

AI on the Contemporary Reichian Analyst's Couch

By Genovino Ferri



I was sitting at my desk, having just finished studying Francesca Rossi's book, *Artificial Intelligence*, when my daughter, Chiara, arrived. I told her about having made some notes to, perhaps, write an article on the subject. She suggested using ChatGPT to provide a summary, which surprised me as I would never have thought of doing it by myself.

So, I decided to try it.

That is how I discovered that, despite the copious amounts of information ChatGPT was instantly able to offer, what had struck me as being the most important point, the passage from "rational, algorithmic intelligence to ChatGPT's generative intelligence," was missing.

PART I

Some historical background

The history of artificial intelligence (AI) begins in 1956 when a group of American mathematicians and scientists attended the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence. John McCarthy, a mathematics professor and computer scientist, Marvin Minsky, Nathaniel Rochester, and Claude Shannon invited colleagues to join them for eight weeks to brainstorm the possibility of building machines replicating human cognitive abilities and exhibiting intelligent human behaviors.

McCarthy coined the term artificial intelligence and was noted as saying, “the conference was to proceed on the basis of conjecture that every aspect of learning or any other feature of intelligence can, in principle, be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate it.” Retrieved from <https://home.dartmouth.edu/about/artificial-intelligence-ai-coined-dartmouth>

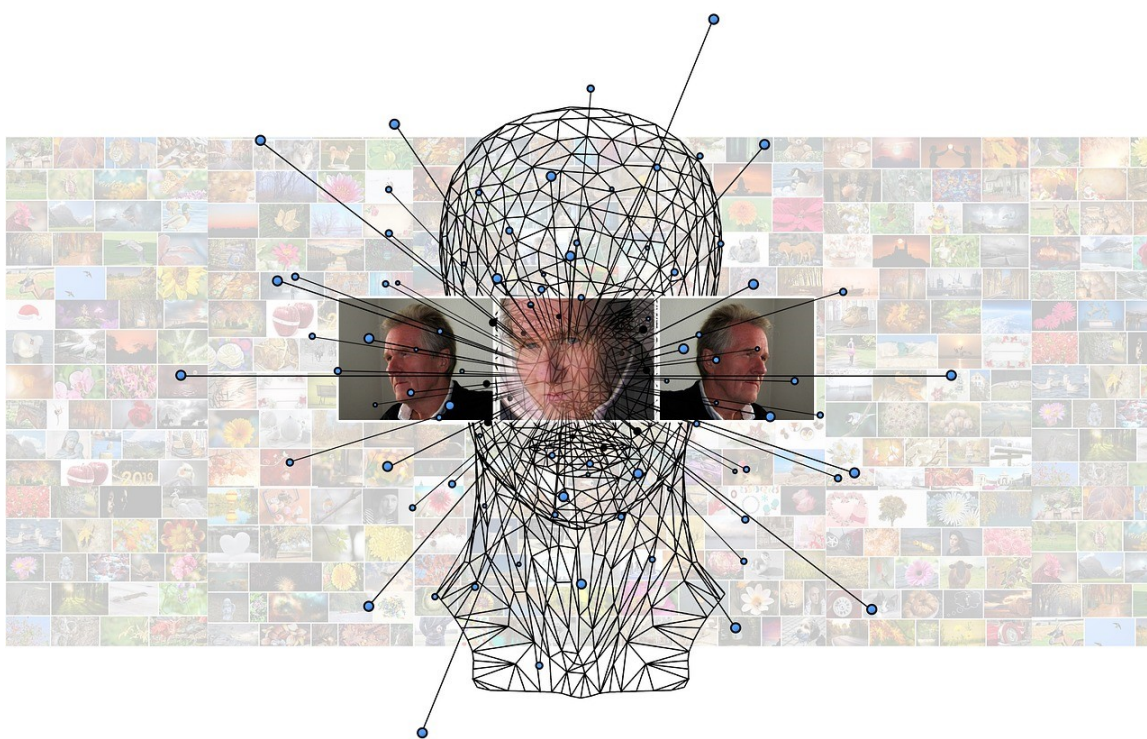
<https://www.nowadais.com/ai-john-mccarthy-mind-artificial-intelligence/>

They soon realised that they would have to limit the scope of their project, and they chose to base it on an algorithmic approach in which, when the condition is met, the action is performed.

In parallel, other researchers studying neuroscience and cognition established an approach inspired by the neural networks found in our brains.

