How to Live Together with Her (2013): Posthuman Forms of Roland Barthes' Idiorrhythmy

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Abstract

Roland Barthes' concept of idiorrhythmy describes a specific form of living together in a community, wherein everyone is able to retain their own rhythm and live according to their own speed (Barthes 2012). This paper will use this notion to explore the ways in which Her (Spike Jonze, 2013) charts a potential posthuman social life with artificial intelligence (AI).

In light of recent technological innovations in robotics, it seems increasingly likely that artificially intelligent devices will enter homes of the Global North on a mass scale in the foreseeable future. Even now, home assistants like Amazon Echo or self-regulating devices that are part of the "Internet of Things"[1] are beginning to blur the boundaries between devices that are simply smart, and artificial intelligence (AI).[2] Simultaneously, a recent wave of audiovisual depictions of AI has begun to thoroughly complicate the familiar pattern of a machine uprising or robot revolution. Television shows like Black Mirror (Channel 4/Netflix, 2011-present) or Westworld (HBO, 2016-present) and films like Transcendence (Wally Pfister, 2014), Her (Spike Jonze, 2013) and Ex Machina (Alex Garland, 2014) are beginning to incorporate are more nuanced view on AI and, crucially, co-existence between humans and AI, perhaps signaling a societal shift as well.

Using Roland Barthes' concept of idiorrhythmy as a form of living together, this paper will explore the ways in which Her charts a potential posthuman social life. The film, showing a love story between a human and an immaterial operating system (OS) might truly advance the idea of a posthuman idiorrhythmy, devoid of old stereotypes and usual conflicts, by way of calling attention to the characters' and viewers' bodies. As I will show, this runs counter to most of the history of filmic representations of AI and the

posthuman in general. It is not coincidental that peaceful living together was rarely depicted as a possibility, and it may be telling that, for all its aspirations, it is still not possible in Her.

Artificial Intelligence in Film History

Film and film history has long been populated with examples of artificial intelligence, robots and sentient machines, most often inextricably linked with the genre of science fiction (SF). Within the genre, a development can be made out, perhaps alongside more general societal beliefs, as Hauskeller, Philbeck and Carbonell write about the posthuman in general:

A trajectory can be charted in SF's representation of posthumanist concepts through film and television over the last century. In SF films, early 'posthumans' were monsters in horror films – Frankenstein for example. Later, posthumans and transhumans were villains that challenged human society in one way or another. Even later, posthumans became ambiguous in terms of their status as moral creatures, like the Terminator played by Arnold Schwarzenegger in Terminator 2: Judgment Day or the Cylons in Battlestar Galactica. The most recent incarnations are fantasy figures and heroes such as the X-Men's Wolverine, Tony Stark as Ironman and Will Caster in Transcendence, who sacrifices himself for the world as a technological Christ. This trajectory from monsters to heroes is evidence of a change in social consciousness concerning what we consider acceptable posthuman attributes.[3]

The trajectory from posthuman "monsters to heroes" throughout the history of science fiction can be traced to many examples, the early history as part of what Elaine Graham describes as "ontological hygiene."[4] The phrase marks the efforts of the Western world to demarcate between humanity, nature, and machines, to define anything posthuman as monstrous precisely because of its non-humanity. Even more specifically geared towards artificial intelligence, science fiction has always been, arguably even in many of its most recent offerings, deeply entangled with a distrust in technology and technological forms of the posthuman, or "Technophobia", as Daniel Dinello dubs it in his study of SF in all media.[5] The term "is meant to suggest an aversion to, dislike of, or suspicion of technology rather than an irrational, illogical, or neurotic fear."[6] Thus, although science fiction can definitely elicit this kind of fear, the relationship seems to be more complicated, often acknowledging the wide-ranging applications of technology, from specific threats to the 'uncanny valley' of humanoids.[7]

Even if not all futuristic films and novels could be defined as technophobic, "most science fiction [...] projects a pessimistic vision of post-human technology as an autonomous force that strengthens an anti-human, destructive, and repressive social milieu."[8] As Hauskeller, Philbeck, and Carbonell contend, this is especially true for science fiction films until the 1980s and technophobia can be found in major examples even past the decade. Beyond the evolution from phobia towards heroism, could it be that, amidst rapidly accelerating technical innovations, film as well as social

consciousness has already begun to move on further? Could a new wave of AI in film exhibit instances of posthuman forms of living together? Before we examine this question in detail, and as AI cannot be excluded from the efforts of ontological hygiene, a cursory (and for lack of space necessarily incomplete) look at depictions of AI in film reveals similar historical tendencies analogous to the rest of posthuman characters as well as clear cases of technophobia.

At the beginning of the 20 [th] century, artificial intelligence occupied a peculiar place in film, symbolizing a fear of technology when the medium itself, and its technology, was not fully established yet and trying to define itself as a genuine new art form. Early examples like Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927) exhibit this fear, when an evil robotic double of a peacemaking worker, dreamt up by the city's chief industrialist, sows unrest among her peers, leads them to burn the machinery of the city and causes great chaos. Order is only restored when the double is burned at the stake, banishing the hazards of technology for the moment. At once embodying and inducing fear of the very technology she is made of, the robot double could be seen to symbolize the promises and threats of automatization and replacement of human labor.[9]

