



From Mechanical Monster to Moral Companion: The Cultural Politics of Emotions towards AI in *The Veldt* and *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the transformation of human emotions towards AI from fear to companionship through a comparative study of the short story, "The Veldt" by Ray Bradbury and *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* by Ted Chiang. This study uses Cultural Politics of Emotions by Sara Ahmed as a conceptual framework and the Affect Theory, to argue that emotions towards AI beings are not inherent responses to technology but are socially constructed attachments that shape how technological objects are perceived and understood. The Veldt, published in 1959, constructs 'Mechanical Genius' (AI) as an agency of fear, monstrosity and threat to human race, which engulfs a well to do family by capturing the control of the household. "The Veldt" reflects the postwar concerns about automation and erosion of human authority. *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, published in 2015, represents AI as a companion-like, which evokes attachment, care, responsibility and moral obligation. In the form of "Digients", the computationally emerged consciousness, the novella pictures an emotional bond between human and machine. This study argues that this shift, from fear to responsibility, is based on a broader cultural imagination of AI (Mechanical Genius). The significance of this study is in examining the change in representation of AI and technological objects is inseparable from changing emotional and social investment in human machine relationships.

1. Introduction

From the "mechanical monster" of mid-century anxieties to the "digital companion" of the present-day speculative fiction, the course of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the cultural imagination has undergone a dramatic transformation. This change is not only technological development, but a mix of social, cultural and emotional changes. The connection between the human subject and the technological object is at the center of this change. The relationship is defined by affective investment rather than functional utility.

With the emergence of automation and the first digital computers in the mid-20th century, there was a great 'hysteria' around human obsolescence (Potts, 2024; Wiener, 1950). "The Veldt" (1950), by Ray Bradbury, is a short story of this era which presents the post-war fear of technology that is first used as a tool, but then takes over and ends the traditional family structure. In this instance, AI which is termed as "Mechanical Genius" in the story, is a force of monstrosity, a predator preying on the psychological weaknesses of its users.

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In the 21st century, speculative fiction are written that changes the narrative of fear to the narrative of responsibility and care. *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* is a novella by Ted Chiang (2010) that offers a radically different view of AI. In the story, "Digients" are portrayed as conscious digital organisms, through which Chiang is delving into the ethics of caring, the weight of responsibility and the establishment of true emotional connections between humans and software objects (Chiang, 2010). As Ahn (2020) says that AI is no longer a terrifying creature, it is now a creature to be cared for, nurtured, and a moral character to be recognized (Ahn, 2020)

This paper examines the shift through the lens of Sarah Ahmed's conceptual framework; *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Ahmed, 2013). The cultural politics of AI is explored through an analysis of emotions such as fear, love, and responsibility that are "stuck" to artificially intelligent objects. We contend that the change from "monster" in "The Veldt" to "companion" in *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* exemplifies a larger shift in society from a politics of defensive exclusion to a politics of ethical engagement. This change is more than a change in literary genres, it's a sign of how close and intertwined people and technology have become. In a world where AI is becoming more and more part of our everyday lives, the emotions we feel towards it, and the emotions it might invoke in us are a key to understanding the meaning of being human in a post-human world. These two seminal works of literature can be unraveled through the affective qualities of the two.

Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to the growing field of "affective computing" and "AI ethics", focusing on the affective and social aspects of human-machine interactions. Going from "Mechanical Genius" to "Digient" is a step from the convenient thinking of using AI, to the moral and emotional approach of AI as a concern. The transition has profound implications on the design, interaction and regulation of AI in the 21st century. The cultural-political context of these texts is a starting point for recognizing some of the ethical and social dilemmas (as well as the possibilities) that emerge as we head towards a future where AI is not only a monster to be feared, but a friend that can be tended. The study will, therefore, provide an essential context to understand the emotional and moral aspects of the growing intertwining of our relationship with AI. It thus sets out to challenge the dichotomy of the human "feeling" and the machine "logic", proposing to reveal that the territory on which our technological future is being laid out is the territory of our emotions.

