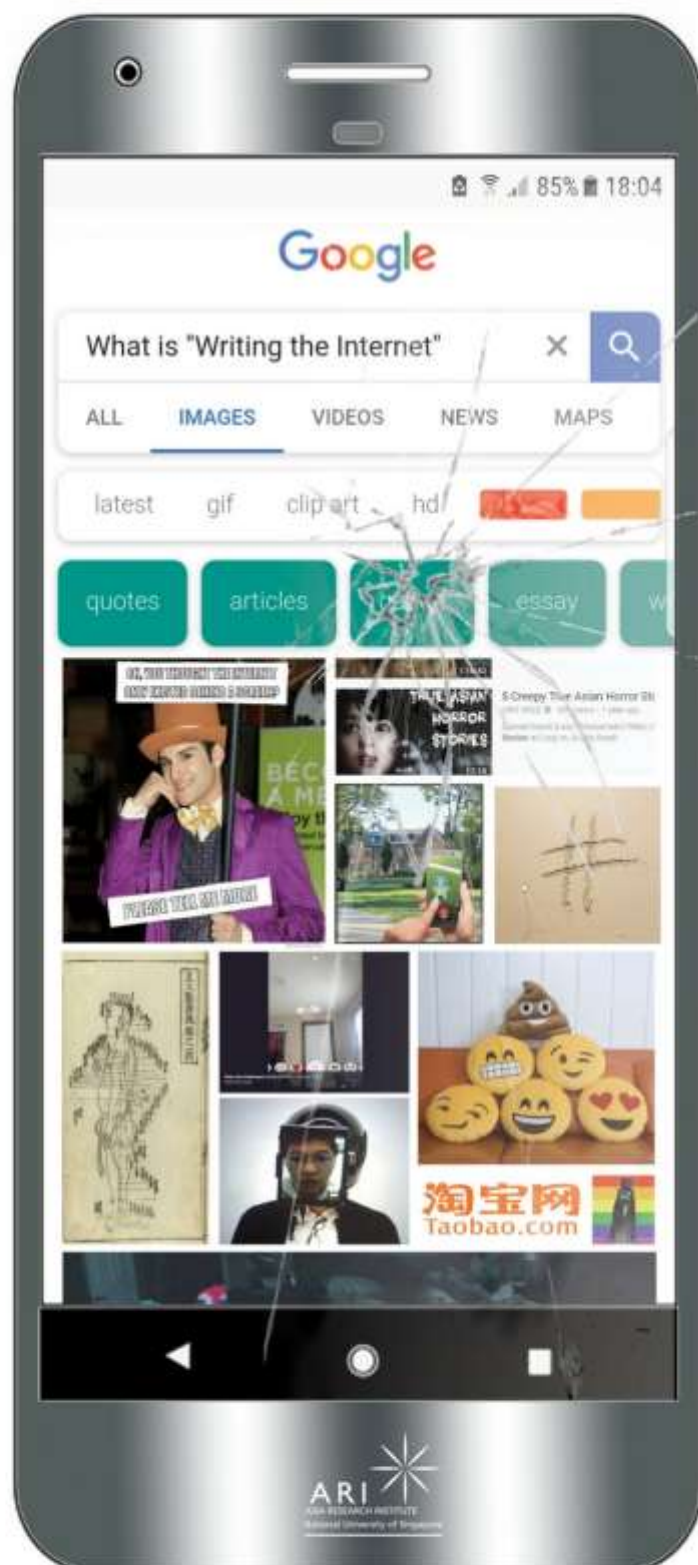


WRITING THE INTERNET: INTERNET LORE IN ASIA

ORGANISED BY
ASIA RESEARCH INSTITUTE,
SUPPORTED BY THE HUMANITIES
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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

8-9 MAR 2018

ARI SEMINAR ROOM
AS8 #04-04
10 KENT RIDGE CRESCENT
SINGAPORE 119260



[HTTPS://ARI.NUS.EDU.SG](https://ari.nus.edu.sg)

Organised by Asia Research Institute, supported by the Humanities and Social Sciences Seed Fund, National University of Singapore (NUS).

This workshop brings together scholars, artists, and storytellers to critique in Asia and globally what it means to *write* the Internet. This metaphor could be interpreted in at least the following ways:

1. What forms of writing make up the “front end” of the internet? How do different internet communities write themselves and their own histories, mythologies, and lore? How are stories remediated and reinvented online and what new forms of writing emerge through this process?
2. What forms of writing make up the “back end” of the internet? How do programming languages, algorithms, technological infrastructure, protocols, and so on, shape internet communities?
3. What does it mean for us, as scholars, to write the internet? What (new) methodologies are needed to do scholarship online and about the Internet? How should we communicate this scholarship to others, given new methods of hosting and sharing information?