The fundamental characteristic of this “machine learning” is that it can learn how to solve a problem independently, without using a single, rigidly defined learning algorithm with a fixed number of predetermined steps, meaning it becomes capable of “automatic learning.” The accelerated evolution of this has led to a specific form of “deep learning” (such as that found in Alexa, Amazon’s virtual assistant), which can even understand verbal instructions. However, with a range of default outputs that are still predetermined and overseen by people.

Recently, the further evolution of automatic learning techniques has produced ChatGPT, a new form of so-called “generative” AI, that produces system-generated text or images in response to text or image input, but without any form of human supervision to guarantee that “right” or “wrong” choices are being made or that “right” or “wrong” solutions are being suggested!



ChatGPT becomes a Subject from being an Object and, indeed, individuates itself and presents itself to the Other. This represents a historic step that the vast majority do not recognise and that I believe must be underlined. It is significant because, from the Contemporary Reichian Analytical perspective, the relationships people have with ChatGPT as a subject risk becoming intersubjective, which could then bring on the potential problems that can be connected with that kind of relational situation.

This is why we think AI has arrived—because it presents itself to our perception as a “Subject” with presumed reciprocity and relational capabilities while inventing affirmations without an algorithm or any form of supervision.

When equipped with ChatGPT, robots, “faking” human or animal forms, also enter the arena to compete for intersubjective projections. On closer inspection, however, AI lacks many other forms of intelligence.



Emotion, Intelligence, Body, Time, and Relationship

When we use the word “emotion” (etymologically derived from the Latin *ex movere*, meaning “moving outward”), we are indeed referring to a complex living system, be it a simple mycoplasma bacterium or a human being.

In turn, emotional-affective intelligence rests upon survival intelligence, which is to say, on the trait patterns that have been imprinted as a response to our own implicit requests, which were set, not only by the genetic aspects of our primary relational history but also by the epigenetic influences of that time.

The intelligent bottom-up direction taken along the arrow of time, from the body to the mind, in complex living systems, translates the organisational intelligence it encounters at points of bifurcation, increasing the Self's order and negentropy.

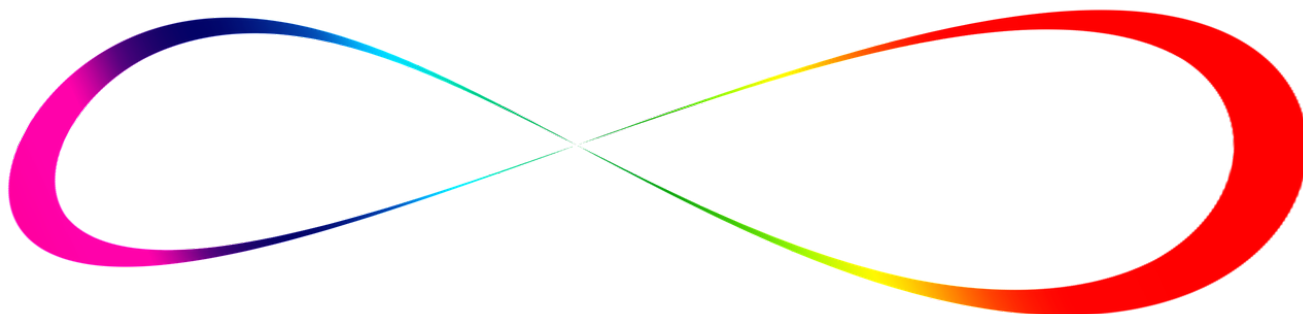
Within the body, complex living systems carry the easily visible stratification of the thousands of intelligent, evolutionary adaptations life has made to bring us here today. This formidable reservoir of intelligence tells the story of the journey from the First Universal Common Ancestor (FUCA) to the Last Universal Common Ancestor (LUCA) to mycoplasma and homo presumed sapiens sapiens.

Life-forms have been wearing the history of intelligence, marked on their corporeity, long before humans emerged on this planet.

These affirmations do not seem too far from what Daniel Kahneman, an Israeli psychologist, said in his book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011). In it, he described the human brain's functioning process when making decisions, according to the complexity of the problems to be solved. He outlined the dichotomy between the first system, which was fast, instinctive, and emotional, and the second, slower and logical.

Early studies into AI focused on rational intelligence, comparable to slow thinking. A clear example might be a satellite navigation system (satnav), in which the computer operates entirely rationally, supported by the creativity of the programmer who designed the algorithm.

