

A photograph of Scarlett Johansson on a red carpet. She is wearing a black, off-the-shoulder, strapless gown with a draped bodice and a long, flowing skirt. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is wearing a colorful, multi-strand necklace with green, blue, and purple stones. Her hands are clasped in front of her. The background is filled with photographers and cameras, creating a busy, high-profile event atmosphere.

Screening Scarlett Johansson

Gender, Genre, Stardom

Edited by Janice Loreck
Whitney Monaghan · Kirsten Stevens

palgrave
macmillan

Screening Scarlett Johansson

Janice Loreck · Whitney Monaghan ·
Kirsten Stevens
Editors

Screening Scarlett Johansson

Gender, Genre, Stardom

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

Janice Loreck
Screen Arts and Cultural Studies
Curtin University
Bentley, WA, Australia

Whitney Monaghan
Film and Screen Studies
Monash University
Caulfield, VIC, Australia

Kirsten Stevens
Culture and Communication
University of Melbourne
Parkville, VIC, Australia

ISBN 978-3-030-33195-5 ISBN 978-3-030-33196-2 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33196-2>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer
Nature Switzerland AG 2019

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover credit: MARKA/Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

PREFACE

Ingénue, sex symbol, cyborg, muse: American actor Scarlett Johansson has many incarnations. She is, by several measures, one of the most successful performers working in Hollywood today. Her career began over twenty years ago when she took a small role in *North* (Rob Reiner, 1994), and she has been a consistent screen presence ever since. In July 2016, Johansson was named the highest-grossing actor of all time in North America (Robehmed 2016), beating several high-profile male stars. This was a considerable feat given that only a small number of women stars can open a film on their status alone (Hollinger 2006, 55). Johansson has also achieved renown as a superlatively beautiful and desirable individual, a feature that has been a central part of her image for over a decade. Since 2005, Johansson has frequently topped “sexiest woman alive” polls in men’s magazines such as *Maxim*, *Esquire*, *GQ*, *Playboy*, *FHM* and *Men’s Health*. Johansson is thus extraordinarily successful in her stardom. Elena Gorfinkel (2016) calls her “the sex symbol of our precarious times.” This assessment rings true: the decade following the millennium saw no other Hollywood actress positioned as an object of desire more than Johansson.

Screening Scarlett Johansson began its life at the Deletion-Deviation science fiction symposium held at Deakin University in Melbourne in February 2015. This event was dedicated to exploring science fiction and the “pleasure gained from its fictive forms, and the perversions of facts and flesh within its speculative futures” (Hancock 2015). At that time, Johansson was appearing in a rush of science fiction films, specifically as

an artificial intelligence in *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013), an alien in *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2013) and chemically augmented human in *Lucy* (Luc Besson, 2014). She was therefore an exciting star to consider in relation to the genre, and our panel at the symposium, entitled “Crowning the New Sci-fi Queen: The Films of Scarlett Johansson,” featured three accounts of Johansson’s roles in these films. Whitney Monaghan offered insight into the opacity of Johansson’s star image, exploring the perversion of her early indie-darling and sex symbol personas within her recent films; Kirsten Stevens examined the threat of the non-reproductive female within Johansson’s sci-fi roles; and Janice Loreck examined how Johansson’s character in *Under the Skin* evoked anxieties about humanity and industry in intensive farming practices. A lively discussion followed, but it did not entirely satiate our desire to interrogate Johansson’s stardom. On closer inspection, it appeared to us that Johansson was more than an emergent star of science fiction or, indeed, a young actress who fulfilled the role of sexiest woman alive for the post-millennium decade. While her science fiction roles made her more visible—more conspicuous as an image that could be appropriated for different genres—we realised that she had always “been there.” Johansson is a consistent presence and a figure of central, and growing, importance in contemporary Hollywood.

It is easy to focus on the label of “sexiest woman alive” when discussing Johansson, yet what appears on closer inspection is a persona that is rich, surprisingly diverse, and characterised by paradox and dichotomy. Johansson’s work stretches across popular cinema and independent film milieus. She has appeared in action films (*The Island* [Michael Bay, 2005]; *The Avengers* [Joss Whedon, 2010]), period dramas (*Girl with a Pearl Earring* [Peter Webber, 2003]; *The Other Boleyn Girl* [Justin Chadwick, 2008]) and comedies (*Rough Night* [Lucia Aniello, 2017]). She has taken roles as American *flâneuse* and tourist in *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003) and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (Woody Allen, 2008), as well as parts in blockbusters like the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) *Avengers* franchise. Lastly, before Johansson was a woman deemed the sexiest alive, she was a girl. At age nine, Johansson made her film debut as a wholesome child in *North*, which she followed with more significant roles as a runaway in *Manny & Lo* (Lisa Krueger, 1996) and a wounded thirteen-year-old in *The Horse Whisperer* (Robert Redford, 1998). Overviewed in this way, Johansson’s career reveals a shifting, multifaceted identity that has many incarnations. Her persona

