**From *Casino Royale* to *Spectre*:**

**Daniel Craig’s James Bond**

Klaus Dodds and Lisa Funnell

The decision to cast the British actor Daniel Craig as the next James Bond after Piece Brosnan’s last outing in *Die Another Day* (Tamahori 2002) was not met with universal acclaim. For critics and fans, Craig was allegedly the wrong height and look, and even possessed the wrong hair colour.[[1]](#endnote-1) Others feared that he would be another ‘George Lazenby’; a miscast actor who would assume the mantle of 007 and then be swiftly replaced by someone judged to be better looking, more profitable, and in keeping with the formulaic strengths of the Bond franchise. While others have interrogated what is at stake when speaking of the ‘Bond formula’,[[2]](#endnote-2) it is noteworthy that the distinct generic characteristics include a palatable sense that Bond must exhibit and perform the sorts of qualities that his literary creator, Ian Fleming, imagined for him—namely, a fit, masculine, virile, heterosexual, (Cambridge) educated professional man who could manipulate and intimidate men and when needed charm and seduce women, whilst retaining a well-honed capacity to escape from mortal danger if need be.

Daniel Craig’s casting appeared to provoke doubt in many and this sense of unease was heightened by the aesthetic, geopolitical, and financial challenges facing the franchise. For all the criticism of *Die Another Day*, as excessively dependent on CGI technologies and bedevilled by a weak storyline, it had been commercially successful. The release of *Casino Royale* in 2006, with a new Bond in place, would be judged in the context of rival franchises (Batman and Jason Bourne), its ability to relate to a new post 9/11 and war on terror geopolitical environment, and the rising concern that Bond script writers had lost touch with the literary origins of this famous super-spy. As James Bond scholars, such as James Chapman remind us, the so-called Bond formula involved the blending and balancing of tradition and innovation (Chapman 8), with what we would term ‘repetition with difference.’ Audiences expect gadgets, glamorous locations, spectacular action sequences, and an array of fiendish villains and beautiful companions for Bond to showcase his sensual skills. But they also want storylines that are attentive to changing geopolitical orders and reflective of real-world shifts from the Cold War to the War on Terror in films that remain mindful of Bond tradition as evinced through manner in which 007 responds. A number of films paid due respect to Bond tradition like *Die Another Day,* which was released on the 40th anniversary of *Dr No* including an homage to the introduction of quintessential Bond Girl Honey Ryder; in *Die Another Day*, it is Jinx Johnson who emerges from the sea in an orange bikini with a dagger strapped to her belt as Bond watches on.

Four films into the Daniel Craig era (2006-15), however, it seems that those earlier expressions of unease concerning the actor would be unjustified. In terms of box office receipts, all four films have proven commercially successful. Worldwide box office figures include: $599 million for *Casino Royale*, $586 million for *Quantum of Solace* (Forster, 2008), $1.1 billion for *Skyfall* (Mendes 2012), and $880 million for *Spectre* (Mendes 2015).[[3]](#endnote-3) The Craig-era films have acquired professional and public kudos and recognition. It would appear that the decision to reboot the Bond story in *Casino Royale* and in the process rebrand the Bond franchise was a necessary risk and one that has proved popular with critics and audiences around the world. As the *New York Times* critic Manhola Dargis noted, “Successful franchises are always serious business, yet this is the first Bond film in a long while that feels as if it were made by people who realize they have to fight for audiences’ attention, not just bank on it. You see Mr. Craig sweating (and very nice sweat it is too); you sense the filmmakers doing the same” (n.pag.).

The selection of articles presented in this special “James Bond and the Daniel Craig Era” themed issue of *Journal of Popular Film and Television* explore further the aesthetic, gender, geographical, and geopolitical qualities of Craig’s’ Bond, with due recognition given to both continuity and change. It would be impossible to make sense of the four films in question without acknowledging the enduring role of Judi Dench as the first female head of MI6. As M, Dench’s depiction of Bond’s boss has strongly informed not only the way we think about the agency of women in the franchise but also the complex and multi-faceted relationship that Bond and M have with one another. The intersection of the personal and the professional has contributed greatly to the representation of how Bond and his colleagues accommodate the challenges facing them, and the costs to those often closest to them. The death of M in the final moments of *Skyfall* exposes Bond’s to yet another painful loss, following the death of his beloved Vesper Lynd. And yet as *Spectre* depicts, a video handed to Bond by Moneypenny allows a temporary reprieve from overwhelming loss as Bond is able to hear and watch M for the last time.[[4]](#endnote-4)

As part of our accounting of the papers that follow, we present four areas of enquiry that are a shared concern for our authors, namely agencies, moods, places and structures, and how they converge and become manifest in particular sites and spaces including London and the MI6 building by the River Thames.

