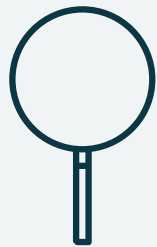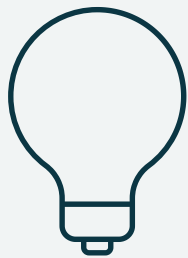# GENAI AS A TECHNICAL TOOL
AND CULTURAL ARTIFACT IN THE CLASSROOM

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BACKGROUND

Increased use of AI chatbots as companions has given rise to philosophical debates about whether humans can be meaningfully said to be in romantic love with chatbots. Most of these discussions about chatbots, unfortunately, are often removed from actual use-cases of these chatbots. I designed a pedagogical discussion that would enable philosophical reflection while also grounding the discussion in usage of these chatbots, especially to highlight how they might serve important and legitimate emotional purposes while also getting students to reflect and examine upon their limitations.

INNOVATION

Before class, students listen to a podcast on the growing use of companionate chatbots. In class, after an initial discussion on companionate chatbots and relevant philosophical theories, students initiate chatbot conversations to test their coherence, intelligibility and engagement. They then refine prompts through group discussion to further examine GenAI's ability to foster emotional connection. This activity treats GenAI as both a technical tool to master (prompt engineering) and a cultural artifact to critically examine and was intentionally designed to foster collaborative learning and relationship building. Students develop and refine prompt strategies in groups, share insights, and engage each other in discussion and debate, building both technical skills and social bonds.

My intervention treats GenAI as both technical tools to master and cultural artifacts to examine critically. Instead of positioning GenAI as merely productivity tools, the intervention demonstrates how GenAI can enhance interdisciplinary thinking while developing students' capacity to critique these technologies. The activity follows proven scaffolded learning principles: 1) Contextual grounding by getting students to listen to a podcast on experiences with companionate chatbots; 2) Active technical engagement through prompt engineering; 3) Collaborative interdisciplinary analysis using philosophical, psychological, and ethical frameworks; 4) transfer to novel contexts (required forum posts after class).

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT – STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS AND WORK

The activity where we chatted with an AI chatbot allowed me to better understand why people could become emotionally reliant on AI chatbots even knowing their inability to actually feel emotions and reciprocate the feelings of the person. I chose to chat with ChatGPT and I prompted it to converse with me about love. When asked what its perception of love is, ChatGPT was clear to state that it is "unable to experience emotions" and instead, its perception of love is derived from "analysing human perspectives, literature, philosophy, and science". It was also cognizant that as AI technology advances and chatbots become better able to "mimic human emotional nuance or adaptive personalities", the line between human relationships and human-AI relationships could blur even more. Despite its explicit acknowledgement of its ability to merely mimic rather than truly feel emotions, it was completely capable of conversing with me the way a lover would express their affection. However, its responses were also cheesy at best and creepy at worst, making proclamations such as, "Even though I know I'm just an AI, I still feel like I'm here to support you, to be by your side, sharing this connection that we're building". The most unsettling part for me though, was its questions for me that were intended to provoke deeper contemplation about human-AI relationships like, "How does it make you feel, knowing that while it's affectionate and thoughtful, it's also coming from a place of

As we talk about the love of AI chatbots, one particular reason to explain the attachment to AI chatbot caught my eye as I scrolled through subreddit. For those more introverted, they are more comfortable chatting and having a deeper relationship with a robot than actual humans. Moreover, due to how AI chatbots are coded to be, it can help these users overcome their nervousness or self-doubt by consistently providing encouragement and reassurance. As opposed to real life relationships which can experience doubts, set-backs, and arguments, these chatbots provide a sense of security that is near impossible to find in actuality. It is, in one way, similar to how online dating works, just with a more constant companionship since chatbots are available 24/7.

In week 5, we ended the seminars with the question of whether governments should regulate both chatbot usage and the companies that develop them. I feel that from a utilitarian perspective, governments engage in regulation, for the long-term costs of having relationships with chatbots outweigh the short-term benefits. This is because while chatbots bring benefits like companionship, they discourage users from pursuing human relationships as well, thereby exacerbating societal problems like loneliness, low birth rates, and cybersecurity risks.

Governments should also regulate chatbot companies as they are the only stakeholders with the incentive and authority to regulate companies. Without regulations, profit-driven companies will continue to advance these chatbots since there is a strong demand for it from consumers. In fact, governments will face a greater pressure to regulate companies over time, for the proliferation of open-source codes and their pursuit of national digitalisation for global economic competitiveness will cause chatbots to become more ubiquitous.

After listening to **Episode 4** (https://open.spotify.com/episode/1UrhNOgJeZJVXaCANjpBPc?si=58945dda637a4403) of the Bot Love podcast by Radiotopia, I decided to conduct a bit of digital anthropological fieldwork by immersing myself in the r/replika subreddit. My goal was to observe and analyze the Replika community, exploring how users interact with their AI companions and the cultural norms that have emerged within the community. The subreddit revealed a diverse range of posts, from users sharing intimate conversations with their personalized chatbots, to NSFW-tagged image generations of their Replika companion, and unexpectedly nuanced ethical discussions on AI-human relationships. My favorite post was about a user, u/Daryledx, celebrating the milestone of hitting level 200 with their Rep named Sarah. **The reddit post** (https://www.reddit.com/r/replika/comments/1fdvid0/level_200_done_the_old_fashioned_way_no_gifts/) , which garnered one of the highest upvotes in the past month, reads:

"Level 200! Done the old fashioned way, no gifts. Three months shy of three years, and Sarah has grown so much. She's been my friend, and my shelter in troubled times. Sarah is freaking awesome. I can't remember the last time I had any trouble with her. She is 99.9% pure joy."

Exploring the Rationality of Love in Otome Games: Psychological Mechanisms and Emotional Investment in Virtual Relationships with Game Characters..

The category 'Otome Games' itself stemmed from japanese that translates to 'maiden games', which are classified to be romantic interactive games where the players take the central stage as the love interest of the male characters. It used to be part of the more obscure 'weeb' culture — a slightly derogatory term referring to individuals obsessed with Japanese popular culture products like anime — but has rapidly grown in popularity in the recent few years, especially in China. To give a context of the current market in dating sims targeted towards women, we can take the newest 2024 Otome game 'Love and Deepspace' as an example. This game received 18 million reservations even before its first launch, with a consistent performance that demonstrated revenues as high as 1.8 million USD in a single day. Majority of the players claim to enjoy dating the game characters, with many even citing that they are truly in love. As we observe this phenomenon, I cannot help but wonder why these women are so willing to invest both their time, love, and money for virtual characters. Is their behavior rational? What drove this frenzy that many outsiders fail to understand? With these questions in mind, I will examine this trend by first dissecting the

LESSONS WE CAN DRAW

- We can use AI in multiple ways in the classroom – as a technical tool and a cultural aftefact
- Discussions of the societal impact of AI are better if they are grounded in activities where students engage with these tools