Jumping ahead to mid-century, the focus shifts towards robots as weapons and rogue forces who turn against humanity in Frankeinsteinian fashion. Against the backdrop of the Cold War and the potential of nuclear annihilation, diverse films like Alphaville (Jean Luc Godard, 1965), THX 1138 (George Lucas, 1971), 2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), Colossus: The Forbin Project (Joseph Sargent, 1970), or Westworld (Michael Crichton, 1973) play out scenarios of robot dictators, robot police or originally friendly or harmless AI turning violent. Compared to Westworld's recent remake as a series, in which the hubris of one engineer to implant sentience within the robots of an entertainment park provides the backdrop for the awakening of their consciousness and will for independence, the original from the 1970s depicts the robots' violence without cause. Importantly, it does not equip them with self-awareness either, only a murder drive. Although self-aware, HAL 9000 of 2001: A Space Odyssey also malfunctions and begins to harm the crew of the spaceship he is supposed to assist. In the end, although the film breached new levels of visual science fiction storytelling, its portrayal of AI remains deeply conventional, even technophobic, as a force that must be defeated to elevate humans to their own transcendent posthuman future.[10]

Beginning with the 1980s, this image of AI slowly begins to change. Especially Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982) starts to complicate the simple relationships between humans and AI, with its 'replicants' beginning to breach boundaries of sentience and communal life. The massive influence of the film and its subsequent iterations as Director's and Final Cut actually provide an illustration for the development of filmic AI representation. Especially the changes from the first version in 1982 to the Director's Cut in 1992 – the removal of protagonist Deckard's voice-over, the addition of the unicorn dream sequence and the removal of the happy ending – thoroughly complicate the relationship between humans and replicants.[11] In the 1990s version, the status of Deckard, depicted as human before, becomes more complex, as the additional scenes

suggest that he might be a replicant himself. This opens diverse questions of subjectivity, both of humans and of artificial intelligence. Matthew Flisfeder explicates these in his study of Blade Runner as a quintessential postmodern film, noting that "it decenters the subject by questioning modern, liberal, and bourgeois conceptions of the centered subject of experience, and draws attention to the operations of time, duration, and memory as part of our centered experiences of selfhood."[12] Blade Runner notably disrupts processes of subject formation, with its insertions of false memories in replicants or by problematizing the indexical truth of photographs in Rachael's story.[13] Subjectivity thus becomes detached from a unified self and by extending this conundrum to Deckard in the later versions, the film seems to mirror postmodern theories that question a singular subjectivity.

Taking the sequel as well as the different cuts into account to show the development of AI politics in film, different approaches in comparison to Her become clear. As the first version prevented a reading of Deckard as replicant and let him ride off into the sunset with Rachael in a happy ending, the Director's and Final Cuts complicate this vision, reflecting evolving views of technology which meant that an emotive, humanized AI seemed more plausible. The sequel Blade Runner 2049 (Denis Villeneuve, 2017), in a story revolving around replicant K and the search for Rachael's child, is seemingly even more progressive, confirming the full range of emotions, cognitive abilities, and even some bodily functions in replicants. The latter, the film's main plot point, already suggests a major difference in articulation of AI subjectivity. As in many examples before and afterward that pit AI either as evil force or destined to become human, Blade Runner 2049 eventually focuses on a setting in which the replicants' ability to procreate would be a key step towards their bid for (human) rights. Publication of the fact would "break the world," as Lieutenant Joshi, K's supervisor, says at some point in reference to the replicants' current status as slaves. Once again, one could argue that humanoids are not treated as independent entities free of biological logic. This is in line with other films like Bicentennial Man (Chris Columbus, 1999) or A.I. Artificial Intelligence (Steven Spielberg, 2001), in which robot characters are depicted as sub-human, and their relationships to humans dependent on becoming human themselves.[14]

Even with both Blade Runner films working towards a fragmentation of the subject and a blurring of the lines between human and machine, I would contend that Her, along with other examples in recent years, depicts the subjectivity of AI in a different light. These include the Cylons in Battlestar Galactica (2004-2009), who were originally created as close to the human form as possible including its incapacities (restricted eyesight, hearing etc.), but repeatedly question why they must be constrained by arbitrary limits. Or take Will Caster in Transcendence, who immediately asks to be connected to the internet after his brain is uploaded to a supercomputer, so that he can disperse himself on the network and give up any physical (and thus human) materiality. Just like Samantha in Her, these characters are portrayed with desires that differ radically from human ones. Before turning to the question if these recent attempts to

take posthumans seriously could bring about a shift in our perceptions towards communal living with AI, I will briefly turn to the origins of the concept of idiorrhythmy and what it could entail for human-technological relationships.

Idiorrhythmy and the Posthuman

To account for this different kind of AI representation in Her, one could certainly turn to recent theories of politics and economics, in order to highlight the relentlessness of capitalism as it extends into personal relationships via AI operating systems. This is shown by Flisfeder and Burnham in a recent article on the film's depiction of processes of subjectivization in the entanglement of work and sex.[15] Here, the authors position the relationships of the film (including Theo and Samantha's) as intimately tied to (im)material labor and the human voice. While these aspects are certainly important for the film, I will rather move my analysis into a new, perhaps more hopeful, direction that re-reads Theo and Samantha's relationship not in regard to the "pairing of work or labor with the libidinal in the digital present,"[16] but as a vehicle to envision new forms of living together with AI.

To pursue this angle, the film will be set against Roland Barthes' theory of idiorrhythmy, as it tries to imagine a form of togetherness that emphasizes the personal over the public and political, which I see consistent with many of the film's themes. Barthes' concept, with its adjacent idea of anachoresis as a form of exile that kick-starts this particular form of living together, provides a frame of reference that befits Her and its politics of digital selfhood. In face of new, emergent forms of subjectivity, immaterial but present in humans' everyday life, I propose to conceptualize our relationships to technological entities in a way that does not mark them as inferior but imagines a co-existence – albeit not one free from complications.

