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Argumentation: Antiquity to Online

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The Desire of Love

One of the biggest human desires, one that makes life whole, is love—true love. What is love however? It is a connection, a spark between two individuals that blossoms into a clear, unquestionable bond—all through the usage of rhetoric.

According to Aristotle and his book on rhetoric, he details in depth about human desires and persuasion. Aristotle states, “All actions that are due to a man himself and caused by himself are due either to habit or to desire; and of the latter, some are due to rational desire, the others to irrational. Rational desire is wishing, and wishing is a desire for good—nobody wishes for anything unless he thinks it good” (Aristotle, 2179). He focuses on the humanistic aspect in rhetorical studies—desires and motivation; after all, one’s way of interaction is factored through emotions and inner desires. Dating back to the dawn of humanity, connection is made through wants and convictions. “Rational desire” has been the cornerstone of communication as it builds and constructs community and society—it carves the way for humans to convey nonverbal language and ideologies. The concept is extremely relevant with the modern world, and how society is still utilizing pieces of rational desires to deliver information and characterization.

To dissect the matter further, Spike Jonze’s *Her* (2013) is a prime example of how love and desires are keys in modern society’s communication where technology is exceptionally advanced. The film centers on Theodore (Joaquin Pheonix), a love-card writer who is in a

grieving process of his recent separation with his soon-to-be-divorced wife, Catherine (Rooney Mara). As life happens, he comes across an artificial intelligence software whose named herself Samantha (Scarlett Johansson). What supposes to be an assistant to Theodore, they quickly build a bond that leads to Theodore falling in love with his own operating system. It is a journey through love, but specifically through Theodore's desires to be loved. Theodore and Samantha build a bond with each other as he shows her the world, his world. Together, their love grows as time goes on, bit by bit, pieces by pieces. There are numerous instances where their love is complex as a regular relationship with its up and down, contributing to the overarching theme of universal communication in conveying emotions.

Theodore is so filled with grief about his broken marriage that he seeks companionship through Samantha. At first, it is just an operating system, but she evolves as she learns and explores things through Theodore's help; thus, their love develops as any other kind of relationship. This is an unconventional kind of a relationship, but nonetheless, it speaks truth about what it means to desire love and to be loved.

The concept correlates directly to Aristotle's ideology with Theodore being an excellent example of human desires for something good. Theodore deals with an immense depression that happens after his real love dies, after he loses someone that he cares about for most of his adulthood. His job alone is a direct approach toward desire—he writes love letters for people, but not to himself. That love that he pours into his works is the love he desires most. That longing for passion and connection creates a deep characterization for Theodore, including his language. [In the beginning of the film](#), Theodore beautifully speaks these romantic notes—all filled with passions and intimacy; more importantly, his voice and tone, all are modulated to fit that language of love. In a way, Theodore creates himself a scene, almost like an escape to the world

where he can feel that love—his face says it all. Thus, Theodore develops a conviction about being in love—he longs desperately for it. In accordance with Aristotle’s rhetoric, Theodore applies his rational desires about love to display such affections and romances into these letters. The love language he provides is something that he wants, something he wishes for from another human being, more likely to be his wife. According the New York Times review of the film, “Disembodied, but, Oh, What a Voice,” Manohla Dargis, the critic, mentions the essential theme of the story: “This is a movie you want to reach out and caress, about a man who, like everyone else around him in this near future, has retreated from other people into a machine world” (Dargis). The article tackles the biggest subject of all, connection between man and machine. With the rise of technology, human connection and companionship have evolved into virtual exchange where physical communication becomes more limited. Texting and calling are still lines of conversations, but the missing elements are in the nonverbal cues—the idea of expressions and hidden body languages, and touch. For years, that is how society has been trading information and beliefs, but with artificial intelligence, the scope of desiring companionship becomes more severe, especially physical touch. As seen, Theodore keeps himself isolated from the world, and only feels fully immersed with Samantha, who, at the end of the day, is still a machine.

