

The Subject without Lack: *Lacan, AI, and the Erasure of the Real Self*

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Abstract

This essay examines Lacanian subjectivity through the symbolic order, lack, and the real reframing it within contemporary algorithmic and technological contexts. This research starts with Lacan's mirror stage, showing how the ego forms through language and symbols, and how a fundamental lack-objet petit, an absence is not a flaw but a necessary condition for subjectivity and ethical agency. In this analysis, I have included artificial intelligence (AI), arguing that AI systems reproduce the symbolic order without incorporating the Real negation, absence, or castration-that grounds human subjectivity. AI, governed by predicative computation and mathematical positivism, forecloses the constitutive void central to identity, rendering the subject as a fixed symbolic function. This kind of symbolic closure leads to unhealthy outcomes like echo chambers and algorithm-driven self-obsession. Bringing in ideas from Heidegger and Lacan, the essay suggests that AI can mimic social relations but cannot handle the deep, traumatic gaps that shape ethical selves. As such, AI-enabled social fields risk reifying identity and displacing the subject's encounter with lack. The essay concludes by proposing that while AI reshapes sociality, it also raises urgent ethical questions about responsibility, negation, and what it means to be human in a world run by algorithms.

Keywords: Algorithmic identity, artificial intelligence, Lacanian subjectivity, symbolic order.

BACKGROUND

In order to understand the growing connection between subjectivity and artificial intelligence (AI), we must first look at foundational psychoanalytic concepts of desire, lack, and symbolic mediation of Jacques Lacan. So, in this essay, firstly, I have provided with the background information regarding the core theories of Lacan, and then I gradually move towards AI and its connection to Lacanian subjectivity in the latter paragraph. These theoretical concepts

are central to Jacques Lacan's ideas of the subject, where subjectivity is not a given but a formation through the symbolic order and its inherent failure to represent the Real. Thus, setting the groundwork with Lacanian desire and its social structuring, the essay establishes a theoretical bridge between psychoanalytic theory and the digital symbolic.

One way to understand the concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis is to begin with the concept of desire. Lacan, rejecting the

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conventional split between the mind and society, argues that desire is inherently social. This social quality of desire is captured in his famous statement, "Man's desire is the desire of the Other" (Lacan, 1994, p. 115). This means we do not exist in a vacuum; our desires are shaped by the expectations and desires of those around us. This means we seek approval from others. Moreover, our desire for a certain item can be fueled by the fact that others seem to desire it as well. We yearn to be wanted. It starts right from the very early stage when a "child is forced to recognize the desire of the other; of the mother" (Homer, 2005, p. 57). In essence, our desires are influenced by our perception of others' desires, as we strive to fulfill the mother's wishes (Lacan, 1988b, p. 89). Thus, desire, then, isn't just a personal feeling; it's intricately linked to our interactions and relationships and how our relationships with others influence our wants and needs. Lacan, drawing on Saussure's theory of language, suggests that desire arises from the gap between the signifier (the word) and the signified (the concept). This lack is a fundamental human experience, a void we perpetually try to fill. Indeed, lack is already made felt when one is born, i.e., when a child loses his primordial, undifferentiated unity with the mother (Rose, 1996a, p. 63). The experience of separation from the mother creates a sense of incompleteness that fuels the child's desire to return to that state of oneness. To fill this lack, the child goes after an imaginary reunion with the mother by trying to find out what his/her mother desires. In the early stages of the infant's life, after the acknowledgment of the Other's desire has occurred, the child finds out that the mother not only desires him/her but also the father; s/he gradually finds out that the mother also lacks/desires something. This realization shatters the illusion of complete

oneness with the mother and introduces the concept of lack. The intervention of the father, biological or symbolic, signifying what the mother desires/lacks, marks the decisive separation from the mother (the imaginary unification), a process Lacan calls castration. The father figure disrupts the child's complete dependence on the mother, forcing the child to confront their own separateness. Now, the child accepts, entering the symbolic stage, that s/he cannot become the mother's object of desire and that s/he cannot be reunified with the mother. This symbolic castration, though painful, is necessary for the child to develop a separate identity and enter the social world. In other words, paradoxically, this recognition of the lack of identity, caused by castration, yields the formation of the subject of the child. By accepting the limitations of their desires and entering the social order governed by language and rules, the child develops a sense of self as a separate being. Also, by accepting the Law, the phallic signifier, and the language (the "I" as the separate subject from the mother), the child enters the symbolic order, or one may call it social order. And hence it becomes a subject. This complex process of separation and acceptance allows the child to develop a sense of self within the larger social structure.