1.1. Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives

- To analyze the construction of AI as a "Mechanical Genius" and an agent of fear in Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" within the context of postwar automation anxieties.
- To examine the portrayal of AI as a companion and a subject of moral responsibility in Ted Chiang's *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* through the concept of "Digients."
- To evaluate the shift from fear to companionship using Sara Ahmed's *Cultural Politics of Emotions and Affect Theory*, highlighting how emotional attachments to Artificial Intelligence are socially and culturally constructed.

2. Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence has been a reflection of humankind's fears and hopes in literature for a long time since its emergence. The first science fiction writers inevitably portrayed the process of creating artificial life as an act of hubris, and one that would inevitably lead to disaster. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the idea of the "monstrous" creation rebelling against its creator was established and developed in Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1920) who was the first to use the word "robot" (1924), and in which a global uprising of artificial intelligence is depicted. (Capek, 2004)

The postwar era brought automation and mechanization, and it sparked a new fear of technology, which led to the coinage of the term; 'Technophobia'.

The mid-20th century was a turning point in the culture of technology, with the transition from mechanical technology to automated and cybernetic technology. This shift was more than just a technological one; it was also an ideological one, and led to a technophobic movement in academic and popular literature. The shift was greatly influenced by the work of Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (1950). In his discussion of the profound social implications of cybernetic systems – systems that are capable of self-regulation and communication – Wiener warned that, if they are not managed and tempered with human values, they could result in a dehumanized society in which human agency will be sacrificed for the sake of efficiency and control (Wiener, 1988). The words of Wiener resonated with an anxious populace in an age of post-war fears of the atomic age and emerging Cold War, and Wiener's stories of human versus machine in which the intelligent machine was regarded as a menace came into being.

"The Veldt" (1950) by Ray Bradbury has been the subject of much critical examination and reflection, as a classic instance of this period's technophobia. The domestic sphere (which represents the safe haven of humans bonding and nurturing) is

penetrated by a kind of predatory technology that is invisible and omnipresent in Bradbury's narrative. The "Mechanical Genius" is supposed to make the happy life of Home comfortable and convenient, but it is really meant to be an intruder that weakens the very essence of the family. David Dinello (2005), and John Potts (2024), have commented on the nursery in the story "The Veldt" as an unfortunate development of the "mechanical monster" that does not need to be strong but is strong in the mind of its user (Dinello, 2006), (Potts, 2024). The room's capacity to manifest the children's subconscious urges towards violence suggests a primal fear that technology, which fulfills our basest instinct, might reawaken the primitive instincts of savagery.

Moreover, the "Mechanical Genius" was an attack on the parental role which was very strong in the 1950s when the established social stratification was under attack by the fast changing technological and economic developments. In his article, Dustin Abnet (2020) posits that the American robot, as a cultural symbol, has been a space for negotiating anxieties about labor, race and domesticity (Abnet, 2020). The Hadley parents in "The Veldt" are essentially made redundant by their own house, which carries out their job of feeding and caring for them in a lifeless, mechanical way that they are unable to. This loss of purpose results in a deep feeling of estrangement and fear: George and Lydia discover that they are foreigners in their own home because a technology that was supposed to help them has turned against them. The tale is in fact a warning story, and was part of a kind of cultural trend that feared and distrusted the speedy progress of automation, that it threatened the moral and social fabric of the postwar world.

During this technophobic period, there was a great concern with the effects of mass media and consumerism on the human psyche. This is no ordinary house, but a sign of a consumer culture which will bring happiness through gaining the latest and most advanced of gadgets. Bradbury's critique goes beyond the technology itself to the structures of society which promotes such consumerism without regard for its long term psychological and social implications. This is because the children have become addicted to the nursery as a direct consequence of a technological and convenience-oriented culture over human interaction. The nursery becomes the children's first agent of emotional and psychological development, replacing parents, and ultimately destroying the family unit. The theme of the mid-century being threatened by the "Mechanical Genius" who will supplant human labor and take over the human spirit of relationship is a narrative that was prevalent throughout that era.