We take “digital folklore” and “Internet lore” to be key analytical terms in answering these questions. The term “lore”, in the digital realm, is used to refer to a (quasi-) fantastical background created by a user(s) (often syncretic and compiled from extant or re-purposed legend) or the attempt to create a ‘real’ history (Krzywinska, 2008). Internet lore is often more traceable than other forms of lore, in that records and caches of origin stories may still exist on the web. At the same time, it may be explicitly acknowledged to be artificial and recently invented, and even embraced as such.

The workshop proposes to challenge three assumptions about Internet lore:

- i. That there is a single, global, monolingual (English) Internet that acts as a homogenizing technology, always, or mostly, eradicating difference;
- ii. That written work on the Internet merely transposes or digitizes offline genres rather than recreating written forms and creating new genres of writing; and
- iii. That the connections between writing and the Internet end at the user interface. That they do not extend, for example, into the languages underpinning websites or complex competitive algorithms and automated systems.

Workshop Convenors

Dr Eric Kerr, Asia Research Institute and Tembusu College, NUS

Dr Connor Graham, Asia Research Institute and Tembusu College, NUS

Exhibition

Co-curator | **Dr Eric Kerr**, Asia Research Institute and Tembusu College, NUS

Co-curator and Dramaturge | **Dr Nancy Mauro-Flude**, Department of Communications and New Media, NUS

Research Assistant and Cover Design

Aieshah Arif, Asia Research Institute and Tembusu College, NUS

WORKSHOP FORMAT

The workshop adopts an exploratory format with the dual aim of refining an agenda for research on internet lore, including key research topics and questions, and developing a network of researchers in internet studies in Singapore and globally. Panel presentations will be short 5-minute ‘provocations’ aimed at establishing a thematically open and intellectually focused framework.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SPEAKERS

Each speaker submits in advance a concise position or ‘provocation’ paper that presents or contextualizes a viewpoint in response to some aspect(s) of the workshop description above. The provocation papers are circulated in advance and will be used as a starting point for discussion. Speakers’ presentations will be approximately 5 minutes and should aim to identify and frame key questions or opportunities for discussion. All participants are expected to read all provocation papers in advance and to come prepared with questions, comments, and feedback. The primary purpose of this is to kickstart a more advanced discussion.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESPONDENTS

The task of respondents is to find connecting themes between papers and to articulate a few key questions, not necessarily related to individual papers or to all. Responses should be 5-10 minutes. Respondents will also act as chairs for the session.

THURSDAY, 8 MARCH 2018

09:30 – 09:45 REGISTRATION

09:45 – 10:00 WELCOME REMARKS AND INTRODUCTIONS (PROLOGUE)

GREG CLANCEY, National University of Singapore

ERIC KERR, National University of Singapore

CONNOR GRAHAM, National University of Singapore

10:00 – 10:45 EXPOSITION

Distraction and its Discontents: Social Media from Critique to Alternatives

GEERT LOVINK, Institute of Network Cultures, Netherlands

10:45 – 11:15 MORNING TEA

11:15 – 12:25 THREAD 1 | APPROACHES

Respondent SUN SUN LIM, Singapore University of Technology and Design

Once More around Digital Folklore (Through China)

GABRIELE DE SETA, Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Digital Tribes: Bovine Myths and Violence in India

MALINI SUR, Western Sydney University, Australia

Traveling Folklore and Ethnographic Intertextuality

JILLET SARAH SAM, Indian Institute of Technology – Kanpur

12:25 – 13:25 LUNCH + EXHIBITION VIEWING (TECHNO-IMAGINATIONS) +

FILM SCREENINGS OF *ROOM AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS* & *WHITE SONG*

13:25 – 14:35 THREAD 2 | INFRASTRUCTURE

Respondent ITTY ABRAHAM, National University of Singapore

Alternative Visions of Living Digitally

HALLAM STEVENS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Between Javanese and JavaScript: Writing Tradition into the Internet

MIGUEL ESCOBAR VARELA, National University of Singapore

Aerial's Cypher: Poetic-Speculative Storytelling, Software Collage, Wi-Fi Meshing and Hardware Assemblage

