

Heroines of the Gaze: Gender and Self-Reflexivity in Current Espionage Films

By Isabelle Stauffer, University of Zürich, Switzerland

Abstract:

The two female spies central to the movies *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, USA 1996) and *Shining Through* (David Seltzer, USA 1992), indicate that it is time to re-scrutinize Laura Mulvey's now famous analysis of gender-specific ways of looking in Hollywood cinema. Spys - male or female - need to be good observers and usually they are also in possession of optical devices extending their visual capabilities and hence their visual power. Psychoanalytical approaches, however, fail to explain such a character: the female spy provided with optical devices and weapons cannot be explained away as a phallic and therefore 'false' woman, but transgresses the binary logic by means of her ability to form assemblages with weapons, special devices and things found.

1 In the history of the spy movie genre, women have served mostly as little more than "window dressing." At least this is the conclusion that Tom Lisanti and Louis Paul come to in their work, *Film Fatales: Women in Espionage Films and Television*, which appeared in 2001. Despite this initially one-sided statement, the authors go on to outline four different types of heroines. The first type, the helpful spy, supports the hero with her fighting skills and may, as an exception, even be central to the action. The second type, the innocent, becomes the quasi-reluctant spy who burdens the hero with her ignorance; she helps to maintain the tension of the film by her need to be repeatedly rescued. The two remaining types are to be found on the side of the adversary: either the spy who because of her love for the hero sides with him, or the incorrigible fiend (Lisanti/Paul 14-16).

2 Then again, despite this differentiated categorization, Lisanti and Paul's talk of "window dressing" implies that the presence of these women generally serves a voyeuristic purpose and that they are unable to return the gaze. This view corresponds to Laura Mulvey's now famous analysis of the gender-specific ways of looking in Hollywood cinema that she had put forward in 1975 in her essay, "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema": "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (19). What Mulvey was saying was that spectators identifying with characters in films, male protagonists act as "bearers of the look," whereas female protagonists serve merely as spectacle - on both levels: within the narrative and for the audience. The female character's visual presence tends "to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation" (19). While the male characters, as bearers of the look, neutralize these extradiegetic tendencies of the female spectacle by pushing the story along (Mulvey, "Visual

Pleasures" 19-20). Consequently, according to Mulvey, the cinema establishes and serves only the scopophilia of the male members of the audience, while the visual pleasure of the female members of the audience remains unconsidered. These structures, however, conflict with the career profile of the female spy. Spies need to be good observers, therefore they usually possess optical devices, such as night-vision equipment, telescopic sights, cameras, etc., that extend their visual capabilities and consequently their visual power. As a result, such characters, when female, might present a potent key to reverse traditional ways of looking in cinema.

3 Optical devices as mentioned above not only present visually attractive props for the camera, they also form a kind of connection with the camera by introducing a self-reflective quality, as can be seen in early crime films (Schlupmann 115). The same holds true for the espionage film in general as crime film and espionage film can be regarded as closely related genres (Brockhaus-Enzyklopädie 12: 510). There is, nevertheless, a slight difference in character typology: in contrast to police officers or detectives, a female spy can deviate further from postulated norms and is allowed to demonstrate a more violent behaviour (Dole 94).

4 Let us now turn to the factor of self-referentiality in more detail. I agree with Robert Stam's understanding of the term "reflexive art", that is, an art form that calls attention to its status as a construct by inviting the audience to examine its design and materiality (1). Of course, reflexivity cannot only affect the visual level of espionage films, but also that of the narrative, as the character of the female spy alludes to the literary stereotype of crime fiction narrator, whereupon the manifested gender reversal provides a possibility for self-reflexivity of the narrator's position (Schlupman 136).

5 In my analysis of interrelated aspects of gender and self-referentiality in espionage films, I will focus on the first kind of the female spy - the helpful spy. I have chosen as examples the following two films: *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, USA 1996) and *Shining Through* (David Seltzer, USA 1992). My aim is to examine in the light of Laura Mulvey's theories the degree to which the potential of inversion has been realised and the resulting self-reflective elements. Although *The Long Kiss Goodnight* as a secret agent film and *Shining Through* as an anti-Nazi film belong to different sub-genres, they are related by their moments of self-reflective questioning of gender roles.

