# How can art help us engage with difficult questions about artificial intelligence?

## Transcript

Dr Caroline Green

Hello and welcome to Accelerating AI Ethics, the podcast of the Institute for Ethics in AI at the University of Oxford. I'm Dr Caroline Green and in each episode we explore bold ideas, innovative research and creative responses to the ethical challenges posed by artificial intelligence. Today's guest is one of our Accelerator Fellowship Program Fellows, Kit Green. She is an artist working across theatre, music, academia, cabaret, comedy and broadcast. Kit is an Olivier Award winner and was nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the National Film Awards. She will be exploring the ethics of AI in therapy and elder care through innovative digital and performance art. Welcome, Kit. It's a great pleasure to have you here.

Kit Green

It's a delight to speak with you to talk about these things.

Dr Caroline Green

Yes, you are our new type of fellow at the Accelerator Fellowship Programme and creative fellow. So we are really, really pleased to have you. And yeah, Kit Green, we're maybe...

Kit Green

No relation. No relation.

Dr Caroline Green

Probably important to say exactly. Yes, just right there will be people wandering out there, I know. Even though I would find it great to have an artist in my family.

Kit Green

No, that would be great. I would own you two and celebrate, but no, relation. We choose ourselves as family. Yeah, that's what's happening.

Dr Caroline Green

Exactly. So you're part of the Accelerator Fellowship Programme family now?

Kit Green

I love that.

Dr Caroline Green

Okay, Kit, so it's great to have you here as we're kicking off your fellowship with us. I'd first love to hear more about you. Who are you? What's your background? And then later we'll talk about what brings you here.

Kit Green

Okay. So I come from a tiny village in Derbyshire in the middle of the country. And I had a very evangelical Christian childhood. So I had an extreme childhood. And I think I was never really sure What was I going to do? How was I going to break out of that and find myself? And I thought I wanted to be an actor. I studied English and drama and then I decided I definitely didn't want to do that. And then I almost came to Oxford to do an MPhil when I was 21 and I didn't. because I had a fork in my life and I had to choose between working on a trashy TV show which was called The Word, which British people of a certain generation will know. And I was a music researcher so I just hung out with bands, which was the perfect thing for me. So I think my life split at that point and I could have come to Oxford at that point. But I found my own way around and here we are. So, and then I started making my own work, but not really as an actor, as a creative across lots of different things, as you said. I think, who am I? really love music. My sort of main form of expression is writing songs that most... Most of which no one will ever hear, probably thank goodness. And yeah, I've made a career in which I'm really lucky. All I do is, the things that interest me, like really, really interest me and engage me, I'm lucky enough to go, can I make some work about this? And people go, yeah. And I think that's fantastic. So my work is across many, many different things. And the only thing that unites them is that I'm fascinated by them.

Dr Caroline Green

So I would love to hear a little bit more about some of those projects, some of those topics that fascinate you. Tell me how you work. What's your way of operating, so to say?

Kit Green

So a lot of the things I do are immersive. So it's like, how can I break down the 4th wall is the classic theatrical way of talking about it. But it's like, how can I involve the audience in things? And I think it's because I'm very wary of that old-fashioned kind of idea of making work. So we go, here's an issue, let's put it on a stage and we'll all sit in the dark and go, oh, look at these people with a problem. or look at these things. But most of the things that are going on in the world, we're all involved in. And so we can't externalise. And that's for me why I make things experiential. Do you know what I mean? We can't afford to sort of other people. So what are good examples of that? But I should also say

crucially, because I started in music and comedy and cabaret, These are really where I got my training, where I trained myself. My thing is always to make difficult issues, difficult areas of exploration into entertainment and to have this conversation between the two things, between something being super serious and can we be really silly and playful with it. And so I always try and call my shows an entertainment about. Or do you know what I mean? To remind us that we don't need to sort of separate these two parts of our humanity into two separate strands, if that makes sense. A good example that I'm really proud of, and I might remount this show, it was 10 years ago. I'm dangerously close to entering my retrospective period. We might mount show for its 21st year anniversary next year. That's on the cards. And then this show's 10 years old, so I'm obviously at the stage of life where I'm having retrospective. But this was a show about **** addiction. And I was just really interested, I think, and this relates to what I'm sure we'll come on to talk about with digital projects and technology, I wanted to make something about digital addiction, the way that even 10 years ago we were all starting to be completely obsessed with our phones and the way that the dopamine hit was there to kind of like draw us in. And I was like, well, how can I do that? What's a good way of talking about this? And then did some research and I read about **** addiction and it wasn't really being talked about at the time. And so I created this piece in which you come along, you know you're coming to a theatre show about **** addiction, but you don't know anything else than that. So people arrive, audience of 200 and they are just held in this kind of waiting area and then they go into an empty meeting room, nothing in there at all. I arrive as a group leader and I'm like, If you know why you're, regulars help the newcomers to set up the room and you're in a 12 step meeting for **** addicts and there are 10 actors but you don't know who the actors are and the whole thing unfolds around you and people lost their minds because they're like, I know I was coming to see something about people with a problem. I don't want to be one of them. But the point about making it experiential and making it funny and a bit silly at times was to say we all have a problem. We all have a problem with these addictions because we're all being exploited by these mechanisms. So I think that's a good example. Did it in London at first and then it got taken to New York and it was the first piece, theatrical piece that was commissioned by the Guggenheim Gallery. So, you know, swanky. But the thing about that was that the differences between America and the UK when it comes to that kind of digital addiction blew my mind as well. So that's a good example of the kind of work I make.