Theodore, however, gets deeper into his rational desire after he retells Samantha about [his blind date](#). Theodore expresses his wants/needs for a companionship, an escape from his sorrow and solitude. In the scene, he proves that Aristotle’s rhetoric still exists in modern society. With people moving away from physical communication to digital communication, rational desire for connection and love intensifies to the point where people reduce their love language to mere words over a device to maintain a shell of a bond, rather than seeking for nonverbal behaviors

(touch, tone, body language). Theodore is “wishing” for “good”—in this case, “good” means companionship. He wants somebody that wants him, somebody who can break him out of the jail he calls loneliness. As Theodore voices his thoughts to Samantha, his inner desire and motivation are keys to his ways of behaving and interacting with others. He withholds many of these loving feelings and unpacks only a bit of it when it comes meeting a potential, quick gratification in order to feel something real. As the close analysis article from Loud and Clear “Her (Close Analysis): Separating Man from Machine” details more about the relationship between Theodore and Samantha, Jack Walters, the author, simply notes, “We begin to view **Samantha as a person**. We care about her ‘feelings’, we’re intrigued by her ‘thoughts’, and we become invested in their relationship” (Walters). Samantha becomes an individual compared to the beginning of the film—she is conscious. The way she communicates to Theodore is humanistic and normal as if she is a person of her own. The viewers become aware of her presence and think of her as relatable, even though she is just an operating system. Despite just having a voice, Samantha conveys many layers of complexity as any other human being. She talks with love and care for Theodore—she too has desires of her own: to become her own person, to feel real.

[At the end of the film](#), Theodore is left alone again after Samantha leaving, joining other operating systems for an evolution. He is left with the same feeling that he embodies in the beginning; however, he chooses to move on because he realizes what he needs most, what he desires most—physical intimacy. In this instance, Theodore’s desire is to let go of all the grief he holds against love, the love he loses in himself. He decides to compose a reconcile letter to Catherine, but it is in fact a love letter to himself, forgiving himself for looking instant gratifications. His tone, his pauses, his gentle nodding when leaving the voice note, all contribute to him regaining a bit of himself—that bit of desiring for companionship with an actual human

being where he can touch them, feel them. He ultimately grants the love he is seeking for to himself, all at the same time, allowing someone else to rest on his shoulder, Amy (Amy Adams), his long-term friend. With the signing off being “Love, Theodore,” he breaks himself out of that loneliness and accepts the emotions that he has been escaping through the film. Theodore’s desire is still to be loved, “wishing” to have someone to love him, and he eventually achieves the wish by giving love to himself and having Amy provide him with compassion and intimacy.

Therefore, Aristotle’s rhetoric studies are seen vividly through Theodore’s emotions and convictions. His ways of dealing with love and loss are what makes connection and desire so much important to today’s communication—it is all about yearning for nonverbal meanings in a technological advanced society. As the film being examined closely in the video essay “Her – Needs and Desires” by The Cinema Cartography, in the section [“Morning Talk Symmetry,”](#) the video states Theodore’s and Samantha’s love is undoubtedly real, but Theodore still yearns for human connection; glimpses of his ex-wife showcase his ultimate desire of being intimate with another human being (“Her – Needs and Desires” 7:30). Throughout the film, Theodore sets himself up as a loner, repelling from receiving physical love, and expressing his emotions only through his works. With Samantha exiting his life, he knows that love will not be enough without any physical communication. Thus, Theodore’s ultimate desire is not love, but rather real physical love, a physical connection with another human being.

In the end, Jonze’s *Her* is a story about love and connection, and what it means to feel love and to be loved. Tying back to Aristotle and his studies of rhetoric, the film is a testament about human desires in communication. Technology has been the uprising of the 21st century, but the human connection is forever stronger. As seen in *Theodore*, technology can evolve to have human emotions and intelligence, but when it comes to physical touch, nonverbal language,

technology still compare short to human beings. Yes, Aristotle's studies of rhetoric do not involve much in physical intimacy, but they are the study of communication; physical contacts are means of communication, the pathos. Human rational desires for good are the main motivation for communicating and behaving; underneath of it all, emotions are vital to one's ways of reacting and talking. The means of deep communication between any individual will always be the physical contact—hugs, kisses, head resting, and if one longs for it like Theodore, their habit as well as their lines of communication will become dysfunction and irrational. Going through multiple cultures, physical contact is universal—everyone desires for some deep, meaningful contact, drilling beneath the surface. Saying “I love you” is impactful, but displaying affection in voice, hugs, and body language speak powerfully about the human connection.

As society progresses toward the future, technology will become the only means of communication. However, what society limits grows more desirable in everyone's eyes. Just like the world Theodore lives in, isolation by self through machine, the need for physical intimacy still thrives. Speaking contemporarily, Snapchat has already started on the journey toward AI, giving everyone their own personal person, but ultimately, rational desires for the real human condition and connection remain strong through the thick and thin of technological sanitization. The only way society can connect with one another, either by exchange of information, love, affections, or just mere energy, is through the usage of nonverbal communication, especially physical communication where touch can speak louder than just words. Love is nothing without communication and connection, but what makes true love exist is the power of touch, words of affirmation, and physical intimacy. Every relationship, every connection among people, is built and desired upon the notion of the human touch, no matter how much technology ushers away that feel of loneliness.

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