STRIPPERS, LESBIANS AND WITCHES: THE FEMME FATALE AND THE FEMALE GAZE IN FEMINIST CINEMA

A historical film analysis of the femme fatale archetype in *The Working Girls* (1974), *Bound* (1996) and *The Love Witch* (2016)

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Copyright Statement

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Table of contents

Abbreviations

dir. = director
writ. = writer
VO = voice-over
ECU = extreme close up
CU = close up
MCU = medium close up
MS = medium shot
MLS = medium long shot
LS = long shot
ELS = extreme long shot
VO = voice-over

Introduction

> I'm doing that with *The Love Witch*, reclaiming the
> figure of the witch, the femme fatale, an old sort of
> male fantasy figure, and make it a femme fatale seen
> from the female side. – Anna Biller[1]

Women have appeared on screen since the beginning of film, where their portrayal has been firmly anchored in historical and contemporary male perceptions and fantasies about women. One of the most mythical and notorious female archetypes in Western culture is the *femme fatale*.[2] Janey Place states that the femme fatale figure is one of the oldest themes in art.[3] History is filled with myths of the untrustworthy seductress who destroys men. The femme fatale's original sin is her desire to be sexual without becoming a mother. To the patriarchy, such an attitude is considered villainous and evil.[4] In film, this archetype has been portrayed since its very beginning. However, the femme fatale character only became extremely popular through the *film noir* genre of the 1940s and 1950s.

In this study, my working definition of the femme fatale is based on Helen Hanson's description. I call her a "mysterious and seductive woman whose charms ensnare her lovers, often leading them into compromising, dangerous, and deadly situations".[5] In my analysis, I use the definition broadly enough to allow the femme fatales in my chosen cases to have at least one of these characteristics but not necessarily all of them in order to qualify for analysis in this study. According to Place, the character of the femme fatale was used in film noir after the end of World War II as a cautionary figure aiming to send women back to their domestic chores after they had replaced many men in the workforce while they were fighting overseas.[6] The femme fatale therefore embodies the threat that women's power posed to the patriarchy in postwar America. This character was often solely defined by her sexuality or through her relationship with men.[7]

This sexualized portrayal of women and the notion that men could be afraid of women is an important issue discussed in feminist film theory. This theory came into being in the early 1970s in America and was influenced by the second-wave feminist denunciation of men's control over women, their bodies, and even their physical appearance. This criticism of the patriarchy led a group of film theorists to study whether women are being subjected to social subordination via film.[8] One of the most important and most influential views of feminist film theory is that of Laura Mulvey.

She uses psychoanalysis and semiotics to study cinematic spectatorship and is the one who developed feminist film theory as a valid field of research. Her groundbreaking essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), explores women's sexual objectification in the Hollywood and

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[1] John Patterson, "Interview. The Love Witch director Anna Biller: 'I'm in conversation with the pornography all around us,'" *The Guardian* (2017), consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.theguardian.com.

[2] Helen Hanson, *Hollywood heroines. Women in film noir and the female gothic film* (London: Tauris, 2007), 11-8.

[3] Place, "Women in film noir," 47.

[4] Place, "Women in film noir," 45-9.

[5] Hanson, *Hollywood heroines*, 11-22.

[6] Hanson, *Hollywood heroines*, 11-9.;Biesen, *Blackout*, 2-7.

[7] Place, "Women in film noir," 48-9.

[8] Peter Bosma, ed. *Filmkunde. Een inleiding* (Nijmegen: Socialistische Uitgeverij Nijmegen, 1991), 254-9.

mainstream cinema. Mulvey argues with her *male gaze theory* that women are almost always portrayed from a man's point of view in the media. She claims that female characters are hardly ever placed in a role where they can take control of a scene. The portrayal of women as an object of desire or a spectacle to be looked at is unavoidable in a visual culture where men are always the bearer of the look.[9]

The so-called male gaze enforces the dominant ideology and power structures of the patriarchy. Michel Foucault claims that the disciplinary power manipulates people's minds by controlling of individual's bodies and behavior. This idea can be applied to the relation between the female body and male power. The dominant male culture tries to control women's bodies and define them in terms of their reproductive organs. Linked to Mulvey's male gaze theory, patriarchal power can be exercised through the use of men's gaze, transforming women into sexual objects. This creates expectations of how women should behave and look.[10]

Specifically regarding the femme fatale, feminist film theoreticians do not agree about whether the femme fatale is purely a male fantasy (i.e., she and her sexuality are passive) or whether the power of her sexuality makes her strong and capable of great agency. Both views define the femme fatale in relation to the genre of film noir, which as stated above had an enormous impact on the creation of the archetype in film.[11] In Mulvey's view, the femme fatale is no different than other female characters. She even seems like an extreme example of this theory, as she is extremely sexy and seductive but is never overtly in control of the film's narrative.[12]

Chris Straayer believes the femme fatale's sexuality is always passive and that her sole purpose is to offer sexual arousal and pleasure to the other male characters and the male audience. Straayer even states that he strongly disagrees with the analysis of the authors who contributed to *Women in Film Noir* (1978), including Place, who regards the femme fatale as a character with a great deal of agency. Place agrees that film noir is a male-dominated genre where women are defined by male desire. Still, she believes the classic film noir to be the only period in (American) film history up to the 1970s with strong and independent female characters. [13] [14] [15]

Kathleen Canning argues that the human body has always played a significant role within new social formations. She explains that Foucault understood how power was inscribed on and by bodies through modes of social supervision and discipline as well as self-regulation. Foucault states that power always requires opposition, implying that there is always the potential for change within power

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[9] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.; Shohini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

[10] Johanna Oksala, "Freedom and bodies," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2011), 85-97.

[11] Chris Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme. Bound in sexual différance," in *Women in film noir*, ed. Ann E. Kaplan (London: BFI publishing, 1998), 152-3.; Place, "Women in film noir," 47.

[12] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists,* 2.

[13] Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme," 152-3.; Place, "Women in film noir," 47.

[14] Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme," 152-3.

[15] Place, "Women in film noir," 56.

relations. However, Foucault argues that the act of resistance can only shift power relations, not eliminate them. [16]

When applied to the discussion around the femme fatale, this implies that women who refuse to be defined in a stereotyped and passive way are perceived as attacking the patriarchy. Besides the body signifying an obedient and passive object that is controlled by dominant discourses and power, the body can also become a seed that grows resistance against those dominant discourses and power techniques. In this way women can obtain active power and independence by using their body and sexuality. For this reason, Canning regards the femme fatale character in film noir as an uncommon acknowledgement of female power and sexuality.[17]

This discussion about the active or passive core of the femme fatale archetype raises the question if any feminist filmmakers have used this character in their films with the aim to empower women and address issues of gender inequality. In this research, I employ the working concept of a feminist filmmaker as someone who creates films with a strong feminist message, either by advocating for gender equality or opposing gender-specific problems, and who uses feminist tactics of the women's movements.[18]

Such feminist filmmakers make use of the *female gaze*, a term proposed by the media after the recent emergence of several female-focused films and television series like the *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017) and *Big Little Lies* (2017) have popularized authentic representations of women.[19] The construction and definition of such a female gaze is not as simple as objectifying men from a female perspective, nor is it an objectification of both genders, although objectification can play a role. The female gaze presents the audience with an authentic female perspective and encourages the viewer to experience this female world. Janice Loreck argues that it is impossible to create a female equivalent to the dominant male gaze because the male gaze originates in and exemplifies a power imbalance. Loreck even remarks that many films made by women are subversive and portray women's desire in a non-gaze way. That's why the female gaze cannot be regarded as the direct equivalent to the male gaze as defined by Mulvey. There are, however, few examples of female directors, producers, writers or cinematographers. This may explain why little research has been done on the female gaze in contrast to the well-studied male gaze.[20]

According to Mulvey, the male gaze not only impacts the way men look at women, but also how women look at themselves and other women. Therefore, some would claim that a 'real' female gaze can never fully exist as long as it is created under a patriarchal society.[21] Although the current uses of the female gaze might not be complete and although the academic world has not agreed what such a gaze exactly would contain, it is clear that it is used as a device to encourage change through film in

[16] Kathleen Canning, *Gender history in practice. Historical perspectives on bodies, class & citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 178.; Dianna Taylor, ed. *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2011), 1-10.

[17] Canning, *Gender history in practice*, 178.; Oksala, "Freedom and bodies," 85-97.

[18] Margaret Walters, *Feminism. A very short introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2005), 1-5.

[19] Sophia Gemelas, "Under her eye: Examining the female gaze in 'The Handmaid's Tale'" (master's dissertation, University of Oregon, 2019), 1-14.

[20] Janice Loreck, "Explainer: what does the 'male gaze' mean, and what about a female gaze?," *The Conversation* (2016), consulted 13.06.2020, https://theconversation.com.

[21] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Telfer, "How Do We Define the Female Gaze in 2018?"

terms of gender equality. Within this study, I therefore define the female gaze as an authentic female perspective.

Because the female gaze is a very new field of study, it is relevant to research the few examples of feminist films featuring such a gaze where the so-called sexist archetype of the femme fatale stands central. Use of the femme fatale character as a strategy for feminist activism is almost non-existent, most likely due to the sexist roots of this archetype. However, some cases of female writer-directors do exist who use the female gaze to portray the femme fatale character. Because the femme fatale usually functions as a projection of the contemporary sociocultural context, it is logical to presume that an analysis of the feminist femme fatale would also provide insight into the struggles inherent in women's lives in a patriarchy.

My research is a study on the evolution of the femme fatale character and the female gaze in feminist cinema throughout the twentieth and twentieth-first century in the United States of America. In modern Western society, equality between men and women has not yet been realized despite several waves of feminism and female writers and directors are in the minority. Discussions about representations of women in mass media are recurrent subjects, thus a study on feminist cinema is highly relevant to modern-day challenges. This research adds new insights into the representation of women in films made by women and how they reflect real-life gender issues in society. Despite a great deal of research on the femme fatale in film noir, neo-noir and even some other genres like horror and the erotic thriller, little research has been done about this female archetype in feminist films. More precisely, there is a lack of research regarding the ways the femme fatale can be used to portray women in a strong and feminist way from a historical perspective. This research and point of view concerning the femme fatale and the female gaze fill an important research gap.

My research centers around the questions "How were feminist filmmakers able to use the (often perceived as sexist) archetype of the femme fatale to support their feminist messages and create an authentic female perspective (the female gaze) in their movies? And how did the evolution of the various feminist 'waves' influence these changing portrayals of women and the strategies and themes *used* in these films?" Subsidiary questions include: "How did feminist filmmakers use or subvert the sexist characteristics of the femme fatale archetype to give this female character agency and a narrative that shows her respect?", "How did they alter the archetype of the femme fatale to fit their feminist messages?", "Which strategies did these feminists use to critique this patriarchal archetype and the patriarchy in general?", and "How did these filmmakers succeed in creating an authentic female perspective in their films?"

My hypothesis is that despite and even because of the use of the femme fatale archetype, which is often used to sexualize women for male audiences, the female filmmakers discussed in this research used the popular filmic codes created by the male-dominated Hollywood film industry to criticize and subvert this patriarchal stereotype. In so doing, they appropriate this character to serve their feminist message, a method which is reinforced through time under influence of the ideas and strategies of the feminist waves. I look at the different variations of the feminist femme fatale and prove that they all share common features: they are strong, independent women who gain power (over men) by using their body, their femininity and their sexuality. I prove that these 'feminist' femme fatales mirror the evolution of the feminist waves and larger socio-economic changes in the status of women during the twentieth and twentieth first centuries. I also demonstrate that the feminist filmmakers in question

use the femme fatale as a critique as well as a reflection on this often-used archetype that symbolizes the male gaze.

The limitations of the small scope of my research are revealed in their narrow Western focus. This issue is reflected in the literature consulted, which is most often Eurocentric. My choice of primary sources limits this study to the portrayal of White women. In White male dominated American society, most films being produced put White characters at the center. There are of course subversive feminist films that counteract this, but as the focus of my research is already quite tight - the femme fatale – few more racially or culturally diverse cases were available to choose from.

It is impossible to incorporate a representation of Black and Latina women, despite forming a large section of the American society, with their own history regarding the evolution of the gender division of labor and the consequences. Intersectionality (the idea that different axes of oppression intersect, producing complex and often contradictory results) is often underexposed; this is true of both my research and contemporary feminism. Women's movements themselves have often ignored the deeply intertwined issues of race and class. White women (and research that focuses on them) need to acknowledge that they have a complicated relationship with White male dominance, as that system confers White women certain privileges that women of color cannot access.[22] However, I do also acknowledge the issue of social class in cinema and how it can be researched in the same ways as gender.[23]

My historical film analysis is based on the methodology of Chris Vos. Just as film theoreticians do not agree on a single film theory, no consensus can be found about one method for film analysis either. Vos's approach is context-oriented, unlike most film analyses which are text-oriented and only (or mostly) focus on the narrative and the stylistic elements of the film. Vos makes use of the cultural studies approach, which is the only approach in communication science that tries to analyze the mass media within their social context.[24] He emphasizes the significance of the context in which a film is made, and the role of that context in the formation of meaning. Using his method, not only symbolic and ideological elements in the film can be identified, but also the meaning of the film in relation to its historical and production context.[25] Vos also believes a certain ideology can be reflected through the use of narrative and visual codes.[26] Following Vos's approach, I approach my analysis in four 'levels': first, the broad *historical* and *social context* (first level), then the *film-historical context* (second level) and the *production context of the film* (third level). Only then do I analyze the film itself as a product (fourth level) in terms of the filmic, narrative and symbolic layer.[27] Vos's approach is particularly suited to identify and examine the discursive context and construction of the feminist stories told in

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[22] Walters, *Feminism*, 1-5.; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 2002), 15.

[23] Canning, *Gender history in practice*, 12-21.; Michael L. Stephens, *Film noir. A comprehensive, illustrated reference to movies, terms and persons* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1995), 125-6.; Ealasaid Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," *Political Insight* 4, no. 2 (2013): 22–25.

[24] Chris Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*. Inleiding in de analyse van audiovisueel materiaal (Houten: De Haan, 1991), 91-8.

[25] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105-6.

[26] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 99.

[27] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105.

the films, because (especially these) films express meanings that are linked to a broader social and historical context. The origin critique and the heuristic context are therefore essential to my analysis.[28]

Feminist activism in Western culture began in the early twentieth century and has returned in 'waves' since then. In my film historical analysis, I examine to which extent the feminist messages in these films are related to the changing strategies and ideas of the different 'waves' of feminist activism and also link them to the broader context of the emancipation of women. I consider if these feminist filmmakers have a moderate or a more radical viewpoint compared to the views of the contemporary feminist movements and how this could have come about. A filmmaker is always part of a society and thus will always be influenced by a certain ideology or use ideological stereotypes in her/his communication. In the case of feminist filmmakers this ideology is that of the subculture of women's movements, although these are also unavoidably influenced by the patriarchy due to its long history and widespread impact.[29] For that reason I link my sources to the ideology and subculture of the maker and will look at how these are linked to the larger dominant (patriarchal male) culture.[30] I analyze the framing of the feminist messages by looking at genre, narrative style, structure and specifically the character of the femme fatale. I link the themes and symbols used in the films to the contemporary historical and production context. I focus in particular on the *mise-en-scène*, with attention to costumes, make-up and attributes.[31]

For this research, I have chosen three feminist movies directed by female feminists in the United States as case studies. The cases are *The Working Girls* (1974), written and directed by Stephanie Rothman (°1936), *Bound* (1996) written and directed by Lana Wachowski (°1965) and Lilly Wachowski (°1967) and *The Love Witch* (2016) written and directed by Anna Biller (°1965).

There are several reasons for this choice. The three films represent a specific period in time, being the 1970s, 1990s and 2010s. This will be useful when linking the used strategies and themes to these of the feminist waves. Third-wave feminism emerged in the 1960s, second-wave in the 1990s and third-wave in the 2010s. Keeping in mind that the number of feminist films that include a *femme fatale* is very low, I opted for a mix of films, each with a specific approach to the *femme fatale*. This adds value to my analysis and comparison. Also, in all three film cases the filmmakers have either suggested they identify as feminists or scholars and film critics have interpreted them and their work in this way.[32] I have also chosen to only include films made by female feminists.

Of course, male filmmakers are capable of embodying feminist ideals too and some do. However, by the nature of their male body and male experience, they cannot create a cinematic world viewed authentically from the female perspective and experience, thus incorporating an authentic version of the so-called female gaze. The analysis of female perspectives in films made by men like *Thelma & Louise* (1991) or *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) would certainly be a fruitful path for further research. [33] Also, the feminist films made by men have an important value in the representation of

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[28] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105-9.

[29] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 91-8.

[30] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105-9.

[31] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105.

[32] Margaret Walters, Feminism. A very short introduction (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2005), 1-5.

[33] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Pam Cook, *The Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 123.

women in film culture. For this reason I check my cases against them and compare the films made by feminist women with similar films made by feminist men.

The Working Girls (1974) is a feminist exploitation film with a running time of 80 minutes, written and directed by Stephanie Rothman in the American studio *Dimension films*. Rothman is known for her feminist exploitation films made between 1967 and 1974. She was one of the only female directors to have worked in the 1970s film industry in the United States; she states herself that she would have liked to work outside of the exploitation genre but did not get the opportunity to do so. *The Working Girls* and Rothman's other feature films – *It's a Bikini World, The Student Nurses, The Velvet Vampire, Group Marriage, Terminal Island*– all contained feminist ideas about the depictions of women and sex and always featured strong independent women.[34] While popular with the cinema-going audience, the film industry held her back and her work was often ignored by canonizing critics.[35]

This R-rated drive-in comedy and sexploitation film focuses on role reversal, stereotyped expectation, female friendship and sexuality amongst three femme fatales, in the form of young women who are roommates in an apartment in Los Angeles. The three female protagonists are ambitious and determined to make it in the male-dominated world of Los Angeles, but they become endangered by the illegal and shady activities of the men who become their lovers. Honey (Sarah Kennedy) can be described as gutsy and liberated. She comes to Los Angeles in the hope of finding a job and a new lifestyle. While still broke and unemployed she meets Denise (Laurie Rose) and Jill (Lynne Guthrie), who offer her a place to stay.

Eventually, Honey, who has an aptitude for the stock market, gets lucky when she gets hired by a millionaire who seems to expect nothing more from her than a chat and some company. Denise, who is a painter, starts a relationship with a guitarist with a dubious background who came home with Honey one day. Jill first works at the local strip bar as a waitress, but soon starts working there as a stripper. She becomes involved with the son of a mafia boss. Despite being sexually liberated and free spirited, the three young women are soon confronted with the questionable backgrounds and activities of their boyfriends. Using inventiveness and a fierce imagination, they all find a way to survive in the big city and male-dominated society.[36]

Bound (1996) is a *neo-noir* crime thriller with a running time of 108 minutes, written and directed by the transgender sisters Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski (credited as The Wachowski Brothers), who became later most known for their franchise *The Matrix* (1999). The film was produced in the *Republic Pictures Home Video* in the United States.
Bound was the Wachowski sisters' feature film directorial debut. They are independent filmmakers and also worked as executive producers on the film. At the time of release, they had not come out yet as trans women, so in public opinion, many queer audiences found it strange that directors who referred to themselves as the "married, heterosexual brothers from the Midwest," succeeded in making

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[34] Marjorie Baumgarten, "Exploitation's Glass Ceiling. Feminist filmmaker Stephanie Rothman on her short but brilliant run making B-movies," *The Austin Chronicle* (2006), consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.austinchronicle.com.
[35] S.n., "Sight & Sound: the July 2019 issue," BFI, consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.bfi.org.uk.
[36] S.n., "The Working Girls," IMDB, consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.imdb.com.; S.n., "The Working Girls," Rotten Tomatoes, consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.rottentomatoes.com.

a film that expresses the authentic experiences of lesbians.[37] Lana came out when they were shooting a sequel to the *Matrix* and *Lilly* only in 2016. Their roles as transgender women in the film industry have helped them to forge a different kind of path for new generations of screenwriters, directors and producers.[38] *Bound* was received positively by both film critics and the lesbian community, who appreciated the realistic portrayal of a lesbian relationship in a mainstream film. The film even became a lesbian cult classic. The film was made on a tight budget, financed by Dino De Laurentiis. It contained many scenes with sex and violence, which gave the film an R-rating.[39]

The story of *Bound* could be described as a 'crime-romance' thriller. The plot centers around Violet (Jennifer Tilly), a sexy femme fatale and her new lover Corky (Gina Gershon), a sexy lesbian ex-con lover. At the start of the film Corky is hired to renovate and paint the apartment next door to where Violet lives with Caesar (Joe Pantoliano), a psychotic gangster and money launderer for the mafia. Violet is the moll of Caesar, who uses the apartment as a place to meet and beat people up. Since first meeting Corky, Violet is physically attracted to her and is mesmerized by her sex appeal. Caesar offers Violet as a kind of prostitute to his criminal comrades. Suffering from Caesar's violent behavior, she soon seeks solace from Corky. Violet is determined to make a new life for herself, but insists that she needs Corky's help. Eventually the two young women become involved in an intense love affair. Together they concoct a scheme to steal two million dollars of stashed mob money, use it to escape and put the blame on Caesar. Corky and Violet think Caesar will be forced to flee from mafia boss Gino Marzzone given that he will be a suspect of the robbery. From there, things begin to escalate.

When Caesar finds out the money is gone, he realizes that Gino will think he stole it if he runs away. He decides to get the money back from one of his cronies whom he suspects of having stole it. Violet panics and threatens to leave, but Caesar forces her to stay, convinced she was involved in the robbery and is trying to frame him. When Gino and his son arrive at the apartment, the son flirts with Violet and taunts Caesar. Caesar is convinced that Gino's son stole the money and kills both mobsters. After finally discovering that Corky and Violet were the ones who stole the money, Caesar becomes violent. He ties them up, threatens to torture them, and demands to tell him where the stolen money can be found. When another crony of the mobster gang arrives at the apartment, Caesar makes a deal with Violet to help him stall. The mobster is fooled. Corky then tells Caesar she has hidden the money in the next-door apartment and he goes to retrieve it. Corky tries to stop Caesar from taking the money, but he beats her violently. Violet arrives just in time and kills Caesar. The story ends with both female protagonists driving off as survivors, holding hands tightly.[40]

The Love Witch (2016) is a horror film with a running time of 120 minutes written and directed by Anna Biller in the studio *Oscilloscope Laboratories* in the United States. Biller took on a number of roles in the film: that of producer, lead editor, head of soundtrack and she also made many of the costumes and props herself. This explains why the film took seven and a half years to complete. Biller has a background in painting but turned to filmmaking after compleing a Master's degree at *CalArts* in the

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[37] Kelly Kessler, "Bound Together," *Film Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2003): 13–22.
[38] Barbra Penne, *Transgender Role Models and Pioneers* (London: The Rosen Publishing Group Inc, 2016), 21-4.
[39] R-rating is part of the Motion Picture Association (MPA) film rating system and it is based on its content. R = restricted, children under 17 require an accompanying parent or adult guardian.
[40] S.n., "Bound," IMDB, consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.imdb.com.; S.n., "Bound," Rotten Tomatoes, consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.rottentomatoes.com.

United States. *The Love Witch* is Biller's first feature after Viva (2007) and a few short films. She always takes her time to prepare her movies by herself. The common characteristics of her films are the colorful sets and the theme of the absurdity of gender inequality, which is also expressed in *The Love Witch*. The film got a NR-label[41] and became a minor cult classic with a ranking on *Rotten Tomatoes* as the 40th best horror film of all time.[42]

In this feminist horror comedy, a tribute to 1960s Technicolor thrillers, a femme fatale in the form of a modern-day witch uses spells and magic to get men to fall in love with her. Elaine (Samantha Robinson) is a sexy witch who is determined to find a man that will love her. After her ex-husband dies she leaves San Francisco and moves to a small northern Californian town. In her gothic Victorian apartment, she seeks out spells and prepares magic potions, which she uses as part of her seduction scheme when picking up men. Her strategy consists in first luring these men in with her curvaceous body, and then she makes them drink the mysterious mixture she has prepared at home. Time after time, her spells turn out to be too effective. Too many men become too strongly enchanted and they all declare their love for her.

Clearly, none of these temporary lovers can handle the power of the heavy emotions that Elaine triggers in them. They all lose their manliness and become weak, emotional creatures. That is the opposite of what Elaine wants and she becomes annoyed with them. She feels she has no choice but to get rid of them, permanently. As a result, these hapless men who crossed her path end up as a string of defenseless victims, all doomed to a dramatic death. The police officer Griff (Gian Keys) who investigates one of these suspicious deaths traces it to Elaine. During his interrogation of Elaine, they fall in love with each other. Elaine is convinced he is the man of her dreams, as this was foretold by her tarot cards. They even hold a mock wedding at a medieval fair. Later, Griff confronts Elaine over two deaths that she is tied to by DNA evidence. He tells her that it seems that no man can ever love her enough. Finally, her desperate need to be loved drives her to the far end of insanity and she murders Griff.[43]

I will begin my research by presenting an in-depth description of my chosen methodology, namely Chris Vos's historical film analysis. I then give a compact description of the historiographical debate, theoretical framework and historical context used to conduct my research, including the four feminist waves and their central ideas and strategies. I dive into feminist film theory, which was created under the influence of second-wave feminism, and more specifically Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. I link this to the dominant ideology of our patriarchal society and the function of the archetype of the femme fatale within it. Then, I present the main points in the discussion of whether the femme fatale character in cinema has only sexist or also feminist features. This section ends with an introduction to feminist filmmakers, their strategies and the recent concept of the female gaze.

After sketching the context required to present my research, I analyze my primary sources by researching the ways in which the feminist writer-directors of *The Working Girls*, *Bound* and *The Love Witch* used codes of the dominant ideology and popular Hollywood genres to address feminist issues

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[41] NR rating : If a film has not been submitted for a rating or is an uncut version of a film that was submitted, the labels Not Rated (NR) are used.

[42] Anna Biller, "About,'" Anna Biller, consulted 13.06.2020, https://lifeofastar.com.

[43] S.n., "The Love Witch," IMDB, consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.imdb.com.; S.n., "The Love Witch," Rotten Tomatoes, consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.rottentomatoes.com.

and even subvert certain stereotypes of women. Then I explore how these filmmakers succeeded in conferring power and agency on their femme fatale characters through the use of their body and sexuality. Further, I examine the incorporation of the theme of revenge as expressed through a *revenge fantasy* in these films, whereby women seek vengeance on the patriarchy and its oppression. Finally, I analyze how these female creators conveyed the authentic experiences of femininity and the creation of visual pleasure for women. Through this analysis, I want to acquire insights in how these feminist writer-directors use the femme fatale archetype and the female gaze in order to convey messages of gender equality. Throughout the paper, I loop back to the theoretical discussions and historical context provided in the beginning.

Methodology

Film analysis is complicated by the lack of a universal theory of film and thus the lack of universal analytical methods. Common methods and approaches include Peter Verstraten's narratological model, David Bordwell's linguistic film theory and André Vandenbunder's theory regarding antefilmic elements including both a-filmic and pro-filmic elements.[44] After consideration of a range of possible models, I chose Chris Vos's historical levels approach. Vos's approach is context-oriented, unlike most film analyses which are text-oriented and thus only (or mostly) focus on the narrative and the stylistic elements of the film. Vos includes the importance of the context of the film and its role in the formation of meaning. He has assembled a method to not only recognize symbolic and ideological elements in the film, but also understand the meaning of the film in relation to its historical and production context.[45]

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[44] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 8-9.
[45] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105-6.

According to Vos, a certain ideology can be reflected through the use of narrative and visual codes. The quantitative counting method, which does not use these codes, is therefore inadequate for content analysis. The insights from semiotics resolve this problem.[46] Semiotic insights from structuralists like Umberto Eco state that the meaning of a film is defined as a relative concept and that the social-historical context takes a central place in this attempt at explanation.[47]

Vos claims that is it possible to make a cultural and historical analysis of film by analyzing film as a producer of meaning within a larger culture. To construct his method, Vos uses the *cultural studies* approach, because it is the only communication science school that attempts to analyze mass media within their social context. Vos believes that a film does not possess an absolute meaning; possible meanings are only created when the specific form and content of a film is linked to its maker, the broader historical context, and the intended audience. This is especially crucial for ideological analyses of film based on the intended meaning of the film, as in the present study. History therefore plays a crucial role in my analysis.[48]

Vos builds his method on aspects of both the structuralist approach and the myth approach. Both claim that characters and storylines have a deeper meaning than the viewer initially experiences. Claude Levi-Strauss as well as Roland Barthes and Will Wright demonstrate that characters used in cinema are not arbitrarily created; instead, they symbolize a larger group, class or movement. This is supported by the number of films that concentrate on the creation of a stereotypical character in which the viewer can recognize her or himself. The same is valid for the use of objects or symbols, which are designed to evoke connotations that the viewer is likely to have.[49]

According to the thesis of reflection, the content of a film reflects fundamental problems in society. Semioticians like John Fiske and John Hartley have made this idea more realistic by proposing that it is not society itself that is being reflected upon, but rather social values: the way in which that society would like to see itself. In my research, the feminist films I analyze are part of the subculture of feminism, and will therefore not reflect the social values of the dominant society but rather those of this specific subculture. I also start from the idea that these reflections are not 'automatically' connected to society, but are deliberately incorporated into it with the intention of achieving a certain effect. Inherent in my analysis is the connection to society and the evolution of strategies used by feminist movements to fight for women's rights.[50]

The history and heuristic context of the film's origin are important to the analysis of my film cases - *The Working Girls* (1974*), Bound* (1996) and *The Love Witch* (2016) - together with the interaction between audiovisual media and history in terms of the background of this medium and its function as a historical source. In accordance with Vos's methodology, I begin by framing the social and film production context of the film before analyzing the film itself. Both are equally important in researching the representation of women in the film as well as the possible influences of the filmmaker's life and historical context. Concerning the context of the film, I will look at the production context, the social context, the historical context and the private context of the directors at the time the film was made, with a focus on their ideology and subculture and how these are linked to the dominant

[46] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 99.
[47] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 91-5
[48] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 91-8.
[49] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 91-5.
[50] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 91-5.

culture. This is particularly important when researching films made by and featuring disempowered individuals and characters, i.e. women in a patriarchal society.[51]

When determining the ideological value of a film, I draw on different of disciplines and theories within the social sciences which all aim to explain the functioning of society. This interdisciplinarity allows me to analyze which worldview(s) the film carries within it, and how it deals with societal fault lines.[52] History and film studies are of course central to this study: the first step is to thoroughly study what is conventional within the genre, as only then does it become possible to label a character, plot twist or visual presentation as 'stereotypical'. Furthermore, certain themes in the film can only be linked to real-life issues once one has sufficient insight into a specific society during a specific time period.[53]

Following Vos's approach, I worked from 'top to bottom', starting with the broad historical and social context and ending with the product/film itself. Vos cautions against working the other way around, as the researcher's own presuppositions may color his or her later analysis. At each level of analysis, Vos offers examples of questions as a starting point. I altered several of these to make them more specific and also added new questions specific to my inquiry. My method therefore differs from Vos's 'ideal method', which is to be expected, as every film analysis requires a tailored approach.[54]

The first level is the *broad social context*. Here I look cultural, economic and political issues and characteristics of the time, questions like "What problems dominate the period?", "Which issues are part of the public agenda?", "What is characteristic of the mental climate?", "Which method of production predominates?", "What is the attitude towards mass media in general and audiovisual media in particular?". At this level I created a pool of information from which to draw on in each subsequent step. The feminist filmmakers are thus situated within the various feminist movements and the broader context of women's emancipation.[55]

The second level is the *film-historical context*. Here I examine film production within the social, historical and private context of the directors at the time the film was made. For the cultural aspects I examine who wrote, directed and produced the film and assign a style and movement to which the film belongs. Regarding the economic aspect, I examine the management and organizational principles of the film industry at the time the film was made.