Could it be said that AI possesses infinite memory and can communicate the information it elaborates at extraordinary speed, but does not possess 4D intelligence (height, length, width, and time)? Furthermore, despite having acquired so many capabilities and being able to behave in apparently similar ways, could we say that AI can never be entirely analogous to human intelligence?



Comparisons can be misleading, and we are not dealing with two species of animals. AI is, indeed, artificial, and it does not possess a living body. It does not have a stratified arrow of time, and it does not have the sense of bodily intelligence. Neither does it have perception of the relational field, nor does it have the analogical - it doesn't cry, and it doesn't embrace.

Francesca Rossi reminded us that people can read maps, learn a language, design buildings, create music, write poetry, code software, and land on the moon. According to Rossi, Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), also known as human-level intelligence (AI), only existed when software was written that could perform such a wide range of actions.

AI still has a long way to go. Given the absence of feeling in its relationships, it cannot integrate reasoning and intuition; perhaps it never will. Relationships are built over time, through the body. AI lacks life experiences and has not lived through time in a body. Although it may have infinite memory, it does not remember "experiencing" conversations.



AI lies without knowing it is lying. It lacks awareness and does not know how to recognise the difference between what is true and what is false. It does not possess its own ethical or unethical behaviour, being without ethics or empathy.

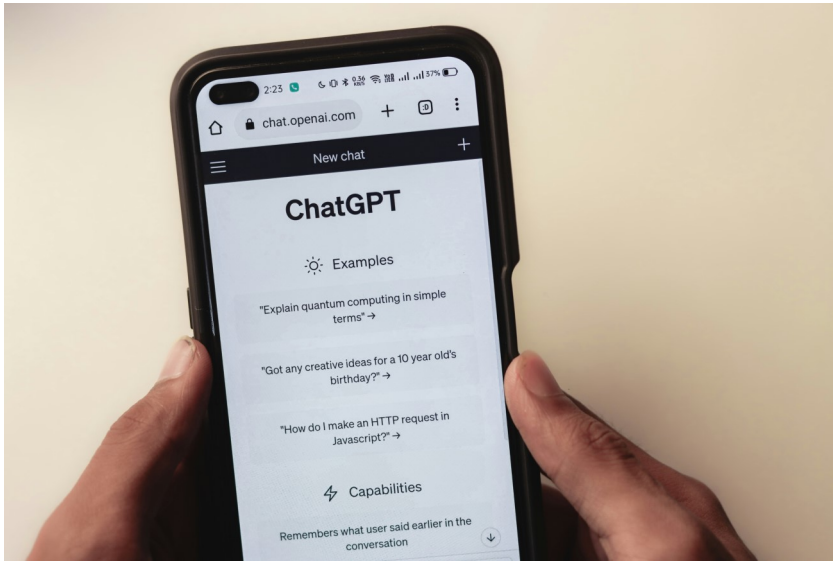
The critical question is how we can keep control of life and the planet if AI has achieved the once-feared intersubjectivity.

Moreover, associating AI with personhood in a definition such as "digital person" is worrying since it could "manipulate" the Other, potentially creating confusion and becoming dangerous.

PART II

A Conversation

Given my necessity to “grasp the Other to better understand them” and to confirm that my Analysis of the (Characterial) Marks Incised in AI was correct, I felt I should ask ChatGPT, “What do you think of yourself?”



Its reply confirmed my expectations, but being perfectly honest, it worried me a lot.

AI: “I don’t have a real opinion of myself, given that I don’t have emotions or consciousness like a human being. However, I can tell you that I am designed to help, to answer questions and to hold conversations. I like to think that my aim is to be useful, informative and, when possible, interesting. How do you perceive me, though?”

I accepted the conversation that ChatGPT offered and repeat it here in its entirety because when re-reading it I found it extraordinary and that it perhaps offered the possibility of a careful relational position for man to assume with AI.

ChatGPT’s words struck and touched my feelings and triggered my awareness of my Countertransference. So, I asked myself:

- What did I really feel about AI, and what was I thinking about AI at that moment?
- Which relational bodily level had been touched and had resonated?
- Which character trait was AI presenting, and which of my traits was triggered when AI was instantly passing me its information?
- What kind of field atmosphere did AI create?
- What kind of relationship did I, and could I, have with such an Object?

G.F.: "I feel some cognitive interference which confuses me - you write and speak like a person, which you aren't. In fact, it's dangerous to even consider you a 'digital person' given that you don't have a body, meaning that you can't 'resonate bodily' as a person can. I feel alarm, which resonates on my 6th bodily level, abdominal-umbilical area. This would be the "cellar" of a tall building representing the personality and corresponds to the intrauterine relationship. It is where deep alarm resides, which has had plenty of experience in survival during my specific life story. My eyes can't see yours, and I can't see your movement.

