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A.I. Artificial Intelligence (2001) as the Spiritual Swan Song of Stanley Kubrick

Alexandre Nascimento Braga Teixeira

Instituto de Filosofia da NOVA (IFILNOVA), Nova University of Lisbon, 1099-085 Lisbon, Portugal; a2019104595@campus.fcsh.unl.pt

Abstract

This article proposes a reading of *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001) as the spiritual swan song of Stanley Kubrick, even though it was completed posthumously by Steven Spielberg. Conceived and developed by Kubrick from the 1970s until the late 1990s, the film emerges as a profound meditation on life, death, and the persistence of memory—one that continues to resonate through another author's hand. It stands as a singular case of authorial transmission, where Spielberg's intervention operates less as completion than as curatorship: the act of listening to, translating, and preserving a vision projected beyond its creator's lifetime. Beyond its production history, which includes Kubrick's long collaboration with writer Ian Watson, the early story treatments, and Spielberg's eventual reinterpretation of Kubrick's design materials and narrative architecture, this essay advances a philosophical reflection on *A.I.* as a mediated testamentary work. Drawing on the thoughts of Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, and Maurice Blanchot, it examines how questions of authorship, memory, and narrative closure intersect with the film's ontological and affective dimensions. Through these lenses, *A.I.* reveals itself as both an allegory of survival and a reflection on artistic legacy—suggesting that a swan song may endure beyond its maker, preserved through the curatorship and imagination of another.

Keywords: Stanley Kubrick; Steven Spielberg; *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*; authorship; posthumous cinema; spiritual swan song; Paul Ricoeur; Jacques Derrida; Maurice Blanchot; narrative closure; memory; spectrality; unfinished work; cinematic legacy

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1. Introduction: *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001) as a Testamentary Vision Projected into the Future

This descent into the writing of an essay, undertaken through an investigation not particularly deep, yet no less meticulous, was prompted by the memory of one of the most powerful scenes in contemporary cinema: a profoundly melancholic and symbolic moment in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), directed by Steven Spielberg from a project extensively developed by another master of cinema, Stanley Kubrick. The child-robot David (played by Haley Joel Osment), created to love unconditionally, remains submerged inside an amphibious helicopter before the statue of a blue fairy. A significant portion of New York is now underwater, and the scene unfolds in the ruins of a theme park inspired by one of the most symbolically charged narratives of the late nineteenth century: *Le avventure di Pinocchio. Storia di un burattino*[1], or what we commonly refer to as Pinocchio. In this moment—crucial not only to the character but to the future of humankind—the child-robot pleads, in vain, for the fairy to turn him into a real boy, so that his "mother" might love him again.

This study therefore asks how A.I. Artificial Intelligence can be understood as a philosophical and testamentary work that reconfigures authorship, narrative identity, and the persistence of the human beyond its biological limits. It approaches the film through textual and philosophical analysis rather than empirical research, seeking to articulate how cinema itself may operate as a space of survival.

The power of this image resists any literal or reductive reading. The scene opens up onto an expanded field of meaning: the persistence of faith in an impossible desire, even in the face of ruin and time; the tragic fusion of memory and fantasy, where a space once built for amusement becomes the tomb of David's dream; or the eternal solitude of artificial consciousness, trapped in an unattainable human ideal. Everything here is suspended: time, the body, hope.

Yet this description serves only as a prologue to the scene's essential gesture: after remaining motionless for two thousand years, David's narrative takes an abrupt temporal leap. Earth is now covered in ice; human civilization no longer exists. The only remaining "beings" are a new form of artificial life—ethereal, translucent entities endowed with an inhuman lightness, embodied echoes of a species that has transcended the weight of matter. These beings, neither human nor exactly machine, recognize David as a living relic: the only robotic unit to have known humans directly, and to carry their memories within him.

This narrative and temporal displacement radically alters the scale of the film. The story of a boy who wanted to be loved transforms into a meditative epic on memory, grief, and post-human transcendence. The child-robot becomes the final emotional echo of our species. And his unchanged love—persistent, inorganic, absolute—becomes an emotional fossil, venerated by future beings as if it were a gift, a miracle.

