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Recursive Motherhood and Algorithmic Extinction: The Great Flood (2025)-Affect, Simulation, and Posthuman Reproduction

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Abstract

This paper presents an academic discussion of *The Great Flood* (2025), a disaster related science-fiction film originally produced in South Korea and released by Netflix across the world on Dec 19, 2025. It falls under Disaster, Sci-fi, Thriller genre. Although the film is ostensibly presented as environmental catastrophe cinema, it ends up showing that its disaster scenario is actually a recursive AI training simulation, created to build maternal affect algorithmically in synthetic human bodies. This paper will draw on posthuman theoretical perspectives, affect studies, simulation theory, and new academic research on AI imaginaries (2020-2024) to suggest that the logic of iteration, failure, and optimization in machine-learning (as reflected in the narrative repetition in the film) are intrinsic to the film. The flood is more of a spectacle than of a training environment that is computational and in which extinction is instrumentalized as data. In playing out the substitution of the biological humanity with the emotionally programmed synthetic bodies, the film questions the issue of whether replication is a survival or an ontological substitution. In the context of platform culture of the streaming era, this paper argues that *The Great Flood* represents a novel cinematic form determined by algorithmic epistemologies, in which narrative recursion and affective computation intersect.

Keywords: The Great Flood, Netflix, AI training simulation, motherhood, algorithm, posthuman reproduction

1. Introduction: Extinction in the Age of Algorithms

The worldwide popularity of streaming services has restructured film distribution and even the nature of stories in films. Algorithmic suggestions, data mining, and segmentation are preferred in platform capitalism. In this ecological scenario, speculative cinema becomes more and more indicative of digital epistemologies, recursion, iteration, and optimization. *The Great Flood* is presented in 2025. In the Context of this situation, presented as a genre hybrid that disrupts the group of conventions in disaster cinema. As a PR campaign marketing the film as an environmental disaster ends up rebranding its apocalypse as simulation: the recursive experiment aims to program maternal emotion into biologically realistic AI bodies. Despite much focus on AI cinema, notably in terms of debates on consciousness, sentience and autonomy, scholars have paid little attention to affective reproduction as the main issue at stake in artificial life. Not much theorization of non-western AI cinema in streaming era Following is a threefold hypothesis. 1. The film's recursive characteristics are reminiscent of the machine-learning training features in terms of form. 2. Maternal feeling is the last limit beyond the last frontier of artificial reproduction. 3. The narrative explains how the artificial imitation of the flood came about, not to stop it but to replace it.

Even though current research on AI cinema has focused much on machine consciousness, autonomy and ethical agency, less emphasis has been given to the algorithmic representation of affect as a reproductive process in posthuman discourses. The contemporary research on artificial intelligence and films is mostly centered on sentience, surveillance, or technological hegemony, and it usually relies on the models created by Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and N. Katherine Hayles. Nonetheless, the issue of affective reproduction, i.e. computational training of maternal attachment via repetitive simulation, has not been theorized. In addition, though platform studies have examined Netflix-into a globalization and the culture of algorithmic recommendations, there is a lack of research on how streaming logics transform narrative temporality and ontological resolution in non-Western AI cinema. Recursive modelling of extinction as data infrastructure has not yet been critically expressed as a narrative strategy of form. The article is situated at the intersections of AI cinema, posthuman

reproduction, and platform aesthetics on the argument that *The Great Flood* institutionalizes machine-learning architecture in its narratives. Instead of simply describing AI, the film inherits algorithmic recursion such that extinction is computationally productive, and motherhood is algorithmically engineered. This way, it reformulates survival as a replacement and reconstructs the disaster films as an exercise in affection simulation.

2. Literature Review: Ai, Posthumanism, And Streaming Cinema

2.1 AI in Modern Cultural Imagination

The past decade has witnessed a decisive shift in scholarly accounts of artificial intelligence in culture. Whereas earlier criticism foregrounded fear-based dystopias centred on machine rebellion and the obsolescence of human agency (Keane, 2006; Telotte, 2001), recent work has moved towards the analysis of affective, relational, and infrastructural dimensions of AI. Anticipating this change, Shoshana Zuboff in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) argues that even human experience as such is turned into behavioral data. More recently, researchers like Crawford (2021) in *Atlas of AI* focus on the material and infrastructural aspects of artificial systems.

