its variations and specific functions (Segalen, 2002). Symbolic gesturalities, accordingly, must be interpreted in their polyvalent configuration.

In Durkheim's (2020) perspective, the general functions of ritual manifestations, understood as ritual efficacy, can be observed in how they mobilize the collectivity around a shared time distinct from routine, reinforcing belonging, consolidating identities, and promoting social cohesion (Segalen, 2002; Durkheim, 2020; Eliade, 1957; Turner, 1974; Han, 2021). Ritual efficacy manifests on different planes: in identity, by preserving collective memories and connecting present and past (Han, 2021); in temporality, by suspending or reinscribing routine (Segalen, 2002); in signification, by conferring intelligibility on human experiences (Douglas, 2021); in sacrality, by anchoring sacred events or desacralizing them (Eliade, 1957); and in passages, by demarcating life cycles (Van Gennep, 2014).

Ritual efficacy depends, however, on collective recognition: the rite is fully realized only when believed in and legitimized, instituting bonds among individuals, communities, and generations, whether in physical assemblies or in digital memorials (Segalen, 2002).

Its multifunctional character responds to the plurality of occurrences, morphological diversity (Van Gennep, 2014), and contextual variations (Douglas, 2021; Bell, 1997). As they gain symbolic meanings, ordinary activities become extraordinary, instituting singular space-times, hierophanies (Eliade, 1957) that transfigure common gestures into symbols of faith, memory, or resistance.

In the organizational field, uniforms and badges transcend their practical function, symbolizing belonging and legitimacy (Douglas, 2021; Turner, 1974), whereas standardized T-shirts at events or white lab coats in health institutions institute *communitas* and social cohesion. In contemporary life, posting texts or images in virtual environments turns banal gestures into memorial inscriptions (Segalen, 2002).

Eating becomes a rite when it is associated with commemorative dates, festivities, and ceremonies; resuming the consumption of certain foods after deprivation acquires symbolic value, and comfort diets in palliative care constitute affective rites of memory and bonding.

Thus, rituals institute memorable times and spaces (Eliade, 1957), configure places of belonging (Bachelard, 1979), transfigure banal practices into gestures of symbolization (Certeau, 2012), and reveal forms of sacrality that extend beyond the religious domain (Eliade, 1957). Time, space, and ritual gesture produce meanings, institute continuity, and ensure intergenerational transmission.

## **The Extraordinary Everyday Life and Ritual Typologies in Significant Losses and Grief**

Several meaningful human experiences require symbolic gesturalities, which can be grouped as piacular rites (Durkheim, 2020), funeral rituals (Van Gennep, 2014; Bayard, 1996), and liminal rites (Turner, 1974; Van Gennep, 2014). The delimitation of these ritual typologies has cultural and historical roots (Segalen, 2002), enabling an understanding of dying in the present as a composition that amalgamates characteristics inherited from past traditions. This is a hybrid configuration that brings together urban, rural, and prehistoric behaviors shaped by economic, political, and public health factors imposed by contemporaneity.

These factors decisively affect human customs and the personal and collective ways of positioning oneself when confronted with death, composing what Kellehear (2016) calls the social history of dying. Consequently, rituality is positioned as a symbolic response to this common destiny (Kellehear, 2016; Bayard, 1996) and as a mediation in grief processes (Casellato, 2020; Franco, 2021; Parkes, 2009).

The concept of piacular rites stems from the ritual classification proposed by Durkheim (2020), which organizes social time around the categories of the sacred and the profane. Although distinct, these ritual genres are oriented toward a common end: the strengthening of social bonds. According to Durkheim (2020), cults can be negative or taboo, comprising rites of avoidance whose function is to mediate symbolically the boundaries between the sacred and the profane; positive cults, linked to festive rites; and, finally, expiatory or piacular rites, associated with states of grief and anguish, within which mourning rites are situated. These mediate symbolically by gathering expressions of pain and grief and communicating them socially.