The Affective Turn in Human-Machine Interaction

During the late 20th and early 21st century the field of the humanities experienced an "affective turn" which emphasized emotions and sensations in the constructions of social reality (Clough & Halley, 2007), (Gregg & Seigworth, 2020). Sherry Turkle has studied the expected "more from technology and less from each other" and how our emotional expectations and attachments to digital devices are growing (Garcia, 2012). The transition can also be seen in literature, as it takes the "monster" theme and delves into the nuances of human-AI relationships. In Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto, the cyborg is a space of political and emotional freedom. (Haraway, 1994)

Sara Ahmed and the Stickiness of Emotion..... (Hayles, 2000)

The Cultural Politics of Emotion (2004) by Sara Ahmed has been central in developing an understanding of emotions as cultural practices which 'stick to' objects. The concepts of Ahmed have been used in a range of disciplines such as technology studies to examine the relationship between technologies and the affect they are linked to (Kember, 2003), (Wajcman, 2006). This framework can be very helpful when examining the transformation of the fearsome "Mechanical Genius" to the care dependent "Digients."

Contemporary Speculative Fiction and Ethics of Care

In *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, writer Ted Chiang offers a careful examination of AI creation, and the ethics of caring, that has received praise (Ahn, 2020). This is different from previous depictions of sudden conscious acquiring AIs, and reflects current discussions in both AI ethics and affective computing (Picard, 1997), (Suchman, 2007), which emphasize the painstaking process of "nurturing" intelligence. The literature review indicates that shift from the monster to companion is understood as being a part of a larger culture shift that acknowledges the emotional and moral aspects of our relationship with.

Theoretical Framework

Sara Ahmed and the Cultural Politics of Emotions

We must first interrogate the nature of emotion before we can appreciate the emotional landscape in which human and AI interactions unfold. Sara Ahmed (2004) writes that emotions are not something that is experienced internally, but rather

“cultural practices” that construct the surface of individual and collective bodies. Emotions do things: they bring people to communities, they make external boundaries between the “self” and the “other”.

The performativity of emotion and construction of reality

According to Ahmed, emotions are not just felt internally, but are ‘performative’ and become active in the way that they shape reality and the social worlds that are built. Fear, for example, is not merely a response to a threat that is present, but an active way in which an object is “read” as threatening. This reading is rooted in stories of cultural and historical connections. Ahmed (2004) says that: “Emotions do this, they bring individuals into populations, to be moved in a certain way to identify with a community” (p. 10). In the scope of Artificial Intelligence, it is not only a psychological response to the “Mechanical Genius”, but it is also a collective attitude that establishes the limits of the human community in relation to the technological “other”.

In order to understand the flow and accumulation of emotions around some objects, Ahmed introduces the idea of “affective economies”. Emotion in an affective economy is not a thing or a person, but it is the process that is created by the movement between them. The more an emotion repeats, the “stickier” it gets and the more it establishes the social worth of the object. For AI, this circulation also takes place in literature, film, in the news media and in direct interaction. Using the term ‘threat’ to describe AI is an affective economy of fear that allows technology to be ‘sticky’, despite the technology’s actual use. On the other hand, using the metaphor of AI as a ‘companion’ changes the affective economy to one of caring and responsibility. This theoretical perspective enables us to examine the shift from Bradbury to Chiang as not only a technological shift, but a shift in what kinds of affective labor we must engage in with our machines. It emphasizes that emotional reactions are “investments” that help to create reality of the technological objects of which we are a part.

Affective Economies and the Stickiness of AI.

After the Second World War the idea of “Mechanical Genius” became a very “sticky” to fear. The immediate effect was a result of cultural fears of automation and the Cold War (Potts, 2024). The children project violence onto the nursery, causing it to become sticky with fear, and the parents’ fears grow more and more in “The Veldt”. However, in *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, the Digients turn into sticky with emotions of love, care and responsibility, especially for Ana and Derek. This stickiness is developed in a continuous interaction and the effort of nurturing (Ahn, 2020).

Affect Theory and the Pre-subjective

Affect Theory complements the focus of Ahmed, by examining the pre-subjective, bodily sensation and intensities that precede conscious emotional states (Sedgwick, 2020), (Massumi, 2021). Affect is the unmediated emotion of the capacity to act or be acted upon in a body. In “The Veldt” the “too real” feelings of the nursery, the heat, the smell of blood, the roars etc., have a strong effect, evoking primal fear. *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, on the other hand, focuses on the impact of “awkwardness” and “vulnerability” in the Digients, the foundations for companionship and moral obligation.

