

Moon

(Jones, 2009, UK)

Component 1: Varieties of Film and Film-Making (AL) C
Component 2: European Film

The Contexts of the Film

Institutional: Moon achieved recognition for being an extremely engaging low budget Science Fiction film. The film was made on a budget of \$5 million, it won a BAFTA for the outstanding contribution of director, writer and producer Duncan Jones. For an independent film it had quite a box office success through bringing in almost \$10 million worldwide.

Historical: Moon plays homages to Science Fiction films of the 70s and 80s such as Alien (1979) and Outlands (1981). These films were influenced by Science Fiction literature from writers such as Phillip K Dick; they focus on the human element of space travel. Jones highlights how these films pose the question 'how do people maintain their humanity by living in space.'

Political: Capitalism – dominance of large corporations, motivated by profit. The company Sam works for is responsible for his cloning, this shows they put their own profit above the welfare of their people. It represents these big companies as immoral and greedy. Also noteworthy is the seemingly lack of government, we are introduced to Lunar Industries and how they helped to solve the energy crisis, the film doesn't represent a government or political leader, this could link to the ideology that in the future there is no democracy and the people in power will be the ones with the most money.

Themes

A.I
Capitalism
Cloning
Dystopian
Homage
Isolation

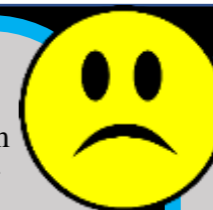
Production: Kevin Spacey was the voice of Gerty, he agreed to voice the machine only if he liked the finished film. Luckily he loved the film and recorded his part immediately.

Technological: There are two main landscapes within the film, the moon base landscape and the lunar landscape. Jones didn't want to use location shots; therefore, the set was built on two sound stages. The exterior was a 30' x 40' piece of set made to look like the surface of the moon. The filming techniques used were very retro to keep within that theme.

The voice of Gerty pays homage to the voice of HAL 9000 from 2001: A Space Odyssey. In an interview with Wired Jones stated he wanted a "delicate balance" between "taking what we loved from those films and reinventing them in a creative and hopefully original way and avoiding copying things outright."

Aesthetics: The film embodies the retro look of classic Science Fiction films. This has been created through using model work over digital effects. Bill Pearson, the supervising model worker on the film Alien, worked alongside Jones on the models. Jones' main influences for the look of the film were the Science Fiction films of the 1970s and 80s including 2001: A Space Odyssey, Outland and Silent Running.

Sam Rockwell has been praised for his performance as he had to act alone for the majority of the film. This was particularly challenging as Rockwell is trained in the Meisner technique which relies on reactions of other actors to improvise from.



Narrative: Moon follows a linear narrative; this illustrates the relentless routine that Sam has had to endure for three years. The linear narrative also helps to show Sam's physical decline over time. The narrative is dystopian meaning it presents a nightmare world; the world is in danger as it is lacking natural energy.

The Science Fiction sub-genre that the film adheres to is the 'space narrative', apart from the opening shots and the video calls the film is set in space. It conforms to the conventional space narrative through being set on a space craft that is owned by a big corporation, there is also an imminent threat of death which is a common convention. It challenges the traditional space narrative by having no external threat from another species or the threat of the planet about to be destroyed. Instead the threat comes from the corporation themselves, the people who sent him on the mission are the ones threatening to destroy the Sam clones.

The ending does not have a comfortable resolution which fits with the dystopian narrative that there are no happy endings. The reaction to Sam is hinted at but we don't know what awaits him back on earth or the fate of Lunar Industries.

Ideology

Moon offers an interesting perspective on A.I and clones. Every three years a new clone is woken up and given a false consciousness, it believes it is the real Sam Bell in order to fulfill its duties. The ideology presented here is that man uses technology to fulfil a purpose despite the moral or ethical implications. It raises the argument of what it means to be human; if the clones believe they are human and experience human memories and emotions then what really separates them from us. As another Sam awakes it highlights the relentless cycle of clone awakening, along with the ongoing repetition of the 'lie' told to Sam.

Science Fiction Themes and Moon

Isolation: Sam is on the moon for three years; his only company is a robot; at the beginning of the film he is told that communication to earth is also broken making him completely isolated. Even his video messages are one sided, they are recordings with no opportunity for interaction.

Deviant A.I: A.I. is designed to bring a utopian world whereby life is easier for humans as a result of the machine doing the work for us. The notion of a deviant A.I transforms this into a dystopian narrative, the technology designed to help you ends up turning on you. Gerty tells Sam that he is there to serve him and to make him happy which supports this idea. However, Gerty also stops Sam from going outside, he holds secret video conversations with earth which leads us to believe he is deviant. At the beginning we get the impression that he is controlling Sam rather than helping him. However, Moon then subverts this as Gerty helps Sam to escape at the end and lets him wipe his memory. Again challenging our perception of who is good and who is bad.

Corporate control over character and situation: Sam works for Lunar Industries; they are represented as putting money over people and displaying questionable ethics. They have controlled Sam by replicating him hundreds of times in order for him to carry out their work.

Clones: The clones form a human relationship making us engage emotionally with the Sam's. This makes us distrust the corporation and want the clones to win the moral battle. The spectator is positioned to side with the clones over the humans.

Technology: The advancement of technology has allowed Lunar Industries to harvest the moon and to clone a human being. Both of these are not too far away from what technology can currently do in the real world.

Xenophobia – The notion of fear of the other is hinted at with the ending of the film. As Sam returns from space we hear radio announcements as he is described as 'an illegal immigrant'. This links to current society and immigration with people fearing things that they do not understand. The ending implies that Sam is the threat as he is the clone and the unknown entity entering earth's atmosphere.