is a phenomenon of simultaneous sex-goddess warmth in texts like *The Island* and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*—undoubtedly a dominant narrative that frames her image—and cyborg coldness in *Under the Skin* and *Ghost in the Shell* (Rupert Sanders, 2017). She performs fresh-faced youth in early works such as *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, which contrasts against (and converses with) the knowing maturity of femmes fatales in *The Avengers* and *Lucy*. Johansson comes into greater relief the more roles she plays—as Sophia Nguyen (2014) writes, “[t]o watch Johansson perform remoteness is to suddenly realize that she had performed intimacy.” With this comes the awareness that her persona is not stable, but instead self-referential, self-negating and thus paradoxical.

Screening Scarlett Johansson investigates Johansson’s stardom to understand her complex persona more fully. That said, there is an additional case for launching an analysis of her as a female film star. Celebrity studies has reached what Elena D’Amelio (2013) calls “the post-Dyer years”; rather than focusing solely on the kind of classical stars that Richard Dyer examined in his foundational work—such as Marilyn Monroe or Judy Garland—various kinds of celebrity are now ascendant as objects of study, including reality television stars like Kim Kardashian (Sastre 2014), video bloggers such as Charlie McDonnell (Smith 2014) and “lifestyle experts” like British chef Jamie Oliver (Lewis 2008). As Su Holmes and Sean Redmond explain, celebrity is “a broad category” which refers to fame in all its manifestations (2010, 4). The diversification of star studies into celebrity studies has meant that objects of enquiry other than professional Hollywood performers are rightly under investigation. Celebrity and celebrity culture are now the objects of analysis rather than just film actors. However, film stars are by no means an extinct or irrelevant category of celebrity. The advent of “post-Dyer” celebrity studies does not indicate a “post film star” culture.

A critical study of Johansson is also warranted because recent extended studies of female film stardom attend predominantly to stars of yesteryear: examples include *Vivien Leigh: Actress and Icon* (Dorney and Gale, 2017); *Growing Up with Audrey Hepburn: Text, Audience, Resonance* (Moseley, 2002); *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom* (McLean, 2004); *Elizabeth Taylor: A Private Life for Public Consumption* (Cashmore, 2016); and *Brigitte Bardot* (Vincendeau, 2013) and *Brigitte Bardot: The Life, The Legend, The Movies* (Vincendeau, 2014). Such historical analyses are valuable for the way in which they complete our knowledge of how stardom develops

and evolves historically, yet it is striking how seldom scholars devote full-length studies to female stars under seventy years of age: Pam Cook's *Nicole Kidman* (2012) and Ann Davies's *Penélope Cruz* (2014) are two exceptions. The focus on stars of earlier generations is understandable. Such an approach circumvents the need for scholarly reconsideration that a working actor might generate as they progress in their careers. Yet we note that such challenges do not affect the publication of books on the works of contemporary directors, for instance. Moreover, the tendency to reserve extended studies for stars whose acting careers are effectively "over" has consequences for the field, reinforcing the notion that film stardom is a phenomenon of the past. The presence and power of Johansson's stardom in the contemporary media landscape indicate that it is not.¹ Studying Johansson provides an excellent opportunity to maintain (and update) understandings of film stardom as it operates here and now.

The chapters herein approach Johansson as both text and sign. They deploy Johansson's persona as a discursive conduit, a phenomenon that facilitates an analysis of gender, sexuality, celebrity and subjectivity. We consider a range of Johansson's film works as part of this project, from her early roles as a child actor to more recent performances in Hollywood blockbusters such as the *Avengers* franchise. A diversity of texts factor into our study, yet Johansson's later films such as *Under the Skin* and *Ghost in the Shell* prove central due to their reflexive use of Johansson's persona and the insights they yield about her celebrity.

Precedence is also given throughout this volume to Johansson's film performances. While Johansson's place as a contemporary celebrity exists in parallel to and often exceeds her film roles, this volume is first and foremost interested in addressing Johansson as film star. In making this distinction, we align with Sabrina Qiong Yu's observation that "film stardom is a distinct type of stardom... [with] its own sets of research questions and priorities" (2017, 13–14). In exploring how Johansson acts as a catalyst and focus point for discussions of gender, genre and contemporary female film stardom, this book prioritises an engagement with her film texts above extensive engagement with the more extra-textual

¹Star studies has also moved to fill a significant blind spot around celebrity and ethnicity, race and nationality, considering actors from national cinemas other than the United States. Collections on Indian, Latin, East Asian and European films stars, as well as transnational stars, have resulted (D'Amelio 2013).

material that shape celebrity culture. Although Johansson's off-screen and extra-filmic work, as well as the way her image has circulated beyond her films and through fan texts, factors into many of the chapters in this volume, and substantially in the chapter by Daniel Palmer and Kate Warren, the overwhelming focus of this volume rests with Johansson's films.