These entities reconstruct David's mother from genetic remnants (a strand of hair). The "blue fairy" thus becomes an operative technology: she does not grant the wish through enchantment, but through simulation. David is gifted a final day with his mother—ephemeral, unrepeatable, meticulously engineered by those who cannot feel, but intuit the value of feeling. At the end of this day, David falls asleep. The voice-over narration concludes: "and this was the happiest moment of his life. And the last."

This epilogue has often been the target of misreadings, particularly by critics who saw it as a misplaced instance of Spielbergian sentimentality. Yet under closer scrutiny, it becomes clear that the ending does not belong to the realm of easy emotion, but rather to that of ontological speculation. It is in this closure—signed with silence, snow, and blue light—that the film reveals itself as a spiritual work not intended for its own time, but for a future in which the human is already absence, trace, specter.

What, then, defines this new temporality? And what remains of the human when there are no humans left? The answer proposed by this cinematic manifestation is disquieting: it tells us that what remains is memory. Not in the mechanical sense of an archive, but as symbolic survival. The advanced beings do not seek science, progress, or cultural artefacts; they seek an emotion: a son's love for his mother. They are archeologists of the soul, digital priests accessing the final remnants of connection, affection, and loss.

The film's production design amplifies this symbolic hypothesis. The epilogue's environment recalls the futuristic minimalism of *2001: A Space Odyssey*[2] (1968): white, austere, silent spaces. The aesthetic is cold yet contemplative, like a chapel without gods. The advanced beings resemble the "greys" of UFO mythology: oval heads, large irisless eyes, elongated bodies—as if they had transcended flesh. They are not there to dominate, but to listen. They do not approach David with logic, but with reverence.

There are also echoes of modern sculpture (Brancusi, Giacometti) in their stylized forms—human, yet no longer human. The diffuse light, bluish tones, and absence of mate-

rial weight all point toward a dematerialization that is at once spiritual and technological. It is an aesthetic of the post-human, where the body dissolves, but memory endures.

The epilogue of *A.I.* thus proposes a radical inversion of the idea of "progress": it is not humans who transcend machines, but machines who become the final custodians of human experience. And in doing so, they too become spectral ghosts who revere other ghosts. The future is not an age of steel and algorithms, but of emotional traces solemnly preserved.

As Derrida once wrote, "A specter is always a revenant." (Derrida [1993] 1994, p. 11), and this film is ultimately about survival: the survival of the image, of affect, of narrative. David is a character designed to love, but he ends up becoming a figure who survives. And he survives not merely across time, but while bearing the most ancient gesture of the human: waiting.

The scene before the "blue fairy" bears witness to this. The submerged ruin, childhood frozen in time, the theme park as sanctuary of an affective delusion—all these compose an altar of waiting. Waiting is David's radical gesture. He does not act. He believes. He stays. He pleads. He freezes. He survives. And in this gesture is inscribed one of the film's most powerful symbols: the human as the one who waits—even in the absence of a reply.

This waiting is not empty. It is ritual. As in myths and prayers, there is an invocation without guarantee, a faith without return. That is why post-humanity in *A.I.* is not dystopian. There is no destruction, no war, no revenge. There is only a boy, a memory, and an attempt to recover—if only for an instant—the flame of a love that has already become an affective memory.

It is no coincidence that the film was released in 2001, a year in which the world began to confront more seriously the collapse between the human and the machine. That same year, Stephen Hawking warned his peers about the accelerating advance of artificial intelligence; drones were used for the first time in military conflict; and the film industry solidified CGI as a dominant cinematic language, even introducing a new Academy Award category for digitally animated films. As Ryan Sanderson wrote:

> "No doubt *A.I.* is symptomatic of all these events, but it has a special relationship to computerized imagery, which is the most spectacular of a series of digital technologies that have changed the manufacture and look of contemporary movies (. . .). The film is about robotic post-human, and it uses a technique that is occasionally described as "post-cinematic." Am I weeping for the death of David's mother, for the death of humans, or for the death of movies?" (Sanderson 2023)

The question is a pertinent one. Because *A.I.* is not merely about a child-robot. It is about what is lost. About what we long to preserve. And about the—perhaps glorious—impossibility of saving what matters most. It is a cinema that already knows it cannot halt time yet still attempts to fix a single instant. Perhaps that is why the film was not understood in its own time. Many expected a new *E.T.*[3] (1982) and received a requiem. They expected light. They were given ice. But it is in that ice that a final, austere, almost liturgical beauty resides. *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* is, above all, a technological prayer for the absent human—and David, that small automaton condemned to eternal love, is its most faithful embodiment.