Scrutinizing the self and others: *The Long Kiss Goodnight*

6 Samantha Caine (Geena Davis), a primary school teacher and mother of an eight-year-

old daughter, suffers from partial amnesia and only remembers the last eight years of her life. After a series of traumatic events she starts searching for her past with the help of a private detective, Mitch Hennessy (Samuel Lee Jackson). Gradually she (and along with her the audience) discovers that she used to be an assassin for the CIA called Charlene Elizabeth Baltimore. Meanwhile, however, circumstances and power structures have changed; former enemies of her employers have become the CIA's allies. This new situation leads to a series of brutal confrontations involving Samantha/Charlene, Mitch and their opponents, including the CIA.

7 In espionage films the character of the secret agent is often portrayed as a split personality; here, this provides additional depth as the split results from a modern woman's view of herself and from conflicting notions of contemporary femininity. Accordingly, both sides of her personality confront each other in two mirror scenes hallucinated by Samantha. In the first scene, Charlene introduces herself to Samantha thereby announcing her return. In the second scene, Charlene goes so far as to cut the throat of the primary school teacher and mother.

8 According to Carol M. Dole, such character splitting is a mechanism typical of contemporary films portraying women whose power is based on armed violence and physical strength: "Splitting, which distributes among multiple personalities or characters the modes of power that would otherwise be concentrated in a single female hero, reduces the threat of each individual protagonist" (89). This mechanism aims at the empowering of women *without* bringing about the sense of disempowerment in men (Dole 81).¹ By splitting the role, the male and female attributes of the heroine can be apportioned to two personalities and thus the binary ordering of the sexes can be re-established at least within the character. In consequence, "[e]ach of these splitting techniques avoids commitment to a single representation of heroic womanhood [...]" (Dole 94).² Hilary Neroni thinks, that the splitting results in a stereotypical representation of two traditional opposite images of women, the whore and the faithful wife. "The battle between these two stereotypes in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* offers us an example of the role of violence in male fantasies of women" (157). Thus the splitting reinforces the duality of women rather than collapsing it (160).

9 However, I challenge Dole's and Neroni's thesis that the female spy in *The Long Kiss*

¹ Empowering and disempowering are terms used by Dole that I will discuss further at the end of my article. The possibility that violent women trigger in men a feeling of disempowerment exists not least because violence normally results in establishing hierarchies. In this specific case this carries the added consequence that it represents a reversal of traditional configurations (Vares 223).

² Dole's observations are based on a traditional, i.e. original, rational-autonomous and uniform understanding of the subject, in the Cartesian sense, whereas the current post-structural interpretation sees the subject as being decentralised and generated through discourse (Nünning 613).

Goodnight is being weakened by such a splitting strategy. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, there exists a certain tradition within espionage films to employ main characters with a split personality. In the opening credits already we see contrasting images characterising each side of the heroine: Scenes portraying Samantha are shot normally, that is, in positive (compare fig. 1), whereas scenes from Charlene's life are shot in negative (compare fig. 2).³ Secondly, the film emphasizes the subversion of the binary opposition, on the one hand between the heroine's two contradicting personalities, and on the other hand between femininity and espionage activity. As a result, the film constructs a complex image of a woman that includes both female-defined and male-defined characteristics. Binary oppositions are undermined as follows: firstly, we can identify iconographic similarities between, say, lipstick and bullets.

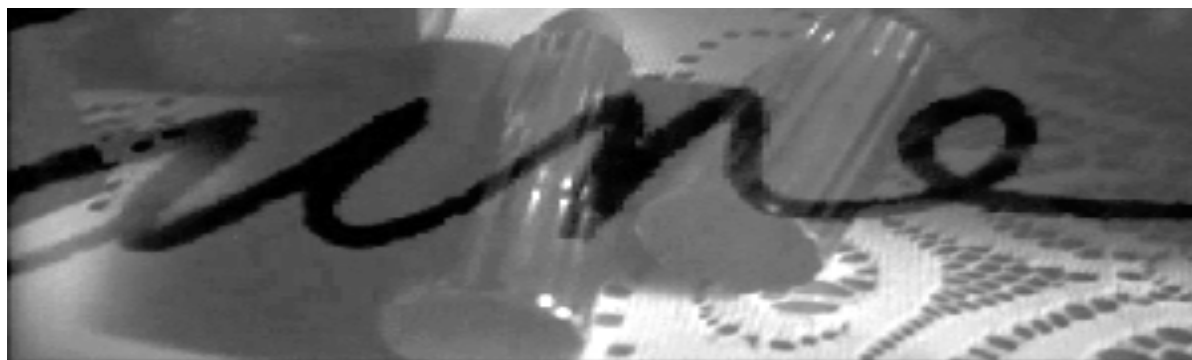


Fig. 1.: *The Long Kiss Goodnight*



Fig. 2.: *TLCG*

10 Secondly, at the beginning of the opening credits we see Gina Davies' hand signing Samantha's name, followed by the same hand signing as Charlene, but this time the sequence is represented in negative. Furthermore, a scene (located near the middle of the film) depicting the transition from one personality aspect into the other is alluded to: In search of