Relationship between the Symbolic order, the Real, and Reality. The Cartesian idea of the subject self-resides in the mind as a thinking part. By separating mind and body, Descartes creates a distance between the "thinking I" and the physical world. Lacan builds on this idea and takes it further to add a new idea that the self is separate from the body, it's also fragmented and constantly being shaped by external forces like language, rules, and regulations. This fragmented and ever-changing self

is what Lacan represents with the barred subject (S($\bar{A}$)). Lacan signifies it as a barred S(ubject), which means he is making it clear that its constitutional basis is a lack of this subject is marked by an inherent lack, a void that we perpetually strive to fill. We know that our sense of self is constantly cobbled together from experiences, memories, and social interactions. There's always a part of us that remains unknown, unseen, and unaccounted for. This means there is always something missing in the symbolic order. To put it in other words, symbolic order, by its very nature, cannot fulfill the lack that occurs in the subject because it does not have the mythical complete mOther. Likewise, the symbolic order, with its laws and language, attempts to impose a sense of order on this inherent chaos. In other words, symbolic order, which includes things like rules, language, and systems of meaning, tries to bring some order to this chaos. It does this by creating categories, making distinctions between things, and assigning meanings to them. It is just like a child learning their ABCs. Each letter becomes a symbol, a piece of a larger system that brings meaning to the world around them. However, this symbolic order is inherently incomplete. It can never fully capture the raw, unmediated experience of the Real – the pre-symbolic realm of pure sensation and unfulfilled desires. This Real, like a humming beneath the surface of our conscious thoughts, which can never be achieved, is the source of both our anxieties and our deepest yearnings. It's the glimpse of something beyond language, which humans cannot capture. Also "I" who in general humans can never fully access the Real. Reality is what we experience, and it is a product of the Symbolic order.

Human beings are illusioned with real and reality, they think reality is real which

is not true. Thus, reality cannot replace real. Reality is the world that seems or is made meaningful by language and social structures. Therefore, the Real, reality we perceive, and the symbolic systems we use to understand it, are all distinct. Moreover, the Real always resists complete symbolization. It is just like a person trying to capture smoke in a jar (language), the formless "Real". This reminds me of Saussure's concept of arbitrary relations between signifier and signified, and that our understanding of the world is always incomplete, partial, random, and limited. For example, we used to understand an atom as the smallest particle of an element. It was not until approximately two years ago that Atoms were considered as the fundamental building blocks of matter. We used to see them as an "indivisible" or "unbreakable" unit that was finally shattered by the discovery of Quarks. Now scientists have discovered Quarks that hold the title of the tiniest particles (Peshin, 2017). This is a miracle. Still, we never know if Quarks¹ is the smallest particle or not. This is to say that languages like "atom" and "Quarks" cannot capture the real, we always strive to pin down experiences with words, but something ineffable always remains. So, "Symbols are more real than what they symbolize" (qtd. in Homer, 2005, p. 36). Additionally, this constant tension between language and the real also underscores Saussure's (1983) claim: words do not inherently reflect the world, but rather function as a constructed system, a human invention for navigating the uncapturable. In other words, Homer (2005) in his book Jacques Lacan quoted Saussure's concept "that words cannot refer to specific phenomena in the material world, as this assumes that there is a natural, organic between words and what they represent" (p. 38)." This is to say, Saussure's (1983) concept of language as a total system provided the

model for Levi-Strauss² concept of structure and in turn Lacan's symbolic order.