**Theming Daniel Craig’s Bond: Agencies, Moods, Places and Structures**

The four articles and one perspectives piece that constitute this special issue address four meta-themes. Our first area of common concern is agencies, and it is one that has preoccupied the wider scholarship on Daniel Craig’s tenure as James Bond. The reboot *Casino Royale* is notable for its exploration of gender and specifically hegemonic masculinity.[[5]](#endnote-5) A number of scholars, shortly after the film was released, drew attention to an apparent break from the gendered past of Bond by exploring how Bond’s body was positioned as an object to be gazed at as opposed to the bodies of Bond girls (see Funnell [2011], Cox [2014]). Bond’s emergence from the sea while in the Bahamas has become emblematic of this debate as the camera lingers on his muscular body. Later, however, that same body is shown to be hurt badly by the torturous methods of his arch-enemy Le Chiffre. Bond’s masculinity appears to (literally and figuratively) hang in the balance as Le Chiffre demands that Bond ‘’yield’ as he attacks his genitals.

The state of his body becomes a site for personal and geopolitical projection.[[6]](#endnote-6) Bond’s capacity to move through space and endure hardship not only speaks to his abilities/agencies as a relatively new field agent but also Britain’s capacities to cope in a changing world. In *Casino Royale*, Bond’s interactions with the suspected terrorists in and around Miami airport is notable for the manner in which he by-passes American airport security officers while keeping a London-based M in touch with his intentions. There is no Felix Leiter or even FBI counterpart on hand, with the inference being that the emerging threat is just too rapid to allow for diplomatic niceties.[[7]](#endnote-7) Indirectly, it reverses the tension inherent in *Dr No* when Bond and Leiter exchange words about Jamaica being a ‘British patch’. Bond’s departure from the Bahamas, another former ‘British patch’, appears to act as a Caribbean gateway facilitating Bond’s entry into the southern United States. Noticeably, Bond’s body and demeanour only attract the suspicion of the suspected terrorists in the Miami airport environment.

However, the capability of Bond and by extension Britain also depends on the interaction and intersection with others. In her paper on the Bond Girl, Lisa Funnell considers further how this archetype is problematized in the Craig-era films with an examination of the role of M as mother-figure, professional women like Camille Montes who are not seduced by Bond, and the referencing and reframing of Bond’s love interest Vesper Lynd in the character design of Madeleine Swann in *Spectre.* Both Lynd and Swann have the measure of Bond, and while their agency is different to earlier incarnations of Bond lovers, they are also help-mates. Most egregiously, Swann ends up being tied up by Bond’s nemesis and thus in need of saving by Bond. For a quartet that was arguably quite experimental of Bond’s agencies, *Spectre* arguably is the most conservative/traditional/regressive when in its depiction of female characters. The widow of the assassin Lucia Sciarra (played by Monica Bellucci) is presented as somebody merely to be seduced and saved by Bond and former field agent Moneypenny (played by Naomie Harris) is reduced to being a messenger for Bond rather than a weapon-wielding (field) agent.

The second area of mutual interest addresses the prevailing moods of Daniel Craig’s James Bond and the affective politics of the spy. Sarah Thomas’ paper speaks to the ‘brutalism’ of Daniel Craig’s portrayal and draws attention to his outlook, voice, and demeanour. In *Casino Royale*, Bond’s backstory is presented to the audience. Depicted in film noir style, it addresses Bond’s violent assassination of his first victim and then moves on to his second kill, a treacherous MI6 operative. While M might have concerns about him being a ‘blunt instrument’, the Craig era films have often attracted positive commentary about their grittiness and unstinting approach to Bond’s use of violence. Even if he is capable of a witty quip or two, Craig’s Bond approaches his mission with a bloody-mindedness that was rarely present in the Roger Moore era, where the use of violence was less brutal and extended in terms of screen time. *Quantum of Solace* witnesses a Bond literally propelled forward by an enduring sense of anger at the loss of Vesper Lynd and a ruthless determination to track down those who violated the personal and collective security of MI6. He is moody, unpredictable, and hard-edged, much like the sort of brutalist architecture Thomas notes was so reminiscent of the modern era.