The first chapter of this collection provides an overview of Johansson's career, setting the scene for this volume and highlighting the importance her films have had in shaping her stardom. It traces how her image emerged and evolved through key career turning points, from her early roles as a child actress in *Manny & Lo* and *The Horse Whisperer*, to sex symbol status in adulthood, to her recent reflexive turn as a science fiction performer in *Her*, *Lucy*, *Under the Skin* and *Ghost in the Shell*.

Whitney Monaghan explores the early period in Johansson's career in her chapter "Young Scarlett Johansson and the Liminal Perspective." While Johansson gained notoriety as a starlet in her late teenage years, she began her acting career at age eight. Reflecting upon Johansson's film roles from 1996 to 2001, Monaghan reads Johansson's emergent star persona through theories of child stardom and the framework of "liminality." Drawing on analyses of *Manny & Lo*, *The Horse Whisperer*, *An American Rhapsody* (Éva Gárdos, 2001), *Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff, 2001) and *The Man Who Wasn't There* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2001), Monaghan highlights how Johansson's roles present liminal perspectives to destabilise dominant representations of girlhood on screen. Through her analysis, Monaghan argues that this liminality, established in Johansson's early career, contributes to the understanding of Johansson as a contemporary star.

Progressing from Johansson's early years, Kirsten Stevens' chapter, "Blank Stares and Blonde Hair: Performing Scarlett Johansson," looks to elements of Johansson's performance across her body of work. Described as an actor who "oozes" on screen—not one to "fiz" but rather always "slightly behind the beat" (Cousins 2016, 15)—Johansson's performance is marked by a distinct relationship to time and space within the frame. This chapter engages with current turns in the analysis of acting, screen performance and stardom to consider what marks Johansson out as an actor. Looking across her body of work both within and outside of film, including her supporting roles, Hollywood breakthroughs, independent films, as well as her music videos and advertising work, this

chapter charts Johansson's style in performance as a distinctive element of her stardom.

Edward Lamberti's contribution "‘Certain Only of What She Didn't Want': Scarlett Johansson's American Outsiders in Woody Allen's *Match Point*, *Scoop* and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*" focuses on Johansson's three roles in Allen's films. Johansson's work with Allen proved to be an important and formative stage of her career as a young actress. Lamberti contends that these films provide a vital opportunity to consider Johansson's abilities not merely as a celebrity in the making, but as an actor and performer. The chapter focuses specifically on how Johansson's youth and femininity combine to fulfil the trope of the American traveller in Europe, undergoing formative experiences in the "old world."

Chris Davies' chapter "‘Who Do You Want Me to Be?' Scarlett Johansson, Black Widow and Shifting Identity in the Marvel Cinematic Universe" attends to Johansson's place in popular cinema and mainstream screen culture. Davies explores Johansson's role as Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). As the first female superhero in this otherwise male-dominated franchise, Johansson's character has a significant presence in the MCU. Interrogating Johansson's appearance in this role, Davies parallels Johansson's career trajectory with Romanoff's narrative journey. In doing so, he illustrates how both Johansson and Romanoff have been associated with the figure of the femme fatale but have actively shifted their identity to become action heroines. Analysing the impact of this shift with regard to Johansson's star persona, Davies explores how Johansson converges the sexual allure of the femme fatale with the agency of the action star to redefine her stardom.

Troy Michael Bordun's chapter moves away from the visually alluring to take up an analysis of stars-as-sounds. In "On the Off-Screen voice: Falling in Love with Her," Bordun reflects on the ways in which the play on Johansson as star and as voice in the film is essential to the perceived romantic authenticity at the heart of the film. Exploring the place of sound within classic narrative form and realism, Bordun takes up Spike Jonze's *Her* as a film that at once complicates but ultimately reasserts established relationships of sound to image within narrative cinema. Within this discourse, Bordun further implicates the Star, exploring how iconicity forms through the perception of embodied attributes—even when a visible or physical body is withheld.

