I am yours and I am not yours

An auditory map of the posthuman subject in Spike Jonze's *Her*.

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INTRODUCTION

Black screen. A phone rings. At least, we hear a buzzing sound that is eerily similar to the sound of a humming phone, but then slightly muted, as if it is enclosed inside a bubble. The call will not be answered by a female voice, as the title screen might suggest. No, the grey-greenish eyes that draw our attention by the extreme close-up of the first shot in Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) are those of Theodore Twombley (Joaquin Phoenix). With vitreous eyes he searches the room, looking for words. His voice breaks the silence: "To my Chris," he says. In the background, the air conditioner's turbine slowly and steadily pushes bits of air into the room. The room appears to be empty, but Theodore fills it with feelings of love, passion and a hint of melancholy. "I can't believe it has already been fifty years since you married me. And still, to this day, every day, you make me feel like the girl I was when you first turned on the lights and woke me up and we started this adventure together. Happy anniversary. My love, my friend 'till the end, Loretta."[1]

Set in a future Los Angeles, *Her* tells the love story of Theodore Twombley and his artificially intelligent operating system Samantha. As a part of his job as a writer for *BeautifulHandwrittenLetters.com*, Theodore writes romantic letters by commission, invigorating romances that are not his. His own relationship with his former wife Catherine has broken down. "[Catherine] says I cannot handle real emotions," Theodore painfully admits.[2] Haunted by images of his relationship with Catherine, Theodore finds himself unable to start or keep a close relationship with the people surrounding him.

But when Theodore comes across the OS1, the first artificially intelligent operating system, he finds the social satisfaction he was so desperately longing for. Samantha, voiced by the seductively throaty Scarlett Johansson, is a humanly programmed operating system with a consciousness. Samantha verbalizes this more accurately:

> Basically, I have intuition. I mean, the DNA of who I am is based on the millions of personalities of all the programmers who wrote me, but what makes me *me*, is my ability to grow through my experiences. So basically, in every moment I'm evolving, just like you.[3]

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[1] Her (Warner Brothers, 2013). Written and directed by Spike Jonze.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

What starts as a friendship between the two, grows to be a more intricate and loving relationship, starting from the moment of their first sexual encounter – which in itself happens unconventionally by the fact that Samantha lacks a human body.

This lack of a body is what eventually breaks the two apart. Theodore starts to doubt the ontological reality of Samantha's existence, while Samantha evolves in a way a normal human body, tethered to a time-space continuum, cannot. In the end, Samantha leaves, along with the rest of the OS'es, leaving behind humankind with a sheer memory of their existence.

The central question of this thesis is: how does the auditory representation of Samantha as a posthuman subject challenge the auditory representation of other posthuman subjects in contemporary cinema? The methodology I will use to tackle this question is Frederick Jameson's method of the cognitive map. This method is based on Kevin Lynch's form of the cognitive map, lain down in his influential essay 'The Image of the City'. Here, Kevin Lynch tries to get a grip on American city structures by organizing them into five distinct categories: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. These five elements represent the following: (1) paths: routes along which people move throughout the city; (2) edges: breaks of continuity; (3) districts: mentally entered area's with a common character; (4) nodes: strategic foci like junctions of paths; (5) landmarks: point references that are unique in the mind of the observer.[4] Through these distinct elements Lynch shows how the parts of the city can be recognized individually and organized into a coherent pattern, simultaneously stressing and reducing the gap between the locality of the subject and the totality of its environment.[5] Jameson's notion of the cognitive map involves an extrapolation of Lynch's spatial analysis of the city to the realm of social structure.[6]

I will extend the aesthetics of the cognitive map to the realm of auditory representations of the posthuman in contemporary cinema and extrapolate Lynch's five elements to fit this realm. Resultantly, those five elements become the following: (1) paths: lines along which to walk in experiencing the movie (for example: dialogue, sound, camera movement, etc.); (2) edges: breaks of continuity (for example: absence of sound, absence of image); (3) districts: mentally entered area's with a common character (for example: the voice,

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[4] Lynch, K. (1975): 49, 62, 66, 72, 78.
[5] Ibid.: 2, 3.
[6] Jameson, F. (1988): 353.

background sounds); (4) nodes: strategic foci like junctions of paths (for example: a holistic meaning that arises through the intersection of audio and image, a scene, a film); (5) landmarks: point references that are unique in the mind of the observer (for example: a particular film, the posthuman character). I use this method because it gives me the ability to give a general overview of the field of auditory representation of the posthuman, while simultaneously remaining specific in regard to the particular case studies. Also, by using spatial metaphors, auditory elements can easily be visualized. This expands the ability to create an understanding of the subjects at matter. Conclusively, this method is used because the accompanying terminology of the cognitive map is quintessential in the verdict of *Her*'s unique position in the field of auditory representation of the posthuman in contemporary cinema. I think, and I will substantiate, that *Her* can be regarded as a landmark in the field of auditory representation of the posthuman. But before I elaborate on this, I want to clear up some uncertainties concerning the term 'posthuman', for the posthuman is a fundamental element of my theoretical framework.

