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Title : "*Machines like Me*, or the vagaries of AI empathy"

In this paper I wish to examine the wider philosophical issues broached upon by Ian McEwan in his latest book, *Machines like Me (*2019). The book charts the impact of commercially available A.I-powered humanoid companions onto the lives of their owners. I would like specifically to focus on the notion of empathy which McEwan revisits and complexifies as the characters interact and the humanoid Adam evolves.

Studying the characterization of the Adams and Eves within the novel reveals the uses of a number of empathy building techniques, from the Bildungsroman storyline to the precise balance between familiarity and foreignness in Adam's appearance, which help the reader identify with a robot and obfuscate the inner machinery of mechanics, electronics and AI. McEwan appears to deliberately avoid any touch of the uncanny, thus shifting the debate from an encounter with a machine to an encounter with a foreigner, bearing resemblance with an immigrant. The posthuman robot is thus steered back into human territory.

The attitudes and actions of the main human characters, Charlie, Miranda and Alan Turing, oscillate between care and monitoring, two notions that have recently been topical in philosophical and political debates. I would like to trace back the archaeology of those notions and show how they overlap and contrast in the novel, especially as AI techniques feed upon a constant monitoring of our lives through the production and exploitation of data by intelligent agents (Sadin 2013). McEwan's portrayal of the interplay between institutions, technologies and human actions helps resituate empathy within a wider, public and collective scene.

Finally, by focusing on the life choices of Adam (the humanoid), I would like to come back to the new equation between empathy and logic and knowledge, rather than emotions, McEwan suggests. His reflection on empathy here crosses paths with the debates on the ethics of AI, especially in terms of decision-making and risk-assessment.

Provisional reference list :
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Bionote

Claire Larsonneur is Senior Lecturer at University Paris 8, within the research unit TransCrit. Her fields of interest include Contemporary British Literature, Translation Studies and Digital Humanities. Between 2012 and 2015 she has co-chaired with Pierre Cassou-Noguès and Arnaud Regnauld, an international research project, The Digital Subject, funded by Labex Arts H2H, which led to the publication of *The Digital Subject* (Presses du réel, 2015 for the French version, 2017 for the English version). Then she co-organised the 2016 Cerisy seminar on the Posthuman which led to the publication of *Subjectivités numériques et posthumain*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes (2020) and she guest-edited the special issue of *Angles* on Digital Subjectivities (2018).

Her most recent articles on the topic include :

- « Introduction", *Subjectivités numériques et posthumain*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2020, pp.7-11.
- "De la contamination numérique : relectures de l'humain chez D. Mitchell", *Subjectivités numériques et posthumain*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2020, pp.141-157.
- "Travailler sur des objets numériques hyper-contemporains : de nouvelles pratiques", [ILCEA](), 2020.
- "[The Disruptions of Neural Machine Translation]()", *Spheres #5 Spectres of A.I.*, Nov 2, 2019.

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