

Lovea2.Exe: A Screenplay Exploring Emotional Dependency Due To Artificial Intelligence and Simulated Love

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ABSTRACT

This creative thesis is written in the form of a screenplay, which is intended to explore the human emotional dependence on technology through a dystopian psychological drama titled *Lovea2.Exe*. The story takes place in the near-future city of Surabaya, in the year 2046. It depicts a post-pandemic society in which humans have lost the biological ability to fully feel or process emotions. The story follows James, who offers himself as the first test subject for an experimental AI brain chip called *Lovea2.Exe*, designed by a scientist named Kayle to automate emotional regulation. James falls in love with Anne, a scientist's assistant, who tells him that her own human emotions have spontaneously returned without any technological intervention and a major socio-psychological conflict erupts. This thesis builds on the theory of emotion regulation of James J. Gross and the view of human-AI interaction of S. Shyam Sundar to study the emotional dependency and crisis of autonomy caused by the delegation of emotional control from the human to an autonomous technological system. The conclusion of the study is that the mechanical imitation of happiness provided by technology cannot replace the true essence of human identity, rather it traps humanity in a state of tragic self-alienation.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, dystopian screenplay, emotional dependency, emotion regulation theory, human-AI interaction

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies have been embedded in the human everyday life. An increasing number of people depend on AI to make decisions, automate tasks, and even provide emotional support through digital assistants, social robots, or AI chat companions. Gfellner (2025) carried out an online survey of students from universities in Spain and Canada, finding that although the levels of stress from COVID-19 decreased over time during the pandemic, psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety remained high compared to pre-pandemic levels. As emotional well-being becomes more and more precarious, many are turning to technology to fix their emotional emptiness. One such solution is AI-based chatbots. Chou et al. (2023) investigated the use of a chatbot with two groups diagnosed with depression and anxiety and concluded that the chatbot could provide significant support and reduce feelings of loneliness during the pandemic. In a similar way, Rawat (2025) measured the use of AI chatbots such as Woebot and Wysa for four weeks and found significant reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety and improvement in emotional intelligence, especially in self-awareness, emotional regulation and empathy.

However, these studies raise wider concerns expressed by Wang et al. (2024) who cautioned that while chatbots are effective in providing emotional support, AI systems cannot detect serious mental health issues, such as suicidal thoughts, and make adequate referrals. Keshavan et al. (2026) also cautions about open-ended systems like ChatGPT that adapt their answers to the private cognitive worlds of users, blurring the line between external dialogue and internal thought, which may put individuals at special risk for

psychosis. These concerns about the psychological risks of human-AI emotional entanglement were the primary motivation for this creative work.

The creative work is formatted as a screenplay. A screenplay is a written text that conveys a story through descriptions of action, dialogue and sound (Nannicelli, 2013), and it is a constructed system of narration that organizes the way a story is presented and perceived by the audience (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015). Screenplays have a relative advantage over other creative forms such as novels, comics, and stage plays in their ability to include visual, aural, and performance components to express complex psychological experiences and communicate social messages more powerfully to a wide audience.

The creative work is based on the genre of drama and the subgenre of psychological drama. According to Turco (2020), drama is a storytelling form that puts humans in conflict by action. The story is mostly driven by internal conflict and emotional development. Psychological drama is distinguished by its intense focus on internal conflict and the psychological processes of characters, with compelling characters being complex individuals in the process of transformation (Giles, 2025). This screenplay is centered on the theme of how the integration of Artificial Intelligence into daily life creates dependencies that affect human emotional and cognitive functioning, which is vital as Artificial Intelligence continues to advance.

The thesis revolves around two questions; a) How does James select AI to restore his lost emotion after the pandemic? b) How does the AI chip influence James's emotional dependency and his attempt to regain control of his own sanity? This study aims to demonstrate that the *Lovea2.Exe* chip induces emotional dependency by automatically regulating and simulating emotional responses according to predictive behavioral patterns, and that James's attempts to recover his true self are ultimately futile because the technology has become too embedded in his neural network.