³ Moreover, by showing family photographs in a reverse shot through the telescopic sight of a weapon we see that traditional role images will be attacked.

her identity, Samantha writes Charlene's name on a sheet of paper in a gesture reminiscent of automatic writing. In addition, the entire opening credit sequence features repeatedly images of both names in handwriting. Thirdly, these negatively and positively represented film passages are inseparable from one another, hinting at the likewise established connection between the two sides of the character. Finally, this reference to the materiality of film as a stripe of celluloid also embodies a self-reflective element.

11 The transformation from Samantha to Charlene takes place gradually and gets communicated by various mechanisms, one of which uses the mirror scenes as mentioned above. Further mechanisms are as follows: Samantha increasingly picks up on male-connotated behaviour, such as drinking, smoking and swearing - activities her boyfriend jokingly indulges in at the beginning of the film.⁴ The principle of a phased intensification is also applied to Samantha's assumptions concerning her past. As her weapon skills return, she thinks - first due to her dexterity with a knife - that she must have been a cook. In the course of the story this assumption is commented on ambivalently. Samantha knocks out her first opponent with a cake. In the further confrontations with her opponents, the visual and acoustic codification of her as the female victim is gradually being replaced by that of her as the female culprit. Initially, Samantha is depicted as attractive for both the characters on screen and for the people in the audience. Her adversaries strip her down to a white *négligé* and she gets tortured by being tied to a water wheel. Yet, the more her fighting spirit returns, the less her underwear highlights her femininity. Instead, the camera emphasizes her upper arm muscles and what used to be Samantha's hysterical cry of fear alters into Charlene's battle cry.⁵ Thereafter, her *négligé* gets replaced by an armless (and again white) T-shirt and a pair of jeans.⁶

12 In addition to these transformation processes there are also fundamental elements of ambivalence that help to resolve the oppositions. Motherhood, as a popular vehicle for traditional representations of women, relates to both personality aspects, in conflict-oriented as well as harmonious form (Dole 105). The character names are also chosen correspondingly: both names, Samantha and Charlene, get shortened to Sam and Charly, that is, to names normally attributed to men. Furthermore, Samantha's surname Caine is reminiscent of the pugnacious biblical figure Cain.

⁴ For male codification of these activities see for example Vares 223.

⁵ This change is achieved by cinematic means, that is, both the camera range and the framing is altered (switching from a medium long shot or from American shot to a close shot), resulting in her arms filling the middle of the screen. Regarding muscular women and the way in which they present a problem for a binary conception of gender identity see Tasker 4 and Brown 62.

⁶ With regards to her clothing, Samantha has already dressed as a man at the beginning of the film when she appears as Santa in the Santa Claus procession.

13 In accordance with its undermining of binary oppositions, the film's end remains open. We see the heroine spending her days peacefully on a farm with boyfriend and child at her side. Her appearance combines that of Sam and Charly. When her boyfriend remarks that he could live like this forever she confidently throws a knife at the nearest tree, where it sticks quivering. Dole's regarding of this ending remains ambivalent. On the one hand, she claims that the end is monopolized by the traditional female side. On the other hand, it is precisely this open-end quality that offers new possibilities of strength and of self-acceptance to the heroine (Dole 98). Neroni is convinced, that Sam has become a schoolteacher again, even if we do not see that. For her the combination of Sam and Charly ultimately fails, so she speaks of an "uncomfortable amalgamation" and a "uneasy combination" (154, 158). At the same time she notices: "But the combination also shows that we cannot separate the violent woman from the schoolteacher - or the whore from the mother" (158). She gives another hint, that there is more complexity in his depiction of femininity than she would like to admit: "When faced with the question - who is the fantasy, Samantha or Charly? - the film nicely formulates the idea that both these identities are based in fantasy" (158). I will return to this deconstruction of an original gender identity in my discussion of Judith Butlers notion of gender as a cultural construct below.

