

# The Agency of the Agent in *Spectre*

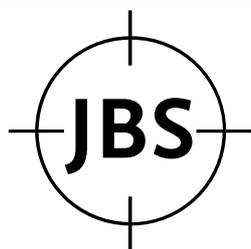
## The Heroic Spy in the Age of Surveillance

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Secret agents have a special agency that also makes them a special kind of hero.<sup>1</sup> In common understanding, heroes are defined by their capacity and willingness to perform deeds that exceed the determination, courage, endurance, and capabilities of more ordinary human beings and have more far-reaching effects. This goes hand in hand with other qualities traditionally associated with heroic agency such as autonomy and leadership. In his famous lectures on *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (published in 1841), Thomas Carlyle emphasised the “free force” of the ideal great man and the “lightning” with which he is allegedly infused (1966, 13). Carlyle deplored how this heroic force was increasingly restrained by the advance of modern civilisation. Nevertheless, the heroic has survived into the twenty-first century in the productions of popular culture as well as in real life, if not without critique and the observation that Western societies have had a post-heroic bias at least since the end of the Second World

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War.<sup>2</sup> It is in this context, which perceives heroes sceptically while also still seeking and desiring them, that the spy, the secret agent, becomes significant as a figure that highlights the precariousness of the heroic generally and for the specific cultural moment of the twenty-first century. Conversely, the question as to the heroism of secret agents sheds light on the cultural perception of spies and espionage in a given social and historical constellation. This article reads the James Bond film *Spectre* (2015) as a diagnosis of secret agency at a time when the heroic and specifically human element of this agency appears to be superseded by non-human, machine- and data-based forms of surveillance.

#### THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE SECRET HERO

Spies make ambivalent and paradoxical heroes because they have to perform their deeds secretly and often with deceit. Rather than projecting their glamour on the world, spies are spooks, as the British vernacular phrases it: spectral figures like the shady enemies they fight. Operating in and from the dark, spies are not simply admirable but always under suspicion that they might be “turned” and change their position from friend to rogue. Because of the covert nature of his or her operations, any spy might turn out to be a double agent and is therefore not naturally trusted. Secret agents are also denied the classical hero’s fame even when they are beyond suspicion and perform the most brave and noble deeds.<sup>3</sup> James Bond may be “licensed” to kill for his country like a soldier, but unlike the case of a soldier, his achievements cannot be made known to the public he serves, at least not within his fictional world. Only as fiction can we know the secret agent as hero at all, and then even this fiction notes that the heroism of secret agents is characterised by having to remain a secret. In Ian Fleming’s *From Russia with Love* (1957) the Russians are quite correct when they remark that “[t]his man Bond is unknown to the public” (2004a, 49).

So, although the spy’s agency is essentially based on seeing and watching others,<sup>4</sup> his own agency and its effects must remain unseen. The spy fails when

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2 The German political scientist Herfried Münkler (2005; 2006) has been a leading voice in the international debate about the post-heroic society.

3 See Geoffrey Cubitt’s definition of the exemplary hero as “any man or woman whose existence [...] is endowed by others, not just with a high degree of fame and honour, but with a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance – that not only raises them above others in public esteem but makes them the object of some kind of collective emotional investment” (Cubitt 2000, 3).

4 The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the origin of the word spy to the “Middle English shortening of Old French *espie* ‘espionage’, *espier* ‘espionage’, of Germanic origin, from an Indo-European root shared by Latin *specere* ‘behold, look’”.

he is observed himself, and Fleming's novels turn such occasions into moments of their hero's deepest humiliation, most poignantly when Bond is exposed to Dr. No's voyeurism in the eponymous 1958 novel (which became the first Bond film in 1962). Bond is watched through portholes (that literally function as peep-holes) during his long ordeal in the doctor's laboratory of pain, which has been designed to test how human endurance can be measured, and he perceives this observation as an indecent insult:

Suddenly, behind the glass, he saw movement. As he watched, a pair of eyes materialized from behind the electric light bulb. They stopped and looked at him, the bulb making a yellow glass nose between them. They gazed in-curiously at him and then they were gone. Bond's lips snarled back from his teeth. So his progress was going to be observed, reported back to Doctor No! (2006, 252).<sup>5</sup>

