# CHAPTER 15
# LOOKING, JUST LOOKING: JAMES BOND AND THE OBJECTIFICATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF THE HUMAN FORM

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## Abstract

*The recent cinematic success of Casino Royale (Wilson, Broccoli & Campbell, 2006), the twenty-first Bond film in the official EON Production series, provides an opportunity to examine the character of James Bond in relation to his role in the objectification and commodification of the human body in cinema. In fact, the James Bond films have long been considered synonymous with the sexualisation of the female form. From the first moment Ursula Andress walked out of the ocean wearing "that" white bikini in Dr No (Saltzman, Broccoli & Young, 1962), the series established the voyeuristic manner in which these women were to be "seen", not only by the character of James Bond but by the audience as well. Some theorists have argued against this position on the basis that it reduces the act of spectatorship to one of virtual stasis, involving "a uniformity of viewer response and meaning production" (Austin, 2002, p. 12). Instead, they contend that readings are contingent on the individual with each a result of various "social and intertextual agencies within mass culture, seeking to structure reception beyond textual boundaries" (Klinger, 1989, p.4). Paradoxically however, these very same "social and intertextual agencies" can also act to restrict the range of these perceptions.*


While at first glance the James Bond films appear to exemplify the position that equates the camera with the "male gaze", a closer examination reveals a more complex situation. After all, in *Casino Royale* it was James Bond himself and not his female co-star who emerged from the sea, tantalising in his wet semi-nakedness. In many ways, the producers have often placed as much emphasis on Bond's sexual appeal as they have on the "Bond girls". This "fluidity" of desire means that it no longer is, if it ever was, a simple case of "women want him and men want to be him", but rather that "Bond is himself a sex object for men and women who like men" (Faust, 1996, p. 30). This chapter will test various theories related to the concept of the "male gaze" and its association with the sexualisation of the female form. It will then compare these to theories that connect the "female gaze" with the process of commodification. The chapter will also consider how the male body in cinema—represented in this case by James Bond—presents a site of contention where desire is both flaunted and commodified, and yet strongly repressed through various forms of "feminisation"

and suppressed homoerotic violence. In this way, the James Bond films demonstrate how the "social and intertextual" agency of consumer culture overrides individual interpretations of gender in the creation of desire in spectators.

## "JIGGLE VISION"

Although there have been numerous shifts in the sexual politics governing the films, it is still reasonable to say that from the series beginning, the women surrounding the James Bond character have most often been defined by their sexuality. Ursula Andress' Honey Rider spent most of the film clad in little more than a skimpy bikini, clinging to Bond's side. This sparked a long tradition of female "eye candy" with such sexually suggestive names as Pussy Galore, Plenty O'Toole, and Holly Goodhead, whose cinematic appearances were often supported by an obligatory *Playboy* photo-shoot (Chapman, 1999). However, by the time the series reached "the mid 1980s... audiences were fed up with Bond girls whose only real function was to look sexy and helpless" (*Sunday Times*, 22 August 1999, p. 67). This led to a number of changes made to the series not only in an attempt to alleviate growing feminist criticisms, but also to ensure that the films had a more modern, "twenty-first century" feel to them (Boshoff, 1998). These changes have seen Bond's female counterparts taking a step away from the bedroom (although they inevitably end up there) to play a more productive role in the story's plot. As Michael Apted, director of *The World is Not Enough* (Wilson, Broccoli & Apted, 1999), stated: "We want to bring Bond into the twenty-first century with a different attitude to women and different women in the film. That is my agenda" (*Sunday Times*, 22 August 1999, p. 67). One of the biggest changes came in *GoldenEye* (Wilson, Broccoli & Campbell, 1995) when for the first time a woman was cast in the role of Bond's superior, "M". In one pivotal scene, the formidable Dame Judi Dench directly challenges Bond, calling him a "misogynist dinosaur" left over from the Cold War. In doing so, the film managed to reduce the weight of feminist criticisms "by voicing them itself through the agency of a female authority figure" (Chapman, 1999, p. 257).