NANCY MAURO-FLUDE, National University of Singapore

14:35 – 14:50 AFTERNOON TEA

14:50 – 16:10 THREAD 3 | REAL-ISATIONS

Respondent JASON MORRIS-JUNG, Singapore University of Social Sciences

Writing History, Writing Future

YUK HUI, Leuphana University, Germany

To Affect, Be Affected and Affecting as an Ontology of Being on the Internet

CLARISSA LEE AI LING, Sunway University, Malaysia

Haw Par Villa: An Eidetic Prosthesis

OLIVIER PERRIQUET, Le Fresnoy, France

ERIC KERR, National University of Singapore

Supernaturalize Me: Of Fake Ghosts and Monsters... and How We Become Them Online

BRIONY KIDD, Playwright and Scriptwriter

16:10 – 17:40 FIRST WRITING FORUM

17:40 END OF DAY 1

FRIDAY, 9 MARCH 2018

10:10 – 11:30 THREAD 4 | FIGURES AND LITERACIES

Respondent CONNOR GRAHAM, National University of Singapore

Networked Capillaries of Vigilante Activism on the Singaporean Internet

CRYSTAL ABIDIN, Jönköping University, Sweden

Kuntilanak and the Locus of Authenticity in Folklore in the Digital Space

KATRINA IRIWATI GRAHAM, Horror Writer (Theatre/Film)

Ethical Forms of Internet Writing: A Look at Internet Research Ethics in Asian Context

SORAJ HONGLADAROM, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

(Re)Writing the Internet through Collaborative Storytelling

ALEX MITCHELL, National University of Singapore

11:30 – 12:00 MORNING TEA

12:00 – 13:20 THREAD 5 | FORMS AND MOVEMENT

Respondent CÉLINE CODEREY, National University of Singapore

via SKYPE ***Near Queer Objects: Writing as Recension***

NISHANT SHAH, ArtEZ University of the Arts, The Netherlands

Command + Shift + 4: A Screenshot of Online Performativity

SARAH-TABEA SAMMEL, Alien & Turtle LLP, and National University of Singapore

Rethinking the Form of Internet's Content

NATALIE PANG, National University of Singapore

My Malaysian Uncles are Reddit Conspiracy Lurkers

TEIK-KIM POK, Performance Artist, Writer, and Live Art Producer

13:20 – 14:15 LUNCH + EXHIBITION VIEWING (TECHNO-IMAGINATIONS) + FILM SCREENINGS OF *WHITE SONG* & *ROOM AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS*

14:15 – 15:00 STORYTELLING SESSION

KAMINI RAMACHANDRAN, MoonShadow Stories and The Storytelling Centre Ltd,
and LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore

15:00 – 16:30 SECOND WRITING FORUM

16:30 – 16:45 BREAK

16:45 – 17:30 AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERNET LIFE AND LORE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND CLOSING REMARKS (EPILOGUE)

CONNOR GRAHAM, National University of Singapore

ERIC KERR, National University of Singapore

17:30 END OF WORKSHOP

Distraction and its Discontents: Social Media from Critique to Alternatives

Geert Lovink

Institute of Network Cultures, Netherlands
geert@xs4all.nl

In this lecture, I will give an overview of the work of the Unlike Us network and my writings on social media. After many years of solitude and stagnation, the general discontent with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. is on the rise. I will relate two tendencies of fake news and Russiagate (which have compromised Facebook and Google) with the latest revelations about the role of behaviour science in the mass manipulation of attention on social media. This leads to the Unlike Us question how social media architecture should look like: what alternative network models are available and should be developed?

Geert Lovink, founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures, is a Dutch-Australian media theorist and critic. He holds a PhD from the University of Melbourne and in 2003 was at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies, University of Queensland. In 2004, Lovink was appointed as Research Professor at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam and Associate Professor at University of Amsterdam. He is the founder of Internet projects such as nettime and fibreculture. His recent book titles are *Dark Fiber* (2002), *Uncanny Networks* (2002) and *My First Recession* (2003). In 2005-06 he was a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin Institute for Advanced Study where he finished his third volume on critical Internet culture, Zero Comments (2007).

About Respondents, Organisers, and Exhibitors

Itty Abraham is Head of the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He moved to NUS from the University of Texas at Austin, where he directed the South Asia Institute from 2007-2010. Before that he served as program director for Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Global Security and Cooperation at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in New York and Washington, D.C. He is the author, most recently, of *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics*, published by Stanford University Press in 2014; the editor of volumes on borderlands, political violence, and nuclear power; and numerous scholarly articles and book chapters. He was a Fulbright-Nehru senior fellow in 2011 and has received grants from the National Science Foundation, and the Ford, Rockefeller, and MacArthur foundations, among others. His research interests include science and technology studies, postcolonial theory, and international relations.