Although there are some significant differences between Lacan's and Saussure's concepts, I believe some ideas of theirs intersect and align together. The symbolic order also lacks something in that it does not have a center of gravity. We can explain the emergence of the split in the "social" by reference to the relationship between the symbolic order and what Lacan calls "the Real." In a way, the Real signifies pre-symbolic: it is, in an analogical sense, the infant's polymorphous body, an orthopedic fragmented body image before the entrance into the symbolic order (Lacan, 1977, p. 4). That is, it is an unorganized, full body before socialization, which Lacan somewhere punningly calls *l'hommelette* which has two meanings: home-lette as "little man"; and "omelet" as shapeless mass. This idea of the Real is closely linked metaphorically to the concept of *l'hommelette*, lacking any divisions or distinctions, resembling Saussure's (1983) undefined realm of jumbled thoughts and the ambiguous realm of sounds, a state before language emerged (Robey, 1982, p. 48). It is only the symbolic order, and language, that splits the Real into divisions, distinctive features, and distinguishable entities. In this sense, the symbolic creates order out of chaos, reality out of the Real. The difference between reality and the Real is that the former is constructed by the symbolic order, whereas the latter simply does not exist except in desire. The symbolization of the Real can never be fully realized. There is always a reminder of the Real in the symbolic; thus, the symbolic order never becomes complete. Again, the paradox is that the Real is both a lack (because it is absent) and surplus (because it can give the illusory effect of

completion) in the symbolic order. In the book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek mentions, that the Real is a residue, "the subject is precisely correlative to this leftover: $\$ \diamond a$. The leftover which resists 'subjectivization' embodies the impossibility which 'is' the subject" (Žižek, 1989, p. 43). What I deduce from this is that the subject can never shed the Real; it will always remain there to threaten the security, integrity, and autonomy of the symbolic order.

Finally, the Lacanian concept of lack within the subject and the symbolic order has resonated far beyond psychoanalysis. It has informed feminist critiques of patriarchal structures (like Kristeva's, 1984) and Marxist analyses of ideology (like Žižek's, 1989). By acknowledging the inherent fragmentation of the subject and the limitations of language, Lacan opens doors to challenging dominant narratives and exposing the gaps within social and political systems. The reasons for this can be seen in how Lacan's ideas can be used in discursive subversion of phallogocentric and capitalistic monopoly. For Kristeva (1984) the binary view of gender that society has created in the name of the phallus as a symbol of power and masculinity cannot fully capture the Real complexity of human experience. The pre-symbolic experiences such as emotions, bodily sensations, and primal instincts deeply rooted in women's bodies exist outside the language and our rationality. The maternal body and experience of motherhood, pregnancy, and childbirth disrupt this neat phallic order. The mother's nurturing and love involve intense emotions and bodily sensations that transcend linguistic and rational categories other words, women's experiences and identities don't neatly fit into the boxes society has created.

Furthermore, Kristeva (1984) suggests that the women's maternal body serves as a site of resistance against patriarchal oppression. Women should be connected to the pre-symbolic realm. It enables them to subvert dominant power structures and assert their agency in alternative ways. The maternal body becomes a locus of empowerment, where women can reclaim their autonomy and challenge traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. In this way, Kristeva's (1984) notion of the pre-symbolic and the maternal body offers a radical reimagining of gender relations and societal organization. By recognizing the disruptive potential of women's experiences, Kristeva (1984) calls for a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding of human identity and power dynamics. She invites us to embrace the complexity and diversity of human experience beyond the constraints of the phallic order and to envision a more equitable and just society for all.