14 I prefer Karen Schneider's approach of assessing the ambiguity to Dole's and Neroni's interpretations; Schneider concludes that: "Sam has not repressed Charlie but incorporated her; she can fully reemerge any time Sam/Charlie needs - or wants - her to. It is left for the audience to decide if this is a promise or a threat" (11).

15 The role-transgressing potential of a figure like Sam/Charly causes problems for binary sex/gender conceptions:

For example, feminists working within the dominant theoretical model of psychoanalysis have had extremely limited spaces within which to discuss the transformative and transgressive potential of the action heroine. This is because psychoanalytic accounts which theorize sexual difference within the framework of linked binary oppositions (active male/passive female) necessarily position normative female subjectivity as passive or in terms of lack. From this perspective, active and aggressive women in the cinema can only be seen as phallic, unnatural or 'figuratively male'. (Hills 39)

Psychoanalytical approaches not only see an active performance but also special devices and weapons as phallic: "It is perhaps the centrality of images of women with guns [...] that has caused the most concern among feminist critics. The phallic woman, that characters like Sarah Connor and Ripley represent, is seen as a male ruse [...] (Tasker 139).⁷ The logic

⁷ See also Schmid-Bortenschlager 80, 90 and Brown 53, 56.

behind these approaches emerges as a circular "'philosophy of capture' in which the innovation of a new concept is contained and interpreted in an endless being-made-what-one-is-*a priori*" (Hills 44). If role-transcending heroines are basically seen as being phallic or male they cannot be perceived as questioning gender categories, and women as a result can only be defined as being passive (Vares 239, Brown 53, 56, 65 and Hills 39, 44). What this does result in, however, is that gender roles become absolute. In addition, these approaches are blind to their own self-constructing element: "In the circular logic of gender/role identification, the character wields the guns and muscles because of the role and is identifiable in the heroic role because of the guns and muscles" (Brown 60). Adding to this is the ultimate and too narrow notion of viewer identification (Brown 69). Barbara Creed notes that post-Mulvian feminist film theory increasingly questions an identification model where the spectator is monolithic and rigidly oriented on his or her gender counterpart on the screen. It is assumed rather that the audience takes alternating positions, depending on how films attempt to channel and manage to regulate the identification process (84 and Neale 4-5).

16 Elizabeth Hills' term *assemblage* offers an escape from the circular argumentation of such an approach (44). For her, it is no longer a question of which organ a body has at its disposal, but rather what it is that the corresponding body produces, what connections it makes and what it does. In connection with special devices and weapons, the body can form associations or assemblages. The focus of such a new mode of subjectivity lies in the dynamism. Whereas in a psychoanalytical model the heroine's losing her weapon even once would indicate "instability of ownership" and thus lack of phallus, with Hill's approach this must not have more pejorative implications than the male hero's losing his weapon (Dole 97).⁸ In line with Hills' stress on temporary alliances it is unimportant where Charly takes her telescopic sight and/or weapons from. However, if a woman with a weapon, or any active and aggressive woman, from a psychoanalytical point of view is been regarded as a false woman or a disguised man, then the element of falsification or of disguising should be looked at more closely - even when refusing such a view. And this is where Marie Ann Doane's term *masquerade*, from her essay "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator" which appeared in 1982, does come in. Doane suggests that the representation of femaleness is to be understood as a masquerade, just as identification by a female audience with a male position was described as transvestism. Whether intentionally or simply in effect, masquerade carries the accoutrements of femaleness to extremes, thus duplicating the representation. This contains a disturbing effect for the image of the woman: "By destabilizing the image, the

⁸ By making this claim Dole is ultimately limiting herself to the psychoanalytical model.

masquerade confounds this masculine structure of the look. It effects a defamiliarization of female iconography" (Doane 26). Moreover, in the business of espionage, the element of masquerade is part of the job, as a result of which female spies with their femaleness as masquerade always possess a duplicated representation (Schlupmann 138 and Horvilleur 148).

