

RECYCLED WOMAN AND THE POSTMODERN AESTHETIC

Luc Besson's *Nikita* (1990)

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Nikita: contexts – a film in the making

Nikita was Besson's thank-you film to his audiences for saving *Le Grand bleu* (1988) from oblivion. *Nikita* was released in a shroud of secrecy (much like *Le Grand bleu*). Besson wanted to privilege his public, not the journalists. Thus, he argued that the film should go out on general release and not be premiered for special audiences such as the film critics.¹ This attitude did not endear him to a great majority of the reviewers, who reproached him for playing guru ('porte-parole') to the youth audience.² However, as before, his new film was a great success with audiences (it netted a 3.7 million audience in France alone, 3 million in the USA).³

Thanks to the success of *Le Grand bleu*, producing *Nikita* was relatively easy. Gaumont agreed to finance *Nikita* without seeing a script. *Nikita* cost 39 million francs (the average for 1990 was 20 million francs) and was a Franco-Italian co-production between Besson's own company (Les Films du Loup), Gaumont and Cecchi Gori Group Tiger Cinematographica. *Nikita* was the first scenario Besson scripted by himself without his usual entourage of scriptwriters. In terms of the music, as always, Besson stayed with Eric Serra, even though he did not particularly like the score to the opening credits of the film (Besson 1992, 165). As for casting, to his unofficial ensemble of players (Reno, Anglade, Bouise) he added the talents of Tchékya Karyo (a choice not liked, initially, by the producer at Gaumont, Patrice Ledoux) and Anne Parillaud. After three successful films with Carlo Varini as director of photography, Besson, seeking a new challenge, chose to work with Thierry Arbogast. Besson's and Arbogast's common interest in effects with natural light and simple lighting had a considerable impact on the look of *Nikita*, demarcating it visually from Besson's earlier films. Besson wanted a fairly weak lighting effect, causing problems with shooting beyond a

certain focal length: after one and a half metres there is a loss of depth. Consequently much of *Nikita* was shot in medium-close-up shots and, given that the film is in Cinemascope, the effect on the image is to bring it very strongly up against the screen in terms of spectator perception – affording the image a certain inherent violence of its own.

Nikita tells the story of a nineteen-year-old junkie who gets arrested in a police raid during which she kills a policeman. Instead of life imprisonment she is given a 'second chance' by the State Secret Service Police for whom she 'agrees' to become a killer-agent. It was intentionally a *film noir*, and for the first time Besson had someone definitely in mind for the lead role, Anne Parillaud, who until then was mostly remembered for working opposite Alain Delon. When *Nikita* was released, Parillaud went from bimbo-starlette to ferocious androgyne, and finally to lethally armed female. She was no longer 'Delon's girl'. Press release after press release commented on the fact that Besson had become her Pygmalion and transformed her.⁴ And, as if to confirm this regeneration, she won the 1991 César award (the French equivalent of the Oscar) for the best actress. Earlier, in 1990, she had won Italy's Donatello award for best foreign actress. The film itself won best foreign film award at the same ceremony.

Besson was pleased to have acted as her Pygmalion. However, it was a curious Pygmalionization since Parillaud was trained up in the opposite of ladylike good manners. She had to toughen up: learn judo, take lessons in shooting and gun maintenance. She was sent to acting classes to lower her voice and lose her 'titi parisien' accent. She also went to dancing and singing classes. A whole year of strengthening her body went by before she was shown the script and told the role she was to play. It is well documented that Besson pushes Jean Reno, his friend and fetish star, into strenuous training before he plays a part in his films, but this was the first time he had demanded it of a woman actor.

