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Skyfall
(2012, Sam Mendes, UK)

Component 2: Global Film: Narrative, Representation and Film Style

Focus Areas
Film Style, Aesthetics

PART 1: Key Sequence(s) and timings and/or links

Sequence 1
Istanbul chase 00:00 - 00:06:43

Sequence 2
Silva's lair 1:09:24 - 1:14:00

PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography (including Lighting)

- *Skyfall* opens unusually for a Bond film. Instead of the 'roaming circle' ident, there is just the silhouette of a figure, out-of-focus; he strides forward, into focus, but with only a patch of light illuminating part of his face. What does this mean? He is obviously Bond, but introduced in this way he seems unfamiliar and mysterious. This suggests that this is a new 'vision' of Bond, promising something we haven't seen before. It also links to the theme of MI6 working "in the shadows" (as M says later). The shot composition is symmetrical, with Bond in the centre - this is a motif repeated throughout the film (see 'Aesthetics').

- Sequence 1: Mostly typical - but very effective - mix of whole range of shots and angles: CU/MS/POV used to emotionally engage us and immerse us in the action; LS, ELS and helicopter shots used to show larger scale action and produce a sense of spectacle. Additionally, Roger Deakins, the cinematographer, uses kinetic camera movement to follow the action, but keeps the camera steady (cf. to the 'jerky-cam' of the *Bourne* series) which suggests that Bond is in control of the situation despite the chaos the chase creates.

- Throughout the film the action appears to come 'straight at' the viewer (e.g. Bond's gun at the start, the jeep crashing into the stall, and the police motorbike skidding directly into the camera). This heightens the immersive quality of the sequence and intensifies the sense of danger.

- Sequence 2: LS used to show the scale of Silva's island lair - but also to show the wrecked, crumbling architecture. Shots are composed so that Bond is always in lower centre of the screen. This composition is also used in the hall where Bond is tied up. The shot is symmetrical, one small man surrounded by technology, apparently isolated and besieged. However his central position throughout the film suggests stability, solidity and sense of control even when seemingly overwhelmed by elements in the rest of the shot.

- When Silva enters: a single shot of him approaching Bond (and us) - mirroring the entrance of Bond in the opening shot of the film (small, indistinct figure, striding into view). As he gets closer, the camera moves to meet him, eventually becoming Bond's POV. The movement reduces the distance between them and the proximity creates danger, but also queasy intimacy (suggesting the two characters aren't that different).

Mise-en-Scène

- Sequence 1: All the elements of the generic chase sequence are thrown into the mix here: chases on foot, car, bike and train; with bystanders dodging the carnage, other vehicles crashing, windows to crash through, bridges and rooftops to fall off - all adding to the sense of danger. Plus: the London HQ has large screens and computer monitors that surveil the action from afar. The colour palettes used in the two locations are contrasting: oranges, browns, dirty/dusty, chaotic and crowded in Istanbul vs. cold navy blues and pale washed-out colours for London, connoting relative calm.

- Sequence 2: Though Severin states the island city shows Silva's power via the use of technology, his victory seems literally empty. It looks more like the war-ravaged architecture of Aleppo than the glittering techno-lairs of other Bond villains (e.g. *You Only Live Twice*'s volcano, *The Spy Who Loved Me*'s underwater city). Similarly, the heart of his lair is a crumbling hallway filled with dusty servers and wires - far from the bright, clean or glamorous location we would expect. This is the tawdry 'reality' behind his 'virtual' power.

Editing
- Sequence 1: Cutting between shots that create a spectacle - LS, ELS, helicopter shots (esp. during rooftop bike chase) - and those that create a sense of immersion: MS, CU and POV.
- Cross-cutting: Between Istanbul and London (to show Bond is both being assisted by technology, and that he's being held accountable by higher authority); and between Bond, London and Eve (in the jeep) once the bike chase begins. This introduces the core theme that no matter how advanced surveillance technology we have, there is still a need for 'field agents' to do the more traditional chasing, shooting and fighting.
- Sequence 2: As Bond waits for the arrival of his nemesis, there are cutaways to his calm face, showing that though he may be prisoner - and surrounded by the technology that threatens his ability to protect his country - he is calm and almost amused by the familiarity of his situation.

Sound
- Sequence 1: Unusual use of music - opening two chords of traditional Bond theme, then stops: again suggesting this may be a version of the character that is unfamiliar; similarly used during the bike chase.
- Dialogue: Jokes during car chase, when Eve smashes the wing mirrors off. Emphasises the danger of the narrow streets, Eve's control of the jeep, and their control of the situation: calm enough to make quips. Also shows Eve can match Bond with wit, establishing her as not 'just another Bond girl'.
- Sequence 2: Severin's explanation of why the island is deserted emphasises the almost god-like power that technology has given Silva. When we finally meet him, Silva's speech about the rats on his grandmother's island is typically cryptic and sinister (mocked as

'monologuing' in *The Incredibles*). His revelation that M lied about Bond's test scores again asserts that Silva is Bond's 'dark double': what we previously interpreted as M's pride and confidence in Bond, Silva interprets as betrayal.

PART 3: STARTING POINTS - Contexts
Social
- Representation of age/tradition vs youth/ modernity: a core theme of the film is whether Bond, M and their agency is 'out of step' with the more technological threats of the modern world. Are they "dinosaurs" (how she branded Bond in her first film as M), powerless to the point of incompetence? This theme is made explicit when Bond meets the new, youthful Q in the National Gallery and they interpret a Turner painting differently: Q sees a "once great ship towed to the junkyard", whilst 007 ignores complexity and nuance: "I just see a bloody great big ship". Is his blunter, straightforward approach what is actually needed to defend against the 'new breed' of cyber-criminal?

Historical
- *Skyfall* is similar to two other successful franchises that were 're-booted' around the same time: Batman (in Nolan's *Dark Knight* Trilogy) and *Star Trek*. All three take familiar characters that have grown almost comical, and add depth, humanity and darker, more complex themes. They also cleverly balance fresh perspectives and elements with iconography that is familiar to fans. In *Skyfall*, the references to Bond's past haunting the present becomes a source of danger (Silva) and power: his Walther PPK gun, the Aston Martin, with the Skyfall estate of his childhood a fresh element that provides back-story.

PART 4: STARTING POINTS - Specialist Focus - AESTHETICS
- The film is an accomplished fusion of character, theme and visual style. Though the cinematography and production design is striking, it is more than just 'style over substance'. There are three key visual motifs throughout:

1. A blue/orange colour scheme that symbolises the thematic conflict between the new, digital technology and the 'old school' espionage

of chases, fisticuffs and gunfights. Electric blues (especially in the Shanghai scenes) represent the 'virtual' power of technology, bright, shiny but intangible and distracting. Orange/brown symbolises the tangible (if physically dangerous) 'dirty realism' of the solid world that Bond is expert at negotiating.

2. Mirrors / doubles / reflections: the symmetrical composition of many shots, and use of actual reflections, symbolise two things: the way the 'actual' and 'virtual' worlds are connected; and the connection between Silva and Bond. Both are agents who "overstep the mark", both have been 'betrayed' by M in the service of their country. Like Batman and the Joker in *The Dark Knight*, they are two sides of the same coin.

3. The consistent framing of shots that places Bond (or M) at the centre establishes them as a stable, dependable presence in a changing, chaotic world, reassuring the audience of their relevance. The second to last scene of Bond staring out over London suggests he is a champion and protector of Britain (a shot familiar from superhero films). The presence of other national flags flying above their embassies suggests he is also a protector of the whole world.