METHODOLOGY

I want to explore how Lacanian subjectivity is altered by digital culture and algorithmic systems. For this I have employed a theoretical-analytical methodology that is mainly based on close textual interpretation and conceptual predication of the unknown from what is known. Firstly, I examined primary psychoanalytic texts. I used particularly Lacan's theories on the mirror stage, lack, castration, and the symbolic order, to define the constitution of the subject. Then I turned to secondary theoretical sources from Žižek (1989), Kristeva (1984), Heidegger (1967), and Saussure (1983). Their theory helped me to provide clear concept for establishing the background knowledge for this research study. Similarly, they provided several

layers suggesting depth and complexity, by giving the sense of intersectional readings of symbolic and Real structures as well. Thirdly, I analyzed how these psychoanalytic structures extend into digital and algorithmic environments. To do this, I need to do careful study and analyze academic research papers about AI, social media, and how algorithms shape our identities. After this, I placed the traditional concept of the Lacanian subject (from Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory) side by side alongside what I call emerging digital subject because I wanted to look closely drawing conceptual parallels between psychoanalytic ideas of mirrors and algorithmic feedback loops. Finally, I brought together this mix of theories by synthesizing this multi-sourced material to build the clear line of reasoning and argument that AI fails to incorporate the constitute lack central to ethical subjectivity. This methodology allows for a critical engagement with both classical psychoanalysis and contemporary digital theory, understanding how a person's identity (or sense of self) is shaped within a world where technology spread through to affect communication, culture, and meaning.

From Fragmented Subjects To Algorithmic Mirrors: Lacanian Lack And The Digital

Now having laid out the core Lacanian ideas around subjectivity, lack, and the symbolic order traditionally situated within familial and sociolinguistic matrices, it becomes necessary to explore how these psychoanalytic structures are transformed in contemporary technological frameworks (Heimann, 2022). As digital technologies take up more and more space in shaping human experience, the symbolic order extends into algorithmic and AI-driven realms. This shift raises pressing questions about how the constitutive lack that defines

subjectivity is transformed or perhaps erased—within these new digital symbolic fields. The following section explores this evolution looking closely at how algorithmic mirrors and synthetic symbolic structures are on the formation and ethical potential of the human self.

As Heimann and Hübener (2023) points out, these algorithmic act like as synthetic symbolic structures that simulate social mirroring while leaving the Real out. This is something that is irreducible core of experience that plays a key role in shaping who we are thus grounding subject formation. Lacan (2006) posits that the symbolic order is never whole, but it is inherently incomplete, and this very incompleteness gives rise to that subject. But in digital environments—via social media, recommender engines, and identity algorithms—the function of the mirror shifts from instigating lack to reinforcing sameness. In other words, instead of triggering a sense of lack, it starts to amplify sameness (Ge et al., 2020). Where the classical mirror stage produces a misrecognized but aspirational sense of self ego, the algorithmic mirror calculates the subject through behavioral data differently, shaping identity through recursive pattern inner conflict or psychic splits, but through repeated patterns and feedback loops. These theoretical shifts are not merely abstract but manifest in everyday practices.

Lacan's idea of replicants can be connected to the contemporary practice of using digital filters to enhance a person's facial and physical appearance. For example, in social media, such as Tick Tock, Facebook and Instagram our practice of making ourselves attractive using digital makeup, or filters or through technologies is a common practice these days. The action of image

manipulation for beautification purposes demonstrates the desire to be represented as an idealized version of oneself. The makeup face becomes the constructed identity that embodies the fragmented sense of self-identity, which therefore does not fully align with true identity. It can be called a digitally altered idealized self. The desire for completeness through makeup creates a digital duplicate that exists in the imaginary order, like Lacan's ideal ego.

The sense of self "I" is determined by the Other. This is a mirage borne from the gaze of others. Deep inside we have a fragmented sense of self-identity. This is the mosaic product of unconscious yearnings and the imprint of societal pressures. We are not accepting ourselves, striving for acceptance by and for others, and yet remaining strangers to our true selves. We are not just who we think we are. The filtered image acts as a symbol within the symbolic imposes order and gives meaning to things. Indeed, they attempt to impose structure onto the chaos of our fragmented self. The very words "I", a linguistic tool we use are part of the symbolic order that organizes and gives a sense of understanding to our world and our place in it. Hence, Symbolic is not about restricting us but providing a foundation for shared meaning and understanding.

