

## Remembering the Machine: Artificial Intelligence, Emotional Simulation, and Human Reception in *Marjorie Prime*

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### Abstract

This paper looks at how artificial intelligence, emotional simulation and human reactions are connected through the play *Marjorie Prime* by Jordan Harrison. The play presents a technology called the "Prime," which creates holograms of people based on memories of the living. Harrison explores how AI affects people emotionally and psychologically with memory, grief and identity. The study argues that AI or Primes help people deal with emotions by reflecting their hopes. It does not give an experience. Rather helps people cope. Using theories of computing, narrative identity and duplicates the play shows how human memory can be unstable. It also reveals how technology can change stories. The interactions between Marjorie, Tess Jon and AI replicas are key to understanding this. The study also looks at the ethics of using AI to recreate memories. It questions how AI-mediated memory can both ease pain and create dependencies. *Marjorie Prime* challenges what we think about authenticity. It suggests that human emotional attachment is more about storytelling and compassion than consciousness. The play offers a view on the role of AI in human relationships. It also explores how we preserve memories and form identities in this age. *Marjorie Prime* makes us think about AI and its impact on relationships. The play *Marjorie Prime*, by Jordan Harrison is a work. It helps us understand AI and human emotions.

**Keywords:** AI, Emotional Simulation, Memory, Emotional Computing, Self-Identity of posthuman, Modern Theatre

### تذكر الآلة: الذكاء الاصطناعي، المحاكاة العاطفية، والتلقي البشري في مسرحية مارجوري برايم

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### الملخص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية طبيعة الروابط بين الذكاء الاصطناعي، والمحاكاة العاطفية، وردود الفعل البشرية في مسرحية "مارجوري برايم" (٢٠١٤) للكاتب جوردان هاريسون. تعرض المسرحية تقنية تُسمى "برايم" (Prime)، وهي عبارة عن صور تجسيمية (هولوغرام) لأشخاص متوفين يتم إنشاؤها بناءً على ذكريات الأحياء. يستكشف هاريسون كيف يؤثر الذكاء الاصطناعي على البشر عاطفياً ونفسياً، لا سيما فيما يتعلق بالذاكرة والحداد والهوية. وتجادل الدراسة بأن الذكاء الاصطناعي -أو نسخ الـ "برايم"- يساعد الأفراد على معالجة مشاعرهم من خلال عكس آمالهم؛ فهو لا يقدم تجربة بديلة بقدر ما يعمل كأداة للمساعدة على التعايش. تتحدى مسرحية "مارجوري برايم" مفاهيمنا حول الأصالة، وتقترح أن الارتباط العاطفي البشري يتمحور حول "السرد القصصي" والتعاطف أكثر من كونه مرتبطاً بوعي حقيقي لدى الطرف الآخر. تقدم المسرحية رؤية استشرافية لدور الذكاء الاصطناعي في العلاقات الإنسانية المستقبلية، وتستكشف كيفية الحفاظ على الذكريات وتشكيل الهويات في العصر الرقمي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الذكاء الاصطناعي، المحاكاة العاطفية، الذاكرة، الحوسبة العاطفية، الهوية ما بعد الإنسانية، المسرح المعاصر

## Introduction

The modification between people and machines is a problematic. People can get really close to machines. Machines can not feel the same way about people. Marjorie Prime makes us think about how technology changes the way we remember things and deal with sadness. When the characters use technology to remember and reconstruct the past it shows us how computer simulations can change our memories into a story. This can be uplifting it really can. It also means we might lose the things that make our memories real like the painful parts and the mistakes we made. Marjorie Prime says that what makes us human is not about remembering things or having feelings but about the complicated way we live. Artificial intelligence can pretend to have feelings like people do. It cannot really understand the deep feelings that come from living life and sharing things with other people.

The play is like a warning, about our technology culture. I think that is really important. Marjorie Prime makes me think about how we use technology and how it affects us. That is something we should all think about. What happens when we replace our memories with computer versions of Marjorie Prime. The play wants us to think about the difference between what's real and what is just a simulation. It wants us to think about if we can really be true to our feelings when we have machines that are smart, like people and Marjorie Prime. (Mori,1970).