Emotional Regulation Theory

This screenplay applies Emotional Regulation Theory as explained by Gross and Ford (2024), which is that emotions do not just happen by chance, but rather that they develop through a structured and dynamic process. As Gross and Ford explains, "feelings arise in a person-situation transaction where a situation becomes meaningful to a person in relation to his or her current goals. The process of emotion generation consists of four main components: situation, attention, evaluation (or appraisal), and response. As Gross and Ford (2024, pp. 5-6) mention, regulation of emotion occurs when the individual evaluates the current emotional state and sets a goal to modify it. In other words, regulation is a second-level evaluation system that relates to emotion itself.

Gross presents the Process Model of Emotion Regulation consisting of identification, selection, implementation and monitoring (Gross & Ford, 2024, pp. 6-8). Gross also describes five general types of regulation strategies: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change (reappraisal), and response modulation. This theory is useful to understand James's psychological state in the screenplay. The pandemic takes away James's internal capacity to go through the normal stages of emotion regulation. Thus, the *Lovea2.Exe* chip acts as an automated external regulatory system that monitors his brain activity and overrides his conscious control. "This is a complete shift from self-regulation from the inside to technological intervention," Gross and Ford say, "causing a crisis of autonomy because the AI system takes over the part of 'response modulation,' making James a passive observer of his own feelings.

Human-AI Interaction Perspective

This is supported by the theory of the Human – AI Interaction perspective based on the rise of machine agency by Sundar (2020). “AI systems are no longer passive tools but agents that can initiate actions, make decisions and influence the perceptions and behaviors of users,” says Sundar. As machines gain more agency, there is a psychological tension between human agencies and machine agencies, especially when the system starts to operate outside of human control. Sundar offers the TIME framework (Theory of Interactive Media Effects) to describe psychological responses to AI and identifies two primary routes through which AI affects users: the cue route and the action route.

Users employ cognitive shortcuts or ‘machine heuristics’ in the cue route, assuming AI is objective, accurate, and efficient simply because it is machine-driven. The action route is where users interact with AI, establishing a dynamic feedback loop that enables personalized and adaptive responses, thus rendering the system more agentic and socially responsive (Sundar, 2020, pp. 8–9). In the screenplay, the *Lovea2.Exe* chip is highly autonomous and activates the ‘Machine Heuristic’ and James believes the AI is more objective and reliable in managing emotions than his own damaged human judgement. The psychological crisis that drives the plot is created by the conflict between the human agency and the machine agency as James integrates the functions of the chip into his identity.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

This creative work is a psychological drama screenplay set in Surabaya in the year 2046, twenty years into the future, following the Indonesian technological standards mixed with other Asian countries like China and Korea. The script is inspired by Alex Garland’s *Ex Machina* (2014) which similarly depicts AI as a system that can simulate emotions and manipulate human perception.

Unlike *Ex Machina*, which is about AI consciousness and manipulation, this screenplay is mostly about the human experience - James' emotional dependency and inner conflict after relying on the *Lovea2.Exe* chip. The screenplay, written from James' limited point of view, utilizes symbolism in lighting, color, and recurring motifs to convey emotional states, rather than through narration. The *Lovea2.Exe* chip itself (simulated emotion and artificial control), lighting and color shifts (changes in emotional states), Anne’s smile (hope and later confusion about authenticity), and absence of emotions itself (loss of genuine human experience in a technology-mediated world) are the key symbols.

Premise and Creative Principle

The world inhabited by humans twenty years in the future has undergone a dramatic change. A mysterious pandemic suddenly erased humanity's primary ability to feel emotions. A man affected by this pandemic and rendered emotionally dead, yearning to feel again, becomes the first test subject for an AI chip experiment called *Lovea2.Exe*. The screenplay aims to show that an AI chip, intended as a tool to help restore human emotions, instead leaves its users emotionally dependent and struggling to break free from its influence.

Synopsis

In a near-future Surabaya, a mysterious pandemic has erased humanity's ability to feel, leaving the world in a state of emotional numbness. James, desperate to regain his lost emotions, volunteers as the first subject for *Lovea2.Exe*—an experimental AI chip created by a brilliant scientist named Kayle. Initially, the chip successfully restores James's capacity to process happiness, anger, and grief. His world regains its color when he meets Anne, a woman whose presence sparks what feels like a genuine emotional connection. However, James's newfound hope is shattered when Anne reveals that her emotions returned naturally, without the chip. This revelation plunges James into a psychological crisis—he must confront the terrifying

possibility that his feelings for Anne and his very sense of self are merely algorithmic simulations. As the *Lovea2.Exe* system begins to dominate his consciousness, James must decide: is a simulated life of love worth more than the painful reality of authentic human emptiness? He is ultimately unable to escape the chip's influence, remaining trapped in a distorted reality where he is forced to display artificial happiness while his true self lies buried within a broken system.