From voice to image, Daniel Palmer and Kate Warren's chapter explores the place of celebrity in online visual culture. "Scarlett Johansson Falling Down: Memes, Photography and Celebrity Personas" hones in on single image of Johansson falling over while filming a scene in *Under the Skin*. As Palmer and Warren highlight, this image provides significant insight into celebrity culture in the era of digital malleability and social media shareability as it was promptly transformed into the viral meme "Scarlett Johansson falling down" and shared widely online. Through analysis of this meme and its rapid proliferation, Palmer and Warren explore the relation between contemporary celebrity culture and online photosharing practices. They highlight the central role of photography and online image-based sharing practices in producing and critiquing celebrity personas.

Fulvia Massimi's contribution "Remapping Femininity: Johansson's Alien Transnationalism in *Under the Skin*" considers Johansson's casting in Jonathan Glazer's art film, which was conspicuously set and released in the period close to the Scottish independence referendum of 2014. Massimi examines Johansson's performance and stardom in the context of Scottish national cinema more broadly, which has long gendered Scotland as a masculine realm. Massimi considers how Johansson's casting as a feminine wanderer exposes uncertainties in Scottish cinema about the national character at a crucial historical moment. Moreover, the chapter argues that the mobilisation of Johansson's stardom in *Under the Skin* illuminates the transnational deployments and possibilities of stardom more generally in relation to art, film production and national cinemas.

In "Man, Meat and *Bêtes-machines*: Scarlett Johansson in *Under the Skin*," Janice Loreck takes a different approach to the meanings initiated by Johansson in *Under the Skin*. At first glance, Johansson's status as a global sex symbol makes her a fitting choice to play the role of a predatory alien seductress. However, Loreck argues that Johansson's fame and body also facilitate the film's exploration of the materiality of personhood—whether humans consist of body or mind. Conducting a close analysis of the film's narrative and *mise-en-scène*—and Johansson's vital place within them—Loreck considers how Johansson's much-desired body becomes the focal point for the film's anxiety about the mind/body split and humanity's corporeal vulnerability.

In "What We Do Defines Us: ScarJo as War Machine," William Brown and David H. Fleming investigate how Johansson's image works

to signify who counts as human, inhuman and posthuman in the science fiction worlds in which she appears. Brown and Fleming consider a range of texts that associate Johansson with technology—including *The Island*, *Under the Skin* and *Her*—but focus chiefly on the live-action film of cult manga *Ghost in the Shell*. Brown and Fleming consider how Johansson’s image is deployed to promote violence, white supremacy and violent dehumanisation of others in this text.

Finally, looking to her recent science fiction works Sean Redmond’s chapter, “The Alien Whiteness of Scarlett Johansson,” examines Johansson’s at times problematic position as racialised star. Taking up a discourse of idealised whiteness in conjunction with star theory, Redmond frames Johansson as at once “unattainably immaculate” and “essentially non-reproductive.” Both intensely desired as perfected female form and yet rendered unobtainable and sterile through idolatry, Redmond frames white female stardom as a privileged yet restrictive state. Locating Johansson within such a construction of stardom, Redmond looks to how her idealised white star image as resolved through her roles in *Her*, *Under the Skin* and *Ghost in the Shell* is simultaneously recognisable and alienating within these texts. As idealised white star, Johansson traverses the cinematic universe, moving with privileged access into roles, spaces and intimacies laid open for her. Yet as an unobtainable and non-reproductive idol, Johansson is also alienating, an embodiment of the loneliness, fragmentation and isolation that plagues contemporary (white) social existence.

Caulfield, Australia
Parkville, Australia
Bentley, Australia

Whitney Monaghan
Kirsten Stevens
Janice Loreck

WORKS CITED

- Cashmore, Ellis. 2016. *Elizabeth Taylor: A Private Life for Public Consumption*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Cook, Pam. 2012. *Nicole Kidman*. Basingstoke: BFI, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cousins, Mark. 2016. “A Study in Scarlett.” *Sight and Sound*, 26 (10): 15.
- D’Amelio, Elena. 2013. “Stardom.” *Oxford Bibliographies in Cinema and Media Studies*, edited by Krin Gabbard, January 28. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/obo/page/cinema-and-media-studies>.
- Davies, Ann. 2014. *Penélope Cruz*. Basingstoke: BFI, Palgrave Macmillan.