Paolo Casani is currently a part-time PhD research student at the UCL Centre for Digital Humanities. His research is an exploration into ways in which computer, information and communication technologies (ICTs) impact how we see, understand, and conceive ourselves and the world at large. It aims to collect testimonies and insights about the ways and extent in which these new technologies influence how we experience our sense of self and express and create identity. Paolo's academic background includes studies in art and graphic design, the humanities and computer science. He holds a BA in Philosophy and an MA in Cultural and Critical Studies from Birkbeck, University of London, where he also studied Computer Science. Paolo also has an MSc with Distinction in Business Systems Integration from Brunel University, West London.

Gregory Clancey is an Associate Professor in the Department of History, the Leader of the STS (Science, Technology, and Society) Cluster at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), and Master of Tembusu College at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He formerly served NUS as Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and as Chairman of the General Education Steering Committee. Assoc Prof Clancey received his PhD in the Historical and Social Study of Science and Technology from MIT. He has been a Fulbright

Graduate Scholar at the University of Tokyo, a Lars Hierta Scholar at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, and a Visiting Professor at Nagasaki University. He has won three NUS teaching awards. Assoc Prof Clancey's research centers on the cultural history of science & technology, particularly in modern Japan and East Asia. His book *Earthquake Nation: The Cultural Politics of Japanese Seismicity* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2006) won the Sidney Edelstein Prize from the Society for the History of Technology in 2007; and was selected as one of the "11 Best Books about Science" for the UC Berkeley Summer Reading List in 2009. He is co-editor of *Major Problems in the History of American Technology* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998), *Historical Perspectives on East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine* (Singapore: Singapore U. Press & World Scientific 2002), and *The City as Target* (NY: Routledge, 2011). Assoc Prof Clancey is the 2012 recipient of the Morison Prize from MIT for "combining humanistic values with effectiveness in the world of practical affairs, and in particular, in science and technology".

Céline Coderey is a Social Psychologist and a Medical Anthropologist currently appointed as Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore and as a Teaching Fellow in Tembusu College. Her research covers several aspects of the "therapeutic field" in contemporary Myanmar: the institutionalisation of traditional medicine, the governance and circulation of medical products, (the obstacles to) the accessibility of biomedical health care services, notably in the sector of HIV and mental health, practices of divination and alchemy. Her current projects look at how the political and social transformation within the country affect both healers' practices and patients' health seeking process.

Connor Graham is a senior lecturer at Tembusu College and a research fellow at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. His research centers on living and dying in the times of the Internet in Asia, with a particular focus on new information and communication technologies.

Eric Kerr is Research Fellow in the Science, Technology and Society Cluster at the Asia Research Institute and Fellow at Tembusu College, National University of Singapore. His work centres on the philosophy of technology and social epistemology with a focus on the petroleum engineering industry in Southeast Asia. Eric has published on topics including scientific evidence, engineering epistemology, survey methods, and applied and cross-cultural philosophy. He is Book Review Editor at Social Epistemology and the Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective. He is a co-founder and board member of the Society for Philosophy of Information. He received his PhD from the University of Edinburgh and has taught in the UK and the US before moving to Singapore. He has been a visiting scholar at the University of Vienna and TU Delft.

Briony Kidd is a graduate of the VCA Film School and lives in Hobart, Tasmania. Her best known short, the gothic melodrama *The Room at the Top of the Stairs*, recently debuted on the Shudder platform and her latest short, *Watch Me* is now on the festival circuit. Her latest project in development is a feature film supported by Screen Australia, inspired by the 'psycho-biddy' films of the 1960s. Briony is also a founding member of the Radio Gothic collective, which uses text, foley and live sampling to create creepy tales for theatre and podcast. In addition to her own creative work, Briony is a freelance writer and the director and programmer of the *Stranger With My Face* International Film Festival, which focuses on women's perspectives in genre. *Stranger With My Face* was recently named in Movie Maker Magazine's list of The World's 15 Bloody Best Genre Fests.