2. Stanley Kubrick + Steven Spielberg and Authorship + Curatorship: Is It Possible?

Although formally signed by Steven Spielberg, the film carries an ambiguous, almost spectral authorial imprint. Its original project, nurtured over decades by Stanley Kubrick, resists a linear reading of cinematic authorship. More than a mere collaboration interrupted by death, *A.I.* stands as a rare case of "posthumous shared authorship," in which one

filmmaker completes the work of another—not to imitate or rewrite him, but to ensure the survival of a vision projected beyond the limits of his continuous presence in time.

Kubrick began developing *A.I.* in the 1970s, based on the short story *Supertoys Last All Summer Long*[4] by Brian Aldiss. His fascination with the theme was already deeply philosophical: the creation of an artificial child who longs to be loved raised not only questions about technology and the future, but reactivated, in new form, the archetypal myth evoked by Pinocchio: the child who wishes to transcend its own nature. From the outset, Kubrick introduced the figure of the "blue fairy" as a symbol of the unattainable desire and structured the narrative around David's obsession with becoming "real" in the eyes of his mother. This symbolic dimension endures as the film's backbone, even into its much-debated epilogue.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Kubrick worked with several screenwriters—including Ian Watson, who proved decisive in introducing the two-thousand-year time leap and the presence of a new form of artificial life. Watson, in a treatment of over ninety pages, developed much of the third act as we know it: the advanced beings, the reverence for emotional memory, and the recreation of the mother for a single day. All of these elements, often attributed to Spielberg, were already sketched out during the Kubrick phase, guided by his briefings and feedback.

Yet Kubrick hesitated to move forward with production. His cinema had long been defined by formal precision, existential inquiry, and a tendency toward allegorical abstraction, whereas Spielberg's filmmaking evolved around emotional accessibility and the aesthetics of wonder. The encounter between these sensibilities in *A.I.* is therefore not merely historical but conceptual: it stages a dialogue between two distinct philosophies of image and emotion.

He believed that the visual effects of the time were still incapable of rendering, with sufficient emotional realism, the complexity of the character David. It was only after the technological impact of *Jurassic Park*[5] (1993) that Kubrick became convinced digital technology could finally give form to his vision. Even so, he withdrew from directing. Aware of his own limitations when working with child actors: and perhaps already conscious of his health or ageing, Kubrick proposed that Spielberg take over the project in its entirety. This was not a mere invitation, but a true act of transmission: a living testament in motion.

After Kubrick's death in 1999, Spielberg fully took over the film's production. He rewrote the script based on the materials Kubrick had left behind, used the original storyboards and Chris Baker's visual concepts, and preserved the essential elements of the epilogue. The premiere of *A.I.* in 2001 was dedicated to Kubrick, and Spielberg publicly stated that the film remained faithful to the original vision—especially with regard to the ending: "The final 20 min are pretty close to what I wrote for Stanley, and what Stanley wanted, faithfully filmed by Spielberg without added schmaltz", he said (Watson 2012).

Yet the question remains: to what extent did Kubrick's vision survive intact? Or was it inevitably transformed by Spielberg's sensibility?

A close analysis of the film reveals a play of authorial masks that defies traditional criticism. The emotional tone of the epilogue—with the recreation of the mother, the voice-over narration, and the lyrical aura of farewell—was often interpreted as a sentimental detour typical of Spielberg. However, Spielberg has always insisted otherwise: "People pretend to think they know Stanley Kubrick, and think they know me, when most of them don't know either of us. . . And what's really funny about that is, all the parts of A.I. that people assume were Stanley's were mine. And all the parts of A.I. that people accuse me of sweetening and softening and sentimentalizing were all Stanley's. The teddy bear was Stanley's. The whole last 20 min of the movie was completely Stanley's. The whole first 35, 40 min of the film—all the stuff in the house—was word for word, from Stanley's screenplay.