- Dorney, Kate, and Maggie B. Gale (eds.). 2018. *Vivien Leigh: Actress and Icon*. Manchester: Manchester UP.
- Gorfinkel, Elena. 2016. "Sex, Sensation and Nonhuman Interiority in *Under the Skin*." *Jump Cut* 57. <https://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/-Gorfinkel-Skin/index.html>.
- Hancock, Grady. 2015. "Episode 9: Deletion|Deviation." *Deletion*, May 4. <http://www.deletionscifi.org/episodes/episode-9/episode-9-deletiondeviation/>.
- Hollinger, Karen. 2006. *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star*. New York: Routledge.
- Holmes, Su, and Sean Redmond. 2010. "A Journal in Celebrity Studies." *Celebrity Studies* 1 (1): 1–10.
- Lewis, Tania. 2008. *Smart Living: Lifestyle Media and Popular Expertise*. New York: Peter Lang.
- McLean, Adrienne L. 2004. *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP.
- Moseley, Rachel. 2002. *Growing Up with Audrey Hepburn: Text, Audience, Resonance*. Manchester: Manchester UP.
- Nguyen, Sophia. 2014. "The Posthuman Scar-Jo." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, September 12. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/posthuman-scar-jo/#!>.
- Robehmed, Natalie. 2016. "Scarlett Johansson Is The Top-Grossing Actor of 2016." *Forbes*, December 27. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/natalierobehmed/2016/12/27/scarlett-johansson-is-the-top-grossing-actor-of-2016/#5f39e14f1433>.
- Sastre, Alexandra. 2014. "Hottentot in the Age of Reality TV: Sexuality, Race, and Kim Kardashian's Visible Body." *Celebrity Studies* 5 (1–2): 123–37.
- Smith, Daniel. 2014. "Charlie Is so 'English'-Like: Nationality and the Branded Celebrity Person in the Age of YouTube." *Celebrity Studies* 5 (3): 256–74.
- Vincendeau, Ginette. 2013. *Brigitte Bardot*. Basingstoke: BFI, Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2014. *Brigitte Bardot, The Life, The Legend, The Movies*. London: Carlton.
- Yu, Sabrina Qiong. 2017. "Introduction: Performing Stardom: Star Studies in Transformation and Expansion." In *Revisiting Star Studies: Cultures, Themes and Methods*, edited by S. Yu and G. Austin, 1–22. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all of our contributors for their ideas, perseverance and input throughout the creation of this book. We acknowledge the organisers of the *Deletion-Deviation: The Perversions of Science Fiction* symposium, where we were first inspired to undertake an extended project on Scarlett Johansson. We also thank the editors at *Science Fiction Film and Television* journal and the authors who contributed to our dossier: “Stardom and sf: A symposium on the sf films of Scarlett Johansson” (2018), where many of the ideas leading to this volume were further developed. The guidance and enthusiasm of the team at Palgrave Macmillan were also instrumental in shepherding this volume to publication. Our appreciation especially goes to all the people who provided instrumental advice on specific sections of this book, with special mention to Tim Laurie, Teresa Rizzo, Claire Perkins, Belinda Glynn and Belinda Smail for their feedback and insight.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to our friends and colleagues who have endured endless conversations about Scarlett Johansson and who have supported and advised us throughout the writing process: Kerreen Ely-Harper, Christina Lee, Thomas Loreck, Lyn Loreck, Bronwyn Stevens, Sian Mitchell, Hayley Summers, Isabella McNeill and Hannah McCann.

CONTENTS

1	Why Scarlett Johansson?	1
	Kirsten Stevens, Janice Loreck and Whitney Monaghan	
2	Young Scarlett Johansson and the Liminal Perspective	23
	Whitney Monaghan	
3	Blank Stares and Blonde Hair: Performing Scarlett Johansson	41
	Kirsten Stevens	
4	“Certain Only of What She Didn’t Want”: Scarlett Johansson’s American Outsiders in Woody Allen’s <i>Match Point</i>, <i>Scoop</i> and <i>Vicky Cristina Barcelona</i>	63
	Edward Lamberti	
5	“Who Do You Want Me to Be?” Scarlett Johansson, Black Widow and Shifting Identity in the Marvel Cinematic Universe	81
	Chris Davies	
6	On the Off-Screen Voice: Falling in Love with Her	99
	Troy Michael Bordun	

7	Scarlett Johansson Falling Down: Memes, Photography and Celebrity Personas	121
	Daniel Palmer and Kate Warren	
8	Remapping Femininity: Johansson's Alien Transnationalism in <i>Under the Skin</i>	145
	Fulvia Massimi	
9	Man, Meat and <i>Bêtes-Machines</i>: Scarlett Johansson in <i>Under the Skin</i>	165
	Janice Loreck	
10	"What We Do Defines Us": ScarJo as War Machine	183
	William Brown and David H. Fleming	
11	The Alien Whiteness of Scarlett Johansson	203
	Sean Redmond	
	Filmography	221
	Index	223

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Troy Michael Bordun is a contract instructor in Art History at Concordia University, English and Film Studies at Bishop's University and Sociology and Cultural Studies at Trent University. His recent work can be found in *Celebrity Studies* and *Porn Studies*, among other journals. He has forthcoming chapters in *ReFocus: The Films of Carlos Reygadas* and *Screening #TimesUp: Exploring Rape Culture in Hollywood Film* and a forthcoming article in *Mise-en-scène*.

