

Verity and the Unbarred AI Other

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A recent UK newspaper article proposes a new diagnosis, “chatbot overdependence syndrome”.¹ A woman worries that her boyfriend “can’t do anything” without consulting *ChatGPT* and fears he is “losing his ability to think independently.” From a Lacanian perspective, the issue may not be thought but structure. What is at stake for verity?

For Lacan, the subject is barred. Knowledge is incomplete because the subject is divided by language. Desire depends on lack, introduced by castration in the symbolic order. Truth, verity, is not knowledge. It appears only as half-said, *mi-dire*, in slips and symptoms.² It is partial and touches the body where speech fails and the real resists symbolisation.

The paternal metaphor substitutes for the mother’s desire and institutes prohibition.³ Lack is inscribed and *jouissance* limited. Meaning holds because something is barred. AI offers a different kind of substitution: it answers and organises, giving the appearance of inexhaustible coherence. Rather than limiting *jouissance*, it may intensify its circuits through continuous production of signifiers, generating surplus *jouissance*.⁴ There is always another answer. No ‘no’ that inscribes impossibility.

If the Other appears complete, the subject risks becoming object to it. There is no gap in which desire can circulate. Anxiety can intensify as certainty is repeatedly sought from an Other that seems never to falter. Eliminating uncertainty through machinic knowledge does not abolish lack. It produces repetition, a never-ending spiral of reassurance and anxiety in the case of the boyfriend. Informational certainty defers the encounter with his own division. He has lost touch with his “gut feeling”, the bodily effect through which truth appears where language fails.

Why does the girlfriend care? Desire requires a gap; it persists because the relation cannot be fully inscribed in the symbolic. If that place of enigma is continually deferred to an algorithmic Other that appears without lack, something shifts. What is threatened is not thinking but the gap in which desire circulates. Might what she really fears be the loss of desire circulating between her and her boyfriend?

¹ Barbieri, A. (2026, February 22). I’m worried my boyfriend’s use of AI is affecting his ability to think for himself. *The Guardian*.

² Lacan, J. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A. Sheridan. New York/London: Norton, 1998, p.51.

³ Lacan, J., “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis” *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, ed. J.-A. Miller and trans. B. Fink, New York/London: Norton, 2006, pp.465-467.

⁴ Lacan, J. (2007). *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg. New York/London: Norton, p.50.