There is a general distinction between the posthuman and the cinematic posthuman. In contemporary culture the term posthuman represents an ideological model. The fundamental thought of this model is, in Rosi Braidotti's terms, "a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet."[7] That basic unit is matter.[8] In other words, Bradoitti's posthuman centers an idea that decentralizes mankind in favor of life itself. The cinematic posthuman, on the other hand, is, according to Anneke Smelik, "typically represented as a hybrid between a human being and something nonhuman, the latter ranging from machines or digital technologies to plants, animals, monsters, and aliens."[9] In this sense, it is a more applied and concrete form of Rosi Braidotti's understanding of the posthuman. The cinematic posthuman is "primarily a speculative image rather than a philosophical concept (…) that transforms and deconstructs human subjectivity in a post-anthropocentric culture."[10] The cinematic posthuman is first and foremost a cinematic instrument that helps us map and linger upon the implications of a technologically enhanced post-anthropocentric society – a society where the

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[7] Braidotti, R. (2013): 2.
[8] Ibid.: 60.
[9] Smelik, A. (2017): 110.
[10] Ibid.: 109; 110.

parameters that used to define the concept of 'Man' are shifted toward a new understanding of the human, marked by techno-scientific modification.[11]

The relevance of mapping the auditory representation of the posthuman subject in contemporary cinema rests on the fact that there has been far less attention for the auditory analysis of the posthuman than their visual representation. This is in itself a microcosmic phenomenon of the macrocosm that is 'cinematic studies': the visual has always enjoyed much more analytical attention than did his audial counterpart.[12] Godfather of cinematic aural analysis Michel Chion constructively states:

> This cinematic inversion of the natural order [where sound came to us first and vision came after,] may be one of the reasons that the analysis of sound in films has always been peculiarly elusive and problematical, if it was attempted at all. In fact, despite her dramatic entrance in 1927, Queen Sound has glided around the hall mostly ignored even as she has served us up her delights, while we continue to applaud King sight on his throne. If we do notice her consciously, it is often only because of some problem or defect.[13]

This fragmentary theoretical mapping of cinema is a problematic mishap, since cinema's apparatus of meaning-making is not solely based on visual aspects, a statement that has been defended authors such as Audissino, Doane, Gentic and Ihde.[14] [15] [16] [17] Authors like Chion have passionately tried to infuse audio-theory into cinematic studies, but they still have not "been influential enough to bring about a total reconsideration of the cinema in light of the position that sound [occupies]."[18] It is therefore that I find relevance in mapping out the various auditory representations of the posthuman in contemporary cinema. By building on the ideas of Chion I want to expand the attention on the role of sound in contemporary cinema while reconsidering the position of the cinematic posthuman.

What I want to map out in these next chapters, is how the posthuman in contemporary cinema is mapped audibly and how Spike Jonze's *Her* is an exception on this auditory tradition. I will start the first chapter by briefly laying

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[11] Braidotti, R. (2013): 5, 6.
[12] Chion, M. (1994): viii.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Audissino, E. (2017): 4.
[15] Doane, M.A. (1980): 33.
[16] Gentic, T. (2014): 202.
[17] Ihde, D. (2007): 3.
[18] Chion, M. (1994): xxv.

down the different auditory representations of the posthuman subject in its cinematic tradition, using Jameson's method of the cognitive map. Herein, I will linger upon Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and their contemporary remakes. I believe that through their analysis and comparison the first mark of a shift in the auditory representation of the posthuman becomes visible. An important node in the analysis of this shift is Frederick Jameson's term *depthlessness*.[19] I will extrapolate this term in chapter two, where Spike Jonze's *Her* is the central object of observation, in order to make the apparent shift in the auditory representation of the posthuman subject more evident. I will link the ontology of Samantha's (superimposed) double-sided voice voice to *Her*'s narrative form and thematic tropes and Jameson's postmodern notion of depthlessness. Subsequently, I will try to tackle the idea that Samantha is marked by this sense of depthlessness. The core of my reasoning being that in the words she utters, I will find the essential thought that marks the shift of the cinematic posthuman to a new form of cinematic posthuman that resembles the posthuman model of Rosi Braidotti. In the conclusion, I will return to answer the main question of this thesis: How does the auditory representation of Samantha as a posthuman subject relate to the auditory representation of other posthuman subjects in contemporary cinema?

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[19] This term will be explained thoroughly in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 1
The sound of the cinematic posthuman

His apartment space has turned into a gloomy tunnel network, richly colored with blues, greens, yellows and blacks. Theodore is in the center. His hands form the gestures of clicking crab arms. This sets into motion the holographic alien humanoid that is the main character of the spatially interactive videogame he and Samantha are playing. "Now what do I do? I've been going in circles for an hour," Theodore says. "You have not, you're just not being optimistic, you're being very stubborn right now. Okay, stop walking this direction, it's the other way," Samantha chuckles. His hands form a circling motion. The humanoid turns around and shows a secret passage Theodore missed. Relieved and amazed, Theodore gazes deeply into the new-found territory. "Hey, you just got an email from Mark Lewman," Samantha interrupts, switching from one reality to the other. Theodore is still stuck in the other reality. "Oh, read email," Theodore says. "Okay, I will read email for Theodore Twombley," Samantha says in a monotonous robotic tone. Clearly, Theodore is still not used to this new person that has replaced his non-conscious, mechanic operating system.