The third level is the *production context*. This level concerns the development of the story and script: "How did the idea come about?" and "Does it fit in with one of the identified general problems in society?"[56]

For the fourth level, that of the 'product' itself, no one method of analysis can suffice. Vos chose to distinguish three layers of the film: the filmic (cinematic) layer, the narrative layer and the symbolic layer. Vos recommends including both the narrative and cinematic layers; I chose to also include the symbolic layer, because after multiple viewings certain symbols and themes emerge. Recognizing that an endless number of observations on these three levels are possible, I chose to note only the observations that were most directly related to my research question (Appendix B).[57]

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[51] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 91-105.
[52] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 8-9.; Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105-6.
[53] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 106-9.
[54] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105.
[55] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 106-7.
[56] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 107.
[57] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 31.

When analyzing the filmic layer, I performed a shot analysis regarding the *mise-en-scène*, the portrayed behavior and the image manipulation. For the *mise-en-scène* (which includes all the elements that are constructed within the frame), I wanted to know, "Which cinematic and adopted conventions are used (social codes are clothing, houses, street life, whereas medium and genre codes are grouping in front of the camera, light, depth of field, sets)?". The *mise-en-scène* plays a big role in defining the atmosphere of the story. By manipulating these elements, the director exerts control over the viewer's perception. The frame itself can be defined as the way the camera captures the *mise-en-scène*.[58]

Regarding the behavior of the characters, I asked "What cinematic and adopted codes/conventions are shown?" and "How do the male and female characters treat each other?" For image manipulation, I looked at how what media and genre codes (e.g., type of frame, camera movement and position) are used. This is always a combination of different parameters, thus all of these film technical elements must be analyzed in relation to each other.[59]

Vos distinguishes three overarching shot types: the close-up (CU), the medium shot (MS), and the full shot (F)[60]. The choice of shot type is aimed to get the viewer's attention and lead it. Sometimes, shot choices are also about what is not shown. In general, CU's are associated with subjectivity, while wider shots are linked to a more objective point of view.[61] Besides the determination of CU, MS and F, I distinguished more specific shot types like the extreme close up (ECU), big close-up (FCU), medium close-up (MCU), medium long shot (MLS), long shot (LS), extreme long shot (ELS) and the use of shots like establishing shot[62], a shot/reverse shot or over-the-shoulder shot.[63]

Different camera positions and movements have specific psychological effects on the viewer. Examples of camera movements without displacing the camera set-up in space are a pan shot, a tilt (down or up), or a zoom (in or out). When the camera set-up is displaced through space, a tracking shot or a lift become possible. A low camera angle confers dominance on the filmed figure, whereas a high camera angle diminishes that figure's importance (i.e., the literal visual translation of "looking down on someone" or "looking up to someone"). In Appendix B, the use of CU is primary because CU's are often used to bring special attention to certain elements of the story. An initial analysis of music and montage revealed that these elements have only minimal relevance to my research question, thus they were given only minimal attention.[64]

The narrative layer is the foundation of a film, which is brought to life by the filmic or cinematic layer. For the narrative layer, I examined the themes and problems that are central to the story. Specifically I tried to discover which (narrative) strategies are used to convey the feminist messages the maker intended to send, if any.[65] I also tested whether these case studies conform to or reject the dominant narrative structure of Hollywood. Screenwriting guru Syd Field claims that all movies that use this dominant structure are divided into three acts, namely 'set-up' (beginning), 'confrontation'

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[58] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 20.; Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 107-8.
[59] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 107-8.
[60] In Dutch, Vos calls this the *Totaal-shot (T).*
[61] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 31.
[62] An establishing shot is usually used in the beginning of a scene to place the characters in their environment.
[63] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 20-30.
[64] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 31.
[65] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 31.

(middle) and 'resolution' (end), with a plot point at the end of the first and second acts, and a midpoint in the middle of the second act.

In the narrative layer, a division into scenes (blocks of action that usually occur in the same time and place) and sequences (the grouping of scenes around a theme or subject) is normally employed. I applied the technique of segment analysis to describe each scene in terms of space, time, characters and action. Both narrative and filmic elements appear in Appendix B because these two layers always occur together. Certain themes like sexual violence or seduction can be shown through story as well as visual elements. These 2 layers reinforce one another and cannot be analyzed separately. I then grouped these scenes into sequences.[66] In Appendix B, *content* includes both the story (from the narrative layer) and the *mise-en-scène* (from the filmic layer).

For the symbolic layer, I began my inquiry by determining the main themes used in the film, namely whether there are certain ideological, political or social themes present that can be linked to the director's or society's broader views and ideas of women. For this purpose, I fine-tuned Vos's questions: "What types of characters are used?", "Which (social) relations and/or oppositions do those characters maintain?", "What social problems or themes, like female emancipation and feminism, does the interaction between the relations and/or oppositions represent?", "Which gender stereotypes are used?" and "Which signs (both narrative and filmic) are emphasized more than usual?"[67]

To unravel the themes and meanings in the film, I use the broad historical context as a point of departure. Although Vos does not necessarily recommend including the symbolic layer in the analysis, I found it both illuminating and practical to link those observations to those of the narrative and filmic layers.[68] I must also note that The Love Witch (2016, writ. & dir. Anna Biller) proved itself to contain the most obvious symbols and feminist messages, that is why its segment analysis turned out to be bigger in volume than the other two film cases.

In summary, Vos's methodology was useful to identify and examine the discursive context and construction of the feminist stories told in the films, because films express meanings that are linked to a broader social and historical context. The origin critique and the heuristic context are both essential to my analysis. The logic of the source itself defines its content, whereby origin critique is crucial on every level. I constantly have to pay attention to the message of the maker, the frame used, and in these case studies, the specific construction of the femme fatale presented in the three chosen films.[69]

These methodological and thematic choices do have some shortcomings. Because my research is focused on the intention of the maker, I do not include Vos's fifth level of film analysis, namely that of perceived meanings or the influence and effect of the films on public opinion, as that is outside the scope of this inquiry. Social research of the audience's reception of women in film would take this analysis too far. Future research could survey viewers' opinions and experiences of these feminist femme fatale films and the classic noir films.[70] Some authors, including John Fiske, even believe that different viewers from different subcultures will develop different visions of a film and that the true meaning of the film can only exists through the interaction between 'the text' and the viewer.[71]

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[66] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 31.

[67] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 108-9

[68] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 107-8.

[69] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105-9.

[70] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 101-9.

[71] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 57-61.

Although music and montage had no obvious impact on my analysis and were therefore excluded, these components often have a marked impact on the world created by the filmmaker. A thorough study of these elements would complement future research on this subject.[72]

Historiography

1.1. FEMINIST WAVES & STRATEGIES

The American films analyzed in this study all employ the *femme fatale* archetype. Despite the ambivalent meaning of this archetype, the chosen filmmakers successfully convey strong feminist messages through the medium of film. When attempting to link the methods used by these writer-directors to their historical context, an understanding of the different waves of feminism and the central ideas and strategies of these movements is indispensable. Looking at the femme fatale through this lens makes it possible to recognize whether the filmmakers under study are more radical or moderate in their feminism.

1.1.1. First-wave feminism

So-called first-wave feminism was a period of female activism in Western Europe and the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries. These activists were primarily concerned with women's right to vote ('suffrage'), and the right to run for parliamentary office. Called *suffragettes*, this wave of organized activism was typified by the slogan "Votes for Women". Besides the wish to secure women's voting rights, the first-wave feminists in America also raised awareness of the need for equal contracts between men and women as well as issues around marriage, parenting, and property rights for women.[73]

In 19th-century America, feminism arose out of the anti-slavery movement. This movement was already underway since the 1830s and had welcomed many female participants. First-wave activism was also present in Great Britain and soon spread to Britain's Australasian colonies. The notion of women's suffrage soon reached other countries as well. Movements for women's suffrage in the United States and Great Britain were typified by similar divisions, namely one group with a more cautious and pragmatic approach, as represented by the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, versus a more militant approach, as represented by the National American Woman Suffrage Association.[74]

In the beginning of the 20th century, suffrage for (white) women was gradually adopted in multiple states. This eventually resulted in the 1920 passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which granted all white American women the right to vote. This triumph

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[72] Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 105-9.
[73] Walters, *Feminism*, 75-85.
[74] Walters, *Feminism*, 73.

marks the end of first-wave feminism, despite the fact that black women had to wait nearly another half-century (1965) to gain the right to vote.[75]

The women's suffrage movements created a major shift in the political and legal system. Nevertheless, decades later in the middle of the 20th century, women of all races were still experiencing widespread and marked social discrimination. Undeniably, first-wave feminism marked the start of a mass movement, one that would lead to subsequent waves of feminism that would take the form of lobbying and reformist initiatives.[76]

1.1.2. Second-wave feminism

In the 1960s, a new and more radical period of feminist activism set in, called the second wave.[77] These feminists fought for legal and social equality for women; these gender issues extended beyond the concrete goal of gaining the right to vote. This movement was a reaction to the silent years after 1920. The notions of first wave and second wave feminism were introduced at this time.[78]

Second-wave feminists claimed that many aspects of women's personal lives were deeply politicized and reflected sexist power structures. "The Personal is Political", a slogan written by activist Carol Hanisch, became the mantra of the second wave. Their goal was to raise awareness of the far-reaching effects of patriarchy and sexism on women's private lives. Feminist activists of the second wave viewed women's cultural and political inequalities as being inseparably linked. They also asserted that civic and political systems, which could potentially facilitate social change, instead were choosing to operate in favor of the dominant group and that these societal structures have an built-in tendency to institutionalize discrimination. For them, the origins of gender inequality lie in the discourses about power. Second-wave feminists acknowledged the possibility that a solution to women's oppression may never become possible without a revolution.[79]

The rise of second-wave feminism in the United States is partly credited to Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which articulated the discontent that many American women were feeling. A woman's sovereignty over her own body became one of the most pressing issues of second-wave feminism. In the first place this meant the fight for better health care. Even in America, adequate gynecological advice and care in childbirth, democratic access to contraception and the right to a safe and legal abortion are (still) not self-evident. In the second place second-wave feminism focused on the unrealistic beauty standards imposed on women through the use of mass media. Because the dominant culture attaches so much value to a woman's physical appearance, some women spend extraordinary amounts of money on clothing and jewelry, mutilate their bodies with cosmetic surgery, or impair their health and sometimes even die from following fad diets or eating disorders. This increasing awareness of stereotypical images of women in the media as defined by a male-dominant society was partially responsible for the beginning of feminist film theory. Laura Mulvey became a key

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[75] Walters, *Feminism*, 46.; Walters, *Feminism*, 73.
[76] Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 3-4.
[77] Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought,* 1.
[78] Amber E. Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism," *NWSA Journal* 16, no. 3 (2004): 124-153.
[79] Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought,* 1-4; Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," 22–25.

figure with her essay entitled 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), which explores women's sexual objectification in mainstream films. [80]

In their detailed analyses of 'what it means to be a woman', second-wave feminists were inclined to be more critical and more willing to challenge traditional social/family relations. A possible explanation for this more radical form of feminism was that more women started to gain access to higher education and thus found it less desirable to settle into conventional domestic roles.[81] Women, who had previously been simultaneously patronized and glorified by men, were encouraged to discuss their personal experiences and identify the ways in which their gender gives rise to certain societal expectations, such as providing men with sexual pleasure and household work.[82] Feminist Kate Millett examined the patriarchy as a political institution in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970). She claims that politics include and concern all relationships that are defined by power structures. In the case of men and women, their relationship is defined by the dominance of one and subordinance of the other.[83]

The main subject of resistance was the female body itself and the constraints imposed on it by patriarchal conceptions of femininity.[84] The first widely documented example of second-wave activism took place in 1968 when feminists protested against patriarchal beauty standards in Atlantic City at the Miss America contest. This protest symbolized the start of a new phase of feminist activism as it signified a tactical break from traditional political lobbying. The target had now become the entire system of patriarchal ideas. The Miss America protest sparked the start of a media witch-hunt against feminism and the emergence of labeling feminist activists as 'bra-burners'. Echoes of these media-based messages are still noticeable today. The Miss America demonstration also taught its participants and organizers that such protests could easily be perceived as hateful attacks against other women. For this reason, later protests emitted more sisterly solidarity and were directly directed at the men responsible for treating women as sexual objects.[85]

In addition to this focus on the woman's body, a focus on voting remained. The Reagan elections (1980, 1984) revealed the first 'gender gap' in voting since 1920. This implied that women in the 1980s were voting accordingly to matters that concerned them directly in relation to their gender. In this decade, second-wave feminism obtained positive results in the workplace and the home, though these were more often more paper victories than real ones. Eventually, the popularity of second-wave feminism began to decline during the Reagan-Bush period and the mass media began to redirect its sensationalist endeavors to post-feminist ideas. Post-feminism emerged in the 1980s as a backlash against second-wave feminism, signaling a movement of people who believed that the (second-wave) women's movement had resolved oppressive issues and that now it is up to individual women to make personal choices that simply reinforce those fundamental societal changes. Some post-feminists even claim that feminism is no longer relevant in the present world and that it is even dead.[86,17] In reality,

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[80] Walters, *Feminism*, 105-10.; Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.

[81] Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought,* 7-8.

[82]   Angie Maxwell and Todd Shields, eds. *The Legacy of Second-Wave Feminism in American Politics* (Fayetteville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 7-8.

[83] Walters, *Feminism*, 105-6.

[84] Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought,* 5-6.

[85] Maxwell and Shields, eds. *The Legacy of Second-Wave Feminism,* 7-8.

[86] Catherine M. Orr, "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (1997): 29-45.

second-wave feminism peaked from the mid-1960s through the early 1980s but it does remain a viable movement that co-exists with third-wave feminism.[87]

1.1.3. Third-wave feminism

In 1992, a third wave of feminism arose as a reaction to the second wave's emphasis on the experience of white upper middle class women and the political aspects of gender inequality. This wave is located in popular culture and focuses mainly on multicultural inclusion, identity politics and intersectionality. While these have already become central paradigms within feminist theory, this new wave reflects a more elaborated collection of debates and approaches proposed by these paradigms.[88] Third-wave feminists identify contemporary feminism a powerful force, clarifying its unique contributions by differentiating it from that of the still-present, highly influential, and widely recognized second wave. Emerging from popular culture like punk music and cyberspace and targeting young women, third-wave discourses have entered public spaces and represent a split from second wave and scholarly feminism. Third-wave feminism has developed at the same time as, and in contrast to, the post-feminist attempt to depoliticize the feminist discourse.[89]

The third-wave discourse arose from debates and essays about the intersections of feminism and racism in the mid-80s. Feminists of color initiated feminist discussions that took race-related subjectivities into account.[90] Women started to re-envision the capacity to empower themselves and other women beyond the boundaries of a political discourse. Their disappointment in the so-called 'accomplishments' of second-wave feminism caused them to conclude that female subordination was more than just an consequence of dominant political forces; it was prevalent in all social ties with men. This gave rise to the third-wave feminist focus on micropolitics. They reviewed the tactics of the previous wave, questioned the prevailing ideological conceptions of femininity and tried to move beyond simply lobbying or campaigning for material changes. This new wave was characterized by a division between a group that claims that there are significant psychological differences between the sexes and another that suggests that gender roles are caused primarily by social conditioning.[91]

Third-wave feminists often question the essentialist concepts of femininity as defined by the second wave. The second wave excluded countless lesbians from the women's liberation movements in the late 1960s. Many lesbians, in contrast, believed they were countering male dominance purely through their sexual orientation and thus saw themselves as essential to women's liberation.[92] Queer theory, which claims that gender and sexuality are fluid constructs that are not readily translated to the binary division of 'male' and 'female', has strongly shaped third-wave feminism. For this reason, the recognition of bisexual and transgender identities are important characteristics of the third wave.

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[87] Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces," 124-153.

[88] Leela Fernandes, "Unsettling 'Third Wave Feminism': Feminist Waves, Intersectionality, and Identity Politics in Retrospect," in *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, ed. Hewitt Nancy A. (London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 98-118.; Orr, "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave," 29-45.

[89] Orr, "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave," 29-45.; Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces," 124-153.

[90] Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces," 124-153.

[91] Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought,* 5.

[92] Walters, *Feminism*, 46.

This process is still underway, as the rise in visibility of transgender people has also meant an increase in discrimination within the radical feminist movement.[93]

A concrete example of third-wave strategies is the so-called 'zines': magazines written and (informally) distributed by young women. These writers associate themselves with 'Riot Grrrl', an organization which originated from the punk music scene in the early 1990s. Riot Grrrl's aim is to provide secure and inclusive environments for young women to speak out. The contents of these publications are immensely personal and have an angry tone. The significance of these 'zines' lies in their openly proclaimed discontent with girls and women's representations in mainstream media. Regular targets are advertising, television and fashion magazines. Several of these 'zines' have accompanying web pages which advertise the publication, provide a place for readers to connect, and link the reader to similar feminist or women-oriented web pages.[94]

The second-wave feminists successfully created a context where third-wave feminists, occupying the role of authors, producers and directors, can have a more direct impact on cultural reproduction.[95] Third-wave feminists use pop culture as a weapon to raise awareness of gender discrimination. This gives academic feminists the opportunity to reconsider the production of knowledge and the means by which they transmit their research.[96] Third-wave feminism also attempts to negotiate a space between second-wave and post-feminist ideas. Third-wave feminists oppose post-feminist ideas in media and politics in order to challenge and dismantle their authority.[97]

1.1.4. Fourth-wave feminism

Starting around 2012, second as well as third-wave feminists started to use social media to fight sexual harassment, violence against women and rape culture. This sparked the 'fourth wave' of feminism. Fourth-wave feminism points out the ways in which gender inequality and injustice still exist in our modern society and suggests ways of coping with it. Thanks to the use of social media and internet, sexism or misogyny can be 'called out' as part of an existing digital 'call-out' culture. However, this new wave does not imply another break between old and new ideas and strategies of feminists. The fourth wave must be seen as a temporality instead of a particular generation or identity, as it includes older feminists as well as younger ones. It allows the possibility for surging waves that arise from specific socio-political contexts and their effects on women.[98] Fourth-wave feminists are immensely influenced by the third wave, with its focus on micropolitics and fight against the sexism and misogyny occurring in mainstream media in like film, television and literature.[99]

Fourth-wave feminists address gender-specific issues like street and workplace harassment, campus sexual assault and rape culture. By using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Tumblr, the notion of 'hashtag feminism' has arisen. Feminist blogging also

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[93] Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," 22–25.

[94] Orr, "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave," 29-45.

[95] Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces," 124-153.

[96] Orr, "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave," 29-45.

[97] Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces," 124-153.

[98] Prudence Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave: Affective Temporality* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 21-2.

[99] Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," 22–5.

contributes greatly to contemporary feminism, emphasizing the connections between online media and communities.[100] Famous examples of fourth-wave feminist campaigns include the Everyday Sexism Project (to call attention to sexism in everyday life and the workplace), No More Page 3 (to denounce the tabloid The Sun's Page 3 feature, which published photos of topless women), #YesAllWomen (to share stories of misogyny and violence against women), Free the Nipple (which points out that men are allowed to appear topless in public while it is both illegal and perceived as obscene when women do the same), the Women's Marches of 2017 and 2018 (to protest the sexism, racism, and xenophobia of the Trump administration in the United States), the #MeToo movement (whose goal is to expose sexual harassment and sexual abuse) and the #bringbackourgirls movement (to denounce the mass abduction of over two-hundred Nigerian school girls by Islamic extremist group Boko Haram). These movements have been catalyzed by numerous scandals involving the harassment, abuse and murder of women and girls. These include the Delhi gang rape (2012), the allegations against Jimmy Savile (2012), the conviction of Bill Cosby (2018), the Isla Vista killings (2014), the trial of Jian Ghomeshi (2016), and the conviction of Harvey Weinstein (2017).[101]

Characteristic of (many of) these movements is their international reach. Although social media is not at the base of all fourth wave activism, these online platforms have created enough new possibilities for communication and engagement to create a significantly different socio-cultural context in comparison to previous decades.[102] Social media platforms are effective spaces for discussion and activism. Digital campaigns that gain thousands and even millions of supporters prove the extensive reach of fourth-wave feminism. However, it is often contested whether or not online activism actually enables change. There is concern that the online debates and activism of fourth-wave feminism are increasingly separated from conflicts in the real world.[103]

1.1.5. Issues with the 'wave' narrative

These 'waves' of feminism are not static, even if they may appear that way. This leads some feminists to choose to reject these terms. The semantic division of feminism into different waves can be useful, however, when seeking to emphasize shared feelings and the collectivity of certain generations participating in activism.[104] Certain scholars even question if third and fourth waves can be defined as separate movements. Because they both occur separately from academic feminism, it is difficult to define what they exactly comprise.[105]

Some feminists even challenge the very existence of the 'fourth wave', claiming that the targeted use of digital media for activism is not enough to declare the start of a new movement. Regardless of whether the fourth wave of feminism is happening, it is becoming clear that women's

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[100] Nicola Rivers, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave: Turning Tides* (Cheltenham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.), 107-8.

[101] Rivers, *Postfeminism(s),* 107-8.

[102] Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave,* 107.

[103] Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," 22–25.

[104] Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave,* 21-44.

[105] Orr, "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave," 29-45.

understanding of their social status and political challenges is shifting and that the internet has enabled the development of a global feminist culture that uses the internet for debate and activism.[106]

1.2.   MALE GAZE & DOMINANT IDEOLOGY

1.2.1. Feminist film theory

The present study contributes to the broader discussions in feminist film theory. This theory emerged in the early 1970s in America and was influenced by the second-wave feminist denunciation of men's control over women, their bodies, and even their appearance. This criticism of the patriarchy led a group of film theorists to study whether women are being subjected to social subordination via film.

Feminist film theory studies the roles, agency and representation of women on-screen.[107] Peter Bosma's definition of different methods of film criticism and film analysis describes feminist film theory as a study that researches the roles, agency and representations of women on-screen, including the study of the above as a projection of the image the society has of women. [108]

Anneke Smelik builds upon Bosma's view by elaborating on the tension between politics vs. pleasure and reality vs. entertainment. She exposes the real-life truths that underlie the clichés and fantasies as related to female characters.[109] According to Ann Kaplan, genre and gender are both constructs. Kaplan argues that it has been an important way for feminist film theorists to criticize conventional cinematic forms. Early feminist film theory investigated the types of gender roles and clichés that have existed in mainstream films as well as the female directors working in Hollywood. Later, many themes from the women's movement of the 1970s arose. For example, academics searched for and found gender-specific themes like the mother-daughter relationship in *Mildred Pierce* (1945, writ. Ranald MacDougall, dir. Michael Curtiz) and rape in Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964, writ. Jay Presson Allen). [110]

Feminist film theory includes and draws upon many discourses as history, ethnographic research, culture studies, semiotics and psychoanalysis, all of which can be used to bridge thematic gaps in cinema.[111] Feminist film theory has taken a deep interest in approaches that aim to expose the subconscious and secret meaning behind the female character's behavior in film. This explains the importance of Freudian psychoanalysis in this field. This approach helps to dissect and deconstruct the fantasy from (or of) the female character. Sue Thornham claims that historically, the fantasy of desire was placed more in the object; today this is more noticeable in the *mise-en-scène*. Recognizing this, it is possible to see the fantasy of desire as something which is dependent on the time period and is subject to change over time. Thornham places necessary emphasis on the relevance of the time

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[106] Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," 22–25.

[107] Bosma, ed. *Filmkunde*, 254-5.

[108] Bosma, ed. *Filmkunde*, 254-9.

[109] Anneke Smelik, *And the mirror cracked. Feminist cinema and film theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 7-27.

[110] Ann E. Kaplan, "Troubling genre/reconstructing gender," in *Gender meets genre in postwar cinemas,* ed. Christine Gledhill (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 72.

[111] Smelik, *And the mirror cracked*, 7-27.

period since it clearly influences not just where the fantasy of desire is placed but also how it is placed.[112]

1.2.2. The male gaze, voyeurism and fetishism

One of the most important and most influential views of feminist film theory is that of Laura Mulvey. She uses psychoanalysis and semiotics to study cinematic spectatorship and is the one who developed feminist film theory as a valid field of research. Her groundbreaking essay, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), explores women's sexual objectification in the Hollywood and mainstream cinema. Mulvey argues with her *male gaze* theory that women are almost always portrayed from a man's point of view in the media. She claims that female characters are never placed in a role where they can take control of a scene. The portrayal of women as an object of desire or a spectacle to be looked at pervades a visual culture where men are always the bearer of the look. In such representations, female characters are entirely defined in terms of sexuality and their relationship to men. Through the use of narrative and cinematography, Hollywood films make a clear distinction between the passive woman and the active man. The cinematic process is never gender-neutral.[113]

Mulvey defines two ways in which Hollywood cinema creates visual pleasure. This pleasure is grounded in different mental processes. The first is the objectification of women. This process relates to Sigmund Freud's concept of *scopophilia* (*Schaulust*), which stands for deriving pleasure from subjecting others to one's gaze. This voyeuristic process can be done through watching others when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity. This objectification becomes more complicated when it is applied to cinematic looking, because the viewer is not seeing the object or the woman directly. In a patriarchal society, men dissociate themselves from women and treat them solely as erotic objects. This distancing is even more easy to achieve in a cinema. *Scopophilia* is the primary factor that determines the camera 's position and movement. The second manner is the narcissistic identification with an ideal (male) ego. This form, the result of *scopophilia* in its narcissistic aspect, causes the male viewer to identify with the male protagonist (and his male gaze) in the film, who is often a dominant figure in Hollywood cinema.[114]

Mulvey claims the male subconscious knows two strategies of escaping the fear of castration. The first is the demystification of the female figure, meaning the investigation of the woman and dismantling her of her mysteries. In film, this means that female character(s) will be either saved or punished by the male character. The second way is through the fetishization (*fetishistic scopohilia*) of the female. In the film industry, this results in the creation of the 'star system'. Production companies used to choose promising young actors and actresses and create personas for them, frequently inventing new identities and names. Even though male actors were also part of this system, the female actresses were fetishized, not the men. The image of the glamourous and unobtainable woman was created. In these ways both in real life and on-screen, cinema served to overcome the male conflict of being attracted to a woman and simultaneously fearing her.[115]

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[112] Sue Thornham, ed. *Feminist film theory. A reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 2-3.

[113] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists,* 2.

[114] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.

[115] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Duynslagher, interview.

Mulvey states that the female figure is paradoxical in psychoanalytical terms. She blends attraction with the male fear of castration. Freud's castration anxiety theory states that all males fear loss or damage to the penis. In Mulvey's theory, the woman is a symbol for the sexual difference and represents a castration threat, which is visually recognizable by her absence of a penis. This implies a threat of castration and accordingly displeasure. The female figure can thus be pleasurable in form (and thus displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men), while threatening in content.[116]

Mulvey's pioneering examination of the interaction between the screen and the viewer attempted to reveal the voyeuristic and fetishistic responses of male viewers to depictions of women on-screen. Mulvey distinguishes three types of spectatorship while viewing a film. The first is that of the camera as it records the film. As Hollywood employs primarily male directors, cameramen and producers, images of women are usually created from a male perspective. This is established for instance through the use of shots that pan and linger on the curves of a woman's body, reducing them to an object of lust aimed at a heterosexual male audience, using medium shots (MS) or close-ups (CU) of women shot from over the male character's shoulder or including scenes where a man is shamelessly observing a woman's body. This is linked to the second type of spectatorship, which is that of the male characters in the film who watch women and place them in the passive role of being an object of male desire. Female characters are never given the chance to lead the story and are only meant to support the main (male) character. This way, a connection is created with the audience's voyeuristic gaze when watching the film, which is the third type of spectatorship. [117]

Following Freud's idea of *scopophilia*, people derive sexual pleasure form looking at naked bodies. Film producers know that 'sex sells' so they are more than happy to give in to the audience's desires. Hollywood films being made in a patriarchal system means that these producers focus mainly on the male audience's desires. Women serve the male filmmaker, the male characters and the male audience to create a product of visual pleasure. Through the use of camera and characters, the audience's attention is drawn to the woman's body. Both in the film (for the male characters) and in the cinema (for the male audience), women function as erotic objects. Establishing the male gaze on these three levels of spectatorship, men occupy a place of power over women. Using the male gaze in such a widespread medium as film enforces (the ideology of) the patriarchal society. Pleasure in looking is thus divided into active male participants and passive female objects.[118]

1.2.3. Dominant ideology, Hays production code & Hollywood conventions

The objectification of women is established through the male gaze, which is an instrument of power used by the dominant ideology and culture. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault explains that power and the body are inseparably linked. By 'power', he means the everyday practice of it, not the political or sociological notion of state power. According to Foucault, the dominant culture transforms human bodies into docile and useful bodies that can be controlled. Foucault states that culture and history continuously form the body. Foucault says that "It is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination, […] the body becomes a useful force

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[116] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.