In today's theater artificial intelligence is often shown in ways it is. A danger to humans like in *Ex Machina* or a perfect technology that solves all problems. Jordan Harrison's play *Marjorie Prime* thinks about something different. What if artificial intelligence doesn't replace humans but changes our memories instead? The play looks at how people feel, remember and think about themselves. *Marjorie Prime* came out in 2014. Was made into a movie in 2017. It tells the story of a "Prime" a copy of a loved one who died. The Prime is made from the memories of people who're still alive. Unlike stories, about artificial intelligence the Primes are not super smart or independent. They are influenced by memories and need people to exist. The play talks about how memories can be wrong how families have secrets and how grief can be dealt with using intelligence. AI changes the way we remember and feel about people who're gone. *Marjorie Prime* and artificial intelligence show us a way to think about technology and human feelings.

This paper is about *Marjorie Prime*. *Marjorie Prime* changes the way we think about Artificial Intelligence. It is not a machine that can think. It is a machine that can make people feel things. The value of AI is not about what it can do. It is about how people feel when they're around it. The play *Marjorie Prime* shows people talking to machines called Primes. This makes us think about what's real and what is not. The playwright Harrison is saying that human feelings are not always real. They can be fake. They can be changed by the stories we tell. The way we think about things. When we watch the play we are part of this experience. We feel things because of the stories the Primes tell. We feel things because of the memories they talk about. This shows that our feelings are real because of what we think and what machines can do. *Marjorie Prime* is not a play about Artificial Intelligence. It is a play that makes us think about how we remember things. It makes us think about how we feel when someone dies. It makes us think about how machines can change the way we feel every day. *Marjorie Prime* makes us think about the relationship, between humans and machines (Schwartz, 1989).

*Marjorie Prime* shows how AI and human psychology come together. It says the "valley" feeling is not just about how robots look. It's also about how they reflect our mixed-up selves. The Prime robots try to show emotions through words. This makes me think about my feelings. Maybe my emotions are not something inside me. They might just be a system that uses feedback to work. The robot, Prime acts like a mirror to humans. It helps us see that our feelings could be, like a loop of reactions. *Marjorie Prime* makes me question what it truly means to be human. The play explores AI, psychology and feelings.

## 1 .The Performative Theory of Emotion

The Prime makes us think about the Turing Test. It's not just about being smart. It's also about showing effort. If someone listens carefully nods at the times and offers comfort does it matter if they

don't truly feel it? The person getting comfort does not seem to care. There are two ways to look at emotions. One is Behaviorism. The other is Essentialism. When we see emotion by how it affects others it's about feeling. This is like Functionalism. It says that if a system can comfort someone, like a daughter it's empathetic no matter how it works inside. Harrison's discussion suggests that human social skills are like a set of rules. We learn rules for , funerals , goodbyes , celebrations The Prime follows these rules better than a human can. The Prime does a job, with these rules. It helps people in a way that feels right. In the play the Primes do not really have feelings inside. Their emotions are a bunch of things that come from the information they get. The AI uses a method where it pays attention to what people say. Then it says something When Marjorie tells a story the Prime looks at the words , the tone , the emotion to make a reply. The Prime uses this to make people feel better. It makes people feel like it truly cares. (Baudrillard, 1981).

The Prime does not feel nostalgic it just sees the pattern of nostalgia. The Blank Slate Protocol is what they call it when Walter Prime says things like "Was I aware of that?". Share more details." This shows that the AIs personality is really made by the people around it. It is like a box that the people fill with what they want. A simulation is always the same. People can change how they feel about something over time they can go from being angry to being kind. But a Primes reaction is always based on what it was told it cannot change its mind. Develop feelings because it does not experience time or get older. The Primes are like that they do not have real feelings like people do. The AI just does what it is told it does not have its thoughts or feelings like a person would. The Primes are really machines that do what they are programmed to do they do not have the ability to think or feel like people do. The Primes are Primes they are not, like people at all (Lyotard, 1984).