Sun Sun Lim (PhD, LSE) is Professor and Head of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. She studies the social implications of technology domestication by young people and families, charting the ethnographies of their Internet and mobile phone use. Her recent research has focused on understudied and marginalised populations including youths-at-risk, migrant workers and international migrant students. She has authored more than 70 books, articles and book chapters. Her latest books are *Mobile Communication and the Family: Asian Experiences in Technology Domestication* (Springer, 2016) and *Asian*

Perspectives on Digital Culture: Emerging Phenomena, Enduring Concepts (Routledge, 2016). She serves on the editorial boards of eight journals including the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, *Journal of Children and Media*, *Social Media & Society* and *Mobile Media & Communication*. She is Series Editor for *Mobile Communication in Asia: Local Insights, Global Implications* (Springer), a series of volumes featuring research by emerging scholars of mobile communication in Asia. She has won eight awards for teaching at both university and faculty level, including the Faculty Teaching Excellence Innovation Award for her flipped classroom teaching in 2015.

Jason Morris-Jung is a Senior Lecturer at the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), teaching social research, cultural diversity, and environment. He earned his PhD in Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management (ESPM) at UC Berkeley, and he was formerly a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore. Morris-Jung's areas of research interest examine convergences of environmental conflict, public protest, and online technologies in Vietnam. His articles on Vietnam's Internet politics, the use of online activism in environmental conflicts, and the re-emergence of public intellectuals through online petitions have been published in such journals as *Critical Asian Studies*, *Asian Survey* and the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*. He also recently edited a volume on *In China's Backyard: Policies and Politics of Chinese Resource Investments in Southeast Asia* (ISEAS 2017).

Kamini Ramachandran is director of MoonShadow Stories and The Storytelling Centre Ltd. She is also creative producer of StoryFest: International Storytelling Festival Singapore. A fellow of the Royal Society of Arts with a BA English Language & Literature (Hons) UK, and MA Arts Pedagogy & Practice from Goldsmith's, University of London, she currently teaches her course The Storytelling Intensive at LASALLE College of the Arts. Kamini has performed commissioned works for The Esplanade, The Arts House, the National Arts Council, as well as festivals and conferences across Europe, Asia, Australia and Middle East. Kamini is a founding member, four-term president (2008-2012) and Vice-President (2012-2017) of the Storytelling Association (Singapore).

Eugene Soh, a.k.a. DUDE, (b. 1987) is a computer programmer who 'accidentally' became an artist when his photographic piece, contextualizing Da Vinci's Last Supper in a local hawker centre setting, surfaced on social media in 2012. That discovery, with its tongue-in-cheek commentary on contemporary life in Singapore, catapulted him into the art world. He has since been a full-time artist who codes really well.

TECHNO-IMAGINATIONS

INTERNET LORE IN ASIA



EXHIBITION

1 ALEX MITCHELL

Monstrous Weather'd | Custom Software Exhibit

The week the internet went down, so many of us sat around marvelling at the weird weather and telling scary stories. One story led to another, all around the world. Now we are collecting summaries of these stories.

That was the premise for Monstrous Weather, a netprov (networked improvisation) organized by Meanwhile... netprov studio (Rob Wittig and Mark Marino) from 20 July – 10 August 2016 1. The netprov took place in a Google group 2, and resulted in a set of 159 contributions from 22 authors, collectively acting as “The Cloud Farmers”. A work-in-progress, Monstrous Weather'd is a screen-based hypertextual retelling/adaptation of the netprov, attempting both to recapture the experience of the original networked performance, and to weave together a coherent narrative from the fragmented collection of stories shared across the Internet over a period of three weeks by collaborators from around the world.

2 BRIONY KIDD

Room at the Top of the Stairs | Short Film

In the short film The Room at the Top of the Stairs, a young woman moves into an art school share house and keeps hearing about a strange and badly behaved girl, Carmen, who used to live in her room before her. The unnamed protagonist develops a mental image of Carmen based on the physical traces she's left behind (such as marks on the bedroom wall, self-portraits, clothing and other ephemera) and on what is said about her by others. A mythology develops and Carmen becomes the protagonist's nemesis, purely because she seems to occupy so much 'space' in the house in spite of her physical absence.

The Room at the Top of the Stairs employs the trappings of the supernatural to give their entirely non-supernatural events impact. The “creation of a fake monster” trope lends itself to discourse on multiple platforms, in most direct and observable ways on social media. The film this initiates a conversation about real life “self-mythologisation” and presentation online.