[117] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists,* 2.

[118] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists,* 2.; Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.

only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body."[119] Foucault claims that the disciplinary power manipulates people's minds by controlling of individual's bodies and behavior. This idea can be applied to the relation between the female body and male power. The dominant male culture tries to control women's bodies and define them in terms of their reproductive organs. Linked to Mulvey's male gaze theory, male/patriarchal power can be exercised through the use of men's gaze, transforming women into sexual objects. This creates expectations of how women should behave and look. Only when women got access to birth control did they truly get the freedom to be more independent and less submissive to men.[120]

By applying psychoanalysis to research on cinema, Mulvey uses it as a political weapon to demonstrate how the cinematic text and its female characters are constructed along lines that interact with the cultural patriarchical subconscious. Both Mulvey and Chris Vos claim that the popularity of mainstream films is determined and reinforced by preexisting social patterns, expectations and conventions. The media, and in this case cinema, can be regarded as the instruments that spread the dominant ideology. To achieve this, films make use of signs that are grouped together in codes. The manner in which they are put together is not arbitrary, but is rather based on conventions. Because the sender of a message has to make sure the receiver will understand its meaning, he will always use those codes that are most accepted within society. For the same reason, filmmakers want their audience to understand the film and are thus obliged to use popular codes. The understanding of the recipient would be gravely diminished by the introduction of unknown codes. Such codes are never neutral and will enforce the dominant system of meaning. As Umberto Eco states, conventions are culture-specific and changeable over time. Here I focus on the codes of Hollywood and American and Western society.[121] Due to ideological and commercial interests, Hollywood films are constructed with the aim to appeal to a far-reaching audience. Thomas Elsaesser claims that Hollywood has a an "access for all" policy, which means films are made to evoke a broad interpretation while at the same time the makers stay in control of the codes that make these interpretations conceivable.[122]

Patriarchal conventions in Hollywood films have been reinforced through the notorious 'Motion Picture Production Code', also known as the 'Hays Code', named after Will H. Hays, who was the president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) from 1922 to 1945. Hollywood, after experiencing a great deal of pressure from external organizations (like the American Catholic Church) and local politicians who had been questioning the morals of cinema and its influence on the audience ever since the era of silent film (which was intensified with the arrival of sound technology), Hollywood installed self-censorship in 1930. However, until 1934 these new moral standards were so disorganized and ineffective that this beginning period is called 'pre-Code Hollywood'. During this time, there were more female screenwriters active than later on in the twentieth century, despite subsequent feminist waves. With the Hays Code, the major studios tried to subject movies to Judeo-Christian morality and suppressed films that dealt with controversial themes

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[119] Oksala, "Freedom and bodies," 85-97.
[120] Oksala, "Freedom and bodies," 85-97.
[121] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Vos, *Het verleden in bewegend beeld*, 98-105.
[122] Alison Bartlett, Kyra Clarke and Rob Cover, *Flirting in the Era of #MeToo* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1-15.

like criminal violence, birth control, suicide, drinking, abortion, sexual license, and interracial relations.[123]

This self-censorship was applied to most American movies produced by the major studios. In 1968, the Hays Code was dissolved, but the code had already begun to weaken in the 1950s due to the combined impact of television and influence from foreign films. Sheri Chinen Biesen even argues that censorship rules were loosened even earlier than that, namely in the 1940s due to World War II. War crimes and combat violence were displayed on the news and other kinds of war propaganda. This way Hollywood lost its moral control of the screen, which created new openings for liberty in the filmmaking landscape. In this way, the depiction of violence and crime, often concerning sexual violence, and illicit affairs were allowed more in 1940s filmmaking, certainly in a crime genre like the film noir.[124] After years of minimal regulation, Hollywood decided in 1968 to let the new MPAA film rating system replace the Hays Code.[125]

The Hays Code had an enormous impact on the American moral standards for a large part of the twentieth century. Even though many of the so-called 'controversial' topics and behavior were forbidden in relation to men too, the Hays Code represented a much bigger restriction for the portrayal and storylines of female characters. Not only did the female roles become more narrow in general, their on-screen pleasure got restricted as well. In the pre-Hays-Code era there were actually more libertine movies being made and aimed at a female audience, featuring active and independent women.[126]

During the era of the Hays Code, there was still place for strong female characters, like the film noir *Mildred Pierce* (1945) illustrates. However, Hollywood did not want to encourage active female behavior or ambitions like that of Mildred (Joan Crawford), so such characters got punished severely. After having had a successful career, Mildred becomes bankrupt and is obliged to sell her restaurant chain. Her favorite daughter Kay (Jo Ann Marlowe) even dies from pneumonia after indulging in a romantic weekend with a new man in her life. Mildred's other daughter Veda (Ann Blyth) ends up in jail. Even today, the MPAA film rating system creates a gender bias in film regulation as the film ratings repress images of sexually assertive behavior and pleasure-seeking by women.[127]

1.3. FEMME FATALE AS MYTH
1.3.1. Origins of the femme fatale

Janey Place argues that the archetype of the *femme fatale* figure is one of the oldest themes in art.[128] History is filled with myths of the untrustworthy seductress who destroys men. Predating even the ancient stories of Eve or Salome, the femme fatale has functioned as a cautionary tale about the dangers

[123] Stephen Vaughn, "Morality and Entertainment: The Origins of the Motion Picture Production Code," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (1990): 39-65.; Patrick Duynslagher (film critic and former artistic director Film Fest Gent), interview by Ophelia Van Wijmeersch (student Ghent University), Ghent, 28.7.2020.

[124] Biesen, *Blackout*, 2-7.

[125] Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen & the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 60-76.; Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor,* 248-50.

[126] Patterson, "Interview. The Love Witch director Anna Biller."; Duynslagher, interview.

[127] Chloé Nurik, "50 shades of Film Censorship: Gender bias from the Hays Code to MPAA ratings," *Communication Culture & Critique* 11, no. 4 (2018): 530-547.

[128] Place, "Women in film noir," 47.

of uncontrolled female sexuality. For example, the Greek tragedy of Agamemnon features Clytemnestra as a 'femme fatale' who schemes with her lover to murder her husband Agamemnon. Other clear expressions of this archetype in Greek literature are the Siren's emasculating debauchery, Pandora's narcissism and the Harpies' greed and egocentrism. Throughout Western history, the archetype of the femme fatale has repeatedly arisen as a patriarchal ideological construction.[129]

The femme fatale's original sin is her desire to be sexual without becoming a mother. The femme fatale is not interested in the (servile) role of motherhood and traditional domestic life. To the patriarchy, such behavior is villainous and evil.[130] Virginia M. Allen explains that in the patriarchy, the act of a woman refusing to bear a man's child is regarded as a severe form of male destruction, as it deprives him of the possibility of immortality through his male heirs. The femme fatale is a symbol for the "fear and desire experienced by men confronted with women who deny the right of men to control female sexuality."[131] Place even states that men try to control women's sexuality and bodies in an attempt to avoid being destroyed by them. Throughout history the femme fatale has been a reflection of a given era's anxieties about women's power.[132] [133]

Roland Barthes states, and Laura Mulvey agrees, that myths have the ideological role of naturalization: they make the dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes, and beliefs appear 'natural' and self-evident. Because Western society has been patriarchal since the advent of written history, most myths have been used to uphold male-dominated ideologies; Mulvey shares this view. According to Place our 'modern' popular culture functions as myth for our society. "It both expresses and reproduces the ideologies necessary to the existence of the social structure."[134] Place declares that the medium of film, just as mythology, is receptive to the changing needs in the society such as either conserving gender roles or encouraging their evolution. Place points out that film was used in the first half of the twentieth century as an "expression of the myth of man's 'right' or need to control woman sexually".[135] Throughout history, the femme fatale has been a reflection of her era's male anxieties about femininity.[136]

Considering the importance of the femme fatale in the history of western literature, it is no wonder the femme fatale has been used since the emergence of cinema. 'The Vampire' in *A Fool There Was* (1915, writ. Roy L. McCardell, dir. Frank Powell), a pre-Hays Code movie, was the first femme fatale in cinema. Her exotic presence gave rise to the same mixture of danger and allure that has typified all lethal women throughout history. Tasker claims that film (like the classic film noir but even the more recent neo-noir*)* has always been used to mythologize women. Women are attributed traits of being sexually assertive, vulnerable, confident or strong, but rarely anything else. Those images are shaped by an insistent awareness of how the patriarchy as dominant culture perceives and fantasizes about women. Women are represented in these fixed ways more often than men. [137]

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[129] Place, "Women in film noir," 47.

[130] Place, "Women in film noir," 47.

[131] V. M. Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon* (New York: The Whitson Publishing Company, 1983), 18.

[132] Hanson, *Hollywood heroines*, 11-8.; James Naremore, *More than night. Film noir in its contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 20.; V. M. Allen, *The Femme Fatale,* 20-5.

[133] Place, "Women in film noir," 6.

[134] Place, "Women in film noir," 47.

[135] Place, "Women in film noir," 48-9.

[136] Roland Barthes, "Le message photographique," *Communications* 1 (1961), 128.

[137] Yvonne Tasker, "Women in film noir," in *A companion to film noir*, eds. Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 366-7.;

1.3.2. Women as a post-war threat

The femme fatale character became popular in film during the emergence of the film noir genre in the 1940s and 1950s.[138] The significant impact of World War II on the identity of women and gender roles was mirrored by a change in how women were represented in the media. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, 'women's work' was focused on household and child-rearing tasks, a result of the gender-based division of labor which had existed for centuries. The land on which women performed their chores and raised their children was controlled almost exclusively by men.[139] During World War II, this gender-based division if labor was destabilized.[140] During this period the immense labor shortage in the US gave women new opportunities to participate in and prove themselves in all kind of industries.[141] When the war ended, society expected and pressured women to leave the paid workforce.[142]

According to Place, the character of the femme fatale in film noir after the end of World War II was used as a cautionary figure aiming to send women back to their domestic chores.[143] The femme fatale therefore embodies the threat that women posed to the patriarchy in postwar America.[144] The myth of the femme fatale was linked with male fears that women had gained too much power and independence. Some women were rejecting motherhood. Returning veterans wondered what their wives had been up to while they were gone – perhaps they had been having sex with another man! After the war, many male veterans wanted to return to "normal life" and their role as the head of the family and the sole breadwinner. They did not want women to obtain economic independence. This existential threat to their "manliness" resulted in an obsession with female faithlessness and a naked hostility towards working women. Men feared different types of 'menacing' women: the materialistic woman, the working woman, the aging woman and the adulteress.[145][146]

All of these fears are bound together in the depiction of the femme fatale as a symbol of men's fear of female sexuality, which is linked to Freud's concept of castration anxiety. The deadly seductress undermines the moral and legal codes of marriage as well as the economic codes of society. She is aware of the power of her sexuality and uses it as a weapon to manipulate men and get what she wants (which is often money).[147] She inspires desire but acts in a cold and distant manner. The femme fatale's drive to destroy men is frequently rendered explicit, but not always. She is often depicted as trying to murder her husband, but sometimes attempts to destroy the male character from the inside.[148]

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[138] Hanson, *Hollywood heroines*, 11-8.; Naremore, *More than night*, 20.

[139] Susan Thistle, *From marriage to the market. The transformation of women's lives and work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 11-33.

[140] Thistle, *From marriage to the market*, 37.

[141] Biesen, *Blackout*, 6.

[142] Jack Boozer, "The lethal femme fatale in the noir tradition," *Journal of Film and Video* 51, no. 3/4 (1999): 20-35.

[143] Hanson, *Hollywood heroines*, 11-9.;Biesen, *Blackout*, 2-7.

[144] Place, "Women in film noir," 48-9.

[145] Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme," 152.

[146] David Greven, *Representations of femininity in American genre cinema. The woman's film, film noir, and modern horror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.; Boozer, "The lethal femme fatale in the noir tradition," 20-35.

[147] Hanson, *Hollywood heroines*, 11-8.; Naremore, *More than night*, 20.

[148] Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme," 152.; Greven, *Representations of femininity in American genre cinema*, 2.; Boozer, "The lethal femme fatale in the noir tradition," 20-35.

In addition to the influence of World War II on defining the femme fatale character in film, the strict moral rules of the Hays Code undoubtedly influenced how women were portrayed and which female-related themes (e.g. abortion, childbirth, sexuality, etc.) would have been allowed to appear in film. In all film genres, not only those of the femme fatale as an explicit expression of post-war male anxieties, the effect of this new society was reflected in the depiction of women. Mainstream films like *The Best Years Of Our Lives* (1945, writ. Robert E Sherwood, dir. William Wyler) and *All About Eve* (1950, writ. & dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz) also portray strong working women in a negative sense. In contrast, the femme fatale in film noir is portrayed as being downright dangerous, as she explicitly attacks patriarchal constructs.[149]

1.3.3. Neo-femme fatale

The inclusion of a *femme fatale* character is a typical trait of *film noir*, but a film can belong to this genre without having an evil seductress. Film critic Patrick Duynslaegher even states that film noir is not really a genre, but more of a tone that differs from regular crime thrillers (Appendix C). He claims that film noir and the later pastiches can mostly be defined in terms of visual style. A crime film made during this period but without the gloomy atmosphere filmed in black and white, simply cannot be regarded as a 'noir'.[150] The femme fatale known in popular culture is still characterized by film noir, but as stated above, she predates film noir by many thousands of years. New femme fatales, especially in the neo-noir and post-noir genres, mostly reference the classic femme fatale from film noir but sometimes reach back to much older versions of her. The femme fatale character has gone through a subtle evolution since her popularization in film noir. According to Jack Boozer, the femme fatale's sexualization began to show signs of weakening in the 1950s. The economy was growing, lessening male financial anxieties, and nuclear paranoia represented a more compelling threat than female sexual power.

Boozer points to *The Big Heat* as an example of the bridge to the noir thriller formula that became immensely popular in the 1950s and 1960s. In this period, the greed of the femme fatale is a cover-up for her desire for self-determination and romance. The characteristics of the femme fatale changed even more in the neo-noir films of the 1960s and 1970s. Besides appearing far less frequently in this New Hollywood or Hollywood Renaissance era, she is often portrayed as a passive victim instead of an active manipulator. In both the thriller *Marnie* (1964, writ. Jay Presson Allen, dir. Alfred Hitchcock) and the neo-noir *Chinatown* (1974, writ. Robert Towne, dir. Roman Polanski), the femme fatale is presented as an object of social and sexual abuse. This femme fatale acts out a rescue fantasy by letting an intelligent man help her solve her problems.[151]

American women actively fought during that turbulent period of cultural innovation and social activism to liberalize gender perceptions, including an expressed desire for new and better film roles. In the late 1970s, when the US was on the heels of a prolonged inflationary period, the highly mobile and consumerist society experienced a disintegration of family and community life marked by increasing divorce rates and widespread social discord. Two-career families and households led by a woman became more common. Film viewers were offered a view of the positive facets of women's

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[149] Boozer, "The lethal femme fatale in the noir tradition," 20-35.
[150] Duynslagher, interview.
[151] Boozer, "The lethal femme fatale in the noir tradition," 20-35.

empowerment rather than continuously highlighting the injustice and oppression. In the 1970s, public obsession with the femme fatale decreased. She was more likely to appear as a stereotype in noir remakes like *Farewell My Lovely* (1975, writ. David Zelag Goodman, dir. Dick Richards).

The Hollywood femme fatale in the beginning of the post-noir genre (1980s-1990s) reclaimed phallic significance, after having appeared mainly as a victim of dominant political-economic power in the neo-noir era. Reflecting the reality that more women were occupying higher-level professional positions, this femme fatale is an intimidating and sophisticated character possessing wealth and power. As a career woman, she no longer needs to use or manipulate a man for or violence as she is fully capable on her own. In the late 1980s, the US was already suffering from a huge national debt and then the stock market crashed in 1987. The gap between rich and poor widened. The femme fatale's phallic potency again became more pronounced in this period. The depressive mental state of the citizens is directly reflected in Hollywood films of the time. *Fatal Attraction* (1987, writ. James Dearden, dir. Adrian Lyne) is a good example of changes within the traditional family and their psychological impact.[152]

The femme fatale of the 1990s craves a high-class lifestyle, which is often expressed through the theme of careerist excess. Extremely dominant female characters arise in films like *To Die For* (1995, writ. Buck Henry, dir. Gus Van Sant), *Basic Instinct* (1992, writ. Joe Eszterhas, dir. Paul Verhoeven), *Disclosure* (1994, writ. Paul Attanassio, dir. Barry Levinson) and *The Last Seduction* (1994, writ. Steve Barancik , dir. John Dahl). These women are alluring, not only because of their audacity, but also because of the people and organizations they interact with. This femme fatale reflects real-life concerns around the corrupt economic system and the sexual exhibitionism typical of the 1990s.[153]

According to Boozer, the evil seductress helps to reveal the oppressive nature of the patriarchy in the neo-noir era of the 1960s and 1970s. During this short period, the femme fatale no longer embodies the use of sexual duplicity and murder as a symbol for threat to the dominant culture; instead she shines a light on sexist oppression of women. This shift may have occurred as a reflection of the dramatic attitudinal shift towards women in America. Women were gaining financial independence through work, the women's liberation movement gained power, and more liberal sexual attitudes and experimentation in general developed gradually. Hollywood started to abandon its obsession with heroic male subjectivity and moral puritanism, due to the combination of the downfall of the Hays Code in 1968 (which actually started to weaken much earlier, as stated above) and the heavy visual and erotic influence of European art films of the time. These influences weakened the taboos around women's sexual and economic expression. The narrative positioning of the femme fatale is an effective indicator of sexist cultural repression and male sexual desire from the classic noir period of the 1940s and 50s through the neo-noir era of the 1960s and 1970s, up to the post-noir films of the 1980s and 1990s.[154]

1.3.4. Sexist or feminist?

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[152] Boozer, "The lethal femme fatale in the noir tradition," 20-35.

[153] Boozer, "The lethal femme fatale in the noir tradition," 20-35.

[154] Boozer, "The lethal femme fatale in the noir tradition," 20-35.

Feminist film theoreticians do not agree about whether the (classic) *femme fatale* being a character is a male fantasy (i.e., she and her sexuality are passive) or whether the power of her sexuality makes her strong and capable of great agency. Both views define the femme fatale in relation to the genre of *film noir*, which as stated above had an enormous impact on the creation of the archetype in film.[155] Mulvey argues with her *male gaze* theory that women are never placed in a role where they can take control of a scene. In this view, the femme fatale is no different than other female characters. She even seems like an extreme example of this theory, as she is extremely sexy and seductive but never overtly in control of the film's narrative.[156]

Specifically concerning the femme fatale, Peter Bosma recognizes that this character is a strong representation of independent women in real life, despite her claims that she is subject to subordination.[157] Chris Straayer believes the femme fatale's sexuality is always passive. Only the male audience is targeted to derive sexual arousal and pleasure from viewing her character on screen. The femme fatale's lust is not sexual in nature, as she is mostly focused on money. The femme fatale replaces her sexual desire with economic ambition and her sexual passion with violence. Straayer even states that he strongly disagrees with the analysis of the authors who contributed to *Women in Film Noir* (1978), including Place,[158] who regards the femme fatale as a character with a great deal of agency. Still, Place does define film noir as a male-dominated genre where women are defined by male desire.[159] Still, she believes the classic film noir to be the only period in (American) film history up to the 1970s with strong and independent female characters.[160]

The woman's place in these films can be traced back to the social backdrop of the turbulence of World War II and its aftermath. More specifically, Yvonne Tasker argues that it can be directly related to the unfolding of feminist activism and renewed debate about women's status in both the public and the private sphere.[161] Tasker identifies the dislocation of gender types in film noir in the 1940s. This dislocation is featured on both textual and contextual levels. Not only do female characters in film noir generally fail to conform to the conventional and at times submissive femininity of Hollywood cinema, they also express a dislocation that is based in changing gender ideologies of that time. Female characters, whether good or evil, try to make something of themselves both in public and private spaces. Tasker explains this through the case of the film *Mildred Pierce* (1945). She states that the character of Mildred personifies this dislocation. Her commercial endeavors and her social aspirations are closely connected and both illustrate her determination and toughness. Instead of being motivated by either sexuality or relationship to a man, she is driven by motherhood and economic necessity.[162]

The act of flouting gender norms overlaps with criminality; women are castigated for their ambition almost as intensely as for any crimes they may have committed. This is what Tasker calls "reputation management". The female character's actions are framed in a certain way. The male desires and male point of view are significant, but in film noir the female character is also subject to

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[155] Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme," 152-3.; Place, "Women in film noir," 47.
[156] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists,* 15.
[157] Bosma, ed. *Filmkunde*, 255-9.
[158] Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme," 152-3.
[159] Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme," 152-3.; Place, "Women in film noir," 47-50
[160] Place, "Women in film noir," 56.
[161] Tasker, "Women in film noir," 354.
[162] Tasker, "Women in film noir," 359-60.

the shifting gender ideologies of the time, particularly about women as legitimate members of the labor force.[163]

Regarding the history of gender studies, Kathleen Canning makes the convincing argument that the human body has always played a significant role within new social formations. She stresses that the human body can come to symbolize many things, from political to cultural transformations. Canning explains that Michel Foucault understood how power was inscribed on and by bodies through modes of social supervision and discipline as well as self-regulation. Foucault states that power always requires opposition, implying that there is always the potential for change within power relations. However, Foucault argues that it is impossible to evolve to a society that is entirely free from power. He states that "natural" sexuality does not exist and that an attempt to free sexuality from one set of norms merely means that another set of standards will its place. The act of resistance can thus only shift power relations, not eliminate them.

When women refuse to be defined in a stereotyped and passive way, the patriarchy perceives this as an attack. Besides the body signifying an "obedient and passive object" that is controlled by dominant discourses and power, the body can also become a "seed" that grows resistance against those dominant discourses and power techniques. In this way women can obtain active power and independence by using their body and sexuality. Within this line of thinking, the body has agency. Although it can be subjected to outside coercive forces, it can also be inhabited by and manipulated by the individual. The body can become a threat to a regular systematic mode of social organization. The femme fatale character can use her body and her sexuality as a form of resistance in an active, positive and feminist way.[164] For this reason, Canning regards film noir as an uncommon acknowledgement of female power and sexuality.[165]

Regarding this female body, Straayer points out the tremendous influence of the male gaze in shaping the characterizations of the femme fatale. By combining Foucault's and Place's hypotheses, I conclude that the female characters in these films show a remarkable aptitude for taking control over their own bodies and using their body as a weapon against male protagonists. The sexualized female body clearly holds a great deal of power in film noir. [166] This supports the idea that the femme fatale is a symbol of men's fear of female sexuality. In film noir, the female character gained power over men by using her body. This is in contrast to the A-list films of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, in which women are portrayed as weak and incapable characters in desperate need of a man to protect them. Place suggests that the femme fatale obtained this power by first gaining access to her own sexuality then using that power to manipulate men. Finally, Place remarks that the femme fatale's alter ego, the virgin, could not possibly achieve this.[167]

Another point of discussion in the debate about whether the femme fatale is a feminist or sexist character is how the story ends for the character. In most films, she does not get a happy ending. Because of the power she gains through her sexuality, she needs to be punished in order to diminish or eliminate her threat to the patriarchal order. For example, in *Mildred Pierce* (1945), Mildred gets punished multiple times throughout the story as a result of her career ambitions. In the end she is left

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[163] Tasker, "Women in film noir," 359-60.
[164] Canning, *Gender history in practice*, 69-78.
[165] Canning, *Gender history in practice*, 178.; Oksala, "Freedom and bodies," 85-97.
[166] Place, "Women in film noir," 47.
[167] Place, "Women in film noir," 47-9.; Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme," 152-3.

bankrupt, with one child dead and the other in jail. Punishment of the femme fatale is often expressed quite literally in the form of death or a jail sentence. During this period of the classic film noir, the Hays code reinforced this theme of retribution for sins committed. Even after the Hays code ended, examples of the femme fatale escaping punishment continued to be rare until after the 1990s.[168]

For this reason it would be relevant to analyze the femme fatale's fate through quantitative research, despite Patrick Duysnlaegher's suggestion that the femme fatale got punished severely not because she was a woman, but because she was the villain. Even if such a study would reveal no differences between punishment of villains of either gender, it is still remarkable that the biggest villain of these films is a woman and not a man. A femme fatale can get a happy ending, but only if she is redeemed or revealed to not to be evil at all. She may end up being the victim of the story like in *Chinatown* (1974) and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988, writ. Jeffrey Price & Peter S. Seaman, dir. Robert Zemeckis). Because she is not a 'real' femme fatale, she is allowed to get a happy ending. Even in very recent films like *A Simple Favor* (2018, writ. Jessica Scharzer, dir. Paul Feig), the threat of the femme fatale is still neutralized by the end of the film.[169]

I conclude that the (classic) femme fatale is neither a feminist character exerting agency nor is she a sexist figure only there to fulfill men's desires and express their fears; she is a combination of both. The femme fatale is a juxtaposition of passivity and empowerment, reflecting and simultaneously questioning women's ambivalent position in the patriarchy. Next, I examine how feminist filmmakers either dismiss the more sexist elements of the femme fatale or even use those elements to critique the patriarchal construction of female characters.

1.4. Feminist filmmaking and the female gaze

1.4.1. Feminist filmmakers

Even today, many women that believe in the need for equal rights for women do not identify as feminist; this was certainly true before the 1960s. Therefore, I employ the working concept of a feminist filmmaker as someone who creates films with a strong feminist message, either by advocating for gender equality or opposing gender-specific problems, and who uses feminist tactics of the feminist waves previously discussed in this paper.[170] Use of the femme fatale character as a strategy for feminist activism is practically non-existent, most likely due to the sexist roots of this archetype. Because the *femme fatale* usually functions as a projection of the contemporary sociocultural context, it is logical to presume that an analysis of the feminist femme fatale would also provide insight into women's struggles in history and society. A few do exist but have never been mentioned in academic research.

Some of the few feminist films featuring a femme fatale are *The Working Girls* (1974, writ. & dir. Stephanie Rothman), *Bound* (1996, writ. & dir. Lana and Lily Wachowski) and *The Love Witch (2016, writ. & dir. Anna Biller)*, which are the sources I will analyze in this research. Another example of the use of a femme fatale in a film made by a woman is *Promising Young Woman* (2020), written and

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[168] Duynslagher, interview.
[169] Duynslagher, interview.
[170] Walters, *Feminism*, 1-5.

directed by Emerald Fennell. The female protagonist, Cassie, acts like a femme fatale with the aim to seduce bad men and punish them for their offenses against women. [171] [172]

Male filmmakers are capable of embodying feminist ideals and some even do. However, by the nature of their male body and male experience, they cannot create a cinematic world viewed authentically from the female perspective and experience. For this reason, I only focus on female feminist filmmakers in my research. The analysis of female perspectives in films made by men like *Thelma & Louise* (1991, writ. Callie Khouri, dir. Ridley Scott) or *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991, writ. Fannie Flagg & Carol Sobieskie, dir. John Avnet) would certainly be a fruitful path for future research. The more recent *Gone girl* (2014, writ. Gillian Flynn, dir. David Fincher) is a perfect example of a femme fatale who leads her own story, allowing the viewer an intimate view of her experiences and psychology. The television series *Jessica Jones* (2015), created by a woman (Melissa Rosenberg) but based on the Marvel book series written by men (Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Gaydos), is also a good example of an active and strong femme fatale. [173]

To convey feminist messages via the medium of film, feminist filmmakers adopt several ideas and strategies developed by the various feminist movements. For example, feminist filmmakers have often depended heavily on direct realism techniques to construct an alternate female vocabulary of film. One focus of feminist politics is the search for alternative forms of production and distribution by feminist film-makers. Nevertheless, mainstream conventions remain the norm, because these ensure acceptance by a wider audience and thus higher viewership. Despite progressive developments, such as the break-up of the Hollywood studio system and the rise of smaller independent production companies, the dominant style of production remains powerful. For these reasons, the use of (patriarchal) popular codes persists in occupying an important place in some feminist film productions.[174]

1.4.2. The female gaze

The notion that female filmmakers create based on a uniquely female perspective gives rise to the discussion of whether their films represent a *female gaze* as the equivalent to the *male gaze* as defined by Laura Mulvey. This term was proposed by the media after the emergence of several female-focused films and television series like *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017) and *Big Little Lies* (2017) popularized authentic representations of women.[175] In general, however, there are few examples of female directors, producers, writers or cinematographers. This may explain why little research has been done on the female gaze in contrast to the well-studied male gaze.

