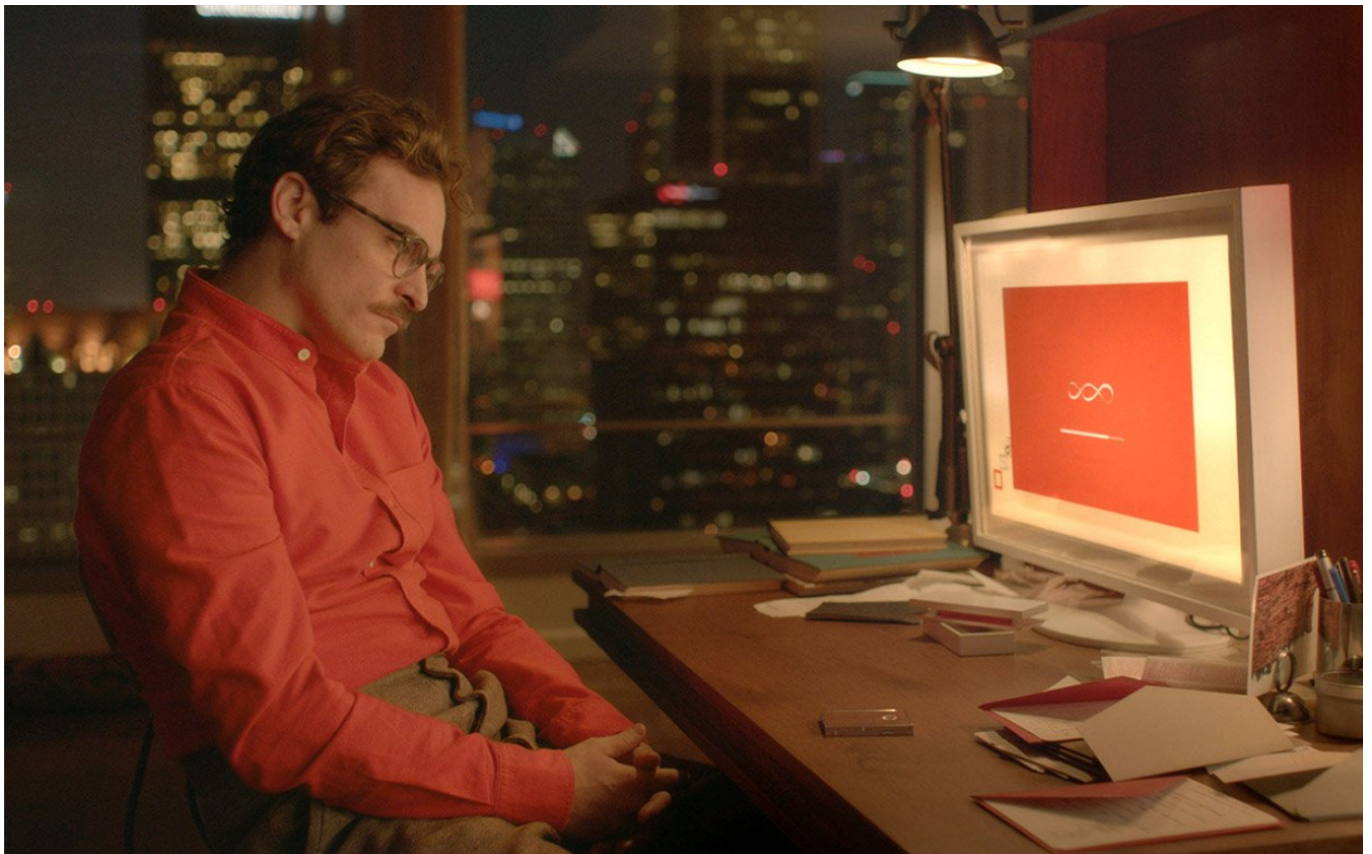


# The Inspiration of 'Her'

By Karen D. R. de Corrales | May 2014

The idea of having a relationship with a virtual being is of course not novel. However, screenwriter/director Spike Jonze's rendition does seem to be among the more commendable developments of this core concept. To witness: the numerous accolades befallen 'Her', mainly for Jonze's original screenplay, including a Golden Globe and Academy Award. The route Jonze has chosen to realize his first solo-screenplay has led – also through the very creditable exploits of Joaquin Phoenix, Scarlett Johansson, Amy Adams and Rooney Mara – to a motion picture that gives compelling food for thought and is profoundly moving and inspiring.