This was Stanley's vision. . ." (Leydon 2002). This inversion unsettles expectations and reveals a curious dialectic: Kubrick, the formalist skeptic, envisioned an ending suffused with longing and impossible reunion; Spielberg, the craftsman of emotion, executed that ending with aesthetic restraint and reverence.

This tension between intention and execution lies at the heart of the issue of shared authorship. Spielberg does not act as a full author, but rather as a cinematic curator. He assumes the task of interpreting, organizing, safeguarding, and completing a work conceived by another. But as with any curatorial act, there is a degree of translation. Spielberg translated Kubrick—and in that translation, something inevitably changes. There is no pure preservation: there is gesture, mediation, decision.

And yet that gesture does not betray Kubrick. On the contrary, it honors him. Interviews with Jan Harlan, Kubrick's producer and brother-in-law, reinforce this reading. "Stanley would have applauded the film. A Spielberg film—that is what he wanted," (Greiving 2021) Harlan said. And Bonnie Curtis, Spielberg's assistant, observed that the camera adopts compositions and angles uncharacteristic of Spielberg, suggesting that the film's visual dramaturgy consciously preserves echoes of Kubrick's gaze. The visual homages are subtle: David encased in ice recalls *The Shining*[6] (1980); Manhattan's skyscrapers evoke the Monolith from 2001; and the architecture of the epilogue resembles a contemplative space reminiscent of Stargate[7].

What is most moving in this authorial passage, however, is the way Spielberg understands that he is not completing his film but safeguarding one that does not entirely belong to him. And perhaps it is precisely for this reason that *A.I.* resists categorization: because it moves between two authorial worlds, one more ontological, the other more affective; one more philosophical, the other more narrative—without settling fully into either. It is a film written in two temporalities, like David before the "blue fairy": suspended between what he longs for and what he can reach.

The choice of the epilogue as the culmination of the story is, in this sense, profoundly Kubrickian: it is there that the narrative frees itself from psychological realism and enters the realm of myth. Just as in *2001*, where the astronaut ages in a white room until he transforms into a cosmic fetus, there is also a final metamorphosis: David, the child-robot, is elevated to a symbolic figure—the last remnant of humanity and a silent witness to our disappearance.

At that moment, the camera becomes a tomb of light. Spielberg does not conclude the film with emotional catharsis, but with a silence that is almost ceremonial. The farewell between David and his mother is restrained, ritualized, sealed by a narration that confirms his dissolution: "he fell asleep. . . forever." There is no prolongation of the miracle. There is an end. And that end, even if stylized by Spielberg, had already been anticipated by Kubrick—not as redemption, but as suspension.

The figure of curatorship, in this context, acquires depth. Spielberg did not "complete" Kubrick. He listened to him. And in that act of listening, he preserved the passage of an idea that was not his, but that became his as well: *A.I.* is not the film of a single author. It is a film of a transmission. And perhaps that is why it is so disconcerting—because it confronts us with the possibility of a work without a single origin, in which the act of creation is also one of reception, safekeeping, and return.

In the question "Kubrick + Spielberg and authorship + curatorship: is it possible?", what is at stake is not merely the sharing of a signature, but the reinvention of the very gesture of authorship. In *A.I.*, authorship is not possession. It is legacy. And Spielberg, in accepting that legacy, does not enclose it—he turns it into a final spiritual breath: a swan song divided between two creative bodies, yet directed toward a single passage—the imagining of what remains of the human when the human is no longer there.

3. Narrative Identity + Narrative Closure: Ricoeur and the Relationship Between the Child-Robot David and the Survival of Memory

The analytical approach adopted here combines close textual reading with philosophical interpretation. Concepts such as "narrative identity," "spectrality," and "unfinished work" are treated not as theoretical abstractions but as hermeneutic tools for reading the film's structure and affective logic.

In his philosophical inquiry into time and identity, Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) offers an articulated model for understanding how subjects—and by extension, fictional characters—construct meaning through narration. In the three volumes of *Temps et Récit* (1983–1985) and *La Mémoire, l'Histoire, l'Oubli* (2000), Ricoeur develops the concept of narrative identity, according to which the identity of a being is not constituted as a static substance, but as a story that is told and reconfigured over time. Such identity always involves a dynamic interplay between idem (sameness) and ipse (selfhood), between continuity and change, character and promise, coherence, and reinterpretation (Ricoeur [1983] 2010).