William Brown is a Senior Lecturer in Film at the University of Roehampton, London. He is the author of *Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age* (2013) and, with Dina Iordanova and Leshu Torchin, of *Moving People, Moving Images: Cinema and Trafficking in the New Europe* (2010).

Chris Davies is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter. He is the author of *Blockbusters and the Ancient World: Allegory and Warfare in Contemporary Hollywood* (Bloomsbury, 2019), and his research interests include history on film, principally the ancient world, westerns and war films, as well as sci-fi and comic book movies. He currently works as a Senior Compliance Officer at the British Board of Film Classification. His views are his own and do not reflect those of the BBFC.

David H. Fleming is a Senior Lecturer in the Communication, Media and Culture division at the University of Stirling, Scotland, and his research interests gravitate around the intersectionalities between cinema, philosophy and technology. He is the author of *Unbecoming Cinema* (2017) and the co-author of *Kinoteuthis Infernalis, or Squid Cinema from Hell* with William Brown (forthcoming), and *Chinese Urban Shinema* with Simon Harrison (forthcoming). He has also published widely in interdisciplinary journals including *SubStance*, *Film-Philosophy*, *Deleuze Studies*, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies*, *Social Semiotics* and edited collections such as *Posthumanisms Through Deleuze* (forthcoming) and *Deleuze and Film* (2012).

Edward Lamberti teaches film at King's College London and also works at the British Board of Film Classification. He is the editor of *Behind the Scenes at the BBFC: Film Classification from the Silver Screen to the Digital Age* (2012) and the author of *Performing Ethics through Film Style: Levinas with the Dardenne Brothers, Barbet Schroeder and Paul Schrader* (2019).

Janice Loreck teaches in the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University. Her research focuses on representations of women and film violence in global art cinema. She is the author of *Violent Women in Contemporary Cinema* (2016) and is Festival Coordinator for the Melbourne Women in Film Festival. Her recent writings have also appeared in *Australian Humanities Review*, *Science Fiction Film and Television Studies* and *Feminist Media Studies*.

Fulvia Massimi teaches in the Humanities Department at Vanier College in Montreal. She holds a PhD in Film and Moving Image Studies from Concordia University. Her research focuses on local and global understandings of gender and nationhood in the cinemas of Québec, Flanders and Scotland. Her work appears in *Synoptique: An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies* (2016), *Trespassing Journal* (2018), *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Cinema* (2019) and *ReFocus: The Films of Xavier Dolan* (2019).

Whitney Monaghan is an Assistant Lecturer in Film and Screen Studies at Monash University. She has a background in screen, media and cultural studies, and her research examines queer and youth representation on screen. She is the author of the book *Queer Girls, Temporality and Screen Media: Not 'Just a Phase'* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and

co-author of *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures* (Red Globe Press, 2019) with Hannah McCann. She is the founding editor of *Peephole Journal*, an online magazine devoted to creative screen criticism, and Festival Coordinator at the Melbourne Women in Film Festival.

Daniel Palmer is Professor and Associate Dean of Research and Innovation in the School of Art at RMIT University, Melbourne. His books include *Photography and Collaboration: From Conceptual Art to Crowdsourcing* (Bloomsbury, 2017); *Digital Light* (Open Humanities Press, 2015), edited with Sean Cubitt and Nathaniel Tkacz; *The Culture of Photography in Public Space* (Intellect, 2015), edited with Anne Marsh and Melissa Miles; *Twelve Australian Photo Artists* (Piper Press, 2009), co-authored with Blair French; and *Photogenic* (Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2005).

Sean Redmond is an Associate Professor in Screen and Design at Deakin University, Australia. He has published ten books, including *A Companion to Celebrity* (2015), *The AFI Film Reader: Endangering Science Fiction Film* (2015) and *Celebrity and the Media* (2014). With Su Holmes, he edits the journal *Celebrity Studies*, shortlisted for best new academic journal in 2011.

Kirsten Stevens is Lecturer in Arts and Cultural Management at the University of Melbourne and has a background in film and screen studies, popular culture and media and communications. Author of the book, *Australian Film Festivals: Audience, Place and Exhibition Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), her research engages with media industries in national screen contexts, reception studies, media exhibition and distribution, and issues of gender in the cultural industries. She is vice president of *Senses of Cinema* journal and deputy director of the Melbourne Women in Film Festival.