Mary Ann Doane, one of the few scholars who has studied female viewers of film noir, states that the voyeuristic male gaze in the genre can be reversed. The woman herself can appropriate the gaze for her own amusement, thus creating a female gaze. Simply because she is a woman, she is more likely to feel a connection to the images of a woman on-screen, which in turn makes it necessary for her to relate to the image. In contrast to authors like Place who claim that the femme fatale of the

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[171] Hanson, *Hollywood heroines*, 11-8.; Naremore, *More than night*, 20.; V. M. Allen, *The Femme Fatale,* 23-9.
[172] Place, "Women in film noir," 47.
[173] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 123.
[174] Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 123.
[175] Gemelas, "Under her eye," 1-14.

classic film noir is a product of the male gaze or the male fantasy, Doane states that the female gaze is also a relevant factor.[176] Doane's research presumes highly active female viewers who can look past the offered male gaze and watch from their own perspective, which differs from the film itself and its filmmakers. While this is problematic, Doane also proposes that the female gaze belongs to the female audience, and that this female perspective should be transmitted through the film itself and developed by female filmmakers.

Besides being a new concept in academic research, the female gaze has not long existed in the history of film, since the arrival of the self-censorship rules in Hollywood in the 1930s. Babette Mangolte, cinematographer of the ground-breaking feminist film *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975, writ. & dir. Chantal Akerman) explained that the wish to invent a female gaze arose in the 1970s. "Women started to shoot films made by women, for women. We all felt that men had shown their point of view since the beginning of the world and we should now try to find out if we could invent a new language that would be different from the one of our fathers or lovers."[177]

The construction and definition of such a female gaze is not as simple as objectifying men from a female perspective, nor is it an objectification of both genders, although objectification can play a role. The female gaze presents the audience with an authentic female perspective and encourages the viewer to experience this female world. Janice Loreck argues that it is impossible to create a female equivalent to the dominant *male gaze* because the male gaze originates in and exemplifies a power imbalance. In films where men are objectified, female viewers are more likely to identify with the female character and the portrayal of her being desired by a man rather than the man-as-object. For example, in the BBC television series *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), the female audience is more incited to desire by viewing Darcy's longing for Elizabeth than the sight of Darcy in a wet shirt.

Loreck even remarks that many films made by women are subversive and portray women's desire in a non-gaze way. Writer-director Sofia Coppola is a fine example of a filmmaker who creates worlds from an authentic female perspective. In both *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) and *Marie Antoinette* (2006) she conveys female experience through the use of warm tones, feminine symbols and music. Through these audiovisual elements, she succeeds in expressing female adolescence and evoking the experience of girls' inner life. By portraying women as subjects instead of objects, such films counter the gaze and even though they don't emulate the male gaze, they do question the prevailing male supremacy of film and television.[178]

Films featuring a female gaze are often, but not necessarily, aimed at a female audience. Both Sheri Chinen Biesen and Helen Hanson generally consider the influence of the audience as a major contribution to the course and development of the plot and the characters of these movies. Hanson believes that the way in which female characters are represented in film could also be related to marketing aimed at women. The success of the production depends largely on whether the target audience can relate to what they are seeing.[179] [180]

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[176] Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes fatales. Feminism, film theory, psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 19-26.
[177] Tori Telfer, "How Do We Define the Female Gaze in 2018?," *Vulture* (2018), consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.vulture.com.
[178] Loreck, "Explainer: what does the 'male gaze' mean?"
[179] Biesen, *Blackout*, 6.
[180] Hanson, Hollywood heroines, 7-10.

Examples of a female gaze created by men can also be found, but these are much harder to research because of the lack of female input in shaping either the narrative or the visual elements. It becomes easier when women occupy key positions in the production as in *Carol* (2015), which was written by Phyllis Nagy and directed by Todd Haynes, *Thelma & Louise* (1991), written by Callie Khouri and directed by Ridley Scott. Still, when an important contribution to the portrayal of women and womanhood in film is in the hands of a man, it is difficult or even impossible to convey a true female gaze.

In reality, even the most self-aware and militant feminists cannot escape the continuous influence of the patriarchy on how they think about themselves and the way they see the world. According to Mulvey, the male gaze not only impacts the way men look at women, but also how women look at themselves and other women. Therefore, some would claim that a 'real' female gaze can never fully exist as long as it is created under a patriarchal society.[181]

The film *Twilight* (2008) has the ingredients of a film with a female gaze. Directed by Catherine Hardwicke, written by Melissa Rosenberg and based on the novels of Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (2008) features a teenage female character (Bella) as the protagonist. Despite perceiving the world through Bella's eyes, the narrative contains patriarchal story narratives like the *rescue fantasy* and male control over the female body. Despite these patriarchal overtones, films such as *Twilight* can offer valuable insights into the way in which women perceive the world, men and pleasure. [182]

Cinematographer Natasha Braya does not see any value in dividing male and female perspectives in film. She proposes to consider the individual's gaze instead. "The female gaze, if there is such, never had the opportunity to truly develop and become something we can analyze. I think every cinematographer has their own unique gaze, technical skills, and style regardless of their gender."[183]

Although the current uses of the female gaze might not be complete and although the academic world has not agreed what such a gaze exactly would contain, it is clear that it is used as a device to encourage change in the feminist movements in film. When I write about the female gaze in this research, I will therefore define it as 'an authentic female perspective'.

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[181] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Telfer, "How Do We Define the Female Gaze in 2018?"

[183] Telfer, "How Do We Define the Female Gaze in 2018?"

Analysis

1. Subverting Hollywood stereotypes

Feminist filmmakers often make use of mainstream filmic codes that were created by the dominant male culture in order to reach a wider audience.[184] The media, and in this case cinema, can be regarded as the instruments that spread the dominant ideology. Feminist films carry very specific and sometimes even complicated messages. If they want to make sure the audience will grasp these meanings, it is easier to use codes that are already accepted within the dominant society. The formation of feminist messages through patriarchal codes make such films very complex. Codes are never neutral and were created to enforce the dominant culture.[185] When making use of these mainstream Hollywood conventions, feminist filmmakers must watch out that these don't eclipse their feminist messages. That explains why in the three films studied here (Appendix B), the writer-directors not only used these codes to send their messages but also tried to subvert these conventions by explicitly addressing them.

The Working Girls (1974), a *sexploitation* film, is the most obvious case that simultaneously submits to and subverts the patriarchal filmic conventions. The exploitation film is a commercial category represented by lower-budget films made for maximum profit. They exploit the popularity of big-budget films by cannibalizing their plots, genres and star-stereotypes. Such films are produced with specific markets in mind and generating the subgenres *sexploitation, targeted to* soft-core pornographic cinema spectators, and *blaxploitation*, which targets black youth audiences. People were willing to pay to watch such low-budget movies with no star actors because they contained nude scenes and portrayed recurring explicit violence or coarse, constant abuse, which could not be found in big Hollywood movies or more supposedly glamorous indie Hollywood films.[186] This genre has existed since the 1920s, but became popular in the 1960s and 1970s due to the weakening of (self-)censorship.

These exploitation films represent some complex issues for feminists. Most films in this genre were aimed at a male audience and, like most Hollywood films, were also made by men. They relied on a fetishized portrayal of women. This presentation of women as sexual objects was a stereotype was strongly criticized by second-wave feminists. They wished to destroy old patriarchal stereotypes and codes of Hollywood cinema and strove to install new types images of women as active subjects. The installation of new codes is problematic, because the audience may not grasp the meaning when presented in new ways. For this reason, some feminists turned to the cinematic language of realism in order to portray women in the reality of their oppression. They tried to replace the oppressive patriarchal ideology with that of feminism. This way they hoped to reclaim women's voices, which were hidden inside patriarchal stereotypes.[187]

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[184] Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 123.
[185] Bartlett, Clarke and Cover, *Flirting, 82.*
[186] Henry Jenkins, "Exploiting Feminism: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman (Part One)," Confessions of an Aca Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, consulted 13.06.2020, http://henryjenkins.org.
[187] Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 122-3.

However, feminist writer-director Stephanie Rothman (°1936) used the Hollywood codes to her advantage. She subverted the cinematic codes of the exploitation genres by parodying them and thus exposing their roots in male fantasies. For this reason, academics situate Rothman's films in the tradition of women's counter cinema.[188] The characteristics of exploitation films are bad acting and simplistic clichés. It is these traits which give such films subversive potential.

Rothman was able to explore this potential with her exploitation feature *The Student Nurses* (1970)*, which* was distributed as one of the first films of Roger Corman's then-new countercultural *New World Pictures* production company. *New World Pictures* gave her a lot of creative freedom. Rothman co-wrote and co-produced this film with her husband, Charles Swartz. They were free to create the story they wanted, "as long as there was enough nudity and violence distributed throughout it."[189] This way, Rothman was able to address what sparked her interest, which are the "political and social conflicts and the changes they produce".[190] Rothman herself actually only realized she had made an exploitation movie when she read reviews that labeled it as such. The film became a big success, which contributed to a trend of *nurse* films and helped to set up *New World Pictures* as a significant commercial studio.[191] This allowed her to keep and extending her freedom in the development of feminist themes in her future films. Rothman addressed issues that were then being ignored in the male-dominated Hollywood films. For example, in the exploitation film *The Student Nurses*, she integrated the discussion about a woman's right to have a safe and legal abortion. This was very progressive, considering the fact this film was made in a period when abortion was illegal and seen as being morally corrupt.

> I have always wondered why the major studios were not
> making films about these topics. What kind of constraints
> were at work on them? My guess is that it was nothing but
> the over-privileged lives, limited curiosity and narrow
> minds of the men, and in those days they were always men,
> who decided which films would be made.[192]

Throughout the 1970s, female characters were put in subordinate roles in most Hollywood films. Rothman wanted to change the ways women were portrayed in cinema, even if it meant representing them more authentically in the notorious genre of exploitation films. For this reason, she sometimes bypassed cinematic conventions by showing men's nudity next to that of women. "I wanted to create – as in the real world I wanted to see – a more equal and just balance of power between the sexes."[193]

After a few years of work at *New World Pictures*, Rothman left Corman's studio to work for *Dimension Pictures*, where she owned a small share. There she wrote and directed more exploitation movies like *Group Marriage* (1973), *Terminal Island* (1973) and *The Working Girls* in which she again

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[188] Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 123.
[189] Virginie Selavy, "Cheap thrills: women of exploitation talk," Electric Sheep Magazine, consulted 13.06.2020, http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk.
[190] Selavy, "Cheap thrills."
[191] Selavy, "Cheap thrills."
[192] Baumgarten, "Exploitation's Glass Ceiling."
[193] Baumgarten, "Exploitation's Glass Ceiling."

incorporated feminist themes and authentic representations of women.[194] Despite the need to develop some bizarre storylines, Rothman always tried to portray her female characters as independent intelligent women making their own decisions. "I didn't always get to choose the subjects of the film, but I did have control over the attitude toward and the treatment of the subjects. In this respect, I didn't feel compromised or constrained." [195] She explains that she does not object to violence or nudity but simply does not like it that the targeted audiences only came to see such things.[196] "My struggle was to try to dramatically justify such scenes and to make them transgressive, but not repulsive. I tried to control this through the style in which I shot scenes." Rothman also used comedy to escape the cinematic conventions of the exploitation genre and give a critique of its stereotypical characters and plotlines.[197]

Rothman's subversive strategies were articulated through a series of rules she adhered to when making exploitation films. Besides including equal amounts of male and female nudity, her rules also included: avoid rape scenes (and when pressured to include such scenes film them in a non-voyeuristic wat; avoid nudity as a form of vengeance; evade violence; and all decisions that female protagonists make should happen outside of their relationship with men.[198] In Rothman's last feature, *The Working Girls*, the three female protagonists are portrayed as beautiful, smart and ambitious women who make their own decisions. Honey has a degree in accounting, Jill is a law student with aspirations to become a lawyer or a judge, and Denise is a skilled painter who rents apartments. However, the usual 1970s advertising of the film portrays these girls as dumb and promiscuous. On the poster cover they look like sexy femme fatales who "would do anything for money."[199]

In the film itself, these characters still carry this image of the femme fatale, but are revealed to be far more than that. Especially Honey is an atypical representation of an ambitious seductress who manipulates men to get what she wants, namely money and a serious job. She is very pretty, but has short blond hair, a petite figure and a tomboy look. She does not try to destroy men, but only uses them to her advantage. [200] When Honey (Sarah Kennedy) arrives in Los Angeles, she has no job and a place to live. Soon she makes new friends, Denise (Jennifer Brooks) and Jill (Lynne Guthrie) and moves in with them. Through an advertisement in the paper, she meets a millionaire, Vernon (Solomon Sturges), who hires her as his companion, but Honey uses her charms and intelligence to convince him to give more responsibility in her tasks. She has an idea to invest some of Vernon's money and when he finally lets her, it turns out she made a good choice.[201]

Law student Jill is also a good example of a subversive femme fatale. Jill is extremely attractive, with long blond hair, but just like Honey, is ambitious and intelligent. She only becomes a stripper because she needs to pay for her law school tuition. Jill wants to make a serious career as a lawyer and uses her body to get the money she needs. She is very proud of her intellect. After Jill finds out her

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[194] Baumgarten, "Exploitation's Glass Ceiling."

[195] Baumgarten, "Exploitation's Glass Ceiling."

[196] Jenkins, "Exploiting Feminism: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman (Part One)."

[197] Jenkins, "Exploiting Feminism: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman (Part One)."

[198] Alicia Kozma, "Stephanie Rothman Does Not Exist: Narrating a Lost History of Women in Film," *Camera Obscura* 32 (2017): 179–186.

[199] Stephanie Rothman, *The Working Girls [DVD]* (USA: Dimension Films, 1974).

[200] Hanson, *Hollywood heroines*, 11-8.; Naremore, *More than night*, 20.

[201] Rothman, *The Working Girls*.

boyfriend is involved in some illegal business, she has a serious talk with him about their relationship. She does not believe they would be a good match as she is way too serious and smart for him.[202] [203]

> J: "So we're incompatible. I'm gonna be a lawyer and
> you're a crook."

At another moment in the film Jill's boyfriend acts like she is property he can own, which she immediately addresses in a verbal way.

> M3: "You're still my woman aren't you?"
> J: "I am my own woman".

The men in this movie are very dominant, but the three female characters are located outside women's traditional subordinate roles. Rothman succeeds with *The Working Girls* in creating female characters that are both sexy but have agency, thus appealing to 'conventional' male audiences as well as emancipated women.

Rothman is clearly influenced by the ideas of the second wave of feminism in America in the 1960s. Second-wave feminism was enormously concerned by a woman's sovereignty to her own body. The women's movement translated this concern into a fight for better health care, including the right to contraception and abortion, and addressing unrealistic images of women in the media. It was only one year after *The Working Girls* release that feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey published her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), in which she explores women's sexual objectification in Hollywood cinema.[204][205]

Even though Rothman succeeded in subverting patriarchal conventions in her films, she was not content: "I was never happy making exploitation films. I did it because it was the only way I could work." [206] She had to meet the audience expectations and was thus obliged to show sufficient amounts of violence and nudity. Because Rothman wrote and directed exploitation films with unknown actors, she had to display more nudity than the big Hollywood studios would, but less than shown in soft porn. For this reason, Rothman was also forced to cast very attractive actors. Therefore, she could not always choose the most talented people, which she found to be a severe limitation.[207]

For example, in *The Working Girls* multiple stripteases are shown. These last several minutes and portray Jill and Jill's stripper-colleague Katya as pure objects of male desire. In the swimming pool scene, Jill jumps out of the water naked in an erotic way and shakes her head while going through her hair with her hands.[208] The male gaze is thus very much present here. Because of this overt use of nudity, this film is still labeled a sexploitation movie and got an R-rating, which meant the film was

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202 Rothman, *The Working Girls*.

203 Hanson, *Hollywood heroines*, 11-8.; Naremore, *More than night*, 20.

204 Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists*, 2.

205 Walters, *Feminism*, 105-6.; Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.

206 Jenkins, "Exploiting Feminism: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman (Part One)."

207 Baumgarten, "Exploitation's Glass Ceiling."

208 Rothman, *The Working Girls*.

'restricted' for people under seventeen years old. If teenagers wanted to go see such a movie, they had to be accompanied by an adult.

Rothman always struggled to keep the balance between genre constraints and her creative freedom: "I would have covered the same topics, but made the films very differently, if I had not had these constraints."[209] Rothman wanted and tried to find directing work outside the exploitation genre, but she explains this was not easy because she was stigmatized by her earlier films and the fact that she was a woman. "I was a woman. No one told me directly, but I often learned indirectly that this was the decisive reason why many producers wouldn't agree to meet me."[210] Female directors were very rare in Hollywood in the 1970s and between Rothman's active years as a writer-director, from 1965 to 1974, she was often the only female.[211] Still, Rothman tries to see the positive in her films:

> [...] the lesson Roger derived from my film's success was that you could make exploitation films whose narratives included contentious social issues, including feminism, and he consequently encouraged his directors to do it.[212]

Writer-director Anna Biller (°1965) also uses the dominant Hollywood codes to subvert patriarchal stereotypes about women. In *The Love Witch* (2016) she makes references to popular film genres to support the transmittal of her feminist messages and give critique on the problematic relationship between women and men and the archetype of the femme fatale, while at the same time using their filmic codes to subvert certain stereotypes these genres produced in the past. *The Love Witch* is labeled as a horror movie, but differs from most horror movies through its incorporation of narrative elements of melodrama and romance. According to Biller herself, this fusion of genres plays a key role in the exploration of female psychology and fantasy exploration:

> I also like to reference older genres because I like to play with expectations and create surprise. The meaning is in the spaces in between, in the places where the film diverges from genre and takes an unexpected point of view.[213]

Through the use of style and genre, Biller counteracts all of the patriarchal stereotypes of the femme fatale and women in general. Biller and her cinematographer shot the film on 35mm, using classical Hollywood lighting to make the film look like it was made in the 1960s. She combines the popular film style of Classical Hollywood, which is the dominant filmmaking style in the US from cinema from 1910s to the 1960s and the most widespread film style in history, with contemporary feminist narratives. Biller uses all kinds of typical visual Hollywood elements like the casting of

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[209] Jenkins, "Exploiting Feminism: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman (Part One)."
[210] Baumgarten, "Exploitation's Glass Ceiling."
[211] Baumgarten, "Exploitation's Glass Ceiling."
[212] Jenkins, "Exploiting Feminism: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman (Part One)."
[213] Biller, "About."

attractive actors and the use of lavish decors to make the film meet classic Hollywood audience expectations.[214]

Many film critics see references in *The Love Witch* to the exploitation movies of the 1960s and 1970s, like Russ Meyer's *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1967), although Biller denies having being influenced by such films:

> It's the exact opposite of what I'm trying to do. That stuff is interesting in the history of censorship, but they're often just really bad movies. I'm in conversation with earlier movies and with my own fantasies about being a woman, and overthrowing patriarchal oppressions that I face in my life. I can't get into the mind of a male producer in the 1960s who is making exploitation because those films were made for men's pleasure.[215]

Instead, Biller was initially inspired by 1960s pulp novels, Italian horror films, low-budget American horror films and European art films. When developing the story more she was also inspired by the films of Douglas Sirk, Jaques Démy and Alfred Hitchcock. The latter she found most inspiring because of the look of his 1950s color films, which she tried to imitate. She strove to portray melodrama and horror in the way Hitchcock would have done.[216] This rupture between the intention and real influences of a woman filmmaker and the interpretation by film critics demonstrates the problems inherent in the methodology used in film history. With *The Love Witch*, Biller not only tries to deconstruct the male gaze in cinema, but also the gaze of the film historian. In film history, academics and critics have often dedicated research to male experiences in cinema. This leads to negation of the female world, which is something Biller tries to address.[217]

Biller also addresses the unrealistic beauty expectations that men have of women. Just like Rothman, she incorporates concerns of second-wave feminism in her film, like man's control over women's bodies and the unrealistic images of women in the media.[218][219] In *The Love Witch*, Elaine is a sexy witch with long black hair, bright blue eye shadow, black eyeliner, red lipstick and red nail polish, which is her signature look throughout the whole film.[220] This look plays with the audience's expectations and forms of recognition. Elaine's black hair and witchy look very much resembles that of the witch Morticia Adams from *The Addams Family* television (1964) and film series (1991 & 1993), a fictional character that is well known in popular culture. Both women are witches with a pale skin, long black hair and a slim figure.[221]

Elaine (Samantha Robinson) always looks beautiful. She pays great attention to her appearance: her make-up, hair – she wears a wig to bring extra volume to her hair – and flattering clothes. However, by the use of Elaine's main narrative, Biller makes clear that Elaine's allure is more than skin-deep. Elaine is an independent woman who makes her own decisions. She has decided to go

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[214] Biller, "About."

[215] Patterson, "Interview. The Love Witch director Anna Biller."

[216] Biller, "About."

[217] Patterson, "Interview. The Love Witch director Anna Biller."

[218] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.; Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists,* 15.

[219] Walters, *Feminism*, 105-10.

[220] Anna Biller, *The Love Witch [DVD]* (USA: Oscilloscope Laboratories, 2016).

[221] Biller, *The Love Witch.*

on a quest to find the perfect man. She does this by seducing men and offering them their ultimate fantasy. Even though her idea of relationships is extremely disturbed, she is the one in control of her own life. But of course, this strange storyline is also a critique on the way the patriarchy has brainwashed women. Elaine is an insecure woman whose heart got broken by her ex-husband and is now trying to find a way to get control back over her life. Biller addresses this critique of Elaine's behavior using the character of Elaine's friend Trish. Trish (Laura Waddell) is a more natural and down-to-earth kind of woman.[222] One afternoon, when both women go out for tea, Elaine explains to Trish her strategy of how to make a man love you:

> E: "Men are like children. They're very easy to please, as long as we give them what they want. [...] Just a pretty woman to love and take care of them and to make them feel like a man and give them total freedom in whatever they wanna do or be. [...] I think that if you want love, you have to give love. Giving men sex is a way of unlocking their love potential."
> T: "You sound as if you'd been brainwashed by the patriarchy. Your whole self-worth is wrapped up in pleasing a man. [...] The whole world doesn't revolve around a man's needs."[223]

Elaine has this crazy idea of what men desire and actually decides to give it to them. Trish pities Elaine and does not think this is the right way to find true love. Trish is thus the personification of feminist ideals. In the middle of the film, Elaine goes through a difficult moment due to these expectations she believes men have. She is in her apartment holding a picture of her dead ex-husband Jerry when she suddenly starts to hear voices of Jerry (Stephen Wozniak) and her father:

> J (in VO): "I love you very much, but you need to be more careful. Dinner was late three times this week. And that house is a total pigsty. Do you know that I found an old hot dog under the bed this morning. And why don't you ever brush your hair? You need to take better care of yourself and of the house. I'm embarrassed to have people over. I've been really patient up until now, but you need to step up your game."
> EF (in VO): "I have a crazy bitch for a daughter. What? You're not crazy. Well, if you're not crazy then you're stupid. Which is it? Are you crazy or are you stupid? And you could lose a few pounds. You're looking a little fatty."
> J (in VO): "Oh my god, Elaine, you've lost so much weight. You have such a hot body now."

While Elaine is hearing these voices, she looks in the mirror and brushes her hair. This scene expresses that Elaine has been emotionally abused by (the unrealistic expectations of) the men in her life and the patriarchy itself (which created these unrealistic expectations). Elaine is miserable that

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[222] Biller, *The Love Witch.*
[223] Biller, *The Love Witch.*

she did not conform to the standards of society and her husband, finally going insane. According to Biller this inner dialogue is commonplace in women's real lives:

She plays that record that women play over and over again in their heads when they are rejected: "Why doesn't he love me anymore? What's wrong with me? How can I get him back?" This is the cycle of self-abuse that causes Elaine to become a sexy witch in the first place. (AB)

In another scene, these expectations are once again addressed, this time through a medieval mock wedding Elaine and Griff Meadows (Gian Keys) have at a renaissance faire. When the couple is having a romantic dinner afterwards, the spectator can hear both their thoughts in voice-over:

> E (in VO): "When you really love him, it's like fireworks and nothing else matters. You love all the little quirks about him. The way he slurps his cereal. The way his mouth is a little crooked. Those details about him become your whole life. Something inside you opens up like a flower. and you realize you have more love to give than you ever thought was possible. 'Cause the more you know him, the more you love him."
> GM (in VO): "The more you get to know a woman, the less you can feel about her. At first, she's this incredible object of mystery who fulfills all your wildest fantasies. Then she starts to reveal little flaws and after a while, just gets hard to care. Feminine ideal only exists in the man's mind. No woman could ever fulfill it. And sometimes, when she tries to love you more, give you more, you feel like you're suffocating, drowning in estrogen. The most awful feeling."

While Elaine is true to her feelings, Griff acts like he is in love, while he actually does not believe he is or wants to be. He thinks that even a woman as beautiful as Elaine will never fulfill the image of the 'ideal woman' he has in his mind. This image is of course also imposed on him by the patriarchy.

Biller also uses the conventions of humor to support her feminist discourse. This is linked to the changing linguistic strategies of fourth-wave feminism. In feminist Kira Cochrane's book *All The Rebel Women* (2013), she states that humor occupies a central place in fourth-wave feminism. Humor helps to convey a form of feminism that is non-threatening and can thus appeal to a more mainstream audience. Irony is a popular tool for this.[224]

In *The Love Witch*, Biller addresses the issue of stereotypes surrounding women through the use of irony. For example, when Elaine explains in voice-over what terrible things happened to her and the way other people stigmatized her for this, you can hear the irony in her voice:

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[224] Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave,* 139-41.

> E (in VO): "Poor Jerry, I had a nervous breakdown after he left me. They say I'm cured now. But I still have intrusive thoughts. My therapist told me I'm not unusual at all. People are abused all over the world, every day. Much worse than me. And they do fine." [225]

Through the use of humor Biller ridicules certain unrealistic expectations men have of women. Another example is when Elaine's new lover Wayne begins to cry after the sex and explains he never met the right woman before.

> W: "Elaine. No woman has ever given herself like that to me before."
> E: "Life has been tough?"
> W: "Yeah, in a way. You're not like any other woman that I've met. No games. No agendas. You just seem to take life the way it is."
> E: "Is there any other way to take life?"
> W: "Well, the women I've been with, they all want you to make a bunch of promises to 'em as soon as you sleep with 'em. But how can you commit to someone that you don't even know? It's crazy."
> E looks understanding. E: "I know baby, I know."
> W: "I never thought I wanted to be tied down to anybody. But it's just 'cause no one was ever quite right. All the women that I'm attracted to physically they're never bright enough. And all the bright ones are homely and don't arouse me."
> E: "That seems like quite a problem."

It is clear that Elaine is being very ironic in her answers and faking her empathy. She is just saying the things men want to hear. Just like all the other examples, this scene is a clear critique on the patriarchy and its unrealistic expectations of women. Through the use of humor and codes from popular film genres, like horror, Biller succeeds in subverting the archetype of the femme fatale and stereotypes of women in general, while mocking male stereotypes at the same time.

The lesbian characters in *Bound* (1996) both be regarded as images of female empowerment and patriarchal marginalization. In traditional cinema, two lesbian women who steal money and run away would be regarded as a threat to the patriarchy and thus be eliminated. In *Bound* lesbians Violet and Corky do get their happy ending. This film would for this reason also be regarded as a threat to the dominant society. However, the film was well-received, both within mainstream audiences as lesbian communities.[226]

The Wachowski sisters (Lana ° 1965, Lilly °1967) succeeded in letting the film appeal to both audiences through two methods. Firstly, they make use of recognizable roles for their main characters, respectively Violet being the femme and Corky the butch lesbian. Violet wears lots of make-up and sexy dresses, whereas Corky looks more masculine with her nonchalant boyish clothes and haircut. This way, the audience can immediately get an idea of who these kinds of people are.[227] However, these

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[225] Biller, *The Love Witch.*
[226] Kessler, "Bound Together," 13–22.
[227] Kessler, "Bound Together," 13–22.

stereotypes are subverted through their reversal. When traditionally, the butch character would be dominant and behave like the man in the relationship, here it is actual Violet who is the leader of the two.[228]

During the sex scenes, it is Violet who is on top and is in control of what happens. She is also the one who comes with the idea to escape their lives and steal the mafia's money. This reversal of behavior linked with traditional gender expectations makes Bound highly feminist. [229] These gender stereotypes are also referenced in the title. The word 'bound' makes allusion on the not in society sexual activity of BDSM, shown through the use of leather clothes and attributes in the film, but more importantly on the ways we are bound to the patriarchy and its gender roles we must conform too.[230]

Secondly, the threat the lesbians might pose to the patriarchy is lightened to make it more acceptable Violet and Corky get to live happily ever after. This is done through the creation of a bigger threat, that of the mafia. This way it is more satisfactory for the conventional audience when the two lesbians steal money and don't get caught. The mafia is also portrayed as a subgroup that functions outside the norms of the dominant society. They are even worse than two women who don't conform to the patriarchy, because of their repulsive and violent behavior, whereas Violet and Corky are intelligent and trustworthy, which are characteristics much admired in heterosexual society. They function as the replacement of the conventional male heroes. In addition, these two female characters are portrayed as an exception to the rules. The film makes it look like it is not usual such characters get away with the crimes they committed. [231]

This way, the Wachowski sisters were able to create an authentic lesbian experience, while also conforming to expectations of a more mainstream audience, which helped to get their film and its feminist messages to a wider audience. And besides the concessions they made towards the conventional cinema-goers, the Wachowski sisters succeeded in subverting patriarchal archetype of the femme fatale and stereotypes surrounding lesbian relationships.[232]

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[228] Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, *Bound [DVD]* (USA: Republic Pictures Home Video, 1996).

[229] Wachowski and Wachowski, *Bound.*

[230] Cáel M. Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 1-15.