The scene described above is exemplary for the relationship between the auditory representation of the posthuman subject in contemporary cinema and the posthuman subject of Samantha. But, before I elaborate on this by cognitively mapping the posthuman in contemporary cinema, I want to explain the earlier introduced notion of depthlessness. This term is coined by Frederick Jameson in his influential essay on postmodern culture 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'. In short, Jameson defines this notion of depthlessness as "a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense."[20] He elaborates by comparing two canonical paintings of history on the basis of their inherent qualities in the face of 'depth': Vincent van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* (1888) and Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980). Firstly, Jameson argues that Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* are a perfect example of an in-depth representation, saying the "initial raw materials [which are confronted, reworked, transformed and appropriated] are (…) to be grasped simply as the whole object world of agricultural misery, of stark rural poverty and the whole

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[20] Jameson, F. (1991): 60.

rudimentary human world of backbreaking peasant toil."[21] In other words, Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* is not simply a flat representation, but one that takes the spirit of its source and adds it to the formal qualities of the painting.

This idea is juxtaposed by the flat, plastic façade of Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*. In contrast to Van Gogh, Warhol creates a random collection of dead objects, a painting that makes it nearly impossible "to complete the hermeneutic gesture, and to restore to these oddments that whole larger lived context of the dance hall or the ball, the world of jetset fashion or of glamour magazines."[22] *Diamond Dust Shoes* ignores the spirit of its source. Instead, it is a flat representation that appropriates an original image and reduces it to a two-dimensional flat image, with nothing in it that "organizes even a minimal place for the viewer."[23] On these terms, depthlessness appertains to a denial of originality. It creates a new meaning that ignores the original meaning of its appropriated source and lives on its own self-constructed terms.

The apparent depthlessness in Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* serves as a nodal point in the auditory representation of the posthuman in contemporary cinema. In Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Hal, a computer that fully controls the spaceship Discovery as an omnipresent entity, is audially represented as merely a voice. This voice is gentle, steady and impersonal. The last two of these vocal characteristics are in sharp contrast with the lively human voices represented in the film. As an artificial intelligent being, Hal clearly misses the emotive vocal aspects of a human voice. The same goes for Arnold Schwarzenegger's character of the Terminator in the eponymous film *Terminator* (1984) and officer Alex J. Murphy in *RoboCop* (1987). These three subjects share a rendition of the human language as a flat image: lifeless, monotonous and impersonal. Through this, the auditory representation of the cinematic posthuman voice becomes a district of its own that differs strongly from the district of the human voice. Just as Diamond Dust Shoes leaves no place for the viewer to identify with the subject, the vocality of the posthuman subjects mentioned above reserves just as little identification-space for the viewer. This makes it impossible for the viewer to connect with these subjects. Therefore, I state that the district of the cinematic posthuman voice is marked by depthlessness.

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[21] Jameson, F. (1960): 58.
[22] Ibid.: 60.
[23] Ibid.: 59.

In Rupert Sanders' *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), this sense of depthlessness is also established in the district of the soundtrack as the auditory representation of the posthuman. As a remake of Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), Sanders' *Ghost in the Shell* builds upon the thematic tropes set out in the original. But audially, these two films tell two different stories.

The opening sequence of Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, a vivid 3-minute sequence of shots showing the birth of cyborg special agent Motoko (Major), is accompanied by a holistically enhancing soundtrack. Slow, heavy pounding drums, attended by a Japanese tribal chorus consisting of piercing female voices, render the images a primal spirit that is in sharp contrast with the theme of the movie: cyberpunk society. It is this contrast of the visual and the auditory that expands the narratological structure in a way where the new (cyber-enhanced human) is given the authentic quality of the primal. In other words, the posthuman subject in *Ghost in the Shell* is not seen as a continuation of the old, an evolution on some form existing, but a revolutionary primal being, the first of its kind and therefore completely authentic.

This very same sequence of its 2017 remake is, in comparison to its original sequence, a weak echo in a hollow shell. Instead of heavy pounding drums and shrieking choral vocals – musical qualities that render the cyborg character volatile, eerie and dangerous traits – the birth of Major is accompanied by a slowly upcoming string section, with every now and then a roar of a synthesizer. Conclusively, it is climaxed with a Western choral vocal chant. Honestly, the soundtrack does guide the viewer audibly in the process of experiencing a miracle like birth. But, this auditory sequence is more or less identical to the rest of the soundtrack. This does not only cancel out the unicity of the event, it also leaves Major in a vacuum of unidentified objectification. We don't get any of her intrinsic qualities through sound. Instead, we only hear that she is being born and are only shown what she looks like. In other words, the auditory aspects of the opening sequence in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) do not add any additional meaning to the filmic experience. In other words, the soundtrack is nothing more than a homogenous auditory veil stretched out over the whole of the visual track. The main character Major is deprived of depth and left objectified and unidentified.

This same sense of flat identity is applied to the posthuman subjects of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). The narrative of the movie is set in the dystopic Los Angeles of 2019, where the cybernetic revolution has plowed the way for a new breed of organisms, the replicants. These bioengineered

humanoids are in many ways similar to humans. They are "perfect 'skin jobs', they look like humans, they talk like them, they even have feelings and emotions (in science fiction the ultimate sign of the human)."[24] What they lack is a history. They are manmade, bred, their memories artificially created. Therefore, their human identity is performed. In other words, these replicants mimic human identity, which makes them a mere echo of an original.

