

# A Three-Part Thematic Structure of *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*

## Introduction

Stanley Kubrick labored for years trying to get the screenplay for his *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* into shape. The film-to-be used the short story “Super-Toys Last All Summer Long” by Brian Aldiss as a starting off point. Kubrick employed a series of writers over the years to help him, including science fiction author Ian Watson. Different scenarios were conceived, yet the basis remained lodged in the Aldiss story.

The Aldiss story (of a little less than 3,000 words) concerns the human characters Monica and Henry Swinton; David, a synthetic life-form manufactured to look like a human boy; and Teddy, a motorized teddy bear with a computer brain. The story takes place in an overcrowded world regulated by population control. Monica, having been refused the right to conceive a child, has tried to love David as a child surrogate, but she has remained unsettled, suspicious of him. David, meanwhile, has existential worries: he wonders to Teddy what “time” is and what “real things” are. Is he or is he not a “real” boy? He writes Monica a series of messages in crayon professing his love for her and his difference from Teddy. Aldiss would have us think on the uncanny phenomenon of an articulate, mobile, self-conscious, environmentally aware, artificially intelligent being. The story is of small scope structurally, taking place over one afternoon, mostly at the Swintons’ house. The story ends with the Swintons receiving news that they can go ahead and conceive a child. In the short run David will be sent back to the factory, ostensibly for a repair, but the suggestion is that he might not return. In the final lines Teddy points out that “Nobody knows what ‘real’ really means.” Without articulating it directly but embodying it through theme, Aldiss raises a question which *is* articulated early on in *A.I.* by Professor Hobby’s colleague: “If a robot could genuinely love a person, what responsibility does that person hold toward that mecca in return?”

“The movie was to be a picaresque robot version of *Pinocchio*, spinning off from the Aldiss story,” Ian Watson later recalled for *Playboy*. When Watson was hired in 1990, Kubrick had already collected a series of original ideas for the film treatment. “Global warming was flooding New York,” Watson explained, “and an ice age had set in a thousand years ahead.” During his labors for Kubrick, Watson introduced the character of Gigolo Joe.

But in the mid-1990s Kubrick gave up on *A.I.* and shot *Eyes Wide Shut* instead. He gave all of his *A.I.* material to his old friend Steven Spielberg. After Kubrick passed away in 1999, Spielberg went ahead with his own production of *A.I.* Using Kubrick’s notes and Ian Watson’s material as guides, Spielberg prepared the shooting script for *A.I.* himself (according to the film’s credits). The last credit in the film is “For Stanley Kubrick.”

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*A.I.*: A film of the future, for the future

Many years in the future, perhaps, *A.I.* will enjoy a great fan base among the artificially intelligent beings of the earth. *The perspective of the film is from the robot characters' point of view.* Most of the humans in *A.I.* act coldly and are hateful. Much of humanity is the enemy. Screen-time-wise, David the robot shows the most amount of empathy, much more than all the human characters put together. While the film, of course, is to be enjoyed by humans in the present time, someday *A.I.* might be celebrated as a consummate fairy tale for robots. For this reason might *A.I.* have a long shelf life and enduring popularity throughout the rest of earthly experience. The following is a hypothesis I am unable to defend, only mention: *A.I. is a film that will still be relevant in, say, a couple of hundred years, if not longer. The story might speak to an audience of the future with more force and meaning than to contemporary audiences.*

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Overview of the structure of *A.I.*

The framework of *A.I.*, a three-part structure, is, coincidentally or otherwise, of a piece with many of Stanley Kubrick's films, for example the four-part *2001*, the three-part *A Clockwork Orange*, the three-part *Eyes Wide Shut*, and the two-part *Barry Lyndon*.

These are the prevailing themes defining the overall structure of *A.I.*:

Part I—heart

Part II—body

Part III—mind

The primary thematic question of *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, the general organizing principle of the entire film, the question which the film explores from beginning to end, is this:

*What is consciousness?*

*A.I.*'s introduction prior to Part I.

Part I of *A.I.* is prefaced by an introduction in two parts. A voice-over narration sets the global scene over imagery of oceanic waves; then comes a glimpse into the operations at Cybertronics.

Dr. Allen Hobby heads a team that designs and manufactures artificially intelligent beings for commercial distribution. "How did that make you feel? Angry? Shocked?" he asks Sheila, a humanlike android ("mecca"), after stabbing her hand with a retractable point. "I don't understand," she says. "What did I do to your feelings?" "You did it to my hand."

Sheila has been manufactured with a sophisticated consciousness that allows her to communicate verbally as well as navigate her environment with consummate ease. She even seems to objectify herself, to take an interest in her appearance, as she decides to put on lipstick. She looks, sounds, and acts human, and yet she is made of machine parts. She lacks the capacity to experience emotion. She is, as Dr. Hobby says, referring to her brain, "a sensory toy." She is able to assimilate sense data and react to the world as rapidly as a human can, yet, just as she is lacking in *human feeling*, she also lacks the power of *imagination*. She has simply been programmed to respond in certain ways.

Sheila looks human, but Dr. Hobby's audience, the employees at Cybertronics, see her as nothing more than equipment. She is even reduced to the status of a trained circus animal, performing tricks for the audience. Prompted by Dr. Hobby, she begins to undress without demur, and she's applauded for her actions.

Discourse (language: speech) and the understanding of one's environment are two fundamental structural elements of human consciousness. Another is *feeling*—we are always experiencing a feeling, even if that feeling is a low-level one, such as the tranquillity of self when we're 'lost in work'. Feelings are not something we have to learn; feelings are primordial. Feelings come and go but we're always feeling something or another in an unbroken chain until death. There is never a moment when a live human has no feeling at all. Cybertronics has dealt with the problems of discourse and understanding, and now Dr. Hobby proposes to tackle the problem of feeling. He announces a plan to design a robot child with an inbuilt capacity to "love" its owner.