As a public servant of the British state, however, Bond’s demeanour and behaviour place enormous stresses on those around him. His certitude and fury find expression in how he treats those who he encounters. Old friends like Rene Mathis are persuaded to come out of retirement to help him (after Bond wrongly accused him of being implicated with the Quantum network), new colleagues such as Strawberry Fields are purposefully seduced and enrolled in his mission, and older colleagues including his line manager M are often forced to defend and back him even when there are others including US counterparts and UK political figures demanding that he be held accountable for his intemperate actions.

What might help to explain this prevailing ‘mood’? One source might be those interested in the state of exception or emergency. Bond’s journey from rookie spy to ruthless assassin is one that progressively normalises the exceptional, so that it is no longer clear for much of the four films if or when it might end. Bond’s actions and responses demand that M has to make a series of difficult decisions throughout the first three films (*Casino Royale*, *Quantum of Solace* and *Skyfall*) regarding his fitness, judgement, and capacity to work with others. As our contributors suggest, it is arguably relationships with Moneypenny and Q that prove as important as any in persuading a sceptical M that Bond’s tendencies to operate beyond his professional jurisdiction and resistance to accountability can be circumscribed by technologies such as tracking devices (fitted by Q) and by companionship in the field. Moneypenny’s in-field support of Bond in Macau was crucial in *Skyfall* to Bond developing further intelligence regarding the location of Raoul Silva.

As Claire Hines notes, however, we should not forget the transformation of Q, much like Moneypenny, in *Skyfall* and *Spectre* who is played by a younger actor and questions if not challenges the hegemonic masculinity of James Bond. Both Q and Moneypenny are capable of teasing and flirting with Bond, while also proving invaluable and loyal to him and his missions. The relationship between Q and Bond in *Spectre* introduces something quite innovative to the Bond formula, namely a playful even flirtatious atmosphere between men. While we witnessed Silva tease Bond in *Skyfall*, it was done to intimidate and unsettle an imprisoned 007. In sharp contrast, Bond and Q tease each other, in a manner quite distinct from the more paternalistic relationship in the past between the older Q with the younger Bond, and the cordial but always professional relationship namely between Bond and his American counterpart Felix Leiter.

The net-effect of these social and spatial relationships is to add complexity to the prevailing geopolitical moods of Daniel Craig’s Bond (see Hochscherf [2013]). Q and Bond’s interactions in particular help to reconfigure the role and scope of the field agent and the signals intelligence officer. Rather than presenting the two in binary opposition with one another, their skill-sets end up being complimentary and their combination necessary. Bond’s covert operations in Italy, Austria, and North Africa depend on Q’s complicity as the latter has to lie for him. When Bond’s superiors want to know where he is, Q tells Mallory that Bond is in Chelsea (London) rather than somewhere in the backwoods of Austria. Bond’s electronic tagging if checked by Mallory would have revealed Q’s lie. Never before has it been necessary for Q to be shown as directly lying to his superiors. But as *Spectre* suggests, the ‘new normal’ is one where it makes sense to be suspicious even paranoid of those closest to you, and where even senior MI6 officers such as Mallory are now being monitored by a new UK spying agency.

Our penultimate theme is place and the manner in which particular sites and spaces play a significant role in shaping Bond’s mobility and his missions. While Bond scholarship has identified how the political geographies of the Cold War era were mirrored by the films in the sense of being filmed in geopolitically sensitive locations like Berlin, Moscow and Istanbul (see Black [2005], Dodds [2005], Funnell and Dodds [2017]), the Craig-era films address a different era. Gone are the fixed cartographies of East v. West; instead the geopolitical atmosphere is quite distinct as Bond is to be found in Madagascar in the opening of *Casino Royale,* in pursuit of a bomber, who appears to be embedded in a mysterious international criminal-terrorist network. The breathless tempo of Bond’s pursuit of the bomber through a construction site and an embassy there prepares the audience for what is to follow: Bond’s ruthless determination to pursue his target and a world where mobile phones, implanted body trackers, and electronic transactions of money are transforming the geopolitical landscape. Speed is integral to safety and security and, as Bond demonstrates, the diplomatic niceties such as respecting the sanctity of embassies and the security architectures of airports will have to be sacrificed in order to apprehend dangerous individuals embedded in complex and expansive networks. Madagascar, rather than functioning as a traditional ‘exotic location’ in the Bond franchise, becomes a place to exhibit what is at stake in this frenetic new world order. In *Quantum of Solace*, Port-au-Prince in Haiti adds further to the sense that these locales in the global South are places to do risky business rather than dwell and even savour the sites, smells, and atmospheres of the city. In the Roger Moore era, by way of contrast, Bond coincided with carnival in Rio de Janeiro and intersected with tourist activities in Cairo.[[8]](#endnote-8) There is nothing even remotely enjoyable about Bond’s voyaging to Haiti and later Bolivia. But what the Craig era films relay over and over again is that Bond’s immersion in the field is vital—electronic surveillance is no substitute for an in-depth knowledge of places and people.