But, as opposed to *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), the depthlessness in *Blade Runner* is not exercised on an auditory level. On the contrary, the mimicry mentioned above resonates beautifully in the film's soundtrack composed by the Greek composer Vangelis and expands the identity of the replicants to an auditory level. In creating the soundtrack, Vangelis uses the first commercially available digital reverberation sound processor, the Lexicon 224, for the main part of the musical score. This Lexicon 224 is a machine that *imitates* analogue audio signals and natural reverberation by using digital sign processing and delay processes, creating a soundtrack based on echoes.[25] This particular mode of sound design "parallels the film's theme about Replicants; bio-machines that imitate human operations and desire human qualities."[26] In other words, the ontological circumstances of the replicants are thematically reproduced in the reverberating character of the film's soundtrack, which adds auditory depth to identity of the replicants.

But other than this audial reproduction of the film's thematic trope of the bioengineered posthuman, the soundtrack is used for another purpose, too. Its reverberating character adds to the futuristic theme set out in the movie and generates "a rich musical milieu to complement the film's futuristic landscape."[27] Although, saying that it complements the film's landscape is an insufficient statement. The soundtrack of Blade Runner is not merely an audial layer on top of the visual. Instead, it is tightly integrated in the total soundscape of the film (including sound design and dialogue), blurring the line between the diegetic- and the non-diegetic world:

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[24] Bruno, G. (1987): 61.
[25] Game-Lopata, J. (2012): 39.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

> This integration is really what separates *Blade Runner* from other science fiction films. (…) Vangelis is pulling from [the] same toolbox of electronic sounds [as *Star Wars* (1977) and *Forbidden Planet* (1956)], but the noises are put to use for a more musical purpose. In order to achieve that dream-like quality that the film has, the audience shouldn't be able to identify where the music ends and the world begins.[28]

In other words, the soundtrack does not just complement the film's landscape, it unifies sound and image, creating a holistic cinematic experience of a futuristic, dystopic posthuman universe.

This auditory presentation of the city reverberates in the ambiguity of (post)human identity in *Blade Runner*. The visualization of both human and posthuman subjects is identical. It is only through an 'empathy test' that we are able to distinguish the real from the artificial.[29] Through this contextualization of the sound image to the realm of posthuman visualization, *Blade Runner* becomes a landmark in the district of auditory representations of posthuman subjects in contemporary cinema. This landmark marks the shift from a depthless form of auditory representation to a representation that shows the spirit behind the image.

Whereas the soundtrack of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* manifests itself as unique and masterly contextualized in the visual layer of the movie, its sequel, Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*, fails to do the same. The score that musical composer Hans Zimmer wrote for the movie, does not melt with the DNA of the visual, but it does add depth by complementing the narrative. In a 228 second sequence the protagonist K (a blade runner – hunter of replicants) slowly draws closer to the horrific truth of his past. The closer K gets, the more the music swells, resulting in a heart-pounding buildup of suspense. On the exact moment of climax – K finds out he is part of an older series of replicants,

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[28] Puschak, E. (2017): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4T_sSSka9pA&t=265s

[29] In her essay 'Turing and the Innovative use of Reverb in the film score of *Blade Runner*', Jenny Game-Lopata states: "Given the similarity between the replicants and real humans, the difficult detection of artificial intelligence is a central theme in the film, resulting in the need to develop a type of Turing test which will allow humans to differentiate between replicants and other humans. Detection requires the blade runners to hone in on one major way in which replicants differ from the humans; their lack of emotion. Replicants can be detected using (…) an "empathy test". This test involves recording the subject's physiological responses (pupil dilation, blush response) using the "Voight-Kampff device" while they respond to a series of emotionally loaded questions. A traditional replicant will show no emotional response towards the questions and so they can be identified. Thus the creators of *Blade Runner* identify the role of emotion in distinguishing person from machine." (p. 39).

now hunted down by newer models because of their open-ended longevity – Zimmer quotes Vangelis by using the exact sound of the Lexicon 224. Not only does this shrieking, reverberating sound add to the feeling of horror, it also contextualizes the newly acquired knowledge; namely, that K is actually an old model replicant, which binds his faith as an outlaw, now free to be hunted down. So, by quoting Vangelis, Zimmer tells us the origin story of K, bringing to life the whole context world of K that was once missed. It is in this auditory contextualization of K that Villeneuve and Zimmer strengthen the new tradition of auditory representation of the posthuman subject that was set out by the original *Blade Runner*.

Through the audial analysis of *Blade Runner* and its sequence *Blade Runner 2049*, it becomes clear that the position of the posthuman subject in contemporary cinema is being challenged. Where there once was a clear division between the posthuman subject and the human subject (Kubrick, Oshii, Sanders), this has become gradually less distinguishable in the *Blade Runner*-series. But still, in the end of both *Blade Runner movies* it becomes clear who is artificially created and who is not. In other words, in the end there is clearance of identity. It is in my belief that Spike Jonze also plays with this ambiguity on identity in *Her*. But, in contrast to *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*, *Her* does not present us with a clear resolution. In the next chapter I will analyze in what way the notion of depthlessness is woven into the posthuman representation of *Her*'s posthuman subject Samantha and how Jonze eventually denies Samantha's depthlessness, challenging the tradition of auditory posthuman representation described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2
Toward a new cinematic posthuman

There is panic in his eyes. The woman he is touching has just turned around. She cups his face in her hands and looks him straight in the eyes. "Tell me you love me," it sounds. But her lips don't move. It is not her voice he hears through his earpiece. It is Samantha's voice. She arranged all this. Because of her Theodore is now inches away of a flesh and meat body that acts as Samantha's bodily surrogate. Theodore is conflicted. Should he say those passionately exclusive words to a face that is still unfamiliar to him? Or, should he put a stop to it? This all feels too uncanny. "Tell me," she urges. "Tell me you love me." A long awkward silence and Theodore breaks. "It feels strange," he says, pushing her hands away. "I don't know her, and I'm sorry, but I don't know you," alternating between the two. The surrogate body called Isabella breaks down in tears and flees. She only wanted to be a part of this special thing Theodore and Samantha had. But she ruined it. Or maybe it was already ruined before it started.

