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I Love Dick

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I Love Dick

Abstract

This is a film review of *I Love Dick* (2017), directed by Jill Soloway.

Keywords

New Religious Movements, Feminism

Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



I Love Dick (2017), dir. Jill Soloway

I chose to review *I Love Dick* because it looked like a film about a religious “cult.” Stereotypically, such films show some charismatic guru attracting a group of followers and exploiting them for his or her own purposes. The representation of New Religious Movements, often called religious cults, is an interesting topic within religion and film studies for what it tells us about how we see such movement, but also for what they tell us about religion and its representation more broadly considered. But, *I Love Dick* turned out to be an unusual representation of such religious movements. Dick Jarrett is a famous artist who runs an Institute for artists and scholars in Marfa, Texas. He is charismatic, but he has no interest in exploiting those who follow him. Most NRM leaders are depicted as the smarmy type and it is easy for the audience to see how they exploit their

followers. But, Dick Jarret is not smarmy and does not exploit those who make him their guru. As a result, this is a tricky role to play, and Kevin Bacon is superb in the role.

I Love Dick is a comedy and a hilarious one at that. But it has a serious side as well. The women of the Institute, led by indie filmmaker, Chris Kraus (played wonderfully by Kathryn Hahn), all seem to fall in love with Dick. Chris begins by writing Dick a love letter (several letters, actually). She is followed by the other women of the Institute, and through those letters to Dick, they learn a good deal about themselves. The insights the women have as they write to Dick concern how they see themselves in the world. How do they navigate a world that is male dominated? How do they navigate their sexuality in a world where they are not allowed to be their sexual selves? How do they pursue careers? How do they get credit for their work in a world where the work of women is undervalued? In some important sense Dick is a savior, not because he adopts the role, but because he is the object of women who are making an effort to understand themselves. In this sense the women exploit Dick, rather than the other way around. This twist makes the movie much more interesting than your usual “cult” film. The press notes identify the film as a feminist film, and it is, insofar as the women of Marfa explore themselves through their gaze on Dick. The seriousness of the film is very powerful, so it is an advantage that we get to laugh throughout. (A special shout out to Roberta Colindrez who is just funny as can be.) We are not hammered over the head by a lecture on feminism. But, then, this is the beauty of stories over lectures and sermons.

It turns out that the movie I saw at Sundance is actually three of the early episodes of a television series. It ended abruptly, as there are more episodes to follow. The premiere is scheduled for Friday, May 12, 2017 on Amazon Prime Video. I'm glad that I have Amazon Prime, so I can follow the rest of the story.