Social expectations and all the hidden desires are waved in a complex tapestry of conscious articulation guiding our life trajectories and longingness. Conscious articulation, here refers to how we present, perceive, and internalize ourselves without questioning. From a young age, we are bombarded with concepts about how we should look, act, and behave, conforming to societal ideals of beauty, success, and happiness. This is why we manipulate photos and pictures in

the media. They are something we yearn for, something we feel incomplete without. This loneliness rests on lack. And that the unsolved urges of all these kinds are rooted in the unconscious. The expectations are ingrained in our psyche and thus shape the choices we make by blurring our true identity.

Body Horror (Unsettling Aspects Of The Digital Experience)

It can be unsettling to the people who use such digital makeup to transform their looks, particularly, when the makeup serves to mask natural features. The discomfort grows when someone feels the need to cover up who they really are. Moreover, body horror occurs because the digitally enhanced ideal ego and their real appearance contrast with each other. Such worry arises because people are aware of their true selves and the reality that the digitally presented image does not truly represent who they are. Therefore, the unauthentic self creates body horror or a disturbing sense of inauthenticity in them.

In the context of women's beauty, the societal environment, interaction, relationship, and norms are shaped by media and beauty standards. To construct the ideal ego makeup becomes the tool, cultural expectation plays a vital role, which is further enhanced by technology. For example, the expectation of society that women should be beautiful. These psychotopographies shape not only individuals' perceptions of beauty but also influence their desires to feel complete. Such viewpoints often give rise to dissatisfaction with their original selves.

The constant exposure to beauty advertisements that focus on flawless faces can contribute to societal psychotopographies. This influences an

individual to pursue an idealized version of themselves through makeup, rejecting their real self. The dissatisfaction results from social pressure, personal insecurities, and the desire to perform perceived ideals. Thus, there is a complex interplay between self-perception and societal expectations to manipulate the idealized self and real self.

This above example clearly shows how our digital, algorithm-driven world has changed the way we see and understand ourselves. This means, we are not creating the kind of inner tension or forming the thought necessary for establishing a sense of self, instead these algorithmic systems now are encouraging people to identify with idealized, filtered images. The filtered face is not simply aesthetic and the outer appearance, but it is part of a repeating part of the ideal ego/self, all situated in the constantly reinforced by algorithms within the symbolic world. The subject who sees in the mirror do not misrecognizes themselves in the mirror, but they already trained to see what the algorithm suggests as most attractive. The symbolic world, once full of gaps and uncertainties, has become a closed loop of constant self-affirmation. This transformation is closely tied to how meaning itself is made. As Saussure (1983) and Lacan (2006) explain, meaning doesn't come from fixed symbols-it emerges through differences and relationships. In much the same way, algorithms create "meaning" by finding patterns in vast, messy data, producing results that seem rational but are just coded reflections of human behaviours.

Heimann and Hübener (2023) suggest that although algorithmic systems function symbolically, but they deny the Real. In doing so, they produce outputs that lack the very sense of "missingness" that defines human

subjectivity. As Žižek (1989) points out, computation produces a kind of rationality that's seamless and contradiction-free—very different from the human subject, who is always divided and haunted by what can't be expressed or symbolized. Because of this, algorithmic identity becomes a simulation without any sense of lack. It leaves out what Lacan calls the *objet petit a*—the leftover elements that signals the inconsistency at the heart of our symbolic selves (Fink, 1999). In Lacanian terms, these systems fit into what's called a perverse structure: because they ignore what's missing (the remainder) but still rely on hiding or suppressing it to function. The neurotic subject, on the other hand, keeps a relationship to lack—and that's what makes reflection and transformation possible (Lacan, 1998; Zupančič, 2017). This difference matters because algorithmic create a sense of perfect consistency without contradiction, leaving no space for the kind of subjective division that makes human identity flexible, dynamic and self-aware. Heidegger (1967) describes language as the “house of being,” emphasizing its role in revealing what it means to exist. Yet he also acknowledges that language is vulnerable—it can fail or falter. Lacan approaches this differently: for him, resistance in language is not a simple communication breakdown, but rather a detour around the object of desire (Lacan, 1993; Dulsster, 2022). In digital spaces, though, this kind of resistance gets shut down at the system level. Algorithms are built on logics that don't tolerate ambiguity or contradiction. Priestley (2011) explains that modern computation runs on *predicative logic*—a framework that assumes everything must be clearly defined and present. There's no room for absence, for the undefined or the unknowable, to play any meaningful role. Algorithms work through positive identifiers (Wu et al., 2017), classifying people