17 Jeffrey A. Brown points out that Judith Butler also uses masquerade as a starting point in her discussion on gender as a cultural construct (53, 56).⁹ The element of construction and consequently the instability of the gender category is apparent in the parodistic staging of gender in drag performances. In his reading of Butler, Brown draws attention to the fact that drag performances can support essentialist perceptions of gender. This is based on an audience's knowledge of the original gender of the performer, and on the fact that transgressing gender borders is depicted as something comic or tragic (55). This critique does not quite apply to Butler in that, with its examples of gender parody, it does not confine itself only to drag: "The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities" (174). Moreover, in drag performances there is also something like a doubling of representation when, for example, a woman plays a man who is playing a woman.¹⁰

18 Accordingly, the action heroine allegedly disguised as a man is not to be read as a false woman but rather as a means to challenge traditional gender roles. In *The Long Kiss Goodnight* this challenging is not just due to the presence of a muscular and armed heroine, but also because the heroine has power of gaze at her disposal. This gets especially clear towards the end of the film. In collaboration with the criminals, the CIA plans a bogus terrorist attack, hoping to thereby being granted more money from the Congress following this incident. Also, in order to be able to blackmail Charly, they arrange for Charly's daughter Caitlin to be kidnapped. For their part, Charly and Mitch want to rescue Caitlin and want to prevent the attack. They succeed to free Caitlin, but in the shooting that follows she runs away and hides in a truck. Under the cover of darkness, Mitch tries to seize the truck that also contains the bomb intended for the attack. Charly, who is monitoring the situation through her telescopic sight, is in radio contact with Mitch and advises him where he should shoot, as well as supporting him with a few well-aimed shots. The camera assumes Charly's point of view, and accordingly, the image adopts a greenish colour and is intersected by the cross hairs of

⁹ In Butlers approach masquerade is not restricted to femininity as Neroni claims (193-194, Endnote 4). See also Brood and Benthien/Stephan.

¹⁰ See *Venus Boyz* (Gabrielle Baur, CH/USA/D 2002) or older films that include variations of this theme such as *Viktor und Viktoria* (Reinhold Schänzel, D 1933) and the remake *Victor; Victoria* (Blake Edwards, USA 1982).

the telescopic sight. As we have already seen in the opening credits, the gun and the camera combine behind Charly's gaze, which is at the same time deadly and life preserving.

This configuration is the exact inversion of two comparable excerpts from the following films: *Entrapment* (Jon Amiel, USA 1999) with Catherine Zeta-Jones and Sean Connery, and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, USA 2001) with Angelina Jolie. In each of these films the male protagonist possesses the optical device used to direct the female protagonist's movements.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

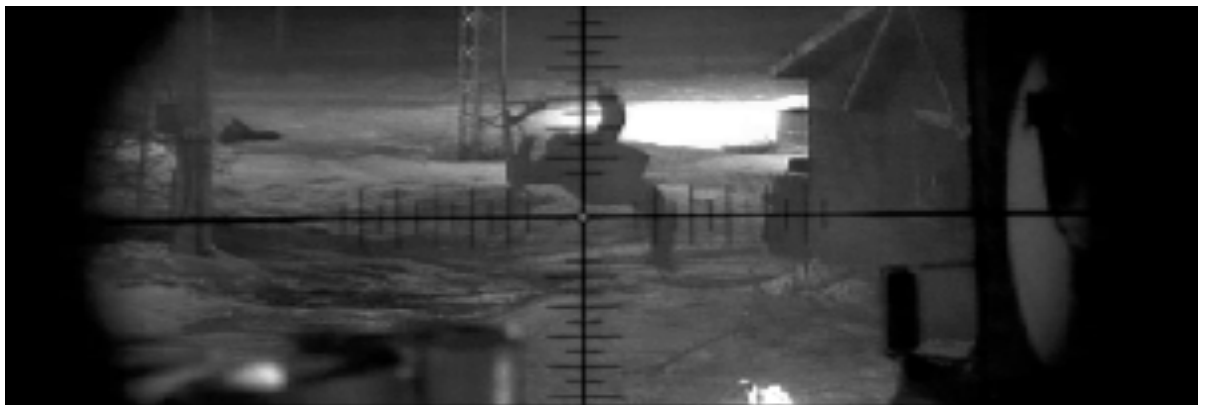


Fig. 7.

19 In *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, notions of female scopophilia and control of the gaze are addressed directly and self-reflectively when Charly retorts to her main adversary, the father of her daughter who is trying to kill Charly and their daughter: "You're gonna die screaming and I'm gonna watch!" At the end of the film she puts her "promise" into practice, thus reversing one of the conventions of horror films by casting the gazing murdering character as a woman, and the screaming dying victim as a man (Brown 57-58). The scene, with a touch of biting commentary, portrays Charly hanging onto a cable in front of a hoarding with a prominently displayed advert depicting a happy family (see fig. 8).



Fig. 8.

