

The Male Gaze: A Look at Scarlett Johansson in *The Island*

Sanne Brands



Sanne Brands' video essay examines the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of Scarlett Johansson's character Jordan Two Delta in the science fiction film *The Island* (Michael Bay, 2005). Watch the video essay here: <https://flowcasts.uni-hannover.de/nodes/EymDv>

Creator's Statement

Michael Bay's films are known for their explosions and violence, which are mostly catering to a male audience. His films have been criticized as sexist. Rita Kempley from the *Washington Post*, for example, called his film *Bad Boys* (1995) "loud, shallow, sexist and a complete waste of time." His sexist approach to filmmaking especially came to light in his *Transformers* film (2007), which sexualizes actress Megan Fox, who was only 15 years old at the time of filming. However, the film *The Island* (2005) was made before his *Transformers* fame and therefore I found it interesting to see how sexism was portrayed in this film. In my video essay, I look at Scarlett Johansson's character, Jordan Two Delta, through the male gaze (cf. Mulvey). It becomes apparent, however, that the male gaze not only portrays Jordan as a sexual object, but also places her in relation to the

male lead who needs her to aid him in his heroism. In addition, the male gaze associates ideal womanhood with the notion of mothering. Therefore, the male gaze is not only visual, but a representation of how women should exist in a functioning patriarchy.

What was most challenging when creating this video essay was the fact that the film was very fast. For example, the film starts with a dream sequence where we see segments of Jordan on a boat intercut with disturbing images of cloning and drowning. Take out these disturbing images and you have a long scene of female spectacle. In my video essay, I use two songs, both of which are featured in the film, to help me tackle the speed problem. The first song, “Blow” by the Prom Kings, represents the fast masculine energy of the film. The second song, “Siboney” by Connie Francis, is much slower, but also contains a more feminine energy. Francis sings of how the absence of her lover would kill her, or, in other words, about her dependence of a male partner. The slow pace of the soundtrack, however, allowed me to slow down the film and highlight elements of the male gaze.

Author Biography

Sanne Brands (she/her) has finished her master’s degree in North American Studies at Leibniz University Hannover with a master thesis is on mother-daughter relationships in Disney’s animated films and their live-action remakes. Her research interest lies in representation in film and media, which includes gender studies and postcolonial studies. Having finished her studies, she is now working as a screen content manager at Vue Cinemas in Amsterdam.

Works Cited

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