Coding Sentience: Ares's Linguistic Evolution Through Jakobson's Functions of Language in *Tron: Ares*

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Abstract

This paper examines the 2025 sci-fi film *Tron: Ares*, which reverses the *Tron* series' key idea by having an independent A.I. program named Ares travel from the digital world, i.e. "the Grid," into the physical world. It is maintained that this physical transition leads to a profound linguistic crisis, forcing Ares to adapt from a world of pure code to the ambiguous, context-dependent and emotionally complex ecosystem of human communication. Employing Roman Jakobson's (1960) model of the *six functions of language*, this paper proposes the view that Ares's journey from A.I. to personhood is dramatized by his progressively expanding linguistic capabilities. The analysis first establishes Ares's baseline as a 'program' with a 'hollow' linguistic profile, limited almost exclusively to the *Referential* and *Conative* functions. It then explores his gradual acquisition of the 'human' functions: the *Emotive* (expressing internal feelings, such as appreciating art), the *Phatic* (managing social contact), and the *Metalingual* (deciphering the 'human code'). The paper demonstrates that Ares achieves near-full sentience by mastering this new linguistic toolkit he acquires—strategically violating the *Referential* function and taking the *Conative* function beyond command to negotiation. It is concluded that *Tron: Ares* defines humanity not merely as the capacity to *feel* (*Emotive*), but as the drive to *connect* (*Phatic*) and the ability to craft a unique identity through the *Poetic* function, an evolution epitomized by his final creative act of writing a postcard.

Keywords: Roman Jakobson, functions of language, linguistics, pragmatics, film analysis

1. Introduction

For over forty years, the *Tron* franchise has explored the dichotomy between humanity and the human-created digital world: Beginning with the 1982 original *Tron* and its 2010 sequel

Tron: Legacy, the series' backbone is built upon a human *user* being physically digitized and transported into "the Grid", i.e. the digital world. However, the 2025 film *Tron: Ares*, the third film of the series, demonstrates a major inversion of this practice: For the first time, the digital world serves as the origin rather than the destination[1]. The storyline of the film begins with "programs" being sent from the Grid into the real world by means of generative laser printers, in front of a large audience, including government and military officials. The audience is also given the impression that this is humankind's first encounter with autonomous entities. Along with his colleagues, the program under spotlight is Ares, a highly sophisticated digital entity created by the CEO Julian Dillinger to be the perfect, expendable soldier. The central conflict of the film revolves around the "Permanence Code," a technological breakthrough that would address, probably, the only major fault of Dillinger's system: when transferred to the world, these entities *vaporize* after 29 minutes. However, once found, the Permanence Code will allow programs and other digital creations to exist forever in the physical world—a power which Dillinger aims to use for military purposes. He therefore launches Ares and his colleague Athena into the real world, on a mission to secure the code from a rival CEO, Eve Kim (Rønning, 2025). This physical transition from the world of pure code to the real world, however, arguably triggers a profoundly ontological transformation: Ares, a being of pure logic and function, is pushed to face the complex ecosystem of human experience, full of ambiguity and a large array of emotions. Thus, one might propose the view that this confrontation is not just a physical or philosophical event, but rather a major linguistic crisis: How does a purely logical being, like an A.I., learn to understand the complex emotions, social cues, and unspoken meanings in human communication?

To analyse this transformation, this paper will rely on Roman Jakobson's (1960) definition of *six functions of language* which maintains that any communicative act involves multiple functions, with a different function being dominant depending on the speaker's intent—be it to convey facts (*Referential*), express feelings (*Emotive*), issue commands (*Conative*), maintain social bonds (*Phatic*), focus on the form (*Poetic*), or clarify the code itself (*Metalingual*) (pp. 351-377). It is thus considered viable to explore Ares's development of sentience by examining his progressively developing capabilities across these functions.