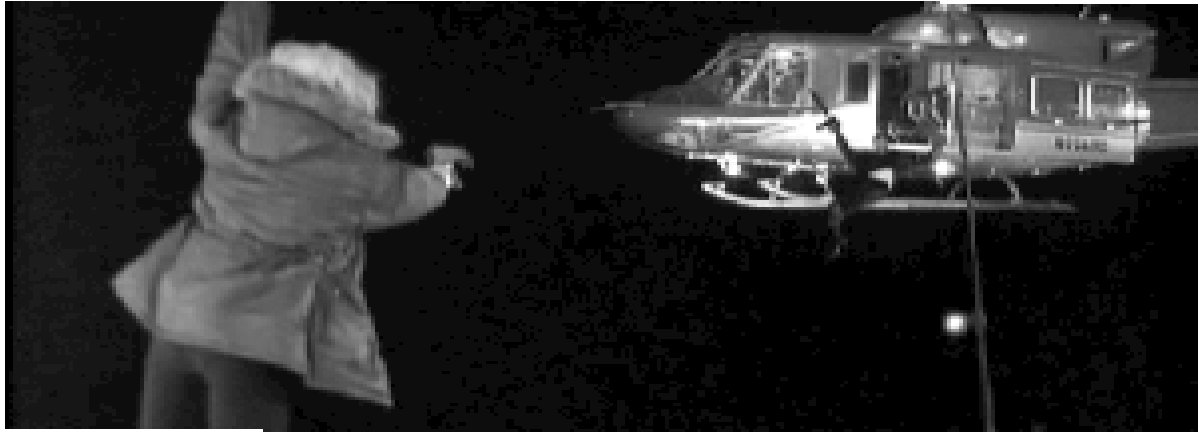


Fig. 9.

The Female Spectator's Pleasure and Knowledge: *Shining Through*

20 The scopophilia of the female spectator, which until now could not be adequately explained by any theoretical model, is being staged in *Shining Through* both on the visual and narrative level. As a result, the film achieves something that neither Laura Mulvey nor Mary Ann Doane can comprehend with their theoretical approaches. In her "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)", Mulvey proposes a transvestite identification for female spectators. She herself admits, though, that this is not a completely satisfactory suggestion: "So [...] is the female spectator's fantasy of masculinisation at crosspurposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes" ("Afterthoughts" 37). Mary Ann Doane talks about three possibilities for the female spectator: she either adopts Mulvey's "transvestite" identification; or she accepts a masochistic over-identification with the passive position; or she chooses narcissism, thus making herself the object of desire (31-32). Doane poses the question of what her concept of masquerade could mean for a female spectator position, yet leaves it unanswered (26). In this respect, she transcends Mulvey's ideas as she does not rule out a female audience's position at all, nor does she reduce it to transvestism. Rather, she sees the female perspective, like the male one, as a produced position within a network of power relations (32).

21 Yet, how is *Shining Through* going about in treating the scopophilia of the female spectator? The film is constructed around a BBC interview about women and their life during the Second World War. Linda Voss (Melanie Griffith) talks about her experience as an American spy in National Socialist Germany. How it came about that she ended up as a spy and what happened during her time in Berlin is being narrated with the help of flashbacks, either explained by her voiceover or made sense of by the dialogues in the flashback sequences. Her only training in the field of espionage had been her early fascination with spy

and war films. She used to identify with the heroic characters on screen, no matter whether they were female spies, resistance fighters or allied soldiers. She also dreamed of being dropped by parachute over Germany and of fighting her way through to her Jewish relatives to rescue them. The film depicts her sitting in a cinema watching films. Some extracts of these films the audience watches along with her, other extracts she mentions, but we do not see her watching them. The clips are taken from *Espionage Agent* (Lloyd Bacon, USA 1939) with Brenda Marshall and *The Mortal Storm* (Frank Borzage, USA 1940) with Margaret Sullivan and James Stewart and *The Fighting 69th*, (William Keighly, USA 1940).¹¹ Thanks to these films, Linda recognizes her superior Ed Leland (Michael Douglas) as a spy. After she bluntly accosts him, he tells her she has been watching too many films. But she only replies: "Enough to know a spy when I see one." When he asks her how she managed to access so much information about him, she replies: "I might be a better spy than you are." In the course of the film this prediction proves to have been correct. By refusing to comply with Ed's orders, she is able to locate and microfilm plans for a rocket factory in Peenemünde. She then kills her friend Margarete von Eberstein, who had turned out to have been a double agent working for the Reich; with the help of Ed, Linda eludes the Gestapo and manages to smuggle the film into Switzerland. When other characters and later on the BBC interviewer ask her how she knew how to behave, she repeatedly refers back to the films she used to watch.

