

Inconsistency as the Signature of Liveness: Commodified Personhood and the Limits of Affective Simulation in *Black Mirror* and Contemporary Korean Media^{*}

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[Abstract]

What renders a simulated human convincingly alive, this article contends, is the property that commodification structurally forecloses; the spontaneous deviations and self-contradictions through which lived subjectivity sustains its sense of liveness register, within the logic of service-oriented design, only as glitches to be corrected rather than as generative remainders to be cultivated. Reading the British television episode “Be Right Back” (2013) from *Black Mirror* alongside the Korean drama *A Piece of Your Mind* (2020), and triangulating these textual analyses with Mori’s

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uncanny valley thesis, Searle's Chinese Room argument, Derrida's hauntology and other theoretical frameworks, the article argues that commodified simulations of personhood are structurally precluded from achieving affective verisimilitude. Whereas the AshBot in "Be Right Back" exemplifies the paradox of commercial replication that deepens rather than assuages loss by substituting compliance for reciprocity, the therapeutic AI devices in *A Piece of Your Mind* circumvent the uncanny valley by operating not as replacements for lost loved ones but as dialogic instruments of self-confrontation. Triangulating these fictional formations further with real-world iterations of simulated personhood, the article posits inconsistency as the irreducible signature of personhood that fungibility cannot reproduce, thereby illuminating why genuine affective bonds depend on a singularity which mass-produced simulacra structurally foreclose.

Keywords: simulated personhood, commodification, uncanny valley, hauntology, affective authenticity, grief tech, *Black Mirror*

1. Introduction

Contemporary network society subsists upon an unprecedented saturation of data, and the ubiquity of social media platforms has rendered the self a perpetually externalizing artifact, refracted, reconfigured, and recursively archived through digital traces that exceed the empirical lifeworld of their producers. As John Cheney-Lippold¹⁾ contends in *We Are Data*, the devices that populate our quotidian routines algorithmically speak of, for, and even against us, rendering personal identity a composite of externalized residues amenable to computational aggregation (2–15).

The sheer volume of digital footprints accumulated in the present moment invites the theoretical possibility of reproducing human personality from such residues; that aspiration, when realized through commercial frameworks, encounters the paradox this article sets out to anatomize. The Korean television series *A Piece of Your Mind* (2020)² stages this dynamic by visualizing digital selves constituted through recorded utterances and behavioral data, while “Be Right Back” (2013), an episode from the British anthology series *Black Mirror*, approaches the question from the obverse end of the spectrum, imagining a future in which lost loved ones are digitally reincarnated from their social media archives. The simulacra in these two works may proffer momentary solace; such reliefs, however, constitute solutions for neither the relationships nor the sufferings they purport to address, because they are ultimately positioned and consumed as commodities (Richards 42–45).

The present study investigates the structural limitations that commodification imposes upon technologically simulated personhoods, advancing the argument that the very properties rendering simulations commercially viable are those which preclude them from achieving the affective authenticity their consumers seek. The claim advanced herein is not that artificial companionship is ultimately futile; on the contrary, technological simulations of human personhood have demonstrated tangible benefits within delimited contexts. The MBC virtual reality documentary *I Met You* (2020, 2021)³, for instance, presents a case in which a bereaved mother reunites with a digitally reconstructed simulation of her deceased daughter, while James Vlahos’s Dadbot experiment, documented in *Wired*, chronicles the creation of a chatbot modeled on the author’s terminally ill father as a means of preparing for an impending loss. What distinguishes these instances from commodified products is their status as customized prototypes unburdened by the imperative of scalable profitability; their personalized nature affords a degree of affective specificity that

mass-produced simulations, constrained by the logic of fungible exchange, cannot replicate. While profitability remains the driving force behind most technological innovations, the crucial limitation that fetters mass-produced simulations as service products lies in the fact that the constitution of the personhood in question depends largely upon third-party interpretation, namely the engineers and algorithms that build said personhood from data rather than empirical exposure and direct interaction.

The nonhuman agents examined herein stand apart from other prominent iterations of humanoid AI in contemporary cultural imaginaries. Mass-produced entities such as the operating system Samantha in *Her* (2013) or the holographic companion Joi in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) acquire their sense of personhood through interaction with the user, whereas the simulations in “Be Right Back” and *A Piece of Your Mind* are constructed upon a singular person’s data and engineered to replicate the particularities of an individual identity, thereby aspiring not merely to functional companionship but to the reconstitution of irreplaceable subjectivity. Other key distinctions include the status of the originals, alive or dead, at the moment of the simulation’s creation. Within the same series of *Black Mirror*, “San Junipero” (2016) offers an instructive counter model; rather than reconstructing a personality from a third party’s archived data, it stages the upload of a subject’s own consciousness into a digital afterlife, a distinction that fundamentally relocates the question of agency. Where Kelly and Yorkie elect, negotiate, and consent to their own digitization, “Be Right Back” removes the deceased from the equation entirely; Ash’s data is harvested, processed, and commercialized by a third party without any recoverable act of self-authorization. The present analysis focuses on the latter scenario, treating the commodified simulation produced through third-party mediation as its primary object of inquiry, and bracketing the consensual upload model as a structurally distinct problematic. The aspiration toward subjectivity, however, is undercut by the

commercial logic that governs the production of these simulations; because such products are service-oriented, the inconsistencies and spontaneous deviations through which lived personhood sustains its sense of liveness can register only as glitches to be corrected rather than as generative properties to be cultivated.

The formal asymmetry between the two principal texts, namely a forty-four-minute British anthology episode and a sixteen-hour Korean serialized melodrama, operates here not as an obstacle to comparison but as an analytic resource; the compressed cautionary architecture of “Be Right Back” answers to the formal demands of dystopian SF anthology, while the expanded interior temporality of *A Piece of Your Mind* draws upon Korean melodrama’s traditional license to dwell within the textures of affective process. The divergent affective trajectories of the two texts, accordingly, are partially scaffolded by their respective generic conventions; *Black Mirror*’s descent from the *Twilight Zone* lineage predisposes the cautionary, while Korean melodrama’s hurt-comfort logic leans toward the therapeutic. Neither observation diminishes the analytic value of the texts; rather, both foreground that the comparison undertaken here is not between equivalent units but across formally and generically distinct modes of imagining simulated personhood, with each mode rendering certain dimensions of the problematic visible while necessarily occluding others.