Yet many of these alterations have proved to be only "skin" deep (Boshoff, 1998). Despite women's increased relevance to the film's plot and the creation of strong, independent personalities, the films still emphasise women's physical appearances. Defending his decision to have his female nuclear scientist wear a skimpy singlet and tiny shorts in *The World is Not Enough*, Michael Apted protested that there was no reason why an intelligent woman could not be attractive as well. He lost the moral high ground somewhat when he continued on to say: "I would have been shit on from a great height if I had not delivered jiggle-vision" (Brown & Giles, 1999, p. 91). Famke Jansenn, who played the villainess Xenia Onatopp in *GoldenEye*, held no illusions as to her role in the film: "This is not anybody's bimbo, I try to bring my intelligence to the part. But women are always going to be objects of desire" ("Bimbos Out, Heroines In in 'Correct' Bond Thriller", 1995, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 28 January, p. 22).

Desire is an essential component of cinema. According to psychoanalytic film theory, the underlying appeal of movies is its voyeuristic nature—a pleasure derived from "watching someone without being seen oneself" (Smelik, 1998, p. 16). Many feminist film theorists maintain that this notion of desire in cinema is intrinsically connected to the "male gaze" (Mulvey, 1989; Stacey, 1994; Smelik, 1998). In 1975, Laura Mulvey's controversial essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" galvanised the field of feminist film theory by being one of the first to locate two fundamental aspects of "visual pleasure"—looking and spectacle—in relation to the roles played by men and women, respectively, in cinema. As Mulvey (1989, p. 19) stated: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female". In 1993 Yvonne Tasker may have detailed the evolution and development of the action heroine in Hollywood cinema, but she also argued that traditionally the woman's role in Hollywood action films has primarily been to act as the hero's love interest and reinforce his heterosexuality: "She both offers a point of differentiation from the hero and deflects attention from the homoeroticism surrounding male buddy relationships" (p. 16).

The James Bond films initially seem to support the theory that "male characters direct their gaze towards female characters" throughout the course of the narrative (Smelik, 1998, p. 10). After all, there are numerous instances in the series where James Bond watches a woman admiringly before making his presence known to her. This "gaze" is established by the camera through a series of shots focusing on the woman's physical attributes. In *Dr No*, Bond hides behind a sand dune and watches as Honey Rider strolls out of the sea in her clingy bikini. The camera reveals his desire through a series of slow pans up the length of her body. In this way, the "spectator in the theatre is automatically and often unconsciously made to identify with the male look, because the camera films from the optical, as well as libidinal, point of view of the male character" (Smelik, 1998, p. 10). The manner in which Bond reveals his presence to the object of his gaze often jokingly refers to this process of looking, as can be seen in this following dialogue from *Dr No*:

> *Honey Rider: What are you doing here? Are you looking for seashells?*
> *James Bond: No, I'm just looking.*

Similarly in *Die Another Day* (2002)—in an obvious allusion to this famous scene—Pierce Brosnan's Bond uses binoculars to watch (somehow in slow motion) Halle Berry rise out of the ocean also clad in a bikini. Bond continues to admire her as she dries herself with a towel before remarking: "Magnificent view!"

The title sequence of virtually every James Bond film (the majority of which were designed by Maurice Binder) featured either naked or scantily clad women gyrating around the screen or, as in the cases of *Goldfinger* (Saltzman, Broccoli & Hamilton, 1964) and *Thunderball* (Saltzman, Broccoli & Young, 1965), a woman's body was used as a canvas upon which the film's credits were displayed. In fact, Roger Moore

once quipped: "There's no nudity in Bond films—only in Maurice Binder's titles" (*Variety*, 1987, p. 57). James Chapman (1999, p. 84) agreed that such scenes do tend to reflect "certain feminist theories of the representation of women in mainstream cinema", whereby "women function as fetishised 'objects of to-be-looked-at-ness'". This position is supported by the fact that a number of the earlier Bond actresses, including Ursula Andress, had their voices dubbed over, thereby literally reducing them "to the level of an object only to be looked at" (Chapman, 1999, p. 84).

Mulvey's article however received a barrage of criticism for its over-simplification with many feminist film theorists claiming that such a position rendered women powerless "victims". Teresa de Lauretis (1984, p. 15), for example, suggested that the female viewer is "positioned in the films of classical cinema as spectator-subject: she is thus doubly bound to that very representation which calls on her directly, engages her desire, elicits her pleasure, frames her identification, and makes her complicit in the production of (her) woman-ness". Alternatively, Mary Ann Doane (1990, p. 46) argued that there exists a definite separation between women and the "image" of women by arguing that "the woman is explicitly represented as a construction, as the sum total of a disembodied voice and an image...The woman becomes the exemplary work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction". Even Mulvey herself later addressed some of her critics concerns in an article called "Afterthoughts" in which she now maintained that a female spectator "may find herself secretly, unconsciously almost, enjoying the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a hero provides" (1990, p. 24).