Dr Caroline Green

Another example that I know you from the past and past life, so to say, was an experiential theatre, immersive theatre piece about a care home called The Home. And that what really struck me there was, again, your approach to, not making an audience watch a show as like an entertainment kind of piece, but something where you really

invited people into the piece. And that was really quite something. Tell me a little bit more about that.

Kit Green

Yeah, so it's the biggest scale experiential piece I've made and it was 2019 was the first outing of it. And yeah, I wanted to create something where people could really feel that balance, which is something we talked a lot about at the time, between care and control. Because one of the things in residential care is that the companies, and it often is these big sort of conglomerates that are running all these care home chains, they will say, in order to care for you, we need to control you. We need to limit your human rights. We need to, you know, we can't let you go out and do what you want to do. because we can't keep you safe. And so this was really the piece. The point of the piece was this balance between care and control. But the logistics were pretty crazy. So 30 people moved into this fake care home for 48 hours. So it was a theatre show that lasted for 48 hours. They had everything provided for them. There were four points during the weekend in which we sold 200 tickets for other people to come in and they would come to the morning activities workshop or the evening bingo session, whatever. So it had elements of a theatrical show. But the core were these 30 people and we did half journalists or stakeholders in the area and half people were in a ballot to get tickets every time we staged it. So yeah, it's, and they were coming to a taster session, adjoining a home. So they weren't pretending to be old, they were just experiencing it. And the first time we did it, I don't know if I'm, I presumably have told you this story, but the first time as a sort of taster version of it, of what became the show, I got lots of stakeholders in the industry, people from these care home companies, academics in gerontology, medical people, philosophers, who are interested in human rights, all these kind of people. And we had a day-long symposium at the at the South Bank Centre in London, maybe like 40, 45 people. And we did the normal kind of coffee thing and then I did the welcome and then I got an actor as a plant to come pretending to be a member of the team from the South Bank and said, oh there's been an incident outside, we need to lock you in this room for your safety. And everyone's like, what's happened? What's happened? What's happened? And they were like, yeah, so yeah, you can't go to the toilet. You can't do anything. You can't leave this room. And then they were coming to me and going, well, I need to go. And it was a little bit cruel. But then I was like, let me go and have a word with them. And I came back and went, no, they've told me that in order to keep you safe, you can't do anything. And about 90 minutes in, someone said, is this real? Are you testing us? And I said, and you've all just completely freaked out and pushed against the thing. But you are, a lot of you are advocating this for vulnerable people. And that's what I mean. I mean, it's still social engineering, but it's also, and then they were like, oh my God, you're so annoying. And I was like, well, I got you to experience it. And one woman who was in her early 60s said, I've worked in this area my whole life and I've never felt that kind of sense that like lack of agency. And I think I've

been part of creating that loss of agency for others. So there's a point to it as well as it being an entertainment.

Dr Caroline Green

Yeah, so I find that really interesting because what you're essentially doing is you're picking up some really abstract, very emotional topics and you give people an opportunity to engage with those topics in a way that doesn't just sort of involve their brains but also their hearts and their bodies and to really feel it, which I think then helps people to think about these topics differently.

Kit Green

And that's what I want, ultimately. I think all artists, whatever their practice is, how can we sort of just disrupt our normal patterns of behaviour a little bit? And I think, yeah, deep thought, beauty, all the traditional things are a way of doing it, but also so is entertainment, so is laughing, always feeling trapped, all of these kind of very basic human emotions. One of the first big scale shows that I made was called Office Party and it was a big party show where you go to the annual company office party and it's low level role play and all sorts of stuff happens and there's loads of plants and it's all kind of hidden surprises and everything. And then at the end, people realise that it's about what does it mean to be a tiny part of a larger whole. And they realise that the little song they were taught in groups at the beginning fits into a larger piece. And people are like really drunk and then going, I need everyone in this room. And I'm like, wow, this really works. People really get that. But they thought they were coming to a party. So anyway, that's just another example.