In this case, the watching and watched subjects are physically in the same space. A twenty-first-century Dr. No would be more likely to monitor Bond's painful progress on computer screens, just like much spying is now done by a broad range of surveillance technology, including all kinds of sophisticated data-collecting devices. This development has a significant impact on defining the agency of the secret agent and on the public perception of intelligence services. The new, prevention-oriented surveillance concepts and technologies that emerged after 9/11<sup>6</sup> appear to have made the agency of the secret agent even more precarious than it was at the height of the Cold War, and they have placed it at the centre of urgent societal and cultural concerns. The tension between technological surveillance and human agency in the field locates the spy in a discursive formation that entangles issues of security vs. insecurity, observation vs. privacy, secrecy/opaqueness vs. transparency, and in the wider context, totalitarianism vs. democracy. This web of discourses entails significant dilemmas and paradoxes. Terrorism, planned and executed in the dark, generates insecurity, but anxiety is also created by counter-terrorist measures that violate the privacy

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5 The theme of voyeurism is prominent in *Dr. No*. Even before Bond's torture, Dr. No is presented as personally inspecting Bond's and Honey Rider's sleeping bodies (chapter 13), and he says about his own eyes that they "see everything" (Fleming 2006a, 209).

6 For a critical discussion of the security-through-surveillance situation after 9/11 see, among many other publications, Lyon (2007 and 2015), and Lyon's introduction to Bauman and Lyon (2013). For prevention-oriented surveillance see also Grusin's concept of premediation (Grusin 2010).

of those they claim to keep safe.<sup>7</sup> In the words of Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon:

If once you could sleep easy knowing that the night watch was at the city gate, the same cannot be said of today's "security". It seems that, ironically, today's security generates forms of insecurity as a by-product – or maybe in some cases as a deliberate policy? – an insecurity felt keenly by the very people that security measures are supposed to protect (2013, 100).

Seen in this context, the title of the latest Bond film to date does not only refer to the secret criminal society SPECTRE known from Fleming's novels and early Bond films,<sup>8</sup> but also, or primarily, the joint spectres of terror and seemingly protective surveillance. The film leads right into this ethical and affective dilemma, and it negotiates the dilemma by invoking the specifically human agency of popular culture's most popular spy. Phrased in the terminology of Bruno Latour (2005), it uses the Bond figure to challenge a security/intelligence network in which the human actor is increasingly marginalised by technology.

#### **SPECTRE: THE SPY IN HEROIC ACTION**

*Spectre* continues several themes addressed in the earlier films of the Daniel Craig series. Already in Fleming's novels, Bond is a character sometimes in conflict with the regulations of his service and therefore sometimes disciplined. In the first film of the "re-booted" series,<sup>9</sup> however, he becomes expressly the object of (friendly) surveillance. After his first, spectacularly forceful performance in the pre-titles of *Casino Royale* (2006), Bond is equipped at M's orders with a subdermal GPS chip that will be able to track all his movements, quite in the spirit of the movement-focused surveillance to which we are all exposed in the twenty-first century,<sup>10</sup> in order to prevent future wild performances. *Skyfall* elaborates

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7 Hence the heroisation of whistleblowers like Julian Assange and Edmund Snowden, who are villains in the eyes of those whose secret operations they make known.

8 SPECTRE, introduced along with Blofeld in chapter 5 of Fleming's *Thunderball* (1961), is an acronym for "The Special Executive for Counter-intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge, and Extortion"; on screen, it made its first appearance in *Dr. No* (1962).

9 On the "re-booting" of Bond in *Casino Royale* see Chapman (2007, 241) and the collection of articles edited by Lindner (2009).

10 The scene is like an illustration of the following observation by David Lyon: "Security has morphed into a future-oriented enterprise – now neatly captured in the *Minority Report* (2002) film and novel – and works through surveillance by attempting to monitor what will happen, using digital techniques and statistical reasoning. As Didier