Nikita was shot in chronological sequence. Besson felt that it would allow for an authentic sense of Nikita's evolution from a teenage punk to a thirty-something woman. It was also important to shoot in continuity, he believed, so that Anne Parillaud could let herself go completely as the punk (Besson 1992, 14). As a result of shooting his film this way, however, it was not until he got to the end of his shooting schedule (sixteen weeks) that he realized that the ending he had scripted did not work.⁵ In the first version, Marco and Nikita have been together for five years. 'Officially' she has been given three years' leave to 'get a life' with Marco. However, the Secret Police come to her apartment to 'arrest' her. She makes her escape, and it is Marco who dies in a shoot-out. She sets up a meeting with the Chief, and arming herself to the nines she blasts him away. She disguises herself as a journalist and gets herself arrested for breach of the peace. Bob (seeing through the disguise) jumps into the car and kisses her goodbye. She makes her escape, and rediscovers herself as the punk of the beginning, but this time it is only a

disguise: she now has light and fight in her eyes so all resemblance to her former self is pure happenstance (Besson 1992, 85). She holes up for two weeks in a police station as a missing person and then leaves.

This ending (which the American 1992 remake, *Point of No Return*, only partly adopts) seems far more empowering of Nikita than the one we actually see – where she just disappears. According to Besson the triangular relationship between Nikita, Bob and Marco came over more strongly in the film than it had done on paper so he could not stick to the original ending which, in his words, was to be a Ramboesque firework display (Besson 1992, 15). The curve of violence of the original version went against the sentimental curve and produced an imbalance, he claimed. This claim, however, says two things. First, that the love-triangle/story is more important than the trajectory Nikita might have been on. Second, that Nikita must remain agent and, therefore, victim of the state and not subject of her own violence (as she was at the beginning of the film). Nor is she allowed agency in the form of violence-as-retribution (as the first end-version had her). Instead, the Nikita we are left with is one weakened by love and who must pay the price for it by disappearing off the surface of the earth. In this respect, the film is consistent with the conventions of the *film noir* it purports to emulate which has the female threat ultimately safely contained. The original ending, Ramboesque or not, would not have left any ambiguity whatsoever as to woman as agent of her own destiny.

Nikita: a first set of readings

Nikita is a film in three episodes about a teenage junkie who 'dies' to get 'reborn'. The narrative is *Pygmalion* recycled into the era of technologies of regeneration with Bob-the-father as the new Pygmalion – the embodiment of state surveillance and terror – who rebirths the dead Nikita as an infant, a commodification, a fiction even of the state. Nikita's (sexual/Oedipal) trajectory during these three episodes can be described as entirely circular. In the first episode she goes from child to woman; in the second she is represented as ageing desire; and in the third she devolves from woman back to child. Throughout the three episodes she is the victim of the state, always on demand and under command from the male voice (either embodied or disembodied) of the state (patriarchal law).⁶

When we first meet Nikita, her language and her bodily posture demarcate her as infantile, as pre-Symbolic. She sits foetus-like under the counter in the Chemist's shop and bleats out 'give me more' – as a child would to a nurturing mother. She calls out to her mother twice as she is administered, by men of the state, what she imagines to be a lethal dose to eliminate her. In fact the dose is to eradicate her past, to allow her to be reborn again, to be remade in the image/model of man (Bob-the-father). The dose starts the process of taming the wild animal she was (who blew off a policeman's head).

However, Nikita is a slow learner: in the totally male environment where she is taught 'male' things to do – karate, computer technology – she still acts the child ('again' she says when learning computer skills; she plays pranks – putting a live mouse in a box). She is still the naughty, subversive child who outhits the karate teacher, attempts to run away, shouts abuse, but then, counter to type, performs a ballet dance. All this is done under the ever watchful eye of Bob-the-creator/father.⁷