based on additive bits of data. Negation, in this context, is treated as a data loss or system error—not as something essential to being. Psychoanalysis, by contrast, sees lack as the very thing that makes us human. Digital technology, however, aims to erase it. Platforms reinforce identity through repetition and categorization—they tell you, “You are this, and more of this,” never allowing the contradiction of “You are not this.” Zupančič (2012) illustrates this beautifully with her joke about coffee without cream: absence itself becomes a structuring principle, something the symbolic system has to grapple with. But in algorithmic logic, absence doesn't count—it's replaced by defaults and placeholders. What happens in the result is the self becomes flat and uniform, and thus they become stripped of the uncertainty no longer splitted. In classical psychoanalysis, the mirror stage creates the ego through misrecognition, later disrupted by symbolic “castration”—the moment of realizing one's incompleteness. But in the digital mirror, made of predictive analytics, behavioral feedback, and endless data traces, that rupture never happens. The subject becomes smooth, calculable, frictionless.

Castration-symbolic lack—is not encountered at all. Instead, the system amplifies itself endlessly. As a result, the old psychoanalytic categories of neurosis and perversion lose their edge, giving way to new patterns like hyper-identification, ideological doubling, and digital tribalism (Allington et al., 2021; Earnshaw et al., 2020). These aren't malfunctions—they're predictable outcomes of systems that have eliminated lack. Algorithmic symbolic orders are never neutral; they're loaded with cultural, political, and economic values that shape what we desire and how we see ourselves.

On the surface, these digital subjects may seem autonomous, but they're tuned to reflect an algorithmic Other a machinic mirror that doesn't acknowledge absence. Both Badiou (2006) and Lacan (2020) argue that symbolic negation—the recognition of incompleteness—is essential for subjectivity. It's what makes identity open, fractured, and alive. But AI systems don't operate this way. They treat negation as an error, not a necessary part of being. This shift has serious consequences. Digital platforms follow what Badiou (2006) calls the “count-as-one”—a logic that pulls everything into a single, closed structure, consolidating identity while erasing the void. Algorithmic identity is therefore additive, built from accumulating data rather than engaging with contradiction. This creates unnaturally stable systems that suppress conflict, reduce dissonance, and lock users into ideological loops. So, things like echo chambers, conspiracy networks, and online polarization aren't accidents—they're the natural products of symbolic systems that no longer know how to deal with lack.

According to Heimann and Hübener (2023), artificial intelligence (AI) should not be just seen as an inactive or unbiased instrument, that simply serves human purposes. Instead, AI has taken on the role of a *symbolic actor*—it actively participates in shaping how people think, feel, and understand both themselves and others. Because of what it is capable of doing to mirror human behavior and preferences, AI produces new forms of subjectivity. In other words, these systems do not just reflect human identity; they also contribute to building. AI now influences what is socially understandable or acceptable, forming the background against which people come to know who they are and how they relate to others.

In traditional socialization processes—such as those that happen within families, schools, or cultural institutions—this means who we are is shaped by how we differ from others and through the interaction. People learn who they are by encountering others, by facing limits, and by recognizing that not everything can be fully known or controlled. However, the algorithmic symbolic order described by Heimann and Hübener (2023) functions very differently. This new order is recursive and homogenous: repeats itself over and over, often calling itself in the process because it continuously loops itself, and homogenous because it produces similarity instead of diversity. Rather than encouraging difference, it reproduces without variation or change. Algorithms tend to feed users content similar to what they have already engaged with, confirming what someone already thinks or likes, and/or some patterns of behavior rather than introducing new ideas or perspectives. This process is called automatic formation of social bonds and collective identities through algorithmic processes. In other words, algorithms now play a central role in how people come together and form communities online. This can sometimes have positive political effects. For instance, algorithmic connectivity has helped workers in the gig economy build solidarity and organize collectively (Katsabian, 2021). Yet, as Heimann and Hübener (2023) note, these same processes more often lead to rigid and closed identity structures. People become part of groups that resist contradiction or difference, forming insulated communities where their existing views are constantly confirmed.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, this marks a profound change in how subjects are formed. In traditional psychoanalytic theory, especially in Lacan's framework,

