

Here (2024), by Robert Zemeckis³⁶⁰

Elena Velilla Gonzalvo³⁶¹

Robert Zemeckis's *Here* (2024) presents an ambitious cinematic experiment that transforms a single patch of land into the protagonist of a sweeping temporal journey. Based on Richard McGuire's 2014 graphic novel, the film abandons traditional narrative structure in favor of a bold spatial approach: it follows one specific location from prehistoric times to the present day, revealing the many lives that briefly intersect with this unchanging geographical point. This unorthodox narrative framework challenges conventional cinematic storytelling, shifting focus away from individual characters and instead treating space itself as the true protagonist.

Zemeckis implements this concept through split-screen techniques that allow viewers to witness different historical periods simultaneously. We see dinosaurs roaming around the same area where a 1950s family will later host a barbecue, or Indigenous Lenni-Lenape inhabitants moving through the space that will eventually be a colonial estate. This visual approach effectively creates what spatial theorist Doreen Massey might call a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (2005), depicting places not as static entities but as processes constantly being made and remade through social relations and historical forces. The result is a layered, almost palimpsestic representation of space, where different eras coexist on-screen, mirroring the way places are shaped by historical accumulation. The film's central focus becomes a house constructed at the turn of the 20th century, serving as an anchor point for much of the narrative. Through this structure, we witness multiple inhabitants: from aviation enthusiast John Harter and his wife during the Spanish flu era to bohemian inventor Lee Beekman and his pin-up model wife during World War II, and finally to the multi-generational Young family in the post-war decades. Each family's experiences demonstrate how spaces accumulate meaning through human activity, transforming mere locations into repositories of memory and emotion. The film subtly contrasts the

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³⁶¹ **CONTACT** Elena Velilla Gonzalvo <761496@unizar.es>

architectural permanence of the house with the ephemerality of its inhabitants, underscoring the transient nature of human existence.

Tom Hanks and Robin Wright demonstrate remarkable emotional depth as they portray characters across multiple times through digital de-aging technology. Their familiar, trustworthy screen presence provides an accessible emotional entry point into the film's experimental structure. Rather than serving merely as a technical showcase, this digital manipulation reinforces the film's thematic interest in temporal continuity within spatial constancy. Hanks and Wright bring such authenticity to their roles that they create moments of genuine human connection, making the abstract concept of place as protagonist deeply personal and accessible. By allowing them to embody characters at different life stages, the film also draws attention to the passage of time within individual lives, highlighting the way people themselves are in constant flux while the spaces they inhabit retain traces of their presence.

One of the film's most affecting sequences involves Richard Young (Hanks) bringing his dementia-afflicted ex-wife Margaret (Wright) back to that same house, but this time, in 2024. As they stand in the empty living room, a blue ribbon triggers a cascade of memories, illustrating how spaces function as repositories of human experience, capable of reactivating dormant memories even when cognitive function has deteriorated. This scene powerfully reminds viewers of life's brevity and the importance of cherishing moments before they become mere memories. In this sense, *Here* offers a poignant meditation on aging, loss, and the lingering presence of the past in everyday spaces. Throughout the film, Zemeckis employs recurring visual motifs—most notably a hummingbird that appears across different time periods—to suggest certain elements persist despite human transience. This motif functions both as cinematic punctuation and thematic reinforcement, suggesting that while individual human lives are fleeting, the continuum of existence endures. The effect creates a profound awareness of life's impermanence while paradoxically emphasizing the importance of present moments within these larger temporal patterns.

Here succeeds as a thought-provoking meditation on time, space, and memory. The film's technical achievements deserve particular attention. The simultaneous presentation of multiple time frames disrupts cinema's traditional temporal flow, requiring viewers to process spatial continuity across historical discontinuity. This technique places unusual cognitive demands on audiences accustomed to conventional narrative progression, perhaps explaining its limited commercial appeal. Yet for those willing to engage with its experimental nature, the film offers an intellectually and emotionally rewarding experience. What makes the film particularly moving is its ability to translate abstract concepts about time and space into emotionally resonant moments. The film suggests that our brief occupancy of any space is both insignificant in the grand scheme of history and profoundly meaningful in terms of human connection. Watching families love, celebrate, grieve, and simply exist within the same walls across different decades creates a powerful sense of connection across time that inspires reflection on our own temporal existence. This interplay between permanence and impermanence is where *Here* finds its deepest emotional impact: it encourages viewers to think about the places they have inhabited and the imprints they leave behind, however fleeting they may be. Hanks and Wright bring essential humanity to this experimental narrative structure. Their performances ground the film's intellectual concepts in authentic emotion, particularly in the scenes of the elderly Richard and Margaret revisiting their home. The familiar warmth these actors bring to their roles contributes to the conceptual gap between the film's ambitious spatial experiment and its emotional connection to memory, connection, and the time frame.

Here ultimately stands as a bold experiment in cinematic language, one that uses the unique properties of film to explore how space and time intersect in ways that shape human experience. Zemeckis has created a work that challenges viewers to reconsider their relationship with the spaces they temporarily inhabit and the fleeting nature of existence itself. The film raises crucial questions about what it means to inhabit a place, to leave behind traces of our presence, and to recognize that even as time progresses, spaces are echoes of those who came before us.

The film's closing image – as the camera finally breaks its fixed perspective and a hummingbird flits across the frame – serves as a perfect visual summation of its thesis: while places persist, our time within them is transitory yet meaningful. Through Hanks and Wright's emotionally grounded performances, *Here* transforms from an intellectual exercise into a deeply moving meditation on memory, connection, and the relentless forward motion of time. For those willing to engage in its unconventional structure, the film offers not only a new way of viewing cinema but a new way of understanding our brief moment in the places we call home.

Works Cited

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Notes on contributor

Elena Velilla Gonzalvo

Elena Velilla Gonzalvo is a researcher and educator specializing in cinematic spatiality and identity. She is currently pursuing a PhD examining the representation of urban spaces in film, with a focus on how Toronto is depicted across different cinematic narratives. Her research explores the intersections of film, mobility, and cultural geography, analysing how spatial representation in cinema shapes and reflects identity. In addition to her academic work, she teaches English in a private school and engages in pedagogical research on film-based language learning, exploring innovative approaches to audio visual literacy and intercultural competence in education.

CONTACT: 761496@unizar.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5286-6163>