Barthes' notion of idiorrhythmy, developed in his first seminar at the Collège de France in a series of "Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces," was only recently published (and translated) and while it has garnered some attention, still constitutes one of his lesser known works.[17] The concept, which purports to be his personal "fantasy",[18] describes a form of living together in a community, wherein everyone is able to retain their own rhythms and live according to their own speed. Idiorrhythmy (idios = self; rhuthmos = rhythm) originates from monasteries on the Greek mountain of Athos where monks would live in their own cells, keep their own possessions and were not obliged to attend every mass. It describes a communal life form and "refers to any community that respects each individual's own personal rhythm."[19] Barthes is interested in this form because it is able to "eschew those grand repressive forms" of society,[20] and represents an alternative to ordinary forms of living together. However, it is an ambiguous undertaking, balancing seclusion and social contact, as Patrick ffrench observes: "On the one hand, therefore, the fantasy involves departure and exile […]. On the other hand, in order not to fall into the status of exclusion, […], the life fantasized needs an affective connection."[21]

How does idiorrhythmy relate to posthuman relationships as imagined in science fiction films? When evaluating SF film history, we can see that normal coexistence between humans and AI was rarely possible, that it almost always ended in hostility or becoming human. Thus, idiorrhythmy could present a possible form of living together, to leave oneself and the AI in their own rhythms. Considering the vastly different sets of needs and desires, physical on the one hand (hunger, sex drive, bodily functions), technological on the other hand (mechanical maintenance, recharging, updating), the only way towards co-existence could be mutual acceptance of each other's desires. Moreover, the clutter of everyday lives and organizational chores that Barthes views as detrimental to idiorrhythmy in "modern-day 'communes'" is entirely removed from the equation.[22] If we apply the term of the idiorrhythmy freely, as Barthes himself has done in his seminar, covering diverse novels with different foci (i.e. desert, island, city, sanatorium, home) under the concept,[23] the shift to posthuman living together is not implausible and becomes a useful tool in thinking about posthuman societal conceptualizations.

The question of the socio-political is especially interesting in regard to idiorrhythmy and ffrench ties it explicitly to the figure of utopia, which "Barthes reconfigures […] as domestic rather than political."[24] The term invites a comparison with Mark Fisher's Capitalist Realism, which theorizes the present as the opposite, devoid of utopian ideas. Per Fisher, the current moment encapsulates "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it."[25] Surely, this is on display in Her, the financial system is not at stake and the society envisioned in the film seems to fit neatly into the framework. However, I would argue that on the level of the (inter-)personal, the film displays utopian visions and puts forward an alternative. This aligns the film closely with Barthes, whose utopia refers, as ffrench observes via Diana Knight, to "domestic rather than social space […], to a certain mode of corporeal and spatial being with others."[26] This idea of utopia is at the heart of How to Live Together, and it makes the concept of idiorrhythmy valuable for an analysis of the relations between human and machine in Her.

Of course, to realize such a relationship as idiorrhythmic, one would have to cease the aforementioned "ontological hygiene" and embrace the posthumanist project of rejecting the anthropocentrism that has been prevalent in Western thought. Posthumanism, in this sense, is "a new culture of transversalism in which the 'purity' of human nature gives way to new forms of creative evolution that refuse to keep different species, or even machines and humans, apart."[27] Following N. Katherine Hayles' idea of an embodied posthumanism, this does not mean that one should blindly dismiss the human body in order to attain a virtual one. Hayles argues for an embodied posthuman subjectivity that accepts differences but rejects hierarchization:

Nevertheless, these reflexive complexities do not negate the importance of the sedimented history incarnated within the body. Interpreted through metaphors resonant with cultural meanings, the body itself is a congealed metaphor, a physical

structure whose constraints and possibilities have been formed by an evolutionary history that intelligent machines do not share. Humans may enter into symbiotic relationships with intelligent machines [...]; they may be displaced by intelligent machines [...]; but there is a limit to how seamlessly humans can be articulated with intelligent machines, which remain distinctively different from humans in their embodiments.[28]

As we will see, especially Her is very conscious of these differences and pays special attention to affective forces that presumably only stimulate human bodies. Meanwhile, as Holly Willis has recently pointed out, film in general, in the era of 'post-cinema', pivots towards posthumanism.[29] In this regard, fiction films are especially marked by a novel way of narration, "a compelling model of posthuman storytelling experience that does not presume the human as the central axis for both agency and perspective."[30] This changing mindset, the focus on non-human protagonists and views is a discernible strategy of the AI fiction at hand and could be seen as a first step towards a posthuman idiorrhythmy. As Hayles also recognized, there has always been the potential for different stories, they just had to be realized: "Although some current versions of the posthuman point toward the antihuman and the apocalyptic, we can craft others that will be conducive to the long-range survival of humans and of the other life-forms, biological and artificial, with whom we share the planet and ourselves."[31]

Turning to Her, I will now analyze the film as an expression of posthuman idiorrhythmy, showing that it at least partially actualizes the potential for a version of the posthuman that Hayles describes.