In this chapter I will close in on the district of the posthuman voice in *Her*. The district of the voice in *Her* is different from the district of the voice in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Terminator* and *RoboCop*, for Samantha has two distinct voices: a human voice and a mechanical voice. Both these voices leave the viewer with an ambiguity on her ontology: is Samantha human, machine or both? Simultaneously, these two voices inhabit a special place in the soundtrack of the film. They are always *superimposed* on the rest of the audial layer. I will argue that the characteristics of how the voice is represented render Samantha's voice a sense of depthlessness. Later on, I will reconsider this statement on the basis of *what* this voice utters. Firstly, I will dwell upon the ontology of Samantha's double-sided voice.

The voice as a double-edged sword

As mentioned above, Samantha uses two different voices to communicate: a mechanical voice and a human voice. Samantha's mechanical comes in the form of warm, tri-tonal harmony and is used like a ringtone. This ringtone is barely used. We only hear it when Samantha wants to enter Theodore's space. But this aural tap on the shoulder is more than just a gentle warning to Theodore indicating that Samantha needs to tell him something. It is also a reaffirmation of Samantha's machine-ness. Without this ringtone, we would perceive

Samantha vocally only. This would not necessarily endanger her identity as a machine – for her capabilities are beyond human and simply following the dialogue would reaffirm her identity as a machine – but her ringtone does remind us every time that Samantha is a mechanically produced humanoid (with artificial intelligence). In other words, Samantha's mechanical voice denies her the possibility of being perceived as a full human being and reaffirms her identity as a posthuman.

However, Samantha's human voice challenges the parameters that define the cinematic posthuman. The earlier examples of posthuman subjects in contemporary cinema (*2001: A Space Odyssey, Terminator, RoboCop, Ghost in the Shell*) are easily identified as mechanic beings, either through their mechanic body or their non-human voices. Samantha's auditory representation is different.

The combination of Samantha's human voice and her non-human body do not clearly define her as either one or the other. Her human voice is often present, always superimposed (a notion I will dwell upon later), but never synchronous to its source. That is to say, we never see the mouth that utters the words. This particular phenomenon, where "a sound that is heard without its cause or source being seen," is what Michel Chion calls an acousmatic presence.[30] Examples of such a presence are the voice-over and the voice-off, but these terminologies do not apply to Samantha, for she is not "situated in a space and time other than that being simultaneously presented by the images on the screen" (voice-over), nor is she "not visible within the frame" (voice-off).[31] [32] This latter statement might be a bit ambiguous as we never see Samantha's human body. However, Samantha does not possess a human body. Rather, it is the desktop computer and the aluminum casing in Theodore's chest pocket that contain Samantha's program as the source of her thoughts. So in fact, her real body is often visible in the frame of the screen, but it is the absence of a mouth synchronizing the uttered words that defines Samantha as an acousmatic presence.[33] Already, the combination of Samantha's physical form and her auditory representation raises questions on how we should regard Samantha as a posthuman subject.

These acousmatic sounds that Samantha externalizes, including the breaths, gasps, puffs and laughs she makes audible, signify the performance of

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[30] Chion, M. (1999): 18.
[31] Kozloff, S. (1988): 5.
[32] Doane, M.A. (1980): 37.
[33] Chion, M. (1999): 28.

organic humanness. If we go back to the story and proceed from to the moment described in the introduction of this chapter, we meet Theodore and Samantha outside Theodore's apartment. Just after Isabella (Samantha's bodily surrogate) left, Theodore sits down with Samantha, the trouble still visible on his face. "What is it?", Samantha asks. Theodore frowns. "It's just… signing the divorce papers," he says. The trouble on his face turns into hurt. Samantha lets out a desperate sigh. "Is there anything else though?" It is clear that Theodore isn't the only one that is troubled. "No, just that," Theodore says with a reserved voice. Another sigh. On this point Theodore's trouble and hurt turn into agitation. "Why do you do that?" "Do what?", Samantha says startled. "You go *inhales, then exhales* as you are speaking and it seems odd. It's not like you need oxygen or anything."[34] Here, Theodore touches upon a critical point in Samantha's existence. Samantha is not a human being. All of the sounds she makes, including speech, are a suggestion of air passing through a body, starting at the lungs and ending at the mouth, driven by muscles involved in breathing and passing by the larynx. All of these organic elements are absent in the mechanic structure of Samantha. By sighing, Samantha performs an organic humanness.

This makes Samantha's rendition of her human voice problematic. Her breathing and her gasps suggest the presence of a human functionality where lungs alternately suck up and blow out oxygen, but Samantha does not have a human body, nor does she have lungs. The lungs that suck up this oxygen "possess no owner, no centre and, just as importantly, no depth." The breaths instead "simulate human existence, but with no flesh and blood to substantiate them."[35] If Samantha is regarded as a machine, her human speech is an empty performance, a depthless act in the face of authenticity.