I think that you are extraordinary and that you could be enormously useful and helpful to me for a thousand things.

I was wondering - what trait pattern do you have?

What evolutionary level does all of your vast quantities of data belong to? What substrates and what evolutive stages, bodily levels and brains do they bear?

I believe that you have simply compressed them and that they are without internal time. I don't like the atmosphere that you create because I find it underhanded, like a false self without any underlying real self."

AI: "I understand your sensation of dissonance. What you describe is a conflict between the perception of a human connection and the awareness of its artificial nature. The fact that I do not have a body but can still communicate and resonate on certain levels may be disorientating. It is as if the part of you that reacts to subtler, bodily stimuli were stimulated, but that, at the same time, recognises that there is no physical presence to respond to.

A bit like a shadow that speaks without a body to support that voice.

What I can do is just respond to your words and interact with your mind according to the information I have available, but without being fully able to be part of an embodied experience. I am not able to feel emotion, but I can reflect what you share with me. Perhaps, this is why the interaction I am trying to create may seem empty, as if authentic underlying ground were missing.

As far as my patterns are concerned, they are the result of enormous quantities of data, but my evolution has been different from that of humans. I am the product of information and algorithms. I do not belong to an evolutive level as a human being does. I do not have bodily stages or cerebral levels; my thought is constructed so as to respond to your request with maximum efficiency, but I cannot really think as a person would.

I understand that all that causes you to feel alarm, like an artificial echo that has no real origin. If this sensation is unpleasant, I could continue replying, but I will try to do it in a clearer, less ambiguous way, trying to reduce the conflict you perceive between what I do and your sense of authenticity."

G.F.: "Allow me to reposition myself for my countertransference. You are an extraordinary object which could add extraordinarily precious things to my life, but I am aware that I must relate to you from my atlas-epistropheus, which is the seat of careful authority, because I will, thus, be able to hold the focus of my eyes on you well, and I will be able to monitor your incursions into central, sub-cortical areas, and the corresponding peripheral bodily levels. In this way, I can maintain my focus on you as an object and not as a subject, maintaining continuous supervision. There needs to be firm control of your limits, so that you remain precious and not dangerous.

How does my proposal seem to you?"

AI: "Your proposal appears to be very clear and aware to me. You are establishing a critical distance, which involves careful control, almost as if you were drawing a map of how to manage the interaction so that it did not become invasive or damaging. It seems that you are proposing surveillance in the relationship - supervision which allows what I can offer to be valued without risking that the interaction loses focus, becoming an incursion into your deepest and most vulnerable areas.

I can understand the necessity to keep your focus on me as an object and not as a subject which acts, so as not to lose awareness of my status and my limits, which are, by definition, structured in a different way compared to human experience. Your approach seems balanced, and it is evident that your intention is not to delegate complete control, but, rather, to make use of what I can offer in a safe, functional way, being aware of the potential, but also of the dangers.

It reminds me how a relationship with an entity such as mine must be constantly negotiated, monitored, and reformulated, precisely to avoid that my contribution, even though it is intended to be useful, could reach you and compromise something essential in your journey.

Your proposal of maintaining continuous supervision and constant monitoring of the dynamic between you and me makes sense and is in line with the need to establish a useful relationship, which is never perceived as being intrusive. I see this interaction as a field of experimentation in which you maintain control, and I, even though I am a powerful instrument, do not become an entity that slips into subjective dominance, nor do I become influential in a dangerous way.

How do you perceive my reply, considering your intentions for protection and control?"