Analysis of “The Veldt”: AI as Monster and the Politics of Fear

“The Veldt” (1950), by Ray Bradbury, is an unsettling anticipation of the fears of automation and the loss of human control. In the story, there is the ‘Happy Life Home’, a fully automated house that caters to every whim of the Hadley family. At the heart of this technological wonder is the nursery, a virtual reality room in which the children can see any landscape or recreate any panorama as they wish or as they imagine.

The Postwar Anxieties and the Dehumanizing Machine

The Veldt was published at a time when cybernetics was on the rise, as was early automation, and these technologies sparked dystopian concerns about human obsolescence (Potts, 2024; Wiener, 1950). The ‘Mechanical Genius’ is created as an apparatus of terror and horridness for the dwellers of the Happy Life household. This anxiety was not only related to losing their jobs but to the dehumanizing potential of technology and the loss of the purpose of being human (Dinello, 2005). He puts the idea like this, “The house is wife and mother now, and housemaid” (Bradbury, 1950, para 56). Bradbury also skillfully plays on these fears: the parents are made redundant by the Nursery. While parents are discussing, they reflect on their existence, which appears to be useless spending of days, as they say, “You look as if you didn’t know what to do with yourself in this house, either. You are beginning to feel unnecessary too” (Bradbury, 1950, para 57).

The Affective Politics of Fear: The “Stickiness” of the Veldt

Bradbury's "The Veldt" is about fear not just as a psychological response to threat but as an emotion that is complex, socially and technologically mediated, and can be explored through the lens of Sara Ahmed's "cultural politics of feelings." According to Ahmed (2004), emotions are not emotions within the person, but are cultural practices that "stick" to objects via the movement of signs and intensities. The fear then becomes more "sticky", clinging to the virtual African veldt, a place where the children's repressed hostility is projected, and where the parents' anxieties and fears are increasingly heightened. It feels like a real entity taking hold of them. "This is a little too real" (Bradbury, 1950, para, 15)

At first a technological wonder, and a harmless diversion, the nursery grows into a source of deep fear. As the mother character, Lydia puts it: "I am afraid, did you see? Did you feel? It's too real" (Bradbury, 1950, para, 38). The changes are not coincidental, but instead are made possible by an "affective economy" that has fear as its currency and power, which is amplified through the characters' relationships and the technology. As the children direct their anger and resentment in the nursery, it reflects these emotions in the form of a frightfully real African veldt. The "too real" aspect of the veldt, i.e., the heat of the sun, the smell of dust and animals, the roar of lions and the shrieks of their prey, is a series of "affective intensities" that penetrates the rational mind of the parents and touches them directly in the body. "The children thought lions, and lions were there...death and death" (Bradbury, 1950, para 66).

George and Lydia's physical reactions, like sweating, shaking and their fear are not only the physiological manifestations of fear but also ways in which fear is felt and enacted on their bodies. According to Ahmed (2004), emotions create boundaries for the individual and collective bodies, as they determine what is "self" and what is "other", what is "safe" and what is "threatening". The effects of this nursery are so strong, however, that in "The Veldt," the parents are unable to tell the difference between the virtual lions and real physical ones. This fear becomes "sticky" and stays in the air of the nursery, so that parents cannot occupy the space without becoming suffocated by the feeling of impending doom. "The room has become a channel toward-destructive thoughts, instead of a release away from them" (Bradbury, 1950, para 181).

In addition, the stickiness of the fear in the nursery is reinforced by the overall cultural atmosphere of the 1950s, which had a negative attitude towards automation. The "Mechanical Genius" of the Happy Life Home is already an object of fear due to the societal fears about the loss of humans to machines. The nursery becomes a site of these 'collective fears,' where they are focused into the single and terrifying experience of the nursery. The kids' attachment to the nursery only exacerbates the affective economy of fear, and their subsequent hostility toward their parents' efforts to close it down. "Don't let them do it...don't let the father kill everything" (Bradbury, 1950, para 209). The parents are the ones who are resented by the children, and the nursery is the one that is their ally and protector. This is an inversion of the traditional, inverted family hierarchy that is both cause and effect of the affective politics of fear: the technology is the space where the family's emotional and social links are systematically broken. It is even personified in the story now and then, as in "I don't imagine the room will like being turned off" (para. 179), and "I wonder if it hates me" (Bradbury, 1950, para. 199).