Yet how is the female form "seen" by women? Some theorists maintain that the female gaze—while fuelled by desire—is not necessarily sexual in nature. According to Stacey (1998, p. 206), the same series of close-up shots of the female form which are sexualised in the male gaze, instead produce a "fascination" which could be seen "as a form of intimacy by female spectators", often resulting in a sense of identification with the star. In other words, rather than merely *desiring* the female form, many women instead desire to *be* the female form. In some cases, this sense of identification results in female spectators altering their physical appearance through the procurement of particular products, especially make-up and clothing, in order to better resemble the object of their admiring gaze (Stacey, 1994; Matthew, 2005). Advertisers have taken advantage of this situation by maximizing their associations with these film stars. "What woman hasn't dreamed of being a Bond girl?" claimed a Ford press release before announcing its intention of releasing 700 special-edition T-birds, as driven by Halle Berry in *Die Another Day*, and all in the same coral pink colour as the bikini she wore in the film (Patton, 2002, p. 12). This colour just happens to match the lipstick she wore, also available for purchase from Revlon's *Limited Edition 007 Colour Collection* (Patton, 2002).

Female stars have been used throughout cinema history to sell all manner of products—not just make-up and clothing, but also electrical appliances and other such household goods. In fact, "by the 1930s Hollywood was so

heavily embroiled in the promotion of fashions, furnishings, and cosmetics that it had become the biggest single influence on women's fashion throughout the world" (Maltby & Craven, 1995, p. 93). In this way, could it be said that while the male gaze objectified the female form, it was the female gaze that commoditized it? It is not such an unusual concept that a human body can be bought and sold much like a commodity in its own right. In 1986, Igor Kopytoff published an essay entitled "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process" in which he discussed the long history of human commodification – "People can be and have been commoditized again and again, in innumerable societies throughout history" (p. 65). Kopytoff used the specific example of slavery to demonstrate his point that within particular societal constructs, every individual possesses an intrinsic exchange value. In 1987, Barry King demonstrated how an actor's performance could constitute "as a labour process" before breaking down "the relations of production in which such a process occurs" (p. 145).

Every actor undergoes a process of triangulation whereby their personality is amalgamated with the characters they play and their "star" persona—the identity derived by the public. In this way stardom is a collaborative process within which the audience has a part to play, projecting their own fantasies and desires onto the object of their gaze. It is believed that the "separation of the actor from his or her 'reflected image' is ... responsible for the 'cult of the movie star' which replaces the actor with the 'phony spell of the commodity'" (Benjamin cited in Friedberg, 1993, p. 54). In the early 1950s, Hollywood agent Lew Wasserman even went so far as to "incorporate" a number of his star clientele, before literally selling them as enterprises to film studios and radio stations. As a result of this commodification process, the "incorporated" star "had to pay less than half the taxes required for salaried individuals" (Gomery, 1998, p. 48). These studios and radio networks then set about capitalizing on their "investment" through additional commercial activities such as advertising. According to Jackie Stacey (1994, p. 206), "Hollywood *sold* its stars as icons of feminine attractiveness, whose beauty could be replicated through the purchase of particular commodities" (emphasis added).

Yet, what of the male form? Is the male body subject to the same process of objectification and commodification? While Mulvey (1989, p. 20) did discuss the male body in relation to gaze, she negated any erotic component the gaze may have held for the spectator:

> *As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate ... A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror.*

In fact, some maintain that a society defined by its patriarchal and heterosexual ideologies simply cannot allow the male body to become "the erotic object of another male look" and thus attempts to repress any sexual element the male body may hold for male spectators (Neale, 1983, p. 8).

However, action films such as the James Bond series contradict Mulvey's position and provide an interesting site of contention. Edwards (2006) for example, suggested that in this age of heightened commodification in which we all now live, men's bodies have also come under the increased scrutiny of the objectified "gaze". This has resulted in "a contemporary shift towards an increasingly anxious, image-centred and strangely gender-blurred but still reactionary and over-whelmingly commodified culture of bodily obsession" (p. 157). Yvonne Tasker (1993, p. 16) concurred, claiming that action in classic Hollywood films cannot simply be divided into active/passive "in which the male figure advances the narrative whilst 'woman' functions as spectacle" but rather that he simultaneously "controls the action at the same time as he is offered up to the audience as a sexual spectacle". After all, it could be said that the film producers placed as much emphasis on Bond's own sexual appeal as they did on his female counterparts with Sean Connery's physical attractiveness and sexual charisma playing an essential role in his being selected to play the character of James Bond. According to Toby Miller, producers specifically cast Connery "in the hope that he would appeal to women sexually and encourage cross-class identification by men" (Miller, 2001, p. 248). His rugged good looks and muscular physique were generously put on display, not only by his frequent semi-naked appearances on-screen clad in little more than a bath towel, but also in the subsequent publicity material.