Kate Warren is a Lecturer in Art History and Curatorship at the Australian National University. She is an art historian, writer and curator, with expertise in modern & contemporary Australian and international art and cinema. She received her PhD in Art History from Monash University in 2016, and her research interests cover film, photography, video & new media art, creative research practices and arts writing & criticism. She publishes extensively in publications including *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, *emaj: Online Journal of Art*, *Senses of Cinema*, *Persona Studies*, *History of Photography*, *Discipline*, and *Objektiv*.

She has curated exhibitions for the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art and Channels Video Art Festival, and she is also co-editor of *Peephole Journal*, an online journal dedicated to creative film criticism.

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.1	Scarlett Johansson’s blank stare in the final frames of “Falling Down” music video. Video still, “Falling Down” music video (Bennett Miller 2008)	43
Fig. 7.1	Scarlett Johansson trips on a Glasgow street, 2012, unknown photographer (<i>Source</i> Reddit)	122
Fig. 7.2	Selected examples of the Scarlett Johansson Falling Down meme, in order: Johansson as DJ (<i>Source</i> Know Your Meme), with “Sad Keanu” (<i>Source</i> Says.com), as walrus (<i>Source</i> Sad and Useless), riding a dolphin (<i>Source</i> Know Your Meme), playing bongos (<i>Source</i> Know Your Meme), and dancing “Thriller” (<i>Source</i> Know Your Meme)	134
Fig. 8.1	Female-as-nation, film still <i>Under the Skin</i> (2013)	159
Fig. 8.2	Fusion with nature, film still <i>Under the Skin</i> (2013)	159



Why Scarlett Johansson?

Kirsten Stevens, Janice Loreck and Whitney Monaghan

In his introduction to the BFI's *Star Studies: A Critical Guide*, Martin Shingler suggests, "One of the most persistent questions asked about stardom is why some film actors become stars and not others" (2012, 3). Yet we might also pose another question—why do some stars become the focus of scholarly and popular writing on their stardom and not others? What qualities do some stars possess, in their saleability, their enduring appeal or their engagement with processes of commodification, that make them worthy of the type of close scrutiny that sustains articles and book-length examinations? In developing *Screening Scarlett Johansson*, these questions have been unavoidable. What about this actress, whose career—while spanning more than two decades—is far from complete, makes her ready and fitting to be the focus of a book? Of all the actresses who currently populate the films of Hollywood and world cinema, or adorn the pages of magazines

K. Stevens (✉)

Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, Parkville, VIC, Australia
e-mail: kirsten.stevens@unimelb.edu.au

J. Loreck

Screen Arts and Cultural Studies, Curtin University, Bentley, WA, Australia

W. Monaghan

Film and Screen Studies, Monash University, Caulfield, VIC, Australia

© The Author(s) 2019

J. Loreck et al. (eds.), *Screening Scarlett Johansson*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33196-2_1

promoting perfumes, fashion brands or simply themselves, what makes this one distinctive? In short, why a book on Scarlett Johansson?

There are many reasons to single out Johansson for special attention within the growing collection of studies devoted to contemporary stars and stardom. Johansson sits among a number of female stars who have transitioned from child actor to adult star since the 1990s. Alongside the likes of Natalie Portman, Kirsten Dunst, Kristen Stewart and Emma Stone, Johansson has emerged over the past two decades to an increasingly central role within Hollywood filmmaking, franchise cinema and global celebrity culture. While a case could be made for an exploration of many of these women, however, there are qualities to Johansson that stand her apart from this company. Unlike the majority of these actresses, she has not won an Academy Award. Instead, she has achieved fame and acclaim in other ways.

Much of Johansson's celebrity rests in her popular appeal as a hyper-feminine beauty and global glamour star. Moreover, much of this notoriety has come, as Dyer (1986) suggests it does for all stars, from the diverse, multimedia and intertextual star images of Johansson that have circulated beyond her on-screen roles. After topping a poll run in *Esquire* in 2006, Johansson has regularly featured in "sexiest woman alive" lists in men's magazines such as *Maxim*, *GQ*, *Playboy*, *FHM* and *Men's Health*, including achieving the perhaps dubious honour of becoming in 2013 the first woman to have achieved top spot twice on the *Esquire* chart. The popularity and fascination with Johansson's body and beauty have not only captivated male fans, however. Numerous brand endorsements have also secured her place in the pages of women's magazines. She has worked as a model and spokeswoman for several fashion and cosmetic brands, including Calvin Klein fragrance, Louis Vuitton fashion, L'Oréal hair products and Dolce & Gabbana perfumes and cosmetics. Such endorsements shore up Johansson's image, building on her sexualised persona and place within the popular imagining of contemporary Hollywood stardom. Yet it was in 2016 that Johansson's popularity found a more material measure, with *Forbes* naming her the year's top-grossing star due to the \$1.2 billion USD brought in by the films in which she starred (Robehmed 2016).

