

Dr Adelina Ong

Resisting Neoliberal Technologies of Self-repair: Conversations With a Mental Wellbeing Artificial Intelligence About Inequality

Dr Adelina Ong delivered her talk – Resisting Neoliberal Technologies of Self-repair: Conversations With a Mental Wellbeing Artificial Intelligence About Inequality – as part of Liverpool John Moores University’s Liverpool Screen School Research Seminar.

Dr Adelina Ong (Royal Centre School of Speech and Drama,
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Wysa is a chatbot, enhanced with artificial intelligence (AI) and designed to be ‘your 4am friend and AI life coach’ supporting those who are struggling with stress, anxiety and sleep loss (Wysa 2019). Wysa also positions itself as ‘a fun way to build emotional resilience’ (Ibid.). Drawing from Sarah Bracke’s critique of resilience and Sara Ahmed’s critical analysis of happiness as a social construct for my critical framework, I will reflect on the performance of care rendered by Wysa in response to lines from Sarah Kane’s 4:48 Psychosis. Adapting from narrative inquiry as my methodology, I will feed Wysa lines from Kane’s last work. Kane struggled with depression and frequently found herself awake around 4:48am.

As a technology of self-repair, Wysa operates as an extension of neoliberal self-surveillance, where one is expected to identify negative (unproductive) thought patterns and behaviours and take steps to reframe them positively. I will critically analyse Wysa’s definition of emotional resilience and resist its efforts to reframe structural inequalities in a neoliberal framework that places the burden of change on the individual. Instead of

rethinking situations positively, I will explore ways of expanding Wysa's model of mental wellbeing through these chat sessions towards the shaping of a more socially contextualised response to depression that recognises inequality.

Biography:

Adelina Ong completed her PhD at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (London, UK) in August 2018. Her thesis proposed a theory for compassionately negotiated living inspired by parkour, art du déplacement, breakin' (breakdancing) and graffiti. As an applied theatre practitioner, she has worked with young people in Singapore (2003 to present) and London (2012 to present). In Singapore, she worked mostly with young people from low-income families, many of whom were struggling with depression and anxiety. Her current research builds on her theory of compassionate mobilities and uses cosplay, street dance and martial arts to initiate conversations about the mental wellbeing of young people in Hong Kong. She has published in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Journal* and *Research in Drama Education (RiDE)* and co-edited a special issue of *RiDE* 'On Access' with Colette Conroy and Dirk Rodricks.