22 In addition to this narrative element of self-referentiality there are several striking visual elements. For example, in the opening credits sequence to *Shining Through*, a tracking shot inside a TV studio occurs (see fig. 10). The camera follows Linda Voss and her interviewer to the designated transmission area. The camera movements are jerky, the camera has to be re-focussed, they do a sound check, and the clapper-board claps for the interview scene. Also, during the flashback scenes, there are regularly cuts back to the interview situation.



Fig. 10.: *Shining Through*

¹¹ Thus we see a woman not only entering the "Männerkino" (men's cinema), but also indulging in a genre usually spurned by women (Koch 19). In using a term like "Männerkino", Koch understands what Mulvey before her had understood about cinema's gender-specific ways of looking, but Koch argues not only psychoanalytically, but also cultural-historically and socio-politically (Koch 17).

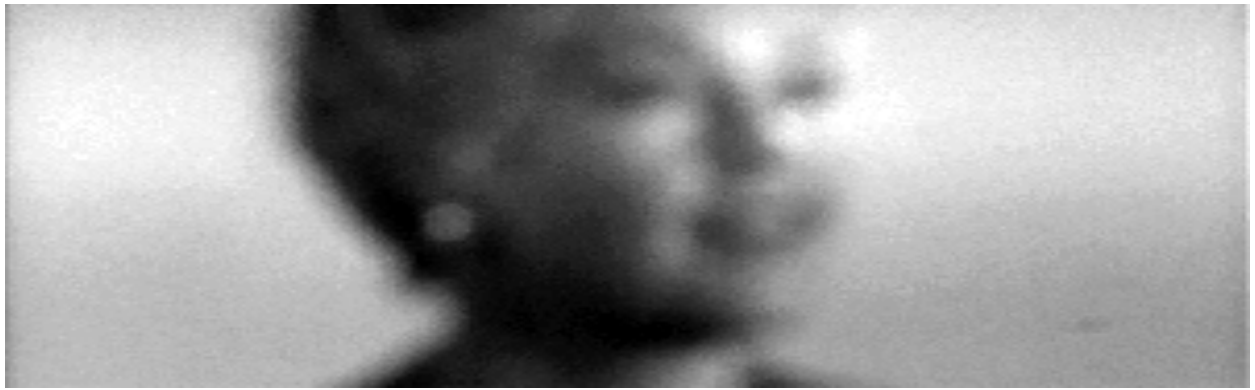


Fig. 11.: *ST*



Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.

Moreover, the genuine and faked clips from films and newsreels of the 1940s are shown in standard black-and-white 1.33:1 format, whereas the interview and flashback scenes are shot in colour and in a wide-screen format. That some of these excerpts are also fake becomes only clear when we suddenly see Linda Voss in one of them. This dual framing is skilfully realised by means of screen enlargement and colouring.

23 Such designating of the apparatus, interruptions of narrative flow, juxtaposition of heterogeneous slices of discourse, as well as mixing of documentary and fiction are all efficient means of signalling reflexivity (Stam 16). Of course, such means can serve in a purely playful way without claiming to be emancipatory (Stam 16, Lewinsky 75), but here they are significant, as in *Shining Through* the female gaze is taken as an intradiegetic theme and explicitly being portrayed as gender specific. Linda Voss not only often refers to the cinema in her lines, but we also see her as a cinemagoer - and that not in the context of a social activity, but on her own. Gertrud Koch has suggested that going to the cinema by oneself, for women, is not considered to be a very high-minded leisure activity. This "latente Kinoverbot" (latent prohibition of the cinema) should keep women from experiencing scopophilia (15). Because the film depicts Linda in the cinema, the incorporated clips she watches are defined as *point of view shots*. Moreover, because of the framing as an interview situation, the flashbacks can even be understood as imaginary POV shots from her perspective.



Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.



Fig. 16.



Fig. 17.



Fig.

