

# Goodbye Mister Bond: 007's critical advocacy for feminism & modernism

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## INTRODUCTION

It's not just villains that are fond of saying, "goodbye mister Bond". Any viewer mindful of prejudice is likely to have wished that he - or rather his casually misogynistic attitudes to women - could get killed off on occasion, too. And yet, could James Bond be considered to be both a feminist and modernist advocate? If not, then why would the author - an architect and a feminist - find the way in which both women and modernist buildings are represented in all 24 Bond films politically affirming and even professionally inspiring - as opposed to simply sexist or oppressive (Funnell, 2011)? In the spirit of *auto-ethnographic curiosity* (Chang, 2008), this paper considers whether the way in which Bond films represent both women and modernist architecture amounts to negative stereotyping, or if they offer instead a critique of their mutually problematised status within society.

## RISKY WOMEN

Whilst author Ian Fleming's James Bond character has long been vilified as a sexist, the cinematic franchise continues smash box office records (Ashton, 2015). But what is it about the Bond franchise that women find appealing?. More recent iterations have seen the Bond character manifest "*endearing cracks*" and "*weaknesses*" (Cox, 2015), not unlike a concrete edifice, gently degrading. Previously it has been argued that the Bond series strategically incorporates second-wave feminist discourses, not as a means to alter Bond's attitude to women, but rather, to alter the attitudes of the women around him to Bond (Chapman, 2000). However, this analysis fails to take into account the possibility that women might not be tuning in because they're interested in Bond, but because they're interested in Bond 'girls' (or rather women) instead. Because whilst the immutably *misogynist* Bond sets an unachievable, hyper-masculine and even *misandrous* ideal for most men, female audiences are, in contrast, offered a far greater confection of complex and brilliant female characters to identify with. Overall in fact, Bond women are portrayed as unrelentingly brilliant: displaying substantial skills in hand-to-hand combat (*From Russia With Love*, 1963), poly-linguistics & HMRC treasury duties (Eva Green speaks three languages; French, English and Swedish), nuclear-physics (such as 'Dr Christmas Jones' in *The World is not Enough*, 1999), geo-political expertise, as well as demonstrating a tenacious ability to survive a perilous existence through timely shifts in allegiance to the winning team. So what is it about them that prove to be so compelling? And from the auto-ethnographic perspective of an architect and feminist, so professionally affirming? If the latter is true, what are the origins of these parallels exactly?

### “YOU ALWAYS WERE A CUNNING LINGUIST, JAMES” (TOMORROW NEVER DIES, 1997)

For many commentators, the names of some of the Bond Women such as Pussy Galore, Xenia Onatopp, Honey Rider, Octopussy, Plenty-O-Toole & Holly Goodhead, are viewed as demeaning to women due to their sexual overtones (Angelsey, 2012). However, a study into the etymological, lexical and phonological associations of Bond women’s names reveals their purpose to allude to more complex plot narratives (Vikstrand, 2006) or each character’s multiple and often contrasting identities. To perceive them as purely “*disposable pleasures rather than meaningful pursuits*”, as Bond woman Vesper Lynd points out in *Casino Royale* (2006), is to underestimate them, with typically fatal consequences - three quarters of the 44 women Bond has slept with have tried to kill him – regardless of whether they were coitally claimed by him or not (Stokes, 2008). Subsequently, one might assume that Ian Fleming’s decision to name Bond after, “*the simplest, dullest, plainest-sounding name*” he could find (Sterling & Morecambe, 2003) was partly motivated by a desire to create a blank screen onto which the complex lives of the female characters could be more effectively projected. This advances Kingsley Amis’s view - captured in his 1965 book entitled, *The Bond Dossier* (Amis, 1965) - that Bond has no inner life in Fleming’s novels, so any opinions we give to him are our own projections. In either scenario, Bond’s ‘blankness’ resembles the ‘blank canvas’ or *tabula rasa* associated with the large slab of white-rendered walls favoured by early modernist architects.