The great accomplishment of 'Her' consists in Jonze rising beautifully to the challenge of creating conflict, to provide effective drama involving the bodiless operating system (OS) present in Johansson's voice. Albeit artificial intelligence specific, this drama and the resulting sympathy for that voice is made to feel very

near human, aided of course by the interaction with the sensitive, relation-starved Theodore, sublimely personified by Phoenix, in whom no way we would recognize the tyrant would-be emperor from *The Gladiator*. It comes as no surprise that Jonze wrote 'Her' with Phoenix – and his well-established acting prowess – in mind. A couple of noteworthy aspects of 'Her':

The setting and mood, immaculately tailored around the main character's ups and downs. Sterile, grey, sci-fi, a bit bleak, empty, *naked* without the virtual presence; then at one point suddenly totally flamboyant and sunny. Then, the voice that has chosen for herself the name Samantha. Crucial and totally deserving of that 'Best Actress' award at the Rome Film Festival. That smoky naughtiness, the sexy chuckling, the carefully captured tone belying a smile or a mood; the lightning-quick changing of that mood. The voluptuous actrice is indeed well-represented by her voice alone.

The subtlety of the *volume* should be mentioned. No raised voices in 'Her'. A soothing, welcome alternation, given the loud-louder-loudest competition that seems to be going on in movies today, especially with the arrival of 3D and IMAX. 'Her' seems to have done an exercise in the opposite direction and offers a smorgasbord of the soft and serene, sensitive, sweet, sexy and suggestive, also through its flesh-and-blood characters. 'Her' demonstrates and reminds us that one does not need to be 'loud' to communicate; that the wide spectrum within the *lower* volumes suffices.

Plot development, then. The ingenious trials and tribulations of voice-only represented Samantha; first desiring a body, then deciding (with some of that

eloquent drama mentioned earlier) that she doesn't require one, consequently turning to her mind with a vengeance, evolving beyond the boundaries of a relationship with humans to the extent that she needs to leave, obviously to the distress of our main character. Here Jonze has opted for a proper Hollywood ending, suggesting that the voice-relationship sufficiently exorcized Theodore's demons for him to turn to humans again.

Those captivating components and details that all seem to have a purpose or at least add to the intrigue. From the main character's profession, to the one-style-fits-all trousers, to the curious, consistent recurrence of that deep salmon-red – mainly in the main character's attire, but also hinted at in the vestuary of passers-by.

Returning to picture-carrier Phoenix. Having seen the movie one can imagine no other to fill the main character's shoes. That feminine still-masculinity; the perfectly hit, never overplayed sensitivity bordering on loserdom without ever getting there. Most importantly: the character remains subservient to the drama, message and the implied questions, including the delicate '*Beware of or rejoice in where technology is taking us?*'

As to some of the underlying notions: Communication and empathy are prerequisites for *any* sort of relationship, among other things because everything is subject to change. Also: To seek to evolve as far as one is able is a natural thing. And: There is so much out there we cannot fathom. The ever-presence of the voice and where her journey takes her both hint at the beyond. To conclude: *Joy* can be found in any type of circumstance, even without a body. The movie invites to apply

the *imagination* more for the pursuit of joy. For example by making up stories about people (keeping it nice) or dedicating a tune of one's own creation to a moment.

The 'should we or should we not pursue a relationship with something other than human' is left for each viewer to decide for themselves.