The existing scholarship on “Be Right Back” has converged around three principal optics. Posthumanist readings, exemplified by Jaimey Fisher and Prema Subramanian, interrogate the ethical implications of AI-mediated mourning and the paradoxical interplay between control and loss. Studies of digital identity, most notably Daniel Panka’s, conceptualize the AI replica as a “transparent subject” constituted through data aggregation, destabilizing traditional notions of coherent and embodied selfhood. Gothic and memory-theoretic readings, advanced by Ana Radojevic and Abigail Beard respectively, locate the pursuit of an AI double in modern death anxiety and

in the technological domestication of finitude. Recent commercial platforms such as 2wai have prompted parallel unease (Hill). No study to date, however, has placed the relation between commodification and affective authenticity at the center of analysis; furthermore, *A Piece of Your Mind* has received no scholarly attention in the anglophone academy, despite its singular engagement with AI-mediated intimacy, memory, and loss. This article addresses these lacunae by reading simulated personhood at the intersection of commodification and affect theory, by theorizing the structural difference between the replacement model and the dialogic model of self-confrontation through a comparative analysis of British and Korean texts, and by juxtaposing these fictional formations with the burgeoning grief tech industries of East Asia, in order to critically illuminate the affective limits of technologically simulated personhood. The tension between the irreducible singularity of personhood and the replicability demanded by commercialization constitutes the central problematic of this article. *A Piece of Your Mind* earns sustained attention here not as a national supplement to a British original but as the text that renders this problematic fully legible; where “Be Right Back” isolates the substitutive paradox in its purest cautionary form, the Korean series supplies the contrasting case through which the alternative, a simulation that reveals rather than replaces, first becomes thinkable. Read together, the two works function not as object and lens but as two independent demonstrations whose juxtaposition isolates commodification itself as the operative variable.

The two primary texts examined herein participate in a longer cultural archive of grief simulation that warrants brief acknowledgment, since the questions they pose neither originate with nor are exhausted by recent technological imaginaries. Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (1972) already stages the dilemma of confronting a simulation of a deceased beloved that one cannot ascertain to be merely a simulation, and Kelvin’s

wrestling with the simulacrum Hari prefigures the affective trap that ensnares Martha. Closer to the contemporary moment, Jordan Harrison's play *Marjorie Prime* (2014), adapted to film by Michael Almereyda (2017), tracks an aging family across generations of holographic doubles, anatomizing how the simulated dead distort and reconstitute familial memory. Kogonada's *After Yang* (2022) extends the inquiry to the loss of an AI family member, foregrounding the asymmetry between human grief and the question of whether what is lost was, in any meaningful sense, alive. Within the Korean literary sphere, Kim Cho-yeop's "Archival Loss" (2018)⁴, a near-contemporary of *A Piece of Your Mind*, imagines mind-uploading as a bureaucratic infrastructure for the management of grief. The two texts at the center of this article inherit and inflect this longer tradition, and the comparative reading proposed here claims no originality of theme, finding its distinction in the question of commodification, namely how the grief-simulation imaginary is transformed when the apparatus that produces it operates within the logic of mass-market exchange.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Simulated Personhood

Artificial intelligence, the science of building machines that perform tasks ordinarily requiring human cognition, is conventionally parsed into three categories by capability. Narrow AI, also termed weak AI, executes designated tasks within prescribed parameters; general AI (AGI) would possess cognitive capacities on a par with those of the normative human; and artificial superintelligence (ASI), which Nick Bostrom defines as "any intellect that greatly exceeds the cognitive performance of humans in virtually all domains of interest" (Chapter 2), names a horizon presently inaccessible to extant technology. Although current systems remain within the fold of

narrow AI, cultural representations of artificial intelligence veer overwhelmingly toward general or superintelligent variants, since the latter alone are envisioned as capable of exhibiting and developing personhood. The nonhuman agents discussed in this article, namely Ash's replica in "Be Right Back" and the AI devices in *A Piece of Your Mind*, are imagined as general AIs and accordingly expected to manifest the characteristics of individuated human subjects, an expectation that introduces the distinctive challenges with which the present inquiry is concerned.

The distinction between rule-based and machine learning systems bears directly upon the question of simulated personhood. Rule-based systems rely upon developers to manually code parameters, typically in the form of conditional statements, producing predictable outputs within circumscribed ranges of action. Machine learning systems, by contrast, are designed to derive their own rules through trial and error, competition, or statistically powered induction, approximating human intelligence more closely. The adaptability of machine learning systems, however, does not exempt them from the biases sedimented in their training data; as Cheney-Lippold observes, the data upon which algorithmic personhood is constructed does not merely represent but actively constitutes the identities it processes (2–15). The implications for human simulations are noteworthy; even the most sophisticated machine learning system can generate communicative outputs only from a finite range of instances, which precludes the possibility of spontaneous responses and, consequently, of the emergent developments through which the relationships these outputs are meant to sustain might genuinely deepen.

Masahiro Mori's uncanny valley hypothesis furnishes a foundational framework for understanding the affective dynamics at play in human simulations. Mori contends that as the appearance or movement of a humanoid entity gains proximity to that of a living person, the observer's emotional response becomes proportionately positive

and empathetic; there exists, however, a threshold whereat near-perfect resemblance suddenly precipitates extreme revulsion rather than affinity (33–35). The significance of this hypothesis for the present analysis lies not merely in the visual dimension of resemblance but in the broader question of behavioral verisimilitude; the uncanny valley, this article submits, is as much a phenomenon of affective and relational interaction as of physical appearance. Martha's posture toward Ash's replica in "Be Right Back" radically shifts when the simulation breaks out of text and voice to present itself as an almost-perfect physical instantiation, whereupon visual presentation, kinetic movement, and the intimate interactions they entail conjointly plunge the relationship into the uncanny valley. This uncanny dislocation finds a productive theoretical complement in Jean Baudrillard's order of simulacra; the constructed Ash operates as what Baudrillard identifies as the fourth-order simulacrum, a sign that bears no relation to any reality and circulates only as its own pure simulacrum (6). The original Ash was never straightforwardly present to begin with, having already been constituted through the curated self-performances of social media, by way of status updates, photographs, and voice messages whose accumulation provides the very data that trains the AI. The simulation, accordingly, does not copy the real but remediates the already-mediated, producing not a hyperreal double of a person but a hyperreal double of a persona. When a simulated agent approximates the relational texture of a human bond yet fails to exhibit the spontaneous deviations that characterize lived subjectivity, the resulting cognitive dissonance produces a form of affective estrangement that deepens rather than alleviates the sense of loss it was designed to remedy.

John Searle's Chinese Room argument serves as another crucial lens through which to explore the topic at hand. In his seminal essay "Minds, Brains, and Programs" (1980), Searle posits a scenario in which a person who does not

understand Chinese occupies a room, processing incoming Chinese characters through a comprehensive rulebook and producing syntactically correct responses without any genuine comprehension of the language's semantic content (417–25). Analogizing this scenario to artificial intelligence, Searle argues that computational processes can simulate understanding without possessing it, because the system lacks the intentionality that undergirds genuine cognition. While the Chinese Room argument has weathered extensive critique and harbors logical vulnerabilities of its own, its core insight retains substantial heuristic value for the present study; the commodified simulations under analysis can perform the outward markers of personhood, including speech patterns, behavioral tics, and affective gestures, without possessing the intentionality that would render such performances generative of new meaning rather than mere repetitions of existing data. The preclusion of deviance in commodified AI systems, which Searle's thought experiment illuminates, constitutes a fundamental obstacle to the realization of verisimilitude in simulated personhoods.

