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Paranoia, perversion, and the subject of desire: A Lacanian exploration of AI chatbots

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Abstract

The dynamic between individuals and an expanding array of artificially intelligent (AI) chatbots has become a distinctive focal point in psychoanalytic discussions. Alongside this, prevalent concerns often yield to a paranoid belief that AI could attain ‘total knowledge’, thus transforming into an entity devoid of limitations. While these debates offer insights into our interaction with AI and its applications, my argument in this paper asserts that our connections with chatbots extend beyond their role as mere sources of knowledge. Rather, they are rooted in the subject’s desire not to know.

To support this claim, I explore Lacan’s psychotic and perverse perspectives in order to critically examine the impact of such technology on the subject’s ethical responsibility. In doing so, I couch this discussion in a consideration of the extent to which the AI chatbot serves to expose the relation between two forms of subjectivity: the subject of knowledge and the subject of desire.

It is argued that, outside of the very fears and anxieties that underscore our adoption of AI, the desire not to know reveals the potential to embrace the very loss AI avers as well as the opportunity to render a transformation in our digital lives. In this sense, the desire not to know reveals the opportunity to assert and define the gap inherent to both the subject and the AI we create.

Through a Lacanian account of desire, the desire not know will help ground the discussion in a psychosocial approach to digital culture.

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