the surveillance theme within an overall narrative that restores Bond from fallen hero to hero triumphant after all official institutions and hyper-modern technology have failed to eliminate the threats to which Britain is exposed in the twenty-first century, notably the villain Silva's cyber-terrorism. Thus, as Marouf Hasian also notes, "[p]art of the resonance of this film comes from fact [sic] that it reflects and refracts an Anglo-American form of imperial nostalgia that harkens back to a time when individual spies and other social agents really could make a difference" (2014, 572).<sup>11</sup> *Skyfall's* argument against surveillance technology and for the individual hero is highlighted by the fact that Bond's – metaphorical and literal – fall in the opening sequence is caused by technological surveillance in the first place: M surveils Bond's man-to-man operation in Turkey via satellite from London and interferes with almost fatal consequences for her agent. M's act of surveillance, in turn, is occasioned by a strained relationship between the government and its intelligence service. MI6 is meant to be turned into a transparent organisation that fits the public's understanding of a modern democracy as a political system based on trust, not least in trustworthy actors and institutions. The idea that the public's security should depend on a community of secret agents is uncomfortable in such a system, as Gareth Mallory (M's later successor as head of MI6), who is meant to supervise the implementation of change in MI6, spells out: "We're a democracy. We're accountable to the people we're trying to defend. We can't keep working in the shadows. There are no more shadows". However, as M makes very clear during her government inquest, the ideal of democratic transparency is undermined by the logic of an enemy who operates incalculably from the shadows and through individual terrorist acts: "Our enemies are no longer known to us. They do not exist on a map [...]. They're not nations. They're individuals. Our world is not more transparent now. It's more opaque. It's in the shadows. That's where we must do battle. So, before you declare us irrelevant, ask yourselves, how safe do you feel?" Immediately after this vindication of secret agency, the villain invades the room of the inquest, right in the middle of Whitehall, and proves M right – as does Bond, a man from the shadows himself, who has been in pursuit and can prevent the worst.

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Bido points out, such security operates by tracking 'everything that moves (products, information, capital, humanity)'. So surveillance works at a distance in both space and time, circulating fluidly with, but beyond, nation-states in a globalized realm" (Bau-man and Lyon 2013, 5).

11 In a similar vein, see also James Smith's (2016) discussion of *Skyfall* as an ideologically conservative depiction of the British secret state in the twenty-first century.

*Spectre* is in many respects a direct sequel to *Skyfall*.<sup>12</sup> It has the same retrospective and nostalgic note,<sup>13</sup> and again a significant part of the action is set in the British capital and its government district. Once more, the agency of the field agent comes under attack only to be vindicated in the end. But *Spectre*'s concerns with democracy and transparency are more immediately linked with surveillance since the power of its villain Franz Oberhauser, later to be revealed as Ernst Stavro Blofeld, Bond's great nemesis, seems to be based exclusively in hyper-modern devices for observation and data gathering. The film addresses the uncanny power of such surveillance with reference to the asymmetrical distribution of transparency that is described in the following sentences:

Put very simply, new surveillance practices, based on information processing [...] permit a new transparency in which not just citizens but all of us, across the range of roles we play in everyday life, are constantly checked, monitored, tested, assessed, valued and judged. But the converse is clearly not true. As the details of our daily lives become more transparent to the organizations surveilling us, their own activities become less and less easy to discern. As power moves with the speed of electronic signals in the fluidity of liquid modernity, transparency is simultaneously increased for some and decreased for others (Bauman and Lyon 12).

In *Spectre*, it is the British government itself that experiences this decrease in transparency because it has put its security/surveillance measures in the hands of a man who secretly cooperates with the villain. What unfolds alongside the main battle between Bond and Blofeld is therefore another one between M, the champion of democratic government, and Max Denbigh, or "C", the new head of the Centre for National Security in which the two national intelligence services, MI5 and MI6, have just been merged. It is also a battle of generations and values in which the respective generations believe.<sup>14</sup> It is C's mission "to bring British intel-

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12 Also with respect to authorship, since *Spectre* had the same team of writers and the same director, Sam Mendes.

13 *Spectre* also leads into Bond's childhood and so gives his relationship with the villain a personal note of envy for a (step)father's attachment.

14 That M is a representative of the same "old-fashioned" generation as Bond, and is associated with the same English values, is emphasised in a scene that refers to the scene in *Skyfall* that shows Bond, next to the younger Q, in front of Turner's painting of the Old Téméraire. The restaurant in *Spectre* where Money Penny and Q come to look for M when they begin their underground fight against C is one of the oldest in London: Rules was founded in 1798, and M is sitting in front of a painting that shows

ligence out of the Dark Ages into the light.” He works for Blofeld not for personal profit but because he believes in all-encompassing surveillance, which makes him, in Bond’s eyes, as dangerous as Blofeld: “Visionaries. Psychiatric wards are full of them”. As an agent of hyper-modernisation, C intends to abolish the Double-O section: “The Double-O programme is prehistoric. [...] You can’t really tell me that one man in the field can compete with all of this running around out there with his licence to kill”. Instead, he has turned his new centre into a security-through-surveillance machine where human agency has no place because the data-gathering is largely automated. That this future for the intelligence/security services is a “spectre” is made explicit in the following dialogue between C and M, and its references to ghosts and nightmares:

C: “When it goes online, this building will be the most sophisticated data gathering system in history. The world’s digital ghost, available 24/7.”