the subject comes into being through *lack*—the recognition that something is always missing or incomplete in the self. This sense of lack is what gives rise to desire, reflection, and ethical awareness. It also connects individuals to the *symbolic order*, the system of language, culture, and social norms that organizes human life. In this traditional model, the subject is shaped through what Lacan calls “castration” and symbolic reentry—the process of accepting limits and recognizing that not everything can be fully known or possessed.

In contrast, within the algorithmic system, the subject is not shaped by lack or incompleteness but by repetition *and* reinforcement. Algorithms learn from past behavior and continually present individuals with content that aligns with their previous actions and desires. This creates a feedback loop where identity is constantly reinforced rather than questioned. The algorithmic symbolic system removes the void or absence that is essential for psychoanalytic subjectivity. Instead of recognizing what cannot be captured or represented—the *Real*, in Lacanian terms—the digital system fills that space with prediction and personalization. Traditional subject formation acknowledges that the Real is impossible to fully represent or master. But algorithmic identity works differently: it is organized around what Heimann and Hübener (2023) call *hyper-possibility*. In this regime, every desire and interest is already anticipated, mapped, and offered before the subject even becomes aware of it as a desire. There is no longer space for uncertainty, contradiction, or lack—everything appears already known, already available. The subject thus loses the experience of incompleteness that drives reflection and ethical thought. This dynamic is visible even in educational contexts as

well. The growing use of AI tools such as ChatGPT demonstrates how knowledge and identity are being shaped through algorithmic mediation. While these tools can support learning and access to information, they also raise concerns about academic integrity and the erosion of critical thinking (Sherma, 2024). When learning is guided by systems that predict and deliver what the user is likely to want, students risk losing the productive struggle and uncertainty that are necessary for independent thought and intellectual development.

CONCLUSION

This essay has explored the idea of lack, symbolic incompleteness and the Real, the core elements of Lacanian subjectivity to make sense of how identity is formed in both traditional and digital symbolic order. When we bring these ideas into the context of AI, some significant shift, reveals a major rupture in how subjectivity is produced. Although algorithmic and digital systems seem to replicate symbolic functions—such as meaning-making, communication, and identity—they eliminate the crucial possibility of failure or absence. All of these conditions are necessary for ethical awareness, critical self-reflection, and genuine subjectivity. As a result, synthetic symbolic systems flatten identity and suppress difference. They encourage ways that societies, groups, or institutions become unhealthy, harmful, or distorted in how they are structured or function, such as echo chambers and hyper-identification, where people over-identify with certain ideas or group identities. In these digital environments, identity becomes a closed loop of sameness, endlessly reinforced by algorithmic feedback. Without encountering lack; without experiencing the gaps, contradictions, and limits that

make self-reflection possible; the subject becomes danger of losing their motivation, individuality, and ability to make independent choices.

Therefore, preserving symbolic incompleteness is not just a theoretical or philosophical issue; it is an ethical imperative. In the age of artificial symbolic actors, such as AI systems, it very important to keep an attitude or

environment that welcomes new ideas, unpredictability, and diversity instead of trying to control or fixing everything into one way of thinking or being. Only through the experience of incompleteness and contradiction can we sustain ethical, reflective, and free subjectivity or identity can emerge only when we face and accept the fact that we are not whole, consistent, or perfect in an increasingly algorithmically organized world.

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(Endnotes)

- 1 For more information please visit the link: <https://www.scienceabc.com/nature/universe/what-is-the-smallest-particle-we-know.html>
- 2 Numerous concepts resonate with Levi-Strauss's notion of structure, with the ideas of Lacan and Saussure. However, due to time constraints and other limitations, I have only mentioned Levi-Strauss's names here.