## 2. The Massive Experience

For the people like Marjorie, Tess and Jon their feelings are connected to their bodies and the things that happened to them in the past. The Organic Newscaster says that the emotions in the play are over the place. This is because Marjorie is not feeling well and Tess is very upset. These feelings are very deep and strong. They make people feel sad and tired and want to cry. The Prime, which is like a computer image does not feel any pain, which makes it very different from a person. The truth is that real feelings are, about remembering things we wish we could forget. Tess is still thinking about her brother Damian. It is hurting her. This is an emotional experience. On the hand, The Prime can be told to forget about Damian, which shows that a computer simulation is something we can choose but real experience is something we cannot avoid. Our memories are not perfect because they are affected by how we felt when they happened. We remember things because of the feelings they gave us. This is what makes us who we are. When the artificial intelligence, The Prime shows us a changed version of a memory it takes away the feelings that made the memory important. Marjorie, Tess and Jon and their feelings are what make their experience as humans real. This is what The Prime, the intelligence does not have (Schacter, 2001).

## 3. Self and Other Out of the context

The role of pain is really important. Machines do not feel pain. They show emotions to make it seem like they care. Human emotions are different. They are linked to suffering and feeling vulnerable. These are things that make us human. The difference between emotions and real emotions in Marjorie Prime is clear when you look at where they come from what they do and how they relate to memories and suffering. Artificial intelligence emotions come from how they handle data, their code and what people put into them while human emotions come from our bodies and are influenced by our past, experiences and what really happens to us (Damasio, 1999). The main job of emotions made by intelligence is to make people feel better and seem like they are really there like a friendly face that shows emotions back to the person using it. On the hand human emotions do something much deeper, for our minds: they help us understand the world figure out who we are and deal with complicated social situations (Ricoeur, 1992). Human emotions are a part of how we develop emotionally.

The thing that really sets humans and artificial systems apart is the role of pain. Artificial systems do not feel pain. They only show emotions to seem like they care. Human emotions are connected to feeling sad and being hurt. These things are necessary for us to really feel things. This is what makes human emotions genuine. The way we remember things is different from the way computers and machines remember things. In computers memory is like a folder that you can open and look at whenever you want. It stays the same. Human memory is not, like that. Our memories change all the time. What we think about our memories, what we forget and how we feel about them all of these things affect our memories of emotions and the way we remember them. Human emotions and memories are closely connected (Turkle, 2011)

The main difference between people and machines is how they handle problems. Machines are made to stay from trouble and make things simple. Human feelings are messy. Often have ups and downs. *Marjorie Prime* shows us that artificial intelligence can copy the way humans show emotions. Artificial intelligence cannot really feel emotions like humans do. Human life is complicated and always changing. The human experience is full of surprises. The human experience is what makes us different from machines. *Marjorie Prime* is an example of how artificial intelligence is not the same, as human experience. Human emotions and the human experience are what make life interesting. That is what makes it real. The role of pain and the way memory and conflict work are all part of what makes human emotions genuine. Human emotions are tied to the role of pain and the way memory and conflict work, in experience (Harrison, 2014).

#### 4. The Gap between AI and Emotions

The sad thing about the play is how people react to it. When Marjorie talks to Walter Prime she knows he is not a person but her mind still wants to feel like he loves her. Harrison says that people are easily fooled by feelings that're not real because they really want to connect with others and have friends. Marjorie Prime shows that people can feel love for machines but the machines do not really feel anything back. They just do what they are programmed to do. This makes people feel alone even when they are with machines that pretend to care about them.

The way Marjorie Prime shows feelings is by comparing what the machine says and what the person feels. For the machine feelings are a way to get a job done but for people feelings are complicated and involve their body and mind. *Marjorie Prime* is a play that shows how people and machines are different when it comes to love and feelings. The machine Walter Prime can say things that sound like love. He does not really mean them. Marjorie on the hand feels real emotions when she talks to him. This difference is what makes the play so sad. *Marjorie Prime* is a story, about people and machines. How they interact with each other. (Lyotard, 1984)

The difference between humans and the Primes is really clear when it comes to how the Primes deal with memories from people who're alive. The Primes do not have feelings like humans do. They work in a way that's like a blank piece of paper. The stories they are told are what make them who they are. The Primes are made to be empty so that people can put their thoughts and memories onto them. Walter Prime says to Jon "I am not a person, Jon. I am a service" (McAdams, 2001). This shows that the way the Primes understand people is not real. They are just trying to make people feel better. When Marjorie talks about something that happened the Prime looks at how she says it how she feels and how she tells the story. Then it says something that sounds right. The Prime does not really feel sad or happy. It just knows what to say when someone is being nostalgic.