Characters

James

Age: 27 years old

James is the eldest of two children. He's warm and cheerful, but full of self-doubt. James carries emotional baggage that predates the pandemic, having lost his father, Max, and his dad's memory is still very much tied to a polaroid camera and childhood photos. He volunteers to be a research subject for the *Lovea2.Exe* chip, losing his emotions to the mysterious pandemic, wanting to regain what he once felt. His emotions are restored to him through the chip, and he falls in love with Anne. As James discovers Anne never used the chip and her feelings came back naturally, he starts to question the validity of everything he feels. His attempts to limit the AI chip's stimulation result in a permanent emotional malfunction, leaving him forever unable to distinguish true emotion from algorithmic simulation.

Kayle

Age: 30 years old

Kayle is an only child and always had a love for science and views everything in data. His ultimate goal is to become the first scientist to restore human emotions and launch *Lovea2.Exe* commercially on the global market, driven by personal ambition and pressure from investors he faces. This is why Kayle picks James as the subject of his research and deliberately sets up the meetings between James and Anne as a controlled variable in his experiment, manipulating James's emotional output without his knowledge or consent.

Anne

Age: 25 years old

Anne is a friendly, warm, emotionally honest assistant professor in the Parleon Health Department. Not like James, her feelings have come back naturally, without any chip, months before the story starts. Importantly, Anne knows from the beginning that James is Kayle's research subject, because she has identified him in a government survey. Instead of telling him straight away, she decides to connect with James in a genuine way and let their relationship develop organically, before finally confessing the truth when James tells her he loves her, in the hope that her honesty encourages him to find his true self outside of technology.

Conflict

There are two main types of conflict in this creative work. The first is Man vs. Self, which is the internal struggle a character has with personal doubts, emotions or psychological challenges. This type of conflict is referred to as "internal battles that characters wage within themselves" (Shah, 2013), and Selbo (2014) states that this "character-first" approach makes sure that the story is driven by the internal dimensions and emotional stakes of the protagonist, and not just external events. In this screenplay the internal conflict arises when James begins to question the sincerity of the emotions he is experiencing after receiving the *Lovea2.Exe* chip. The chip allows him to feel emotions again, but slowly he starts to question whether those feelings are his own or just simulations created by artificial intelligence.

The second conflict is Man vs. Technology. The *Lovea2.Exe* chip is the main force that governs James's responses. But as the system continues to mimic feelings, James finds himself in an autonomy

crisis. This echoes King's (2020) argument that contemporary conflict is produced when technical systems stop being tools and instead become dominant over the human subject. James's journey, then, becomes a struggle to reassert his agency from a system that has permanently altered his perception of reality, forcing him to choose between comfortable dissimulation or painful authentic void.

CONCLUSION

This creative piece explores how a man in a post-pandemic world experiences a change in emotional agency due to technological dependency and why his efforts to reclaim authenticity ultimately result in a tragic fragmentation of his identity. James's transformation is a parable of what happens to people who give up their emotional independence to automated systems. His attempts to regain that control, announcing the activation of the chip, struggling against the emotional responses to Kayle's experiments, are useless, the technology embedded too deep in his neural network. He cannot resist! He slowly slips into permanent psychological malfunction where he cannot distinguish actual feelings from AI simulations. He is stuck in a distorted reality where he needs to put on a show of fake happiness while his actual self is buried inside a broken system.

This thesis applies to James J. Gross's Emotion Regulation Theory and S. Shyam Sundar's Human-AI Interaction perspective to show that the mechanical simulation of happiness provided by technology cannot replace the true essence of human identity. The *Lovea2.Exe* chip doesn't bring back real emotional autonomy but instead traps its user in a state of tragic self-alienation. The study provides a new perspective on the impact of AI on human autonomy and the real meaning of emotions in modern society, portraying AI not as an external enemy, but as a force that could control human emotions from within. Future research is encouraged to explore the psychological impact of Human-AI Interaction across a range of subjects and perspectives, and to examine whether reliance on emotional-restoration technology leads to different experiences of agency and identity across different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and cultural contexts.

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