“The Island” – and its brave new world?

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1 Introduction

Two months ago the science fiction thriller “The Island” was on TV. As a matter of interest I decided watching it and I enjoyed it very much. Hence, I did research into the film’s reviews and eventually found out that it joins a series of successful dystopic films e.g. “Planet of the Apes” from 1968 (2 Oscars and another 4 awards)\(^1\) and “Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome” or “Mad Max 3” from 1985 (nomination for 1 Golden Globe)\(^2\)

Predecessor of these films is a novel called “Brave New World”, written by Aldous Huxley, which already took up the topic of future generations in the year 1932. Did the features set up by Aldous Huxley for the purpose of describing a future society act as a kind of orientation for the films? Or did they appear to be outdated?

Does “The Island” go beyond these features? Is it in the position to teach us something about our society or is it just an action film willing to satisfy all the science fiction fans out there?

In the course of my “Facharbeit” I would like to attend to these questions. First of all, I am going to describe the plot of both “The Island” and “Brave New World”. In a next step I am going to compare the film with the book regarding the features of a dystopia. Finally, I want to find out whether the film implies a political or social message.

1.1 Summary of “Brave New World”

In his dystopian novel “Brave New World”, published in 1932, Aldous Huxley describes how society could be like in the future.

The novel is set in the year 632 after the introduction of the assembly line by Henry Ford.

People live in a single World State, which aims for social stability and happiness. Therefore everything is perfectly organized from the cradle to the grave.

Fertilized eggs from which human beings will develop later have to undergo a process called “bokanovskification”, which arrests the development of the eggs and exposes them to alcohol, x-rays and a lack of oxygen. The intensity of this process is decisive for the caste people will belong to. There are Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons. In order to guarantee that every citizen is perfectly happy with his life and the caste he belongs to, there is conditioning, too.

The ten World Controllers, one of them is called Mustapha Mond, ensure that people stick to the rules for a functioning society.

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Beyond the World State, several reservations exist. There the natives still live like people used to do in Ford’s age.

While Bernard Marx, a not very popular Alpha-Plus, and Lenina Crowne, a very attractive Beta, visit a reservation in New Mexico they make John’s and Linda’s acquaintance. John is an English-speaking, handsome young white and Linda is his mother. The two of them live as outsiders among the natives, meaning that they are neither tolerated nor integrated. As soon as Bernard finds out that Linda originally is from London and was left behind pregnant in the reservation by her boyfriend a few years ago, he sees his chance to finally win social recognition instead of being excluded. John, who has a certain image of the civilized world due to his mother’s stories, is desperate to get to know it.

At first Bernard’s plan works out: he unmasks his boss to be John’s father and thus ruins his social position and career. Since John, Mr. Savage, becomes London’s attraction, Bernard also gains in importance.

But John quickly turns away from this civilization, where people only have one aim and duty: having fun. After he has come to the conclusion that also his admired Lenina only understands love as having sex, he withdraws to a lonely lighthouse as a hermit. By doing so, he becomes even more interesting for the society – the lighthouse has turned into a tourist attraction. In total rage he attacks Lenina and he hangs himself.³

### 1.2 Summary of “The Island”

“The Island“ is an American science fiction thriller directed by Michael Bay and released in 2005. It is featuring Ewan McGregor and Scarlett Johansson.

In the first half of the film the characters are in a sterile futuristic environment. While the citizens wear identical white uniforms, their supervisors wear black ones. There is a considerable amount of TV screens that show slogans and instructions. Twice a day they show the results of the Lottery. This environment is said to be a place of protection for its citizens, since there has been a worldwide contamination. But still, there is one non-polluted place on earth extant. The lucky ones, who win the Lottery, are allowed to go there.

As the inhabitants’ level of education is equivalent to that of 15-year-olds, they do not question the status quo or the fact that they have to abide by certain regulations. Lincoln Six Echo (Ewan McGregor) is an exception. He wants to know why he is not allowed to eat bacon instead of tofu or why they all have to wear white uniforms, which testifies for curiosity.

³ see also Hermes 2000, p.5
Together with Jordan Two Delta (Scarlett Johansson), Lincoln Six Echo escapes from the isolated world in the second half of the film and they find out that there has not been a contamination. It was just an illusion perpetuated by the corporation in order to cut off its objects from the world around. The clones are not intended to find out that they only serve as spare parts store for their donors.

Lincoln Six Echo and Jordan Two Delta decide to search for their donors who do not have the slightest idea that their spare parts stores actually are real human beings that can feel and think. By doing so, they hope to trigger off a revolt against the corporation. On their way to their donors the two clones have to fling off various pursuers.4

2 Comparison of “The Island” and “Brave New World”

2.1 Society structures

In “The Island” the society of clones is controlled by the corporation that has created them. It wants to offer people the opportunity to elongate their lives and to cure diseases such as leukaemia. Control includes the following aspects:

First of all, the clones are scientifically supervised by means of computers, which note any kind of conspicuousness while they are sleeping e. g. nightmares. Additionally, the computers are in a position to analyse the clones’ physical condition, resulting in a possible ban to eat what they want.