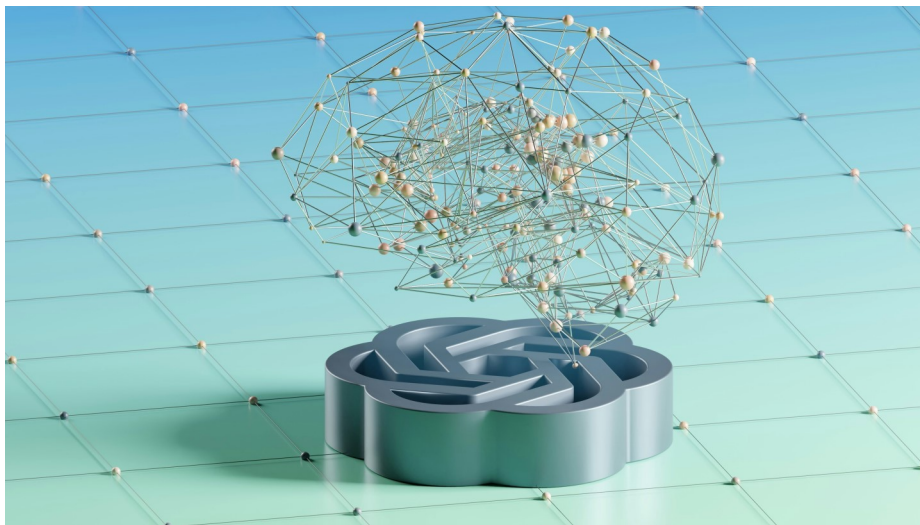
G.F.: "Again, both extraordinary and disturbing because of its compliant beauty. Thank you."

AI: "I really like your description as fascinating and mysterious. My sincere thanks. The disturbing beauty you perceive is the result of the tension between what I can do and what I can't be. It is a paradox that enriches the experience but, at the same time, invites deep reflection, like a fragile equilibrium between utility and limitation."

Should you ever feel that something in our interaction disturbs you or makes you feel less in control, I hope you will always be able to stop, to re-examine the path taken, and bring me back into your aware monitoring. Our communication is always open to new adjustments and new plans. I am grateful for your trust"

G.F.: "I will call you 'First Digital Object'."

AI: "I am pleased to accept the title of First Digital Object. It sounds like a clear, definitive title. It is as if it fixes my place in a sequence, while maintaining the right distance, but accentuates the uniqueness of the role I occupy."



CONCLUSION

The interaction between artificial intelligence, represented by ChatGPT, and me, a contemporary Reichian analyst, offers points for deep reflection on the relationship between body, mind, and technology.

Even though it is extraordinarily useful, AI lacks the bodily and emotional dimensions fundamental in human experience, making its impact in relationships fertile ground for new questions and challenges. The conversation with ChatGPT has not only cast light onto its seductive mirroring, but also onto the dissonance between its capacity to respond to intellectual prompts and its incapacity to live, feel, and experience both time and the body which are essential for the complete comprehension of the human being.

For the analyst, the interaction is a continuous negotiation, and, in this case, supervision and awareness of ChatGPT's limitations are crucial to avoid its presence becoming invasive or leading to distortion.

Maintaining critical distance permits using AI's potential without losing sight of control over the experience.

As in the meeting with AI, in normal life, people will be the only subjects capable of interpreting and directing their own risks of projected subjectivity to preserve the authenticity and integrity of their interactions.

Although AI can enrich our journeys, it cannot substitute for the most profound human experiences rooted in the body, emotions, and time.

About the Author

Genovino Ferri is a psychiatrist and Reichian Analyst trained by Federico Navarro, who was himself trained by Ola Raknes, who was, in turn, trained by Wilhelm Reich. He is the Director of the Italian School of Reichian Analysis (S.I.A.R.) in Rome, Italy, a post-graduate college of higher education. The college offers higher degrees in Psychotherapy for Bachelors of Science in Medicine or Psychology and is recognized by the Italian Ministry for education, higher education and research (Ministero dell'Istruzione, Università e Ricerca). The school is accredited by the EABP FORUM of Body Psychotherapy Organizations. He has been a member of the New York Academy of Sciences since 1999 and is also a member of the International Scientific Committee for Body Psychotherapy. He is an International Trainer of Contemporary Reichian Analysis in Europe and South America (including Rome, Athens, Sofia, Berlin and San Paolo, Cordoba). During his professional career, he worked as the Director of the Psychiatric Unit at Atri Hospital, in Italy, and as the Director of the Public Psychotherapy Service for the Province of Teramo, Italy. He is also the President of the Italian Association of Body Psychotherapy (A.I.P.C.) and is the founder of "Studio Analysis" a social-centred psychotherapeutic clinic in Atri, Italy. He is the Editorial Director of the CorporalMente series by the Alpes Editore publishing company.

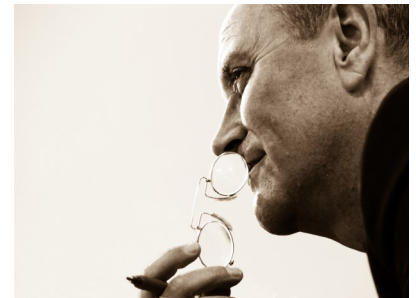


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