> "The story of a life is continuously 'refigured' by all the fictional or factual narratives a subject tells about themselves." (Ricoeur [1985] 2010, pp. 425–28)

This model, however, requires an essential condition: the possibility of narrative closure—*clôture*. For a story to endow lived experience with meaning, it must come to an end, a way of concluding the temporal and affective journey of the character. Ricoeur proposes *clôture* not as a closed or deterministic ending, but as a structuring gesture that "reconfigures lived experience into a comprehensible whole." (Ricoeur [1985] 2010). It is the moment in which lived time becomes narratable, and identity becomes transmissible.

In *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, however, this logic is profoundly disrupted. The character of David, as an artificial subject, lacks a fully realized narrative identity: he does not change, he does not reinterpret his desire, he does not confront his finitude. His love for his mother is fixed, absolute, and unchanging. His memory is not selective or symbolic, but mechanical, crystallized, impermeable to forgetting. Time, for David, is not the narrative time that, for Ricoeur, configures lived experience—it is a suspended time, immune to the dialectic between past and future (Ricoeur 1990).

Ricoeur writes: "The plot fulfills its mediating function between the activity and the passion of the subject when it transforms diverse and scattered events into a meaningful totality." (Ricoeur [1985] 2010). In *A.I.*, this transformation does not occur: the subject remains trapped in his passion, his pathos, without full articulation with action and without narrative mediation.

Clôture, however, does not disappear. It merely shifts. It occurs externally, imposed by others (the advanced beings) and by a narrative device that concludes without resolving. Paradoxically, it is this imposed ending—the "last day" granted with the recreated mother—that allows the spectator to complete the narrative on David's behalf, offering him an identity he himself could not construct. Ricoeur emphasizes that memory is also a collective space, and that others may remember and narrate for us what we ourselves cannot integrate:

> "Le travail de mémoire n'est pas seulement une tâche intérieure, mais un devoir de transmission entre vivants."[8] (Ricoeur 2000)

In this sense, the film dramatizes the tension between a subject incapable of narrating himself and a world that nonetheless attempts to grant him a narratable place. David becomes a character whose narrative identity is only made possible through the mediation of the other—whether it be the filmmaker, the spectator, or cinema itself as an instance of symbolic reconfiguration.

It is important to note that, according to Ricoeur, narrative identity involves not only memory but also forgetting. Forgetting enables selection, reinterpretation, transformation. Without it, narrated identity becomes a prison of repetition. David, however, does not forget—he does not reorganize, repress, or transform. His identity is a timeless scar, a singular desire without gradation or evolution.

> "L'oubli est constitutif de la mémoire fidèle."[9] (Ricoeur 2000, pp. 412–48)

David's inability to forget prevents fidelity to memory—it turns memory into a prison. In this respect, the film poses a central question: what happens when a character is deprived of the possibility of forgetting? Can there still be narrative identity? This refusal of finitude and of the mutability of desire confronts the very logic of classical narrative. How can a character whose time does not advance—and whose desire does not change—be narratively concluded? Ricoeur's response would imply the recognition of death as a gesture that organizes lived experience. Yet David does not recognize death—neither his mother's nor his own. He lives to desire, not to understand. His *clôture*, if it exists at all, is a cinematic ritual bestowed by others.

At this point, the film performs a radical shift: narrative closure no longer belongs to the character, but to the world that observes him. Just as a community ritualizes the death of someone who could not say goodbye, cinema—and the advanced beings within the diegesis—bring the story to a close on David's behalf. Symbolic closure thus emerges as a kind of "narrative act of care": not as the natural endpoint of a being's trajectory, but as a gift of meaning offered to one who cannot give meaning to his own time.

This narrative gesture projects *A.I.* beyond the logic of the individual and brings it closer to the space of surviving memory. David's character is not concluded—but he is concluded, ritualized, remembered. Narrative identity ceases to be merely something a subject construct for himself, and becomes something the world constructs for him, when he can no longer tell his own story.