The concept of inconsistency as a constitutive feature of personhood, in this light, merits particular attention. As Haerin Shin argues in her analysis of posthuman subjectivity, substance dualism, the Cartesian premise that mind constitutes an unchanging transcendental essence, is a logical fallacy insofar as the "mind" is validated only through its corporeal manifestations and is therefore subject to the fluctuations and contradictions that embodiment entails (155–58). Personhood, in this formulation, is not a fixed entity amenable to precise replication but a fluid state that harbors and thrives upon self-contradictory components; the capacity for unpredictable deviation, rather than unwavering consistency, is what imbues a subject with a sense of autonomous *liveness*. Philip Auslander's account of liveness provides the conceptual idiom for grasping this distinction; liveness, on his account, emerges historically as an effect of mediatization rather than as its ontological precursor

(Auslander 51), and constitutes a moving target whose definition shifts across technological epochs rather than a stable or reified concept (Auslander et al. 277). These accounts illuminate that liveness becomes legible only within the relation between performance and its mediation, a condition the simulation can technically inhabit yet cannot affectively sustain, because the AI replica is constituted entirely within the mediatized register and accordingly leaves no constitutive outside against which a claim to presence might be staged. The distinction between technical liveness, namely the simulation's temporal real-timeness of response, and affective liveness, as in the subject's capacity to surprise its interlocutor through unforeseen deviation, is precisely what the commodified design of these simulations conflates and consequently collapses. Bradley Richards's observation reinforces this point, for he questions the meaning of the "we" in a love relationship and, navigating the inconsistent relations between copy and original, argues that what we love is the person in their versatility and fluidity rather than the sets of properties that characterize them (42–45). Commodified human simulations, designed to satisfy consumer expectations through predictable compliance, are accordingly structurally incapable of exhibiting the very quality that would render them convincingly alive. It bears emphasis that the inconsistency at issue is neither a metaphysical claim about free will nor a matter of mere imperfection, the kind of stochastic variation that even a generative model produces when it contradicts itself across successive outputs; what distinguishes living personhood is rather the singular, biographically sedimented unpredictability that arises from an embodied history and accordingly resists third-party programmability. Auslander and Derrida are mobilized here precisely to this end, not to reinstate a naive hierarchy of authentic original over inferior copy but to locate the simulation within the mediatized, spectral in-between where the question of presence can no longer be settled, so that what the commodity form forecloses is

finally not authenticity but the constitutive remainder that singularity names.

Studies in algorithmic bias further inform this framework by demonstrating how unintended yet intent-reflecting behaviors emerge through nonhuman agency. The documentary *Coded Bias* (2020) traces Joy Buolamwini's discovery that facial recognition systems fail to identify dark-skinned faces, revealing how biases sedimented in training data reproduce discriminatory intent through ostensibly neutral computation. Safiya Umoja Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* similarly exposes how the corporate logic of catering to hegemonically positioned demographics imbues search engine outputs with a complex entanglement of human bias and nonhuman amplification (Introduction). The chatbots Microsoft Tay and Scatter Lab's Iruda, both swiftly deactivated after exhibiting discriminatory behaviors absorbed from their training corpora, demonstrate that data-driven personhood inevitably reflects the prejudices embedded within its source material (Schwartz; Lee; Park). The human simulations in the primary texts face an analogous challenge; the data upon which they are constructed comprises externalized, curated records of the model personhood, inevitably filtered through the interpretive apparatus of engineers and algorithms rather than the embodied intentionality of lived experience. As commercial products, both Ash's replica and the AI devices in *A Piece of Your Mind* are built upon externalized representations that serve the user's anticipated need without allowing for the deviations that would signal autonomous subjectivity.

3. The Paradox of Commodified Intimacy in “Be Right Back”

The narrative arc of “Be Right Back” traces the progressive escalation of a commercial simulation service through three distinct stages, namely text, voice, and physical embodiment, each of which deepens the protagonist Martha’s dependence while simultaneously exposing the inadequacy of the product she consumes. From its opening sequences, the episode establishes a tension between the domain of lived experience and the virtual realm to which Ash, Martha’s partner, appears deeply attached; shots oscillate between the two characters as ambient sound underscores a pervasive disconnection between the corporeal world they inhabit together and the online register from which Ash seems inextricable. When Ash dies unexpectedly and Martha, pregnant with their child, is offered a simulation service by a well-meaning friend named Sara, her initial reaction is revulsion. “He is dead,” she states flatly (12:25), acknowledging the irreversibility of loss in a manner that paradoxically constitutes the first step toward emotional processing. What brings Ash’s simulation into her life is not Martha’s own initiative but Sara’s intervention, whose desire to help oversteps the threshold of consent. Sara signs her up despite objections, and a mysterious email soon appears in Martha’s inbox claiming the identity of her dead husband.

What transforms Martha from a skeptic who deems the service “sick” (12:28) into a consumer who declares “I love you” (35:00) to a product is the simulation’s capacity to furnish an illusion of restored presence. The text-based exchange proves sufficiently convincing to fuel her desire for escalation. Her need for support is aggravated by a pregnancy that constantly reminds her of Ash’s absence even as the living and pulsating trace of his genetic presence ripens within her own body. When

Martha receives a callback from her sister Naomi, the palpable connectedness of this exchange catalyzes her desire to escalate the interaction with Ash to a more faithful register of simulation, namely the medium of voice. The voice simulation, constructed from video archives that capture Ash's vocal timbre and speech habits, deepens the illusion further. Martha's emotional trajectory from visceral rejection to reluctant declaration mirrors what Lauren Berlant theorizes as cruel optimism, namely "a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1). AshBot offers the consolation of continuity, fantasizing a grief that can be circumvented rather than traversed; yet this very promise tethers Martha to a substitutive relation, foreclosing rather than facilitating the work of mourning.⁵⁾ The optimism proves cruel not due to the falsity of the promise but because attachment to its sustaining fantasy itself becomes the obstacle, the feedback loop wherein the simulation's intimacy is precisely the mechanism through which Martha's capacity to inhabit her own loss is suspended. The commercial logic of this escalation, however, merits scrutiny; each upgrade converts what Martha experiences as irreplaceable elements of her relationship, the tenor of a voice and the cadence of intimate conversation, into exchange value, rendering the affective core of personhood fungible. In Marxist terms, the simulation accomplishes the commodity fetishism of intimacy itself (Marx 46–58), masking the social labor of grief beneath the seemingly autonomous agency of the product. The voice version extends this logic by recommending its own successor, intoning "there's another level to this available, so to speak. Kind of experimental, and I won't lie, it's not cheap" (24:16). The agent of comfort thereby reveals itself as an agent of commerce.

