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Joaquin Phoenix is a lonely, introverted man looking for love in a world where the lines between personal interaction and intimacy are further blurred by an artificially intelligent operating system. PHOTO BY WARNER BROS.

Connecting with 'Her'

OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY JUDGE DARLEEN ORTEGA



Joaquin Phoenix navigates technology in search for love

The subtle trick that opens "Her" gently prepares you for the complex emotional terrain ahead. Joaquin Phoenix thoughtfully reflects to a loved one, in a tone of utter sincerity, about the meaning of their long relationship. Within successive

beats, however, we learn of the relationship's 50-year duration, then that his perspective is female, and then we see a computer producing what he intones into handwritten form. A voice answers a nearby phone -- "beautifulhandwrittenletters.com -- please hold" -- and the camera pans out to several others in a softly-lit office, intoning similarly personal letters.

With this, writer-director Spike Jones deftly signals that the film resides in a world of the not-too-distant future, in which the lines between genuine personal interaction and mechanized communication have further blurred the indicia of intimacy beyond the present world of "sexting" and Twitter and status updates.

What he also conveys is that the film is a safe context for exploring the most existential of questions. What makes communication authentic? Whose voice is speaking when words of appreciation and long-

ing are expressed, in any context? How much must one risk in order to achieve real intimacy?

Phoenix's latter-day Cyrano de Bergerac, the melancholy Theodore Twombly, doesn't display in real life the effusiveness he lavishes on behalf of people he has never met. He lives alone in a future Los Angeles in which quiet trains seem to have overtaken cars and everyone is wearing button-up shirts and high-waisted pants and is murmuring to his or her voice-activated personal device.

Having sunk into isolation since separating from his wife (who we see often in flashbacks), it appears that Theodore's human contact largely consists of anonymous (and creepy) phone sex encounters. Finally, intrigued by a soft-focus advertisement for the world's "first artificially intelligent operating system," Theodore

continued ▼ on page 15