### EXPENDABLE WOMEN, INCREMENTAL CHANGE

Of course, not all Bond Women are given explicitly sexualised names. *Thunderball*’s (1965) Dominetta Vitali - described by Fleming as, “*an independent, a girl of authority and character*” (Fleming, 1961) – takes her name from the term ‘dominus’ meaning lord & master’ (Vikstrand, 2006). And whilst Fleming always described ‘M’ as a male character in his books, the directors took the canonically questionable decision to make ‘M’ a female in *Goldeneye* (1995) until *Quantum of Solace* (2008), a decision assumed to reflect the appointment of the real-life head of MI5 – Stella Rimington, (West, 2010). Revealingly however, ‘M’ was in fact Fleming’s nickname for his own mother (Sterling & Morecambe (2003), which perhaps explains why ‘M’ is the only character to whom James Bond is ever accountable. Indeed, Judy Dench’s portrayal of ‘M’ was described as that of a, ‘tough yet occasionally tender’ boss (Child, 2012) – and even a working mother. And yet, Dench’s ‘M’ has been viewed as a departure from the usual ageist stereotypes, which portray older women as, “*sick, sexless, uninvolved and alone,*” (Payne & Wittington, 1976). In killing off ‘M’ in *Quantum of Solace* - the ultimate act of Oedipal matricide – Bond is finally cut loose from the apron strings and literally turns feral - working outside of MI6. Perhaps this accounts for why he hooks up with an ‘older’ Bond woman, Lucia Sciarra, in the subsequent film (*Spectre*, 2015), as if as a gesture of maternal longing. In this, the most recent Bond film, representations of women have generally been reported as having improved (Lee, 2015). For example, the afore mentioned Lucia Sciarra is a Mafiosa queen unafraid of leading a large team of men; Miss Money Penny has graduated from a secretarial wife to counsel and capable agent in her own right (*Skyfall*, 2012); psychologist Dr Madeleine Swann only adheres to the Bond-smitten stereotype when he subjects her to a co-dependent relationship – by bringing harm into her life and then protecting her from it; and the mysterious Mexican ‘Estrella’, while limited to being Bond’s plus-one during the Day of the Dead party, avoids the tradition of being killed off when someone more intriguing comes along. But is this true progress? Not really. Bond has always dated brilliant women who consistently and repeatedly, “*put Bond in his place*” (McGowan, 2010) despite their apparent – or possibly intentional – disposability (Over the course of the 23 James Bond films, Bond has sex with 55 women. Seventeen of the 55 end up dead).



▲ Figure 1 Elrod House, by architect John Lautner (1968) featuring in *Diamonds are Forever* (1971)



▲ Figure 2 Barbican, Chamberlain, Powell & Bon



▲ Figure 3 Dr No's Command Centre (1962)



▲ Figure 4 Albert Kahn's Ford Centre



▲ Figure 5 Osato's office in *You Only Live Twice* (1967)



▲ Figure 6 Corbusier's National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo

Indeed, whilst the women are becoming more certain of themselves, Bond's attitude to women seems generally unchanged. The message to women is clear. Progress is being made, but it is incremental. However, if misrepresenting women "once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. Three times is enemy action", then perhaps we should take author Ian Fleming at his word (Fleming, 1959) and examine the matter further.

### RISKY MODERNISM

It is not just women who struggle to survive an encounter with Bond. Many modern buildings



▲ Figure 7 Goldfingers 'rumpus' room



▲ Figure 8 Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House



▲ Figure 9 Hugo Drax's lair in Moonraker (1979)