As our contributors Nick Jones and Christopher Holliday note, what is particularly notable about the quartet of Craig-era films is the role and significance of London and MI6. For much of the Bond franchise, with the exception of the explosion that hit MI6 in *The World is Not Enough* (Apted 1999), audiences have been used to a particular narrative-spatial order for Bond (see Jones 2015). London is a comparative haven of tranquillity, a place from which Bond can enjoy a social life and a professional routine that was remarkably durable. The office environment, with the customary interchanges involving Bond, M, Q and Moneypenny were an enduring staple. More recently, the sanctity of London and MI6 as both institution and infrastructure changes. MI6 is in the bunkers while Judi Dench’s M is besieged, far more troubled by the weight of her office than her male predecessors. She has to endure the revelation that she can no longer trust some of the people working closest to her and withstand the humiliation of an unwanted and forced retirement. In *Skyfall*, the danger confronting her and MI6 is brought devastatingly close as their central London headquarters is hit by a bomb that kills some of the government agents working inside it. It is again M who has to bear the burden of standing by the coffins of the fallen.[[9]](#endnote-9)

M and Bond are in mortal danger and, as our contributors note, London is the locus of insecurity. London’s subterranean geographies inadvertently accommodate an evil genius (Raoul Silva) hell-bent on exacting revenge for a decision made by M involving Chinese spies and the fate of Hong Kong in the late 1990s. Silva’s revenge is to take the fight back to M and London direct. He uses his techno-scientific skills to deadly effect, as the underground becomes a frontier of terror, echoing the terrorist attacks of 7th July 2005 on London (see Weber 2006). MI6 is forced to relocate and Silva uses the subway system to extract further bomb-generated chaos for MI6 and innocent London commuters. Bond, M, and London are battered and, as our contributors note, both *Skyfall* and *Spectre* trade in the idea that the recovery and resurrection of one depends upon the other. Places and people will, the two films suggest, need to be resilient even if bodies and buildings face ruination and even death (see Macmillan 2015). M cannot be saved but the question becomes thereafter can others endure the trauma of loss and demonstrate resolve and resilience?

As *Spectre* reveals, the bombed-out shell of the MI6 building acts as a visceral reminder that this restorative project will not be straightforward. Bond and colleagues discover that places can haunt and provide unwelcome reminders of the past. While Bond may have been able to destroy his childhood home in Scotland, and explosively let go of the past, the spectral presence of a half-brother in the form of Franz Oberhauser/Ernst Stavro Blofeld proves more bothersome. Blofeld uses the remnants of the MI6 building to tease and torment Bond of his failures and losses. Temporalities and spatialities co-constitute one another, as Bond is forced to confront both the when and where of his recent past. The building acts as an unwelcome archive, paradoxically awaiting final destruction by his nemesis. Bond is able to save Swann but he cannot save what his colleague Bill Tanner has described as the ‘old girl’ (with obvious associations to the death of the late M in Scotland).

The final area ripe for interrogation is the role and scope of operational structures in shaping Daniel Craig’s Bond. What our authors draw attention to is a series of interactional dynamics encompassing the body, its performance of gender, and interaction with objects. All our papers speak to the operating environments of Bond and MI6, and the pressures agents and agencies are asked to endure in the pursuit of a ruthless and relentless criminal and terror network. Notoriously, in *Skyfall* the fall-out from M’s death leads to the appointment of Gareth Mallory as the new M and the reallocation of Moneypenny to an office-based role. After an accidental shooting of Bond in Istanbul, her role as field agent was under scrutiny and is shown to be something that both Bond and Mallory are reluctant to resurrect. By way of contrast, Bond is shown to possess a body that can cope with set-backs and disappointments in his personal and professional life.[[10]](#endnote-10)