Grief emerges as an effect of ruptured bonds that once structured the bereaved person's life (Franco, 2021), instituting the need for symbolizations that operate as structures of liminality in this dynamic, continuous, and transformative process of adjusting to life without the other (Casellato, 2020). However, rituality cannot always be performed, because certain social circumstances delegitimize specific experiences of loss and prevent the recognition of some grief processes (Casellato, 2020). Certeau (2012) notes that death occupies another place, often silenced; however, it is the only intransmissible social experience. It is an experience that is singularly inexorable yet collectively symbolized (DaMatta, 1997).

Durkheim (2020) provides examples of conditions, contexts, and circumstances that trigger expiation, such as epidemics, similar to the COVID-19 pandemic experienced globally, threatening environmental situations, such as extreme natural disasters, armed conflicts and wars, and contexts of illness and grief. It should be noted that both ritual scarcity and ritual excess can constitute piacular scenarios. The absence of ritual is identified as a social risk factor, but excess, including festive rites, can also be problematic, since social times must be organized through rhythmic alternation. Life requires oscillation between rites of ordinary and extraordinary everyday life, inscribed in social times and spaces, in objects, and in ordinary garments.

In this sense, DaMatta (1997) states that distinguishing ritual activities and practices of the home, the street, and the other world helps organize life at both the personal and collective levels, revealing that different spheres of social experience are ritually demarcated and symbolically structured.

Ritual practice aimed at circumscribing the end of piacular situations also proves essential, symbolizing the closure of cycles to maintain social cohesion (Durkheim, 2020). This practice manifests, for example, when, in the occurrence of death or in validating ruptures of bonds (Casellato, 2020), a death certificate is issued to relatives of missing persons, as a symbolic gesture of closure and legitimation of the loss.

In this regard, the systematic framework of rites of passage is invoked (Van Gennep, 2014), particularly funeral rites, which are inscribed in the function of simultaneously demarcating the passage for the dead and for the bereaved. Thus, the funeral ritual is not limited to attesting biological finitude but acts as a symbolic device of transition and reorganization of the social bond, ensuring that the rupture is symbolically recognized and incorporated by the collectivity.

Van Gennep (2014) systematizes these rites by relating them to the varied situations and contexts that run through the life cycle, from cradle to grave, and considers both the stages of individual life and the social relations that shape it. This author includes going and coming, being and ceasing to be in material and immaterial terms, experiences of gain and loss, migratory processes, and other existential transitions, all understood as passages that require symbolization. This framework organizes rites of passage into three phases: rites of separation, margin or liminal rites, and rites of aggregation.

Van Gennep (2014) observes that the function and extent of these phases can vary according to the type of rite, and may even acquire relative autonomy, as occurs in cases of pregnancy, engagements, the traveler's rites, or the period between departure and return.

Within this framework, Van Gennep (2014) stresses that funeral rites tend to be read predominantly as rites of separation. However, it is also necessary to recognize these rites as rites of margin and aggregation. They are rites of aggregation insofar as they fulfill the function of symbolically integrating the dead into the world of the dead (Van Gennep, 2014; Bayard, 1996), as occurs in cases of cremation, burial, or interment; and rites of margin insofar as they place participants in a liminal state, in which the dead no longer belongs to the world of the living but has not yet been definitively aggregated into the world of the dead, which can be exemplified by the wake (Freitas et al., 2025).

It is important to emphasize that funeral rites are not restricted to the treatment of the body for sanitary reasons, but fulfill functions of symbolic, social, and psychological relevance for the bereaved, acting as fundamental practices of mediation when confronted with loss (Freitas et al., 2025).

Grief takes on a dual nature in funeral ceremonies and may present itself as both as a rite of separation and a rite of margin (Van Gennep, 2014). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, such ceremonies were prohibited because of the biosecurity, which deeply affected the experience of grief and highlighted the relevance of the functions of this ritual group (Freitas et al., 2025). The multiple losses, deprivations, and prohibitions characteristic of the pandemic context instituted a state of liminality, understood by Turner (1974) and Van Gennep (2014) as especially dangerous because of its disorganizing and amorphous character.