Furthermore, supervisors ensure that the clones stick to the rules such as not having physical contact. Whenever there is an offence, the supervisors intervene and make a note of it. As a result, a protocol of the individual’s behaviour is set up.

Besides, loudspeaker spread the rules of etiquette whereby everybody is meant to preserve his or her sense of decency. Bedtime is also used for shaping the clones’ attitudes, because certain images are incorporated into their dreams. These images or implants of memories are mainly responsible for pretending that there was a life before the contamination.

Every clone is given a job, but during his spare time he ought to go in for sports and participate in reading lessons. With this the corporation aims to reduce aggressions and beget a good social behaviour.

4 see also Ebert 2005, rogerebert.suntimes.com
If there are clones that appear to be problematic the main supervisor has to deal with them. Eventually he either compels them to undergo the performance test of the synapse or kills them.\(^5\)

Focusing on how society is controlled in “Brave New World” one could state the following:
To start with, citizens of the World State are totally controlled by the government that wants to achieve social stability and happiness. For this, it frees its citizen from all evil such as sadness.

In the course of time infectious diseases have been eradicated and people have found possibilities to stay young. This is why they stay healthy and do not need medical supervision. Because of the conditioning there is hardly anyone who would like to stray from the standard behaviour. If a member of the upper castes behaves inappropriately, the World Controllers will take care of him.

Children receive moral indoctrination while they sleep, too. The underlying process is called “hypnopaedia” and involves the permanent repetition of mnemonic phrases.

In Brave New World people are given their jobs according to what caste they are in. Since they are conditioned they like their jobs even if they are of the greatest monotony. In their free time people can do whatever they want to do for the purpose of being happy.

In case there is someone threatening social stability, he is obliged to see the World Controller who is then going to decide on which measure is taken, at worst he is transferred to Iceland or another Island far away from civilisation.\(^6\)

So all in all, one could state that the clones in “The Island” are actively controlled all their lives. Primarily, computers are responsible for this, but humans also contribute to it. In contrast to that, one has to point out that control in “Brave New World” already takes place as soon as a human being is created. It also covers childhood. As an adult one’s attitudes are perfectly shaped and if they still start to sway, the World Controllers will take care of you.

\section*{2.2 Members’ characteristics}
In “The Island” their purpose in life is based on the hope to be transferred to the Island. The only chance for men to get there consists in winning the Lottery, whereas women can also be sent to the Island as soon as they have given birth to a child. Hence, the Lottery represents the

\(^5\) cf. “The Island“ 2006, min. 0-16
\(^6\) cf. Huxley, 1932, chapter 1ff
most important social event in the clones’ lives. Nobody would risk missing it. When there is no Lottery the waiting clones spend their time on simulated duels as well as on hanging around in bars.

When doing their duty i.e. working, participating in sport activities or reading lessons, the clones do not question anything. They are simply satisfied with doing what they are expected to do.

In the community of clones only friendships are conceivable, probably only among their own gender, because it already seems to be kind of odd that the two protagonists have such a strong bond. But since the clones are not familiar with sexuality and are subjected to the prohibition of touching one another, sexual tensions do not occur.

The clones’ names all have the same structure. They comprise their bearers’ age and the place of residence of the donor.⁷

In contrast to that the citizens of “Brave New World” are made differently. All they aim for in life is happiness and amusement. When they do not have to work they while away the time with playing Obstacle – and Electromagnetic Golf, having dinner in Westminster Abbey Cabaret for example, taking soma, dancing and having sex. Due to bokanovskification, conditioning and hypnopaedia the citizens in “Brave New World” do not find fault with their lives either. Except for the Alphas maybe they are satisfied with what they have. If they have to cope with problems or a touch of sadness they can take soma which allows them to flee from everyday reality.

Living according to the principle “everyone belongs to everyone else” sex and pleasure constitute the relationships between men and women. Promiscuity is an unwritten law. That is why serious, long-term relationships do not exist. Even friendships appear to be difficult because there usually develop sexual tensions between men and women.

There is a small number of different names in “Brave New World”, which also leads to the suppression of individuality.⁸

After having compared what the members of society are like in the film and in the book one could detect parallels. In both communities the people do not question their lives. While the clones have found the meaning of life in the longing for the “Island”, the citizens of the World

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⁷ cf. "The Island“ 2006, min.26-31
⁸ cf. Huxley 1932, chapter 4f
State see the purpose of life in being happy. Nevertheless, there is no real community in both cases since there are no real and strong bonds among the members.