▲ Figure 10 Wright's Ennis House

suffer similarly too. In fact, the aspirations of most Bond villains - to improve humanity by inserting a rational, orderly utopia of their own design, (Rose, 2008) favouring a palette of concrete, steel and grand-scale fenestrations - are profoundly similar to those of many modernist architects. For example, Le Corbusier's stated intention, "to create architecture... to create order," (Le Corbusier, 1931), is echoed by Bond villain Elliot Carvers ambition to, 'launch a new world order' in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997). Indeed, Bond villains, "neither express their roots in history nor attract the viewer with the splendour of intricate facades," (Greinacher, 2012) preferring the, "somewhat frightening sign of progress driven by technological and scientific advances," embodied in the international style (Rosa, 2000). The majority of Bond films depict the villain's lair in either appropriate key modernist buildings - such as architect Lautner's Elrod House in *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971) [Fig 1] or the M16 mole in *Quantum of Solace* (2008), who lives in London's Barbican centre (Rose, 2008) [Fig 2], or resort to conspicuously derivative film sets. Examples of the latter include Dr No's command centre [Fig 3], resembling Albert Kahn's designs for industry (Greinacher, 2012) [Fig 4]; Osato's spacious office [Fig 5] in *You Only Live Twice* (1967) and Corbusier's National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo [Fig 6], Japan; *Goldfinger's* rumpus room's [Fig 7] similarity to Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House [Fig 8] and Hugo Drax's behind-the-waterfall lair in *Moonraker* [Fig 9], whose Mayan-patterned relief panels resemble those of Wright's Ennis House (Rose, 2008) [Fig 10].

However, it isn't only modernist buildings that are appropriated by and associated with villainous activities. That one of Bond's most troubling villains was named after Erno Goldfinger was no coincidence. It was widely known that Fleming held 'scathing views' against modernism and was renowned for generally naming villains after living people (not just architects) with whom he'd developed a negative association (Rose, 2008).



▲ Figure 11 James Bond's regency style, mid-Georgian-esque apartment in Dr No



▲ Figure 12 Bond is removed from Elrod House by Bambi & Thumper



▲ Figure 13 Iec Trevelyan (Janus) dies by his own satellite in Goldeneye (1995)



▲ Figure 14 Blofields Lounge with Piranha pool in You Only Live Twice (1967)

Interestingly, some of Goldfinger's rare post-war private houses shared the same fate as the modern architecture depicted in the Bond films, and one of the most significant of his private residences was demolished to make way for a bungalow [Fisher, 1998, cited in Greinacher, 2012]. In much the same way that the plainness of Bond's name acts as an unremarkable blank canvas upon which the more complex female characters concerns are projected, Fleming similarly chose to situate Bond in 'unremarkable' accommodation, featuring "combinations of French Empire, English mid-Georgian, but very few Regency touches" [Snadon, 2012] [Fig 11]. This creative disregard for Bond's interiors stands in stark opposition to the, "detailed and prominently featured" architectural interiors of his villains [Greinacher, 2012]. What Bond (or his interiors) seem to stand for are out-dated, traditional values, which one could easily align with his similarly out-dated attitudes to women. But are these really Bond's values? After all, he seldom spends time at home and instead endlessly covets the modern lifestyles and locations of his catalogue of nemeses. Perhaps his desire to destroy them is more about his out-of-control and consistently thwarted longing to possess them, rather than his disdain. Arguably, this principle could easily be applied to the women in his life.

### A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE VILLAINOUS DOMESTIC INTERIOR

Bond villain domains form a backdrop against which many common domestic anxieties are explored, particularly in relation to women's confinement within the home. For example, the villain's lair is typically isolated, thereby forcing intimacy between the villain and his mercurial and often reluctant girlfriends - invariably requiring Bond to engage in acts of rescue. As Dr No put it, "together, that is sovereignty. The world is too public. And how

do I possess that power? Through privacy” (Fleming, 2002). The desire to simultaneously achieve “togetherness” and “privacy” is of course a conundrum faced by most nuclear families and spawned the drive towards suburban isolation – against which teenagers, seemingly much like Bond – have attempted to rebel. The conflict between longing for both “togetherness” and “privacy” is what Richard Sennett discusses in *The Brutality of Modern Families* (Sennett, 1970), arguing that the emphasis on privacy underpinning the nuclear family impacts negatively upon the “civilising possibilities that a metropolis uniquely offers [that] are disappearing” (Sennett, 1970). Arguably, both togetherness and privacy are more likely to be achieved, for better or for worse, within a high-density modernist housing block, than in a remote suburban retreat (Lawson, 2009).

