

Her: placing a contemporary lens on love in film



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Nothing can stand the test of time greater than the form of relation or sympathy. But even greater than that is the ability to force that compassion and relation into the reverse perspective... in other words, rather than feeling emotion upon reacting simply to what happens on the screen throughout a film, we can channel that emotion towards similar events in the world off the screen. Famed director Ingmar Bergman said, “ Film as dream, film as music. No art passes our conscience in the way film does, and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls.” This precisely highlights the reasoning as to how these films stand the test of time; they don’t simply hit the heartstrings of audience members with entertainment value, but rather inspire us and inform our moral values. They test our perspectives of how we genuinely view the world we all inhabit. To delve into this further, focus will be on the topic of love in film, and how contemporary romance movies, specifically Spike Jonze’s *Her* (2013), showcase what love truly is and how it’s evolving within our generational perspectives.

The reasoning behind selecting *Her* for this topic is that this film truly provides a testament to our current culture, as well as embodies all the qualities of Bergman’s statement on cinema. Jonze executes this by placing a contemporary look onto love in the modern eyes of society, showcasing that regardless of the nature of the relationship and how “ disconnected” it may be from reality, the power of love remains just as strong. This is explained by author, Max Nelson, from Film Comment in which he accentuates how, “ It’s important to note that Jonze never makes Theodore an object of pity or scorn. His romance with the disembodied Samantha is as

real as, if not realer than, any of the film's human relationships" ("Modern Love: Her", Max Nelson, Film Comment). We see this expressed in the scene at the peak of the story, the "Book Monologue", in which Samantha explains why she is leaving to Theodore. Samantha asks Theodore, "Can you feel me [Samantha] with you right now?" hitting upon the idea that even though they are physically away in separate existences, their love and bond with one another is together. Real love, in a fake world per se.

While it may be viewed as too philosophically abstract for an O. S.-Human bond to actually carry romantic relevance, and holds a sense of satire, there is a certain humanization to the model of an actual loving relationship. It's structured this way in order to get the audience's attention, nearly forcing them to look deeper into what's not seen directly on the screen to get the message Jonze is trying to evoke. James Bell, an author from Sight and Sound, furthers this message by underscoring how "Her is an unapologetic modern love story, except that one half of the couple remains invisible and is not 'real'... yet Her is not often comedic in this way... instead, the film takes its romance as seriously as it does its insights into the way we use electronic media and what it's doing to us." (Sight and Sound, James Bell, 2014 Issue).

In order to exemplify a story in this manner, Jonze utilizes the concept of abstract narrative, specifically in the form of this love story between a man and his O. S. "Abstract Love" Stories truly are not all that abstract in hindsight. The only difference that places a major division between these love stories, and others that are more 'traditional', are the setting, gender roles, and society, both as portrayed in the world of the story and actual world of the audience. This is where more aesthetic elements come into play, <https://assignbuster.com/her-placing-a-contemporary-lens-on-love-in-film/>

in order to heighten this as an emotionally grasping “ abstract” film.

Cinematographer, Hoyte van Hoytema, portrayed this story into a warm-colored, sometimes pastel bleak, futuristic Los Angeles. Since most abstract love stories are also tragedies, due to their nature of highlighting truth and difficulty of achieving true love in a world where this type of connection may be frowned upon, Hoytema provided us with many melancholic-looking shots throughout the sadder moments of the narrative. To do this, he took really wide-angle shots embodying the smallness of Theodore in a world engulfed by a sea of people, in the vast size of a city-scape like LA.

In addition, another conflict in these types of narratives, which are also present in Jonze’s film, is the two-sided view of the relationship...where one person grows distant from the other, which we see from Theodore during the surrogate scene. Here he feels Samantha is trying too hard to become something she most definitely is not: alive. It is this conflict that underlies throughout the rest of the story leading to the eventual disintegration of the pair. And Hoytema captures this state of affairs with perfection, by taking the scene in which Samantha announces her departure, and shows the dust particles in Theodore’s warm, bright-colored room and then rack-focuses out to blend into the blurred, cold snow-fall of Samantha’s world/mind. By doing this camera work, Hoytema hits the juxtaposition between the two’s emotions and physical living-worlds very vividly. He even places Theodore into both shots, which then further emphasizes that even though both worlds are physically apart, they both live in them and share the experience together. This hones into a very honest sense of the struggle that is their relationship.

While there is the more, open-minded outlook on the film itself as seen in the past mentioned articles, there also are those who don't share the same sympathy for the story, nor evoke the same sense of relation or compassion within themselves. They simply see the movie for what it is: a Sci-Fi Romance about a troubled protagonist who fails to achieve love with a 'real' being, so instead finds love through an artificially intelligent operating system. It does take a certain depth and willingness to come into 'abstract' love stories or any 'abstract' film of that matter, with an open-mindedness and readiness to be introspective, but to some they simply do not place themselves into the shoes of the narrative. This is seen specifically in the The New Yorker review, "Ain't Got No Body" by Richard Brody, in which he explains "The people he creates are so synthetic, so artificially sweetened, so pure in their maudlin isolation, that it's hard to know whether he's satirizing the emptied-out specimens who are condemned to each other, damning the advanced technological powers that have emptied them out... or merely bumping up against the limits of his imagination."

While this provides a valid point toward turning this as just a simple imaginative tale and social statement on the consumption of society by technology, I choose to stand by seeing its social stance not purely through the physical progression of the story, but also by turning toward and embracing the fact that the more 'abstract' approach toward the film exists. This requires far more introspection beyond what we just see on the screen in front of us. I will in specific take the scene revolving around Samantha's question of, "How do you share your life with somebody?" I will draw upon this by explaining how love, while it is quite subjective, truly is embodied

through the struggle to keep it alive as it progresses. To literally, share a part of yourself, your life with another. This becomes difficult for Samantha to understand, since she doesn't truly embody a physical form, so as a result it becomes the struggle for their love, or sharing of lives...to become attainable. It poses the question of whether or not a present physical form is needed to truly make love real. In order to assist this point, one can look at Christopher Orr's point on the film, which lies in questioning: "What makes love real: the lover, the loved one, or the means by which love is conveyed?" (The Atlantic, Orr).

In order truly hone into this topic, a look can be taken the end scene of the film, where Theodore (now separated from Samantha) writes his letter to Catherine (his ex- wife), and how it accentuates a moment of realization for not only Theodore, but I also feel, the audience. Both truly move in tandem, coming to the discovery, that maybe love is best recognized through the actual experience and emotionally tangible feeling, not just the intangible desire, or artificially portrayed examples of love/relationships we see dispersed across so many other media platforms or 'romantic' films, which tend to lean toward a more classical, unrealistic approach. While Her still is Science Fiction, it in a way develops into something even more real, since the topic is so relevantly illustrated to our times consumed by the constant progression of and immersion into technology. It takes film and "considers how [its] new approaches work to interrogate the nature of narrativity as they shift the erstwhile cinema viewer into a new position of implicit integration" (Film Quarterly, Ruby). Ultimately, it may be too difficult to even get to the point of trying on the shoes of this narrative and type of

storytelling in film, since you'd rather just enjoy the cinema for its entertainment. If you do actually embrace the intangibility of what lies beyond the screen and apply it to what's happening on the screen, you'll find that the shoes might fit.