[231] Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski*, 1-15.; Kessler, "Bound Together," 13–22.; Wachowski and Wachowski, *Bound.*

[232] Jean Noble, "'I want out!' Bound and invested: lesbian desire Hollywood ethnography," *CineAction* 45 (1998): 30-40.

2. Female agency and power through sexuality and the body

The *femme fatale* is a symbol for the "fear and desire experienced by men confronted with women who deny the right of men to control female sexuality."[233] Whereas the classic *femme fatale* of the *film noir* genre is defined by her sexuality in a passive way (she only gets meaning in relation to men's desires), the feminist femme fatale uses this sexuality to gain power (over men) and agency.[234][235][236]

Stephanie Rothman, the Wachowski sisters, and Anna Biller all manage to create an authentic female perspective in their films by letting their femme fatale characters gain agency and power through their sexuality and body. Using Michel Foucault's idea that the power of the dominant culture was inscribed on and by bodies through modes of social supervision and discipline as well as self-regulation, women, and thus especially the sexy femme fatale who takes control over her own body, can be seen as a form of resistance and threat against the patriarchy. Foucault states that power always requires opposition, implying that there is always the potential for change within power relations. In all three films, the female characters use this control over their own bodies in one way or another as a weapon against the male characters. This supports the idea that the femme fatale is a symbol of men's fear of female sexuality.[237]

This focus of these three films on gaining female power through sexuality is in accordance with the second-wave feminist concern with women's sovereignty to their own bodies.[238] Just like the filmmakers studied here, second-wave feminists are interested in the female body and the constraints imposed on it by the patriarchy.[239]

The femme fatale in '*The Love Witch'* is the best example of this theme. Biller explains that "The witch is a very loaded female image, as she stands for both female power and the male fear of female sexuality."[240] This male fear of female sexuality is directly addressed in the film's narrative through Elaine's witch friend Barbara:

> B: "The whole history of witchcraft is interwoven with the fear of female sexuality. They burned us at the stake, because they feared the erotic feelings we elicited in them. Later, they used marriage to hold us in bondage and made us into servants, whores, and fantasy dolls.*"[241]*

Biller uses the theme of witchcraft to express her feelings about the oppression of women and their sexuality. Barbara almost seems to be participating in a feminist debate about women's struggles in the patriarchy. Witches - creatures with the frightening ability to make penises disappear – have great

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[233] V. M. Allen, *The Femme Fatale,* 1-12.
[234] Straayer, "Femme fatale or lesbian femme," 152-3.; Place, "Women in film noir," 47.
[235] Straayer, "*Femme fatale* or lesbian femme," 152-3.
[236] Place, "Women in film noir," 56.
[237] Canning, *Gender history in practice*, 178.; Oksala, "Freedom and bodies," 85-97.
[238] Walters, *Feminism*, 105-10.; Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6–18.
[239] Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought,* 5-6.
[240] Biller, "About."
[241] Biller, *The Love Witch.*

appeal as feminist figures. Feminist activist Kristen Korvette notes "young women are looking for an archetype outside the tired virgin-whore binary that we're offered, and the witch can do just that".[242]

Elaine uses her signature make-up of bright blue eye shadow, black eyeliner and pink lipstick, her fetish lingerie, her wig, and her sexy costumes as a weapon against men. [243] Cinematically speaking, this sexy portrayal is translated to close-ups of Elaine's eyes while she is seducing men. Biller wants to explore through her films what sexuality and power means for women:

> […] the sexy witch is a loaded archetype that is simultaneously about men's fears and fantasies about women, and women's feelings of empowerment and agency. So whereas we are used to seeing the sexy witch or the *femme fatale* from the outside, I wanted to explore her from the inside.[244]

That's why Elaine has created this image of herself as the ideal fantasy for men so once they fall in love with her, she can get power over them and will be the one in control. Biller regards this as a new way to portray the ancient archetype of the femme fatale: "I'm doing that with *The Love Witch*, reclaiming the figure of the witch, the femme fatale, an old sort of male fantasy figure, and make it a *femme fatale* seen from the female side.".[245]

To critique men's expectations of women, Biller portrays them in a simplified manner. Elaine elaborately explains her plan to seduce men when she and Trish are having tea:

> T: "Men, you said we need to give them what they want. Well, what do men want?"
> E: "Just a pretty woman to love and take care of them and to make them feel like a man and give them total freedom in whatever they want to do or be."[246]

Even though Biller succeeds through Elaine's character to gain power over men, the sexy witch does not get a happy ending herself. Although she is not punished like she would have been in the classic *film noir* or the later *neo-noir* and *post-noir* genres, she never finds the love she sought with such vigor. She falls in love with Sergeant Griff Meadows, but this love is not returned. Griff can be seen as the personification of the patriarchy for whom no woman will ever be good enough:

> GM (in VO): The more you get to know a woman, the less you can feel about her. At first, she's this incredible object of mystery who fulfills all your wildest fantasies. Then she starts to reveal little flaws and after a while, just gets hard to care. Feminine ideal only exists in the man's mind. No woman could ever fulfill it. And

[242] Willow Hindle, "Short guide to witchsploitation," Mapping contemporary cinema, consulted 13.06.2020, http://www.mcc.sllf.qmul.ac.uk.
[243] Biller, "About."
[244] Anna Biller, "Bijou Flix interview,'" Anna Biller, consulted 13.06.2020, https://lifeofastar.com.
[245] Patterson, "Interview. The Love Witch director Anna Biller."
246 Biller, *The Love Witch.*

sometimes, when she tries to love you more, give you more, you feel like you're suffocating, drowning in estrogen. The most awful feeling.[247]

Elaine cannot cope with this disappointment and kills him, which symbolizes the destruction of the patriarchy in this film. The reason for this sad narrative is possibly because *The Love Witch*, besides an exploration of female sexuality and femininity, must be seen as a critique of the ancient patriarchal archetype that has flourished throughout the history of cinema. Through the use of Elaine, Biller addresses the *male gaze* and the way our male-dominated society imposes expectations on women. Biller explains it as follows:

My hope is that other women will identify with Elaine as I do: as a woman seeking love, who is driven mad by never really being loved for who she is, but only for the male fantasies she has been brainwashed to fulfill.[248]

With *The Love Witch*, Biller reacts to contemporary problems for women like the #MeToo movement, but at the same time she acknowledges the problems of the 1970s, which Mulvey addresses, as still being relevant today. She is therefore influenced by second-wave as well as fourth-wave feminism. Biller emphasizes the contemporary nature of her film: "This is the story of a woman who lives in a pathologically sexist society - not a sexist society of the 60s, but a sexist society of today!"[249]

This idea of obtaining power through sexuality is not new. When feminist Camille Paglia wrote in an opinion piece in 1990 about Madonna being the future of feminism, she already described this tactic:

Madonna is the true feminist. She exposes the puritanism and suffocating ideology of American feminism, which is stuck in an adolescent whining mode. Madonna has taught young women to be fully female and sexual while still exercising total control over their lives. She shows girls how to be attractive, sensual, energetic, ambitious, aggressive and funny -- all at the same time.[250]

This same strategy is also portrayed in *Bound*. In many films of the subgenre of sexy lesbian couples, their desire to kill is constructed to represent a sign of male fear and insecurity. The messages contained in such films often relate to lesbians being a threat to the dominant culture. However, *Bound* is an example of such a film and a storyline as seen from the woman's point of view, constructed through the female gaze.[251]

Even though the visual and narrative elements in *Bound* are, as discussed above, not constructed to represent a major threat to the patriarchy, it does contain some clear moments of

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[247] Biller, *The Love Witch.*
[248] Biller, "About."
[249] Biller, "About."
[250] Camille Paglia, "Madonna – Finally, a Real Feminist," *The New York Times* (1990): 39.
[251] Kessler, "Bound Together," 13–22.

resistance. The femme fatale Violet, the central figure of the story, emphasizes the discomfort and fear that men experience when women do not need men to obtain sexual pleasure:

> C: What did she do to you?
> V: Everything you couldn't. [252]

When Violet's boyfriend Caesar finds out he never satisfied Violet sexually and that she did not even need him to be satisfied, he is devastated. The notion that women can get power through their sexuality without even relating to men is a direct attack on the patriarchy. In real life, lesbian women were able to counter male dominance purely through their sexual orientation and were thus essential to women's liberation.[253]

The two women are not only physically aroused by each other's beauty, but also by the idea of committing a crime that might bring new perspectives.

> C: "Crime is like sex." [254]

The pleasure that Corky derives from escaping the structure and restrictions of the law, which is also the gender structure, is an erotic one. The way the camera floats over and passes over the opening titles, as well as the characters and sets in the beginning of the film, indicates the possibility of going to a place outside of such constraining structures.[255]

The desire to escape outside the boundaries of heterosexuality is shown through the theme of the fluidity of sexuality. For example, when Violet tries to seduce Corky for the first time, Corky does not believe Violet is a 'real' lesbian. That's why Violet shows her by taking Corky's hand and putting it between her legs:

> V: "You can't believe what you see, but you can believe what you feel."

This theme can be linked to queer theory, which emerged from third-wave feminism. This theory claims that gender and sexuality are fluid constructs that are not readily translated to the binary division of 'male' and 'female'. For this reason, the recognition of bisexual and transgender identities are important characteristics of the third wave. This connection is especially important considering that the makers of the film, Lana and Lilly Wachowski, are both trans women.[256]

In *The Working Girls*, the female characters are all beautiful and sexy young women who also choose to derive their power and agency from their sexuality. All *femme fatale*s in this film use their body to either have fun or accomplish what they want. Honey looks innocent, but is very aware of her sexuality. For example, she takes a guy she just met in the park back home:

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[252] Wachowski and Wachowski, *Bound.*

[253] Walters, *Feminism*, 46.

[254] Wachowski and Wachowski, *Bound.*

[255] Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski*, 1-15.

[256] Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," 22–25.

M2: "Do you got any friends here?"
H: "No, not yet."
M2: "Well, I'll be your friend if you want."
H: "That's not what I want"
M2: "It isn't?"
H: I'll tell you what I want."[257]

Then Honey whispers something in the man's ear and he actually seems shocked. Honey is the one in control of her body and because of that she also dominates the situation. Even though the man she meets is very dominant himself, she does not let herself be intimidated by him.

Jill also uses her body in a powerful way. She wants to make a serious career as a lawyer and becomes a stripper to earn the money she needs to pay for her tuition. At first glance, such a narrative seems very sexist, but considering that *The Working Girls* being a sexploitation movie, Rothman actually gives this character a lot of agency. Jill is, just like Honey, the one in control. She exploits men's desire to watch naked women and uses it to her advantage. Rothman succeeds in giving her attractive female character agency through their sexuality. She never puts them in a situation where a man has the upper hand.

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[257] Rothman, *The Working Girls*.

3. The revenge fantasy

Feminist filmmakers wishing to address male dominance and male assaults against women sometimes use the *femme fatale* character to act out a *revenge fantasy*. Revenge is defined as "an action in response to some perceived harm or wrongdoing by another party that is determined to inflict damage, injury, discomfort, or punishment to the party judged responsible." In this research, "the other party" is the patriarchy and the male gender in general, which has been oppressing women for ages. The feminist filmmakers create characters to embody these oppressors. In our Western culture, revenge is taboo; instead, society encourages forgiveness. However, revenge can balance the harm inflicted by an assault. Because power and control are basic human needs, the victim's desire for revenge is also intended to restore or create a power balance, thus allowing victims to regain a sense of control over their life. [258]

Use of this strategy as a filmic theme seems quite radical, especially when the purpose of feminism is to create equality between men and women. When feminist films use the theme of taking revenge on men, the authentic female perspective weakens, not because such a storyline is not real enough, but because it is used in the same way that the dominant Hollywood cinema culture would use it. By getting revenge, the female characters actually create a new power imbalance where they are the ones in control. The female gaze thus mirrors its counterpart, the male gaze. However, the use of the revenge theme can still support the feminist message in the film by communicating the experiences of the female world to the audience and thus calling male supremacy into question.[259]

This *revenge fantasy* can be linked with third- and fourth-wave feminism. These movements aim to fight sexism and misogyny by focusing on micropolitics, women's everyday experiences and their struggles within the patriarchy.[260] Addressing sexual assault and harassment are central themes to both waves. The fourth wave even employs a specific call-out culture, thanks to the development of the internet, whereby women can denounce wrongdoings by men.[261] In both *Bound* (1996) and *The Love Witch* (2016), this *revenge fantasy* is made very explicit, although in the latter it is not acted out as the heroine's purpose. In *The Working Girls* (1974) the theme of revenge is less present throughout the film, but it does turn up a few times.

This revenge theme is also present in *Bound*. In the opening scene, Violet says in voice-over, "I want out", which introduces the theme of escape throughout the rest of the film. Ultimately this leads to Violet's final but unexpected revenge on her mob boyfriend Caesar. When Violet meets ex-con Corky, she is immediately attracted to her. Although they come from different social classes, they both share a similar captivity experience: Violet has been together with Caesar for five years and Corky has spent the last five years in prison. The prison, the mafia, and the apartment building are all symbols of the patriarchy that restricts women's freedom.[262] Violet feels trapped in her life where she is dominated by her sadistic boyfriend Caesar. She wants to get "out".[263]

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[258] Loreck, "Explainer: what does the 'male gaze' mean?"
[259] Loreck, "Explainer: what does the 'male gaze' mean?"
[260] Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," 22–25.
[261] Rivers, *Postfeminism(s),* 107-8.
[262] Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski*, 1-15.
[263] Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski*, 1-15.

When two million dollars of mafia money comes into Caesar's care, Violet sees a way 'out' and asks Corky to steal the money with her. Things do not go as planned, and Caesar becomes an obstacle.[264] After an altercation between the three characters, Caesar knocks Corky unconscious for the third time. Violet then points a gun at the unarmed Caesar. Caesar takes the risk of pretending – or does he really believe it? - that he knows Violet better than she knows herself:

“C: You don't want to shoot me, Vi.”

Unfortunately for Caesar, he is wrong, as he was wrong about her sexuality. Violet pulls the trigger, shooting him several times, resolving any doubts about her lesbianism at the same time. By murdering Caesar, Violet gets her revenge, but not in the way she anticipated. She initially just wanted to escape from Caesar and start a new life with Corky.[265] Violet and Corky do get a happy ending, however. They get rid of Caesar's body and escape without getting caught. Caesar's mafia colleagues believe Caesar took off with the money. Violet and Corky leave in their car, driving towards a new utopian life.[266] The fact that our female heroines stay together and don't die or get imprisoned in the end makes *Bound* one of the most progressive lesbian films ever produced in Hollywood. This storyline in *Bound* is in accordance with the idea of third-wave feminism, namely illustrating what it means to live in the margins of society.[267]

In *The Love Witch*, the man-killing witch Elaine also seems to be acting out a revenge fantasy. Here, the femme fatale archetype is intertwined with another ancient one, that of the witch. Elaine became a witch after her husband rejected her and died. Having started a new life full of love potions, sexy clothes and make-up, Elaine is allegedly on a quest for the perfect love, but all the men she meets end up dead. The tagline of the movie already insinuates the plot: “She Loved Men…To Death.” [268] This extreme form of loving to death is taken literally here. Elaine successfully uses her beauty and her body as a weapon against men. director Uli Edel had tried to elaborate this theme in his film, *Body of Evidence* (1993), a courtroom drama where the character Rebecca Carlson, played by Madonna, was charged with killing a man through sex, where her body was the murder weapon. His attempt failed: the critics perceived this to be ridiculous.[269]

The search for love appears to be Elaine's main driving force, but in fact she seems to be equally interested in power and revenge.[270] The witch's heart has been broken and she wants to take revenge on men in return. She uses her beauty and appearance as a weapon to seduce them. According to Anna Biller herself, “The witch […] is the female version of the serial killer: a woman who kills for love.”[271] Biller wanted to transform the evil heartless witch figure with her movie. The witch character is usually

[264] Lee Wallace, *Lesbianism, Cinema, Space: The Sexual Life of Apartments* (New York: Routledge imprint of Taylor & Francis, 2009), 18.

[265] Wallace, *Lesbianism, Cinema, Space,* 18.

[266] Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski*, 1-15.

[267] Kinser, “Negotiating Spaces,” 124-153.

[268] Biller, *The Love Witch.*

[269] S.n., “Body of Evidence,'” *Variety* (1992), consulted 13.06.2020, https://www.variety.com.

[270] Marion Gibson, “The Love Witch: a film about the perversities of desire that will soon be a cult feminist classic,” *The Conversation* (2017), consulted 13.06.2020, https://theconversation.com.

[271] Biller, “About.”

portrayed as an evil, heartless woman, whereas Elaine had a heart that got broken by the man she loved. Elaine differs from male serial killers because her motive is love. Men murder mainly for reasons of lust or power, whereas women, like the mythic witch Medea, often kill for love. For this reason, Biller thinks of Elaine as a modern Medea. "She would rather see a man dead than to see him alive and not loving her."[272] A closer look at the film reveals that Elaine really is in search of the love of her life. When she meets the 'ideal' man and he does not give her the love she craves, the tragedy of her life is revealed. Elaine does not want the men she meets to die. She honestly wants them to love her.

Actually, it Biller claims it is not even Elaine herself who is killing the men, but the incapacity of men to handle their own emotions. "[…] that's what kills all the men in my movie – having to experience their own feelings."[273] Still, near the end of the movie this explanation is questioned by sergeant Griff Meadows.

> E: "I didn't kill anyone. Wayne died of heart failure after a beautiful night of lovemaking. And Richard died because he loved me too much. These men weren't used to the deep feelings of love that they were experiencing with me."
> GM: "Are you saying these men died of love? That's insane."[274]
> 45:41-1:52:53

Sergeant Meadows does not believe these men could have died without Elaine being a part of it, and thus credits more agency to Elaine's actions than she does herself. I argue that it is a combination of both. It is not Elaine's main goal to kill these men. The revenge she gets can be regarded as Elaine's (and Biller's) subconscious desire to punish men and the patriarchy for their wrongdoings against women.

This topic of revenge is very timely given recent (Trump-era) debates concerning the persistent misogyny and rape culture in our society. The release of *The Love Witch* took place three days after the misogynistic Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. These election results after an 18-month campaign typified by misogynistic and sexist utterances and revelations certainly affected the perception of the film.[275] Biller explains herself:

> "It came out right on time. As soon as the election happened, the reviews became very different from what they had been before. They talked about the character and her situation as if it were now something current and relevant, which they hadn't done before. Then they started calling her, 'The Love Witch #nastywoman,' you know, grab-her-by-the-pussy jokes. People became more conscious that this movie's ideas were relevant now, rather than seeing it as some fun little retro thing. And those scenes towards the end, at the bar, with the near-rape and the crowds shouting: 'Burn the witch!' – that all feels pretty Trumpian all of a sudden."[276]

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[272] Biller, "About."
[273] Patterson, "Interview. The Love Witch director Anna Biller."
[274] Biller, *The Love Witch.*
[275] Patterson, "Interview. The Love Witch director Anna Biller."
[276] Patterson, "Interview. The Love Witch director Anna Biller."

The Love Witch was clearly meant to denounce our misogynistic culture and use of the male gaze. In our contemporary society, where men still control women's bodies, the expression of the *femme fatale* through the use of a witch archetype, a creature who has the ability to make penises disappear and thus capitalizes on men's castration anxiety, is very powerful.[277]

No one gets killed in *The Working Girls*, but the revenge theme is very much present. Just like sex and violence, *revenge fantasies* sell. That's why they are often used in *sexploitation* films, even in feminist ones like *The Working Girls*. The production company that Stephanie Rothman normally worked for, *New World Pictures*, is famous for its exploitation films and is known for its use of the stereotype of the aggressive positive heroine obsessed with revenge. Founder Roger Corman explains that the creation of this character was a response to a market demand: the most commercially successful films produced at *New World Pictures* were those in which women had agency and control over their own lives and their own decisions. Rothman's feminist themes were thus allowed for practical reasons: they were likely to bring in money. In Rothman's *Terminal Island*, the revenge fantasy was also used as a central theme in the narrative of women fighting to establish a utopian society. Although Rothman made *The Working Girls* for production company *Dimension Pictures*, it is likely that she was influenced by Corman's ideas.[278]

In the opening scene, Honey, despite having no money, eats out at a restaurant. She promises the manager she will pay him back another time, but he is not that easy to persuade. After he declines her offer to help him in the restaurant, he proposes another way. Honey, picking up on the hint that he wants to have sex with her, immediately starts to undress in the middle of the restaurant. The manager, embarrassed and ashamed, kicks her out: [279]

> H: Well, there must be some other way I can pay you back.
> M: Yeah, there is.
> H: Oh yeah, there's that.
> M: Yeah, that. I close at night cutie pie.
> H: Well, I can't hang around that long. So, it's now or never.
> M: Then it's never!

The revenge fantasy comes back in a later scene with Jill at the strip club. When Jill decides to become a stripper to earn more money for her college tuition, an experienced stripper teaches her the "stripper's secret weapon".[280] When Jill has stage fright or feels awkward undressing in front of all the male customers, she needs to imagine the men naked. This is what she does and it works. Rothman conceived this image from Jill's point-of-view, showing the men as ugly and fat. The female gaze objectifying these men functions here as the equivalent to the male gaze and thus creates a power

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[277] Hindle, "Short guide to witchsploitation."
[278] Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 125-6.; David Roche, "Exploiting Exploitation Cinema: an introduction," *Transatlantica* 2 (2015): 2-13.
[279] Rothman, *The Working Girls*.
[280] Rothman, *The Working Girls*.

imbalance where this time it is the woman occupying the position of power.[281] In another scene, Honey meets an older but beautiful woman who asks her to kill her husband for ten thousand dollars. This femme fatale is not happy in her marriage; we find out later that she could have possibly been abused, as her husband is exposed as a wife murderer.[282] No wonder she wanted revenge:

> G: "Run him down with a car and then back over him a couple of times to make sure he's had it."[283]

Honey first agrees but later changes her mind. She later regrets not having helped this woman in some way.

The female characters in *The Working Girls* are based on the idea of placing the woman in the man's position, also known as the *feminist flip*.[284] Rothman copies the male characteristics, language and weapons of the dominant male discourse. However, Pam Cook argues that the aggressive-heroine figure involves the idea of revenge, which is a concept characteristic of the polemic present in feminist cinema. Due to the way Rothman subverts male dominated cinematic codes and stereotypes, her films can be perceived as feminist.[285]

The use of the revenge fantasy can be attributed to more radical feminists. Most moderate feminists want to obtain gender equality and do not wish to punish or humiliate men as a revenge for all the wrongs that the patriarchal male society has imposed on women in history. In *Bound*, killing Caesar was an unexpected and impulsive act, but nevertheless a very extreme form of revenge. In *The Love Witch*, the revenge fantasy was acted out literally and quite explicitly by the witch killing all of her lovers; but still, these murders can be regarded as an effect of the main character's subconscious. In *The Working Girls*, revenge is not the central theme but it does pop up twice in a straightforward way, namely the humiliation of men.

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[281] Terry Curtis Fox and Stephanie Rothman, "Fully Female," *Film Comment* 12, no. 6 (1976): 46-50.; Rothman, *The Working Girls*.

[282] Rothman, *The Working Girls*.

[283] Rothman, *The Working Girls*.

[284] The *feminist flip* is a technique to test whether something is actually sexist (or racist). If a man or white person were in that position, would it feel weird?

[285] Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 126.

4. Femininity and visual pleasure

By creating a female world, the filmmakers obtain visual pleasure with their films. In all three cases this is done by letting the characters act on their (or the director's) sexual desires and fantasies, being it seducing men or women. However, building a feminine world does not only have to do with sex. This also achieved through the creation of feminine spaces, decors, costumes, friendships and relationships between women. This is linked to the second-wave feminist question of what it means to be a woman.[286]

In *The Working Girls* (1974), this female world is conveyed through the use of glamorous hairstyles, make-up and clothes (those of Jill and Denise are sexy, those of Honey more tomboy-ish) and strong friendships. Even though Honey only just met Denise and Jill, they soon create an inseparable bond. They share an apartment and are always asking each other for advice. When you watch the film, you immediately get the feeling that it is these 'working girls' against the (male) world.[287]

The use of external feminine features such as make-up and fashion also plays a role in *Bound* (1996) and *The Love Witch* (2016). In both films, the *femme fatales*, respectively Violet and Elaine, use their sexy and feminine appearance and clothes as a way of *power dressing*. They do it to feel seductive and empowered. Violet's red lips, black nails and dark slip dresses provoke this extremely feminine and sexy look, which makes her portrayal as a femme fatale stand out from minute one. This stands in contrast to Corky's tomboy look with her black boots, boyish pants and top. The trust Violet and Corky build between them throughout the film is a beautiful example of the experience of both female friendship and love. This is expressed in the beginning of the film through a moment when Violet knows what Corky's labrys tattoo (a double-headed axe which symbolizes lesbianism since the 1970s) means:

> V: "That's a great tattoo. Beautiful labrys. Are you
> surprised I know what it is?"
> C: "Maybe."[288]

This knowledge Violet and Corky share of a lesbian symbol immediately creates a powerful connection between the two women.

The Love Witch is perhaps the most extreme example of the creation of a feminine world. Biller provokes this female experience through the use of vibrant color coordinated make-up, costumes, decors and attributes. Through the use of visual style, Biller wants to explore female pleasure. Biller finds style enormously important in the creation of her narrative:

> Well one thing I will say is that style IS substance. Design is a big
> part of creating character and story. I like to make people feel
> they're watching a construction, and I like to use archetypes and

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[286] Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought,* 5.
[287] Rothman, *The Working Girls*.
[288] Wachowski and Wachowski, *Bound.*

symbols in a way that's considered outdated now. But
symbolism – including color symbolism – is a powerful way of
telling a story, and creates meaning.[289]

To create this female gaze and experience, Biller spent seven and a half years researching narcissism and witchcraft, writing and rewriting the script, and making the costumes and props by herself.[290] A perfect example of Biller's expression of visual pleasure is the extremely feminine interior of the *Victorian Tea Room* Trish and Elaine go to sometimes:

I have a Victorian Tea Room set in the film that's all pink and
peach, and it creates a strong mood of the feminine. The set
alone tells you that this is a woman's environment, and that a
man would seem out of place here. I wanted to create this
private feminine space, for men watching the film feel that
they're being voyeurs to an environment where they don't
belong.[291]

Elaine and Trish also talk about the meaning of such a place when they are drinking tea there one day:

E: "What a lovely room."
T: "Yes, isn't it? I love Victoriana."
E: "Being here is like being a princess in a fairy tale."
T: "Do you have fairy princess fantasies, Elaine?"
E: "Of course. We may be grown women, but underneath we're
just little girls dreaming about being carried off by a prince on a
white horse." [292]
07:11-12:26

The tearoom is completely decorated in the color pink and there are only female guests and female waitresses present who all wear pink or white Victorian clothes. While they are having a conversation, a flashback is shown to a happy Elaine together with her ex-husband Jerry and their (possibly imaginary) white horse. This fairy tale idea of the prince and his white horse is also featured in Biller's previous feature *Viva* (2007). There, a young woman who meets a millionaire asks for a white horse as a gift. When she finally gets her horse, she sings a song about it.[293]

Through the use of the female gaze and Elaine's perspective, the viewer learns how it is to be a woman (in a man's world). Biller does not only address such themes in her films, but also on a blog she writes online. There, she writes about all kinds of feminist subjects regarding cinema. This way, Biller

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[289] Biller, "About."
[290] Biller, "About."
[291] Biller, "About."
[292] Biller, *The Love Witch.*
[293] Biller, *The Love Witch.*

fits perfectly in the tradition of fourth-wave feminism, with its focus on digital media to create awareness in far-reaching audiences. Through her blog, Biller creates a world where women feel at home, just like in her Victorian tea room.[294]

Mulvey explains the roots of her desire to create such feminine spaces in her films: "The reason I became interested in visual pleasure as a concept is because of Laura Mulvey's challenge (I took it as a challenge, anyway) to create a cinema of visual pleasure for women." [295] This again proves that *The Love Witch* is embedded in existent feminist discourses.

Although Biller loves expressing her desires on the screen, she says it sometimes can be very hard to stand up for yourself: "When I first started out I had no idea that being a woman trying to put your own fantasies into movies could create so much hostility, suspicion, and ridicule. But that's why it's so important to do it."[296]

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[294] Rivers, *Postfeminism(s),* 107-8.
[295] Biller, "About."
[296] Biller, "Bijou Flix interview.'"

Conclusion

The feminist filmmakers of the three film cases analyzed in this research - *The Working Girls* (1974), written and directed by Stephanie Rothman, *Bound* (1996) written and directed by sisters Lana and Lilly Wachowski, and *The Love Witch* (2016) written and directed by Anna Biller – have all succeeded in using the (often perceived as sexist) *femme fatale* archetype to support their feminist messages and create an authentic female perspective, called the *female gaze*.

The female gaze presents the audience with an authentic female perspective and encourages the audience to experience this female world. The female gaze is a response to Laura Mulvey's theory of the *male gaze* which states that women are almost always portrayed from a man's point of view in the media. Many of Mulvey's insights concerning the male gaze and objectification of women in the media still apply to film production today, which made this research on the use of a female gaze and perspective in film highly relevant.

The studied feminist filmmakers criticized stereotypical characteristics of female characters like the *femme fatale*, traditionally an evil seductress defined either by her sexuality or her relationship to men. The feminist filmmakers criticized these stereotypes by either letting themselves or their characters give a critique on the expectations that the patriarchy imposes on women, or by subverting the *femme fatale* archetype and giving her a narrative in which she is her own agent.

The writer-directors of these feminist films altered the femme fatale archetype from *film noir* and made her more female-oriented. However, in all three films, the femme fatale is still imbued with many patriarchal or traditional elements. This is done on purpose. The female filmmakers subvert the archetype through the use of genre and popular Hollywood codes. To promote recognition, characters are created from the culture of the prevailing society in an attempt to help viewers relate to the form and thus create an opening for the message.