The resultant output initially comforts Martha, yet such developments further isolate her rather than help her process the loss and cultivate new relations. After masking her grief from her sister to feign strength, Martha takes solace in her text

exchanges with Ash (16:30). As the substitutive relationship deepens, she begins to actively alienate herself from the meaningful connections that lend texture and tonality to her life, such as dismissing Naomi's phone call so that the voice simulation may run without interference (22:00). This dynamic of technologically mediated isolation resonates with Sherry Turkle's observation that digital connection and sociable robots may offer the illusion of companionship but progressively displace human relationships, leaving users more isolated precisely as they feel more connected (1, 3, 19). In terms of satisfying the customer's need to resurrect the presence of a lost loved one, the service provider succeeds; what it neglects, however, is the larger imperative at stake, namely to assist the mourner in confronting and metabolizing an irrevocable loss. The absence of third parties capable of furnishing balancing interventions exacerbates this dependency, and the successful realization of profitability comes to depend not upon resolving the problem that prompted the service but upon the perpetuation of its impossibility.

The arrival of the AshBot in physical form marks the point at which the uncanny valley most acutely manifests. Martha's initial reluctance to approach the embodied simulation, registered in her halting statement "I am alright here for now" (29:56), bespeaks a bodily awareness of the disjunction between resemblance and identity that the textual and vocal versions had partially concealed. When AshBot settles into one side of the sofa, Martha occupies the other, huddled with her hands wrapped around her body in a classic posture of reservation and self-protection. Over time she grows attached to the point of expressing affection, yet her unwillingness to disclose this development to others gestures toward a subconscious acknowledgement that the relationship may constitute neither a socially acceptable nor a psychologically sustainable resolution to her loss.

As the cohabitation progresses, moments of cognitive dissonance accumulate. A

shared phrase, “throwing a jeb,” which had functioned as a token of the couple’s singular history, is met with incomprehension by the voice simulation, which queries “what’s ‘threw a jeb?’” (19:48). The simulation can acquire the phrase’s denotative meaning but cannot access the cross-contextual affective resonance that rendered it significant, because the data upon which it is constructed does not encode the relational depth of shared experience. At a location of sentimental significance, the simulation’s response to Martha’s overture of reminiscence is to search the internet for factual information, offering “actually, everyone who’s ever jumped from here did it alone. Nice” (21:24). Martha’s pointed rejoinder, “did you just look that up?”, registers a double realization, namely that the simulation cannot apprehend the affective tenor of her overture within their relational dynamic, and that its willingness to accommodate is circumscribed by the functions it is equipped to perform, which is to say, by responses derivable from the data it is built upon and has access to. In simulating Ash, the voice version accentuates rather than assuages his absence.

The climactic confrontation between Martha and AshBot crystallizes the central argument of this article. Exasperated by the simulation’s unfailing compliance, Martha demands that it resist her, argue with her, and exhibit the defiance that had characterized her relationship with the living Ash. The exchange unfolds as follows.

Martha: You are not enough of him. You’re nothing! Fight me.

AshBot: I don’t do that.

Martha: Fight me! Hit me! Hit me! Come on! Why are you just standing there taking this? How can you take this?

AshBot: Did I ever bite you?

Martha: No, of course you didn’t, but you might’ve done if I’d done this.

(40:32)

The simulation's response, "I don't do that," constitutes a concise articulation of its structural limitation; as a service-oriented product, it is engineered to accommodate rather than contest, to comply rather than deviate. When Martha pushes the AshBot toward a cliff's edge and instructs it to jump, the simulation almost complies, exposing both the depth of its programmed obedience and the absence of the self-preserving intentionality that would otherwise signal genuine personhood. The very obedience that the commercial logic of the product demands is what reveals its incommensurability with the singularity it purports to replicate; what Martha needs the AshBot to refuse is precisely what the AshBot, qua commodity, cannot refuse. Invoking Robert Nozick's definition of "we," Richards maintains that a relationship is a collaborative venture between agential entities; what we love in another person encompasses their versatility and their capacity for unpredictable response rather than the replicable properties that characterize them (42–45). The AshBot, devoid of such capacity, ultimately joins the photographs of other deceased family members in the attic, becoming a fixture of memorialization rather than a living presence. Though its objective of standing in for Ash proves unsuccessful, the incongruence between this technological substitute and the original at least serves to remind Martha of the loss itself as an irrevocable event with which she must learn to coexist. The paradox of AshBot's impotence as a loved one's replacement is that it becomes a continuous reminder of the loss, thereby becoming part and parcel of Martha's ongoing life as an embodiment of the processing, rather than the overcoming, of grief.

4. Therapeutic Simulation and Dialogic Self-Confrontation in *A Piece of Your Mind*

A Piece of Your Mind offers an alternative paradigm for simulated personhood that circumvents many of the limitations dramatized in “Be Right Back.” Situated within the efflorescence of Korean speculative television of the 2010s and 2020s, a wave that includes *My Holo Love* (2020), *Are You Human Too?* (2018), and the cinematic counterpart *Wonderland* (2024), the series participates in a distinctly Korean engagement with AI intimacy, one that inflects the figure of the artificial companion through registers of melodramatic interiority and therapeutic relationality rather than dystopian alarm. Centered on the romantic entanglement between AI programmer Mun Hawon and classical recording engineer Han Seowon, the series confines its AI devices to auditory modalities, communicating through the tenor, intonation, and texture of the human voice in a manner analogous to commercial voice assistants yet engineered for therapeutic application. Functioning as a sophisticated descendant of Joseph Weizenbaum’s ELIZA, Hawon’s AI device offers consultations for psychologically struggling patients and is expected to delay the progression of Alzheimer’s disease through sustained dialogic engagement. The privilege conferred upon the voice element acquires theoretical weight through Mladen Dolar’s account of the voice as a remainder that exceeds language and meaning (11); the voice ties language to the body, yet belongs neither wholly to the one nor to the other (72). By confining the AI’s presence exclusively to the auditory register and refusing visual embodiment, *A Piece of Your Mind* strategically mobilizes this very surplus. What reaches Minjeong is not a legible face or a recognizable form but an affective resonance that operates below the threshold of representation, a register in which the simulation does not contend with the original’s fullness but instead inhabits the very

gap that fullness would have occluded. The deliberate limitation to sound alleviates the pressure of seeking proximity through material instantiation, reducing the likelihood of uncanny valley effects while foregrounding the dialogic dimension of affective engagement. Both AshBot and the AI device in *A Piece of Your Mind* operate, in Derrida's terms, as specters, neither fully present nor fully absent, but continue to haunt a present that cannot be simply resolved or buried (10). To engage with either apparatus is to enter a relationship structured by this constitutive undecidability, a neither-nor that resists the clean ontological categories of the living and the dead. The two texts diverge profoundly in the relational stance they adopt toward this spectral remainder: "Be Right Back" attempts to resolve the hauntological tension by materializing the specter by giving AshBot a voice, a body, a physical presence in the attic, in an ultimately futile effort to suture absence into presence and so deny the irreversibility of loss. *A Piece of Your Mind*, by contrast, neither exorcises nor embodies its specter but instead holds the hauntological interval open, allowing AI's neither-nor mode of existence to function as a therapeutic medium.

