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Aniara

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Aniara

Abstract

This is a film review of *Aniara* (2018), directed by Pella Kågerman and Hugo Lilja.



***Aniara* (2018), directed by Pella Kågerman and Hugo Lilja**

Aniara, at its core, is about creating meaning in order to provide control and comfort. The film focuses on MR, who works on the space ship *Aniara* bringing passengers from Earth to Mars. Her job is in Mima hall, which uses the computer program, Mima, to bring its users pleasurable scenarios revolving around how Earth used to be. People have destroyed Earth. Our hope is in Mars. Our look inside the Mima program shows Earth as a place of natural beauty, as it once was. Participants are surrounded by forests, mountains, and lakes. Mima uses the unconscious thoughts of the people using it to create the ideal scenarios for them. Part way through their routine voyage to Mars, the ship is forced off course by an asteroid, loses all of its fuel, and begins to drift off course with no way to get back.

At the beginning of the journey to Mars, almost no passengers are interested when MR is trying to convince them to enter Mima hall. As passengers begin to discover that there is no way of getting back on course, increasing numbers come to experience the natural beauty of Earth through Mima. Retreating to a virtual world has become a mode of spiritual escapism. The meaning of their lives prior to this was the myth of a better life on Mars. The myth of a better life on Mars is replaced with the possibility of peace through Mima hall.

After a few months adrift, Mima begins communicating with MR, saying that it can no longer handle the emotional baggage that so many humans bring in. MR attempts to prevent the increasing number of people from exploiting Mima and fails. Soon Mima self destructs and Mima hall is left in ashes. Small communities start to gather, mourning the loss of Mima hall, their means of escape. In the space that was once Mima hall, these communities hold rituals mourning Mima's loss but also creating a new sense of meaning for them and their journey through space. The rituals are physical, focusing on surrounding bodies and the shift in the physical space of Mima hall. Instead of bodies lying lethargically, experiencing how earth once was, the space of Mima hall has become a space of active bodies experiencing bodies.

The film tracks the transformation of meaning through changes in physical space. First, there is hope for a better life on Mars. This is replaced by the possibility of escaping their terrible circumstances they are in through the images of Mima Hall. What brings meaning to the passengers is then further abstracted after Mima Hall's destruction. While there is no overtly stated meaning for their rituals, it is clearly creating a purpose for the community. Each new mode of meaning making is a response that tries to reclaim control of a certain space (or way of life) that the passengers once felt they had. They once had control over the Earth, but after its destruction they

attempt to retake control by moving to Mars. They had control over their experiences in Mima hall, and they then try to reclaim this space after Mima's destruction.

In every new attempt to retake control, the means of creating meaning become more abstract. The first round of meaning creation in the film is concrete and material. Earth can no longer sustain life, so humans must move to Mars to continue to exist. There is a clear object that people are moving towards. When the ship goes off course, meaning becomes further abstracted from material existence. Now, it becomes about finding pleasurable stimuli, not a concrete place. Once Mima is destroyed meaning comes through ritual. Consequently, what actions mean becomes increasingly ambiguous and looks more like things we would deem religious.

After twenty-five years of floating through space, MR and the few who are left are once again seen in Mima hall, praying for the return of light. While we were given some hope that the people of Aniara could continue to educate their children and start a small civilization, by the end of the film we are only left with spectres of the Aniari and its passengers. Momentary creations of meaning may have temporarily helped, but inevitably all the members perish.