For this reason, even feminist filmmakers make use of the mainstream filmic codes that were created by the dominant male culture in order to reach a wider audience. In the cases of *The Working Girls*, *Bound* and *The Love Witch*, the femme fatale is used as a recognizable character due to connotations of the male gaze. Her sexist characteristics are then addressed through irony or critique. In this way Rothman, the Wachowski sisters and Biller all succeeded in using the *femme fatale* archetype to support their feminist messages of gender equality and address women's struggles.

In addition, they also manage to create an authentic female perspective in their films. One method they used was to give their femme fatale characters agency and power through their sexuality and their body. Using Michel Foucault's idea that the power of the dominant culture is inscribed on and by bodies through modes of social supervision and discipline as well as self-regulation, women and thus especially the sexy femme fatales who take control over their own bodies can be seen as a form of resistance and threat against the patriarchy. In all three films, the female characters use this control over their own bodies in one way or another as a weapon against the male characters. However, these women do not need men to gain power through their sexuality. This supports the idea that the *femme fatale* is a symbol of men's fear of female sexuality.

Another way to create an authentic female perspective is through the use of the *revenge fantasy*, which these feminist filmmakers incorporated in their films to address male dominance and male assaults against women. The use of this strategy as a filmic theme seems quite radical, especially when the purpose of feminism is to create equality between men and women. However, by using this theme

of revenge, these filmmakers were able to support the feminist message in the film by communicating the experiences of the female world to the audience and thus calling male supremacy into question.

By evoking a female world, the filmmakers create visual pleasure with their films. In the three cases this is done by letting the characters act on their (or the director's) sexual desires and fantasies, being it seducing men or women. However, a feminine world is not built on sex alone. It is also built by creating feminine spaces, decors and fashion, such like the girly tea room and the use of flattering costumes in *The Love Witch,* and the women's private apartments in *The Working Girls* and *Bound*. Friendships and relationships between women play a crucial role in this world-building as well.

The portrayals of women in these three films are influenced by the different feminist waves throughout history. The strategies and themes used in these films even mirror the evolution of the feminist waves and larger socio-economic changes in the status of women during the twentieth and twentieth first centuries. *The Love Witch* turned out to have the most explicit connections to such feminist strategies, although *The Working Girls* and *Bound* also show clear influences of the feminist waves. All three were influenced by both the contemporary (fourth) wave and the previous ones.

Especially Biller, who made the most recent film of the three, proves that even in the fourth-wave feminism of the digital age, classical tools like cinema remain truly useful in spreading awareness about gender issues. The feminist femme fatale has proven itself as a link between the characterization of female characters in feminist cinema and the real-life struggles of women and changes in their perception in contemporary society.

Looking to the future, I would like to propose two paths for further research. Regarding the femme fatale character, it would be useful to study this type of film featuring a *femme fatale* character but written and directed by feminist men. Such a study would reveal how that specific male perspective relates to the authentic female experience. Concerning the female gaze itself, I would suggest a study of female perspectives (and even the archetype of the femme fatale) in media texts outside of cinema, such as video games, advertising, music videos and comic books created by (feminist) women.

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APPENDIX A: CODES TO THE SEGMENT ANALYSIS

Abbreviations audiovisual elements
ECU = extreme close up
CU = close up
MCU = medium close up
MS = medium shot
MLS = medium long shot
LS = long shot
ELS = extreme long shot
VO = voice-over

Abbreviations characters

The Working Girls (1974)
H = Honey
D = Denise
J = Jill
K = Katya
N = Nick
V = Vernon
G = Mrs. Gordon
M1 = restaurant manager
M2 = Denise's boyfriend

Bound (1996)

V = Violet
C = Corky
CA = Caesar
G = Gino
J = Johnnie
S = Shelly
M = Mickey
W(1/2/3) = unidentified woman

***The Love Witch* (2016)**
E = Elaine Parks
T = Trish
W = Wayne Peters
GM = Sergeant Griff Meadows
J = Jerry
R = Richard
PO = police officer
EF = Elaine's father

APPENDIX B: SEGMENT ANALYSIS

The Working Girls (1974)

			THE WORKING GIRLS (1974) - WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY STEPHANIE ROTHMAN			
		Narrative layer		Filmic layer		Symbolic layer
		Content				
DURATION in sec.	SEGMENT per scene	STORY characters, actions, time & place	MISE-EN-SCENE		SHOT COMPOSITION	CAMERA POSITION, MOVEMENTS & TECHNIQUES	THEMES & SYMBOLS
	Short description of the scene	/Who/what/when/where? / Plot	/Decors /Location /Lighting /Setting (day/night & weather & interior (INT)/exterior (EXT))	/Costumes /Attributes /Make-up /Lighting /groepering acteurs (scherptediepte en beweging binnen set)	/Close-up (CU) /Medium shot (MS) /Full shot (F)	CAMERA POSITION: High (H) or Low (L) CAMERA MOVEMENT / zonder verplaatsing vd camera ○ Pan (P) Left (L)/ Right (R) ///rijer?? ○ Tilt (T) Down (D)/Up (U) ○ zoom in/out / met verplaatsing camera ○ Tracking shot ○ Dolly in/out ○ Lift (with crane, e.g. birds eye view/ frog's eye view)	
00:00-02:23	Opening credits						
02:23-04:49	Honey has dinner.	-Honey (H) eats a meal at a restaurant, but has no money to pay. -H: "There are other ways I could pay you back than with money." -M1: There are? -H: Well sure, I could help you with your work. -M1: I don't need help. -H: Well, why not? I could do everything and you could just relax -H: Well, there must be some other way I can pay you back. -M1: Yeah, there is. -H: Oh yeah, there's that. -M1: Yeah, that. I close at night cutiepie. -H: Well, I can't hang around that long. So it's now or never. -M1: Then it's never!		-H: short blond hair, petite figure; jeans, top	-MS H's body		-Revenge fantasy: Honey embarrasses the restaurant manager by stripping in the middle of the restaurant.
04:49-07:01	Honey meets Denise.	-H meets Denise (D). -H says she's looking for a place to stay but hasn't any money. -D says H can stay at her apartment for a while.		-D: long brown hair; jeans and T-shirt			
07:01-07:58	Denise shows Honey the apartment.	-D shows H the apartment. She shows her paintings and her model Roger (R) who is naked.	-Cosy, artsy, messy apartment with lots of painitngs and posters.				-The first naked body we see is that of a man. --> uncommon for sexploitation movies
07:58-10:04	Honey meets Jill.	-Jill (J) comes home and finds H in D's bed. -They talk about J's future plans and ambitions. J tells H she found a new job. -J: Anyway, the money is good. I'll make enough to pay for my tuition. -H: You go to school? -J: Uhu, law school. -H: I hope it's worth the effort. I'm through with school and I can't find work anywhere.		-J: long blonde wavy hair; girlish nightdress			
10:04-10:55	Denise gives Honey a ride to town.	-D gives H a ride to town. (H wants to go look for a job.)		-H: light blue dress			
10:55-13:33	Honey goes jobhunting.	-H goes looking for a job but hasn't any luck.		-H: turquoise dress			
13:33-16:15	Honey meets a guy.	-H walks through the park and meets a guy who is playing the guitar. They start to talk. -M2: "Do you got any friends here?" -H: "No, not yet." -M2: "Well, I'll be your friend if you want." -H: "That's not what I want" -M2: "It isn't?" -H: I'll tell you what I want. -H whispers something in M's ear and then she takes him home.					-H is in control of her sexuality and does not let her intimidate by this guy.

THE WORKING GIRLS (1974) - WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY STEPHANIE ROTHMAN

	Narrative layer		Filmic layer			Symbolic layer
		Content				
DURATION in sec.	SEGMENT per scene	STORY characters, actions, time & place	MISE-EN-SCENE	SHOT COMPOSITION	CAMERA POSITION, MOVEMENTS & TECHNIQUES	THEMES & SYMBOLS
27:22-28:10	Denise and her boyfriend lay naked in bed.	-D and M1 lay in bed, talking and worrying about H.				
28:10-28:58	Denise and her boyfriend go looking for Honey on the beach.	-D and her M2 go looking for Honey on the beach. -They find her sleeping.	-H: jeans and brown jacket.			
28:58-30:29	Honey gets a job offer.	-H reads all the letters she got from possible employers who answered her advertisement. -One answer seems legit, that of mrs. Gordon (G). H calls her back.	-H: jeans, black longsleveed shirt -D: brown pants, colourful shirt with big red heart			
30:29-32:25	Honey meets mrs. Gordon at the hairdresser.	-G meets her possible new employer G at the hairdresser. -G: "Your ad said you'd do anything for money. Are you really that desperate?" -H: "Oh, you're damn right I am." -G: "Good, I like women who swear. They're never phonies. <...> Look, tell me. Are you desperate enough to do something illegal for ten thousand dollars?" -G: "What do you want me to do?" -G: "Kill my husband." -H: "How?" -G: "Run him down with a car and then back over him a couple of times to make sure he is headed." H accepts the job offer on condition she gets 5000 dollar in advance. G agrees.	1970s style hairdresser with elements from the previous decades	-G: white dress; make-up		-Ean explicit femme fatale character shows up: G wants to kill her husband.
32:25-32:52	To kill someone	H returns to the flat and tells D she has a job. D thinks H is not serious when she tells her she has to kill someone for money		-G: white dress; make-up		
32:52-34:00	Under arrest	H meets G at the hairdresser. H says the job is done and wants her money. The conversation is overheard by two cops disguised in drag. G is arrested.				
34:00-35:40	A job offer for Honey?	H, D and M2 are having lunch at their place and discuss the arrest of G. H feels bad. She may have saved a man's life, but he was a rotten person. The telephone rings; D picks up the phone. It's a man (Vernon (V)) who has heard of H's catching G on the news and has a job offer. H is at first reluctant, but the two other girls insist that she goes and that they will accompany her.	- telephone			
35:40-39:21	H's job interview	H meets V in the street. He wants to discuss matters at his office, whichin fact is his black Mercedes. V: "I wanna hire you to talk to me" H: "Talk about what?" V: "About life. And we'll have walks. And we'll eat together, sometimes." H: "But that's the kind of the thing you do with a friend, not a hired hand." V explains that he has no friends and he is looking for a companion. H accepts the job on a trial basis. V: "Wait a minute. I'm the boss. I get to put you on trial." H: "Oh no, for those kind of hours and that kind of pay, you're on trial." V: "I couldn't have said it better myself."	- street scene - black Mercedes - inside the car	- wears a leopard printed shirt and pants with opened buttons (to his waist) - H wears a light-blue mini-dress		
39:21-43:52	Jill's debut as a stripper	J's debut as a stripper. J is dressed up in white - as a nurse - and is introduced to the audience by the club owner Sidney (S). After a few moments J begins to panic. Then, she follows the advice of a 'colleague' -the stripper's secret weapon: "Imagine what the audience would look like with no clothes on." S really gets into it. S says that it is "a miracle". Nick (N) comes to see S. they talk business, N thinks J is too smart for their plans.	- strip club - old-fashioned, decrepit interior with round tables (colour of tablecloths and walls: reddish)	- J is dressed in white as a hospital nurse - underneath her nurse clothes she wears a silvery, glittery bikini	MS	- nurse outfit = male gaze sexual cliché
43:52-44:43	Promotion for Jill	S tells J he has to go to hospital and wants J to manage the joint while he is gone. J: "I'm flattered but i don't know anything about running a club." S: "You're a smart kid, you learn fast." J hesitates but S convinces her with a higher wage.	-backstage the strip club			
44:43-47:59	Nick wants his money	N tries to enter the strip club. When J opens the door he forces himself inside. N is looking for S; J tells him S is out of town (Acapulco) and that she's in charge now. N asks J if she knows that he has come to collect his money from S. J doesn't want to give N the money without S's approval. N points a gun at J. J manages to take the gun from N, points his gun at him and calls S. S is furious and says "That's protection money I'm giving him" and urges that J gives N the money. S: "You kiss his ass if you have to. I could be out of business if anything happens to him."	- strip club - hotel terrace (S)			
47:59-50:26	Love is in the air for Jill and Nick	J and N are now romatically involved. They swim naked in a swimming pool and live in a beautiful house in the mountains. J asks N how he became a crook. N says he went into the family business.	- mountain scene - house with swimming pool - scattered clothes on the floor		FS	
50:26-52:26	Shady business	D is painting a billboard and stops to watch her boyfriend - from above - play the guitar. She is worried when he stops playing and leaves with another man towards a car. There, the other man puts something that looks like drugs into M2 hat.	- street scene - billboard (jeans ad) - D is dressed in jeans from top till toe (pants: flared jeans)		- crane - birds eye view	
52:26-54:12	A present	At the apartment, D is painting. M2 is playing guitar. M2 asks D to leave him alone for a moment, whithout any further explanation. When he comes back to the living room, he surprises D with a present: a bracelet.	- apartment	- D and M2 are dressed in jeans with a shirt, 1970s hippy style - bracelet	MS	
54:12-55:05	Jewels	While M2 is asleep, D searches his clothes (jacket, shirt, trousers) and discovers a handful of (stolen) jewellery.	apartment - nighttime			
55:05-57:15	More shady business	The next day, D continues to paint the billboard jeans ad. She sees M2 with the same man from the day before. M2 gives the man the jewels D had discovered at night, and in exchange M2 receives a pile of money.				
57:15-58:09	Bored	H tells V she is bored and that V never talks to her. She suggest that he needs a wife, not an employee.	- daytime - black Mercedes - inside the car		MS	
58:09-59:46	Night-out	V invites H for dinner. All dressed up, H finds out they're going to a hot dogs joint. H says that this is not	- nighttime	llong dress with stola		
59:46-01:01:31	Biking	On a bike trip around town D suggests she can help V to become even more wealthy if she gets a higher salary from him.	- daytime - hills - bikes	- shorts and T-shirts		
01:01:31-01:02:49	Library	H is doing research at the public library	library - daytime		-CU	
01:02:49-01:05:24	Money-making idea	H dicovers how to make more money. V should buy shares from the biggest rope import company in America. H has done serious research but V refuses to believe her and even fires her, leaving her standing alone in the street.	- black Mercedes - inside the car			
01:05:24-01:07:13	Bad news for Mike	N tells J he was out of town for business. J demands complete honesty from N, when he refuses to give more details. N tells J some criminal friends of him are looking for M2. To waste him. J immediately drives			Tracking shot	

72

Bound (1996)

BOUND (1996) - WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY THE WACHOWSKIS

		Narrative layer	Filmic layer			Symbolic layer
		Content				
DURATION in sec.	SEGMENT per scene	STORY characters, actions, time & place	MISE-EN-SCENE	SHOT COMPOSITION	CAMERA POSITION, MOVEMENTS & TECHNIQUES	THEMES & SYMBOLS
	Short description of the scene	Who/what/when/where? -Plot	-Decors -Location -Lighting -Setting (day/night & weather & interior (INT)/exterior(EXT)) / -Costumes -Attributes -Make-up -Lighting	-Close-up (CU) -Medium shot (MS) -Full shot (F)	CAMERA POSITION: High (H) or Low (L) CAMERA MOVEMENT: - Pan (P) Left (L)/ Right (R) - Tilt (T) Down (D)/Up (U) - Zoom in/out - Tracking shot - Dolly in/out - Lift (with crane, e.g. birds eye view/ frog's eye view)	
00:00-00:18	Opening Credits					
00:18-01:58	Opening scene - Flashforward	- Voice-over with CU images of clothes, boxes, a closet - Flashforward snippets of conversations can be heard: -W1: "I had this image of you inside of me... like a part of me" -W2: "You planned this whole thing." -[Woman 1] "We make our own choices. We pay our own prices." -[Woman 2] "Five years is a long time." -M: "Where's the fuckin' money?" -W1: "All part of the business." -M: "All part of the business." -W1: "You made a choice once." -W2: "What choice?" -W1: "I want out." - CU image of tied up woman on the floor -W1: "Like a part of me."	- Nighttime - (V and CA's) apartment - bedroom / dressing room with numerous elegant women's shoes / -hat boxes, shoes, clothes on hangers,open closet - rope, piece of white clothing (T-shirt)	- CU of clothes, a closet, shoes, boxes - CU of a woman's (C's) body (tattoo of an axe on her arm) and face, while she is lying on the floor, tied up and gagged	-Down (closet) -Tracking shot (woman's body)	-C has a masculine, tough look; -V has a feminine look (red lips, high heels)
1:58-2:50	Elevator scene - first meeting of the protagonists Corky (C), Violet (V) and Caesar (CA)	-C heads to the elevator and holds it while a couple (V and CA) enter -V: "Hold the elevator." "Thanks." -The two women exchange glances, V takes off her sunglasses and you immediately feel the sexual attraction between them. When the couple leaves the elevator C gazes at V's butt and legs with lust in her eyes.	-Daytime - Elevator / -V wears a black leather jacket, black mini-skirt and high heels -V wears red lipstick and small diamond earrings; she holds a small handbag over her shoulder -C wears a black leather jacket over a white T-shirt & black pants -C has a ring on her thumb and has two piercings in her left ear (with small earrings) -C holds a key in her left hand which has the number 1003 on the tag -CA wears a dark grey coat over a brown suit with white shirt and checkered tie -CA also wears sunglasses	- MS of the three people in the elevator	- birds eye view at the end of the scene	
02:50-03:02	Neighbours	-C opens the door to her apartment (number 1003); at the same moment V and CA arrive at enter the apartment nextdoor. -Once again, the two women exchange glances	-Daytime / -key	-CU of key in C's hand	-Tracking shot from C's apartment to V and CA's apartment	
03:02-03:41	At C's apartment	-C holds a (professional) telephone conversation; it becomes clear C is there to renovate the apartment (and doesn't live there) -At the end of the conversation she sighs and, when she puts down the phone, she hears moaning from nextdoor (through the wall) which provokes a smile	-Daytime / -C wears a black leather jacket over a white T-shirt & black pants -A tattoo on her back, right arm and right hand are visible	-MS of C; CU of two coffee mugs		
03:41-06:17	Plumbing and seduction game	-C is doing a plumbing job in the bathtub -Someone knocks on the door, C opens the door and V is standing there -V: "Hi. My name is Violet. We sort of met on the elevator. -C: "I'm Corky." -V: "Well, I heard you working in here, and I was wondering if you'd like a cup of coffee?" -C: "Sure. Come on in. Just give me a second." -V: "All right." -(V checks the name on the doorbell) "So what happened to Rajy?" -C: "He went home to India or some place, but I think he'll be back." -V: "So this is just a temporary situation for you?" -C: "Yeah, pretty much. One day at a time. (V hands over the coffee mug to C) -V: "I guessed you're a straight black." -C: "Good guess. Thanks." -V: "My pleasure. To be honest, I did have a slightly ulterior motive. I was wondering if I might ask you a little favour." -C: "Favour?" -V: "Yeah. I'm kind of a night person, and I was wondering if you might wait a little bit before you start using the power tools?" -(Both are hearing sounds through the walls) C: "Oh, sorry." -V (touch C's right shoulder): "Oh, no. No. It's not your fault. It's just the walls here are so terribly thin. -C: "Really?" -V: "It's like you're in the same room. If it's too much trouble I understand." -C: "It's no trouble at all. I got a lot of stuff I got to do." -V: "You doin' all the work yourself?" -(C nods) -V: "That is so amazing. I am so in awe of people who can fix things. My dad was like that We never had anything new. Whenever anything was broken, he would just open it up, tinker with it a little bit and fix it. His hands were magic. (V looks at C's hand that holds the coffee mug) -V: "I'll bet your car is 20 years old?" -C: "Truck." -V: "Of course." -C: "'63 Chevy." -V: "I knew it." -(Both women look in each other's eyes) -V: "Well, I guess I should be going. You can drop the cup off at any time." -C: "Thanks." -V: "My pleasure."	-Daytime / -C has working clothes on (grey T-shirt) -V wears a black V-neck T-shirt, grey jeans and a black leather belt with silver details	-MS	-Tracking shot inside apartment; mirror shot of C	-The two coffee mugs that V brings along imply/underline her interest in C Plumbing and tools are used as metaphors for sex
06:17-08:02	The Watering Hole	C meets up with an ex-girlfriend, Sue (S) who works at 'The Watering Hole', a gay friendly bar. They haven't seen each other for more than 5 years. S asks C if she has already a new 'real job', implying a job as a criminal. From the conversation it becomes clear C is an ex-con. C says she's not interested and that she's just there "to get laid." - At the end of the scene, when C is approached by a police woman, it's 100% clear that C has just come out of jail.	-Nighttime - Bar - Regular customers of the gay/lesbian bar - A police woman / -S who works behind the bar wears a black berret and dark clothes (just like most customers)	-MS	-Pan within bar	
08:02-08:33	C drives home	-C drives back home and parks her car outside the building. Fter entering she is lying on her bed, twanging a Jew's harp.	-Nighttime -Car		-parking car: birds eye view - H	
08:33-09:14	Renovating the apartment	-C is renovating the house and gets a phonecall from her employer, Bianchini (B), who is also the building owner. -B gives her an extra job; C: "What apartment?"	-Daytime			

74

BOUND (1996) - WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY THE WACHOWSKIS

DURATION in sec.	SEGMENT per scene	STORY — characters, actions, time & place	MISE-EN-SCENE	SHOT COMPOSITION	CAMERA POSITION, MOVEMENTS & TECHNIQUES	THEMES & SYMBOLS
		Narrative layer — Content	**Filmic layer**			**Symbolic layer**
09:14-15:31	V & C having sex	-C knocks on door; V, dressed in lingerie opens the door. -V: "Oh, no. Shit. I didn't know he would call you. You must think I'm a total nuisance." -C: "Not exactly." -V: "I'm sorry. I would usually call Rajiv, but I didn't know what to do so I called Mr. Bianchini." -C: "He said you lost something?" -V: "Yeah. Come on in." -C enters the apartment with a smile on her face. -V: "I was doing the dishes, and just as I pulled the stopper, my earring fell in. That's why I got upset. It's one of my favourites." -C goes to the sink and looks underneath. -C: "You got a pot or a bucket?" -V gives a pot to C, who starts opening the plumbing. -V: "Did you find it?" -C shows V the earring that went down the drain. -V: "Oh, my God. I can't believe that. I can't, you enough. You have to let me pay you something." -C looks at V in a provocative way -C: "No." (starts fixing the plumbing again) -V: "No?" -C: "Told Bianchini I'd do it. I did it. -V: "If you won't take money, how about a drink? You can't work all night." -C: "All right. One drink." -V: "What would you like?" -C: "Beer." -V: "Beer? Of course." -C follows V into the kitchen/living room -V: "Sit down." -V brings a bottle of beer; both women sit on the couch now. -C: "Thanks." -V: "You seem uncomfortable. Do I make you nervous, Corky?" -C: "No." -V: "Thirsty, maybe?" -C: "Curious, maybe?" -V: "That's funny. I'm feeling a little bit curious myself. That's a great tattoo" (V touches C's tattooed arm) -V: "Beautiful labrys. Are you surprised I know what it is?" -C: "Maybe." -V: "I have a tattoo.Would you like to see it?" (V starts taking off her bra) -V: "A woman in upstate New York did it for me. Do you like it? Took her all day to do it. (shows tattoo of flower on left breast) -V: "She promised it wouldn't hurt, but it was sore for a long time after. I couldn't even touch it. Now I love the way it feels. Here. Touch it " -C: "What are you doing?" -V: "Isn't it obvious? I'm trying to seduce you" -C: "Why?" -V: "Because I want to. I've wanted to ever since I saw you that day in the elevator. I know you don't believe me but I can prove it to you. You can't believe what you'd see but you can believe what you feel." (C and V touch each other, V brings C's hand to her crotch and they start having sex) -V: "I've been thinking about you all day." (V starts gasping and moaning) -C: "You planned this whole thing. You dropped that earring down the sink on purpose, didn't you?" -V: "If I say yes, will you take your hand away?" -C: "No." -V: "Yes. Oh, please, Corky. Oh, please. Kiss me!" While they are having sex, V's gasping continues. Suddenly they hear a door opening. -V: Oh, fuck.	-Daytime/afternoon - apartment: slick design, typical 1990s interior	-V wears black lingerie - prop: earring C wears white, sleeveless T-shirt and grey working pants	-MS -CU during seduction game (incl. plumbing scene) and sex scenes	-steady camera	-Tattoo stands for sexuality, seduction - Labrys tattoo: the labrys is a double-headed ritual axe. It is often used as a sign of identity and solidarity among lesbians. - Archetypes: V's look represents the sophisticated lesbian; C's look represents the butch lesbian
15:31-17:49	Caesar's arrival	-V & C's sex play is interrupted when CA arrives at the apartment. When he sees V in lingerie in the dark he is at first suspicious. But when he sees C he no longer suspects anything. -C is introduced to CA -When C tells she works for B, CA is convinced C must be an ex-con. B only hires convicts, he says. CA: "He did time himself. Thirteen fucking years." -CA insists that C accepts money from him -C returns to work	-Daytime/afternoon - Apartment: slick design, typical 1990s interior				
17:49-18:14	Corky cleans brushes	-While she cleans the paint off her brushes, C muses: "Mmh. Corky, corky, what are you dong?" and smiles	-The next-door apartment C is renovating	-White T-shirt - working clothes			
18:14-19:33	V follows C	-C leaves the building and enters her car. She's surprised when the passenger door opens and V nestles next to her. -V: "I had to see you." -C: "Look. I don't think this is a good idea." -V: "I wanted to apologize." -C: "No, please. Don't apologize. If there's one thing I can't stand stand it's women who apologize for wanting sex." -V: "I'm not apologizing for what I did. I'm apologizing for what I didn't do." -The women start kissing -V: "You have a bed somewhere?"	-Nighttime - Parking lot - Chevy car	-MS		
19:33-22:47	Sex in the apartment	-C and V go to C's own apartment and have sex -The next morning, C says to herself: "I can see again" and smiles -They drink a bottle of beer. -V: "I needed that." -V tells C that CA is a money launderer for the Mafia and that they have been in a relationship for five years.	-Nighttime - apartment with shabby looking bedroom - clothes scattered on the floor	-C & V are naked			
22:47-23:43	Happy C	-C feels happy and returns to the aprtment she is renovating; on her way in and outside V and CA's apartment she notices a crony who is visting the couple					
23:43-26:01	Femme fatale	-C & V are in the apartment C is renovating. -V: "I had this image of you inside of me. Like a part of me. You are so beautiful." -C says to V that they are different. -C: "This is the part where you tell me what matters is on the inside and that inside of you there's a little dyke just like me." -V: "No, she's nothing like you. She's a whole lot smarter thanyou are." -C: "Is that what her daddy tells her?" -V: "I know what I am. I don't have to have it tattooed on my shoulder." -C: "So you're saying you don't have sex with men?" -V: "I don't." -C: "For Christ's sake, Violet, I heard you. Thin walls, remember?" -V: "What you heard wasn't sex." -C: "What the fuck was it?" -V: "Work. You made certain choices in your life that you paid for. You said you made them because you were good at something and it was easy. You think you're the only person that's good at something? We make our own choices. We pay our own prices. I think we're more alike than you care to admit." -C: "What about that guy this morning?" -V: "Shelly?" -C: "Don't tell me. You're a workaholic." -V: "No, Shelly knows what I am. He saw me in a bar with another woman." -C: "Yeah. I suppose he just wants to watch." -V: "Fuck it. I think you'd better leave." -C: "Yeah. I think I'd better." -V: "Try not to steal anything on the way out."	-V's bedroom - satin sheets - V in underwear/lingerie - C in working clothes (sleeveless T-shirt)	- CU - MS		
26:01-27:12	Mobsters	-C is outside the aprtment building and sees a car arriving. Three suspicious looking men leave the car with a fourth man (Shelly - S) who seems to have been forced to come alonng.	Daytime			
27:12-31:52	Torturing Shelly	-From the apartment where she's working, C hears that someone (S) is being beaten and tortured. This happens in the bathroom of V & CA's apartment. Also V can overhear what is happening. The 'victim' is S who has been skimming money from the Mafia business. V is upset and tells CA that she want to leave. in the corridor C is waiting for her.	Daytime - V & CA's apartment (bathroom) - corridor - C's apartment	- CU - MS - FS		
31:52-33:47	A new life	-V asks C for help. She wants out. She wants to make a new life for herself and has a plan.	-The Watering Hole	-C & V wear their black leather jackets			

75

BOUND (1996) - WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY THE WACHOWSKIS