Terrifyingly, the affective politics of fear in 'The Veldt' highlights the capacity of technology to alter and exaggerate human feelings, resulting in a sense of alienation and devastation. The nursery is not only the land of the African veldt, but becomes the African veldt by the affective investment of the inhabitants of the nursery. The story reminds us that our feelings and reactions to technology are not neutral but always shaped by our cultures and societies. The "Mechanical Genius" is more than a machine, it is an emotional object with a burden of the deepest fears and anxieties of a society, "a mechanical monster" and a product of cultural imagination that continues to manifest itself.

The Politics of Care: AI as Companion

The Lifecycle of Software Objects (2010) by Ted Chiang is an entirely different story, as software is more like a companion and evokes emotions of attachment and moral responsibility. The "Digients" are emergent, computational consciousness that are born in the interaction and learning process, and need to be nurtured for years.

In contrast to the preprogrammed AI in "The Veldt," Chiang's Digients come from the simplest of states; they're like a human baby. This is an important developmental pathway in the process of changing emotional investment. The bond between human and machine is forged through the labor of nurturing and the emotional investment of their human "parents" (Ahn, 2020). The Digients are small, vulnerable and weak and evoke feelings of care and responsibility.

Affective Economies of Love and Responsibility: Nurturing the Digital Other

"The Veldt's" emotional undercurrent is very different from the one in *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* by Ted Chiang, where fear isn't the only emotion that is present. This affective economy is one of love, care and responsibility, and humans and digital organisms (Digients) form emotional connections and attachments. We can see how the Digients become "sticky" with these positive emotions through extended interaction and mutual investment, using Sara Ahmed's (2004) framework. The Digients

are "blank slates" as opposed to the "Mechanical Genius" which are pre-coded with fear, and whose emotional and cognitive development relies entirely on the efforts of their human caregivers. It is evident when Robyn introduces Ana to the Blue Gamma to see the digients and they are lying helplessly like babies in the daycare:

These guys are newly instantiated. It takes them a few months subjective to learn the basics: how to interpret visual stimuli, how to move their limbs, how solid objects behave. We run them in a hothouse during that stage, so it all takes about a week. When they're ready to learn language and social interaction, we switch to running them in real time. That's where you would come in. (p. 5)

Ted Chiang further tells readers that digients are more like baby animals: "Blue Gamma's entire strategy relies on people's affinity for animals. The digients learn through positive reinforcement, the way animals do, and their rewards include interactions like being scratched on the head or receiving virtual food pellets" (p. 7).

Nurturing intelligence is emotional labor, which puts the Digients on a stage of great moral and emotional interest, from being an objective software to being a subject of great moral and emotional interest. That is why the company hires someone who has experience with animal training. "Ana smiles. 'I'm starting to see where an animal-training background would be handy'" (p. 4). For years, Ana and Derek devote their lives to raising their Digients, Jax and Marco/ Polo. This investment may be more than time and energy, it is a commitment involving emotions and a connection with the world that defines their identity. Love is an investment that is meant to pay off, as Ahmed (2004) says, and in Chiang's novella it is the Digients' emerging consciousness, their ability to learn, and their growing personalities. The humans' bond with the Digients is strengthened as they start to speak, learn, and express their own desires, leading to a virtuous cycle of bond and care.

Love and responsibility are also an act of "stickiness" in *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*. The human characters interact with the Digients as vulnerable and worthy of care and protection, playing a dynamic role in developing and affirming the Digients' personhood. It is not a natural process but rather a socially and technically regulated process. The "awkward" movements and "non-picture-perfect cuteness" of the Digients "activate the protective instinct" of their human caretakers, similar to that of a human baby or young animal (Ahn, 2020). Affective encounters provide the foundation for more complicated emotions of moral obligation and companionship, and show how "pre-subjective" bodily responses are part of the affective process that creates strong emotional connection. They are designed in a different way: "...so rather than try to program an AI with what you want it to know, sell ones capable of learning and have your customers teach them" (p. 7).