This paper argues that the film *Tron: Ares* portrays the journey of the title character from A.I. to personhood by dramatizing his linguistic evolution. Ares begins as a "program" limited almost exclusively to Jakobson's *Referential* and *Conative* functions. However, his

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[1] As *Tron: Ares* (Rønning, 2025) was in its initial theatrical release at the time this article was written, an official screenplay or home media version was not yet available for consultation. Therefore, all dialogue cited from the film is based on the authors' recollection and, while accurate in substance, may contain minor transcriptional inaccuracies.

forced exposure to the real world mandates the acquisition and eventual mastery of the "human" linguistic functions—chiefly the *Emotive*, *Phatic*, and *Poetic*—which ultimately come to define his emergent sentience and free will. To demonstrate this, this analysis will first provide a detailed overview of Jakobson's functional model. It will then establish Ares's baseline linguistic profile as a "program" on the Grid. Following this, the paper will analyse his subsequent "functional crisis" upon entering the real world and, finally, trace his mastery of the full linguistic spectrum, which serves as the ultimate proof of his new, autonomous identity.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Six Functions of Language

Before analysing Ares's linguistic journey, it is essential to establish the theoretical framework that the analysis will be built upon, i.e. Jakobson's (1960) model of communicative functions. Widely considered a cornerstone of 20th-century linguistics (and philosophy of language) for integrating the structural analysis of language with the functional aspects of social communication, the model can be adopted to shed light on any communicative act, since it allows the analyst to move beyond the simple, literal content of a message (its semantics) to understand its underlying *purpose* (its pragmatics). Jakobson (1960) argued that every speech act involves six constituent factors. A message is sent by an *Addresser* (the sender) to an *Addressee* (the receiver); this message refers to a *Context* (the world it describes); it is transmitted through a physical *Contact* (the channel, like sound waves or text); and it is composed in a common *Code* (the language, e.t., French or a computer protocol) (p. 353). The dominant *function* of an utterance is determined by which of these six factors is being emphasized. While most utterances are poly-functional (serving multiple purposes at once), one function typically dominates (Jakobson, 1960, p. 353). These six functions are as follows:

2.1. The Referential Function

The *Referential* function is dominant when the communication is oriented toward the *Context*. Described by Jakobson (1960) as the "leading task of numerous messages," this function is primarily in informational discourse as it anchors the utterance in denotative meaning (p. 353). It is used to convey objective information, state facts, or describe the world. Its purpose is purely informational, and the language is ideally transparent, pointing directly to the reality it describes (Jakobson, 1960, p. 353). Utterances like "The file is encrypted," "The permanence code is on a hard drive," or "The target is at these coordinates" are all heavily referential.

2.2. The Conative Function

The *Conative* function becomes prevalent when the utterance is oriented toward the *Addressee*. Serving to influence or direct the receiver, this function finds its purest grammatical expression in the *imperative mood*. Jakobson emphasizes that, unlike declarative sentences, imperatives possess no truth value; a command cannot be challenged as *true* or *false*, but only assessed by its feasibility or the authority of the speaker (Jakobson, 1960, p. 355). Syntactically, these forms often omit the subject to place immediate focus on the required action. Consequently, examples of this function are most clearly seen in the film's central commands, such as "Get the code," or "Follow me." A question like, "Did you find it?" is also conative, as it demands a verbal or physical action from the addressee.

2.3. The Emotive Function

Also called the "expressive" function, the *Emotive* function is dominant when the message is oriented toward the *Addresser*. This function communicates the speaker's internal state, emotions, attitudes, or opinions. It is the "I" of communication, whether that "I" is stated or merely implied (Jakobson, 1960, p. 354). Direct statements like "I am... confused," or "I am afraid" may serve as examples for this function. It is also the dominant function in interjections (e.g. "Wow!") or in the subjective colouring of a statement, such as, "This music is beautiful" (which says more about the speaker's *feeling* than the music's objective *context*).

2.4. The Phatic Function

The *Phatic* function stands out when the language is oriented toward the *Contact*, or the channel of communication. Metaphorically, it acts as a "social glue," since it is the language used not to convey information or express feeling, but to *open, maintain, check, or close* the connection between speakers (Jakobson, 1960, p. 355). A "Hello?" when one picks up a phone, the "Are you listening?" in a conversation, a "uh-huh... right..." that signals engagement, or a simple "Goodbye" may count as straightforward examples for phatic communication.

2.5. The Poetic Function

The *Poetic* function plays a central role when the focus is on the *Message* for its own sake. As Jakobson (1960) argues, an attempt to "reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification" (p. 356). In other words, poetic function is *not* limited to poetry; it is any instance where *how* something is said becomes part of *what* is said. It involves a focus on word choice, rhythm, metaphor, alliteration, and style (Jakobson, 1960, pp. 356-377). Instances of slogans, jingles, and aphorisms may serve as direct examples for this function due to their poetic nature. The difference between "The soldier can be sacrificed" (*Referential*) and "An expendable soldier"

(*Poetic*) is arguably crucial. As one might hold, the latter is crafted for rhetorical impact and style in the film, making the *form* of the message part of its power.