Opening Scene

On screen text appears asking ‘Where are we now?’ this immediately creates ambiguity and enigma; it gets the spectator questioning where this is taking place. The film opens with a corporate video from Lunar Industries. Montage editing displays disturbing scenes of the world in crisis with pollution, food shortages and no resources. The voice over, a male American in a calm almost robotic tone, tells us “There was a time when energy was a dirty word.” The footage then changes to a series of establishing shots depicting positive landscapes. The voiceover explains to us that Lunar Industries harvest helium 3 to supply energy to 70% of the planet. The video cuts to close up images of smiling children from different countries, reinforcing the good that has been done. Using the corporate video as a narrative device establishes the plot of the film from the exposition. It also shows the Capitalist power of this huge company and the impact it has had on the earth.

The film cuts to a close up of Sam’s feet running on a treadmill, this has the connotation of him not going anywhere. The non-diegetic piano music changes from being calming and positive to going slightly off-key which creates an ominous tone for the introduction of Sam. The camera tilts up to reveal Sam, he has long hair and a beard. This is the trope of the ‘shipwrecked/abandoned voyager’, his disheveled appearance also tells us he has no one around him so he does not need to worry about his appearance. His t-shirt has the slogan ‘Wake me up when it is quitting time’, this is a ironic nod to the life of the clones who we will meet later. As the camera cuts to an extreme long shot of Sam running Gerty goes past, filling the screen and obscuring our view of Sam. This could connote the control he has over the base and over Sam himself. The camera cuts to the exterior of the base as we watch Same through the window, the camera pans across to show the vast expanse of space which emphasises Sam’s isolation. On screen text appears to anchor the scene ‘Mining Base Sarang, Crew: 1, Contract: 3 year.’ Wide shots are then displayed showing the empty landscape of the moon reinforcing that 3 years is a long time to be alone there.



Sam 1’s Video Call Home

A low wide angle shows the lunar buggy coming into view, a robotic voice is heard saying ‘signal re-established’. The camera cuts to inside the lunar buggy, Sam 1 is visually deteriorating, his t-shirt is covered in dirt and blood and he is sweating and pale. The camera changes from being alongside him to a front shot of him. As he opens the video screen the spectator is positioned next to him, we see what he sees on the screen. The non-diegetic music is dramatic and dangerous, we can tell something bad is about to happen. Sam’s breathing is amplified to show us how tense he is. A young woman appears on the screen, Sam 1 says “I am trying to reach Tess Bell” and the young woman replies with “I am sorry she passed away some years ago”. The camera cuts to the front view of Sam, his face is lit by the moonlight creating a shadow behind him, the frame creates a melancholic visual. A non-diegetic piano song starts to play softly as Sam absorbs the news, there is also the constant beeping of the machinery.

As Sam realises he is talking to his daughter the camera cuts between him and the screen, allowing the spectator to absorb the news as well. Sam asks Eve “How did Mummy die sweetheart? How did Mummy die?” The use of the word Mummy shows he still sees her as his little girl and has no understanding of the fact time has passed, this creates an emotional response in the spectator that Sam is unaware of what has happened. As we hear the real Sam off screen of the video Sam 1 shuts the video call off. The realization that the real Sam is at home is shocking to the spectator. Sam 1 takes his hat off and says the line “I want to go home”, the non-diegetic music peaks as we realise that he does not have a home. He is almost fully immersed in shadows at this point showing the literal and figurative meaning of being left in the dark. Sam puts his hand to his head and cries, he starts hitting the seat in frustration. The camera leaves him at this point to show an exterior wide shot of the buggy, it allows the spectator to see just how alone and isolated he is which adds to the tragedy of the situation. As we view this shot the sound of Sam’s crying can still be heard with the emotive music creating a heartbreaking view of his complete abandonment.



Sam 2 Leaves Sam 1

The setting for this scene is in the lunar buggy as Sam 2 prepares to leave Sam 1 in the crash site. The two characters are frames in a mid-two shot, this angle shows the bond that has developed between the two characters, However, in the near center of the frame part of the lunar buggy creates a divide between them. This visual barrier could connote the fact that neither are allowed to survive together, there is always something in between them. The scene is lit with a ghostly white light from the moon, this light enhances Sam 1’s pale features making him look ghostly and not long for the world. Sam 1’s body language shows his weakness, he has his head leaned back against the glass and his body is slouched against the door, they are both wearing the same space outfit making them even more identical.

There is only diegetic sound at this point, the two Sam’s discuss a memory of their wife. The emotion of the moment is heightened, as they both speak the line “She was going back to Ireland” it shows they have a shared memory of her but the spectator knows they are not discussing their actual memories of her, the memory of her has been implanted in them. This makes the conversation even more poignant. As Sam 2 continues to tell the story about their wife he starts by saying ‘You’, “You knew you had to take the chance.” However, as he reminisces the camera cuts to a close up of his face and he starts using ‘I’ as the personal pronoun, “I asked her if she wanted to get an ice cream.” This shows he is getting more involved in the memory and re-living it himself. As Sam 1 loses consciousness, Sam 2 places the helmet over his head, the non-diegetic piano music starts up to enhance the sadness of the scene.

A wide shot is used as Sam 2 carries Sam 1 to the crash site in slow motion, the lunar buggy is shown in the background, a reminder of why they are there and why they are disposable. As Sam 2 leaves the scene the camera cuts to a close up of him, he put on his sunglasses to cover his emotions. This reminds the spectator of the humanity that the clones are capable of. Inside the base the camera zooms into the rescue countdown screen, highlighting the real threat is imminent.

Assessment Question:

How useful has an ideological critical approach been in understanding the narrative of Moon?

Assessment Question:

Explore how the themes and conventions of Science Fiction give us a better understanding of the films’ ideology