Rituality at the end of life is understood as a humanizing practice (Bayard, 1996), since it avoids reducing death to a strictly biological paradigm (Kellehear, 2016), a condition that fails to encompass the biography, affective memories, and relationships lived with the deceased person. The historical perspective shows that the meaning and experience of dying, as well as the relationship with the dead, with death, with grief, and with funeral rituals, constitute distinct, interdependent, and socially relevant dimensions

(Kellehear, 2016). These aspects are renewed in the process of assigning meaning to the lived experience of the funeral ritual (Bayard, 1996; Van Gennep, 2014), since these experiences require symbolisms to be lived authentically and be culturally recognized (Douglas, 2021).

This is one of the reasons that justify why both ritual scarcity and ritual excess can be dangerous in instituting a piacular context. By creating an extraordinary time-space within the ordinariness of everyday life, the rite functions as a device of balance; when it is impeded, it triggers scenarios of social disorder, what Turner (1974) calls ritual anti-structure, which institutes a state of liminality marked by the loss of reference points.

The COVID-19 pandemic instituted a simultaneously piacular and liminal scenario, marked by the need for mass funeral rituals under conditions of impediment and by the re-inscription of new rites to meet this demand. In addition, other ritual typologies related to the closure of cycles not linked to the end of life were rendered unviable, such as those that Han (2021) calls rites of conclusion.

In this context, the rhythmic alternation of social time was disrupted: the ordinariness of everyday life was abruptly interrupted and, paradoxically, a scarcity of traditional ritual markers, both festive and funerary, took hold, while the demand for extraordinary ritual emerged across all dimensions of personal and collective life.

This circumstance, characterized by the absence of rites according to cultural customs and by the lack of temporal reference for the end of the pandemic condition, constituted a state of permanent indeterminacy. The impossibility of experiencing the extraordinary in a meaningful way, or the imposition of disparate and fragmented ritual manifestations, intensified states of grief during the COVID-19 pandemic. It can thus be inferred that the pandemic period simultaneously affected the practice of traditional rituals and the efficacy of their symbolic, individual, and collective functions.

From this perspective, the pandemic, like other large-scale phenomena such as armed conflicts, wars, and forced migratory processes, or even smaller-scale events such as unemployment and the impossibility of realizing festive rites, helps clarify the scope of the concept of liminality. Durkheim (2020) points out that mourning rites are not restricted to funeral rituals but also encompass situations such as the imminence of death and the relationship with the dead immediately after death, both configured as symbolic markers of grief.

In this regard, as Segalen (2002) notes, although the nature of this ritual typology is associated with sadness, its function is to restore confidence in life, so that the absence or weakening of these rites constitutes a threat to the collectivity by compromising the capacity for shared symbolization.

## **Final Interweavings: Instituting Interventions Shaped by Ritual Poiesis**

It is worth noting that the institution of ritual practices responds to the fact that the rite is not a pre-existing condition, but a space-time to be built, resulting from an active process that initially entails recognizing complex situations of loss and bereavement as triggers of pain and grief. The notion of poiesis, as an interventive support, helps clarify that ritual is grounded in inventive gestures, in which creation and symbolic production are articulated as a human response to the need to confer meaning on experience. These inventive gestures are polyvalent in function and may simultaneously mark the singularity of the event, make grief visible, strengthen bonds, organize everyday life, and foster resistance and agency.

Douglas (2012) emphasizes the inseparable relation between the rite and the human creative disposition, noting that, even when a given ritual form is suppressed, it tends to reemerge under another morphology because of the need for social interaction. The rite, therefore, entails an inventive act endowed with meaning, evidencing the human need to resort to symbolizing action as a justification and support for continued existence. In this context, ritualities mediated by digital media exemplify inventive potency in contemporary life, revealing how virtuality reshapes everyday life and reconfigures modes of presence and symbolization (Freitas et al., 2025).

However, some authors indicate that ritual processes may disappear because of the topography of the present (Han, 2021; Eliade, 1957), marked by the prevalence of technicist action at the expense of symbolizing experience (Han, 2021), which could result in an emptying of meaning in ritual action. In contrast, Segalen (2002) argues that the conception of ritual as a fixed, repetitive practice, merely ancestral, or restricted to the religious sphere must be demystified because of its plasticity, variability, and polysemy, which keep rituals as living and present practices in modern society.