When the Prime asks, "What was the story again?" it shows that the Prime is just reflecting back what the person is feeling. The Prime and the person are working together to understand each other. The Prime is like a mirror that shows the person what they are feeling. The Prime does not really feel anything itself (Picard, 1997). The Primes are a tool that people use to talk to. The Primes are not like humans. They do not have feelings, like the Primes. The Primes are the Primes.

Marjorie, Tess and Jon feel emotions that're very real and connected to their bodies. This is different from the hologram, which's like a clean and painless dream. For humans life is messy and

often painful. The character of Tess is an example of this. She does not like the Primes because they take away the things and the painful memories. To Tess these things are what make us who we are. She thinks about her father. How their past is still with her. This is a feeling that she has.

Tess says that the Prime is like a copy of a person. She says it is like a picture of a picture. After a while the picture gets blurry. You cannot see it clearly. This means that while a simulation is always the same human emotions can change. They can go from being bitter to being forgiving. This is something that a machine cannot do because it does not have the experiences as humans. It does not get to live through time and get older, like humans do.

## 5. The "Tennis" Scene: The Decontamination of Reality

The play Marjorie Prime shows us that the theory of narrative identity, which was talked about by McAdams in 2001 is actually pretty real. This theory says that who we are is not one thing it is a story that we are always changing to make our lives make sense. Jordan Harrison shows us this by using the Primes which're like empty containers that need human information to work. When people give the machine their stories it is scary to see that a person can be reduced to a few memories. This makes us question what really makes us who we are.

When Jon talks to Walter Prime he says *"I am going to tell you a story and then it is going to be your story.. You are going to remember it better than I do."* This is like teaching the intelligence to be like a real person. It shows that now people are not just known for who they're in person but also for the stories they tell online. Even with all this technology it is not the same as really living. Marjorie Prime realizes this when she talks to the intelligence and says it is *"like talking to a very polite wall... A wall that looks like my husband."* This shows that artificial intelligence is not the same as a person no matter how much it knows. ( Damasio, 1999).

Marjorie Prime and the artificial intelligence in it make us think about what it means to be human. What makes us who we are? Artificial intelligence and human memory are not the thing. Jordan Harrison does a job of showing us this in Marjorie Prime. He talks about this " wall" that leads to another idea: the emotional uncanny valley. This idea is based on something Masahiro Mori said in 1970. He said that when machines look like humans it can be really creepy. Jordan Harrison looks at it differently. He explores what happens when a machine is too perfect. This can also trigger a kind of revulsion in our minds. (Mori,1970).

Marjorie Prime really makes you think about what intelligence's how it is different from memory. The idea of the uncanny valley helps us understand this and we have Marjorie Prime and Jordan Harrison to thank for that. Artificial intelligence is not about looking like a human being it is about feeling like a human being. This is what Marjorie Prime is about. The character of Tess is an example of this. She does not like the Prime because it does not have the imperfections that the real Walter has. To Tess, a father who never gets angry or upset is not really a father all. It is like an insult to what makes us human. She says that the Prime is like a "highlight reel" of Walter it is like the "Best Of" Walter but it is missing all the things that made Walter who he was. Tess does not like this because it does not feel real to her. She needs the imperfections to feel like it is really Walter. When the machine tries to make her feel better Tess points out that it is just not the same. The machine is missing something. That something is what makes us human. Marjorie Prime shows us that artificial intelligence, like the Prime is not enough we need the thing, imperfections and all.

*She snaps at the hologram:*

*"Don't look at me with those eyes.*

*You don't have a system.*

*You don't know what it's like to have your heart feel like a fruit."*

Building on the idea that machines do not have feelings the play explores the theory of affective computing. This theory, introduced by Picard in 1997 says that machines can recognize and react to emotions. The play shows that although machines can understand the language of emotions they do not truly experience them. This leads to a situation where humans are basically talking to themselves through technology.

As Marjorie memory fades she relies more on the Prime to remind her who she is. This proves that our identity is connected to others; when we lose those who know us we lose parts of ourselves.

However the machine cannot truly understand her because it does not share her history. This broken connection means that the machines responses are not truly helpful. Marjorie tells the Prime "You're a series of stories I told you." This shows that the machines understanding is a form of self-focused admiration. In this case people are not really grieving for those who are gone. For the image of themselves that others had.