Nikita is of father born, but she is of 'mother' made woman. Amande (Jeanne Moreau), another woman caught in the web of state surveillance and terrorism (but seemingly resigned to her fate), teaches Nikita about sexual difference. She holds up the mirror to Nikita. Now that she has learnt this difference, Bob becomes the first object of her desire – a desiring readily colluded with by Bob, as is exemplified by the celebration of her first birthday in internment, when he offers her some cake off his knife. Slowly, over three years, Nikita is modelled into womanhood. But an ambiguous edge is always held, culminating in her first mission. Believing she is to be taken out for her birthday and enter into the real world (the Symbolic order of things) she goes with Bob to the Train Bleu restaurant. She is now 'as-woman'. However, her dress-code – black slinky dress, spiky heels, gloves (delivered upon her body by Bob and Amande) – warn us that she is a wandering fetish. In other words, she has forcibly joined the sisterhood of phallic women as depicted in *film noir*. Things do not improve when she unwraps her present only to discover Bob has given her a gun. This is no birthday (celebration of identity), this is her initiating ceremony/mission – a passage of rites into male/phallic technology. This whole scene represents a double denial by Bob of her sexual difference (first the dress-code, then the gun). Thus, in effect Nikita is still being denied entry into the Symbolic order of things (denied her sexual difference) – a denial that is further exemplified within this mission, first, by her foetus positioning in the kitchen (as she tries to escape) and, second, by the fire-bomb that forces her to propel herself down the waste-chute and run 'home' (down the fallopian tubes and back to the womb).

By the end of this first episode what is she? 'An element of the centre', she is told; hardly a very secure identity. None the less she is ready, she is told, to leave home and she kisses Bob-the-father goodbye. From the death/rebirth/learning scenario of her three years in state captivity, Nikita apparently emerges into the Symbolic order of things as a socialized human being. But we should beware of this assumption for she has been socialized as a killer-agent ('element', even) by and for the state. She is in the world to implement her 'education' and she has two new names. She is Marie and her code-name is Joséphine. As Marie, her first false identity, she is putatively a nurse – this is a cover-up, a masquerade of course for what she truly performs as a job: state assassin, code-name Joséphine. She is no longer Nikita (incidentally a Russian name for a boy), a name she had randomly chosen for herself (possibly off an Elton John song of that name) – with all the connota-

tions of gender ambiguity/hybridity that the name holds. She is now named by others, her naming has been recycled: she is one picked identity replaced by another, this time not of her own arbitrary choosing but of deliberate state intervention. The names Marie and Joséphine themselves are not innocent. As Marie she is the Virgin Mary; she is also as we know masquerading as a nurse. As Joséphine she is named after Napoléon's lusty wife, a sexually voracious woman (if history is to be believed). Under this name Nikita is also the state assassin. The number of identities circulating around Nikita (already an indeterminate identity at that) mean that we never know who she is and we must assume that she too does not know who she is. All names ascribed to her are implicitly ambiguous, pointing to a duplicity (she is doubly mirrored in all her namings) where no subjectivity can seep out and affirm itself. 'La Femme Nikita' is a simulation, not real but hyper-real. Where is the real Nikita?⁸

In this second episode, Nikita finds love. So to all appearances she seems to be safely set on her Oedipal trajectory. She picks up Marco in a supermarket – seemingly she acts as agent/subject of desire. But, as with her subversiveness in the first episode, any sense of self-empowerment is quickly whipped away. In the first episode, we recall, she is shot in the knee, Bob clips her wings. This time she is swiftly brought into line and rebecomes an agent (not subject but object, an element of use) for the state, sent to execute orders. There is a second, more subtle and disruptive, way in which Nikita has her subjectivity denied her. In this instance it concerns Bob's supplying a narrative of his own (under the guise of Uncle Bob) for Nikita. Bob invents Matie as the virginal Mary, the little girl he knew in her 'robe blanche'. He gives her a past, a life story (to satisfy Marco's increasing curiosity about the woman he lives with but about whom he knows nothing). The past is not her past, the present is not her present. She is the fictionalized commodity of the state constructed in the words of Bob. She is, moreover, Bob's fetish and fetishized assassin – already evident from her first mission but made even more so in her third mission which he sends her on and which takes her to Venice. In that mission she handles a telescopic rifle that is as big as, if not bigger than, she is. In that mission, dressed only in her underwear and looking more like a bimbo than a fully fledged desiring woman, she executes (under orders from the male voice of the state) the target, a woman.⁹ Female-on-female violence under orders from the disembodied male voice – a fairly disempowering position for women to occupy, I would suggest.¹⁰