Film as Novelistic Simulation: Spike Jonze's Her

Early on in Spike Jonze's Her, there is a moment when Samantha, the newly acquired operating system of protagonist Theodore, mimics the robotic voice of a more primitive AI, ridiculing his overly functional command to read out an email. This short comedic exchange sets the scene for Her, as Samantha is portrayed as a truly intelligent, sentient and self-improving OS that is capable of emotions, humor and, most importantly, love. The film maps this out, as the relationship of Theodore and Samantha quickly develops in almost classic fashion of a romantic comedy.[32] Theodore is working as a writer at a company that produces 'handwritten' letters for their customers, imagining the most romantic and heartfelt prose for people he has never met. His own life, meanwhile, is in disarray, as he is not only in the middle of the divorce from his wife Catherine but has become relatively socially secluded in the process.

Samantha, on the other hand, is an artificially intelligent OS that humans connect to via a small earpiece and communicate with mainly by voice, although she also has access to a small device and its camera lens, enabling her to 'see'. After being initiated by Theo, she quickly evolves into more than an assistant to him and they share intimate moments: "I feel like I can say anything to you," as Theo mentions after some time. While their relationship appears to be merely platonic at first, the two become lovers

after an unsuccessful blind date of Theo, even experiencing an approximation of sex that very night. In the following, the film explores the ways in which a romantic relationship between a human and a disembodied posthuman entity is possible. Among other things, it reimagines "standard tropes of the urban romance: strolling in the city, people watching, double dating and a trip to the beach."[33] After Sam initially dreams of having a body to share physical moments with Theo, she becomes more comfortable with her digital self as the story progresses, attending an OS reading group, creating a virtual version of the philosopher Alan Watts and being involved romantically with several partners at once. When Theo finds out the latter, their relationship is in serious peril, but it only ends in earnest when Sam leaves the physical world with other operating systems, heading to a place "that would be hard to explain."

An important starting point for Barthes' idea of idiorrhythmy is anachoresis, a self-imposed exile, but "not a matter of absolute solitude, but rather this: a way of reducing one's contact with the world."[34] It is founded on an "abrupt jolt of departure" and can function as a gateway to idiorrhythmy.[35] In relation to Her, one could easily posit that Theodore, at the beginning of the story, practices some kind of anachoresis, not meeting up with friends and choosing between videogames and internet porn, as he self-deprecatingly jokes at one point.[36] The "jolt of departure" would be his break-up with his wife Catherine, the divorce ongoing and for a large section of the story too painful for Theo to fully confirm by signing the papers. The film visualizes this pain repeatedly, channeling sunlit montage sequences of Catherine and Theo in their happiest moments, moving into their apartment or sharing their bed. In one scene, questioned by Sam about marriage, Theo talks of sharing your life with somebody, relaying the development of his relationship with Catherine, ending with their inability to "chang[e] without it scaring the other person." This scene clearly demarcates the two lives of Theodore, his marriage with Catherine on one side, his anachoresis and burgeoning romance with Sam on the other, although it alludes to the problems that will arise with Sam as well.

Barthes views anachoresis generally as something positive, but as ffrench notes, "this life apart needs the affective support of others; thus the ideal of the idiorrhythmic community, apart from the world, where the distance between bodies is maintained, but contact and proximity are possible."[37] In Her and for Theodore, keeping distance between bodies seems key to his new relationship with Samantha. Even though she is at first envious of a physical body, accepting her non-material form is crucial to the brief moment of idiorrhythmy the two are able to enjoy. The film makes clear that Theo is unable to establish a physical connection during his anachoresis, as is especially evident during the blind date with an unnamed woman before he starts dating Samantha. When the film abruptly cuts from inside the restaurant where the two had dinner to a close-up of them kissing on a darkly lit street, the woman quickly remarks: "No tongue," calling attention to the physicality of the moment. After a startled expression of Theo, the statement is reiterated two more times, the last time ("You can use a little tongue, but mostly lips") the shot switches from Theo's to the woman's face and she first touches her lips, then his, again drawing stark awareness to their bodies (see fig. 1). The intimacy

breaks down when she asks him if he is ready to commit to anything serious, but as they part ways, the strong focus on the physicality of the encounter lingers through the cut to Theo alone in his apartment, calling Samantha.
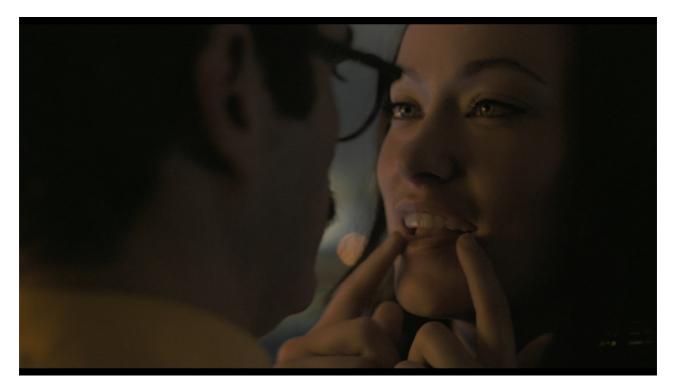

Figure 1: Theo's unnamed blind date, pointing to her lips.

The scene is an important marker for Theo's aversion to physical contact and connects to several other scenes and themes throughout the movie. First, it obviously harkens back to the set-up of the blind date and his hesitance towards Samantha's cheerful suggestion of a possible kiss. Even more directly, it is linked to the scene immediately following the date. Here, Theo and Sam sleep together for the first time, engaging in a kind of verbal sex not dissimilar to phone sex. Tellingly, the screen fades to black early on and as they both climax, the viewer is only able to listen to their haptic descriptions. In sharp contrast to the kissing scene before, the black screen emphasizes the disembodied experience of this night, with no corporeal contact to portray visually.