> *From the first, Connery was the object of the gaze, posing in 1966 for GQ and bare-cleavaged for Life, making it clear that sexiness did not have to be associated with a choice between ruggedness and style ... [He was] the harbinger of a new male body on display. (Miller, 2001, p. 249)*

The latest film *Casino Royale* provides an excellent example of role reversal that results in a shift in the focus of the objectified gaze. Set in the Bahamas where Bond is investigating a possible terrorist link, a scene opens on a beautiful woman in a bikini riding a horse down a beach. While this sequence of shots initially suggests that the woman is the passive recipient of the objectified gaze, the focus suddenly switches to the ocean from which Bond emerges in slow motion. As he gradually begins to walk out of the water, it is the woman who is watching him with desire and not the other way around. The woman's desire is communicated to and shared by the audience through the camera's slow pan up Bond's muscular naked chest. As one reviewer maintained, while Daniel Craig's "claim to fame was assured as soon as he put on the Bond tuxedo, it's when he donned a pair of blue swimming trunks and walked out of water that he stood out from the crowd of other Bonds" (Chester, 2006, p. 59).

In a true reversal of the objectification and commodification process, James Bond's close association with specific brands and long history of product associations has also helped to commoditize the character—particularly in relation to the male gaze. After all, Ian Fleming routinely mentioned particular brand-names as a way of establishing character traits. Take the following excerpt from the very first two pages of *From Russia, with Love* (1957):

> *To judge by the glittering pile, this had been, or was, a rich man. It contained the typical membership badges of the rich man's club...a well-used gold Dunhill lighter, an oval gold cigarette case with the wavy ridges and discreet turquoise button that means Faberge...There was also a bulky gold wrist-watch on a well-used crocodile strap. It was a Girard Perregaux model designed for people who like gadgets. [emphasis added]*

Many of these brand associations managed to traverse the printed page to the celluloid screen along with the character of James Bond. A trailer for the first official James Bond film *Dr No* went into considerable detail as to the particular products Bond preferred in his wardrobe, specifically mentioning his impeccably tailored suit from Saville Row and his Walther PPK7.65ml handgun. While content analysis conducted on the entire James Bond film series has revealed dramatic fluctuations in the number and types of products placed in the films, the tendency has been towards a steady increase. In *Casino Royale* alone, more than 30 different products were shown in over 90 separate scenes—a significant shift from the 11 products placed in *Dr No* in 25 scenes. On the basis of this content analysis, it can be confirmed that the male body—represented in this case by James Bond—has become increasingly commodified "under the guise of consumer culture" (Edwards, 2006, p. 156). As Partridge (1999, p. 1) states, "(m)arketing millions have been earned by 007 franchised manufacturers". Just some of the merchandise released after the success of the earlier Bond films included 007 lunch boxes, beach towels, soundtrack albums, "Special Agent" pens with dissolvable "spy" paper, action figures and miniatures. There was also a brand of 007 vodka, clothing, shoes, aftershave, trench coats, underwear, magic sets, puzzles, watches, water pistols, a James Bond secret service game, pillowcases, trading cards and even a road race set (*Empire Promotion*, 2006). Such is Bond's marketing power that when BMW used *GoldenEye* to launch its new Z3 roadster model, "the car sold out before it even hit the showroom" (Richard Wiesel of product placement firm Norm Marshall & Associates in Carbone, 2002, p. 15).