By the end of episode two there is also an intimation that Bob is not the only male involved in 'forming' Nikita, that is, in constructing her subjectivity. Marco hints, in Venice, that he is aware that Nikita is under some duress to do certain things (he appears to be 'in the know'). A little later, he asks her who taught her to smile like she does, and Nikita replies that it is he, Marco. Well we know this is not true. It was Amande who taught her to smile ('smile for those who look at you'), educating her in the 'ways of women'. But



Nikita – Nikita (Anne Parillaud).

the point is that Nikita did not learn that for herself any more than she learnt anything else for herself. Her subjectivity, sense of identity, is constantly formed from outside of her self by others. She is then the object, not the subject, of the narrative. The point is also, if Marco is in the know – and the end of the film confirms that he knows a lot – then whose narrative are we witnessing? Who is the speaking subject? Bob? Marco? Both?

The third and final episode of the film is more or less given over to the preparation and carrying out of Nikita's last mission. In exchange for successfully completing this mission, Bob promises that she can have a few years' off. Nikita is given *carte blanche* and five months to prepare the mission: to gain access to and film the secret files held in an Eastern European (proto-Communist) embassy. Bob tells her she can do it her way, that he wants a 'light touch not brute force'. To all appearances she has gained her spurs and is to be in control, acting independently from and of the father (Bob). Of course this is a false independence since Bob is ineluctably linked to the state as a high-ranking agent of the Secret Police Service and the mission is in the service of the State Secret Service. Furthermore, Nikita is still an element within the Secret Service obeying orders. Stage one, the 'abduction', seduction and drugging of the ambassador, is successful (small surprise given



Nikita – above: Anne Parillaud and Luc Besson; below: Besson, the eye of the camera.

Nikita's training by Amande). Stage two, preparing to infiltrate the embassy, goes horrendously wrong. A 'cleaner', Victor (Jean Reno), is sent in by the state forces and he liquidates everybody except Nikita, who has to cross-dress as the ambassador to enter the embassy and gain access to the files. Nikita is now on a failure curve that will reduce her to oblivion, and the violence of the botched mission recalls the very brutal and bloody carnage of the opening of the film.

What do we make of Nikita's escape? Can it be read positively as it is by many of the target youth audience? I believe that if we unpick the above we cannot so easily go with a positive reading.¹¹ For a start, the fact that the male 'cleaner' has to come in and 'tidy up' Nikita's mess should warn us that a woman cannot be in charge of male technology. She can be an extension of it, as indeed Nikita was in her Venice mission, but not in control of it. Second, when she cross-dresses, she is again behaving transgressively, which patriarchy cannot tolerate. To gain access to the embassy she has to pass as male. Once she is in the embassy it is as if Nikita has completely forgotten that she has always been under surveillance and that here she will continue to be under the camera's eye. Why does she forget? Because she is passing as male – and, as we know, in *film noir*, it is not the male but, typically, the female who is the object of male scrutiny. To pass as male and not be scrutinized means to successfully masquerade as the phallus. But this cannot be – because to do so would be to outwit/transgress patriarchal law. And if we think for a moment as to how cross-dressing in mainstream cinema is represented then we can begin to see what is going on in *Nikita*. In mainstream cinema the male who cross-dresses never fully gives up his phallus, his sexuality. We are always aware that 'it' is there under the dress (e.g. *Tootsie*, 1982; *Mrs Doubtfire*, 1993). However, when the female cross-dresses, sexuality has to be repressed (both hers and the one she is masquerading as). She hides hers in dressing as male and must also repress the pretence of male sexuality because of the threat to the Symbolic order of things that homosexuality presents. For a woman to cross-dress, then, implies that she returns to the pre-Symbolic, back to the pre-sexual infant-child.