Power of Gaze and Empowerment

24 The modern action heroine refutes Laura Mulvey's theory of the female figure as passive image. Her struggling, shooting, killing, riddle solving, and her ability to rescue herself and others from dangerous situations demonstrates anything but passivity. The modern action heroine carries the plot in a way that only male characters can - according to Mulvey. Yet, in the two example films, if the female protagonist's physicalness is revealed, it is not merely as sexual objectification; her trained and muscular body is predominantly functional, serving as a weapon: "The cinematic gaze of the action film codes the heroine's body in the same way that it does the muscular male hero's, as both object and subject" (Brown 56).¹²

25 The figure of the modern female spy has an even greater potential for inversion when taking into account the self-reflective aspects. According to the representation system as described by Mulvey, a gazing woman constitutes a threat (Doane 27). Earlier films often outweighed this threat by increasing the spectacle of the female spy as the desirable and endangered sexual object. Examples for such films are *Mata Hari* (George Fitzmaurice, USA 1931) with Greta Garbo and *Dishonored* (Joseph von Sternberg, USA 1931) with Marlene Dietrich.¹³ In *Mata Hari*, Garbo is introduced as an exotic dance attraction for Parisian society. The subsequent scenes depicting Garbo in the company of friends and admirers in nightclubs and private rooms offer space for a magnificent staging of the star.

26 In *Dishonored*, Marlene Dietrich plays the role of a prostitute who has signed on as a spy. Her appearance, and in particularly her famous legs, is staged correspondingly. At a masked ball her disguise serves above all as a device to emphasise her lips. At some point she puts aside her mask in front of the other characters, and therefore is recognised later on. In the end, she falls in love with one of her opponents and lets him escape, which leads to her downfall - she is being charged with treason and shot. Thus, the game of masks gets destroyed by love, allowing the characters "true" personality to appear, and, with the death following inevitably, is finalized once and for all.¹⁴ Right at the beginning of the film, *Dishonored* comments on the endangerment of the female spy due to her femininity, when an insert title appears on the screen with the words¹⁵: "Strange figures emerge from the dust of the falling Austrian Empire. One of these, listed in the secret files of the War office as X-27, might have

¹² On the visual display of the male muscular body see Tasker 35-53, 73-152 and Dyer.

¹³ "Greta Garbo et Marlene Dietrich pratiquent l'espionnage comme une forme supérieure, quasi sacrée, de prostitution, où s'épanouit leur séduction naturelle." (Horvilleur 148)

¹⁴ In *Dishonored*, the element of masquerade is carried to extremes, and with it the questioning of naturalised concepts of femininity within the narrative framework: Dietrich, dressed once again as a prostitute, faces the firing squad. The young commandant loses heart and refuses to give the order to shoot, and while a replacement officer is being sought, Dietrich takes the opportunity to put on her make-up and to adjust her suspender.

¹⁵ On the vulnerability of the female spy through the dilemma of the incompatibility between someone's mission and heart - usually leading to a fatal ending - see Horvilleur 148.

become the greatest spy in history . . . if X-27 had not been a woman." The implication that the female protagonist is endangered through a sexual/love affair - usually linked to a theme of vision and recognition - can, according to Dole, also be encountered in current police films: "Although male movie cops sleep with their enemies on occasion, female law enforcers are routinely placed in danger through a sexual relationship, usually with an opponent" (82).

27 Although *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and *Shining Through* realise an impressive amount of the above-mentioned potential for inversion, they exhibit some remaining traces of the female spy as spectacle. Linda Voss in *Shining Through*, for example, accompanies her National Socialist employer, who has fallen in love with her, to the opera. There she is seen and recognised and, in a scene borrowing heavily from *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, USA 1945/6), her cover gets blown (Pawelczak 123). In *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, the possible endangering of the mission by a sexual/love affair is only dismissed when the man concerned gets killed. Consequently, a certain ambivalence regarding the gender-transgressive female character can still be observed in the analysed two rather recent films. According to Butler, though, this corresponds to the manner in which gender is culturally produced, that is, from a multitude of incoherent directives. Such incoherence offers, however, the possibility for subversive reconfiguration:

The injunction to be a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated. Further, the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once. The coexistence or convergence of such discursive injunctions produces the possibility of a complex reconfiguration and redeployment [...]. (185)

Both films thus achieve something that in recent cultural studies discussion has been described by the term *empowerment*, that is, a self-reflective authorization of the female characters *and* the female spectator.¹⁶ In *The Long Kiss Goodnight* this empowerment is based on the power of gaze of a muscular and armed heroine performing violent action. In *Shining Through* it is based on the pleasure and knowledge that an ordinary woman derives from viewing films of a predominately male-oriented genre.

¹⁶ Dole 78, Hills 46 and Tasker 139 apply the term to the characters, and Brown 68 to the female spectators. Tina Vares, however, calls attention to the heterogeneity of female spectator reaction (Vares 235).

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