According to Udo Greinacher, Bond villains’ homes are “designed to dominate from within” (Greinacher, 2012): from the “female territory” of the interior (Havenhand, 2004). In much the same way that feminist writers have described women’s domestic status as housewives (Franck & Paxson, 1989; Gordon, 1996; Floyd, 1999) as “guardians of aesthetic values” (McLaren, 2015), Bond villain interiors are often protected by women, as most strikingly exemplified by the expulsion of Bond by Bambi and Thumper in *Diamonds are Forever* (1971) [Fig 12]. In addition to the conceptual conflation of women’s bodies and interiors (Gordon, 1996), the psycho-sexual symbolism of Bond’s unwelcome ‘invasion’ into the (male) villains metaphorical interior feature in queer theory analyses of the Bond Genre (Stegall and Edwards, 2009; Miller, 2001) extending his modernist longings towards contemporary definitions of metro-sexuality.

## DIEGETIC DOMESTIC TECHNOLOGIES & OIKOPHOBIA

Bond villains’ interiors seem generally inclined towards the fetishisation of technology. Indeed, the “technological advances and functional designs” (Greinacher, 2012) depicted in these interiors, appear to perpetuate the myth that technological progress produces household appliances that sufficiently liberate women from their domestic duties and enable them to enter the workplace (Lupton, 1993). But do they? When Bond villains’ ‘domestic appliances’ turn hostile and are even used against the villains themselves, female viewers are invited to indulge their oikophobic (an aversion to home surroundings) anxieties. For example, the villain Renard is killed by his own Plutonium reactor in *The World Is Not Enough* (1999); Alec Trevelyan breaks his back on his own satellite dish and is then crushed to death by a falling antenna in *Goldeneye* (1995) [Fig 13]; and Dr No, who boils to death in his own cooling vat (1962), tacitly conveying that any attempts to subvert modernism’s pure aesthetics with contaminating technologies comes at a deadly cost. In light of this, Ozenfant and Le Corbusier’s description of modernism as being, “the vacuum cleaning period of architecture” seems to take on new and even acerbic meaning (Jencks, 2002). Similarly, when villains attempt to subvert modernism’s constrained palette by inserting ‘natural’ elements into the minimalist interiors, decorative aquariums transmogrify into shark tanks (*The Spy Who Loved Me*, 1977; *Thunderball*, 1965) and Piranha pools (*You Only Live Twice*, 1967) [Fig 14], and the architecture become retaliatory. Subsequently, from an architectural history perspective, one could construe this as a resistance not only to subverted aesthetics but also to High-Tech architecture, which emerged from Modernism in the late 1960s.

For the average woman viewer with domestic duties, however, these technology-infused interiors play out the dichotomy between technological terrorisation versus domestic drudgery - but from a safe distance. And whilst the majority of futuristic films fulfil their role in pre-conditioning audiences towards accepting advanced technological devices in outer space, Bond films focus on technologies that impact on the interior through diegetic

prototypes: visions of the future that help suspend our disbelief about change (Sterling, 2013). Subsequently, Bond films depict satellite TVs not dissimilar to today's entertainment centres, comprehensive surveillance years in advance of domestic intercoms and baby monitors, and even introduce nuclear energy into the home, decades ahead of microwaves. It is intriguing that whilst Bond can handle any array of portable, non-domestic devices, from flying-shooting-submersible sports cars to mid-range missile fountain pens, the villains' technologies prove more deadly than his own, and are frequently used by Bond against the villain. This message – pervasive in many forms of media from TV commercials and beyond – merely serves to affirm the domestic norm: that women assume primary responsibility for domestic life, rather than risk sharing them with their incompetent and even dangerous-to-domestically-equip male partners (Lupton, 1993).