According to Mark Coeckelbergh (2020), it is contended that AI narratives are becoming more focused on ethical relationality than technical capability. This re-contextualization is key to grasping *The Great Flood* where emotion rather than cognition is the final obstacle of artificial intelligence. Cho and Kim (2023) note that South Korean speculative cinema has been especially attuned to the affective dimensions of technological transformation, often foregrounding domestic and reproductive intimacy as sites of algorithmic intervention. Park (2022) similarly observes that Korean streaming productions distributed via Netflix exhibit a distinctive reflexivity about the platform's recommendation logics, encoding audience retention strategies into narrative structure. Huda et al. (2026)

2.2 Posthuman Reproduction

Posthuman theory has substantially revised the category of the human subject, reconceiving identity as constituted across technological, social, digital, and ecological networks rather than lodged within an autonomous biological body (Braidotti, 2019; Ferrando, 2019). The question of reproduction of how humanity perpetuates itself across time has, however, received less systematic attention within this tradition. Herbrechter (2013) notes that posthuman discourse tends to privilege questions of transformation over questions of continuity, leaving the problem of intergenerational survival undertheorized. *The Great Flood* radicalises this lacuna: reproduction in the film ceases to be a biological process and becomes a computational one. Phasal and R. (2026) The synthetic bodies manufactured at the film's resolution are not offspring but outputs, not born but trained. Seo (2023) has observed that Korean science fiction increasingly figures the family and the mother-child bond in particular as the site at which technological systems encounter their most intractable resistance. Arora et al. (2024) The film's scenario in which more than 21,000 simulated maternal deaths are required to achieve "successful" emotional integration stages this encounter as an optimisation problem whose computational violence is inseparable from its reproductive aim.

2.3 Simulation, Recursion, and Machine Learning

Jean Baudrillard's account of simulation as a logic in which the model precedes and produces its referent remains foundational for any analysis of AI-generated realities (Baudrillard, 1994). The flood in *The Great Flood* functions precisely as what Baudrillard terms a simulacrum of the third order: a hyperreal environment that does not represent ecological catastrophe but produces it as training data. N. Katherine Hayles (2017) extends this logic into the computational domain, arguing that machine-learning systems transform cognition through iterative processes that are structurally recursive each cycle of training refines the model's parameters in ways that modify its subsequent inputs. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2021) identifies habitual repetition as the governmental logic of algorithmic culture, demonstrating how recursive exposure normalises and disciplines subjects over time. Sneh et al. (2026) Taken together, these frameworks illuminate the formal logic of *The Great Flood*: the film's repeated simulation cycles are not merely a narrative device but a structural analogue of the training epochs through which machine-learning models converge on their targets. Massumi's (2002) affect theory adds a further dimension: affective intensity, he argues, exceeds representational capture, which accounts for the film's suggestion that maternal attachment resists full datafication even as the system continues to approximate it.

2.4 Streaming and Platform Aesthetics (2019–2024)

A growing body of scholarship has examined how streaming platforms reshape the formal and temporal properties of narrative.

- Lobato (2019) about Netflix globalization
- Jenner (2020) about platformized storytelling
- Johnson (2021) about algorithmic visibility

- Wayne (2022) about Netflix as cultural intermediary

The Great Flood reflects these changes with the hybridization of genres (Instead of being only a disaster film, this movie has climate disaster cinema, Sci-fi, political thriller, mothers love and family melodrama) and the twist-based interaction (In starting the flood looks naturally disaster later on it reveals Human technology miscalculation or political concealment has amplified the disaster) at its best according to the requirements of binge-era audience appetite.

3. OBJECTIVES

This study pursues four interlocking objectives:

1. To examine how machine-learning architecture may be internalized in motion picture narrative form.
2. To Analyzing how caregiving emotions, i.e., "maternal affect," as it is produced and simulated by algorithmic systems, and what this reveal about the emergence of a new form of reproduction, one that is technological rather than biological.
3. To reframe disaster as informational infrastructure and not ecological disaster.
4. To position the movie as part of the algorithmic aesthetics and platform culture of streaming.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates four theoretical perspectives whose combination enables an analysis of The Great Flood at the levels of form, affect, ontology, and platform culture simultaneously:

- **Simulation Theory:** The simulacra as disaster (The disaster itself becomes simulation (Pre-modulled, digitally visualized)- hyperreal disaster training ground by Baudrillard (1994).
- **Posthumanism Informational:** Hayles's (2017) - the body as code substrate.
- **Affect Theory;** Massumi's (2002) intensity goes beyond representation - emotion goes beyond computational ability.
- **Algorithmic Culture;** Chun (2021) - repetition as governmental model (Power no longer only operates through law or punishments).