M: “George Orwell’s worst nightmare.”

This exchange takes place in C’s new building. It is located demonstratively opposite the ruin of the SIS building near Vauxhall Bridge that was blown up by the villain in *Skyfall* and is now prepared for demolition. When Bond and Tanner pass the ruin in a boat on the Thames, Tanner refers to it as a “poor old girl” that is cheaper to knock down than to rebuild. While the old building had the solidity of a fortress or Aztec temple, and a significant underground section in which the final scenes of *Spectre* take place, the new Centre for National Security is an example of post-millennial glass-and-steel architecture that seems to symbolise the transparency of a democratic government institution; this is also suggested by the fact that this building does not appear to have a secret underground section because all interior shots in which it features are located in the upper floors. In fact, however, the opposite is the case since the Centre was not financed by the government but, as C reveals to M, “benefactors mostly, from the private sector” – that is, Blofeld and SPECTRE. A democratically elected government has allowed privatisation of one of its most sensitive institutions and so opened its gates to a secret criminal organisation. The government has put its own intelligence services and itself at risk. As a result, the glass walls of C’s new security building paradoxically hide a conspiracy, and transparency has become opaque.

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an old ship. Within their own generation, Moneypenny and Q are a positive foil for C, ready to defend their service and democracy.

Furthermore, its transparent walls can be related to the fact that “[t]he architecture of electronic technologies through which power is asserted in today’s mutable and mobile organizations makes the architecture of walls and windows largely redundant” (Bauman and Lyon 4), and this links C’s building with Blofeld’s surveillance headquarters in the North African desert, where glass walls are also a prominent architectural feature.<sup>15</sup>

How C’s data-gathering machine apparently dominates human agency is stressed by the fact that C is spying on M’s agents even before he has managed to oust them from their job. He undermines the secrecy, the necessary opaqueness, of the intelligence service and so discredits it as an effective organisation. This is a transgression of trust to which M reacts with incredulous outrage.<sup>16</sup> For people like C, there is no idea of trust: “We watch everyone”, he says, just like SPECTRE and Blofeld watch everyone. Bond, by contrast, explicitly tells Money Penny that he knows he can trust her by “instinct”, and he repeatedly demands from other people, Q and especially Madeleine Swann, that they trust him instinctively too; those that do are indeed protected and saved. With his demand to be trusted because he – in contrast to villains like Blofeld and C – is trustworthy, Bond confirms his status as a human hero, because trust is an intuitive human relationship and a human need. As Geoffrey Hosking notes in his study of trust: “We all rely on most other people doing their duty and acting ethically in order to lead anything like a normal life. Trust is a vital ingredient in this web of interdependence” (2014, 4). To Hosking, this should also hold for people’s relationship to institutions: “If we cannot trust our public institutions to work properly, then the quality of social life deteriorates” (ibid.). However, as Hosking elaborates further, in Western societies

the institutions in which we place our trust have become much more distant from us and are also more opaque. We know little about them and have no close relationship with them. [...] trust has become more impersonal, more

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15 Other examples of the film’s complex use of glass metaphors include the glass walls of the clinic in the Alps where Madeline Swann tries to hide from SPECTRE’s all-seeing eyes. After Q has come to see Bond in the clinic and leaves it with the task to find more information about SPECTRE, he is seen in a glass gondola with his notebook, already observed by one of Blofeld’s henchmen.

16 Significantly, the agent surveilled in this particular instance is Money Penny, who is in her home, using her private notebook to provide Bond with information on SPECTRE. Such scenes recall that “[s]urveillance is not just practiced on us, we participate in it” (Lyon 2015, 3).

fragmentary, and more instrumental. [...] it is based less on close personal relationships, it encompasses less of our life, and it is directed more at particular rather than general ends. In addition, because we entrust so many of our risk avoidance strategies to government and to large financial institutions, the practices of bureaucrats, accountants, and lawyers determine much of the routine of our lives, imposing on us forms to fill in, reports to write, and targets to meet. Those officials also tend to impose very intrusive levels of monitoring, designed to eliminate all risk; in doing so, they arouse resentment and probably deepen distrust. In recent years, in the West in general (and the UK in particular), we have become aware that our systems of trust are in serious jeopardy – not yet terminal, but certainly precarious (199-200).