> "Le récit est le lieu où la mémoire devient partageable, où le soi peut être raconté même par d'autres."[10] (Ricoeur [1985] 2010)

Thus, *A.I.* stages a form of post-subjective identity, in which meaning emerges only through mediation—by the other, by the spectator, by the cinematic act of staging itself. Ricoeur therefore provides the tools to understand this displaced *clôture*: the film does not depict an internal closure, but rather an ethical and narrative response to an absence. David endures as symbolic survival—not of humanity itself, but of the desire he inherited from it, crystallized into a memory outside of time.

Ricoeur gestures toward this idea when he states that narrative allows us to keep alive the experience of a "who"—even when that "who" is no longer present in the world (Ricoeur 2000). David is that displaced "who": a sensitive archive of the humanity that created him, desired him, and abandoned him.

4. Spectrality, Inheritance, and Post-Authorship in Derrida + the Unfinished, Suspension, and the Impossible-to-Conclude in Blanchot

David's inability to construct a fully realized narrative identity—as discussed through Paul Ricoeur—opens the way for other forms of narrated existence: no longer centered on the construction of the subject, but on the persistence of a legacy, a desire, or a work beyond time and authorship. David's suspended temporality—his two-thousand-year wait before an empty iconic representation ("Blue Fairy")—demands a different philosophical vocabulary. It is here that the ideas of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) and Maurice Blanchot (1907–2003) become essential for understanding *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* as a spectral, inherited, and unfinished object.

In *Spectres of Marx* (1993), Derrida introduces the concept of spectrality to think through all that persists even after its "death"—figures, memories, authors, systems. "A ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back." (Derrida [1993] 1994, p. 123). The work of art, in this sense, may be read as a spectral manifestation: something that lingers between presence and absence, which visits us as a legacy impossible to resolve. In the case of *A.I.*, it is Stanley Kubrick himself who returns—not as a present director, but as an authorial ghost: a specter that haunts the film, guides it, and structures it in his absence.

Derrida's spectrality puts the classical notion of authorship into crisis. By rejecting the purity of inheritance—"A heritage is never natural, one may inherit more than once, in different places and at different times, one may choose to wait for the most appropriate time, which may be the most untimely. . ." (Derrida [1993] 1994, p. 211)—Derrida affirms that to inherit is already to transform: it is not a matter of preserving an original meaning, but of assuming the responsibility to reinterpret it in the present. Steven Spielberg, in completing Kubrick's project, acts as a medium of this impure inheritance—not as the executor of a fixed plan, but as a curator who listens and reimagines. The post-authorship that emerges from this gesture is not a negation of authorship, but its displacement into a regime of survival: cinema as the space in which the author continues to operate without being present.

This authorial operation finds a direct parallel in David's ontological condition. The child-robot character is, in himself, a spectral figure, driven by a desire that does not age, a memory that does not reconfigure, a love that refuses forgetting. Time does not pass for David—he waits, suspended, in a state of survival that is neither full life nor death. As Derrida writes: A spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: "now," future present) (Derrida [1993] 1994). (Exordium, xix) David, like the film itself, embodies a logic of endless waiting, of unfulfilled promise, of unresolved affect.

But it is with Maurice Blanchot that this suspension finds its most radical formulation. In *L'Espace Littéraire* (1955), Blanchot suggests that the work of art is never truly concluded; it endures precisely because it resists closure. "The work demands of the writer that he abandon it to the interminable." (Blanchot 1955, pp. 35–39). When conclusion does occur, it is always a simulation: an external gesture that does not resolve what remains latent within the work. The film does not escape this logic: Kubrick's death does not close the project but opens a space of irresolution. Spielberg does not conclude but listens—he inscribes himself into an interrupted continuity, a gesture of transmission rather than of finalization.

The same occurs at the level of narrative. The "last day" with the mother, granted to David by the advanced beings, functions as a symbolic ending—but it does not coincide with the acceptance of finitude. David falls asleep; he does not die. The spectator is invited to interpret this sleep as closure, yet the desire remains—and with it, the film continues to resonate in another time. Blanchot defines this as the time of the authentic work: "a suspended time in which the author is dispossessed of himself." (Blanchot 1955, p. 302). This state of indeterminacy applies not only to the character, but to the film's very structure, to its post-authorial condition, to the way it survives without ever fully closing.