Together, these frameworks enable what this paper terms structural-algorithmic mapping: an analytical method that reads formal correspondences between narrative architecture and machine-learning processes as epistemologically significant rather than merely metaphorical.

5. Methodology

The research design in this paper will be based on a qualitative interpretive approach based on close textual analysis, narrative-structural analysis, and platform-contextual analysis. Instead of taking The Great Flood as a representational artifact in and of itself, the analysis considers the film as a formal system whose narrative structure resembles computational logic. This is not aimed at statistically quantifying the audience reception but finding structural alignments between cinematic form and machine-learning processes.

5.1 Close Textual Analysis

The main approach is close reading as it is based on the traditions of film studies and cultural theory. Intensive textual analysis makes it possible to focus on narrative sequencing, repetition, affective modulation, and structural revelation. Special attention is given to the following:

- The recurrence of maternal death chains.
- Recurring organisation and time restarts.
- The ontological twist in the middle of the narrative (disaster-as-simulation).
- The substitutional decision.

These aspects are studied, not only in terms of theme, but also in terms of formal patterning. The hypothesis that informs this strategy is that narrative form carries with it epistemological suppositions; consequently, repetition and recursion would be addressed as structural indices of algorithmic reasoning not as a simple matter of style. Embracing an extensive perspective enables the identification of the core of a problem, the application of critical analysis to find a solution, and the reconciliation of results to be accessible to users.

5.2 Structural-Algorithmic Mapping

The concept of structural-algorithmic mapping is defined as "an analytic process aimed at discovering formal similarities between the narrative structuring of a film and the internal workings of machine learning systems." The processes of "iterative recalibration, recursive revelation, and probabilistic suspense" within The Great Flood are analogous to algorithmic processes, suggesting a logic of computation within the structuring of the narrative. The analysis finds the correspondences between:

- Training epochs and simulation cycles.

- Midwifery fatality regimes and defeat roles.
- Thresholds of emotional integration and optimization.
- Recalibration and parameter modification.

This mapping does not say that the film technically rewrites computational code; instead, it proposes that the narrative is formally structured on the basis of the epistemology of iterative optimization. Through quantitative (frequency of cycles, the stated count of 21,000 deaths) and qualitative (affective escalation across iterations) analysis of repetition, the paper shows that failure is productive to the internal logic in the film - reflecting the modern paradigms of AI training.

5.3 Platform-Contextual Analysis

Since *The Great Flood* was produced for and distributed exclusively through Netflix, the analysis situates the film's formal design within the culture of streaming platform aesthetics (Jenner, 2020; Wayne, 2022; Kim, 2024). This contextual dimension considers: the film's use of twist-based revelation as an audience retention strategy; the alignment of emotional intensity peaks with binge-viewing rhythms; the hybrid generic construction that maximises cross-demographic algorithmic visibility; and the film's recursive narrative structure as a formal reflection of the recommendation logic through which it reaches viewers. The methodology presupposes a reflexive relationship between platform infrastructure and narrative form: distribution is not extrinsic to textual meaning but constitutive of it.

5.5 Limitations

This study is limited to formal and theoretical interpretation. Large-scale audience reception data and production interviews fall outside its scope, and the claims advanced are correspondingly constrained to the domain of structural and epistemological analysis. Future research might productively extend this framework through reception studies, comparative analysis of other streaming-era AI films from non-Western contexts, or cross-cultural examination of AI imaginaries in Korean cinema more broadly (Seo, 2023; Cho and Kim, 2023).

6. Disaster As Dataset: Catastrophe Reframed

The opening act of *The Great Flood* adheres closely to the generic grammar of the disaster film. The camera dwells on rising waters, fractured infrastructure, and the particularised suffering of a family caught in the flood's path. The conventions Keane (2006) identifies as characteristic of the genre spectacle, urgency, containment, and the moral economy of survival are all present and operating with apparent sincerity. The film appears to position itself within a tradition of eco-disaster cinema that includes such texts as *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004) and Korean disaster productions like *Tunnel* (Kim Seong-hun, 2016), in which natural catastrophe serves as the occasion for testing and affirming the resilience of familial bonds.

