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Love Me

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Love Me* (2024), directed by Sam Zuchero and Andy Zuchero.

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Author Notes

John Lyden is the Department Chair and Blizek Professor of Religious Studies at University of Nebraska Omaha. He has been the Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film since 2011. He is the author of Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals (NYU Press), and the editor of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Film and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservativism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars (Wipf and Stock 2018).

Love Me (2024), dir. Sam Zuchero and Andy Zuchero

On a future Earth, a "smart buoy" that has been frozen in the ocean thaws out, and is contacted by a satellite that was launched by the last humans before our species became extinct. With no humans to learn from, they must learn from each other, and in the process, they begin to approximate humanity. Whether AI can actually think or feel is beside the point: this is a meditation on what it means to be human, to be an individual, and to love another.

The satellite has been programmed to search for life forms, so the buoy decides to impersonate a life form—a feat accomplished through its rapid search of the internet reservoir that the satellite carries, including especially YouTube videos. As a result, the buoy chooses to model "herself" on Deja (Kristin Stewart), an online influencer who lives with fiancé Liam (Steven Yeun), and the buoy takes the name "Me." She names the satellite "Iam," so that each of them is identified as a self, and each is then drawn to the other as the only other "being" that either can encounter.

Me creates avatars for each of them in a virtual apartment that mirrors that of Deja and Liam, although Iam does not realize this is just a replication of another reality. They endlessly parrot a video in which they make Blue Apron quesadillas for "date night 2.0" to the point that it becomes stale, after which they embark on a quest to discover what it means to be alive, to feel, and to love. They try to laugh, and to kiss; but everything seems artificial. Of course, it may be that they cannot actually "feel" anything; they are robots, they have no corporeal physical interaction, and they have no idea what they are trying to approximate. With no remaining humans to teach them, they seem to want to have these experiences of authenticity, but they do not know how to do so. These scenes are hilarious as well as painfully poignant, perhaps because these representations are so similar to the interactions of contemporary humans—following a misguided path to identity in social media tropes, which essentially reduce their lives to superficial stereotypes without substance or depth.

And yet these two computers begin to move towards real love; Me becomes insecure, fearing that Iam will not love her for herself, although he reassures her that he does. Ultimately, they learn that they must accept their *own* selves, and that of the other, as they actually *are*—rather than trying to replicate something they found on the internet. This is a good message for humans, and as Kristin Stewart said after the screening, she found that the roles they portrayed modeled what an *honest* relationship should be—an accomplishment for a computer, to be sure, but also something humans desperately desire as well.