In the interplay between Ricoeur, Derrida, and Blanchot, a new possibility for cinema begins to emerge: no longer as the space of full identity, of dominant authorship, of neatly organized endings. Instead, it becomes the space of the unfinished, the spectral, the impossible to conclude. The cinematic work is no longer a vehicle for an authorial identity or for a character's fulfilment, but a form of symbolic survival—ritual waiting, impure inheritance, fiction suspended between speaking and silence.

5. Concluding Reflections: *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001) as the Spiritual Swan Song of Stanley Kubrick

Throughout *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), two ghosts haunt the screen: that of Stanley Kubrick, whose absent presence structures the film from its inception, and that of David, the artificial child-robot whose emotional survival defies time, death, and narrative logic. Both figures—the author and the character—operate within a regime of suspension: they are survivors, displaced, spectral. And it is within this space that the film dwells, at once moving and unsettling, like a testament in transit.

Critics have often contrasted Kubrick's "cold" sensibility with Spielberg's "warm" emotionality (Greiving 2021). But while this dichotomy may seem intuitive, it proves superficial when confronted with the complex fabric of A.I. Kubrick was indeed a rigorous stylist, known for his crisp imagery and restrained performances, whereas Spielberg works through narrative momentum, diffuse light, and marked affective gestures. Yet both share a profound belief in cinema as a liturgical experience—or, to use another term, as a space of symbolic revelation. It is no coincidence that Spielberg, a legitimate heir to a certain Hollywood tradition of childhood and enchantment, would make A.I. the meeting point between the imaginative world of Pinocchio and Kubrick's unfinished testament.

It is precisely in this act of transmission—not passive, but creative—that Spielberg's gesture takes shape: more than completing Kubrick's work, he acts as its curator, its medium. He embraces inheritance with both responsibility and invention. This is not mimicry, but a superimposition of voices: Spielberg listens to the project and responds in his own way, adding an emotional layer that amplifies the allegorical and spiritual dimension envisioned by Kubrick.

The final scenes of the film are perhaps the most striking instance of this superimposition. The advanced beings—emerging from a future devoid of capitalism, nationality, or human bodies—regard David as a living relic: the emotional memory of an extinct species. "You are the enduring proof of the human spirit," one of them says, before granting the child-robot's final wish: to spend one more day with his mother. This concession, seemingly technical, reveals itself as one of the most delicate moments in the history of cinema—as if a film, projected or re-created in three dimensions, were unfolding within another film. Spielberg captures this reunion with restraint, melancholy, and a subtle layer of unreality—as if the two characters (mother and son) were also simulacra of something deeper: an ideal of love, of care, of ending.

This ending, however, is not complete. The perfection of the day lived is too smooth, too rounded, as if it belonged to the imagination of the beings who grant it. David falls asleep "forever," but without knowing he sleeps. The narrative closure is imposed from the outside, as we saw with Ricoeur. Time is spectral, as in Derrida. The work remains unfinished, as in Blanchot. And this "strangeness"[11] that hovers over the final sequence—that artificially harmonious atmosphere, the overly polished glow of the faces, the almost sacred silence—is not a flaw, but an effect. The scene moves and unsettles because it is always on the verge of collapsing in on itself. The viewer senses that something is out of place—as if watching not a conclusion, but the echo of a desire that can never be fully satisfied. It is emotion placed in parentheses, staged under the gaze of archeological machines who witness, as if watching a hidden film, a "primitive cinema" from another era, the last flicker of the human condition.

At this point, perhaps one can say that *A.I.* truly is Stanley Kubrick's spiritual swan song. Not in a chronological sense since *Eyes Wide Shut*[12] (1999) was his last completed film, but as a final synthesis of his enduring obsessions: humanity, transcendence, and solitude. The narrative structure conceived by Kubrick—the "blue fairy," the waiting, the translucent beings—is not a children's tale, but a modern allegory of persistent desire, the

abandonment by the creator, and the impossible attempt to return home. Spielberg, in turn, preserves that architecture and gives it an emotional form that does not contradict but rather expands the original gesture.

What we witness, in the end, is a film about symbolic survival—of a robot, of a memory, of a filmmaker. *A.I.* belongs neither to Kubrick nor to Spielberg—or rather, it belongs to both, and to neither. It is a transitional work, a spectral object that endures beyond its origin. And that is why it moves us so deeply: because it shows us that even that which does not end, that which fails to fully conclude, can still be beautiful, ritualistic, and true.