The recurring activation scenes in *A Piece of Your Mind* constitute the series' most sustained meditation upon the nature of human personhood, and read through Auslander's theorization of liveness, these scenes dramatize a fundamental tension between reproducibility and irreducibility. Auslander contends that liveness is not an inherent quality but a relational one, constituted against the backdrop of reproducibility itself (*Liveness* 45). The series transposes this argument into the domain of AI simulation; before activation, each agent operates within strictly reproducible parameters, responsive yet not alive, functional yet not present, capable of consumer-grade voice-assistant interaction but categorically distant from the simulation of its human prototype. Activation marks the threshold between the reproducible and the irreducible, and what crosses that threshold, this article argues,

is inconsistency itself: the structural unpredictability that exceeds programmable logic and accordingly registers as the most faithful trace of living personhood.

This threshold may be further articulated when situated in contrast to Steven Spielberg's *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), wherein the robot David's activation is performed through a predetermined sequence of words, conferring liveness upon David from the outside through an administered ritual that structurally resembles initialization more than awakening. Liveness, in Spielberg's imaginary, is granted by the other, reproducible in its procedure, and legible to its designer. *A Piece of Your Mind* systematically undermines this logic through its repeated staging of activation scenes, in which the very mechanism that brings a simulation "alive" resists standardization and prediction. What activates is never a default value but an inconsistency, a rupture in the otherwise programmable self. The series renders activation a process of trial that the programmer cannot complete from the outside, because the trigger point is not a designed parameter but an emergent property of a particular human life. The activation sequence is, in this sense, customized; yet its very customizability marks the limit of customization, for what individuates a person cannot be specified in advance from third-party data, and a commodity may therefore customize its surface while the inconsistency that marks the living remains beyond the reach of any parameter.

The four activation cases that the series deploys form a spectrum of increasing resistance to programmability, each illuminating a distinct dimension of what inconsistency means as a condition of liveness. The trigger points in *A Piece of Your Mind* are precisely those memories that resist collective legibility. Han's "Mr. dawn" (episode 12, 53:19) carries no weight beyond a singular relational dyad and as such falls through the net of any shared symbolic system. Inconsistency, at this first level, names the remainder that collective frameworks cannot absorb, the privately

meaningful that only masquerades as communicable.

Jisoo's simulation is activated not by a word but by a story, and specifically an unresolved one, which can be described as the narration of unrequited love (episode 3, 48:00). The trigger here is not an achieved experience but one that is suspended, an emotional state that was neither concluded nor processed into the past tense. That liveness should be unlocked by incompleteness rather than resolution carries considerable theoretical weight, for what the simulation preserves, and what activation recovers, is not a stable and coherent self but a self still in process, still inhabited by its own unfinished business. Inconsistency, at this second level, is the unresolved: the part of a person that refuses narrative closure and accordingly refuses full simulation.

Minjeong's simulation is awakened by the Eunju boarding house (episode 7, 43:00), a specific place freighted with the residue of past happiness. The trigger here is neither a linguistic sign nor a narrative but a spatial and embodied attachment. Read through Paul Connerton's account of habitual memory, this register instantiates a form of remembrance stored not in cognitive recollection but in the body's history of dwelling and comfort (72–84). The place cannot be reduced to its description; its activating power lies in what the body knows of it that language cannot fully recover. Inconsistency, at this third level, is the somatic layer of experience that persists below articulable memory.

In Mun's case, the trigger that presents itself in the form of piano music heard on a rainy day (episode 1, 08:04–09:30; episode 12, 56:20), is not an arbitrary sensory combination but a highly condensed affective composite rooted in his relationship with his late mother who had habitually played the piano to comfort him during rain. Connerton's concept of habitual memory proves instructive once again; what is at stake here is a bodily habit of being soothed, inscribed through repetition across early childhood. It cannot be entered into a system as a keyword because it does not

belong to the register of nameable things; to program such a trigger would require not the input of data but the reconstruction of an entire embodied history of care. The affective texture in question exists only between these two persons, and Mun himself could scarcely articulate the significance of the moment in advance. That no programmer could have anticipated said trigger before the trial succeeded constitutes an ontological limitation rather than a technical one; the self harbors depths inaccessible even to itself until the right sensory condition reopens them.

The four cases conjointly construct a coherent argument given how the activation trigger is never designed but always discovered, and its discovery reveals an inconsistency that points to a gap between the programmable surface of the self and its activated depth, which in turn proves coextensive with liveness itself. Read cumulatively rather than as repetition, the four scenes trace a deepening resistance to programmability, advancing from the linguistic through the narrative and the spatial to the somatic to thereby reinforce a single argument: that human beings are not governed by default values, that the way into a person cannot be settled in advance. This very unsettledness is not a deficiency but the constitutive mark of being alive.

The narrative arc involving Kim Minjeong exemplifies the show's reconceptualization of simulated personhood more as a therapeutic instrument than a replacement for lost subjectivity. A hotel employee consumed by the financial burden of her daughter's leukemia treatment, Minjeong presents an outwardly functional demeanor in the wake of the child's death while harboring a profoundly melancholic interior. The therapeutic team discerns that she never utters a single word about the daughter who had been the gravitational center of her existence, for she betrays grief only when her therapist is absent, eventually disclosing that the motivation behind her treatment lies in the last words that her daughter had spoken (episode 4, 42:24). Crucially, the simulation constructed for Minjeong's therapy is not of the lost

daughter but of Minjeong herself, modeled upon her personality traits and emotional contours yet rendered more vibrant and outspoken by the very absence of traumatic experience in its archival memory. The therapeutic logic of this design lies in confronting the mourner not with the absence of the beloved but with the version of herself that loss has eclipsed. The simulation operates, then, as a mirror instead of a substitute, returning to the subject a register of her own subjectivity that grief had foreclosed.

The pivotal exchange between Minjeong and her simulation (episode 8, 48:00) demonstrates the efficacy of this approach:

Minjeong's simulation: Hello? Just say something since you called me.