However the objectification of the male form that led to this increase in commodification also tends to incorporate "defense against possible disturbance in the field of sexuality" as pertained by patriarchal ideology (Smith, 1995, p. 85). A common theme therefore throughout much of Hollywood's action films is for this "eroticisim" to be followed by excessive or at least implied brutality by which that same body that was so admired by the "gaze" now must be, or threatened to be,

destroyed (Neale, 1993; Smith, 1995). One common method of brutality typically depicted in this genre is the threat of castration. In fact, mutilation or the threat of mutilation to the male protagonist's genitals is a reoccurring theme in both the James Bond novels and films. Toby Miller's essay entitled "James Bond's Penis" analyses a number of these examples to illustrate how ultimately Bond's penis—the symbol of his masculinity and sexuality—"is a threat to him—a means of being known and of losing authority" (2001, p. 244). One such example of this is the famous scene in *Goldfinger* in which Bond is strapped spread-legged on a table with a laser beam advancing ever closer to his genitals. As James Chapman (1999, p. 104) states, the scene is an obvious play "on male castration anxiety", however the laser beam also embodies a phallic homosexual symbolism (Bennett & Woollacott, 1987). While Bond lays on the table, Goldfinger stands triumphantly over his prone and helpless body, watching leeringly as his "new toy" threatens to emasculate Bond.

The villains in the James Bond films are typically depicted either as sexual deviants or as possessing homosexual tendencies (Lewis, 1975; Jenkins, 2005). As Smith (1995, p. 84) states: "In movies where homosexuality is not actually imputed to the antagonists (that is, to those characters who are to inflict physical damage on the hero's eroticised body), their sexuality is usually offered as perverse in some other fashion". For example, although Goldfinger is constantly surrounded by a bevy of beautiful women, they are sexually unavailable to him, either preferring the company of other women—as in the case of Pussy Galore (or at least until she meets Bond of course)—or, like Jill Masterton, they are on Goldfinger's payroll:

> *Bond: And why do you do it? [help Goldfinger cheat at cards]*
> *Jill: He pays me.*
> *Bond: Is that all he pays you for?*
> *Jill: And for being seen with him.*
> *Bond: Just seen?*
> *Jill: Just seen.*

Therefore, as Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott hypothesise, there could be an element of "attempted rape" in the laser scene, in that Goldfinger does not merely intend to kill Bond, but rather that Bond be first penetrated and then "killed by Goldfinger's phallic power embodied in the laser" (Bennett & Woollacott, 1987, p. 162).

Similarly in *Casino Royale*, the film's main villain Le Chiffre is depicted slightly ambiguous in regards to his sexuality. Although he does have a beautiful mistress, he seems fairly ambivalent to her presence throughout the film. When she walks past him on his yacht wearing a skimpy wet swimsuit, he barely acknowledges her presence, unlike his poker opponent. And when one of Le Chiffre's "investors" threatens to cut her arm off unless Le Chiffre returns his money, he does not utter one world of protest. There also seem to be sexual connotations underlying his torture of Bond. Following Hollywood action-film protocol, the body that was earlier eroticised must now be followed by its destruction (Smith, 1995).

After Bond is captured by Le Chiffre, he is stripped naked and tied to a chair with its seat removed. As Le Chiffre slowly approaches him carrying a very phallic looking length of knotted rope, he looks down at Bond's prostate and vulnerable naked body and comments: "Wow. You've taken good care of your body". Le Chiffre then proceeds to repeatedly swing this phallic rope into Bond's groin. Daniel Craig commented on the scene: "It's totally emasculating. He's [Le Chiffre] trying to take away his manhood" (in Sutherland, 2006, p. 13).

Bond's sexual attraction for both "men and women who like men" demonstrated that it was not just the female form that could be objectified in the eyes of the spectator, but also the male body as well (Faust, 1996, p. 30). The narrative structures of these films still tend to focus on a central male character, with the camera subconsciously conditioning the audience to adopt the male character's point-of-view. At the same time however, the James Bond films demonstrate that the male body is not immune from the process of objectification and commodification often thought of as connected to the female body. Despite advertisers' insistence that men and women have different responses to commercial messages, the reality is somewhat more "grey" in that the process of desiring and therefore consuming being virtually the same. Demonstrating this cross-over of desires, men's bodies can and have been eroticised in the audience's gaze, providing fuel for the same sense of identification and commodification that underlines the notion of the "female gaze". As Smith (1995, p. 83) states: "There is, in other words, a specific and even ritualised form of male objectification and eroticisation in Hollywood cinema". It is in this way that action films such as the James Bond series suggest the tenuousness of the essentialised notion of gendered ways of watching films, by showing how both men and women objectify and commodify bodies on the screen. However, at the same time this eroticism of the male form must be tempered by violence in order "to defend the picture from its having eroticised the male body" (Smith, 1995, p. 85), and revealing patriarchal anxieties regarding eroticised male bodies.

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