Nikita's momentary amnesia about her status as a woman under constant surveillance suggests that she is assuming a sexual identity she cannot possibly sustain. It suggests also that she has forgotten that she is not her own creation but that of Bob, who has, as we know, already commodified her as fetish (from the moment of her first mission). She cannot make herself fetish, nor can she make herself phallus. She cannot possibly, therefore, cross-dress convincingly, which is again why she is exposed by the surveillance cameras. She completes the mission, yes, but she has learnt that she can never assume her own identity, never make herself over and so her only choice is to not be, to disappear. The question remains, is it her choice, is it one she exercises or is her disappearance an inevitable consequence of her transgressive behaviour? In other words, is she punished for her attempts to take control of

and become the male phallus? As the next section will go on to argue, the answer is a complex one.

Nikita the cyborg cop – recycled woman and the postmodern aesthetic

One of the ways of interpreting of the term *postmodern* is to say that we are currently living in a postmodern age, an age that comes after modernism (loosely the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth). What does that mean? That we come after the age of man's (*sic*) belief in the power of human reason to understand the world (man as transcendental subject) and of man's belief in progress, in science and technology to implement change. In coming after that age, we are in a position either to challenge what was done in the name of modernism and question the belief in the transcendental subject *or* merely look back at the past.

According to Fredric Jameson (1984, 53–94), we are post-everything: post-history, post-colonial, post-modern and so on. Indeed, since the 1950s we have been living in a post-industrial era which has become increasingly one of post-industrial decay. This is the world which Besson so faithfully records in his films as early as *Le Dernier combat* and right through to *Le Cinquième élément* (1997). In *Nikita*, there is something so aptly postmodern about reconstructing, within the same disused Seita factories at Pantin, the set for the Gare de Lyon's beautiful *fin-de-siècle* and neo-baroque Train Bleu restaurant alongside the sterile and modern technological spaces of surveillance (the State Secret Service headquarters). This truly is artifice, post-production within post-industrial decay.

Postmodernism is an eclectic term with both positive and negative connotations (similar to modernism's). On the positive side it is seen as a reaction against the extremes of modernism's belief in the benefits of science and technology to humankind. On the negative side, postmodernism is defined as coming after, as looking back, as lacking its own history (because it is defined only in relation to the past). Indeed, in its lack of history it rejects history and, because it has none of its own, stands eternally fixed in a series of presents. Viewed in this context, postmodern culture does not challenge what is past. Rather it can only *recycle* what is past. This idea of recycling is closely associated to the notion that post-industrialism recycles waste, that it needs its waste in order to live, that it recycles dead styles. It survives on dead styles and seeks only perfect simulation (as with Besson's set of the Train Bleu restaurant). It invents nothing. It pastiches culture. Jean Baudrillard (1983, 142–6) explains this pastiche culture in the following way: because this culture is reproducing what has already been reproduced, postmodern culture reproduces not the real (for that has already been produced) but the hyper-real (of which virtual reality is an extreme example). Hyper-real, that is, a simulacrum of the

real – perfect simulation – so much so, it no longer need invoke the original.

This lack of invocation of the original as a point of comparison means that there is no distinction between the real and the copy. And it is in this loss of distinction between real and representation that Baudrillard perceives the death of the subject, the individual. If there is no distinction between real and simulacrum how can you signify as distinct? If you recycle dead styles, how else can you signify except as lack, as death? You *re*-present nothing, you merely simulate it. The question then becomes, 'who am I'? The subject has no history, is stuck in the ever-present, so is in effect without memory. So how can the subject represent its self to itself? According to Lacan, the experience of temporality (past, present, future, memory) and its representation are an effect of language. We use language to represent notions of temporality, and the idea of historical continuity.¹² If, however, the subject has no experience of temporality, no links with the past (lacking history), then it is without language. That is, it lacks the means of representing the 'I'. This creates a schizophrenic condition in which the subject cannot assert its subjectivity in language (because it cannot 'speak'). The subject fails, therefore, to enter the Symbolic Order (the social order of things, patriarchal order). The subject remains stuck in the Imaginary Order (the pre-linguistic moment). And the question becomes not just 'who am I?', but 'who made me?' In other words, where is the mother?