		Narrative layer		Filmic layer			Symbolic layer
		Content					
DURATION in sec.	**SEGMENT per scene**	**STORY** characters, actions, time & place	**MISE-EN-SCENE**		**SHOT COMPOSITION**	**CAMERA POSITION, MOVEMENTS & TECHNIQUES**	**THEMES & SYMBOLS**
33:47-36:00	Scheming	-V explains that CA will bring the more than 2 million dollar that Shelly embezzled back to the apartment. V tries to convince C to steal the money. -C: "For me, stealing has always been a lot like sex. Two people who want he same thing. They get in a room, they talk about it. they start to plan. It's like flirting. It's kind of like foreplay. Because the more they talk about it, the wetter they get. the only difference is, I can fuck someone I've just met. But to steal, I need to know someone like I know myself." -V: "You think you know me like that?" -C: "I wanna see the money."	-C's car (Chevy)			-Steady camera - Women filmed from behind in car (P)	
36:00-37:53	Bloody money	-CA enters the apartment with a bag of bloody money. He tells V that S is shot and killed bij Johnnie (J), the son of Mafia boss Gino Marzzone (M)	-V & CA's apartment - a heap of money all covered in blood		-MS -CU		
37:53-47:52	C & V are scheming	-C & V work out all the details to steal the money, without CA suspecting them. -V tells C that C has washed, ironed and hung all the money to dry. She explains that CA and J hate each other, and that G and J will come to pick up the money from CA. -C's plan is as follows. When CA has finished drying and counting the money, he will want to unwind. V has to seduce CA and convince him to take a shower to unwind. V will drop a bottle of Glenlivet scotch on purpose (G's favourite) and tell CA that she is going to buy another one. –The moment V leaves the apriment, C will enter, steal the money and leave again. V will return with the new bottle of Clenlivet and tell CA that she just saw J leave. When CA will check his briefcase and find that the money is gone, he will suspect J. C & J think CA will be forced to run away because G will think he has been robbed by CA (and not J).	-C's apartment where she's renovating -V & CA's apartment (incl. shower)	- money (2 million dollars) - briefcase - bottle of Glenlivet Scotch	-MS -CU	-variations in camera positions / movement	
47:52-50:18	The theft	-CA opens the briefcase and finds that the money is gone, he is convinced G will think he stole it if he runs. V tries to convince him to run, to no avail. CA wants to kill J .	-V & CA's apartment			-frog's eye view - CU (CA, V) - moving camera	
50:18-54:50	Panic	-V is in panic because CA is freaking out. C tells her to leave CA and the apartment. -CA tells V he wants the money back from J. -V tells CA she wants to leave. -V: "I don't want any part of this shit. I don't want to be involved." -CA: "I can't let you leave Violet." He threatens V with a pistol. -CA: "if you're not with me, I have to assume you're against me." -CA forces V to stay. He suspects V and J may have stolen the 2 million dollar and planned to frame him.	-V & CA's apartment (bedroom) - The apartment C is renovating	prop: telephone (line) - V has blue eye shadow on and red lipstick - V wears a short red velvet dress	- CU (telephone) - T down - tracking shot		
54:50-01:12:52	The arrival of three mobsters	-C is waiting next-door with the stolen money, while J and their boduguard arrive at CA & V's place. -J flirts with V and taunts CA. CA pulls out his gun and accuses his son J of having stolen the money. -CA kills G, J and the bodyguard. -A police car arrive. Two cops ring the doorbell and V lets them in. Just before, CA has wiped out frantically all possible traces of the murder. -The cops don't see anything suspicious; CA pretends that the noise that was heard comes from his TV as he is hard of hearing. the cops believe him and leave.	-V & CA's apartment	- briefcase - bag with money - Smith & Wesson gun	- MS -CU	-Zoom out (start of the scene) -Lift (bird's eye view) -CU (e.g. G)	
01:12:52-01:13:54	Looking for money	-C sees V & CA leave the apartment. CA forces V into the car. He wants to drive J's place to find the money.	-car park of the apartment building	-car			
01:13:54-01:17:42	Johnnie's apartment	-CA is unable to find the money at J's apartment. He calls another mobster and tells him that G has yet to arrive and that he still got the money.	-J's apartment	-telephone			
01:17:42-01:41:47	Caesar discovers the truth	-CA & V are back in their apartment. CA tells V they must dispose of the bodies. -V calls C who picks up the phone. -V: "Thank, God." -C: "I'm still here." -V: "I was so afraid you were going to leave me." -C: "You don't quit on me, Violet. I won't quit on you." -V: "Corky, it worked. He's going to run. He needs to take care of he bodies to buy himself a little time but as soon as he leaves, it's over. Just a little while longer. Corky, I want to tell you something" -C: "I know, Violet. I know. It's why I'm still here." -CA discovers that V was on the phone with someone else and attacks her, beating her up. V screams and C enters the apartment but CA surprises her from behind. Now CA learns the truth and is scornful about the fact that C is a lesbian and that V is involved with her. -CA: "What did she do to you?" -V: "Everything you couldn't." -CA: "You ungrateful fuckin' bitch. Vi, you were nothing before you met me. Don't you remember? You had nothing. Who gave you this place, huh? Who gave it to you? I did, -Vi. I did. You were nothing. You had nothing." -V: "What a load of crap. Take a look at yourself, Caesar. You're nothing but a common thug. You launder money for the Mob. You rent women like you rented this apartment. You used me, Caesar. That's all. Just like I used you. All part of the business." -CA ties both women up and threatens to torture them. He demands that C tells him where the money is. Just when he intends to cut off one of her fingers, the doorbell rings. Mickey (M) has arrived. C makes a deal with V to help him stall. V calls CA from the bathroom and persuades CA to feign a conversation with G explaining that je and J are in the hospital after a car accident. Mickey is fooled and leaves the apartment. -C tells CA that she has hidden the money in the next-door apartment; CA goes in there with V in the hope to retrieve the money. -V escapes via the corridors and calls M. V tells M that CA stole the money and forced her to keep quiet. -C grabs the tongs from the bedroom floor and cuts herself loose. She retrieves the money next-door. When CA there the money is gone. C tries to beat CA but misses. CA floors C and beats her; V arrives just in time and holds CA at gunpoint. -V: "Stop!" -CA: "Oh, for Christ's sakes." -V: "It's over Caesar. I called Mickey. he's on his way. Get out of here, Caesar.If you want to live, you'd better start running." -CA: "All these years, and you still don't know me. But I know you." (CA looks at gun on the floor that he intends to pick up) -V: "Caesar, don't." -CA: "What are you gonna do with that, Vi? Shoot me? Kill me in cold blood? I don't think so. If you were gonna shoot me, Vi, you'd have done it a long time ago. If I were you, I'd have shot me the minute I brought the money back to the aprtment. But you didn't, and I'll tell you why. You don't want to shootme, Vi. Do you? Do you? I know you don't." -V: "Caesar, you don't know shit." V kills CA with several gunshots.	-V & CA's apartment		- MS - CU	-Lift -CU	
01:41:47-01:44:07	The getaway	-M believes V' story was true. M promises that he will find CA. M says that his offer to her, to become his girlfriend, still stands but V says she needs to get away from it all and needs a fresh start. -V and C drive off in C's car. -C: "You know what the difference is between you and me, Violet?" -V: "No." -C: "Me, neither."	-Outside the apartment building -M's car -C's Chevy (truck)	- V wears a sexy black dress (open neck) - V & C wear black letter jackets and dark sunglasses	- MS - FS		-Both women have the same look, this accentuates their bond

The Love Witch (2016) – Written & Directed by Anna Biller

		THE LOVE WITCH (2016) - WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY ANNA BILLER					
		Narrative layer		**Filmic layer**			**Symbolic layer**
		Content					
DURATION in sec.	**SEGMENT per scene**	**STORY** characters, actions, time & place		**MISE-EN-SCENE**	**SHOT COMPOSITION**	**CAMERA POSITION, MOVEMENTS & TECHNIQUES**	**THEMES & SYMBOLS**
	Short description of the scene	-Who/what/when/where? -Plot		-Decors -Location -Lighting Setting (day/night & weather & interior (INT)/exterior(EXT))	-Costumes -Attributes -Make-up -Lighting	-Close-up (CU) -Medium shot (MS) -Full shot (F)	CAMERA POSITION: High (H) or Low (L) CAMERA MOVEMENT: - Pan (P) Left (L)/ Right (R) - Tilt (T) Down (D)/Up (U) - Zoom in/out - Tracking shot - Dolly in/out - Lift (with crane, e.g. birds eye view/ frog's eye view)
00:00-00:35	Opening credits						
00:35-03:40	Elaine drives in car + flashbacks dead husband	-Elaine (E) drives in her car while smoking a cigarette. -Elaine (in voice-over) explains she is going to a new place to start a new quiet life where almost no one knows her. -Elaine takes cigarettes out of her purse and some tarot cards fall out. -Flashbacks to Elaine's husband Jerry who drinks from a cup and dies. Elaine says in voice-over "Poor Jerry, I had a nervous breakdown after he left me. They say I'm cured now." -Flashbacks to naked witch ritual. "But I still have intrusive thoughts. My therapist told me I'm not unusual at all. People are abused all over the world, every day. Much worse than me. And they do fine. -A police car follows her. The police officer pulls her over and tells her that her tail light is out. -Elaine:"Oh, thank you for letting me know. Are you gonna write me a ticket?" She looks at him seductively and goes through her hair with her hand. -The police officer:I'll let you go this time, but make sure you get it fixed. -Elaine keeps looking seductive and says "Thank you, officer." -Police Officer: "Drive Safely." -The police officer goes away and Elaine sighs and looks relieved. She starts driving again.		-DAY, EXT -No rain, a bit sunny -Highway next to the sea	-60s red dress, red purse and vintage necklace -Long black hair, bright blue eye shadow, black eyeliner, red lipstick, red nail polish (Elaine's signature make-up look) -Cigarettes, tarot cards (the heart with the three swords is the most visible card) and a photo of her death husband Jerry on the wat next to her -Red car (60s Chevrolet)	-CU Elaine's right eye -CU Elaine's lips -CU Elaine's purse + attributes: cigarette, tarot cards and a photo of her death husband Jerry	-Elaine was supposedly 'sick' -Elaine uses her charms and looks to not get a ticket from the policeman.
03:40-07:11	First encounter Trish and Elaine at Elaine's new apartment	-E is still driving. She puts a cigarette out in the built-in ash tray. She arrives at a pretty suburban neighbourhood. -E: "When Jerry left me, I devoured everything I could about how to get your man back. According to the experts, men are very fragile. They can get crushed down if you assert yourself in any way. You have to be very tricky." -E stops her car at a gothic villa. -Trish (T) arrives with her car and introduces herself. She is very enthusiastic. -E: "Hi Trish, it's nice to meet you." -T: "You're so pretty...Oh, I didn't mean anything. I'm married and everything." -E smiles. E: "No, I didn't think anything". -T: "Well, let me help you with your bags." T and E take the bags. T:"Is this all you've got?" -E: "For now, my art supplies are being shipped over later." -T looks interested. T: "So, you're an artist?" -E looks proud ans smiles. E: "Yes, I am." -T: "I'm an interior decorator." -E looks a bit uninterested. E: "Oh, really?" -T: "Yes." -T explains that the decorated the place, but the apartment belongs to Barbara. She doesn't know when she will be back. T gives the keys to E. Both women walk into the house. -T: "How do you know Barbara?" -E: "We used to dance together in San Francisco." -T: "Oh, really?" Trish stops walking, scans E with her eyes from top to toe, gives a jealous smile and starts walking again. -T and E walk up the stairs. T explains she had to decorate the apartment in the colours of the Thoth Tarot deck with occult paintings from Barbara and her students. T: "She's into all that Wicca stuff." -T and E walk into the apartment. E: "Oh, Trish, I love it. It's just beautiful." -T looks surprised. T: "Really? Oh, I'm so glad. I thought I may have overdone it." -E: "Oh no, it's exactly my taste. -E is hungry and T suggests they could go to the Victorian Tea Room. E accepts and goes to her room to freshen up.		-DAY, EXT + INT -No rain, no sun -Suburban houses -Gothic villa -Occult and 'witchy' interior	-E: Red dress, red purse and vintage necklace, matching red shoes -E: Signature make-up look -Attributes E: red trunks, black raincoat with rainbow lining -T's car: black BMW -T: Middle long red hair with a fringe, natural peachy make-up, white blouse, pink suit, beige shoes, beige handbag -Keys in the form of a red heart	-Establishing shot of the apartment -Pan of the apartment	-Elaine is obsessed about seducing men. -Elaine says that men are very fragile. This is also the director's (Anna Biller) viewpoint.
07:11-12:26	Elaine and Trish in the Victorian Tea Room	-E and T are drinking tea in the Victorian Tea Room, where there are only female guests and female waitresses. -E: "What a lovely room." -T: "Yes, isn't it? I love Victoriana." -E: "Being here is like being a princess in a fairy tale." -T: "Do you have fairy princess fantasies, Elaine?" -E: "Of course. We may be grown women, but underneath we're just little girls dreaming about being carried off by a prince on a white horse." A flashback is shown to E and J being happy with their white horse. -T: "Yes, I suppose so. It's ridiculous, isn't it? -E: "I don't think I've found my prince charming yet, but I think I found the formula. You know, I've been studying parapsychology and I understand men so much better than I used to. If only I would have known before what I know now. Then Jerry would have never left me." -T: "Who's Jerry?" -E: "My ex-husband." Flashback to Jerry. "The day he left me was the day that I died." -Flashback to Jerry lying dead on the ground next to a drinking cup and spilled wine. E: "But then I was reborn as a witch. Barbara and Dan brought me back to life." Flashback to naked witch ritual. "They taught me everything I know about magic and about men. Men are like children. They're very easy to please, as long as we give them what they want. -A blonde girl who is playing the harp in the tea room starts to sing. Both E and T look at her. They restart their conversation. -T: "Men, you said we need to give them what they want. Well, what do men want?" -E: "Just a pretty woman to love and take care of them and to make them feel like a man and give them total freedom in whatever they wanna do or be." -T looks a little bit shocked and starts laughing. T: "But what about what we want? How are we going to be equals with men if we keep catering to all of their needs?" -E: "I think that if you want love, you have to give love." T looks at E with pity. E: "Giving men sex is a way of unlocking their love potential." -E: "You sound as if you'd been brainwashed by the patriarchy. Your whole self-worth is wrapped up in pleasing a man. I'll admit, I used sex to get this, but I'm not proud of it." T shows her wedding ring. T: "A whole world doesn't revolve around a man's desire. If I gave Richard sex every time he wanted it, I'd be a wreck. -E: "Poor Richard. He loves you and he wants you and you torture him. You have to give a man his fantasy." -T starts laughing shocked. T: "His fantasy?" -E: "But what I'm really interested in is love. You might say I'm addicted to love. I wonder if all women feel that way?" -T looks confused. T: "Well, it depends on what you mean by love. A husband isn't a prince, Elaine, and life isn't a fairy tale. We have to face that fact." -E: "Why? Maybe life could be a fairy tale if you pleased your husband more. -T: "I don't need to please Richard. Richard loves me for myself. -E: "Of course. Maybe you did find your prince charming. -T: "Perhaps I did. -Richard arrives at the tea room. He and E make eye contact. -T: "Richard, what are you doing here? This tea room is for ladies only. -T introduces R to E. R and E make eye contact again, this time more intensely.		-DAY, INT -Victorian interior design, almost everything is pink and white (pink carpet and tablecloths, white walls). Everything looks romantic. There is golden harp. The tea sets are white with pink flowers. There are red curtains.	-All the guests are dressed in pink and white Victorian-style clothes. -The waitresses wear black and white Victorian servants clothes. -E: signature make-up look, white blouse (with lace), gold medallion with pink pearl, pink hat with pink flowers on top, ring with red gem, ring with purple gem -T: natural peachy make-up, white blouse, pink suit (same outfit as in previous scene)	-E: establishing shot of the tea room -LS: girl playing the harp -CU tea pot -CU Jerry (flashback) -CU Trish's wedding ring	-Zoom-in on Elaine's eyes.	-The tearoom is presented as an 'only women' place. Men seem out of place there. Everything is pink, a colour that has culturally been associated with women.
12:26-15:14	Elaine making 'witch' potions in her apartment	-E is in her apartment working on a painting. -Then she starts filling little bags with herbs. She places one of the bags between two voodoo dolls. She starts making a red potion. She opens a book. The first page of the book reads "Spell Book". She adds other liquids. The potion turns purple. She pours the potion in a soup mould. -She opens the spell book on a page which reads "Love spell". -She starts grinding herbs and dried rose petals. -She goes sitting on the carpet and drinks from a cup. She looks up. E: "Goddess, please, send me a beautiful, sweet man to love me as I love him". E lays down on the carpet (on her back). She spreads her arms and legs. E: "To love me, love me, love me,..."			-E: signature make-up look, but this time with green eye shadow (but the eye shadow changes in the time laps from green to blue and the lipstick from red to pink); first a beige dress with pink flowers and lots of rings with gems (purple, red, white); then a blue overall with red paint/potion spots, golden necklace, yellow gloves and ring with a green gem; later a blue dress with a gold belt, a necklace with a red gem and two rings with a red and purple gem; later a black see-through dress, a red medallion and lots of rings -Two voodoo dolls: one female version with black hair and one male with brown hair -little bag with spices has a 'witch' sign (kind of a star) embroidered on it -Red and (later) a purple potion -Carpet with same 'witch' sign as little bag; lots of candles; golden cup	-CU rings -CU two voodoo dolls -LS table with all the 'witch' attributes on top. -LS white room (pulpit, carpet, closet with potions, table) -LS Elaine on floor (filmed from above) -CU Elaine's lips	-Elaine is doing a 'love spell' in her search for the perfecht man.

THE LOVE WITCH (2016) - WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY ANNA BILLER

		Narrative layer		Filmic layer			Symbolic layer
		Content					
DURATION in sec.	**SEGMENT per scene**		**STORY** characters, actions, time & place	**MISE-EN-SCENE**	**SHOT COMPOSITION**	**CAMERA POSITION, MOVEMENTS & TECHNIQUES**	**THEMES & SYMBOLS**
15:14-16:34	Elaine visits 'Moonlise Herbs'		-Elaine walks through a shopping street. Three guys that passes turn around and look at her. She walks into the shop with the sign "Moonrise Herbs. Magical Apothecary". A pretty girl behind the counter, called Wendy (W) says hello. E wants to sell some little bags with herbs and voodoo dolls in the store. Wendy accepts the offer and looks at E's inventory list which reads "Love Magick - Products by Elaine".	-The shop is full of potions	-E: signature make-up look, black raincoat, black boots, black purse, black handbag, white and silver medallion -Shop: sign of the shop includes a picture of a witch cauldron; the 'witch' sing is embroidered on a purple table cloth hanging before the counter -W: blonde hair, natural make-up, flower dress	-CU shop sign	
16:34-20:13	Elaine meets a new man		-E leaves the store and when she crosses the street a guy whistles at her. She goes to the square and sits on a bench. She starts eating a sandwich. -E: "People always ask me why I'm a witch. I tell them it' because I wanna have magical power. But it's not like it sounds. All it is, is using your will to get what you want." -E starts feeding bread crimbs to the doves. Suddenly, she spots a man who is talking to a girl The man (Wayne) see her, is drawn to her and walks to her. They start to small talk. Elaine guesses things about his character and Wayne (W) is surprised she is right. He tells her he has a cabin in the woods. She asks if she can go there (at that very moment) and make him a nice dinner. He smiles and agrees. They drive away. The girl W was talking to is stood up and looks at the two driving off.	-DAY, EXT -A clean and quiet town square	-E: signature make-up look, black raincoat, black boots, black purse, black handbag, white and silver medallion -Girl: blonde; blue turtleneck -W: middle aged, beard; blue shirt; brown bag	-CU pigeons -Zoom-in Elaine's face -CU Elaine's eyes		-A man catcalls Elaine. -Elaine has found a prey. She doesn't care who he is and who the girl is he's talking to.
20:13-26:59	Elaine and Wayne at the cabin in the woods		-Elaine and W arrive at the cabin. W wants to make love to her in the car. E tells him to wait and offers him a drink from her flask she brought with her. -W "what is it?" -E "Something I made." -W takes the drink but finds it too strong. He tries to kiss E again. -E "Not here. Let's go inside." They go inside the house. W starts kissing E again. E looks annoyed and holds back. E "I'll stat the dinner." E cooks. W makes an open fire. They eat and talk about W's teaching job at the university. -E asks W if he's a libertine. W " Yes I am, I love women. Does that bother you?" -E "On the contrary." -W starts laughing but suddenly feels strange. -E explains she put hallucinogenic herbs in his drink. W starts laughing. W "Oh baby, you are really wild." -W is hallucinating and E takes off her clothes. When she reveals the rainbow lining of her coat, W can barely look at it. W: "Your coat is so bright." -E "I always line my clothing." -W "You have two selves. Dark and quiet that you show to the world. Who do you give that to?" He points his finger at E. -E "I give the rainbow to you, right now." E starts taking more clothes off. -When E is almost naked she says "You can make love to me now." W kisses her and carries her to his bedroom.	-NIGHT, EXT + INT -The interior of the cabin includes lots of wooden details. The table E and W eat at is very low.	-E: signature make-up look (with pink lips), black raincoat with rainbow lining, jaretelles, black boots, black purse, black handbag, white and silver medallion -W: blue shirt; brown bag	-CU raw meat -CU flask with rainbow background -CU E's eyes	-A rainbow flair is used when E shows the rainbow lining of her coat	-From W's point of view, E seems like the ideal woman.
26:59-31:54	Elaine and Wayne have sex.		-E and W have sex in W's bedroom. -After the sex, W starts to cry. E "What is it Wayne? What is it baby?" -W: "Oh Elaine, I feel so strange." -E "It's all right. You're with me." She softly shushes him to calm him down. -E: "Elaine. No woman has ever given herself like that to me before." -E "Life has been tough?" E caresses him. -W: "Yeah, in a way. You're not like any other woman that I've met. No games. No agendas. You just seem to take life the way it is." -E: "Is there any other way to take life?" -W: "Well, the women I've been with, they all want you to make a bunch of promises to 'em as soon as you deep with 'em. But how can you commit to someone that you don't even know? It's crazy." -E looks understanding. E: "I know baby, I know." -W: "I never thought I wanted to be tied down to anybody. But it's just 'cause no one was ever quite right. All the women that I'm attracted to physically they're were bright enough. And all the bright ones are homely and don't arouse me." -E shows concern. E: "That seems like quite a problem." -W starts sobbing. W "It is." E has a calculated look. W: "I feel my whole life as a loner thinkin' I didn't need anybody. But now I'm not so sure. Ooh Elaine. I have never felt real love like this before." -E comforts him. E: "You're just having a lot of emotions right now." -W starts crying more intensely. W: "Elaine, I'm scared. I'm not used to feeling things so strongly. I can't take it. I can't take it. Ooh. Elaine. Elaine. I'm sick. I'm sick." -E holds W's head in her arms. E: "It's all right. I've got you. I love you. And I'll always be here for you. Try to get some sleep."		-E: signature make-up look (with pink lips)	-Longlasting CU of W (when crying and praising E)		-W can't handle his emotions. Reference to the beginning of the film when Elaine says "Men are very fragile." This is (again) Anna Biller's point of view on the subject.
31:54-32:36	Elaine smoking at the cabin.		-E is downstairs (in the cabin) smoking a cigarette. W is crying and calling her desperately from his bedroom. -E looks annoyed E: "What a pussy, what a baby. I thought I found a real man, but he's just like a little girl. No one was ever there for me when I was crying my heart out. No one ever comforted me. No one."		-E: signature make-up look (with pink lips); plaid blazer (from W?); silver necklace with white gem			-E thinks W is not a real man because he can't handle his emotions. E: "He's just like a little girl." All critiques the patriarchal stereotype that men need to be in control of their emotions in order to be 'real' men. This can be linked to the concept of 'toxic masculinity'.
32:36-33:09	Elaine's breakfast in bed.		-E must have fallen asleep. She wakes up and sees her period blood has leaked on the white sheets of the couch. -E goes to the bathroom with her wig in her hair. She opens a tampon package. She puts on her wig while looking at herself in the mirror. -E goes to W's bedroom to serve him breakfast in bed. W looks very fragile and is very emotional. W tells E about his 'nightmare' that he called her and she didn't come. -W: "Oh Elaine, you love me, don't you?" -E: "Of course I love you." -E starts crying intensely. -E tells him to get some sleep and is about to leave. -W: "Elaine! Don't leave me." -E: "I'm not going anywhere baby. I'll be right here." E leaves		-E: signature make-up look (with pink lips); plaid blazer; silver necklace with white gem; brown and red ring; golden slippers	-CU period blood -CU black wig -CU's breakfast (eggs; toast) -LS of mirror when E comes into W's bedroom with the breakfast		-First time it is shown that E wears a wig. -E in mirror -Indirect use of mirror in W's bedroom
33:09-35:08	Elaine finds Wayne dead.		-E. lays out tarot cards. She holds the card with the red heart and the three swords in her hand. -E goes to W to wake him up. When she enters his bedroom, she finds him dead. E starts to cry.		-E: signature make-up look (with pink lips); black dress; silver necklace with white gem; brown and red ring			-Tarot card: heart with three swords -> This may suggest that W will die.
35:08-36:06	E makes A witch potion.		-E is naked and picks flowers in W's garden. E wees a deer. -E urines in a jar in the bathroom. -E makes a potion with the urine in the kitchen. She puts a used tampon in the potion. -E: "Tampons aren't gross. Women bleed and this tis a beautiful thing. Do you know that most men have never seen a used tampon?". -E puts some herbs in the potion (in a jar). She closes the jar. -E: "Part of me can be with Wayne now. Always.		-E: signature make-up look (with pink lips); beige string; silver necklace with white gem; brown and red ring:; golden slippers -Witch potion -Flowers	-CU deer -CU urine in jar		-Tampon statement: men in our current society are not familiar with the details of the female body.
36:06-39:36	Elaine prepares Wayne's grave.		-E in VO. I don't really mind death. I've buried people before. People I really care about." -E has put W in a wheelbarrow and starts digging a whole in his garden. -E in VO: "In the end we're all just compost anyway. Everything regenerates. I'd like to come back as a cat. I've been so depressed since my cat died. His name was Greymalking, but he was black and white. He was my best friend." -E takes off her dress. E lays flowers, the potion and her dress (inside out with the rainbow pattern visible) on W's grave. -"I give the rainbow to you. Right now." -E pours alcohol on the things and the grave and throws a lit match on the dress. A fire starts. -E takes a bath with fresh flowers in W's bathroom . -E drives away in W's car.	-EXT, DAY -Nature	-E: signature make-up look (with pink lips); black dress; beige string, beige bra,jaretelles; silver necklace with white gem; brown and red rings -Witch potion -Flowers			-First time E admits she has buried people before. -Meaning cat? (typical for witches)
39:36-42:04	Trish visits Elaine		-E is in her apartment painting a naked woman who killed a man with a knife and holds his heart in her hand. -Trish comes for a visit. -T: "Hey Elaine. You look gorgeous. I love what you've done with your hair." -E: "Can I offer you something? I just made some tea and cake." -E pours them some tea. -T: "So, what have you been so busy with? A man, I hope." -E: "Yes, it was a man. But it didn't work out." Flashback to E closing W's eyes after he died. -T: "I'm sorry." -E: "Yes. It's a shame and I really liked him. I thought that he was the one." E looks sad and takes abig bite of her cake. -T: "Well, maybe next time." -T tells E that she is going to be out of town for a convention and that Richard will have to tend for himself for a while. E looks interested.	-INT, DAY	-E: curly hair; green eyeshadow, eyeliner, pink lips; white laced dress, blue overall ; chocker necklace with white gem; brown and green rings -T: yellow sweater; beige pants, beige purse -Big and girly cake on the table	-CU knife with blood on it (painting) -CU red paint -CU fallen golden cup (painting) -CU white tea pot and cup with pink flower		-The cake is super girly and almost too perfect to just have made 'a cake' while also painting + E is sad and eats the cake (cliché) -Cake as comfort food (E is sad that W died)
42:04-50:04	Witches meet at the 'Live Burlesque Girls Girls Girls' club		-Some employees of the 'Live Burlesque Girls Girls Girls' club talk about a murder in town. The bartender explains there was a symbol encarved in his chest; a pentagram. -Random client: "It's them witches again. -Showgirls are dancing on the stage -Somewhere else in the clib E and B are catching up. -E: "After Jerry died, the cope wouldn't stop harassing me. They couldn't prove anything, they actually thought that I killed him. Can you believe it? Anyways, San Francisco got ot be a really bad trip after you left. That's when I remembered you had that extra apartment. <...> Trish has been lonely. And I'm getting a lot of artwork done. But I had this experience last weekend that really shook me up. <...> Well, I met this great-looking guy. Then he got really weird on me. All these emotions started flowing out of him. Then he got really sick." -B: "Well, guys can't handle their emotions too well. That's why they don't like heavy conversations. It was probably just too much for him. All the love and the great sex that you were giving him." -E: "I guess that's what it was. But I don't know." -B: "Honey, you have to be more careful. Maybe you shouldn't be messing with love spells in the first place, you know." -A male witch comes, called Gahan (G). He greets E and kisses her on her belly and breasts. E looks uncomfortable. He tries to kiss her on her lips, but E shows him her cheek. -G: "You have to be careful. Love spells never work the way you think they work. -The three witches make a sort of witch prayer. Someone in the bar yells "Go home witches!" -B: "Just ignore them. they're always giving us trouble." -E looks surprised. E: "Oh are you still teaching than?" -G: "Well, it's certainly not San Francisco. But it's not bad for a small town." -E tells which 'witch' subjects he is teaching other witches. G: "<...> And sex magic, of course." -E looks annoyed again. E: "Oh are you still teaching that?" -G: "Yes. in fact we've invited some girls tonight for a seminar about the power of sexual dancing. Dancing is such a powerful thing for women and girls." -2 young girls arrive. They are called Star (S) and Moon (M). They are the students for tonight. Gahan introduces the girls to E. -G: "I was just pointing out that dancing is a powerful thing for women and girls. We asked you to meet us here tonight so you could learn about that." G talks to the sisters. He points at the showgirl on the stage who is doing a striptease. -G: "Do you see how powerful that girl is? These men would do anything for her. Wouldn't you like to have that power yourselves?" The sisters nod. -G: "Then let us begin. All witches need to figure out where their power lies. **And we feel that a woman's greatest power lies in her sexuality. We don't view this power as satanic or anti-feminist, but as a celebration of woman as a natural creature. An earthly body, a spiritual essence, and a womb.**" The showgirl keeps dancing and the male public is watching her and enjoying her performance. -G "The whole history of witchcraft is interwoven with the fear of female sexuality. They burned us at the stake, because they feared the erotic feelings we elicited in them. Later, they used marriage to hold us in bondage and made us into servants, whores, and fantasy dolls." Both E and the sisters look sad. -E: "Never asking us what we wanted." -G: "They teach us that a normalitue human being is a hyper-rationalist, stoic male and that women's emotions and intuitions are illnesses that need to be cured. And they believe that men and women are different and that true equality lies in that difference." -E: **"We strive for male/female polarity and to regain our primal power as goddesses. We need to teach men how to love us using ways they can understand."** -G: "So goddesses, use perfume, wear high heels and make-up. Learn to dress your hair in attractive ways. Display flesh artfully, and know what to conceal. Be a mother and a lover. Stand your ground, but always let the man feel like a man." -B: "Use we magic to destroy his fear of you and you to open his heart to the floodgates of love. Only then will he begin to see you as a human being with all of your inner beauty. Then, when his heart is open to love, you may do with him what you will"	-Red curtains	-E: purple eyeshadow, eyeliner, blush, pink lips; purple dress; silver necklace with white gem; rings with gems -B: black dress with gold -Star and Moon: look very much alike: both blonde; both white dresses -Showgirl: blue sequin dress , bra and underpants	-MS showgirl who dances with men -CU red paint -CU the showgirl watching her in the background		-It's the first time we learn witches are known in this town and world and that this "town is hostile to witches". -Witches are portrayed as a minority group (// with history of minorities + // with history of witches and witch trials; women who were out of place in society, who didn't belong/weren't married/... were called witches) -Cops as patriarchical symbol -First time we see Barbara. -Barbara is like Elaine's witch-mentor. (She has more experience in these witchy love situations.) -Witches aren't equality between men and women. The idea is that women used to use their sexuality to gain power. "We strive for male/female polarity and to regain our primal power as goddesses. -The feminist theme and view is directly stated. (But maybe the other way around by letting a character (Gahan) misinterpret feminism?) -Body and womb important. -Link is made between witches burnt at stake in history and the fear of female sexuality. -Difference made between men and women in history (in the patriarchy). -The witches aren't equality between men and women. The idea is that women used to use their sexuality to gain their equality. "We strive for male/female polarity and to regain our primal power as goddesses." -Remarkable that a man (Gahan accompanied by Barbara) is explaining women how they need to behave as women. Not very feminist. -B: "Use we magic to destroy his fear of you and to open his heart to the floodgate of love. Only then will he begin to see you as a human being with all of your inner beauty." --> So the advice of the witches is to use your physical appearance to let men appreciate your true self/inner beauty. B: "Then, when his heart is open to love, you may do with him what you will." --> If the end result is to do what you want with men, is this still equality? (Because they said they wanted equality.)
50:04-54:03	Flashback to Elaine's witch ritual and rape.		-E is in her apartment and holds a picture of Jerry in her hands. She has a nostalgic look in her eyes. -J (in VO): "I love you Elaine. You know that, don't you?" Flashback to E and J being happy. -J (in VO): "I love you very much, but you need to be more careful. I saw these three times this week. And that house is a total pigsty." E puts the picture back and takes off her wig while looking at herself in the mirror. -J (in VO): "Do you know that I found an old hot dog under the bed this morning. And why don't you ever brush your hair?" E brushes her hair while watching herself in the mirror. -J (in VO): "You need to take better care of yourself and of the house. I'm embarrased to have people over. I've been really patient up until now, but you need to step up your game. -J (in VO): "I have a crazy bitch for a daughter. What? You're not crazy, but you're stupid. Which is it? Are you crazy or are you stupid? And you could lose a few pounds. You're looking a little fatty." -J (in VO): "Oh my god, elaine, you've let so much weight. You have such a hot body now." -E is laying on her bed touching herself. -G (in VO): "Don't be frightened Elaine, I would never hurt you. I'm not the big bad wolf. You need to have perfect love and perfect trust" (He is wearing a very scary mask) -Flashback to witch ritual. E takes off her robe and kneels before G. She looks scared. -The witches bind her feet and hands together and blindfold her. E: "I have two words. Perfect love and perfect trust." G rapes E during the ritual.		-E: signature make-up look (with purple eye shadow and pink lips); white lace dress and bra; (she wears a red robe in the witch ritual) -Table with attributes; picture frames of Jerry and Wayne (seems a bit like an altar) -G: red scary mask	-CU picture frame Jerry		-The marital expectations of J were too high and unrealistic. All the things E did 'wrong' are things that are way over exaggerated and wouldn't necessarily happen in real life. (E.g. A hot dog under the bed) -Mirror! (// with previous mirror scene: she takes off the wig; the fake beauty she created) (+ she brushes her hair) -The film creates the feeling that E was a totally different person before who couldn't keep her husband interested, was too fat and didn't brush her hair. (// E: "I was reborn as a witch" in beginning of film) -Unrealistic expectations of women from the men in E's life are haunting her. -Combination of G's quote ("Don't be frightened Elaine, I would never hurt you. I'm not the big bad wolf") with is scary mask shows the absurdity of men acting like they're all right while they're not treating you well. -E was raped during the witch ritual. Does the regret becoming a witch? And does she actually hate using love spells etc.? Maybe she likes having the power she has now, but regrets the way she got it? (In general: by becoming a witch; specific: by seducing men)