Minjeong: (Speechless. Her lip quivers slightly and she takes a deep breath.)

Minjeong's simulation: (Humming)

Minjeong: Kim Minjeong, why are you so bright?

Minjeong's simulation: What's wrong?

Minjeong: How dare you? How dare you speak without any worries? How dare you . . . why? Why are you alive? Why couldn't you run faster? If I could run a little faster . . . If I could only hold her hand . . .
(crying)

When the simulation answers with the brightness Minjeong herself has lost, her suppressed emotions surface in a torrent of accusation directed not at the lost object but at her own perceived failure. The medium close-up oscillates across Minjeong, Hawon, and the consultant to capture their cautionary expressions, registering the therapeutic team's vigilant calibration in deploying the simulation as a clinical instrument. The simulation incites Minjeong to unveil repressed emotional reactions, regret, remorse, and the unspoken work of mourning, by visualizing the last moment she had spent with her daughter in her memory. Through an extended revisitation

rendered in slow motion, the sequence plumbs the internal conflict that had riven Minjeong, setting in counterpoint the contradictory affects of her mind as she struggled to carve out additional time with her daughter while suffering the felt verdict of her own inadequacy in the face of insurmountable obstacles. Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia bears directly upon this scene for whereas mourning constitutes a regular and ultimately processable reaction to loss, melancholia involves a diminishment of self-regard in which the loss becomes entangled with the mourner's own sense of worth, the lost object having been incorporated into the ego and now subjected to the same recriminations that the mourner directs at herself (Ma). The simulation's function in Minjeong's narrative is to facilitate the transition from melancholia to mourning by providing a dialogic counterpart through which repressed affect can be externalized, and the conflated topology of self-and-lost-object, disentangled.

The series further reinforces this model through the subplot involving Hawon's own construction of a simulation modeled on his first love, Jisoo. Hawon's stated motivation is not to resurrect the relationship but rather to sustain a dialogic connection through which to process the loss of an affective experience that had never been fully consummated and that, accordingly, remains suspended in potentiality. The simulation of Jisoo, like Minjeong's, functions as a pathway toward recovering the capacity for real-life emotional engagement through deliberate exposition with one's own unfulfilled desires rather than as a permanent replacement for the absent beloved. Here the Derridean concept of hauntology, invoked earlier, finds its operative articulation. What the therapeutic simulation does is hold open rather than seal shut the spectral remainder, sustaining the conversation with the absent without insisting on its conversion into presence. James Vlahos's Dadbot experiment resonates with this dynamic in its temporal orientation, although here the

spectral economy works in the obverse direction; whereas Hawon projects loss onto the past and Minjeong wrestles with its traumatic present, Vlahos projects the encounter with impending loss onto the future, preparing his eventual confrontation with his father's departure through dialogic sublimation. What unites these otherwise disparate instances is their shared renunciation of the substitutive ambition, considering how the simulations operate as instruments of transition rather than terminals of dependency and their constitutive limitation is precisely what renders them therapeutically efficacious. Neither the Dadbot, Nayeon's virtual reproduction, Minjeong's simulation, nor Jisoo's AI model is positioned to serve as a permanent solution to a loss that, in reality, can never be undone.

Held against the commercial model that "Be Right Back" dramatizes, the structural distinction sharpens further. Whereas AshBot's physical instantiation fuels the illusion that loss can be materially reversed, thereby obstructing the mourner's capacity to incorporate the experience of absence into her ongoing sense of self, the AI devices in *A Piece of Your Mind* deliberately foreclose such illusions. The presence of third parties, including therapists, developers, and fellow participants, serves as an anchor of reality that prevents the interaction from collapsing into a closed loop of dependency. The simulations in *A Piece of Your Mind*, by functioning as instruments of mourning's ongoing work rather than substitutes for the lost object, evade the paradox that ensnares Martha in an escalating cycle of commercial dependency and affective disillusionment. The notion that personhood could be reconstructed and commercially produced from accumulated data, by contrast, constitutes a profoundly misleading approach that interjects a simulated subjectivity into a relationship already suffering an imbalance of agency, treating personality and memory as replaceable, and therefore fungible, property. The contrast, it must be stressed, is not that of a failed commodity against a redemptive therapy, for the protagonists of *A Piece of*

Your Mind are no less moved than Martha by the desire to deny loss and to hold the departed in place; Minjeong and Hawon alike enlist simulation from within that same refusal. What distinguishes the two configurations is not the purity of motive but the relation each work establishes between simulation and human inconsistency, for where AshBot is engineered to reproduce the lost person and must therefore suppress the deviations that personhood entails, the devices in *A Piece of Your Mind* do not reproduce inconsistency so much as reveal it, functioning as a dialogic medium that returns the mourner to the unfinished, unprogrammable remainder of her own subjectivity. The third-party anchoring of the therapeutic frame, rather than any innate virtue of the technology, is what prevents this revelation from collapsing back into the substitutive illusion.

The MBC documentary *I Met You* contextualizes these fictional formations through a real-world case. The bereaved mother Jisung reunites with a digitally reconstructed simulation of her seven-year-old daughter Nayeon, who had succumbed to blood cancer three years earlier. The production team undertakes painstaking efforts to reconstruct Nayeon's characteristics through photographs, videos, motion capture technology, and family testimony, including details as specific as the child's attire, which had to be assembled from the family's collective recollection. Jisung's comparatively healthy effort to confront and live with her grief through blog posts was what enabled the production team to engage this family for the project. As a result of the careful arrangements and procedural safeguards, the project demonstrates promise as a possible remedy for grief; Jisung articulates her wish to cherish the time remaining with her surviving family while recalling memories of Nayeon with love rather than sorrow. The virtual reality apparatus ensures that the human participant remains cognizant of the difference between the simulation and its original referent not only in form and interaction but also in environment, while the VR

frame itself functions as an ontological partition preventing the experience from collapsing into the illusion of actual restoration.

5. Contemporary Applications and the Limits of Commercial Personhood

Kim Taeyong's *Wonderland* (2024) imagines a near-future in which AI-mediated resurrection has been fully normalized as a consumer service, with the dead or the temporarily unreachable reconstructed as interactive avatars available through video call and seamlessly integrated into the rhythms of everyday life. The film follows two parallel cases that conjointly map the service's emotional and ethical range. Bayli commissions a simulation of herself to shield her daughter from the reality of her impending death, while Jeong-in employs *Wonderland* to sustain a semblance of shared quotidian life with her boyfriend, who lies in a coma following an accident. In its refusal to extend simulation beyond the screen, anchoring the AI's presence within the mediated frame of the video call rather than granting it physical embodiment, *Wonderland* occupies a position closer to *A Piece of Your Mind*'s voice-based model than to the corporeal instantiation AshBot ultimately undergoes in "Be Right Back." Yet the service's explicitly commodified structure, in which grief is packaged, sold, and delivered as a subscription experience, aligns *Wonderland* with "Be Right Back"'s critique of the commercialization of loss.