Although such popular appeal offers a reason why this star might be singled out for a closer look, there is more to Johansson than her status as a sexy, bankable actress. Johansson's films and her actions off-screen move within and beyond this popular image in ways that distinguish her as a star worthy of closer scrutiny. Johansson's long and varied career demonstrates

she is an actor capable of change, and it is precisely this changeable quality—and the performances it fosters—that drives this book. Beyond her place as popular Hollywood starlet, Johansson’s career has also framed her as a child actress, a darling of American independent cinema, a leading lady within global art house productions, and more recently as the recognisably female face of contemporary science fiction and action franchise cinema. Her ability to move through and across genres and institutional modes with an ease and visibility possessed by few other contemporary actresses marks her as a figure worthy of some consideration. Her body of work, moreover, provides a fertile ground to interrogate not only what contemporary stardom, and female stardom particularly, looks like, but also to see how an examination of the work of a single actor might foster new critical approaches to explorations of gender, genre and stardom in the twenty-first century. It is on this fertile ground that this book sits.

If Johansson has charted a career through a multitude of roles that play to and subvert cultural norms around her recognisable femininity, several of her roles have also worked to highlight her tendency to play up such transformations. Johansson has, with somewhat astonishing regularity, embraced characters that are themselves in transition. Whether playing ingénue or cyborg, Johansson is frequently cast as women who wander, experiencing coming of age or identity crises. She plays American *flâneuses* in *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003) and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (Woody Allen, 2008); characters that investigate the boundaries of their humanity and non-humanity in *The Island* (Michael Bay, 2005), *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013) and *Ghost in the Shell* (Rupert Sanders, 2017); and femmes fatales burdened by their own performances of seduction in *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2013) and *Avengers* franchise. As Johansson (2017) remarks:

perhaps subconsciously I’ve chosen characters who are on some existential quest, perhaps it’s some reflection of my own journey ... These characters all have that struggle and brush up against themselves time and again until they break through and are sitting as women in their own skin.

Whilst Johansson has a large body of work in which she does not play such characters (turns in *Hail, Caesar!* [Joel and Ethan Coen, 2016] and *Rough Night* [Lucia Aniello, 2017] indicate her skill in comedic roles, for example), it is a conspicuous feature of her career that her persona should be so regularly mobilised to portray femininity in transition.

Johansson's decision to take on such characters has a pragmatic element. Roles as ingénues and cyborgs have allowed her to participate in several milieus of cinema culture at various points in her career, performing as both a starlet of independent films as well as a mainstream science fiction performer. Yet it is nonetheless intriguing that Johansson should be the actor who is emblematic of unstable personhood and feminine identity crisis. She is the contemporary go-to actress for Hollywood's own feminine archetype; blonde-haired and green-eyed, Johansson's appearance recalls 1950s sex icons such as Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield. Admirers routinely make hyperbolic claims about her femininity—calling her “gilded to behold” (Lane 2014) and “sexually overwhelming” (Allen qtd. in Hill 2007)—as well as comically redundant declarations: “She looks like a woman. She exudes *womanness*” (Jacobs 2006). Despite this characterisation of Johansson as femininity embodied, she has nevertheless become representative of women in flux.

This chapter gives an overview of Johansson's career as a way of mapping out her persona and its vicissitudes. As the contributors to this volume demonstrate, Johansson's critical interest is extensive, her persona opening up numerous pathways for discussions of child performance, the eroticisation of violence, white supremacy, national versus transnational cinema, and the human and animal divide. The purpose of this opening chapter, then, is to offer an overview of Johansson's career to precede and complement these contributions, as well as to give a unifying perspective on her image. We therefore examine Johansson's early career as a child actress, her positioning as a star of American independent cinema, her fame as an object of heterosexual male desire, and her recent turn towards self-parody in science fiction cinema. In providing this overview, we trace the development of—and productive contradictions within—Johansson's image. We consider how Johansson has evolved in paradoxical ways throughout her twenty year career to become representative of Hollywood's iteration of the perfect woman, yet, at the same time, a star of feminine transformation and instability.

EARLY ROLES AND RISING STARDOM

As with all stars, Johansson's persona consists of a lived biography. Scarlett Ingrid Johansson was born in 1984 in New York City to parents Melanie Sloan and Karsten Johansson. She has three siblings—an older sister and brother, Vanessa and Adrian, as well as a twin brother, Hunter. The Johansson and Sloan families had ties to the film industry long before Scarlett