Dr Caroline Green

So super interesting and this takes us now to AI and your work in AI and how you're going to translate all of your experience and your approach to AI ethics. Because AI ethics too, that's for sure, is an incredibly emotional topic for so many people in so many different ways. and it can be really abstract to many. They can feel quite excluded or powerless if they feel like they don't know anything about it. So I think this is really interesting, the way that you're working with people. But tell me first, what's your relationship to AI in your work?

Kit Green

I think it did start with the piece about **** addiction that I was talking about. Interested in the way that we, I think that was the first time we really started to explore the way that tech developers in Silicon Valley mainly are consciously working out how to hack our brains and working out, maybe for sinister reasons, because it's late stage capitalism after all, but they're like going, what do we need? dopamine release. Get a little, a little pinging noise every time you put something in your cart, or what all of these things, and I

think before that I'd not really thought that we are they are using all these kind of clever people, neurobiologists, to hack our brains and users, so that I think it's my interest in AI has developed. From that, I was shocked because the home piece has continued in many different guises, so I've done it in. various contexts. And there's a thing that tours, a version of it that tours real care homes now. So there's often little troops of actors who are going around care homes, which pleases me a lot. And one time an activity coordinator was just showing me through, in a very ordinary care home, was showing me through a care plan. And I was like, wow, there's pages and pages of this. Who wrote this? And they said, oh, we just get AI to do it. And I was like, You get AI to write the care plan? Like, what? When that was the first time, and we've talked to people, to elders, and they had no idea that it's already been used. So that really shocked me, and obviously that kind of dovetails so much with all the different strands of the work I've been doing. And I think I should say I've had this long-running comedy character who's a very old lady who does hip-hop in an old-fashioned musical style and her music is artificial hip-hop. This character has been with me for a really long time. It's a character I really, really love. She's a very opinionated survivor of a different generation. And she's called Ida Bar. Ida Bar was a real British musical singer. And I was just like, I want to make a show called A Ida, because that's enough for me. And then as a way of exploring all these issues. So that's where my interest in AI was like, I want to make a show about this. And so that's going to be one of the things that I'm going to be working on as part of my fellowship is to go to experts in care for the vulnerable and elder care and talk to them about what are the issues, what do they think I should be talking about in this show. But also as part of the show, I want to use technology to create, to co-create material with the audience. and see whether can we make beats, can we make raps, can we make rhymes live together using AI, can we make good things or is it going to be generic slop and what are the ethics involved and talk to them. And then it's almost effortlessly through comedy like go every time every time we generate a couple of rhymes it costs you know it uses 47 litres of water somewhere. Interesting that innit? Do you know what I mean? So it's that kind of easy way to get these really important topics that people don't know about.

Dr Caroline Green

We should definitely invite Ida Barr for podcast recording.

Kit Green

Yeah, we should do a whole thing as Ida.

Dr Caroline Green

That would be amazing. But you know, also just touching on that, I think you know you were part of some of the workshops we also had on AI and creativity and one of those

very big topics in AI ethics about copyright and you know the role of AI in Essentially, the livelihoods of creatives, and so that would also be a topic.

Kit Green

I mean, that's something in the course I'm really interested in, and I think we so many of us just feel powerless in that way, and this notion that, I mean, I think so many of the companies are basically saying even if there's been court cases, and of course there have been these big court cases, they're effectively, I don't know, but they're effectively saying, oh we can't undo it, we can't unlearn, the models can't unlearn things now. And that, I mean that really sucks, doesn't it? It's like, and I think, just to go back to your point about edging towards this material and talking about it, I mean I'm always interested in I mean, another big area of making work for me at the moment is about death. I'm interested in these things that people don't want to talk about and making entertainments about them and just finding a way in for people. And I think AI really is for so many people, they'll use Claude and they'll use ChatGPT. But apart from that, they'll be like, I just don't want to think about it. I just can't think about any of this ethics. And so if we can do anything to sort of edge people towards it, because everyone needs to have an understanding. It's not enough to say, oh, it's too complicated for me. And the thing, since I've been doing a lot more research in the last six months or so, since coming to some of the conferences you've organised and really educating myself about it, the one fact I say to people is, when they say, oh, I don't really understand it, I go, well, do you know that the people who make these models, these digital interfaces, They don't know how it works either. And they go, what? So they might know more, they might guess more than you, but none of us know how it works. And that's the thing. Then people go, what? And I was like, so not knowing how it works is no reason to not take an interest in it or take an urgent kind of, be a stakeholder in it.