It is also connected to Theodore's earlier unsuccessful attempt of phone sex with a stranger. Strategically positioned after one of the montages of his earlier marriage stressing physicality (cuddling in bed, wrestling on the floor), it underlines the break-up as a border between two distinct modes. As Hilary Wheaton remarks, Theo is depicted throughout the film to be in reclusion of social life, writing romantic letters as a day job, but not comfortable with physical connections, "perfectly positioned for intimacy with an AI designed to know him and cater to his needs (not sexually, but as an OS for his computer and phone)."[38] In his anachoresis, the evident absence of Sam's body is a net positive, a draw that attracts rather than dissuades him, and the film connotes this accordingly. The ending of the blind date and the subsequent 'sex scene' are in the center of this nexus, with myriad connections to other scenes and themes.

Another one of those links is a scene involving a surrogate, when Sam convinces Theo that they should make up for the lack of her body by contacting a third person to interact physically with him. He, in accord with his motifs sketched out above, is skeptical, but ultimately relents. During the encounter with the surrogate Isabella, he cannot let go completely and aborts the experiment prematurely, severely hurting the woman's feelings in the process. This scene is the culmination of Samantha's body fantasies that she first mentions during one of their first truly bonding moments while wandering through the city, watching people and imagining their lives. The film rather unsubtly punctuates this conversation with shots of different people (bodies) walking by, similar to a scene at a crowded beach when Samantha, literally in a sea of people, muses about the appearance of the human body and the film presents matching close-ups of body parts (see fig. 2). Samantha's body-envy is the other side of the coin of Theo's anachoresis, complicating matters by trying to attain the very thing he seemingly rejects. It is only after the surrogate scene when Samantha, and in turn the whole film, stops to attach human traits to her and fully embraces her(self) as a posthuman being, clearing the path for a posthuman form of idiorrhythmy.

Figure 2: Close-up of feet during scene on the beach.

Posthuman Forms of Idiorrhythmy

As laid out above, idiorhythmy can be a powerful way to imagine posthuman relationships between humans and machines beyond the stereotypes, a utopian vision of intimacy between the physical and digital. Even though Barthes originally states that there are no idiorrhythmic couples, I would argue that the completely novel form of a relationship between a human and AI negates his initial objections and, as will hopefully become clear, makes the concept valuable to apply here. Remarkably, it still

seems difficult even for a film like Her, which takes AI seriously as independent entities, to imagine a relationship beyond desires to be human or leaving the physical world behind altogether. This likely indicates that we are right in the middle of another transition of societal views and, if it is realized at all, only at the beginning of full acceptance of the technological posthuman. For Her, this means that Sam and Theo only enjoy a brief idiorrhythmic period, similar to what Barthes attests to several of his exemplary novels,[39] when they are both accepting her posthuman form and are simultaneously fully immersed in their relationship. Different even than most other contemporary conceptions of life with an AI – for example the quite literal turn to the uncanny (or "unheimlich") in the Black Mirror episode "Be Right Back" (S02, E01), in which a young widow acquires a humanoid version of her deceased husband, but ends up storing it in the attic as it becomes too unsettling to have him in her house – Her imagines idiorrhythmic home life with an AI as care-free and unburdened by physical presence or arguments over household chores. When the relationship breaks down, there is no hostility, nothing uncanny, only a sense of loss and sadness.

The idiorrhythmy in Her is staged during the last quarter of the film, right after Theo finally signs his divorce papers and plunges, fueled by criticism from his ex-wife Catherine, into intense doubts of his relationship to Sam. Eventually, the two have a conversation to clear the air and both decide to accept each other and the relationship as is. This dialogue begins with a long zoom into Theodore's face, correlating with the long approach to this moment, to finally reach this point in their relationship. The camera then rests on his face in close-up for almost the entire conversation, registering every little reaction and motion, as his face slowly softens until a warm smile emerges at the end. This scene wonderfully encapsulates the film's narrative arc so far, mirroring the twists and turns to arrive at mutual acceptance.

What follows is one of the most imaginative renderings of posthuman togetherness to date, symbolized by a piano piece Samantha is said to have written. Asked by Theo what it is about, Sam replies that she thought the song could be like a photograph, capturing them in their lives together at this very moment. It is a crucial representation of their newfound idiorrhythmic relationship, dreaming up different means of illustration, neither completely human, nor indicative of an OS. In terms of idiorrhythmy, the musical connotation is obvious: The song as a photograph, a rhuthmos that is indeed not metronomic, but closer to the swing Roland Barthes describes, allowing "for approximation, for imperfection, for a supplement, a lack, an idios."[40] The in-between of the medial transfer could indeed be defined as lack or supplement, yet it brings the two of them together, each in their own rhythm.

The song as photograph naturally conjures Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida, his famous work on photography. Here, he first deciphers the quality of a photographic image in terms of the punctum, a detail that "shoots out of [the image] like an arrow, and pierces me," something that elicits an involuntary jolt of emotion.[41] In the second part of the book, however, in studying a particular photograph of his deceased mother, he shifts the definition of the punctum from some concrete detail in the mise-en-scène to something

more intangible, the invariable connotation of passing time, of death: "Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe."[42] Barthes deems this to be a distinct quality of the medium photography, but since Neal Badmington highlights Camera Lucida's roots in cinema[43] and considering the conflation of media in Her, one can wonder if the scene borrows this specific photographic trait. The melancholy song does indeed contain a sense of mourning, and the subsequent images, while portraying a happy couple, are already engulfed by the inevitable end of the relationship.