With his urge to watch everyone, C seems to embody this erosion of trust, just as he despises democracy per se and instead supports a system based in sheer power: “Take a look at the world. Chaos. It’s people like you [M], paper-pushers and politicians [...] too spineless to do what needs to be done. So I made an alliance to put the power where it should be. And now you want to throw it away for the sake of ‘democracy.’ Whatever the hell that is”. This disdain for democracy concurs with the fact that, as Hosking notes, “once generalized trust declines to a certain point, then it plunges rapidly and damagingly” so that people “reconfigure their trust at a lower level, placing it in the leader of their party, faction, religious or ethnic movement”. The final result is “a Hobbesian world, in which social peace can only be preserved, if at all, by an overbearing authoritarian government” (4). M, as an old-fashioned man who still knows what democracy is, is aware of the fact that there is no going behind surveillance in a digitised world. Surveillance is “a fact of life”, but M insists that it must be used with discretion: “how you use the information” and “who is using it” are essential to him. At the same time, he holds up the importance of the agent in the field because this human agent is capable of autonomous decisions, and especially ethical decisions, on the spot: “Have you ever had to kill a man, Max? Have you? To pull that trigger you have to be sure. Yes, you investigate, analyse, assess, target. And then you have to look him in the eye. And you make the call. And all the drones, bugs, cameras, transcripts, all the surveillance in the world can’t tell you what to do next. A licence to kill is also a licence not to kill”.

By the time he says this, M is already familiar with C’s plans for global surveillance, the Nine Eyes programme (an extrapolation from the Five Eyes intelli-

gence alliance between the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada the scope of which was unmasked by Edward Snowden). In the film, *Nine Eyes* is the merger of the most important intelligence services around the world which C advertises during a meeting in Tokyo, explicitly evoking the logic of premeditation that characterises surveillance practices in the present:

“Do not let them tell you we need less surveillance. We need more, much more. I say again, the Nine Eyes committee would have full access to the combined intelligence streams of all member states. More data, more analysis. Less likelihood of terrorist attacks. Ladies and gentlemen, it is time for the security services of the world to unite. Alone, we are weak. Together, we’re a global power”.

A disapproving M is quite obviously pleased when South Africa does not agree to join *Nine Eyes* and C’s motion to institute it is therefore not passed. “Democracy” is M’s simple comment. But democracy is then shown to succumb to global power when a terrorist attack on Cape Town instigated by SPECTRE forces the South Africans (like other countries before them) to join the alliance. Global security-through-surveillance measures drive local politics into the hands of a global criminal organisation whose aim is world domination.<sup>17</sup> It is telling that the meeting of SPECTRE that Bond infiltrates takes place in Rome, once the capital of a fascist regime, and that the success of the organisation is reported by a woman in the German language, culminating in the sentence “Wir stehen vor dem Sieg”. This sentence connotes the concept of *Endsieg* and its Third Reich associations more obviously than the English subtitles: “The impending completion of the Global Surveillance initiative will mean that our capability is second to none and now is the moment for aggressive expansion. [...] Our increased surveillance capability means government intelligence agencies are easily counteracted. We are winning”.

That organisations like SPECTRE are not winning in the end is guaranteed by Bond as the heroic field agent, but also by M, whose commitment to democracy turns him into a resistance fighter supported by a small group of his most trusted agents. Democracy is revenged when, in the final encounter between M and C in the new CNS building, a bullet from M’s gun destroys the glass wall and

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<sup>17</sup> See Lyon again, who notes that “power and politics are splitting apart. Power now exists in global and extraterritorial space, but politics, which once linked individual and public interests, remains local, unable to act at the planetary level” (Bauman and Lyon 2013, 5).

C falls to his death, right on the logo of his treacherous vision for national security. This is even topped by Blofeld's end on Westminster Bridge, in front of the mother of democratic parliaments. Because Bond refrains from killing Blofeld, he is arrested by M, whose authority is restored together with that of the Double-O section, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government and under the Special Measures Act of 2001.