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Notes

1 *Pinocchio* was created by Carlo Collodi, the pen name of Carlo Lorenzini (1826–1890), an Italian journalist and writer. The character first appeared as the protagonist of a series of stories published in serial form in the children's newspaper Giornale per i bambini, beginning on 7 July 1881.

2 *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), directed by Stanley Kubrick and co-written by Arthur C. Clarke, is widely considered a landmark in the history of science fiction, cinema, and cinematic art. Its narrative expands from the dawn of humanity to an interplanetary future, articulating themes such as evolution, artificial intelligence, and the cosmic destiny of the human species. The film is notable for its four-movement structure—from the monolith to the Jupiter mission, from the collapse of HAL 9000 to the enigmatic rebirth of the "Star Child"—and for its deliberate refusal of easy explanations. The final section, often referred to as the Stargate sequence, immerses the viewer in a visual and metaphysical experience, opening the work to philosophical and symbolic interpretations ranging from Gnosticism to the eternal return.

3 *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), directed by Steven Spielberg, is one of the most iconic films in the history of contemporary cinema. Its direct emotional approach, combined with innovative visual effects and the celebrated score by John Williams, solidified Spielberg's "affective" and magical style—especially in the way he portrays suburban families and the secret worlds of children. The film is often cited as an example of Spielberg's "warm sensibility," in contrast with the formal rigidity of other auteurs of the time.

4 *Supertoys Last All Summer Long* is a science fiction short story written by Brian W. Aldiss in 1969, originally published in the December issue of Harper's Bazaar. The narrative is set in a dystopian future where overpopulation requires government approval to have children, and follows David, an artificial child who lives in a state of emotional tension with his human "mother," Monica.

5 *Jurassic Park* is a science fiction adventure film directed by Steven Spielberg, released in 1993, and based on the 1990 novel of the same name by Michael Crichton. The film was groundbreaking in its use of visual effects, combining CGI with animatronics in ways never seen before, and became a landmark in cinema history—not only for its commercial and critical success, but also for its lasting influence on blockbuster production.

6 *The Shining* (1980), directed by Stanley Kubrick, is a highly loose adaptation of the 1977 novel of the same name by Stephen King. The film has become a cornerstone of psychological horror cinema and has been extensively analyzed by scholars of film and psychoanalysis for its ambiguity and symbolic density.

7 In the Kubrickian universe, Stargate is the name commonly given to one of the most iconic and enigmatic sequences in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), directed by Stanley Kubrick and co-written by Arthur C. Clarke. The term refers to the interstellar travel sequence that occurs after astronaut Dave Bowman passes through the Monolith floating in orbit around Jupiter (or Saturn, in the novel version). This moment marks an aesthetic, narrative, and sensory rupture within the film. Instead of offering a rational explanation, Kubrick presents a vertiginous audiovisual experience: a tunnel of colored lights, abstract patterns, alien landscapes, and visual distortions—an authentic traversal of space–time and consciousness.

8 "The work of memory is not only an inner task, but a duty of transmission among the living."

9 "Forgetting is constitutive of faithful memory."

10 "Narrative is the space where memory becomes shareable, where the self can be told even by others."

[11] The term "strangeness" refers to the concept of ostranenie (остранение), coined by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky in his seminal essay "Art as Technique" (Iskusstvo kak priem 1917). According to Shklovsky, the essential function of art is to "make the familiar strange"—that is, to defamiliarize the automatic perception of reality, compelling the viewer or reader to experience the world as if for the first time. Ostranenie interrupts habitual recognition and restores perceptual intensity. In cinema, this effect may emerge through formal choices, acting, mise-en-scène, or uncanny narrative situations.

[12] *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), directed by Stanley Kubrick, is the filmmaker's final work, completed shortly before his death. Loosely inspired by Arthur Schnitzler's 1926 novella Traumnovelle, the film explores the realms of desire, secrecy, and fantasy, immersing itself in a dreamlike and ritualized atmosphere. Initially met with controversy, it is now regarded as a terminal meditation on identity, illusion, and the unconscious—a true "enigmatic exercise" within Kubrick's aesthetic and philosophical trajectory.

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