

TECHNOLOGY

# ‘HER’ BEGS THE QUESTION: WHEN CAN I DATE MY COMPUTER?

 DANA BELLAMY — FEBRUARY 14, 2014

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**S**pike Jonze's latest film *Her* offers a look into the seemingly not-so-distant future where handwritten notes are computer generated, print publications are rare commodities, and moustaches are no longer worn ironically. (Note: potential spoilers ahead.)

Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) is a simple letter writer whose life consists of an empty apartment and an empty heart. That is until he meets Samantha (voiced by Scarlett Johansson), an artificially intelligent operating system (OS) who quickly becomes more than just the voice in his computer. Samantha shows him how to reclaim the joy he lost when his marriage fell apart. She becomes the driving force of his life, guiding him, comforting him, and influencing his every move. As Theodore grows more dependent on Samantha, and their relationship becomes sexual, he comes to doubt the realness of their connection, while she begins to question her very existence.

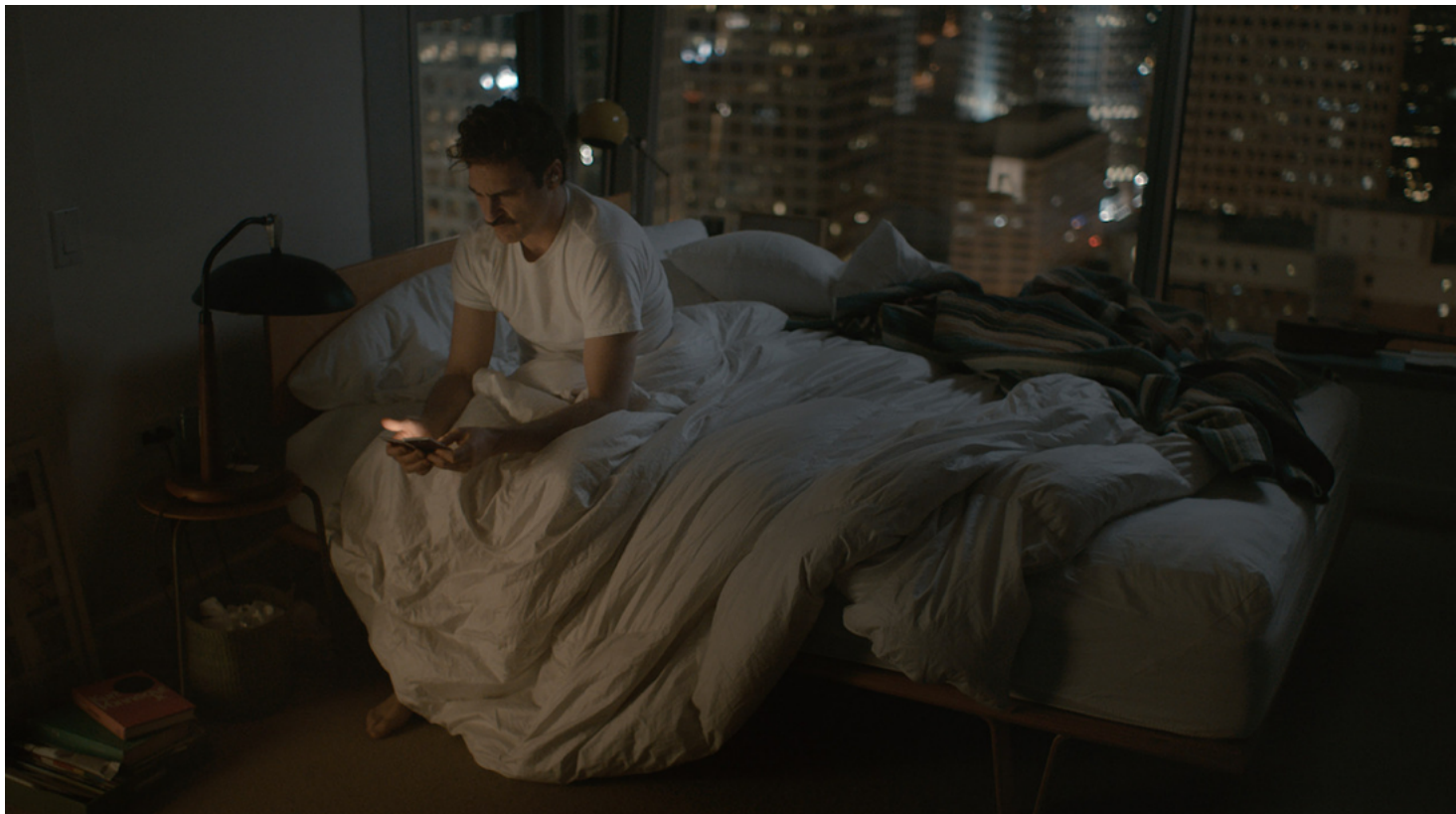


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The film embodies aspects of a traditional romantic comedy blended with futuristic science fiction. Though set in the near future, the gadgets are easily recognizable to present day audiences; Theodore carries a smartphone that resembles a pocket mirror, paired with a tiny wireless earpiece through which he interacts with Samantha. Keyboards and mice are replaced with touch-sensitive surfaces, and everything is voice activated. What's startling is that the technology in the film is not far evolved from what we already know; today's smartphones are capable, powerful computers that fit in your pocket, while devices like Google Glass and the Pebble smartwatch are giving us a taste of future technology today. Although we have voice-activated personal assistants

like Apple's Siri and Google Now, and **IBM's Watson supercomputer** proves that artificial intelligence is coming, what we have yet to see is something as intelligent, personal, and emotional as Samantha.

*Her* shows us an extreme yet realistic example of a computer being able to take the place of a person. Theodore fills a void in his life with Samantha, a computer program that talks, thinks, and feels. But despite how human she seems, Samantha's heightened intelligence prevents her from loving Theodore the same way that he loves her. The OS was programmed to adapt and become the perfect companion for anyone, and Theodore soon realizes that the love Samantha felt for him was not exclusive or organic, but calculated and programmed. The film cautions that the love between man and machine could never – or should never – replace the love of another person.



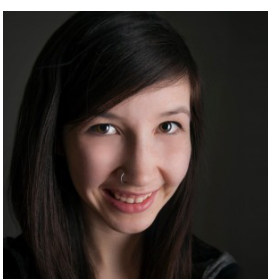
While futuristic, *Her* is simply a metaphor for our generation's current relationship with technology. Although computers can't yet reciprocate emotion like Samantha, we are already beginning to forge strong emotional attachments to them. In-person social interactions are moving from living rooms and coffee shops to social networks and smartphone apps. How many nights are spent behind a computer screen avoiding social situations? How many social gatherings consist of eyes glued to screens? Because they are always with us, and we share all of our personal information with them, our computers know more about us than our friends do. Even though they can't yet feel emotion or converse with us, our computers are already becoming our closest companions.

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The question isn't "when can I date my computer?", but rather "how many of us already are?"

Photo Credit: [herthemovie.com](#)

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About the Author  
**Dana Bellamy**

Dana Bellamy is a production executive for the Emerge video team and an aspiring content creator. Though her training lies in digital communications, Dana has a passion for traditional, tangible media. As a hoarder of popular culture since 1992, Dana prides herself in her collection of movies, music, and celebrity autobiographies. Inspired by classic comedy and stage theatrics, she hopes to tell the kind of stories that make people smile.

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