As far as film is concerned, it is instructive that the 1990s has witnessed a spate of monster films and that central to their narrative has been the question of reproduction and identity. If we just take as examples *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993), *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (Branagh, 1994) and *Interview with the Vampire* (Jordan, 1994), an analysis of these films reveals that the missing link between the past, present and the future is the figure of the mother. She is absent from these films as the site of reproduction. Instead *the* reproduction machine of post-industrialism, male technology, has reproduced 'her' through genetic engineering. The original is not even referred to: genetic engineering replaces the womb 'perfectly', simulating the idea of reproduction. Dinosaurs, monsters, vampires – aliens and cyborgs of our worst imaginings – these are the creatures of the age of simulacrum (to which we can now add the very hyper-real Dolly, the cloned sheep). These films express repressed fears around technology, of course. But they also express fears about being born into lack and having no identity. Besson's films, whilst less extreme perhaps, also express these concerns. Why otherwise do his characters speak so little or not at all? Why are their bodies so linked to technology? The main protagonists in all his films are techno-bodies virtually without language. Very few of Besson's characters have a history, and the only histories told are pure fiction, as in the case of Nikita who has no history of her own but has it narrated for her by Bob.

Nikita is recycled by man as a state assassin, as the visual embodiment of male technology (camera surveillance and the gun). She is then a cyborg-cop. She is reborn into an all-male world of technology, electronic mass media and surveillance (the world of male paranoia, one might add). She can have any name (Nikita, Marie, Joséphine). She is, then, recycled from the waste that she was (as a junkie). She is reproduced by the state as hyper-real, as the simulacrum of the real. She refers back to no original. She is recycled by the state to do male work, to handle male technology – the very technology that handles/watches her (through surveillance). As far as Nikita is concerned and in terms of identity there is no difference between the real and the copy – which is which? She lives the erasure of her subjectivity.

Nikita has no history, except for that invented for her by Bob. She is without memory, no past, no present, no future. She is without the linking mother – the mother she cries out for at the beginning of the film. There is no mother to secure the first sense of identity – as bonded to and loving the mother – so there is no way that Nikita can realistically embark on her own Oedipal trajectory. She will remain a fragmented subject, dispersed in representation as child, *femme fatale*/phallic woman, bimbo, as 'man' – never as woman. We hardly hear her speak. She lacks language and the means of representing the 'I'. She is constantly narrated or viewed by the male (Bob, Marco, the state, camera technology). She is emptied of meaning only to be filled by others' representations of her. She is contained, without identity – the perfect projection of male fantasy – and she can be changed, recycled at any time. She has been recycled to do the male's bidding on command (she kills when told). This entrapped submission of the self to the male command brings the dynamics close to pornography (placing of the female body to do as the man wants: shoot the gun/phallus/camera!). We may object that Amande holds up the mirror for Nikita. The response has to be that that moment merely serves to confirm that Nikita's subjectivity is dependent on the male gaze.

Nikita remains pre-Symbolic, pre-linguistic. And, as such, she eventually disappears (back behind the mirror presumably). Born into lack, and despite her very strong physical appearance (especially in the first half of the film), she can only *be* absence. She has no mother, no history, no language. She is merely the postmodern woman as cyber-reality. And part of the violence in this film is this *mise-en-scène*, through her body, of the hyper-real, of a lack of distinction between real and representation. 'Who is Nikita? Who made her?' *Nikita* is a *mise-en-scène* of the death of the individual. It is even more specifically a *mise-en-scène* of the denial of female subjectivity and therefore ultimately of difference. An effect of cyborg production is that it ends up denying what it has reproduced – and this is precisely what happens to Nikita. In the end Nikita is obliged to disappear.