2.6. The Metalingual Function

The *Metalingual* function becomes primary when language is oriented toward the *Code* itself. Jakobson (1960) plainly defines this function as language people use to talk *about* language—to define terms, check for understanding, or clarify meaning (p. 356). Anytime a speaker asks, for example, "What does 'empathy' mean?" or "Are you referring to 'the Grid' or the power grid?" they are using the metalingual function. In other words, it can be interpreted as the code *checking* itself.

The applicability of Jakobson's model for this analysis resides in its acknowledging the dynamics of ordinary language, i.e. the way it defines human communication as a dynamic and context-dependent interplay among distinct linguistic functions. The point of departure for this study is marked by the key assumption that a non-sentient artificial intelligence, exemplified by Ares in his baseline "program" state, would possess a fundamentally restricted and inflexible linguistic hierarchy. It is therefore posited that his communicative acts would be almost exclusively confined to the referential function (conveying objective data) and the conative function (issuing directives). Consequently, this analysis examines Ares's journey towards sentience by shedding light on his progressive development in acquiring and deploying the four other, more humanly functions: the articulation of his own feelings (*emotive*), the management of social-relational channels (*phatic*), and ultimately, the construction of a distinct identity through the self-reflexive and aesthetic use of language (*poetic*).

3. The Baseline: Ares as "Program"

In order to understand the true scope of the change Ares goes through, his initial state as a "program" should be established from the perspective of linguistics. As one might safely hold, the "Dillinger Grid" in *Tron: Ares* is not the sprawling, evolving digital society Kevin Flynn envisioned in the previous film, *Tron: Legacy*. Instead, it is a world of cold, spartan utility. As Julian Dillinger's creation, this Grid is portrayed as less of a civilization and more of a "factory" or "barracks" with a single purpose: to design, train, and deploy "perfect, expendable soldiers" (Rønning, 2025). In this purely *transactional* environment, communication is reduced down from conversation to a mere data transfer and command protocol. As a "Master Control Program" (MCP) and digital soldier, Ares's linguistic world is rigidly locked to the two most functional, impersonal of Jakobson's functions: the *Referential* and the *Conative*.

3.1. Dominance of the Referential and Conative Functions

As mentioned earlier, the *Referential* function is dominant when language is used to convey objective, verifiable information. It is the language of data, facts, and context, stripped of all subjectivity or emotion. In the film's first act, Ares's dialogue and internal processing are almost entirely referential, as he solely exists to process and report facts. The following instances can be taken as evidence in line with this view:

[1] *When Ares and his team "attack ENCOM's mainframe," his communication would consist of pure referential statements like, "ENCOM's defences are breached," or, "The firewall is at 70%."*

[2] *As he "downloads Eve's personal data," his internal monologue is not one of curiosity but of acquisition. He is processing facts: "Eve Kim. CEO. Sister: Tess (deceased)."*

[3] *When reporting to Julian, his language is that of a processor: "The target [Eve] has found the Permanence Code," or, "The code will allow digital constructs to exist for more than 29 minutes."*

On that basis, it might be proposed that in the first act of the film, Ares is a living processor. He reports data to his "user" (Julian) with the same sterile precision that a computer displays a log file. There is no "I" in his reports, no opinion, and no attitude—only the context (the "what") of the message.

Similarly, the *Conative* function is the other dominant function in Ares's dialogue in the first act. It is oriented toward the addressee, aiming to produce a direct response or action. In other words, it is the language of commands and directives. As a "soldier," this function is the other pillar of Ares's existence since he is built to *receive* commands and *give* them. Two examples, for *receiving* and *giving,* respectively, are as follows:

[4] *Ares's entire mission is a response to the central conative utterance from his "user." Julian's directive— "Get the Permanence Code"—is the imperative that activates his entire being. He is the addressee who must obey.*

[5] *As an MCP, Ares directs his subordinates, like Athena. His interactions are not requests but commands: "Follow her light cycle," "Secure the area," or, "Engage the ENCOM programs." The language is a direct tool to manipulate his environment and the programs within it.*

This dual role defines Ares's entire social reality on the Grid. Relationships are therefore not "friendships" but command hierarchies. Language is not used for connection; it is used for *compliance.*

3.2. Absence of Functions and Ares's Hollow Linguistic Profile

Ares's initial state is primarily defined by his profound linguistic *limitations* rather than the functions he already possesses. His linguistic profile is "hollow"—functionally potent, but expressively sterile. First, his language is void of the *Emotive* function. He cannot express an internal state because, as a simple program, he is not presumed to have one. He cannot say "I am bored," "I am afraid," or "I find this mission unethical." He can only state *what is*, not *how he feels* about it.