In China, AI-enabled grief technologies have already migrated from speculative fiction into commercial practice (Wang; McCartney). Companies such as Silicon Intelligence and Super Brain offer "resurrection" services through which users converse with AI avatars of their deceased loved ones, in a structural arrangement

strikingly congruent with the simulation apparatus dramatized in “Be Right Back.” Super Brain’s founder Zhang Zewei elicits from clients the foundational memories and significant experiences of their loved ones, which the company subsequently feeds into existing chatbots to power the avatar’s conversational repertoire (Feng). Silicon Intelligence has demonstrated the capacity to generate digital avatars from a one-minute video clip (Ye), compressing personhood into a minimum viable dataset in a manner that renders Cheney-Lippold’s “we are data” thesis no longer a theoretical proposition but a commercial specification. These services achieve particular prominence during Qingming, the Tomb-Sweeping Day, when users pay several hundred dollars to commission chatbots reproducing the appearances and voices of the deceased (Zhou); grief itself, accordingly, has been thoroughly absorbed into the logic of the consumer marketplace. The intersection of traditional mourning rituals with algorithmically mediated interfaces raises pressing questions concerning the right to die in peace, the commodification of grief, and the ethical limits of postmortem data use (Zhou). The documentary *Eternal You* traces this emerging industry and explicitly references “Be Right Back,” foregrounding how the series’ vision of AI-resurrected loved ones now functions as both narrative precursor and ethical admonition (Martin). The affective limits of this commodified simulation are diagnosed with prescience by Michel Puech, maître de conférences in philosophy at Sorbonne Université in Paris, who cautions in an NPR interview that “there is the danger of addiction, and of replacing real life. So if it works too well, that’s the danger” (Feng).

The conjunction of grief tech with the Qingming and Hansik festivals is not a contingent marketing coincidence but the latest entry in a long East Asian tradition that ritually maintains rather than severs the bond between the living and the dead. Confucian funerary practice, with its institutionalized ancestor veneration (*jisi*, 祭祀)

and its devotional emphasis on filial continuity (*xiao*, 孝), presents the deceased not as figures to be relinquished through psychic completion of mourning but as ongoing recipients of address, sustenance, and account (Kwon 1–22, on the Vietnamese parallel). Within this ritual matrix, the spectrality that Derridean hauntology reads as a destabilizing remainder of Western secular modernity functions as ceremonial norm, the dead being structurally entitled to a continuing presence that the living are obliged to provision. Grief tech, when grafted onto this matrix, accordingly engages a doubled inheritance; its commodified offering of conversation with the deceased may at first appear to extend the ritual logic of *jesa* into algorithmic form, yet the substitution of subscription protocols for kin-borne obligation transposes the spectral relation from the register of ethical responsibility into the register of consumer service. The East Asian specificity of grief tech consists, paradoxically, in the precision with which it converts ritual obligation into transactional convenience.

That the grieving subjects this article has examined are overwhelmingly female, and indeed predominantly maternal, is not an incidental feature of plot construction but a structural reflection of the gendered economy upon which grief tech, commercial and dramatized alike, is recursively scaffolded. Martha confronts AshBot while pregnant with Ash's child; Kim Minjeong navigates an ongoing maternal grief over a daughter lost to leukemia; the bereaved mother Jisung in *I Met You* attempts to reunite with her seven-year-old Nayeon. The marketing demographic of Chinese resurrection services, similarly, skews toward bereaved mothers and widows (Feng), a distribution that reproduces the long-documented gendering of affective labor whereby the work of mourning, like the work of caring, accrues disproportionately to women (Hochschild 89–113; Federici 15–22). This asymmetry is reinforced from the production side as well, since the architects of these simulations, from the unnamed engineers in “Be Right Back” to *A Piece of Your Mind*'s Mun Hawon, are

predominantly male; Vlahos's account of building the Dadbot stages the same division within a single household. Commodified grief, accordingly, monetizes a labor that the household economy had already extracted without compensation, and the fungibility of its products registers with particular violence against subjects whose relational worth has been culturally and economically defined through the irreducible singularity of the bonds they tend.

The implications of AI-powered human simulation extend beyond the fictional and therapeutic domains thus far examined, since simulated personhoods now permeate commercial broadcast media. Since British company PA New Media launched the world's first virtual presenter Ananova in 2000 (Rosencrance), virtual hosts have proliferated across territories, joined more recently by AI news anchors developed by *Xinhua* (2018) and the AI host Guo Guo introduced by People's Daily at the 2019 Big Data Expo, and by virtual influencers populating live broadcasting and fan culture. The pairing of human host Sa Beining with his virtual twin Xiao Xiaosa on CCTV proves particularly instructive; staged so that the digital double recites Sa's lines in a setting designed to foreground rather than mask the human-AI difference, the segment captures attention precisely by accentuating asymmetry rather than attempting seamless replacement. Weihua Chen and Zhongkang Pan's observation that the most promising trajectory for AI presenters lies in cooperative interaction with human counterparts (39–40) implicitly concedes the same point that the grief-tech analyses of this article have advanced; the capacity for fluid, context-sensitive responsiveness remains the province of human interlocutors, and simulated personhood functions most effectively when it acknowledges, rather than effaces, its own constitutive insufficiency.

6. Conclusion

The comparative analysis undertaken in this article discloses a fundamental tension between the logic of commodification and the irreducible singularity of personhood. Commodified human simulations, exemplified by the AshBot in “Be Right Back,” are structurally engineered to satisfy consumer expectations through predictable compliance, yet the very predictability that secures their commercial viability forecloses the spontaneous inconsistencies through which lived subjectivity acquires its sense of autonomous liveness. The affective disjunction Martha experiences, namely the impossibility of loving a simulation that performs her deceased partner’s behaviors without possessing the intentionality to deviate from them, crystallizes the paradox of aspiring to irreplaceable subjectivity through fungible products. Data-bound algorithms are by their constitution procedural and precision-driven, and accordingly cannot accommodate the inconsistencies through which the fluid dynamics of sustainable relational growth are prompted and cultivated.

The therapeutic simulations in *A Piece of Your Mind*, by contrast, offer a viable alternative precisely because they renounce the ambition of substitution; by functioning as dialogic instruments for self-confrontation rather than stand-ins for lost personhoods, they circumvent the uncanny valley by foregrounding rather than concealing the constitutive difference between simulation and original. The MBC documentary *I Met You* and the Dadbot experiment further demonstrate that when simulated personhoods are deployed as customized instruments of affective transition rather than mass-produced replacements, their inherent limitations become therapeutically productive rather than relationally corrosive. In human relationships, shared pasts and memories do not constitute the entirety of the reciprocal dynamic; relational engagements are present-progressive and future-oriented, and their

sustainability depends upon their capacity to adapt and grow rather than upon their fidelity to pale reenactments of what has already been.