3 OLIVIER PERRIQUET & ERIC KERR

Haw Par Villa | 3D Model Projection

The project, which is named after Singapore's Tiger Balm Garden, is an installation of virtual reality, inspired by the Aw brothers' universe, which creates an immersive, dream-like, hazy, and troubling experience. From shots and captures in Singapore, a set of sculptures and scenes of the park will be modelled in 3D to create a kind of composite dynamic diorama in the virtual space, which evokes the psyche when it takes forms that are not fully conscious, such as when looking for a memory or during dreams. The project is an art-philosophy collaboration and currently a work-in-progress.

4 EUGENE SOH

Puppy Poop Run | Multiplayer Virtual Reality Experience

Gallery.sg is a virtual gallery built on a multi-player gaming platform, where visitors are able to interact with each other on the site in real time, regardless of their locations in the world. In this Virtual Reality installation, participants will play as a puppy running around a virtual reality house with other players as other puppies, and at the same time think about the nuances of and interactions between rich digital and physical worlds.

5 KAMINI RAMACHANDRAN

Storytelling Session

Oral traditions have proliferated across generations and cultures all over the world, as a tool for education, passing on values, or preserving cultural identity. This session will explore the more physical and performative side of folklore - storytelling.

The art form once held particular significance in Southeast Asia, serving as a means for the communities at the juncture of high ethnic pluralism to locally adapt and transmit regional mythology and folklore, such as the Ramayana, as well as the works of Confucius. Once considered a dying art form, however, storytelling has been undergoing a revival in the past few years. But what role has the Internet played in its revival? How do we understand, then, the concept of digital folklore in relation to storytelling? What is the relationship between the corporeal, performative act of storytelling and the intangible way stories propagate themselves online? In this 45-minute session Kamini Ramachandran will unpack some of these questions and ideas. Participants will then experience a live storytelling session, and observe and assess the ways stories shared in-person may be similar or different than the stories online.

6 KATRINA IRAWATI GRAHAM

White Song | Short Film

The most famous of Indonesian ghosts, the Kuntilanak, tells of the haunting of a young woman. Told from the ghost's perspective, *White Song* reclaims the humanity of a supernatural creature by exploring the intersection between the yearnings of a dead woman and those of a living one.

7 NANCY MAURO-FLUDE

Aerial's Cypher | Custom Access Wi-Fi Portal + Email Performance (*work-in-progress*)

The installation is assembled to contextualise a computer network. A wifi network is re-purposed, to become an augury of sorts, without explicitly being so. Playfully extending on the maker culture aesthetic, making strange typical practices of hardware *modding* and system administration. The mediums of poetic-speculative storytelling, software collage, wifi meshing and assemblage addressing the entanglements of technology - on the one hand, the matter-of-fact demystification that technology affords; on the other, mystification - black magic box (that is, the ambiguous, unknown and immaterial nature of input and output code). The performance of the custom-wifi access point works to present and demystify some of the inner workings of language and the elusive black box, while acting as a wifi portal, in order to make a typically invisible network, more visible. *Aerial's Cypher* dismantles and redistributes language, enabling an alternate view of the information we transmit on a daily basis, it highlights the technical structures that observe and act performatively which are becoming increasingly inconspicuous.

8 PAOLO CASANI

From Personal Experience to Digital Expression: An Eclectic Narrative | Poster Display

With a background in art, humanities and computer science, Paolo Casani presents a multi-layered account on the subjective impact of digital technologies, where traditional interview practices are enmeshed with current social media analytics that use computational linguistic techniques.

His piece, entitled 'From personal experience to digital expression: an eclectic account', describes his approach to the investigation about how academics use, experience and express their subjectivity over digital media platforms. Using a mixed methods research design, his research explores in on one hand the qualitative subjective experience of digital technologies in the personal testimonies gathered using semi-structured interviews; on the other, the quantitative manifestations and expression of traits of their self and identity on Twitter studied using natural language processing and machine learning techniques.

9 TEIK-KIM POK

My Malaysian Uncles are Reddit Conspiracy Lurkers | Live Readings + Still Projections

Teik-Kim Pok stitches together news, memes and conspiracy discussions that his 60-something elderly Malaysian relatives share on social media apps such as WhatsApp. Using personal anecdotes and archives from his personal family conversations, he will present a "performative digital rabbit warren," where he attempts to reveal a patchwork of intercultural influences on their social interaction, and reflect on how the extended Southeast Asian family grapevine navigates the boundaries of political discussion across cyberspace in the digital palm of their hands.

In an era where the phenomena of attachment to folkloric modes of sharing, algorithmically-skewed ideological echo bubbles and the post-truth news cycle are interlinked, Teik Kim intends to present an early development of this work to provoke greater discussion about the role of lore in this workshop.