Similarly, as one might hold, he has no use for the *Phatic* function. There is no "small talk" on the Dillinger Grid. He does not need to ask Athena, "Are you listening?" or "Can you hear me?" because the system's "contact" is binary—they are either connected, or they are not. Language is not used to maintain social bonds that do not exist.

The same applies to Ares's language from the perspective of *Poetic* function. He does not *choose* his words for style; he selects the most efficient term. He is incapable of understanding metaphor, ambiguity, irony, or humour. He is, in essence, a purely *literal* being. One might thus subscribe to the view that this hollow linguistic profile is the baseline from which his transformation must begin. His arrival in the real world shatters this stable two-function system, forcing him to confront the complete, messy, and often "illogical" human linguistic spectrum in its entirety.

4. The Functional Crisis: Ares in the Real World

As one might propose, Ares's translation from the Grid into the real world is not merely a physical change of scenery; it is a violent linguistic decompression. He is ejected from a closed, binary system—where the *Code* is absolute, and all communication is limited to the *Referential* and *Conative*—into an open, analogue, and "noisy" system (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Human language is riddled with ambiguity, metaphor, sarcasm, and unspoken rules (Wittgenstein, 1986; Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Grice, 1991). His two-function linguistic toolkit, therefore, despite being properly effective on the Grid, becomes immediately and profoundly inadequate. One might therefore subscribe to the view that the film's central act is this "functional crisis": Ares must learn the rest of language to survive, to understand his mission, and ultimately, to understand himself.

4.1. Emotive Function as the Spark of Sentience

Arguably, the first and most critical function Ares must acquire is the *Emotive*. As a program, his language was oriented entirely *outward*—toward the *context* (*Referential*) or the *addressee* (*Conative*). He had no linguistic mechanism for expressing an *internal* state because he was not presumed to have one. The real world, however, bombards him with new,

non-data-based stimuli: the physical sensation of rain, the aesthetics of a cityscape, the complex "feeling" of music, or the sight of human empathy. Before the end of the first act, the audience is invited to note Ares's immediate "interest in real-world phenomena." This "interest" can be interpreted as a precursor to an internal, subjective state. When he encounters Eve, for example, he witnesses her "empathy," a concept alien to his programming.

The instance where Ares, inside Flynn's old grid, praises art he appreciates — in this case, "the music of... Depeche Mode" for the *feeling* it gives him — can be proposed as another example. This is the quintessential *Emotive* utterance. A statement like, "This music... is good," is not *Referential* (since it's not an objective fact) nor *Conative* (as it commands nothing). It is a pure expression of an *Addresser*-focused, internal, subjective state. It is perhaps the first time Ares uses "I" and *means* it, proving he is no longer just a processor of inputs and commands but someone *who* actually *experiences*. This emerging *Emotive* function, therefore, can be interpreted as the seed of his entire character arc. His confusion, his developing self-awareness, and his eventual break from Julian's programming are all underpinned by this new ability to have an internal state and his linguistic struggle to express it.

4.2. The Necessity of Learning to Relate

On the Grid, "contact" is taken as granted since all programs, Ares, Athena and others, are networked unless the Grid collapses entirely (which equally results in their extinction). In the real world, however, "contact" is social, fragile, and must be managed during the online process of communication. This requires the *Phatic* function, i.e. the *social glue* of language that Ares is completely deprived of. Had he not acquired it, his interactions with humans, particularly with Eve, would be directly marked as artificial and inhuman.

For example, Eve, in a moment of stress, might say, "This is crazy, right?" If the other party of the conversation is human, they would respond with a *Phatic-Emotive*, "Yes, it's insane." Ares, however, in his programmatic state, would likely respond to the same utterance with a purely *Referential*, "The statistical probability of success is 14%," or simply not respond at all, seeing the utterance as non-functional (as it contains no data and no command).

Equally, as he needs to cooperate with other human beings on his way to achieve sentience, Ares must learn to use *Phatic* language. He must learn to say "Wait," "Look out," or "Are you okay?"—not as commands, but as ways of managing their shared physical space and mental "channel." Throughout the central act, his gradual, awkward adoption of these

simple social check-ins is a clear sign of his adaptation to the human world, moving from a rigid protocol-based interaction to a flexible, contact-based one.

