

Panel 15 **Ethics and Care**

Keeping the Dead in Play: Residual Recursion and Intermedial Elegy in the *To the Moon* Series

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What happens when a story ends, but affect continues? This paper examines the forms of care that emerge when narrative closure gives way to a structure of remaining—a recursive, durational mode of engagement with grief. I analyze the narrative constellation formed by *To the Moon* (2011) and its companion works—*Beach Episode* (2024) and the official comics—as an intermedial elegiac archive that reconfigures grief not as resolution, but as affective duration.

In *To the Moon*, the player-as-technician participates in an act of epistemological restoration: to fulfill a dying wish that ultimately proves unknowable and unrealizable. The game resists narrative mastery; what remains are recursive acts of care—memory reconstruction, emotional editing—that generate grief, guilt, and longing. These affects, unassimilable to plot, accumulate as affective excess: an emotional and ethical surplus the player is asked to hold.

This recursive structure extends into *Beach Episode*, where Neil's posthumous absence becomes a narrative center of gravity. Care is reframed as proximity to loss—a mode of after-care that dwells with the dead and refuses closure. The official comics, fragmentary and domestic, deepen this elegiac mode as affective paratexts: temporally off-center, narratively minor, and emotionally resonant.

Together, these works enact a poetics of staying—not solving—that resists closure (structure), generates affective excess (emotion), and sustains durational care (ethics). Drawing on Jacques Derrida's impossibility of mourning, Lauren Berlant's cruel optimism, and Christina Sharpe's wake work, I propose **residual recursion**: an ethics of remaining shaped by loss, repetition, and the refusal of resolution.

Biography

Geraldine Tan Le Ting is a Lecturer at the Language and Communication Centre, Nanyang Technological University, and a PhD student in English. She teaches interdisciplinary writing and critical thinking. Her research focuses on afterlife narratives, contemporary literature, and chronotopes, with emphasis on the temporal and affective dimensions of storytelling.