

# The Geometry of Desire

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## ABSTRACT

In the BDI paradigm, much attention was devoted to beliefs, intentions, choice and commitment, whereas desire has traditionally been seen as given. However, desire is the key connection to the agents' creator, and the ultimate source of behaviour. Desires are allowed to be incoherent, irrational, or at least a-rational. Agent environments establish a motivational context for agents to act upon. Agent societies are never truly autonomous. We argue that pre-designed utility-based behaviour search strategies not only hinder the adaptability of an agent but also prevent the emergence of novel social behaviour. In this paper, we propose a new model of desire acquisition and evolution. Agents continuously adapt their desires by means of both their intrinsic motivations, as well as a mimetic mechanism inspired in René Girard's theory. Agents acquire new goals not through fitness or novelty but out of mechanisms such as envy, imitation and competition. To achieve their goals, agents have to sometimes discard them and just overcome their neighbours.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

I.2.11 [Artificial Intelligence]: Distributed Artificial Intelligence—Intelligent Agents

## Keywords

Agent theories and models; Cognitive aspects; Agent societies and societal issues; Artificial social systems; Agent-based simulation; Emergent behaviour

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In real and artificial societies, agents make their choices using their own criteria, often informed by complex concepts and mechanisms such as utility [19], other times following more esoteric and yet realistic rules of behaviour such as imitation [8], evolution [8] or value sharing [1].

The Belief-Desire-Intention (BDI) agent architecture [16] emanates from and represents a philosophical stance allowing the characterisation of agents in terms of mental qualities easily recognisable by other agents. Several rigorous models and techniques supplied reasoning machinery designed

to deal with such qualities, and build credible scripts for themselves and interpret the actions of others. However, the behaviours that are derived from those scripts are very often unsatisfactory, especially when we hope that our model scales-up to resemble what happens in real societies, hoping to derive some understanding and perhaps useful policies from those models.

BDI used to be an architecture designed for decision and action. For some time it included an associated modal logic, which seemed to constrain the design of agent minds into a logic-based paradigm [16]. But time corrected that tendency and BDI is now seen as a terminological and conceptual basis that provides common ground (and grounding) for a dialogue between theorists and practitioners in the multiagent system (MAS) communities, but also outside, allowing to engage other scientific areas in the discussion, such as economists, other social scientists, as well as physicists, psychologists, philosophers, neuroscientists, etc.

Watching BDI as a general framework for agent mentality, we notice the key role played by intentions as a link between the agents' beliefs (what the agent knows) and desires (what the agent aims for). Several authors (notably Castelfranchi [4]) noted that desires and intentions really belong to the same mental category (pro-attitudes). Intentions are an especially constrained subset of desires, and represent what the agents will really work towards achieving. Intentions come out of desires as a result of the agents' deliberation, and are managed through special mechanisms abiding to rationality principles. What cannot be derived from rational principles, whichever rationality definition we pick, is the set of desires the agents aspire to. Given that most of what remains is left to the agents' (and its designer) discretion, it is in the desire set that we can (should) locate the agents' ultimate goals, which can justify (and generate) their behaviour.

The source of desires is key to determine behaviour, both individually and collectively. In most BDI approaches, desires are given data for the problems to be addressed. But what happens when we want to confer true autonomy to agents? What happens when, as often in exploratory simulation, we don't know what exactly we are after in an experiment, both as agent designers and as interrogative scientists? What happens when we are after novelty, and seek to discover, instead of facing well-defined problems which involve search of a solution? As Ken Stanley puts it [13], sometimes we have to abandon our goals in order to achieve them.

Teleological behaviour [17] has long been the basis of multiagent system development. Simon [18] stated that "People

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## **Table of Contents Geometry Of Desire**

1. Understanding the eBook Geometry Of Desire
  - The Rise of Digital Reading Geometry Of Desire
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Geometry Of Desire
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an Geometry Of Desire
  - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Geometry Of Desire
  - Personalized Recommendations

- Geometry Of Desire User Reviews and Ratings
- Geometry Of Desire and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Geometry Of Desire Free and Paid eBooks
  - Geometry Of Desire Public Domain eBooks
  - Geometry Of Desire eBook Subscription Services
  - Geometry Of Desire Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Geometry Of Desire eBook Formats
  - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
  - Geometry Of Desire Compatibility with Devices
  - Geometry Of Desire Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
  - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Geometry Of Desire
  - Highlighting and Note-Taking Geometry Of Desire
  - Interactive Elements Geometry Of Desire
- 8. Staying Engaged with Geometry Of Desire
  - Joining Online Reading Communities
  - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
  - Following Authors and Publishers Geometry Of Desire
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Geometry Of Desire
  - Benefits of a Digital Library
  - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Geometry Of Desire
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
  - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
  - Minimizing Distractions
  - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Geometry Of Desire
  - Setting Reading Goals Geometry Of Desire
  - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Geometry Of Desire
  - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Geometry Of Desire

- Distinguishing Credible Sources
- 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
  - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
  - Exploring Educational eBooks
- 14. Embracing eBook Trends
  - Integration of Multimedia Elements
  - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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