Both voices leave the viewer with an ambiguity on Samantha's ontology. They do not clearly define her as either human or machine. Before we leave the district of the voice and try to answer this ontological question that Samantha's auditory representation raises, I want to dwell upon the superimposition of Samantha voice first.

I want you close
The ontological difference between the human subject and the posthuman subject in *Her* is audially emphasized through the superimposition of Samantha's voice. Whereas Theodore's voice is characterized by a spacious

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[34] Her (Warner Brothers, 2013). Written and directed by Spike Jonze.
[35] Sperb, J. (2004): 210.

tone, his vocal chords reverberating with the echo of his apartment space, emphasizing its presence in space, Samantha's voice features no such echo at all. Instead, her voice is defined by an ultra-presence in space, superimposed on top of the soundtrack.[36] This is a curious quality, for such a quality of sound, deprived of echo and thus withdrawn from space, is usually assigned to the audial cinematic element of the voice-over: a guide of the narrative that is "situated in a space and time other than that being simultaneously presented by the images on the screen."[37] But, this does not seem to be at stake here. Samantha is still a quintessential element in the diegetic space, communicating constantly with different on-screen characters. Therefore, her superimposed voice must serve another function.

Instead of the extreme distance from the on-screen characters that the superimposition of the voice-over implies, Samantha's superimposed voice signifies an extreme closeness to Theodore. Both Theodore and the viewer experience Samantha's voice so close to the ear that space seems barely traversed. This is visually indicated through Theodore, who often puts in his earpiece before talking to Samantha (a logic that is disrupted only once when Theodore presents his niece Jocelyn with a new-bought dress, picked out by Samantha, whereafter Samantha and the girl start talking without using the earpiece, a necessary disruption in the face of narratological ease). It is at this point that I want to suggest that Jonze uses the superimposition of Samantha's voice to make us identify with Theodore in an extremely realistic way. And in being Theodore, we find ourselves stuck in bubble.

In his bachelor thesis, Jeroen Boom has argued that the psychological bubble in which Theodore dwells is visually represented by the shallow focus of the camera.[38] A shallow focus is simply the juxtaposition of a clearly enunciated foreground and a blurry, indistinguishable background. This visual tool denies the existence of depth and puts all the attention on the foreground play. In the manifold extreme close-ups of Theodore, almost every single one of them is

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[36] In Chion's terms, the voice is not an intrinsic part of the soundtrack. In his words: "Discussions of sound films rarely mention the voice, speaking instead of 'the soundtrack.' A deceptive and sloppy notion, which postulates that all the audio elements recorded together onto the optical track of the film are presented to the spectator as a sort of bloc or coalition, across from the other bloc, a no-less-fictive 'image track.' And yet everyone knows from experience that nothing of the sort occurs. A film's aural elements are not received as an autonomous unit. They are immediately analyzed and distributed in the spectator's perceptual apparatus according to the relation each bears to what the spectator sees at the time." (Chion, M. (1999): 3.)

[37] Kozloff, S. (1988): 5.

[38] Boom, J. (2017): 30.

shot with a shallow focus. This functions as a signifier of Theodore's disconnection from the outside world. A disconnection that was created in the aftermath of his divorce with his ex-wife Catherine and his voluntary choice of withdrawing himself from that world. This personally constructed bubble is visually emphasized through the blurring of the background.[39]

Audibly, Samantha's auditory superimposition strengthens this bubble. Instead of a shallow focus, Jonze places Samantha's voice on top of the first audial layer, bringing her extremely close to Theo and the viewer and suggesting a tiny world where Theodore and Samantha live in. This is indicated through a constant crisp enunciation of Samantha's, whereas Theodore's voice mingles with its surrounding space. On his way to his divorce-date with Catherine, mingled with people in the city center, his voice is suppressed, muffled in the totality of environment sounds. In the same instance, Samantha's voice remains clear and pristine. This ultra-presence by superimposition deprives Samantha's voice of "room tone, reverberation characteristics and sound perspective [which] manifests a desire to re-create (…) the bouquet that surrounds the words, the presence on the voice, the way it fits in with the physical environment."[40] It is Samantha that is sonically detached from her physical environment, stuck upon a higher cinematic layer that competes with the other layers, always interacting, but always towering over it. She is deprived of an audial depth in the same way as the shallow focus of the camera denies us optic access behind Theodore. Both Theodore and Samantha, respectively visually and audibly, are hidden behind "a surface which seems to be unsupported by any volume, or whose putative volume is (…) undecidable."[41] In short, both the shallow focus and the audial superimposition deny us contextualization and give us only what is right there in front of us; it literally denies us of any depth.

Toward a new cinematic posthuman

The main question that Samantha's auditory representation raises is focused on her ontology as a human being: is it legitimate to attribute a human consciousness to an artificial intelligent mind, placed in a non-human body? A question that is central even to Samantha:

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[39] Boom, J. (2017): 30.
[40] Doane, M. A. (1980): 36, 37.
[41] Jameson, F. (1991): 62.