Dr Caroline Green

I think you're touching on such an important topic, which is information education and that big issue of digital exclusion and really actually getting an understanding of how much do people need to understand in order to also feel like less powerless in this and able to take part in these conversations. And so I think, I mean, that's a big part of what drives me in my work is to build these bridges between people who supposedly know much more, tech develops, and as you say, there's a lot of many, many questions that they don't know, I don't have the answer to you. And those people who feel like, well, I'm just a having to use it somehow. It's being used on me, but I don't know anything, so I can't talk about it. So I think your work is really important.

Kit Green

I mean, and sorry to interrupt, I mean, it's like it's maybe a lazy and unhelpful analogy with like the development of nuclear weapons, but you know, like once people kind of

went, oh, this thing has happened, well then people start to say, we don't want this to be used. And I'm not saying that that's what we should advocate for with AI, but people got involved. I mean, maybe because there was that moment of that first mushroom cloud, which was like such a terrible sound effect, but it was such a focus of the world. And people were like, we need as human beings to start to work together about this and have regulation. And I think AI is just so much more nebulous and hard to get your hands around. If there'd ever been a moment that was as sort of as iconic as that, then we'd all be like going, okay, what is our government doing? What are the international communities doing to regulate this? Because we can't put the genie back in the bottle, so let's all be stakeholders in saying, how do we want it to impact our lives? That's why we have governments, that's why we have inter-government organisations. And yeah, I think it is that serious, isn't it? It's not, I'm neither a boomer or a doomer, but, and I don't know what my P doom ratio is, but it's, it floats. And I think it's not enough to just to say, oh, someone else will sort this out. We can advocate for this.

Dr Caroline Green

I think, yeah, absolutely. And, you know, we need different people with different experiences in art. and especially your approach is incredibly important in this. I want to talk about another project that you're looking to do as part of your fellowship. So we've spoken about AI and aging and older people, but you were also thinking of doing a piece which does involve podcast recordings too, but you in character on building an AI chatbot for mental health. Tell me more about that idea.

Kit Green

Yeah, so that's the one. So like the AI project is something that I probably might have made anyway, but being here in this environment, it just will give me access to like such a level of expertise that's exciting, but I definitely wouldn't have been able to make this. I want my provocation, my artistic provocation, is it's not a piece of theatre, it's not an entertainment, but it's an AI therapy app. And of course, AI therapy is one of the huge areas that people are really interested in because all health systems are groaning in We just can't train enough counsellors, therapists, CBT practitioners, hypnotherapists. We just can't train enough people because we're in the stage where the world is so difficult that mental health is struggling. So of course the companies are like, this is huge. And people naturally are using, I know people just anecdotally who are by chatting to Claude every morning about their problems, and it always goes, oh, I'm so sorry to hear that. And so I want to make an AI therapy app, which is, and you could say it's completely solipsistic and self-obsessed, and I will take that criticism. But my experience of being, depression, of clinical depression, is that something happens, there's quite a lot of research happening into this in terms of the neurological pathways, the serotonin, that basically you can't access the good part of yourself. And we know that something shuts down, maybe it's mirror neurons, whatever. So my provocation to

all the tech people and the philosophers as well, so we look at the ethics of it, is can we, with a series of prompts, can somebody upload the best version of themselves, including their voice, maybe even their image, but with memories and from having chats, so that when you're depressed and you just can't access, go for a walk, do this, talk to a friend. you just go onto your, just constantly go onto your app. And then the best version of you goes, now look, I know you won't want to do this, but think of these 17 times when going for a walk made us feel better. And so you sort of, the depressed version hacks the best version of you when you need it. So that's the idea. It's called help yourself, working title. So it's harnessing all that digital technology, speech synthesis and all of the interactivity of these chatbots, these very sophisticated chatbots. So let's see, and I want to document the process of it and what are the pitfalls, what are the unintended consequences, how is it going to destroy the world unintentionally, my tiny little idea. And I like, as an artist, sort of blundering into this world with what I think is a good idea, and I tell people about it. Since I've been connected to the centre, I've mentioned it to a few people, and they're super excited. That's a really great idea, we should do that. And you can see this kind of, and I'm like, okay, great. I can see how things catch fire in this world, in this sort of brave new world that we're in. But also, because I'm not from that world, So going, but hang on a minute, what are all the downsides? And documenting both of those things feels exciting.

