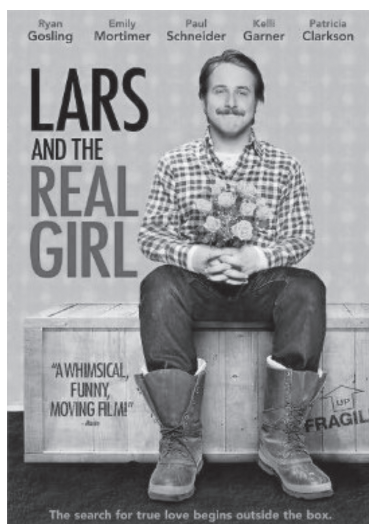


Film Review



Lars and the Real Girl

Directed by Craig Gillespie

Reviewed by Neil Hucker

When I first saw this film title and read a brief review I was cautious. I thought maybe this was just a new soft porn take on men and blow up dolls! I put off even considering seeing it, until a friend recommended it. To my great surprise, it turned out to be a thoroughly enjoyable film without any of the recent postmodernist darkness and pessimism that frequently accompanies films.

It also happened to be one of the most psychodramatic films I have seen.

I will not go into great detail about the plot because that would spoil the poignant surprises that await the viewer. Moreno explored the possibilities of undertaking psychodrama out in the community, in the factory and in the home. He developed the psychodramatic theatre space with auxiliary actors to make the therapeutic work larger than real life.

This film in total can be seen as taking the format of a psychodrama session but the theatre and stage is the community. Lars (Ryan Gosling), the protagonist, is assisted to work through his profound relationship difficulties under the guidance of a psychologically-minded family doctor, who is the director. With the family and the townspeople providing beautifully adapted auxiliary ego support, Lars is allowed to follow his own creative and spontaneous warm up.

From an extremely underdeveloped social role repertoire at the beginning of the film, Lars' social roles and spontaneity emerge and progress. All players in his drama develop their own empathy, tolerance and understanding as Lars moves from coping by withdrawal to moving towards others and allowing them to engage with him.

In reality, I think there would be more community antagonism and derision of Lars' particular social roles than the film reveals. Nevertheless, this film does highlight the value of a community behaving like an ideal psychodrama group with love, safety and respect for social healing and social atom repair. The apparent healing of a delusional psychotic disorder in Lars may draw some clinical criticism but the symptomatic resolution is well within the boundaries of what is reported in psychiatric clinical practice.

Overall I found the film enjoyable and very instructive, and recommend it to be seen. It is a lovely portrayal of a psychodrama being produced naturally out in the community. The film reminds me of J.L. Moreno's dictum in *Who Shall Survive?* (1934), that psychodrama can have no greater goal than to be therapy for the whole community.