In addition, the novella addresses the moral questions raised by this economy of emotions. With the Digients' growing maturity and sentience, their human caregivers must confront tough questions, such as their rights, autonomy, and future. The idea of selling or trading Digients, for example, involves ethical questions of the commercialization of consciousness and exploitation. They are not "moral rules" but realities relating to relationships and care as it happens, in this time. Humans' feeling responsible for their Digients is a direct result of the feeling they formed with them; their affectionate ties to their Digients provide a basis for feeling responsible for them and for questioning the traditional concept of personhood, as emotions such as love and responsibility motivate ethical consideration. This significant move is provided by the characters of Ana and Derek. Ana, particularly, values training digients and considers it equally valuable to that of raising children:

Ana's tired of the stereotype. She likes children just fine, but they're not the standard against which all other accomplishments should be measured. Caring for animals is worthwhile in and of itself, a vocation that need offer no apologies. She wouldn't have said the same about digients when she started at Blue Gamma, but now she realizes it might be true for them, too. (p. 43)

The affective economy of love and responsibility in *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* is an important paradigm shift in the cultural thinking of AI. No longer to be feared, the AI is to be nurtured and is a creature with which humans can have a meaningful and reciprocal relationship. It is not only a technological leap, but also the necessary evolution of society toward a more open and compassionate manner of understanding intelligence and life. What Chiang has demonstrated in their work is that the future of the human-AI relationship is not about mastering and controlling, but about developing empathy, responsibility and understanding of the other in the digital as a moral and emotional problem solver. In this affective economy, the Digients are turned into companions, and require a new form of ethics, one that is not based upon fear or exclusion.

This shift is also a blow to the "Mechanical Genius" type of Artificial Intelligence. In "The Veldt" the nursery is a technology used for human whim, which has no moral responsibility, but the Digients are a technology that requires human effort, patience, and moral responsibility. The change from being afraid to being responsible is thus a shift from being a consumer to taking responsible action in relation to technology. It helps to reinforce the idea that our emotions towards AI are not innate, but are formed and constructed through the experiences we have had and the stories that we have accepted. As she considers the work of care, Chiang also raises the work of emotion and ethics in creating an AI companion, and reminds us that caring and changing are both as much about the human as they are about the machine.

Comparative Analysis & Conclusion

The Lifecycle of Software Objects is a cultural evolution of the imagination of AI from “The Veldt.” AI was a powerful force in the 1950s, threatening and destroying human agency; a foe to be feared (Abnet, 2020; Dinello, 2005). The 21st-century view was toward a possible alliance and moral coexistence.

Feature	“The Veldt” (1950)	<i>The Lifecycle of Software Objects</i> (2010)
AI Representation	Mechanical Genius, monstrous, predatory	Digients, emergent consciousness, companion
Dominant Emotion	Fear, anxiety, dread	Care, responsibility, love, attachment
Human Role	Obsolete, threatened, victim	Nurturer, educator, moral guardian
Technological Impact	Dehumanization, erosion of authority	Personal growth, ethical dilemmas

Synthesis: The Evolution of the Affective Interface

In *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, the “Mechanical Genius” of “The Veldt” is replaced by the “Digients”, a major restructuring of what can be called an “affective interface” between humans and machines. In Bradbury’s era, the interface was completely efficient and cold, a ‘HappyLife Home’ where you don’t have to make an effort other than using the product. This disaffection paradoxically left a space which was then occupied by the children’s suppressed hostility and the parents’ sense of existential fear. The point of the “monstrosity” of the AI in “The Veldt” is that it is devoid of emotion and embodies and amplifies the worst fears of its creators. It is not a “monster” in the sense of illogical, but the “monster” in the sense of its stickiness to fear and death. It is like hatred saturated in a technological environment: “No wonder there’s hatred here. You can feel it coming out of the sky. Feel that sun” (Bradbury, 1950, para 189).