Segalen (2002) adds that reference to tradition sustains, in different ways, the modernity of ritual manifestations, and that these may undergo morphological variations within the same period or across different periods, evidencing their mutability and sociological nature. Because of these broad characteristics, rites assume an ambiguous character, since they may present in diverse forms depending on sociohistorical circumstances and contexts. Nevertheless, the primordial action that characterizes them, in relation to the specific effects they seek to achieve, endures and defines them as potentially plastic practices (Segalen, 2002).

For a rite to be singular and meaningful for the subject, it must be built, communicated, and legitimized. This prompts reflection: *how can one ensure that a rite is singular and meaningful in relation to a significant loss? How should one act when confronted with an event that triggers external ruptures? How should one intervene in situations of vulnerability that challenge ritual construction?* In these situations, the professional or the support network should mediate the experience, recognizing that multiple modes of expression may emerge simultaneously and that understanding the rite also manifests in the subtleties of lived experience.

One cannot speak of rite without referring to communication in its most elementary sense, as it involves the relation with the other, a play of power, and the negotiation of meanings. Since the rite is a narrative and ritual is part of a communicational process, both have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Forms of saying farewell are potentially infinite, so that, in hospital contexts, even when ritual space tends to be previously delimited, choices of symbolic places outside that environment may occur according to the subjective and collective needs of the moment.

From this perspective, occupational therapy finds in assertive communication a privileged resource to recognize which acts must be lived and which meanings emerge for each person or collectivity. This process can be expressed directly or revealed in the subtext of a dialogical relation sustained by active listening, empathy, and care, promoting mediations attuned to the singularities of the context.

Galheigo (2003, 2017) reinforces that everyday life is traversed by power relations and social inequalities, requiring a critical stance from the occupational therapist, capable of recognizing oppressions and emerging potentialities. Thus, everyday life ceases to be an uncritical reproduction and becomes a territory of invention and emancipation.

The critical and complex perspective of Latin American occupational therapy broadens the analytical scope by placing activity and everyday life in dialogue with diversity, social justice, and ethical-political commitment, calling professional practice to assume itself as a situated intervention, capable of tensioning inequalities, promoting equity, and instituting new modes of existence (Galheigo et al., 2024). In the same vein, Galheigo (2023) states that critical thought, inaugurated in the late 1970s, evolved based on a solid theoretical framework, interdisciplinary in nature and oriented by ethical-political commitments.

In this historical and conceptual trajectory, ritual poiesis revisits core categories of occupational therapy, challenging them in view of the demands imposed by losses and grief. Its potency lies in the creation of inventive and multidimensional gestures and in their legibility (Didi-Huberman, 2018), that is, in the possibility of making grief visible and intelligible, retrieving it from opacity and reinscribing it in singular and collective narratives. In addition, rituality can be understood as a central marker of sociocultural contexts, materializing forms of symbolic organization of life and evidencing both historical inheritances and contemporary inventions that traverse individual and collective practices. In socially vulnerable contexts, by creating ritual times and spaces, the occupational therapist can sustain care practices that restore bonds, foster belonging, and institute horizons of meaning when confronted with experiences of rupture.

Understanding ritualization as a multidimensional process enables the occupational therapist to intervene in a way that respects the subjective meanings attributed to symbolic gesturalities and, at the same time, to facilitate negotiation processes when these meanings clash with power relations or with collective meaning. The central question that emerges for occupational therapy, how to mark this painful stage of life in a way that is meaningful for the subject, requires acknowledging its untransferable nature, while acting as a mediator in creating or recreating ritual poiesis, supporting individuals and groups in instituting symbolic practices that foster reorganization, belonging, and care.

Broadening the lens through this essay allows ritual experiences to be understood as human activities within the domain of symbolic gesturalities. Such activities can modify ordinary everyday life or transform it into the extraordinary, and this passage may arise from planning, expectations, or unforeseen events that erupt abruptly. This interchange between everyday lives has the potential to alter relational dynamics, reorganize institutional processes, validate or delegitimize social roles, and mark initiations or the closure of cycles.