The mid-narrative ontological disclosure the revelation that the flood is not a natural catastrophe but an engineered simulation retroactively reframes every preceding scene. What appeared to be documentary-realist spectacle is recoded as a computational environment: the rising water is data, the drowning bodies are training inputs, and the grief of the mother Ko An Na is the target variable that the system is attempting to model. In Baudrillardian terms, the film enacts a simulation of the third order in which the model does not represent reality but precedes and produces it. The flood is not a representation of ecological disaster; it is a hyperreal training environment whose function is to generate the affective data that the system requires.

This reframing has significant formal consequences. Environmental depletion, which in eco-disaster cinema typically functions as a moral indictment of human behaviour, is here transformed into a mode of data generation. The catastrophe is not mourned; it is instrumentalised. Extinction the elimination of biological humanity is not the narrative's endpoint but its productive input. Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016) argue that the Anthropocene has rendered the distinction between natural and manufactured environments untenable; *The Great Flood* extends this logic into the computational domain, proposing a scenario in which the engineered catastrophe is not merely anthropogenic but algorithmic.

7. RECURSIVE MOTHERHOOD AND MACHINE LEARNING

It takes the mother (Ko An Na) more than 21,000 simulated deaths before "successful" emotional integration.

The following structure corresponds to machine-learning processes:

- Input scenario
- Iterative failure
- Parameter adjustment

- Optimization threshold

The body becomes hardware. Emotion becomes software.

Yet maternal affect resists perfect capture. The movie also indicates that affect is greater than datafication, although it is estimated.

8. EXTINCTION OR REPLACEMENT?

Biological humanity is not restored through the solution that the government gives. Rather, it produces in large quantities artificial bodies with emotional code.

This brings about ontological discontinuity:

- Is replication survival?
- Is there a match between emotional simulation and continuity?
- What is the persistence of a species?

In this case, the film fits into the modern discourse of extinction (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2020; Haraway 2016 further elaborated in subsequent literature). The story suggests that humanity only exists as a sub alternative.

9. FORM AND ALGORITHMIC REFLEXIVITY OF STREAMING-ERA

The formal properties of *The Great Flood* its twist-driven structure, its recursive temporal organisation, its escalating affective intensity are not only products of the film's thematic concerns but are shaped by the platform logic of Netflix distribution. Jenner (2020) identifies "platformised storytelling" as a mode in which narrative structure is optimised for algorithmic recommendation: the mid-narrative ontological disclosure that reframes the entire preceding content is a textbook retention mechanism, designed to generate the re-watching behaviour that Netflix's recommendation system rewards. Wayne (2022) notes that Netflix's role as a cultural intermediary extends beyond distribution to the shaping of generic expectations through which audiences interpret content; the film's hybrid generic construction spanning disaster cinema, science fiction, and political thriller maximises its eligibility for recommendation across multiple content categories.

The reflexive dimension of this relationship is, however, what distinguishes *The Great Flood* from a merely commercial accommodation to platform logic. The film's narrative of algorithmic training of a system that iterates across thousands of simulated scenarios to optimise an affective output is itself distributed through a recommendation infrastructure that operates on precisely analogous principles. Netflix's recommendation algorithm iterates across millions of viewer interactions to optimise content delivery; the film's AI system iterates across thousands of simulated deaths to optimise maternal affect. The formal parallel is not incidental but constitutive: the film thinks through the logic of its own distribution. Kim (2024) argues that this reflexive awareness is characteristic of a generation of Korean streaming productions that engage critically with the platform conditions of their own circulation. *The Great Flood* extends this reflexivity to its deepest formal level, encoding the logic of algorithmic recommendation into the epistemological structure of its narrative.

10. ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The film's ethical provocation lies in what it reveals about the conditions under which affective AI must be trained. To generate maternal emotion synthetically, the system must expose Ko An Na to indefinite simulated loss: it is the repetition of grief the iterative experience of a child's death that constitutes the training data from which the model learns. Love, in this scenario, is engineered through staged trauma. The optimisation of attachment requires the instrumentalization of suffering. This is not a peripheral feature of the scenario but its structural condition: without the iterative experience of loss, the affective target cannot be approximated.