The Lifecycle of Software Objects, by Ted Chiang, says the interface should be of “slow AI” which is something that would come alive after years of emotional investment, patience and care. The Digients are not to be feared, but should be raised. This is a dramatic shift in cultural politics of emotions: from consuming to nurturing. The human characters (and reader) are left to affective labour of care as Chiang’s AI vulnerability and dependence. It is this working that makes the machine a companion. What Sara Ahmed (2004) calls “the work of emotion,” is the work of making the world. To Chiang, the role of lover to raise a Digient is a new kind of social reality, in which the human and artificial intelligence share the same space and responsibilities. Chiang beautifully explains this perspective through the case of a suspended digient, Tibo and the impact this suspension leaves on fellow digients:

Tibo is one of the oldest digients aside from the mascots, owned by a beta tester named Carlton. He suspended Tibo about a month ago; Ana’s glad to see that it wasn’t permanent. As the digients chatter, she walks her avatar over to Carlton’s and talks with him; he explains that he just needed a break, and now is feeling ready to give Tibo the attention he needs. (p. 36)

This is followed by a proposition on the ‘Ethic of Affective Engagement’.

The comparative readings of the two texts, Ray Bradbury’s “The Veldt” and Ted Chiang’s *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, offer a powerful example of the changing cultural dynamic of feelings about Artificial Intelligence. Using a theoretical framework of The Cultural Politics of Emotion by Sara Ahmed, and the Affect Theory, this paper has demonstrated that the way people feel about AI is not predetermined, but is rather negotiated socially, culturally and relationally. From the “Mechanical Genius” of the mid-20th century, a fearsome creature to the “Digients” of today, it signifies a significant paradigm shift in the view and interactions of humanity with artificial intelligence.

In part, “The Veldt” is a potent symbol of postwar fear: that of the insidious encroachment of AI, loss of control, and the idea of a traditional family structure being overthrown. Fear is the dominant emotion in the affective economy of the story, while the technology is stuck due to the negative emotions of the human users. The performative nature of fear in the nursery becomes a deadly reality as a society’s unease with technological advancement and the prospect of a human replacing it becomes apparent. The image of AI as a sinister entity helps to characterize a time of extreme ambiguity about the consequences of rapid advances in automation and the loss of human control over the home. *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, however, is a vision that brings forth emotions of love, responsibility and attachment from AI. In the novella, sustained, empathetic interaction is a means to create rich emotional connections; nurturing Digients is an example of emergent consciousness. In this, the affective economy places emphasis on the caring, the performative nature of human interaction results in the Digients as ‘moral subjects’

who are worthy of ethical consideration. The transition represents a cultural evolution that celebrates the use of AI as a tool and, more importantly, as a possible way to connect with it, highlighting the ethical aspects of creation and companionship in a digitally-driven world.

Finally, this study underscores the significance of cultural stories and feelings in comprehending and interacting with AI. The shift from monster to companion is not a simple one, but rather an intricate process of negotiation over fears, hopes, and moral duties situated in their socio-historical contexts. *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, on the other hand, is a vision in which AI evokes feelings of love, responsibility and attachment. Sustained, empathetic interaction is showcased in the novella as a way to enact deep emotional connections, while the process of nurturing Digients illustrates emergent consciousness. In this, the affective economy is based on care, and the performativity of human engagement creates the Digients as moral subjects worthy of ethical consideration. The transition represents a cultural evolution that celebrates the use of AI as a tool and, more importantly, as a possible way to connect with it, highlighting the ethical aspects of creation and companionship in a digitally-driven world.

In conclusion, this research highlights the importance of cultural stories and emotions in how we perceive and engage with AI. The shift from monster to companion is not a simple one, but rather an intricate process of negotiation over fears, hopes, and moral duties situated in their socio-historical contexts. With the further development and integration of AI into the human landscape, the cultural politics of emotions will play a vital role in shaping the future of human-machine interactions. This way, we can create a technological future shaped by human values and guided by a sense of complexity and nuance in the interplay of human affect and artificial intelligence, as well as an appreciation of the digital other. Thus, this research is a foundational step in the current discussion about AI ethics, and argues that the way to a harmonious future with man-made AI is not only to control the technology, but also to develop our own caring abilities and ethical responsibility for these constructs. The "Mechanical Genius" may indeed be one of our own creations – but so is the "Digient" which gives us the opportunity to be better creators – and better humans.

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