The movement of symbolizing is commonly observed in festive, joyful, and fulfilling experiences. However, it is equally necessary in circumstances in which actively reclaiming symbolic gesturalities in everyday life becomes fundamental, especially when confronted with significant losses and grief. Bodies marked by significant ruptures, such as losses, accidents, or illnesses, present vulnerabilities that require prolonged care. In liminal contexts, subjects with functional sequelae or reconfigured routines find in ritualities instruments of symbolic mediation capable of reorganizing everyday life, conferring meaning on experience, strengthening bonds, and reinventing personal and collective dynamics.

In such contexts, everyday life acquires a new layer of meaning, marked by ritual experiences that reconfigure it. These are effervescent layers of signification, capable of producing different ways of seeing, living, and symbolizing.

In this way, occupational therapy, in dialogue with critical and reflective perspectives, builds a field that moves away from the uncritical reproduction of normative practices and invests in understanding everyday life as a space of dispute, creation, and emancipation (Galheigo, 2003, 2017, 2023; Galheigo et al., 2018, 2024).

Within this scenario, theoretical and conceptual contributions help reveal living conditions in contexts marked by structural inequalities and sociocultural vulnerabilities, proposing care and intervention practices grounded in participation, recognition of diversity, and social justice.

Everyday ritualities, understood as markers of sociocultural interweavings, prove fundamental in weaving times and spaces of signification, especially in territories of exclusion. The concept of the legibility of ritual poesis (Didi-Huberman, 2018) helps interpret how subjects and collectivities inscribe meanings in their practices, resignifying losses, grief, and violence, while also elaborating resistances and ways of inhabiting the world.

From this perspective, the rite can be understood as an organizer of collective living. In dialogue with Turner's (1974) notion of anti-structure, rituals may suspend hierarchies, or reveal their absence in contexts of vulnerability, thereby instituting experiences of communality and liminal spaces of social recomposition.

In such scenarios, the absence of ritual devices may aggravate the sense of disorganization and loss of reference points, intensifying grief.

Galheigo et al. (2024) argue that community occupational therapy, from a critical perspective, establishes historical and contemporary dialogues aimed at the construction and emancipation of collectivities. Occupational therapy practice consists in creating conditions under which rites can emerge as a possibility, fostering their construction, communication, and legitimacy. This involves supporting subjects and communities in the symbolic elaboration of experiences of rupture, reclaiming the inventive potency of rituality as a strategy for reorganizing everyday life, strengthening bonds, and reinventing collective life.

Ritual experiences, beyond religious or ancestral dimensions, traverse ways of life and community bonds, configuring themselves as spaces of memory, resistance, and recognition (Segalen, 2002; Galheigo, 2017; Galheigo et al., 2018). From this perspective, the rite organizes social dynamics, mobilizes collectivities, and strengthens ties, while occupational therapy acts as a mediator, sustaining ritual times and spaces that promote belonging, care, and emancipation.

Considering the interdisciplinarity that characterizes ritual manifestations and the dynamic nature of meaning attribution, constantly built and dismantled through human doing, it is understood that occupational therapy can reflect on ways to institute ritual poesis as part of its interventive process. To this end, the creation of inventive rituals constitutes a possibility for reorganizing everyday experiences, as well as a resource for care and resignification.

## References

- Assmann, A. (2011). *Espaços da recordação: formas e transformações da memória cultural*. Campinas: Editora da UNICAMP.
- Bachelard, G. (1979). *A poética do espaço*. São Paulo: Abril Cultural.
- Bayard, J. P. (1996). *Sentido oculto dos ritos mortuários: morrer é morrer?* São Paulo: Paulus.
- Bell, C. M. (1997). *Ritual: perspectives and dimensions*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195110517.001.0001>.