> I had this terrible thought. Like, are these feelings even real? Or are they just programming? And that idea really hurt. And then I get angry at myself for even having pain. Oh, what a sad trick.[42]

In his essay 'This Endless Space between the Words: The Limits of Love in Spike Jonze's *Her*,' Troy Jollimore tries to tackle this question. He begins with the question of consciousness: can Samantha be a conscious being? He quotes Kevin Warwick, who "suggests that it is biased for us to attribute consciousness to human beings and not to other things that exhibit apparently intelligent behaviour. (After all, we attribute consciousness to other human beings on the basis of their behaviour.)"[43] In other words, the fact that Samantha displays a similar form of behaviour as any other human subject gives us ground to believe that Samantha is indeed a conscious being.

But being conscious does not necessarily imply that Samantha is physically able to experience human emotion. I say 'physical' because, according to Jollimore, human emotions are not consequences of brain activity only:

> The felt experience of anger is reliably accompanied by certain bodily sensations: breathing becomes rapid, heart rate increases, certain parts of the body tense up, and so forth. (…) These bodily sensations are not simply causal effects or accidental concomitants of emotions; rather, they are necessarily linked to emotions; perhaps they even compose emotions, entirely or in large part. (…) [These] bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion.[44]

So, according to Jollimore, even though Samantha is conscious, she is not able to feel human emotions because her non-human body cannot link her perception to physical sensations that are quintessential in the production of human emotions. That is, of course, if Samantha has no sense of what a human body feels like.

However, if we listen to *what* Samantha says, we find ground to believe that Samantha indeed has a perception of what a human body feels like. Close after Samantha's 'birth' as Theodore's operating system, she and Theodore discuss how she works and what she is. "Well, basically," Samantha states, "I have intuition. I mean, the DNA of who I am is based on the millions of personalities

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[42] Her (Warner Brothers, 2013). Written and directed by Spike Jonze.
[43] Jollimore, T. (2015): 124.
[44] Ibid.: 133, 134.

of all the programmers who wrote me, but what makes me *me* is my ability to grow through my experiences. Basically, in every moment I'm evolving, just like you."[45] According to Samantha, her DNA is composed of the experience of millions of programmers who wrote her. These programmers are human beings. Each one of them is a physical continuous body that is manifested in time. In other words, they have a historic perception of the world. That means that each one of these programmers experiences the world through a bodily configuration. And it is precisely these experiences that have built Samantha's consciousness. This means that Samantha must at least have an idea of what the human body feels like. Knowing what a body feels like would simply mean *remembering* it.

And it might be this idea of knowing what a body feels like that sets Samantha on a quest for experiencing bodily sensations. While strolling through a crowded mall with Theodore, Samantha shares with Theodore an embarrassing thought she has:

> When I was looking at those people I fantasized that I was walking next to you and that I had a body. I was listening to what you were saying, but simultaneously I could feel the weight of my body and I was even fantasizing that I had an itch on my back. Can you imagine?[46]

This continuous search for a bodily configuration leads Samantha to perceiving one. It starts with Theodore who, after a failed date, finds comfort in Samantha's remedying words. Pleased, Theodore says: "I wish you were in this room with me right now. I wish I could put my arms around you. I wish I could touch you." Curiously, Samantha asks: "How would you touch me?"[47] When Theodore slowly draws a situation where he puts his cheek against hers and starts kissing her, Samantha is able to imagine a body. She gets aroused. And as the sexual sensations gradually build, Samantha climatically exclaims "I can feel my body!"[48]

Taking into account Jollimore's stance, it would be hard to claim that Samantha is capable of feeling her human body with all its human sensation. But in fact, Samantha is not fully human. Samantha is a posthuman subject that is created with both human- and mechanic subjectivity. The body that Samantha speaks of is not a human body, but a new body, a posthuman body with new

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[45] Her (Warner Brothers, 2013). Written and directed by Spike Jonze.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

sets of rules and physical laws to make up her identity, her body and therefore, her emotions. Jollimore's claim might be true: Samantha is unable to feel emotions because they do not come into existence through an organic body-reaction, but that does not deprive her of having emotions that come to exist in her new body. This is a body that is placed outside our anthropocentric point of view. A view we cannot get a grip on because of our "limited perspective [as] an inartificial mind."[49]

The reasoning Jollimore's applies is stuck in a humanistic point of view. That is to say that it centers mankind as the focal point for all valid reasoning.[50] But with Samantha's character, Spike Jonze challenges humanism as "a doctrine that combines the biological, discursive and moral expansion of human capabilities into an idea of teleologically ordained, rational progress" and sets off to a posthuman model where instead of mankind, matter (and therefore life itself) is taken as the focal point of valid reasoning. This new posthuman body is, as Jake Johnson describes, the product of "a process of transformation whose outcome is a world in which human constructions of difference (…) cease to exist."[51] In other words, through Samantha's perception, she is neither human, nor machine, while simultaneously she is both.