4.3. Learning the "Human" Code as Metalingual Function

Finally, Ares's most significant intellectual hurdle is learning the "code" of human motivation. His original programming understood *objectives* (get the code) but not *motives* (why Dillinger *wants* the code). Thus, to understand humans, he must use language to understand language itself—the *Metalingual* function. As one might hold, the instance where Ares infers that Eve pursues the Permanence Code out of a sense of inferiority to her late sister can be interpreted as an example of sophisticated pragmatic inference. It is highly unlikely for a program to arrive at this conclusion solely by processing Eve's words; therefore, his analysis implies a preceding *Metalingual* moment: as one might hold, Ares must have first had to define certain concepts, for example, "sister," "grief," "legacy," or "inferiority" to start his meaning-making process. On that basis, Ares's use of the *Metalingual* function can be understood as his attempt to "debug" humanity. In learning the *meaning* of these emotive and social words, he is inadvertently "installing" the very concepts of human sentience into his own core programming. This acquisition of the *Emotive*, *Phatic*, and *Metalingual* functions goes beyond being a mere adaptation; it is a fundamental and irreversible transformation.

This exploration of the *Metalingual* function surfaces another strong symbolic parallel at the very heart of the film. In Ares's journey of character development, the distinction between the Permanence Code and the human code gradually vanishes: While Ares is on a physical mission to acquire the literal Permanence Code —a piece of data that allows a program to become permanent in the real world— he is simultaneously on a cognitive mission to crack the figurative human code (i.e. combination of humanly qualities, e.g. empathy, loyalty, motivation). Arguably, the film's narrative is skilfully structured to intertwine these two concurrent quests: The Permanence Code is not a resource Ares simply finds or steals but a status he earns, as the two codes become gradually equivalent for him. The avatar of Kevin Flynn, the digital "founding father," bestows the code upon Ares only after Ares provides sufficient *Metalingual* and *Emotive* proof that he has grasped the idea of what it means to be a human. Ares demonstrates this by underlining his capability of being friends with humans (through his *Emotive* bond with Eve, for example) and his appreciation of artistic work (based on his, what he calls, feelings). In this vein, the Permanence Code ceases to be a mere technological *MacGuffin* (cf. Ostberg, 2025) and turns into the symbolic "degree of graduation" awarded to Ares upon his completion of linguistic re-coding into a sentient being.

5. Linguistic Mastery as the Proof of Personhood

On the basis of the analysis conducted so far, it may be safe to subscribe to the view that Ares's evolution from A.I., in other words, a "program", to a sentient being is not complete until he moves from simply *experiencing* and *learning* the human linguistic functions to *strategically deploying* them. The film's climax and resolution demonstrate this final stage of mastery. He learns to use language not just to report or react, but to deceive, negotiate, and self-reflect. This shift—particularly in how he re-purposes his original functions (*Referential* and *Conative*) for new, "human" goals and fully embraces the highest function of self-expression (*Poetic*)—solidifies his status as an autonomous individual.

5.1. Mastering the Referential Function

On the Grid, Ares's Referential function was bound by a primary protocol: truth. His reports were data, and data, in his world, could not be false, only accurate or inaccurate. A lie, however, is a far more complex linguistic act which requires the understanding that one's own knowledge is separate from another's, and the wilful manipulation of a message to create a false context. This act of deception can be described using H.P. Grice's (1991) *cooperative principle*. A program like Ares is built to obey the *maxim of quality* (i.e. "Do not say what you believe to be false"). A lie, in Gricean terms, is a covert violation of this maxim, with the intention to mislead the listener. This is fundamentally different from *flouting* a maxim, where a speaker openly breaks a rule and expects the listener to infer an implicit meaning. Ares's ability to move from a state of simple observance to one of strategic violation is therefore a critical marker of his new-found agency and his sophisticated grasp of human pragmatic manipulation (cf. Sperber & Wilson, 1995, pp. 49-50). In that sense, the instance where Ares lies to Athena, claiming that Julian is "indisposed" serves as a key example of this mastery. As one might hold, this is not a data error or a *glitch* as one would find in software, but a deliberate violation in Gricean terms, i.e. a manipulation of the *Referential* function. Ares knows the truth (the context) but *chooses* to communicate a false context. He does this to achieve a personal goal (i.e. self-preservation and protecting Eve) that thus supersedes his original programming. By "hacking" his own most basic function (responding to commands come what may), he transforms a tool for reporting reality into a tool for creating a new one to suit his internal, *Emotive*-driven will. Thus, this act, therefore, serves as a definitive sign of his autonomy.