### PARALLELS WITH PRACTICE

As the evidence so far suggests, both the tacit feminist narratives and inverted modernist advocacy may account for why a feminist and an architect might be drawn to an otherwise overtly misogynist film franchise. But as many commentators have identified, these stereotypes still seem out-dated. What is it therefore that feels pertinent and even applicable the circumstances of a woman in architectural practice today? Could direct comparisons be made between the status of women in architecture and Bond women? Or perhaps more poignantly, could we better understand something of the current professional conditions of architectural practice, via a thorough scrutiny of the troubling appeal of James Bond? Let's look at the points of likely comparison. Firstly, statistics from the UK Fees Bureau (2016) show only 22% of the profession is female, and twice as many women architects are unemployed compared to men. In effect, both Bond women and women architects form a marginal interest in proportion to the considered importance of the activities of men. Secondly, in much the same way that Bond usually gets through several women in one film, women architects are more likely to take on part-time roles due to parenting career breaks and are further disadvantaged by doing this against the back drop of a long working hours practice culture (Mark, 2015). In terms of pay differentials, the average male architect earns 18 per cent more than the average female (Fees Bureau, 2016) even though they possess the same skills. As examined previously, many Bond women display capabilities equal to Bond, but arguably these skills – diplomacy, advanced accountancy, bad client/boss/contractor management expertise to name a few – seem far more pertinent to the practice of architecture – or espionage – than those of bombastic Bond. Indeed, Bond's contradictions around the need to be both a 'predator' and a 'gentleman' [Arp & Decker, 2006; Taliaferro & Le Gall, 2006] are not dissimilar to the need for architects to resolve both their commercial interests with their ethical ones.

And much like Bond's 'disposable' women, more female than male architects were made redundant during the last recession (Hopkirk, 2012) in addition to those who simply leave the profession after a few years in practice of their own volition (Duncan, 2013) – most often citing endemic sexism and concerns over childcare than any lack of interest in the work.

Seemingly, the women who succeed in Bond films have learned to adopt a status of sexual 'ambiguity' as means to survive (Ladenson, 2001), in much the same way a female architect might feel the need to conceal or play down her familial or maternal status or responsibilities. Although Dench's M reveals she's a working mother, the maternal status of the women Bond sleeps with remain concealed. Indeed, despite all the unprotected sex Bond has, it seems remarkable that he produces only one son – with Kissy Suzuki – a detail in Fleming's novel *You Only Live Twice* (1964), one that, unsurprisingly didn't

make it into the film version in 1967. In general, the fade-to-black cinematic convention supposedly alludes to the possibility of sexual intimacy, and is sometimes used in Bond films as a means to moderate the many sex scenes. But as any 'working-mother' architect will tell you, 'fade to black' doesn't imply you're sleeping with the boss, it simply means that you're too exhausted to contemplate nocturnal adult interactions in the bandwidth between finishing at work and waking up before the children, in order to prep for an early site meeting. Overall, the parallels between architects in practice and women in Bond films share two core principles; that underrepresentation perpetuates disadvantage and that very little seems to ever change.

## CONCLUSION

So do Bond movies really rail against modernism & women as previously assumed? For some proponents of the Bond genre, Bond's attitudes merely reflect – rather than direct – public perception of both women and modernist buildings. However, as this analysis has illustrated, by attempting to make an enemy of both architecture and women, a political and even aesthetic empathy can be discerned. In other words, Bond's routine annihilation of both women and modern architecture be understood less as a grudge against modern architecture and instead – an extreme yet galvanising form of critical 'consciensization' (Friere, 1968) that, "liberates human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer 1982). In effect, by aligning the plight of modernist buildings to that of Bond women, it could instead be construed that Bond films offer a tacit advocacy of the position of both within society. Where the real critique is focussed it seems, is upon Bond's 'traditional' values and aesthetic origins. Furthermore, in asking, "*why does saving the world necessitate the demolition of meticulously designed hideouts that display amenities & technology not available to most of us?*" (Greinacher, 2012), leaving the viewer to wonder whether this is a petition against affluence and not just aesthetics. Subsequently, the flooding, setting alight and exploding of modern buildings can instead be construed as an act against socio-economic exclusion, rather than an act against architecture. Indeed, the "*endearingly cracked*" (Cox, 2015) character of James Bond cannot be fixed by women anymore than the problem of women in architecture become fixed by women-appeasing male architects. Perhaps – as Bond's name implies, these cracks can only be 'bonded' together by the man himself.

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