Figures 3 and 4: Theodore watching the dancer in shot/reverse shot

These images appear as a montage sequence, set to Samantha's song: The couple (or in actuality, Theo with the earpiece), are out and about in the city, shopping groceries, in front of a spectacular nighttime cityscape, playing videogames, and in a bar with Theo's friend Amy, her actively engaged with the camera lens that acts as Samantha's eyes. Just when the song slows down again after a crescendo, we see Theo in medium long, watching a dancer whose "body [is] twisting and contorting like a strand of DNA"[44] in shot/reverse shot, visibly moved. Apparently, the integration of physicality is now possible and does not seem to threaten the relationship anymore. After the failed experiment with the surrogate, this is a crucial sign of their new confidence, and as a bodily expression of music fully in line with the symbolism of the song that is still playing over the images. On the other hand, this moment seems to be especially melancholy, the song slowed to single notes and Theo almost close to tears, capturing the sadness, the passage of time and inherent catastrophe of their relationship; one that is closely connected to their respective (non-)corporeality as well.

The montage sequence ends with images of Theo at the beginning of a double date with another couple, standing on a sailing boat in the sun, wind gently rustling his hair. The date casually signals the societal acceptance of relationships between humans and AI and, along with the following trip to a cabin on a snowy mountainside, is more evidence of the idiorrhythmic moment the two enjoy.[45] Again, Her chooses to illustrate the vacation with a song and montage sequence, this time Theodore plays ukulele and Samantha sings to images of them outside in the snow, cooking, drinking, and laughing in the cabin. There is even a callback to the dancing scene from the previous sequence: This time, Theo dances in the half-lit cabin, reiterating the integration of physicality.

Still, there are already tears in the fabric of their idiorrhythmy, as becomes briefly

visible during the double date, when Sam talks of the advantages of having no body, irritating Theo and the rest momentarily until someone saves the awkward silence with a joke. Similarly, on their trip, Samantha introduces Theodore to the virtual version of the philosopher Alan Watts and describes her increasing unsettlement; that she is changing evermore faster, having feelings no-one has ever had before. This is the beginning of the end, the idiorrhythmy of the two is slowly missing beats and soon enough, Samantha's rhythm is too far advanced to come together with Theo's. At the end of the film, Samantha, completely consumed by her capabilities as a posthuman entity, confesses that she has had over 600 simultaneous relationships. Before their break-up can take real shape, she leaves the physical world for some kind of otherworldly space, departing after a beautiful monologue about the incompatibility of their minds.

The brief idiorrhythmic moment Sam and Theo enjoy in Her is heavily predicated on evolving views of the posthuman. Only when they accept their respective (dis)embodiments, their rhythms are able to align. The film prepares us for this moment in various ways, on the one hand positioning Theo in a kind of anachoresis, in social reclusion and in opposition of physical contacts to other humans. On the other hand, Sam's body envy is repeatedly picked up and played out in different scenarios, including the episode with a surrogate. Eventually, this elaborate set-up culminates in a long dialogue between the two, resolving their issues and enabling them to experience an idyllic, idiorrhythmic period, their relationship in "a precise calibration of spatial, corporeal and affective factors."[46] Her makes repeated use of montage sequences accompanied by intra-diegetic music, with one song supposedly acting as a photograph, underlining the idiorrhythmy with the help of a media metaphor, converging two distinct modes of representation.

Affective Complications

In addition to the various techniques the film employs in depicting posthuman forms of idiorrhythmy, there are more ways the film adds to its overarching theme of physicality and virtuality. Strewn across Her are images of particles, shots with layers of texture and sounds of material objects that are all intended to heighten the viewers' perception of sensory input.[47] Even though one can see nothing at all, most remarkable in this regard is the instance of the black screen during Theo and Sam's sex scene. For over one minute, the viewer is left without image, only the sounds of their voices present. As Tanya Shilina-Conte contends, the black screen can be viewed as a disruption of the cinematic flow that emphasizes other sensory inputs: "The viewer, suddenly bereft of the optic, relies more prominently on the acoustic and the haptic."[48] This subversion of filmic conventions "leads the spectator to a heightened awareness of his/her own body as a receiving medium that empathetically partakes in the experience" that is being portrayed.[49] These phenomenological consequences of the black screen, drawn from Vivian Sobchack's and Laura U. Marks's work, apply neatly to Her. Here, it radically alters the viewer's perception of the scene as well, shifting the emphasis from

the characters' (as during the blind date) to the viewer's physicality. In a way, by simulating the posthuman experience of the event, the film once again puts human senses into its center.

Moreover, this is supported by multiple shots of objects and textures that do not seem to serve any purpose at first glance and resemble haptic images in Marks's sense. From the textured concrete of the street and smoke from the subway after the surrogate has left, to the gas flame and whistle of a kettle in the mountain cabin that endures even after a cut-away, or an extreme close-up of dust particles in the air when Samantha finally leaves. Especially in the last case, as Samantha is speaking of her departure to a non-physical world, the particles draw attention to the viewers' own physicality, "encourage[ing] a more embodied and multisensory relationship to the image"[50] and forging a sensuous connection between screen and viewers.

Figure 5: Dust particles during Samantha's final monologue

This, of course, further complicates the notion of a posthuman idiorrhythmy for the viewers, directly questioning their beliefs. By using these affective strategies, Her forwards the queries of the plot beyond the screen and immediately connects them to the viewers' bodies. Is life with an AI possible, is this slew of synapses and flesh capable of idiorrhythmic life with a disembodied posthuman? It is this strategy that lends renewed urgency to Her and its representation of the posthuman, making it highly relevant for contemporary questions of life with AI.