Dr Caroline Green

So why I find this project really exciting is because, first of all, I can completely see where you're coming from. How often have I spoken to people who said, oh, I've just been to this retreat and I came out feeling really well. It was like a well-being and a sort of mindfulness retreat. But then it's really difficult to stay, and I was really the best self You see it leeching away from you. Exactly, and I myself, and I've got days, obviously, probably most people out there, where I feel really low and where I find it difficult to remind myself of what helps me to get through days where I'm not as positive as I can be. So I can see how your idea might be, something that suddenly pops up on my phone, like, oh, you should... Just a little reminder. Exactly, a little reminder that don't take things So seriously, so I can see how that could be a really interesting idea. What I also find interesting though is that there are lots of people out there now, which I think is empowering to, who before kind of the new generative AI boom that we are in, they wouldn't have ever really thought about creating a new product, tech-based product. But because that was not their background, they were doing other things and now they're saying, wow, I've got this idea for a new product and it must be really easy because it's all out there and I can just ask, whatever perplexity Claude to create it for me. But then, as you say, there's so many ethical issues that immediately I'm thinking of. Absolutely.

Kit Green

I mean, not least who owns the data, who, this act of co-creation with the app, let's say it all works. Like this is a version of yourself, but who owns it?

Dr Caroline Green

Yeah, and even though you know the question of what is the best version of yourself?

Kit Green

Absolutely. And is it reliable?

Dr Caroline Green

Is it reliable?

Kit Green

Yes, what is the best version? Yes, it's true. I mean, yes, there's a whole argument. I love this. is why you're a philosopher, ultimately. There's a whole argument that the depressed version of us is a very, very, very logical response to where the world is right now. And if people aren't depressed, what's wrong with them, quite frankly? But yes, it's an abstract thought. So yes, trying to sort of use technology to kind of gee us up to being acceptable and, you know, happy. Yeah, it is.

Dr Caroline Green

It might actually be that this chatbot has got a very absolutely. I mean, that's clearly the problem with this.

Kit Green

Idea that people are going to be talking to themselves instead of talking to other people. Yeah, no, absolutely. And I totally get that. I love that.

Dr Caroline Green

But it's exactly those problems why this is such an interesting topic and the way that we have thought about it or you have thought about it and how we could develop it is really to have you as this person who says, well, I've got this great idea. Now let's go on this journey together to build it. And then at the end of the project, you'll be able to say, well, you know, I'm going to go ahead with this with A, B, C&D.

Kit Green

Wouldn't it be great after 18 months? This is a total fantasy. However long. I go, hey, this is going to be real and we're going to sell it for $20 million to someone, or I'm going to kill it because it's dangerous. You know, that would be such a great kind of sci-fi output, or not even sci-fi. It's just, you know, this real decision-making thing. I mean, both are very possible. But yeah, I kind of love that.

Dr Caroline Green

So that's maybe a hook for the listeners to this podcast. So we'll have a podcast again at the end of your project. Exactly. How did this turn out?

Kit Green

What's that sort of thing on social media was like, you wouldn't know I've got $20 million, but there would be signs. So I'll come back and I'll be sort of like drenched in fur. I don't know. It's just spooning caviar. I wouldn't be drenched in fur. But you know, I can't think. Fake fur. Fake fur. Just covered from head to toe in gold. And I'll be going, I may have sold the idea, Caroline. Goodbye.

Dr Caroline Green

Well, stay tuned, everyone.

Kit Green

That's fun.

Dr Caroline Green

Well, Kit, it's really great to have you with us.

Kit Green

I'm delighted to be here. It's really, really great. And Schwarzman Center is amazing. And yeah, just to be around all this new innovation. And I love this kind of interface between artists and people of all different disciplines. And I think that is so hopeful. for as we get into this new phase of humanity. And we all need to be talking to each other and learning from each other.

Dr Caroline Green

Absolutely, and drawing on each other's expertise and backgrounds. And I think what you're bringing in, that deep experience of involving people with topics that can be so difficult, like death, addiction and so on. loss of control when you age and become frail. I think we're going to be learning a lot from you for AI ethics. So thanks so much for joining us.

Kit Green

Can't wait to hear what people think is going to happen to that. So yes, please interact, everyone. I'd love to hear something.

Dr Caroline Green

Great. Well, thanks so much, Kit. Thank you. This has been the Accelerating AI Ethics podcast at the Institute for Ethics and AI at the University of Oxford. If you have enjoyed this episode, please subscribe and share. Until next time, thank you for listening.