Atul Gawande points out that “Patients die only once. They have no experience to draw on. They need doctors and nurses who are willing to have the hard discussions and say what they have seen, who will help people prepare for what is to come – and to escape a warehoused oblivion that few really want.” But in addition to willing doctors and nurses, such as Gawande himself who is a surgeon, there is also much to learn from end-of-life narratives about the importance of initiating, on the part of the patients and their loved ones, the “hard discussions” or end-of-life conversations. In this project, I look specifically at how Paul Kalanithi’s *When Breath Becomes Air* and Georgia Blain’s *The Museum of Words: a memoir on language, writing and mortality* could inform healthcare professionals, terminally ill patients, and their caregivers of the importance of initiating end-of-life conversations. Such conversations entail careful considerations of the consequences of accepting life-prolonging medical and surgical treatments that could adversely affect the patients’ quality of life in their final days. By close-reading the depictions of temporal experiences at the limit of the human, the project aims to highlight the importance of transforming the Difficult Conversation into the Imperative Conversation.

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

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Michelle Chiang is Assistant Professor of English at the School of Humanities, NTU. Her research interests are in the intersection between Literature, Philosophy and Psychology. At present, she is running two research projects. The first investigates how temporal experiences in end-of-life narratives accentuate the importance of quality of life over quantity of time. The second explores how Absurd Literature could inform the design of Virtual Reality environments. She is the author of *Beckett’s Intuitive Spectator* (Palgrave, 2018).