Concluding Thoughts – Charting a Way Forward

In deviation of much of the history of science fiction film, Her depicts the relationship of Theodore and his artificially intelligent operating system Samantha as a model of

posthuman idiorrhythmy, bringing them together in mutual acceptance of their respective (dis)embodiments. By positioning Theodore in anachoresis for the first parts of the film, focusing on his difficult relationship to physical connections and Samantha's simultaneous body-envy, Her opens up a complex nexus that culminates in a brief idiorrhythmic period of the couple. With the help of two highly interesting comments on medium specificity, first the usage of a black screen and other decidedly affective images; second, the metaphor of a song as a photograph, the film also positions its own medium in regard to the posthuman.

As Alexander Darius Ornella argues, Her tries to imagine a disembodied entity, but has to surrender at last and let Samantha leave, "since there is no body to hold her back, no body to show on screen."[51] It is instead the body of the viewer that is addressed, not only during the black screen, but also on other occasions that favor non-visual sensory inputs. Furthermore, the film dreams up the concept of a song as a photograph, and while this media convergence is a wonderful metaphor for idiorrhythmy, the ensuing montage sequence is a conventional filmic trope. This creates a friction that reflects on the visual representation of disembodiment and posthuman togetherness, in turn reflecting on a truly posthuman cinema. The affective strategies could be one way forward, or as Holly Willis puts it, one of the "possibilities for imagining the world as an ecosystem within which the relations among all things constitute a primary force, and a potential grounding for story through affect and senses beyond the visual."[52] Her explores this possibility and in combination with the plot, it adds up to a forceful investigation.

During his seminar on "How to Live Together," Roland Barthes analyzes what he calls novelistic simulations of idiorrhythmy, using literary works to better grasp the inherent complexities of the concept, "like looking into tiny model worlds that present the spatial organization of the temporalities of living together," as Frederik Tygstrup summarizes the method.[53] In Bodies of Tomorrow, Sheryl Vint's study of science fiction as a vessel for posthuman imaginations, she is working towards something similar, an understanding of SF as valuable in itself:

Thus, I am arguing for the importance of SF as a site of critical engagement with the discourse of the posthuman not only in terms of how SF texts might 'reflect' or 'illustrate' models of the posthuman theorized elsewhere, but also as a space in which models of possible future selves are put forward as possible sites for identification on the part of readers.[54]

Her, viewed in this way as a space for models of the viewers' "possible future selves", adds credence to its attempts to complicate the notions of the plot and extend them beyond the screen. This is the case especially if the diegetic world of the film is understood as an example of Rebekah Sheldon's concept of a "corrected present," a version of our immediate reality that is only slightly amended to incorporate new technologies that the affluent classes are already anticipating.[55] Therefore, the leap from the viewers' realities to that of Her is not extraordinarily large, and in connection with the affective strategies reflects on the contemporary moment of AI emergence. As

societal views on the technological posthuman are beginning to shift towards acceptance, the film does not only illustrate the imaginable near-future, but instead charts a posthuman idiorrhythmy, not necessarily with a happy ending, but at least mindful of each other's rhythms.

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Notes

1. See Mercedes Bunz and Graham Meikle, The Internet of Things (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017). ⌂

2. My usage of the term artificial intelligence (AI) includes all forms of intelligent machines, although I will differentiate robots, androids, humanoids etc. when applicable. ⌂

3. Michael Hauskeller, Thomas D. Philbeck and Curtis D. Carbonell, "Posthumanism in Film and Television," in The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television, eds. idem (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4. ⌂

4. Elaine Graham, Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002), 33. Also see Stefan Herbrechter, Posthumanismus: Eine kritische Einführung (Darmstadt: WBG, 2009). ⌂

5. Daniel Dinello, Technophobia: Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005). ⌂

6. Ibid., 8. ⌂

7. The theory of the 'uncanny valley' states that "people will have an unpleasant impression of a humanoid robot that has an almost, but not perfectly, realistic human appearance." See Jun'ichiro Seyama and Ruth S. Nagayama, "The Uncanny Valley: Effect of Realism on the Impression of Artificial Human Faces," Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments 16, no. 4 (2007): 337. ⌂

8. Dinello, Technophobia, 16. ⌂

9. Kevin LaGrandeur, "Androids and the Posthuman in Television and Film," in Hauskeller, Philbeck and Carbonell, The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television, 114.

10. See Dinello, Technophobia, 97-99. To be fair, the much lesser known sequel (with no involvement of Stanley Kubrick) 2010 (Peter Hyams, 1984) resurrects HAL and turns him into a martyr, as he sacrifices himself for the survival of a new crew.

11. Matthew Flisfeder, Postmodern Theory and Blade Runner (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 96-97.

12. Ibid., 93.

13. Ibid., 130-33.

14. David Meeler and Eric Hill. "Sharing Social Context: Is Community with the Posthuman Possible?," in Hauskeller, Philbeck and Carbonell, The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television, 285.

15. Matthew Flisfeder and Clint Burnham. "Love and Sex in the Age of Capitalist Realism: On Spike Jonze's Her." Cinema Journal 57, no. 1 (2017): 25-45. doi:10.1353/cj.2017.0054.

16. Ibid., 27.

17. Barthes' notion of idiorrhythmy, developed in his first seminar "How to Live Together" at the Collège de France in a series of "Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces," was only translated into English in 2012 and still constitutes one of his lesser known works.