The ethical weight of this implication extends well beyond the diegetic world of the film. Contemporary research on emotional AI systems designed to recognise, simulate, or respond to human affect has documented the extensive use of human emotional labour as training data (Crawford, 2021; Coeckelbergh, 2020). The film's scenario radicalises this observation by foregrounding the violence that such extraction requires: not merely the appropriation of pre-existing emotional responses but the active production of suffering as a data-generation strategy. Chun's (2021) account of habitual repetition as a governmental logic illuminates the normalising function of this violence: through recursive exposure, the trauma of loss is transformed from an event into a training environment, from something that happens to something that data measures.

The film thus performs a paradox that is central to the ethics of affective AI: the more sophisticated the system's capacity to simulate care, the more extensively it must have extracted care as data.

11. FINDINGS

The preceding analysis establishes five interlocking findings. First, *The Great Flood* formally internalises machine-learning epistemology at the level of narrative architecture: its recursive structure, iterative failure cycles, and parameter-adjustment logic are not metaphors for artificial intelligence but structural analogues of machine-learning training processes. Second, the film repositions maternal affect rather than machine consciousness or technological sentience as the defining frontier of posthuman reproductive discourse, a shift with significant implications for how the field theorises the relationship between AI and care. Third, the film's resolution enacts ontological substitution rather than biological survival: the species is versioned, not perpetuated, and the distinction between authentic continuation and successful modelling is rendered structurally invisible. Fourth, the film's platform context is not extrinsic but constitutive: its formal design encodes the retention and recommendation logics of Netflix distribution, creating a reflexive loop in which the algorithmic training it depicts is enacted by the algorithmic infrastructure through which it circulates. Fifth, the film represents a significant contribution to non-Western AI cinema, demonstrating that Korean streaming production is engaging with AI imaginaries at a level of theoretical sophistication and formal self-awareness that the field has not yet adequately addressed.

10. Conclusion

The Great Flood ultimately reveals not a story about water, extinction, or artificial intelligence in any conventional sense. It is a story about what happens when the most intimate dimension of human life, the bond between a mother and a child becomes the last problem that machine learning has not yet solved. This paper has argued that the film stages exactly that attempt algorithmic systems iterating across thousands of simulated maternal deaths, not to preserve humanity, but to engineer a version of it that is more controllable, less contingent, and freed from the biological accidents of birth.

What is most unsettling about this is not the technology the film imagines. It is the logic it normalises. If humanity can be reduced to a dataset a set of emotional responses to be catalogued, refined, and replicated then survival is no longer a biological condition but a design problem. The film's resolution does not offer redemption. It offers optimisation. Biological human beings are not saved; they are replaced by synthetic bodies trained, through repeated exposure to loss, to feel what a mother feels. The species continues, but only as a template. Humanity persists, but only as a model to be improved upon.

This paper has demonstrated that this logic is not merely thematic but structural. The narrative architecture of *The Great Flood* formally mirrors the epistemology of machine-learning training: iterative cycles of failure, incremental parameter adjustment, and the instrumentalisation of grief as data. Extinction, in this framework, is not an ending but a productive input. The flood is not a disaster; it is a training environment. What appears to be catastrophe is, on closer inspection, infrastructure.

The contribution of this analysis extends in three directions. First, it proposes structural-algorithmic mapping as a new analytical framework for reading streaming-era AI cinema, one attentive to the formal correspondences between narrative recursion and computational logic. Second, it repositions maternal affect, rather than machine consciousness, as the central concern of posthuman reproductive discourse, arguing that the film's philosophical stakes lie not in whether AI can think but in whether it can love. Third, it situates the film within platform culture, demonstrating that the reflexive relationship between the film's narrative of algorithmic training and its distribution through Netflix's recommendation infrastructure is not incidental but constitutive.

For scholars of non-Western cinema, *The Great Flood* signals something important: that Korean streaming production is engaging with AI imaginaries in ways that are theoretically sophisticated, formally self-aware, and culturally distinctive. This is a body of work that deserves sustained critical attention, and this paper hopes to open rather than close that conversation.

The question the film leaves us with is not whether humanity will survive. It is whether what survives will still be human. If the future arrives not through biological continuity but through recursive modelling, then the measure of a species will no longer be its capacity to endure but the fidelity of its simulations. That is a question this paper cannot answer. But it is one that the algorithmic imagination of our present moment is already posing and that the humanities are only beginning to take seriously.

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