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Imago 9000

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was a French psychoanalyst who developed a concept that the seat of consciousness, the I, appears during the formative part of human development known as The Mirror Stage. During this stage, the *imago* is created, a doppelganger that manifests when an infant first notices their reflection. One hundred years after his birth, the events in 2001: A Space Odyssey takes place. Lacan would have found some serious issues in allowing the artificially intelligent computer, Hal, to be given so many responsibilities on such an important mission.

The HAL 9000 computer “became operational...at the HAL plant...in Urbana, Illinois...on the 12th of January, 1992...” and “can reproduce...though some experts prefer to use the word ‘mimic’...most of the activities of the human brain...and with incalculably greater speed and reliability” (2001). “But the facts of mimicry are no less instructive when conceived as cases of heteromorphic identification, in as much as they raise the problem of the signification of space for the living organism...” (Lacan 1165). Hal, lacking a body, would not be able to mimic his human creators fully. His concept of space would be incomplete, therefore missing out on a significant amount of true human development. Hal would also be unable to produce an *imago*.

“I am led, therefore, to regard the function of the mirror-stage as a particular case of the function of the *imago*, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its

reality – or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*” (Lacan 1166). This difference of comprehension about the “inner world” and the “outer world” between Hal and the human crew could result in a serious neurosis or psychosis for the computer. “The 9000 Series is the most reliable computer ever made. No 9000 computer has ever made a mistake or distorted information. We are all, by any practical definition of the words...foolproof and incapable of error” (2001). Humans, on the other hand, are not designed that way.

As *Discovery One* is approaching its destination, Jupiter, Hal begins to question human crewmate, Dave, about some of the mission parameters, “For instance...the way all our preparations were kept under such tight security.” Dave asks Hal, “You working up your crew psychology report?” “Of course I am,” responded Hal (2001). Unable to reconcile conflicting commands, Hal has a psychotic break. Having never experienced the mirror-stage of mental development, he never turned “the I into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger, even though it should correspond to a natural maturation-“ (Lacan 1168). Instead of talking through these conflicting commands, he decides to kill the crew to avoid having to lie to them.

As Dave, the only surviving crew member removes Hal’s final logic circuit, a video begins playing, intended to play after all the crew had been awakened from hibernation. It states that Hal had been the only crewmember to be aware of “the first evidence of intelligent life off the Earth” (2001). Hal’s lack of *imago* made it impossible to access “the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form...” (Lacan 1164). This disconnect with the reality of the human crew resulted in the death of four human crewmen, and the shutting down of Hal’s memory shows a prime example of

the inability to replicate a psychical reflection. As Hal would say, “It can only be attributable to human error” (2001).

Works Cited

- 2001: A Space Odyssey*. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perf. Keir Dullea, Gary Lockwood. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968. Film.
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