

Here I'd like to try to make a little more explicit some of the more provocative interrelations between Lacan's philosophical and psychoanalytic project and the goals of modern artificial intelligence. Let's start with the "hard problem" of consciousness, which can be phrased: "Why is there a subjective component to experience?" In his seminal article *Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness*, Chalmers puts it thus:

It is undeniable that some organisms are subjects of experience. But the question of how it is that these systems are subjects of experience is perplexing. Why is it that when our cognitive systems engage in visual and auditory information-processing, we have visual or auditory experience: the quality of deep blue, the sensation of middle C? How can we explain why there is something it is like to entertain a mental image, or to experience an emotion? It is widely agreed that experience arises from a physical basis, but we have no good explanation of why and how it so arises. Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all? It seems objectively unreasonable that it should, and yet it does.

This "undeniable" element of experience is the zone of subjectivity proper. It is not, properly speaking, a location, a concept, a word or an object. On the contrary, this zone seems to be the ultimate source of linguistic/gestural 'reality'; as such, it represents the capacity of a signifier to delay its own signification, the delay being the experience of the signification which depends on future utterances to acquire its meaning. Such a postponement is not technically a concept, a word or an object, but an experience or a temporal mode. There are close ties here to Derrida's notion of *differance* here: for Lacan, the self constructs its identity relationally, as signs do. So, in short, the crisis can be boiled down to a recursion problem: How can we even begin to signify "how the self begins to signify"? This "explanatory impasse" of consciousness, our inability to translate it into schematic, algorithmic or in any sense technical (non-poetic or archetypal description) results, apparently, from the curious self-ownership of experience, from the *fractured* reflexivity of intentional awareness. Lacan closely analyzes this cut or rupture as the joint or juncture of subjectivity in his 1949 lecture on the mirror stage (which is also the subject of the first paper in *Ecrits*.)

Lacan's work on development was of course influenced by Freud, but also very much by Marxist psychoanalyst Henri Wallon, who lectured at the Sorbonne in the first decades of the last century. Wallon's theory differed from Piaget's model of development by asserting the possibility of regression (which cannot occur in Piaget's theory.) For Wallon, from the moment a child is born (and probably much earlier) there already exist impulsive and emotional factors, affective influences from the external environment which are mirrored by internal feelings and a burgeoning subjective awareness. These factors dominate the child's reality until, by positive and guided interaction, the child differentiates emotional modes and dispenses with "gestural disorder"; the child *integrates* the external stimuli, allows these to structure their reality (instead of the affective internal sensations which previously dominate.) This second stage (which Wallon called the sensorimotor and projective stage) supports the emergence of two distinct kinds of intelligence: *practical intelligence* which emerges from the manipulation of real world objects and the child's own body, and *discursive intelligence* which can emerge only through structure interaction (imitation, appropriation and correction.) The most important philosophical consequences of Wallon's views (on Lacan) is the *crisis* of development. Wallon emphasizes the messy causality, the properly dialectical (in the Hegelian sense) progress of development: the subject is structured by a lack; a positive theory of development is, in a sense, a critical impasse,

an anti-synthesis, for an all-too-real crisis of disruption underlies all possible development and progress.

So for Lacan, the crisis at the mirror stage is not the erasure of a previous body composed of “bits and pieces” which are united by a glance in the mirror (“Ah! I am finally unified once and for all!”) To Lacan, the salvation of a unity of consciousness is already a misrecognition and only highlights the ever-present risk of a depersonalization, the traumatic possibility of a real disruption, of regression—one step forward, two steps back. The child has a desire to see himself as an “I,” as a complete entity exterior to the external world. Desire itself, for Lacan, is a desire for wholeness; yet the desire *is* the hole, desire is the missing piece. The object of desire—the completed self—structures our self-directed activity through maintaining a distance to the desired object. The subject *is* this division; the object (the symbolic hole within the imaginary whole) *is* the desire. Lacan, then, is saying that the “recognition” the child experiences when he looks at the mirror is actually a *misrecognition*, that is, it recognizes a *lack*: the sense of wholeness emerges from “bits and pieces.” Being *doubly* outside ourselves: *this* is what it to be ourselves. So in looking at the mirror, by misrecognizing ourselves, we *create* a self which is alienated from us, which is structured by a lack which we try forever (impossibly) to close and endlessly fantasize about filling in. Let’s hear from Lacan himself (from Sheridan’s translation of *Ecrits*):

This act [looking into the mirror], far from exhausting itself, as in the case of the monkey, once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates—the child’s own body, and the persons and things, around him. This event can take place, as we have known since Baldwin, from the age of six months, and its repetition has often made me reflect upon the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror. Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support, human or artificial (what, in France, we call a ‘trotte bébé’), he nevertheless overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support, and fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image. For me, this activity retains the meaning I have given it up to the age of eighteen months. This meaning discloses a libidinal dynamism, which has hitherto remained problematic, as well as an ontological structure of the human world that accords with my reflections on paranoid knowledge. We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term; namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*.

For Lacan, all knowledge is paranoid because it is built directly upon deception, and in this way he directly opposes himself to Cartesian theories of the subject which derive their power from the reflective axiomatism of the *cogito*. He can say this because he understands the mirror stage as an identification. In Freudian theory, identification is always identification with *another*, especially an ideal image of oneself. This assumption of an image is understood to be an ideal mental object from the child’s earliest memories—that we have an imagined ego-ideal which we strive to identify with. In other words, the ego is a fiction:

This form would have to be called the Ideal-I [*je-ideal*], if we wished to incorporate it into our usual register, in the sense that it will also be the source of secondary identifications, under which term I would place the functions of libidinal normalization. But the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego [*moi*], before its social determination, in a fictional direction which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being (*le devenir*) of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality.

The agency of the ego—a phrase which ought to be of some interest to artificial intelligence experts—is identified prior to its social determination as an irreducible fiction, one which cannot be integrated into being-in-the-world by any sort of dialectical synthesis. Yet we are driven towards precisely such a resolution, and this is the rupture in which the ego circulates as a pulse, the cut in which we attempt to resolve our own discordance with ourselves, that is, the break between ourselves and our own reality. Whether or not “Can we model/simulate such a rupture?” is a meaningful question, we shall have to leave for another time.

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