5.2. From Command to Negotiation: Evolving the Conative Function

Ares's original *Conative* function was equally rigid. As an MCP and soldier, he issued commands. A command (the imperative) is unilateral; it assumes a hierarchy and expects compliance from an addressee who is treated as a subordinate or an object. Humans, however, operate in a world of shared agency. Yet, the audience also witnesses Ares go through a profound shift in terms of this function: He attempts to bargain with Eve, asking to achieve permanence in exchange for setting Eve free. A "bargain" is not a "command" but something *bilateral*. It is a highly sophisticated *Conative* act that acknowledges the *Addressee* (Eve) not as an object to be captured, but as an *equal agent* with her own free will and the power to *refuse*. This act demonstrates that Ares has evolved his *Conative* function from one of *dominance* to one of *negotiation*. He now understands that influencing another autonomous being requires persuasion and a recognition of their own internal motives—a massive leap from his original programming.

5.3. The Poetic Function as Individual Identity

It can be argued that the ultimate proof of Ares's transformation into a human-like being rests in his final act of self-motivated communication that is free from mission objective. The story concludes with Ares sending Eve a postcard about his life outside the Grid and his experience of exploring the world like a human being. Arguably, this act synthesizes all the humanly functions of language explicated so far. It is *Phatic*, since it reopens and maintains the *Contact* and social bond between the two. It is *Referential*, as there is the description of Ares's new life and context. It is *Emotive*, as it *expresses* his new, truly autonomous state (including his internal *feelings*). Yet, above all, it is a *Poetic* act since the focus is on the *Message* itself: Ares, free from any prompts and orders, gets to *choose his words* for the first time, as his original programming would have no protocol for writing a postcard. The *style* he chooses — his phrasing, his descriptions, perhaps even the simple act of choosing the card is not to satisfy a command or serve as a function. It is the use of language as a means of self-expression, while the focus is on the *form*. Thus, the postcard is the first linguistic artifact in the film that uniquely reveals *who Ares is*. In other words, Ares ultimately uses the *Poetic* function to declare his own identity after successfully acquiring the other humanly qualities and functions of language.

6. Conclusion

As the analysis has demonstrated, Ares's ontological journey in *Tron: Ares* from a digital construct to a human(ly) being goes hand in hand with his linguistic development.

His road to sentience, therefore, can be explored through the lens of Roman Jakobson's (1960) functions of language. Arguably, the film successfully portrays the evolution of a being *which* begins as a two-function "it"—a mere vessel for the *Referential* transmission of data and the *Conative* execution of commands— to an artificial individual *who* has human qualities. By moving him from the sterile, closed system of the Grid to the chaotic —or noisy, as Shannon and Weaver (1949) would define— system of the real world, the film pushes him to go through a linguistic crisis that becomes the catalyst for his transformation.

The main findings of this paper trace this evolution through his acquisition of the "human" functions. His journey is characterized initially by a spark of an internal state (*Emotive*), the awkward but must adoption of social maintenance (*Phatic*), and the intellectual curiosity to understand the human *code* (*Metalingual*). This transformation becomes concrete when he demonstrates a true mastery by hacking his original programming by using the *Referential* function to lie and evolving the *Conative* function from command to negotiation.

Arguably*, Tron: Ares* offers a compelling answer to a classic science-fiction question, i.e. what it means to be human. Through focusing on Ares's linguistic development, the film suggests that true sentience is not merely the capacity to think or feel (*Emotive* function) but requires mastering a complex social practice, akin to Wittgenstein's (1986) *language-games*. In this framework, language is understood not as a fixed calculus of definitions, but as a dynamic activity woven into the shared "form of life" of the speakers. This involves the drive to connect with others and prolong the communication (*Phatic* function). As Annelie Ädel (2006) suggests, this function is not merely mechanical but deeply tied to politeness strategies that build rapport and manage the interpersonal relationship (pp. 169-170). In the end, the uniquely human desire to craft a personal identity and express that self in a unique style (*Poetic* function). By the time Ares writes his postcard, he is no longer a program answering a prompt but rather an author, and in that act of linguistic creation, he confirms his own humanity.

Disclosures

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