All four films offer glimpses into how MI6 organises itself in a fast-moving world of vaguely defined relationships between friends and foes. Looking backwards from *Spectre* to *Casino Royale*, we find ourselves in a discombobulated world. Mallory, the successor to Judi Dench’s M, becomes aware that he and his colleagues such as Moneypenny and Q are under near-constant surveillance by a new rival organization headed by C. The latter is dismissive of of the 00 program and field-based intelligence collection. A brave new world involving a global program of co-operation involving nine states (Nine Eyes Committee), including Britain, confronts Bond and Mallory. In a meeting held in Tokyo, which Mallory and C attend, it becomes clear that Britain is forging new geopolitical and corporate partnerships. The special relationship with the US and Felix Leiter has been replaced with bureaucrats and computer programmers. The old M warned of pencil pushers and C has no shortage of pencils on his desk.

When first introduced to Bond in *Casino Royale*, M was very much in charge and adept at keeping the parliamentary and political scrutiny of MI6 at bay. Silva’s partial destruction of MI6 building helped to initiate a sea-change. Inadvertently, the new M helped to make MI6 virtually extinct while C is determined that everyone should be monitored and not just ‘rogue’ field agents. The ‘new brutalism’ that Thomas identifies takes on a sinister twist when C makes it clear that no one will be spared the disciplinary gaze of the national security state. His treachery, however, once exposed by Bond and his work companions proves essential to stalling the entrenchment of this paranoid working environment where no one is trusted. Danger and mistrust appears to be everywhere (see Smith 2016).

**Conclusion**

Our special issue authors acknowledge that Daniel Craig era has endured the pressure placed on the Bond franchise by other serial film franchises like the Jason Bourne and Batman series. The kinetic qualities of Craig’s Bond and the frantic pace of his films, as exemplified in *Quantum of Sola*ce’s opening scene involving Bond racing through northern Italy, reinforces the sense that this 007 has to operate at the limits of his working environment. In the new millennium, more than 20 films and 50 years into the franchise, Bond audiences now have other super-spies and heroes (many of which are inspired by the Bond brand) to judge him by. A screaming car being pushed at high speed through narrow roads and a rough track through a marble quarry illustrate well his ravenous desire to avenge Vesper Lynd’s death and uncover the dark forces supporting Le Chiffre and others. His arrival in Sienna merely provides another opportunity for Bond to demonstrate how in order to succeed he must be able to master the built infrastructure of the city, including its subterranean geographies. In order to prevail, Bond’s touch becomes symptomatic of his judgement. The heroic standard has been elevated by other franchises, and we would argue that Daniel Craig’s Bond has risen to meet/match the challenge.

Whatever the fate of Daniel Craig as James Bond, and regardless of whether there is a fifth (and maybe sixth) film in this era, it is a tribute to Craig and his co-actors including Judi Dench that an impressive body of scholarship now exists[[11]](#endnote-11) exploring this cinematic legacy and its contribution to the Bond franchise. If Craig returns for a follow up to *Spectre*, he will find himself in an operating environment that is likely to be even more tense as the screenplay writers debate whether to echo a geopolitical world of immigration bans, fake news, territorial tension, and border walls. There is no shortage of opportunity for Craig to return to the screen as a super-spy willing to operate in the ‘shadows’.

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**Notes**

1. See Brooks (2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See essays in Christoph Lindner’s anthology *Revisioning 007* (Wallflower 2009) and the monograph by James Chapman *License to Thrill* (I.B. Tauris 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See http://worldwideboxoffice.com [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For a discussion of the videotapes and video messages in *Spectre*, see Funnell and Dodds (*Geographies* 37-38). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. For a discussion of hegemonic masculinity, see Connell (2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. For a discussion of the haptic geographies of James Bond’s body, see Funnell and Dodds (2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. This is similar to Bond’s violation of UN policy when he broke into the Nambutu Embassy to kill the bomb maker Mollaka earlier in the film. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. For a discussion of carnivals, circuses, and street festivals, see Funnell and Dodds (*Geographies* 186-190). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. For a detailed discussion of what we term “heartland geopolitics,” see Funnell and Dodds (*Geographies* 199-218). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See Dodds (2014) for a discussion of the resurrection rejuvenation of Bond in *Skyfall*. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. For a discussion of Dench’s M and other female characters like the Bond Girl, female villains, Miss Moneypenny, and a range of named and unnamed secondary figures, see essays in Funnell’s *For His Eyes Only* (2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)