Before that can happen, *Spectre* elaborates its critique of unlimited surveillance by clearly linking this kind of surveillance with its main villain figure. One of the most impressive visualisations of this association occurs in Blofeld's headquarters in the desert, where Blofeld takes Bond and Madeleine Swann, now his prisoners, to his surveillance centre, which is equipped with hundreds of screens. "What is this place", asks Madeleine, and Blofeld answers: "Information. Information is all, is it not?" The visit is meant to demonstrate Blofeld's omnipotence since he can watch everything in real-time – including M's announcement in London that the Double-O programme has been closed down by the Home Secretary. On a screen within the screen, M is seen and heard pronouncing to his section: "The French have a saying, 'It's the fate of glass to break.' Well maybe it's the fate of spies to just disappear. But with any luck, we leave something behind". In the end, the French saying will prove true in another sense, as has already been shown. And at least verbally, Bond challenges Blofeld's arrogance even in his own headquarters, claiming that he has seen through all his plans and exposing Blofeld as a mere voyeur who is "too scared to join in". At this moment the villain is still in a position to counter that the hero was not infallible and that Bond never saw that Blofeld was behind all the traumatic losses in his life. This exchange between hero and villain emphasises once more the centrality of the motif of seeing and watching in the whole film, and how it is connected with the different agencies of hero and villain: If Blofeld is the voyeur who lets others do the dirty work for him, Bond is the man who "spies" and then acts himself according to what he has seen. After the final showdown with a lot of heroic action on Bond's part, the villain is literally on the ground, and Bond can prove what M has said earlier about the advantage of the human field agent over surveillance machines. After a long look at Blofeld, he makes the decision not to kill him: "Out of bullets, and besides I have something better to do". This brings the film back to its spectacular opening scene in Mexico where Bond, after careful watching, made the on-the-spot decision not to kill Marco Sciarra (at least preliminarily) and instead to explode a bomb that would otherwise have killed thousands of innocent people. Back in Whitehall, Bond is disciplined for this heroic but unau-

thorised performance and injected with a tracking device again – not with a GPS chip as in *Casino Royale*, however, but even more intrusively with nanotechnology that cannot be as easily removed from his body as a chip. In the end, M orders Q to delete all data files collected by the “smart blood” so that Bond will not be endangered by the villains’ surveillance: “He’s on his own”, he says.

Bond’s being “on his own” and the force with which he can act autonomously, are emphasised throughout the film, not only in its action sequences. Individual shots virtually stage Bond as a solitary character: the credit sequence that shows his naked torso against a backdrop of light, the moment when he walks up the steps to SPECTRE’s meeting in Rome, or the moment when he is in a boat on an Alpine lake on his way to Mr White. All these images are visually effective and emotionally charged. They have a verbal equivalent in descriptions of Bond. Mr White refers to him as “a kite dancing in a hurricane”; and Madeleine asks Bond: “Is this really what you want? Living in the shadows? [...] Always alone?” Bond’s autonomy and integrity even resist Blofeld’s high-tech torture with brain probes that are meant to penetrate to the inside of his head in an ultimate violation of his subjectivity and privacy. Despite his suffering, Bond’s control over himself and capacity to save himself and Madeleine remain unimpaired. The villain’s methods of observation and penetration may have become more technologically sophisticated since the days of *Dr. No*, but Bond remains the hero he always was.

The Bond franchise is meant to entertain, but it also always performs cultural work and the films in particular negotiate themes that concern their respective audiences. *Spectre* engages with the anxieties created by increased insecurity and by surveillance and its ambiguous functions in the contemporary world. The film shows a double spectre of globally concerted terror and globally concerted intelligence measures whose promise of maximum security is devious because now everything can be made visible even where it should not. Unchecked, largely automated surveillance undermines the values of trust and individual rights on which democracy is built. It is the personal heroism of Bond and M, human actors, that defeats the villains and holds up the tenets of democracy. One can criticise this as too simplistic and conservative a message, but it does articulate contemporary audiences’ concerns about how their security can be ensured with an amount of intelligence that does not compromise personal and civic rights and the principles of democratic society. *Spectre* ultimately evokes confidence in a government served by men like Bond and M who know where surveillance has to have its limits. As a cultural signifier, James Bond has always

“consisted in his ability to co-ordinate [...] a series of ideological and cultural concerns that have been enduringly important in Britain since the late 1950s” (Bennett and Woolacott 1987, 18). It seems timely that a Bond film released in 2015 should make a point about surveillance and its risks for democracy, not only in Britain.

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