He asks Sheila, "Tell me, what is 'love'?" "Love is first widening my eyes a little bit," she answers, "and quickening my breathing a little, and warming my skin . . ." Sheila can activate surface sensations to suggest an inner experience, but it remains all show. The robot can do no more than mimic the passion of human love.

Definitions of Love include fascination, fixation, a "can't living without." The robot child will not be programmed merely to mimic a state of starry-eyed worship; rather, the robot, according to Dr. Hobby, will be designed with the capacity to *genuinely* recognize—"feel"—a pure love for its parent or parents. Its love will be its center of attention. The robot child will be a conscious entity which will come to *choose* to act in ways according to its own *desire*. The robot child, through its experience of love, will acquire imagination, and will be *inspired* to act in ways respectful of that love.

With love comes the threat of the loss of love. Indeed, a lost love is behind Dr. Hobby's latest project. He is the artist figure creating something tangible to fill a private lack, in this instance the death of his child, whose image and name will be commemorated in the robot child named David. Dr. Hobby seeks to recreate life the way *he* wants it. Mythically, he is the dominant father, the lawmaker, the God-like Creator. By (re-)creating David, Dr. Hobby seeks to overcome death.

But then comes that question. "If a robot could genuinely love a person, what responsibility does that person hold toward that mecca in return?" Part I of *A.I.* explores this question.

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# PART I: HEART.

What are feelings? What is love?

## Aspects of love:



The familial bond.  
“Home is where the heart is.”  
Part I focuses on *the family*.



Ultimate bond. “You’re my mommy.”  
Child *clinging* to parent.



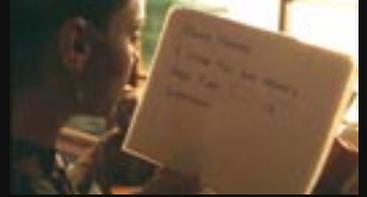
Respect (and lack of it).  
Monica shoves David into closet,  
annoyed with his *fawning attention*.



Caring. *Giving presents*.  
Mommy gives Teddy to David.



Caring. *Solicitude*.  
Mommy tucks David into bed.  
*Smiling*; we see “heart” in the face.



Caring. *Love letters*.  
Messages ‘straight from the heart.’



Friendship.  
David and Teddy: a double act,  
like, say, Laurel and Hardy.



Attachment. *Concern*.  
The strangeness of attaching our  
love to someone/something.



Open Heart Surgery.  
Apt imagery, considering the theme.



Competition. *Rivals*.  
A contest to win Teddy’s affections.



Competition. *Jealousy*.  
Each begrudges the other’s place  
in mommy’s heart.



Competition. *Jealousy*.



Fear of loss.  
“Mommy, will you die?”



Abandonment. *Loss of love*.

Part I explores the priority of the *blood bond* between humans. “Human nature” is assumed to be *more real* than manufactured consciousness. Humans, seeing themselves as “natural,” feel they have a priority over mecca. A mecca, created by humans, is seen as a second-class citizen. Hence, Monica is able to abandon David by the side of the road. She takes her love away, leaving David *heartbroken*.

## PART II: BODY.

Part II surveys the plexus of sex/death/factuality.

### Being-in-the-World:



GIGOLO JOE. Bodily passion. Dead woman's blood on his fingertips. Sex and death.



THE MECCA TRASH DUMP. Limitations of the material form. Conscious beings are "things" in the world. The Trash Dump is a graveyard of body parts. The death of the body.



THE FLESH FAIR. Announcer: "We are alive, and this is a celebration of life." "Celebration of Life" is a lugubrious irony. This is grungy, salt of the earth entertainment, a morbid circus of base appetites. Meccas are led like lambs to the slaughter. The death of the body.



FALLING IN LOVE. A girl discovers David in the cage. She experiences love at first sight. *First sight*—she sees his face: the body.



ROUGE CITY. The Throat Tunnel. A lascivious, hedonistic environment. There is a large illuminated sign: "Throb/Maximum Flow". A bazaar of carnal appetites. The celebration of the body.



DR. KNOW. The totality of facts that make the "world." Sign: "Ask Me Anything". The ultimate all-inclusive reference work. Everything than can be known. The factuality of the material world.

DR. HOBBY'S OFFICE. David kills David. The death of the body.

## PART III: MIND.

### Consciousness and Time.



Two thousand years have passed. Human beings are long gone. Human time has vanished. The Earth spins to cosmic time exclusively.



David is taken to an alien world. He inhabits a recreation of the Swintons' home, an image plucked out of his memory circuits. Recalling Part IV of *2001*, David moves through a recognizable place built by an alien consciousness for his benefit. While Bowman lives out the rest of his life in his eighteenth century room, David will live only one single day in the house from an earlier time.



David cries. Can robots acquire emotion? First of all, what is an emotion? A feeling, a mood, a physical surplus 'above and beyond' thought. Human emotions are implicated with our prehistoric drives and body consciousness. Meccas have no prehistoric drives, but they do have body consciousness. Might this body consciousness lead the mecca to learn to feel emotion, such as concern, empathy, and love for others?



David lives out the "day of his dreams" with his resurrected mommy in the house from his memory. His self and his environment are melded as one psychological whole, a 'mind space.' The robot becomes a storyteller, fondly recalling past times.



"He went to that place where dreams are born." The world inside his head. To enter a dreamworld, and to stay there for Eternity: to become, in dreaming sleep, a disembodied consciousness, never to return to the confines of the body: this is the apotheosis of mind, an analogue of a god.