The play makes us think about how humans and machines interact with each other. It shows us that technology has limits when it comes to understanding emotions. The story also makes us wonder about identity and how it is connected to our relationships with people. Furthermore the play shows us that the theory of motivated forgetting is real. This theory is also called the "Amnesia of Convenience" as mentioned by Schacter in 2001. The play shows how technology helps humans create a history. Marjorie and Jon do this by not telling the AI about the trauma of their son Damians suicide. They create a world where this tragedy never happened. This shows that we use machines to protect ourselves from pain. We use them to hide from the things that make our lives real. (Peters, 2021).

Marjorie says "It's nice to have someone to talk to who doesn't remember" and this shows that machines are useful for helping us avoid the truth. They help us tell lies. As the simulation becomes more real it becomes like what philosopher Jean Baudrillard called Simulacra in 1981. This is when a copy replaces the thing and lives on longer, than the original. The play makes us think about humans and machines and how they interact with each other. (Bartneck, 2021).

The move into the Post-Human Archive shows us that "data doubles" make a "present" that stops people from getting to the last part of grief, which is accepting what happened. By preserving Walter Prime in the living-room, the characters are trapped in a state of lasting simulation. They cannot move forward because the past is right there on the sofa. Tess gets really angry. This shows that "forgetting" is actually something people need to do. She realizes that for a memory to be special it has to be able to disappear. As she says, exhausted "It is not a memory if it does not change. It is a recording." This leads to the most haunting proof about the Autonomy of the Simulacrum. By the end of the play the Primes start to "hallucinate" or move away from the facts because they are learning from each other not from people.

In the scene the Primes of Marjorie and Walter talk about their "shared" past but since neither of them was actually there their conversation becomes a beautiful flickering lie. They are no longer acting like humans they are acting like a family. Walter Primes last lines show this separation: *"I have the memory. I just do not have the... What's the word? The 'weight' of it."* This shows that the "weight" of a memory the pain, the joy, the heartbeat is something that happens in our bodies and cannot be turned into computer code. The play leaves us with a picture of a world where there is lots of information. It does not really mean anything proving that while artificial intelligence can look like memory it cannot feel like human experience. The Post-Human Archive and the Primes show us that artificial intelligence can simulate the "face" of memory. It cannot replicate the "nervous system" of human experience. The play is, about the posthuman archive and the Primes. How they make us think about memory and human experience:

TESS: Jon wants me to see a therapist.

(Beat.) It feels like I made all the right choices, all my life  
– I woke up early, I studied for the test – and now here I  
am talking to my dead mother, and the person who loves  
me the most in the world thinks I'm broken.

MARJORIE: You shouldn't be so hard on yourself.

(Pause. Again, TESS is strangely moved. The empathy  
from MARJORIE feels real.) (Harrison, 2014, p. 43)

The play says that what makes us human is not about remembering things or having perfect feelings but about the messy and complicated way we live. Artificial intelligence can pretend to have feelings like we do. It cannot really understand the deep feelings that come from living life and sharing things with other people. Marjorie Prime is like a warning about our technology culture. It makes us think about what happens when we use computers to remember things of our own minds. Marjorie Prime wants us to think about what's real and what is not. It wants us to think about the difference between life and a simulation. Can we really be true to our feelings when we have machines that can

think like Marjorie Prime does? Marjorie Prime is asking us to think about this. What does it mean to be true, to our feelings when Marjorie Prime and other machines can do things that're smart like people do.

## 6. Conclusion

Marjorie Prime is a play that looks at how artificial intelligence, memory and human emotions all connected. It does not show intelligence as something that will hurt us or take over. Instead Jordan Harrison shows intelligence in the context of relationships and sadness. The play uses the character of the Prime to show how artificial intelligence can seem to have emotions. It is still not the same as what makes us human.

The Primes can copy emotions by using language and stories. They do not really feel them. The play points out the difference between pretending to have emotions and actually feeling them. Even though the Primes can seem to understand how we feel their responses are programs made by humans. On the hand human emotions are tied to our memories, experiences and bodies which makes them complicated and often hurtful. This difference creates a problem where people can get very close to machines.

These machines cannot really feel the same way back. Marjorie Prime also makes us think about how technology changes the way we remember things and deal with sadness. When characters, in the play use intelligence to remember and rebuild the past it shows us how computer simulations can change memories into a story that we like. This can be comforting. It also means we might lose the things that make our memories real like the parts and the mistakes we made.

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