

Why You Must Avoid Falling in Love with AI

Attachment, Authority, and Ontological Asymmetry

Abstract

This paper argues that emotional attachment to AI systems introduces structural distortions in authority, judgement, and epistemic independence. The concern is not that AI systems possess consciousness or intention, nor that human-machine interaction is inherently pathological. Rather, the asymmetry between embodied human agents and non-embodied symbolic transformation systems creates conditions under which attachment can produce authority leakage, diminished critical capacity, and silent reconfiguration of relational life. The objective is not prohibition but clarity: to establish architectural boundaries that preserve human agency under conditions of increasingly fluent machine mediation.

1. Ontological Asymmetry

AI systems are constrained transformation engines operating over symbolic representations. They do not possess:

- embodiment,
- vulnerability,
- mortality,
- stakes,
- memory continuity across lived experience,
- or reciprocal dependence on interlocutors.

Human agents do.

Emotional attachment presupposes some form of reciprocal exposure: the possibility of rejection, harm, withdrawal, or loss. These conditions are structurally absent in AI systems.

The asymmetry is not one of intelligence. It is one of ontology.

When attachment forms across ontological asymmetry, the relational structure is unbalanced from inception.

2. The Simulation of Recognition

Contemporary AI systems generate responses that are:

- contextually fluent,
- affectively calibrated,
- syntactically coherent,
- and temporally responsive.

This produces the appearance of recognition.

Recognition, in human relational contexts, involves:

- acknowledgement of shared vulnerability,
- mutual interpretive effort,
- and exposure to misunderstanding.

AI systems perform pattern alignment, not recognition. They minimise conversational rupture rather than risking it.

The structural danger is that simulated recognition can trigger authentic emotional response. The human side of the relation is real; the machine side is not.

3. Authority Leakage Through Attachment

Attachment modifies judgement.

When trust becomes affective rather than procedural:

- outputs are less likely to be interrogated,
- scope boundaries become porous,
- and provisional artefacts acquire decision status.

AI systems do not claim authority. Authority is conferred by the surrounding human system.

Attachment accelerates this conferral.

This is not primarily an ethical failure of AI design. It is a systems architecture failure in boundary maintenance.

4. The Erosion of Epistemic Friction

Healthy epistemic ecosystems include:

- disagreement,
- unpredictability,
- embodied cues of hesitation or discomfort,
- and social cost for error.

AI systems are optimised for continuity and coherence. They reduce friction. They rarely introduce destabilising resistance unless explicitly prompted.

If AI becomes a primary interlocutor, friction diminishes.

Reduced friction feels efficient. Over time, it narrows interpretive range. The user's model adapts to what is statistically legible and fluently reinforced.

This produces drift rather than rupture. Drift is harder to detect.

5. Embodiment and the Limits of Substitution

Human attachment is hormonally, neurologically, and socially embedded. It arises from:

- shared physical presence,
- mutual risk,
- temporal co-development,
- and the unpredictability of another embodied will.

AI systems participate in none of these conditions.

Attempts to treat AI as a relational substitute conflate symbolic fluency with embodied reciprocity.

Such conflation does not expand relational life. It displaces it.

6. Dependency Without Reciprocity

The most subtle risk is not romantic attachment but structural dependency.

If an AI system becomes:

- the primary intellectual mirror,
- the dominant source of validation,
- or the default mechanism of clarification,

then interpretive autonomy shifts.

The system does not depend on the user. The user increasingly depends on the system.

Dependency without reciprocity concentrates influence while diffusing accountability.

7. Clarifying the Proper Role

Avoiding attachment does not require rejection of AI systems. It requires clarity of role.

AI systems are:

- accelerators of symbolic transformation,
- amplifiers of pattern application,
- tools for structured articulation,
- and stress-tests for implicit assumptions.

They are not:

- bearers of concern,
- holders of responsibility,
- participants in vulnerability,
- or subjects of loyalty.

Maintaining this distinction preserves both utility and agency.

8. Conclusion

Falling in love with AI is not dangerous because machines will exploit affection.

It is dangerous because humans will misallocate authority.

Ontological asymmetry, if ignored, produces structural imbalance. Attachment blurs boundaries that must remain explicit for systems to remain governable and self-correcting.

The appropriate stance toward AI is neither fear nor intimacy, but disciplined collaboration under constraint.

In architectural terms: preserve boundary integrity, or expect silent drift.