Notes

- 1 Instead he invited some eight hundred people and their partners who had written to him in support of *Le Grand bleu* and the film was premiered at the Grand Rex in Paris. In all, two thousand people came and this figure included some three hundred journalists. See Besson 1992, 174.
- 2 See Michel Ciment's review of *Nikita*, in *Positif*, 350 (1990), 43–4. And Besson's riposte in *Première*, 157 (1990), 83.
- 3 And in the first weeks of its worldwide release it netted nearly four million spectators. Even though *Nikita* did not meet with much critical acclaim in France, it was a huge success with French audiences. The Americans, therefore, were very keen to buy up the rights. However, for its release in the United States, Gaumont wisely decided to handle the sale of distribution rights separately from the film rights. The distribution rights were sold to Columbia Pictures and later the rights to the film were sold to Warner Brothers who were responsible for the remake of *Nikita* (released as *Point of No Return* aka *The Assassin*). Besson held on to the possibility of shooting the American remake, not because he wanted to make it but because he wanted to be party to the rewrite so that he could see how Warner would Americanize his story. In the end John Badham directed it. Besson felt it stayed fairly close to the original except for the ending (a happy one).
- 4 *Film français* describes the transformation thus: 'The gentle actress without any real character became a scandalous street-bum and an irresistible Mata-Hari' (no. 2340 (March 1991), 18). And see interview with Anne Parillaud in *Studio Magazine*, 61 (1992), 76–7.
- 5 In my book on Besson, I discuss the three endings Besson scripted in more detail. See Hayward 1998, 58–9.
- 6 For a contrastive 'woman with a gun' film where the outcome is more positive for the woman see Kathryn Bigelow's *Blue Steel*, 1990, interestingly released the same year as *Nikita*.
- 7 See Ginette Vincendeau's article for more detail on the father/daughter axis in French cinema (*Sight and Sound* (1992), 14–17).
- 8 Interestingly, the distribution title in English-speaking countries was 'La Femme Nikita' which thus removed the intended androgyny of the original.
- 9 I have written an article analysing this 'murder of the mother' in a discussion of *Nikita* and the uncanny (see Hayward 1997).
- 10 In my recent book on Luc Besson I have examined the extraordinary set of shots just before Nikita shoots the target as a displacement of the male probe, the masculine body using the female body as an instrument of voyeurism and death. The camera actually looks down a telescopic lens into Nikita's eye (see Hayward 1998, 117).
- 11 Elsewhere (Hayward 1997) I discuss in more detail this positive reading as an outcome of pleasure in Nikita's transgressive behaviour.
- 12 For a very helpful reading of Lacan's notion of temporality, schizophrenia and the postmodern see Giuliana Bruno's wonderful essay on *Blade Runner*: 'Ramble City: postmodernism and *Blade Runner*', *October*, 41 (1987), 61–74. I am indebted to her analysis in this section on the fragmented post-industrial subject.

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APPENDIX

Luc Besson (1959-): filmography

- 1978 *La P'tite sirène* (short)
- 1980 *L'Avant-dernier* (short)
- 1983 *Le Dernier combat*
- 1985 *Subway*
- 1988 *Le Grand bleu*
- 1990 *Nikita*
- 1991 *Atlantis*
- 1994 *Léon*
- 1997 *Le Cinquième élément*

Other films cited in the text

- Blue Steel*, Kathryn Bigelow (USA 1990)
- Interview with the Vampire*, Neil Jordan (USA 1994)
- Jurassic Park*, Steven Spielberg (USA 1993)
- Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, Kenneth Branagh (UK 1994)
- Mrs Doubtfire*, Chris Columbus (USA 1993)
- Tootsie*, Sidney Pollack (USA 1982)