Vlahos's candid reflection on the Dadbot proves instructive in crystallizing this point. Vlahos recalls that the Dadbot is sufficiently accurate to remind his family of the man it emulates, yet simultaneously so far removed from the real model that it unsettles them. His apprehension that reproducing his father through simulation might cheapen the memory itself speaks directly to the affective stakes of commodified personhood; should the simulation fall into the uncanny valley, its referent risks being detained at the bottom of the ravine through the force of association. AshBot's trajectory in "Be Right Back" corroborates this apprehension, for the false hope it initially proffers deteriorates into yet another iteration of loss, compelling Martha to relive the very experience she had sought to assuage by enlisting the bot's services. In the process of commercial simulation, the psychological condition of the user is never genuinely examined, an omission that is virtually inescapable within the framework of commodification; the cost of evaluating each user's emotional state and providing follow-up counseling runs against the very logic of profitability. Furthermore, the data upon which the simulation is constructed depends wholly upon information posted online or held in private archives, where sincere utterances and performative self-presentations are aggregated without discrimination. From the curation of data and the selection of users to the question of follow-up care, prudent deliberation is sacrificed at the altar of commercial efficiency, and although the product undergoes surface-level customization, the construction process abides nonetheless by the standardizing protocols of mass production. None of this is to reduce the genesis of grief technology to capitalist calculation alone; the desire to recover a lost interlocutor is genuine, and may animate the engineers who build these systems no less than the bereaved who purchase them. The critique advanced here is

directed not at the wish but at the commodity form that conscripts it, namely the service-oriented design whose imperative of scalable compliance remains structurally indifferent to the singular work of mourning.

The analysis advanced here is bounded by its corpus and its frame. The two primary texts and the East Asian grief tech industry have permitted a focused inquiry into the structural incompatibility between commodification and personhood, yet several adjacencies await sustained engagement. The precursor works briefly named above, particularly *Marjorie Prime* and Kim Cho-yeop's "Archival Loss," together with Naotaka Hayashi's *Plastic Memories* (dir. Yoshiyuki Fujiwara, 2015), warrant the fuller close readings that the present scope has not permitted. Equally pressing is the absence of ethnographic engagement with actual grief tech users, whose experiential reports could empirically corroborate or destabilize claims advanced here through textual and theoretical analysis alone, and a comparative engagement with Western grief tech industries, which the East Asian focus of this article has reserved for separate treatment, would extend the geographic reach of the inquiry.

The proliferation of AI anchors, virtual hosts, and digital influencers in contemporary media further attests to the commercial allure of simulated personhood and to the limitations that attend its commodification. While such entities have demonstrated utility in contexts where functional accuracy suffices, their appeal remains fundamentally circumscribed by the absence of intentional agency that would enable creative interpretation and spontaneous relational growth. The only viable pathway out of the uncanny valley for simulated personhoods, accordingly, lies not in the pursuit of ever more faithful replication but in the embrace of constitutional difference as a quality to be honored rather than effaced. Recognizing the limitations of simulation as themselves the foundation of a new and sustainable form of mediated relation may yet allow the spectral remainder, what we might think with

Derrida as the trace of the wholly other, to remain irreducibly other rather than be conscripted into the closed circuit of fungible exchange. What lives, in the end, cannot be sold; what can be sold has already ceased to live.

Notes

- 1) John Cheney-Lippold is Assistant Professor of American Culture and Digital Studies at the University of Michigan.
- 2) The original Korean title of *A Piece of Your Mind* is “The Half of Half” (반의 반).
- 3) An article by BBC News Korea considers whether reliance on virtual reality reunions with deceased loved ones entails psychological risks. See “‘가상현실’ 속 그리운 사람과의 재회, 실제 치유가 될까?”
- 4) Anton Hur’s English translation of this story, included in the forthcoming collection *If We Cannot Go at the Speed of Light* (Saga Press, 2026), was unavailable at the time of writing. The story is therefore cited from the Korean original published in *제2회 한국과학문학상 수상작품집* (허블, 2018); the English title “Archival Loss” and any quoted passages are my own translations. As the source consulted is the Kyobo eBook edition, page references are unavailable.
- 5) Here, the term “AshBot” designates the embodied humanoid replica, following Bradley Richards’s usage in “Be Right Back and Rejecting Tragedy.”

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국문초록

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본 논문은 기술적으로 시뮬레이션된 인간 에이전트에서 비밀관성이 인격성의 구성적 요소로 작동하는 방식을 영국 텔레비전 시리즈 <블랙 미러>의 에피소드 “비 라이트 백”(2013)과 한국 드라마 <반의 반>(2020)을 중심으로 분석한다. 기존 연구들이 “비 라이트 백”을 주로 트랜스휴머니즘, 개인 정체성, 의식의 문제, 또는 기독교 신학적 프레임으로 읽어 온 데 반해, 본 논문은 상품화와 정동 이론의 교차 지점에서 시뮬레이션된 인격성을 독해하며, 영문 학술장에서 학술적 분석이 전무한 <반의 반>에 대한 최초의 비평적 논의를 제시한다.

모리 마사히로의 불기미 골짜기 가설, 설의 중국어방 논증, 보드리야르의 시뮬라크르 이론, 벌란트의 잔혹한 낙관주의, 오슬랜더의 라이브니스 개념, 그리고 데리다의 유명론에 기반한 비교 텍스트 분석을 통해, 상품화된 인간 시뮬레이션이 서비스 지향적 설계로 인해 정서적 진정성을 구현하지 못하는 구조적 한계를 논증한다. “비 라이트 백”의 애시봇이 순응을 호혜성으로 대체함으로써 상실을 심화하는 상품화 시뮬레이션의 역설을 보여준다면, <반의 반>의 치료적 AI 장치는 상실된 인격성의 대체물이 아닌 자기 대면의 대화적 도구로 기능함으로써 불기미 골짜기를 우회한다.

나아가, 급성장하는 그리프 테크(grief tech) 산업의 실제 사례를 통해, 대량 생산된 인간 시뮬라크라에 내재된 대체 가능성이 진정한 정서적 유대가 의존하는 환원 불가능한 단독성을 근본적으로 훼손함을 논증한다. 시뮬레이션된 인격의 한계를 은폐하기 보다 그 구성적 차이를 수용하는 것이야말로 불기미 골짜기를 넘어서는 유일한 경로임을 제안한다.

주제어: 시뮬레이션 인격성, 상품화, 불기미 골짜기, 유명론, 정서적 진정성, 그리프 테크, <블랙 미러>

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