78

THE LOVE WITCH (2016) - WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY ANNA BILLER

		Narrative layer		Filmic layer			Symbolic layer
		Content					
DURATION in sec.	SEGMENT per scene	STORY characters, actions, time & place		MISE-EN-SCENE	SHOT COMPOSITION	CAMERA POSITION, MOVEMENTS & TECHNIQUES	THEMES & SYMBOLS
54:03-55:53	Disappearance Wayne reported at the police station.	-At the police station, sergeant Griff Meadows (GM) receives Shelley (S: the girl who was talking to W the day E met him) to hear her out about W's disappearance. G: "I saw him drive away with a strange woman near the Plaza."		-S: natural make-up; white blouse; yellow cardigan; brown skirt; pearl necklace			-Shelley and Trish are portrayed as the 'good girls', which is shown through their appearance (pastel colours like pink and yellow; no revealing clothes). They seem like the marriageable types. Their storylines are not provocative. They do not want to seduce men no matter the cost, like Elaine. -Elaine is described by shelley as "a strange woman". --> Women being judgemental about other women?
55:53-57:44	The police find Wayne's grave.	-The police and S visit W's cabin. They find rotten food and a jar with urine. -In the garden they find W's grave, the rainbow dress, the witch potion with the tampon. Police officer: "What the hell is this?" GM: "I don't know." -GM starts to dig.		-S: natural make-up; white blouse; yellow cardigan; brown skirt; brown purse; pearl necklace and bracelet	-CU white sheets with bloodstain -CU rotten breakfast with insects -CU jar with tampon		-The first thing E sees when he walks into the cabin, is the white sheets with E's period blood in it. -The olice officers do not realize what a tampon in. E was right when she said "Do you know that most men have never seen a used tampon?" --> Cliché that men aren't familiar with the reality of being a woman.
57:44-1:02:47	Richard visits Elaine.	-Richard visits E and eats cake. (I had invited him.) R:"This cake is absolutely fantastic. And what a great dinner." E: "Thank you, I enjoy cooking." They talk about Trish. E: "No one has ever loved me the way you love Trish. No one." E takes her glass of wine and almost starts to cry. R: "what about your husband?" E: "My husband never loved me. He couldn't wait to get away from me. R: "I'm sorry." R takes of this jacket. They move to the sofa. E: "Sometimes I think Trish would like to get away from me, too." E: "Poor baby. Poor, poor baby." E puts out her cigarette and pours R a drink in a very, very big glass. E: "So tell me, what turns you on?" R: "What turns me on? Wow, no one's ever asked me that before. Let me think. You know what really turns me on? Flying." E: "Flying?" R: "That's right?" R: "Yeah, flying a plane <...> being in control" E: "Oh, how fantastic." R: "It really is. it's the only time I feel really clear about things. Sometimes I look at my life and wonder how I got here. I feel like my life is slipping away and there's so many things I haven't done." E: "Like what?" R: "I've never had any sort of love affairs or gotten into any mischief. I used to watch those old Steve McQueen movies. On those westerns, when they'd shoot up a town and then go visit the local prostitutes. It sounds stupid, I know." E: "No, it doesn't. It's very sweet." R: "Really? Trish doesn't think so. She rolls her eyes when I talk like this." E: "You do?" R: "Of course. You wanna have a sordid love affair. You wanna get into some mischief." E puts on some music, starts to dance and undresses herself. R is laughing and is really happy. They kiss. R: "Who are you? What are you doing to me?" E: "I'm the love witch. I'm your ultimate fantasy."		-E: signature make-up look (with purple eye shadow and pink lipstick); black dress; golden necklace with big red gem; lots of rings with red, pink, green and purple gems;jantelles; black and red lingerie	-CU cake		-Elaine is once again showing pity to a man who doesn't really deserve pity. Richard is just wining about 'macho' men things. -Meaning Big glass? -R: "I feel like my life is slipping away and there's so many things I haven't done. I've never had any sort of love affairs or gotten into any mischief." --> The idea that men need love affairs to be happy. -Elaine is the "sexy, messed up girl" men desire. She fulfills their needs and images of women. --> Seems not very feminist, but she does it to obtain what she wants (love) and to obtain equality (after women have claimed their power over men). --> Unrealistic expectations of women are articulated here. (Although Richard is reflexive about his desires. "It sounds stupid, I know." But Elaine wants to give him his fantasy "No, it doesn't. It's very sweet." She acts of she understands him.) -Men don't want regular women. (R: "Really? Trish doesn't think so. She rolls her eyes when I talk like this.") Elaine acts of if there are women out there, like her, who do understand. (E: "That's because she doesn't understand you. I understand you perfectly.")
1:02:47-1:04:29	The policemen have a conversation.	-The policemen discuss the death of W. They say it looks like heart failure. GM: "But the toxicology report showed traces of jimsonweed also known as devil's weed, a highly toxic hallucinogenic."					
1:04:29-1:06:31	Sergeant Griff visits professor King.	-GM gives the E's jar (he found on W's grave) to professor King (K). -K smells the bottle. K: "Just what I thought. The contents indicate that it's a witch bottle. <...> Witches used to make them for protection against curses. <...> Witchcraft, long dormant in civilized place, has taken root again in cities.		-Name card "Professor King - Occult Studies"			-Meaning "witchraft dormant in civilized places"?
01:06:31- 1:10:30	Naked witch ritual and party.	-E, B and G are at a naked witch ritual and party. -E has a flashback to W dying after they had sex. -G approaches E. G: "You're looking a little tense tonight, Love. What's the matter?" E: "Nothing, just my usual roller coaster love life." -G talks about E's victims an touches he breast. E gets uncomfortable and annoyed. E: "Please don't, touch me!" -E goes to B. B: "How's it going?" E: "Back in the dating pool again." B: "What happened? I thought you were crazy about that new guy you were seeing, the married man." E: "No, I broke it off. He just became really obsessive, morose and his aura became really murky. He didn't even wanna make love anymore. He became just like a woman, crying at every little thing. There was no polarity. But I should have known. He's a Pisces."		-E: signature make-up look (with pink lipstick); red dress, big golden necklace	-CU E's mouth (eating a cookie)		-Gahn takes advantage of the women in the witch cult. -E is said that her dating life is not going well (while she is trying so hard). --> Not very feminist to put all your time in seducing men and being sad when it doesn't work out. -E gives men their ultimate fantasy in order to go close from them, but when they give that love it becomes too much for E because these men become obsessive with her and she doesn't want that.
1:10:30-1:13:06	Richard is sad.	-R wrote a letter to E that is laying on his desk. ("darling Elaine, why haven't you returned my calls? I'll die if I don't see you.") He looks tired and terrible. T and R have an argument. R cries. R has a flashback to his amazing night with E. -Trish finds the letter.		-T: pink nightgown and pink robe	-T: CU E's eyes		
1:13:06-1:14:27	Sergeant Griff visits the 'Moonrise Herbs' shop.	-In 'Moonrise Herbs' the cashier tells G that Elaine sold her witch bottles.					
1:14:27-1:19:16	E is making witch potions when GM suddenly visits her.	-GM visits E when she is making witch potions. He asks questions about W. E tells him she doesn't know him. GM steps into the smoke of the potions. GM: "Ms. Parks, are you a witch?" E: "Yes, I am. Is there a law against that?" GM: "I guess not, not unless you do something wrong." E: "Do you think that being a witch makes me evil? Capable of murder even?" GM: "No, I wasn't trying to imply..." E: "Sergeant Meadows, do you know what it's like to really suffer? You have to fight and fight until you're too exhausted to go on. Witchcraft is my religion, Sergeant. And this religion, which is older than your Christianity saved my life." GM: "Ms. Parks, I'm sorry if I offended you. I didn't realize." E: "That's all right, Sergeant Meadows." GM: "You can call me Griff." E: "Griff, I know I've seen you before. I just don't know where." E looks confused. GM: "I have that same feeling." E: "I know. You're the man in the cards. You're my fate." GM: "What do you mean, I'm your fate?" E: "I did a Celtic cross reading. For my future card, I got the knight of wands. I've always felt that if that card showed up in a future reading, I'd soon meet the man that I'm going to marry. So the man that I marry has to love animals. Do you like animals, Griff?" GM: "Why yes, I love animals. In fact, a friend of mine has a couple of horses I'm very fond of. You know, tomorrow is my day off and it's supposed to be quite nice out. Maybe I'll get away from the city and do some riding. Do you like to ride, Elaine?"		-E: signature make-up look (with purple eye shadow and pink lipstick); colourful pants and top, blue overall; golden necklace with red heart; lots of rings gems	-E: signature make-up look (with purple eye shadow and pink lipstick); colourful pants and top, blue overall; golden necklace with red heart; lots of rings gems		-"Witch' metaphor for being a woman? Both witches and women are being stigmatised by men and the patriarchy. As if you're doing something wrong just by being yourself. (-GM: "Ms. Parks, are you a witch?"; E: "Yes, I am. Is there a law against that?"; GM: "I guess not, not unless you do something wrong."; E: "Do you think that being a witch makes me evil? Capable of murder even?"; GM: "No, I wasn't trying to imply..." -Symbol/meaning of liking animals? -E thinks GM is the man she will marry.
1:19:16-1:29:59	Elaine and Sergeant Griff go horseback riding.	-Elaine and Sergeant Griff go horseback riding. They take a break. GM: "How's my girl?" E: "Am I your girl?" GM: "For today you are. You're my girl and there's nobody around to tell me otherwise." E: "Except me." GM: "And what's that supposed to mean?" E: "Nothing. Kiss me." They kiss. -They hear medieval folk music. They follow the sound and arrive at a medieval fair. The people there are celebrating the midsummer. -There is a medieval kind of theatre performance. Lots of happy couples in medieval clothes are laughing. G and B are the hosts. -There is a game/performance played where two men fight. the one who wins gets the chosen maiden as a gift. -The fair visitors sing a love song. (Love is a magical thing, love will make you feel like a queen or a king. Unicorns, rainbows, lucky charms; Await you in your true love's arms. Love is a magical thing, Mystical, physical, alchemical. We're pretending to be in love today, But pretending is also real. There's a lady in a castle, She's sad and so forlorn, When her troubadour returns and kisses her, she's all smiles and laughter, Lady, you're so beautiful, Come lie with me and be my love, I'd slay any dragon, endure any danger just to have you near me. Love is a magical thing, Mystical, physical, alchemical. With the might of our passion and the magic of our spring. We sip from goblets full of joy but when love dies all life it does destroy!") -E and GM have a mock wedding at the fair. They change into new outfits. When GM is undressing, these girls watch him and giggle. Three other girls help E undress. -The marriage takes place in the form of a ritual where the hands of E and GM are tied together. -They have dinner. E and GM are kissing and feeding each other GM (in VO): "I'm not in love. It's not that I don't have sentiment, it's just that love is soft. You need guts in this business. I've seen guys get shot to death because they fell in love and got soft inside. I want on her some day and then I would need to have a wife, but love is something else. A man can get destroyed by things like that. It's like he's not even a man anymore. I never wanna get that way." E (in VO): "When you really love him, it's like fireworks and nothing else matters. You lose all the little quirks about him. They way he slurps his cereal. The way his mouth is a little crooked. Those details about him become your whole life. Something inside you opens up like a flower. and you realize you have more love to give than you ever thought was possible. 'Cause the more you know him, the more you love him." GM (in VO): "The more you get to know a woman, the less you can feel about her. At first, she's this incredible object of mystery who fulfills all your wildest fantasies. Then she starts to reveal little flaws and after a while, just gets hard to care. Feminine ideal only exists in the man's mind. No woman could ever fulfill it. And sometimes, when she tries to love you more, give you more, you feel like you're suffocating, drowning in estrogen. The most awful feeling."		-E: signature make-up look; white shirt, beige pants, black riding boots; later during the mock wedding a white dress, white shoes, a golden crown, a golden necklace, a ring with a white gem -E's horse: white dress with golden details -GM's horse: brown	-CU E and GM's hands which are tied together		-GM has patriarchal idea of being in a relationship/dating women. (-GM: "For today you are. You're my girl and there's nobody around to tell me otherwise."; E: "Except me.; GM: "And what's that supposed to mean?") He acts as if E belongs to him. without E having a say in this. -During the mediaeval game a girl is given as a gift to the man who won the fight. --> Very patriarchal idea is linked with the Middle Ages. -When GM is changing his clothes, three girls watch him and giggle. --> Reversal of the male gaze. -Quote from the song"We're pretending to be in love today. But pretending is also real" -CU E and GM's hands which are tied together --> Now they're stuck with eachother? -GM (in VO): "I'm not in love. It's not that I don't have sentiment, it's just that love is soft. You need guts in this business. I've seen guys get shot to death because they fell in love and got soft inside. I want on her some day and then I would need to have a wife, but love is something else. A man can get destroyed by things like that. It's like he's not even a man anymore. I never wanna get that way." + "The more you get to know a woman, the less you can feel about her. At first, she's this incredible object of mystery who fulfills all your wildest fantasies. Then she starts to reveal little flaws and after a while, just gets hard to care. Feminine ideal only exists in the man's mind. No woman could ever fulfill it. And sometimes, when she tries to love you more, give you more, you feel like you're suffocating, drowning in estrogen. The most awful feeling." --> 'macho' cliché of love making you soft and not being a real man anymore. (What is even a real man? This image is constructed by society/patriarchy.) -Stereotypical image of how men think about love and women. -E: "When you really love him, it's like fireworks and nothing else matters. You lose all the little quirks about him. They way he slurps his cereal. The way his mouth is a little crooked. Those details about him become your whole life. Something inside you opens up like a flower. and you realize you have more love to give than you ever thought was possible. 'Cause the more you know him, the more you love him." --> Cliché idea of how women perceive and experience love. E suddenly seems a bit naive. --> E's and GM's thoughts and visions about love collide.
1:29:59-1:32:37	Discussion at the police station.	-One police officer has done some more research on Elaine. -PO: "Now, Elaine used to run an organic beauty store in Berkeley with her husband Jerry. Two years later they were divorced and Elaine moved to San Francisco to start dancing at a burlesque club where she got involved with a witch coven. The coven broke up after police questioning when some of its members died mysteriously. Soon after, Elaine's ex-husband died of a drug overdose shortly before he was planning to remarry. The police questioned Elaine, but they couldn't find enough to hold her. <...>" GM: "I told you, we're laying off her." -PO: "Because of orders or because you're in love with her?" GM: "Who says I'm in love with her? Get the hell of my back." GM punches his colleague in the face.					-GM: "Who says I'm in love with her? Get the hell of my back." GM punches his colleague in the face. --> Toxic masculinity. GM thinks it is wrong to be in love with him because the patriarchy has planted that idea in his head. The only way he knows how to deal with this confusion, is to use aggression.
1:32:37-1:33:47	Trish finds Richard dead.	-Trish finds Richard dead in their bathroom. He is laying in the tub. He killed himself with a razor blade.		-T: long pink night dress and gown, pink slippers	-CU T's mouth	Zoom-in T's mouth	-CU cake with red sauce dripping on it --> Symbol for blood. + Link with blood in previous scene.
1:33:47-1:38:35	Elaine and Trish meet in the 'Victorian Tea Room'	-It's the first time since R died that E and T meet. It's also the second time they go to the 'Victorian Tea Room' -The same blonde girl on the previous time is playing the harp. -T is mourning. T: "I can't help but blaming myself for what happened." E: "You can't blame yourself. You were a good wife to Richard." T: "I tried to be. I tried so hard to please him, but I should have tried harder. He wanted a certain type of woman, someone I could never be. Maybe you were right. Maybe you should give a man his fantasy. I think that was so awful when you said that. Maybe I was being naive, but I really thought he loved me for me. But now...now I wish..." E: "You have to stop torturing yourself. You have to let go." T: "Remember how he changed after my Dallas trip? I think that's when he started having that affair. Whoever she was she drove him crazy. I hated him so much for that. I wanted to kill them both. If I ever found out who she was, I would rip her to pieces. But now I see, I should have helped him. I didn't know he was going to take his own life." T is sobbing. E: "Hey, hey." T: "Enough about me. What's going on with you?" E: "Trish, I'm in love." T: "He's a detective and he's everything a woman could ever want. He's strong and handsome, smart and kind. I just know that he's the one. He even gave me this ring. I call it my magic ring. It's not an engagement ring, but I just know that he's gonna pop the question soon." T: "When we first came her, I showed you my engagement ring, remember? I can barely stand to look at it anymore. It's too painful. I'm sure he's going to ask you soon. You're going to make a beautiful bride. The first day we met, you were envious of me because I had a man and you were all alone. Now it's the reverse. Life is funny, isn't it?" T: "Trish, I'm sorry, I've gotta go. Would you like to walk out with me?" T: "No, I'd like to stay and finish my tea." E: "All right. Take care, love." E forgot her ring she showed T, so T calls E to tell her she will drop it off at her place.	-DAY, INT -Victorian interior design, almost everything is pink and white (pink carpet and tablecloths, white walls); Everything look aromantic. There is a golden harp. The tea sets are white with pink flowers. There are pink curtains.	-T: signature make-up look (with purple eye shadow); short white dress; golden necklace with pink gem; rings with gems -E: long black dress -T has a smartphone	-CU cake with red sauce		-T: long black dress. --> T's outfit is in contrast with the pink and optimistic dress code of the 'Victorian Tea Room'. -The same blonde girl on the previous time is playing the harp. --> A returning symbol. Meaning: the previous time all was well and now not anymore? So maybe E is the continuity because she (and her life) didn't really change, whereas T and her life did. -E: --> Critique on the idea that women blame themselves when their marriage go wrong (eventhough you're with two) in a relationship and not only one person is to blame). -T: "I tried so hard to please him, but I should have tried harder. He wanted a certain type of woman, someone I could never be. Maybe you were right. Maybe you should give a man his fantasy. I thought that was so awful when you said that. Maybe I was being naive, but I really thought he loved me for me. --> T has changed her mind about relationships with men. She's also being brainwashed by the patriarchy. (Because of her guilt feelings. The idea that only women are responsible for making their marriage work.) (Does she suggest that E is this ultimate fantasy? Because later in the next scene, T will try E's wig to try how it must feel to be E.) -T: "Whoever she was she drove him crazy." --> T is not very consistent in her ideas about how she could have kept her husband. On the one hand she now thinks she should have given him his fantasy. On the other hand, she thinks that the woman who gave him this fantasy drove him mad (so he killed himself.) -E is a bad friend. She seduced T's husband, lies about it and then only talks about how in love she is. -T: "He's a detective and he's everything a woman could ever want. He's strong and handsome, smart and kind. I just know that he's the one. He even gave me this ring. I call it my magic ring. It's not an engagement ring, but I just know that he's gonna pop the question soon." --> A very naive and stereotypical idea of how women think about men and love. -T: "I'm sure he's going to ask you soon." --> Strange that both T and E think it is normal to get engaged to someone yu sjust met (or even expect they would propose so soon). -T: "The first day we met, you were envious of me because I had a man and you were all alone. Now it's the reverse. Life is funny, isn't it?" --> The roles are reversed now. -Meaning:.do you really need a man? -Everything in the film is set like it's the '60s but Trish has a smartphone. --> ...
1:38:35-1:44:35	Trish goes to Elaine's apartment.	-T goes to E's apartment to bring back her ring. E is not home. T snoops around. She finds drawings and paintings with sexual actions depicted. There is lingerie laying on the table. -T enters E's bedroom to place the ring there. She puts E's make-up and wig on, while looking at herself in the mirror. Then, she also puts E's lingerie and night gown on. -Suddenly T notices picture frames of men on a table. There is also a picture of R. In the drawer she finds a paper which reads "Love Spell for Richard", a voodoo doll, a card written by R and a photo of R and E. -E comes home and over T is there. E takes a knife in her hand. T sees E walking into the room and starts hitting her. T: "Bitch, skank, whore. You'll burn for this." T takes the stuff she found of R (like the voodoo doll) and leaves. -E cries and takes a medallion in her hands. E: "Crash, crash, crash. Die, die, die."		-T: E's signature make-up look; E's pink lingerie and night gown -E: signature make-up look (with purple eye shadow); short white dress; golden necklace with pink gem; rings with gems; jantelles			-She puts E's make-up and wig on, while looking at herself in the mirror. Then, she also puts E's lingerie and night gown on. --> Mirror! + Trying to be someone else (someone more attractive/the ultimate fantasy). -T: "You bitch! You killed my husband. Bitch, skank, whore. You'll burn for this." + E: "Crash, crash, crash. Die, die, die." --> Complicated relationship between women (jealousy!)
1:44:35-1:45:41	Witch ritual to bind Elaine and Griff together.	-E, B and G attend a ritual to bind E and GM together.					
1:45:41-1:52:53	E and GM meet at the 'Live Burlesque Girls Girls' club	-E and GM meet at the 'Live Burlesque Girls Girls' club. S and M are dancing. -GM says E's DNA ic connected with W. He also says that T said E drove her husband to suicide. E: "So I was a bad girl. Are you going to punish me?" -GM takes E's cigarette out of her hand. E: "I didn't kill anyone. Wayne died of heart failure after a beautiful night of lovemaking. And Richard died because he loved me too much." E: "These men weren't used to the deep feelings of love that they were experiencing with me." GM: "Are you saying these men died of love? That's insane. What about the spells and the drugs? Are you using witchcraft had nothing to do with it?" E: "Witchcraft is just a way of concentrating energy. It can only work with what's already there. I just use sex magic to create love magic. I didn't know how strong the spells would be. Sometimes it's almost scary how strong the love gets." GM: "Love? What do you love about love? What you call love is a borderline personality disorder. Or worse." E: "Don't diagnose me. Maybe you're a narcissist who can't love. You think that I'm sick, because you've never loved like I have. I would do anything for love." GM: "That's right, you'll never get enough love. Even when a man loves you so much it kills him, it's not enough for you. You're like a bottomless hole. You stuff yourself up and do the Stepford wife thing, thinking every man is going to fall at your feet. But your creepy little sexy act, doesn't work with me. I don't love you." E: "How can you stand there and boast about being immune to love? Why does the genuine love of a woman scare you so much? You think that your way is a superior way to love? I know a lot of women who feel the way that I do. Only men make us work so hard for your love. If you would just love us for ourselves, but you won't. My ex-husband was just like you. He used to punish me by withholding his love from me. All my life I've been tossed in the garbage-except when men wanted to use my body. So, I decided to find my own power. And I found that power through witchcraft. That means that I take what I need from men and not the other way around." E: "I'm sorry Elaine. It won't work this time. I'm afraid I'm going to have to arrest you." E: "What for? Marrying a love according to my religion? Seducing a married man? I know 400 years ago you could be burned for a thing like that, but not today." GM: "No, not burned, but you'll be booked for burying Wayne Peters illegally and we'll find out more." -People in the bar overheard their conversation and are angry with E. They grab her. People: "Burn the witch! Burn the witch!" -They rip off her clothes. One man lays down on her. Other are opening their pants. GM comes to rescue her. E and GM drive off in his police car.		-E: signature make-up look (with purple eye shadow); red dress; golden necklace with red gem; rings with gems; black lingerie			-GM takes E's cigarette out of her hand. --> He wants to destroy the symbol of female emancipation???? -What's the difference between love and sex magic?
1:52:53-1:58:19		-GM is sitting on E's bed in E's apartment. He looks like he is in shock. E: "Poor baby. Poor baby. Don't worry. Everything will be okay, because I love you so much." -E: hands GM a cup but he throws it on the ground. -GM looks angry at E. -E looks scared. She puts her hands before her. Suddenly she sees a skull instead of GM's head. Then she flashbacks to W, R and I, who say they love her. -E looks in the mirror and holds a rose in her hand. -An image of GM in his medieval wedding clothes is shown GM: "I love you Elaine. I've never loved anyone but you." E is in her wedding clothes too and holds a red rose in her hand. They're at the medieval fair. A jester brings her a white horse. E sits on the horse and GM lead them away. -E is sitting on her bed with a smile, holding the knife. GM is laying dead on the bed.		-E: signature make-up look (with purple eye shadow); black nightdress; golden necklace with red gem; rings with gems; black lingerie; later signature make-up look; white dress, golden crown; pearl earrings	-CU tarot card with the heart and the three swords. -CU: heart (from the painting) -CU sword (from the painting) -CU dead man's wound		-Mirror! -GM wears (in E's imagination) the same medieval wedding clothes as during the medieval mock wedding with E. -Red rose -E has her happy end. She thinks she lives in a fairy tale. She is in love with GM.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PATRICK DUYNSLAEGHER

Short list of the questions and topics central to the interview with film critic and former artistic director at Film Fest Gent Patrick Duynslaegher on July 28th, 2020 (conducted in Dutch by Ophelia Van Wijmeersch), regarding the *femme fatale* and *film noir*.

- Definition of the femme fatale archetype.
- Can film noir be defined as a separate genre?
- Did the Hays Code have an influence on the portrayal of women in Hollywood films?
- Evolution of the neo-noir and post-noir genre.
- Female directors.