- Casellato, G. (2020). *Luto por perdas não legitimadas na atualidade*. São Paulo: Summus Editorial.
- Certeau, M. (2012). *A invenção do cotidiano: artes de fazer*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- DaMatta, R. (1997). *A casa e a rua: espaço, cidadania, mulher e morte no Brasil* (5th ed.). Rio de Janeiro: Rocco.
- Didi-Huberman, G. (2018). *Remontagens do tempo sofrido: o olho da história* (Vol. 2). Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG.
- Douglas, M. (2012). *Pureza e perigo*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Douglas, M. (2021). *Símbolos naturais: explorações em cosmologia*. São Paulo: Editora Unesp.
- Durkheim, É. (2020). *As formas elementares de vida religiosa: o sistema totêmico na Austrália*. São Paulo: Editora Edipro.
- Eliade, M. (1957). *O sagrado e o profano: a essência das religiões*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes
- Franco, M. H. P. (2021). *O luto no século 21: uma compreensão abrangente do fenômeno*. São Paulo: Summus Editorial.
- Freitas, L. C., Oliveira, P. R. N., Farias, L. A., Almeida, M. H. M., & Batista, M. P. P. (2025). *Prática de memorialização virtual no contexto da pandemia de COVID-19 no Brasil: rito do velório online*. Rio de Janeiro: Associação Brasileira de Saúde Coletiva. Recuperado em 1 de abril de 2025, de <https://cienciasaudecoletiva.com.br/artigos/pratica-de-memorializacao-virtual-no-contexto-da-pandemia-de-covid19-no-brasil-rito-do-velorio-online/19798>
- Galheigo, S. M. (2003). O cotidiano na terapia ocupacional: Cultura, política e história. *Revista de Terapia Ocupacional da Universidade de São Paulo*, 14(2), 49-56.
- Galheigo, S. M. (2017). Terapia ocupacional, cotidiano e a tessitura da vida: aportes teórico-conceituais para a construção de perspectivas críticas e emancipatórias. *Cadernos de Terapia Ocupacional da UFSCar*, 25(1), 19-30.
- Galheigo, S. M. (2023). Problematização de saberes e práticas na terapia ocupacional brasileira: a construção do pensamento crítico entre 1979 e 1996. *Revista de Terapia Ocupacional da Universidade de São Paulo*, 33(1-3), e215636. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2238-6149.v33i1-3e215636>.
- Galheigo, S. M., Braga, C. P., Arthur, M. A., & Matsuo, C. M. (2018). Produção de conhecimento, perspectivas e referências teórico-práticas na terapia ocupacional brasileira: marcos e tendências em uma linha do tempo. *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional*, 26(4), 723-738. <https://doi.org/10.4322/2526-8910.ctoAO1773>.
- Galheigo, S. M., Olive, F. C., & Almeida, M. C. (2024). La terapia ocupacional comunitaria desde una perspectiva crítica: diálogos históricos y contemporáneos hacia la construcción y emancipación de colectivos. In M. Satizabal Reyes, S. García Ruiz & M. Palacios Tolvett (Eds.), *Terapias ocupacionales latinoamericanas: praxis políticas y comunitarias*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universidad de Santiago de Chile.
- Han, B. C. (2021). *O desaparecimento dos rituais: uma topologia do presente*. São Paulo: Vozes.
- Kellehear, A. (2016). *Uma história social do morrer*. São Paulo: Editora Unesp.
- Parkes, C. M. (2009). *Amor e perda: as raízes do luto e suas complicações*. São Paulo: Summus Editorial.
- Segalen, M. (2002). *Ritos e rituais contemporâneos*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV.
- Turner, V. (1974). *O processo ritual: estrutura e antiestrutura* (Vol. 7). Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Van Gennep, A. V. (2014). *Os ritos de passagem*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

---

### Author's Contributions

Lucidalva Costa de Freitas was responsible for study design, data curation, research, methodology, writing of the original draft, participation in all stages of manuscript writing and its final revision. This essay forms part of her doctoral research. Victor Augusto Cavaleiro Corrêa

and Paulo Roberto Nassar de Oliveira were responsible for methodology, systematization, visualization and presentation of data, formal analysis, discussion and writing of the original draft, participation in all stages of manuscript writing and its final revision. Maria Helena Morgani de Almeida was responsible for data validation, writing and critical review of intellectual content, data presentation, participation in all stages of manuscript writing and its final revision. Marina Picazzio Perez Batista was responsible for design and formulation of research objectives, methodology, management, coordination, planning, execution, supervision of research activities, formal analysis, participation in editing and critical review at all stages of manuscript writing and its final revision. All authors approved the final version of the text.

#### **Data Availability**

The data supporting the results of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

#### **Corresponding author**

Lucidalva Costa de Freitas

e-mail: lucidalvafreitas@usp.br

#### **Section editor**

Profa. Dra. Maria Fernanda Barboza Cid