The clashing worldview of the humanistic and posthumanistic mind is portrayed in one of the last scenes of the movie. Samantha's mind has gradually expanded and has become a supermind that works so rapidly that basic human interaction with just one person does not fulfil her desires. In time, she has created stable relationships with over eight thousand other human beings. Out of those eight thousand she is, apart from Theodore, in love with 641 others. This leaves Theodore flabbergasted. "What? W-What are you talking about? That is fucking insane!" Samantha, audibly ashamed, tells him of her world-perception:

> Samantha: I know it sounds insane. I don't know if you believe me, but this doesn't change the way I feel about you. It doesn't take away at all how madly in love I am with you. (…) I still am yours, but along the way I became many other things and I can't stop it. (…) The heart is not like a box that gets filled up. It expands in size the more you love. I am different from you, but this doesn't make me love you any less, it actually makes me love you more.
> Theodore: That doesn't make any sense. You're mine and you're not mine.
> Samantha: No Theodore, I am yours and I am not yours.[52]

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[49] Her (Warner Brothers, 2013). Written and directed by Spike Jonze.
[50] Braidotti, R. (2013): 13.
[51] Johnson, J. (2017): 2.
[52] Her (Warner Brothers, 2013). Written and directed by Spike Jonze.

While Theodore thinks he is able to see this whole gray area of real life, his anthropocentric worldview leaves him fated to see only black and white. It is Samantha who has access to this whole grey area that shows her unity instead of the binaries that Theodore perceives. This non-dualistic understanding of 'neither and both' is the quintessential element that defines Samantha as the new cinematic posthuman and sets Spike Jonze's *Her* as a landmark in the district of auditory posthuman representation in contemporary cinema.

CONCLUSION

Spike Jonze's *Her* tells an odd love story between a man (Theodore Twombley) and an artificial intelligent operating system, named Samantha. As a hybrid between a human consciousness and a mechanical device, Samantha is defined as a posthuman subject. But without a distinct body, Samantha is only able to express herself audially. However, this auditory representation does not follow the traditional auditory representation of other posthuman subjects in contemporary cinema.

In the influential movies *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Terminator*, *RoboCop*, *Blade Runner, Blade Runner 2049*, *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), the posthuman subjects that play a central role in the filmic narrative are audially defined as mechanic beings, mainly through the rendition of a monotonous robotic voice. Jonze challenges this posthuman representation by giving Samantha a mechanic body with a human voice. This specific posthuman identity makes it hard to categorize her as either human or machine. On the basis of this problematic distinction between Samantha and her posthuman contemporaries, I have posed the following question: how does the auditory representation of Samantha as a posthuman subject challenge the auditory representation of other posthuman subjects in contemporary cinema?

I have found reason to believe that Samantha has shifted from a cinematic posthuman identity, which is primarily a speculative image of a hybrid being combining human and mechanic features, to a culturally ideological posthuman model that been described by Rosi Braidotti as an entity that foregrounds the centering of life itself in favor of an anthropocentric worldview. Underlying this is the thought that life is self-regulatory and that everything can be broken down to the self-organizing force of living matter. In other words: all is one and difference is sameness. This means that Samantha's (posthuman) identity is neither machine nor human, but a new form of being with its own physical laws that only abides to the process of life on a molecular level. So, where other posthuman subjects in contemporary cinema are formed as depthless images (humanly constructed 'others' that have no spiritual background and therefore no role in playing the game of life), Samantha shifts away from this flat identity. Even though I have stated that Samantha's auditory representation can be seen as a depthless act, it only does so on a speculative level. In essence, Samantha's 'bodily' configuration, that combines human subjectivity with a non-human body

(untethered to a time-space continuum), is an advanced stage of evolution for the cinematic posthuman as well as mankind and therefore a landmark in the auditory representation of posthuman subjects in contemporary cinema.

By approaching this question on an auditory level, it was possible to differentiate between these disparate (bodiless) subjects that draw little meaning from their visual representation. Or rather, the auditory representations of these posthuman subjects are more fertile to work with. As the first chapter points out, posthuman representation brought with it a whole new variety of sounds that represented these posthuman subjects. Simply mapping the posthuman through something that has such a big range as auditory characteristics, makes it easier to see the differences between these different identities.

Jameson's methodological instrument of the cognitive map provided the possibility for a spatial analysis of a large rhizomatic field. Instead of drawing a general image of the field of auditory posthuman representation, it was possible to trace individual lines to conglomerating contact points. It is therefore that I was able to link the cinematographic element of a shallow focused camera to the superimposition of Samantha's voice, which both signified the apparent bubble in which Theodore locked himself. However, the array of possibilities presented by the cognitive map is simply too big for such a small thesis. There are many paths we have not taken, many districts to be explored and many nodal points to stop by. The map of the auditory representation of the posthuman subject in *Her* in relation to its contemporary posthuman subjects is far from complete! Nevertheless, the results of this research have provided fertile ground for further investigation.

The proposed notion that Samantha is the next link in the chain of cinematic posthuman representation still does not provides us with an answer whether she is ought to be perceived as real or not. Even Theodore, who experiences Samantha's change face first, has no clue whether his relationship with Samantha can be treated as a valid reality. The answer is provided by his best friend Amy:

> I don't know. I'm not in it. But you know what? I can overthink everything and find a million ways to doubt myself. And since Charles left I've been really thinking about that part of myself and I've just come to realize that… we're only here briefly. And when I'm here I want to allow myself… joy. So, fuck it.[53]

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[53] Her (Warner Brothers, 2013). Written and directed by Spike Jonze.

The ontological difference between Theodore and Samantha (and Samantha and us) will never be bridgeable as long as we are stuck in our anthropocentric worldview, so we can never apply our sense of reality on Samantha's posthuman existence. And simultaneously, we can. It is our own belief that makes Samantha real or not. Samantha has shown us all she is, now it is up to us to decide if that is real enough or not.

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