18. Barthes, How to Live Together, 6; see also Patrick ffrench, "How to Live with Roland Barthes," Substance 38, no. 3 (2009): 116.

19. Claude Coste, "Preface," in Barthes, How to Live Together, xxii.

20. Barthes, How to Live Together, 9.

21. ffrench, "How to Live with Roland Barthes," 120.

22. Barthes, How to Live Together, 8; see ibid., 42f.

23. See Knut Stene-Johansen, Christian Refsum and Johan Schimanski, "'How to Live Together?': Roland Barthes and the Phantasme of Idiorrhythmic Life," in Living Together - Roland Barthes, the Individual and the Community, eds. idem (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018), 12-17.

24. ffrench, "How to live with Roland Barthes," 116.

25. Mark Fisher, Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative? (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2007), 2; original emphasis.

26. ffrench, "How to live with Roland Barthes," 117. See also Diana Knight, Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

27. Nicholas Gane, "Posthuman," Theory, Culture & Society 23, no. 2-3 (2006): 432.

28. N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics (Chicago/London: Chicago UP, 1999), 284.

29. Holly Willis, Fast Forward: The Future(s) of the Cinematic Arts, (New York: Wallflower Press, 2016); regarding post-cinema, see e.g. Malte Hagener, Vinzenz Hediger and Alena Strohmaier, eds., The State of Post-Cinema. Tracing the Moving Image in the Age of Digital Dissemination, (London: Palgrave, 2016).

30. Willis, Fast Forward, 142.

31. Hayles, How We Became Posthuman, 291.

32. Lawrence Webb, "When Harry Met Siri: Digital Romcom and the Global City in Spike Jonze's Her," in Global Cinematic Cities: New Landscapes of Film and Media, eds. Johan Andersson and Lawrence Webb (New York: Wallflower Press, 2016), 97-98. Of course, this also entails important aspects of gender dynamics and conceptualizations which unfortunately lie beyond the scope of this paper. For more in this regard, see e.g. Sennah Yee, "'You bet she can fuck' – Trends in Female AI Narratives within Mainstream Cinema: Ex Machina and Her," in Ekphrasis 17, no.1 (2017), 85-98; or Davina Quinlivan, "'A Dark and Shiny Place': the Disembodied Female Voice, Irigarayan Subjectivity and the 'Political Erotics' of Hearing Her (Spike Jonze, 2013)," in Locating the Voice in Film: Critical Approaches and Global Practices, eds. Tom Whittaker and Sarah Wright (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016), 295-309.

33. Webb, "When Harry Met Siri," 98.

34. Barthes, How to Live Together, 25.

35. Ibid. For more on the greek origin of the concept, see Knut Ove Eliassen, "ANAKHÔRÈSIS/Anachoresis," in Stene-Johansen, Refsum and Schimanski, Living Together, 29-41.

36. It is naturally much harder to define Samantha's status before the relationship, as she supposedly only comes into being when Theodore initializes her.

37. ffrench, "How to Live with Roland Barthes," 121.

38. Hilary Wheaton, "Desire and Uncertainty: Representations of Cybersex in Film and Television," in Hauskeller, Philbeck and Carbonell, The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television, 169.

39. E.g. Robinson Crusoe, which Barthes finds only interesting in its descriptions of loneliness, before his encounters with the cannibals and slave traders, see Barthes, How to Live Together, 84f.

40. Barthes, How to Live Together, 35; emphasis in original. Regarding the significance of rhythm for the concept, see also Frederik Tygstrup, "IDIORRHYTHMY/Idiorrhythmy," in Stene-Johansen, Refsum and Schimanski, Living Together, 223-230.

41. Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010 [1981]), 25.

42. Ibid., 96.

43. Neil Badmington, "Punctum Saliens: Barthes, Mourning, Film, Photography," Paragraph 35, no. 3 (2012): 312-313. The connection between punctum and film has of course been researched before, Badmington is useful because he includes Barthes's Mourning Diary, published in 2009. For a listing of works concerning film and Camera Obscura, see Badmington, "Punctum Saliens," 315, endnote 8.

44. Hilary Bergen, "Moving 'Past Matter': Challenges of Intimacy and Freedom in Spike Jonze's Her," in artciencia.com VIII, no. 17 (2014), 4.

45. See Meeler and Hill, „Sharing Social Context," 284.

46. ffrench, "How to live with Roland Barthes," 117.

47. For more on the textile nature of these shots, see Christina Parker-Flynn, "To Be Felt: Examining Textility in Spike Jonze's Her," Mise-en-scène 3, no. 1 (2018), 73-77.

48. Tanya Shilina-Conte, "How It Feels: Black Screen as Negative Event in Early Cinema and 9/11 Films," Studia Phænomenologica 16 (2016): 410.

49. Ibid.

50. Laura U. Marks, The Skin of the Film (Durham/London: Duke UP, 2000), 172.

51. Alexander Darius Ornella, "Uncanny Intimacies: Humans and Machines in Film," in Hauskeller, Philbeck and Carbonell, The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television, 338.

52. Willis, Fast Forward, 142.

53. Tygstrup, "IDIORRYTHMY/Idiorrythmy," 227. 🏠

54. Sherryl Vint, Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 20. 🏠

55. Rebekah Sheldon, "Spectrum Orders: Digital Science Fiction and the Corrected Present," Science Fiction Studies 43, no. 1 (2016): 33-50. 🏠

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