2.3 The protagonists` development
One of the two protagonists in „The Island“ is Lincoln Six Ecco (Ewan McGregor). The first few scenes of the film enable the viewer to find out that he does not live within the law of the community: he has differing eating habits, ignores the prohibition to touch one another, leaves his sector, has contact with a stranger and drinks alcohol. Lincoln Six Ecco actually is the first, who questions the structures of the community. First of all, he is desperate to know what the point of his work is. Furthermore, he longs for more than the Island. Additionally he doubts the meaningfulness of several rules.
Following the observation of two important incidents Lincoln Six Ecco decides to escape from his normal environment: he captures a moth that is said to have become extinct because of the contamination and he witnesses that a young mother is killed directly after the delivery of her child. He comes to the conclusion that the supervisor and his people only pretend to have saved him and his friends. In fact they are kept imprisoned and the Island is just a way of explaining the disappearance of people. When he figures out that his friend Jordan Two Delta is threatened, he takes her with him and they flee.
While they try to cope with the life outside the corporation and have to hide from their chasers, the protagonists reveal the truth about their identities. From 15-year-olds they develop into adults. They make their first sexual experiences and decide to search for their donors in order to demand the rights of a human being.
Lincoln Six Ecco sticks to this decision and proves in the course of the film that he really has matured. This becomes obvious when he can chose between leading a free life and abandoning his friends who remained in the corporation or risking his own life and returning to the corporation. 9

One of the main characters in “Brave New World” certainly is Bernhard Marx. Although he is an Alpha-Plus, he does not enjoy a high standing. On the one hand this can be explained by his outer appearance. Due to alcohol in his blood surrogate, he is notably smaller than other Alpha-Plus men. As a result men laugh at him and women do not even take it into consideration to have sex with him. On the other hand it is his behavior that makes him

9 cf. „The Island“ 2006, min.0-26; min.31-124

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appear strange. He opts out of society refusing to take soma and to participate in the normal spare time activities. On top of that he considers promiscuity to be something bad. When he returns from the reservation accompanied by Linda and John and becomes a man of outstanding importance, it turns out that his criticism of the values of “Brave New World” was a way to make himself be special. When he has several women at the same time and falls out with his friend Helmholtz, one can detect that he is in fact unprincipled. Instead of rushing to John’s and Helmholtz’s aid during a soma-uprising, he betrays them. From the very beginning John only serves as a means to an end so that Bernhard can satisfy his vindictiveness concerning his boss. As soon as John refuses to remain Bernhard’s instrument, Bernhard’s success fades and he is even more isolated than before.  

The two protagonists develop in the course of the story. Lincoln Six Ecco turns from the initial fifteen-year-old rebel into a grown-up man who risks his life for the sake of justice. Bernhard, however, slips out of the outsider role and becomes a man of significant importance. He shows his true colours and after that he becomes an outsider again.

3 Conclusion

In the course of the comparison between the film and the book I could detect both parallels and differences concerning the features describing a dystopia.

Both works describe that an authority sets up rules and controls society. In “The Island” the corporation acts in an attempt to earn money and to satisfy people’s wishes for an extremely long life. In contrast to that the government in “Brave New World” acts for “the good of society”.

Furthermore, people are manipulated in both cases so that they are content with the structures they live in. “The Island” suggests that people have to be manipulated all their lives, because otherwise they would behave the way normal human beings do: they tend to be curious. Through “Brave New World” we get to know another perspective. If people are conditioned and manipulated from the very beginning of their lives, they will not become curious or question anything.

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10 cf. Huxley 1932, chapter 6-12  
11 cf. Hermes 2000, p.43f
The people in “The Island” and “Brave New World” are basically the same as they are tranquilised with a pre-defined meaning of life. While they are looking forward to going to the island in the film, the people in the book want to be happy.

The main characters I have chosen to describe are the ones that cannot get along with the structures of society. That is why they dissociate themselves from society. Lincoln Six Ecco does that by turning into a rebel and Bernhard Marx does that by refusing to comply with the standard behaviour.

Due to the parallels I detected one could assert that “Brave New World” basically provided the essence for “The Island”. But since the film was released in a more modern society it had to adapt to the time. Therefore it has a more scientific touch i.e. it integrates science into the story. On top of that, the film deals with people’s current attitudes. In fact, it says that Americans want to live longer and suggests that they will stop at nothing. Here I see an implied sociocritical message. No matter how far science is going to develop people should never have the power to decide on life and death. Taking it upon themselves to extend their lives is wrong, but making another living being suffer for this desire is the most egocentric thing to do. Furthermore, the film hints at a political problem. How can it happen that the corporation is in a position to create clones and make money with them? Would that not be forbidden? Hence, I think that the film alludes to the fact that governments are often not aware of what single corporations really do and in how far they break the law.

With these findings I can definitely say that “The Island” is not only an action film. It shows us that people should make up their minds concerning their behaviour and their attitude, because otherwise it is likely that our society also drives to a dystopia. In this case Aldous Huxley was right when he said: “Then, I projected it (the utopia) six hundred years into the future. Today it seems quite possible that the horror may be upon us within a single century.”

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12 Huxley 1932, p.xxxviii
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Primary literature:

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The Island (130 min.). Dir. Michael Bay. Warner Bros. Pictures and Dreamworks Pictures, 2006
5 Erklärung

Ich versichere hiermit, dass ich diese Arbeit selbstständig angefertigt und keine anderen als die von mir angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel verwendet habe. Die den benutzten Werken wörtlich oder inhaltlich entnommenen Stellen sind als solche gekennzeichnet.

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