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An Analysis of Ocean's 11 Through Frames

In the 2001 movie *Ocean's 11*, Danny Ocean assembles a team of eleven skilled individuals to pull off an elaborate heist targeting three Las Vegas casinos owned by Terry Benedict, a greedy and money-hungry individual who is in a relationship with Danny's ex-wife, Tess. While *Oceans 11* is a seemingly simple story about a thrilling heist, underneath Danny's mission is a quest to win back Jess's love. The revelatory frames provide insight into Danny's character development, as they reveal that planning and committing the heist is just a means to achieving true happiness with the person he loves. As Danny finds himself with Jess, the frames depict a sense of happiness and fulfillment, revealing the message of the movie: happiness does not lie in exorbitant wealth, but rather is rooted in being with the ones you truly love. Ultimately, Soderbergh is successful in conveying Danny's arc as the hero who gets the girl through not only the information in the frames themselves, but also the elements of mise-en-scene like actors' performances, set design, and lighting that reinforce that theme within each frame.

When Danny Ocean plans the heist and gathers his team that will help him commit the heist, the frames that depict this have dark lighting and take place in dim, dark settings while Danny's facial expressions are serious and stern. In frame O11.4, Danny and Rusty are in the process of examining and taking the blueprints for the casinos that Terry Benedict owns. At this point in the movie, the audience has no idea that Tess exists and the heist itself is all they know

about thus far. Danny's facial expression in this scene is very serious and somber, while Rusty is smiling and looks much more untroubled than Danny. Not only that, but Danny's wardrobe consists of a fully black suit in the scene while Rusty is wearing a bright white collared shirt. The mise-en-scene elements of actor performance—as seen with their facial expressions—and costume choice demonstrate how Danny does not feel happy and untroubled like Rusty, but rather, is more grave—knowing the implications his true desires may have on the heist and being reminded of the woman who he loved that he lost. Adding on, the overall dim setting seen in this frame alongside the fact that Rusty's face is illuminated in light while Danny is kept in the shadows further illustrates Danny's misery without Tess. This also shows that there is more to the heist than just trying to get money, as Danny clearly has something to hide, which is why he is kept in the shadows in the frame. In a later frame (O11.5), when Danny and Rusty are going down the elevator after taking the blueprints for the casinos, Danny continues to look unhappy in contrast to Rusty's smug, illuminated face. Danny's facial expressions make it seem like he is thinking about the relationship and love he shared with Tess before they split, and that he is reflecting on the heist he is about to commit to get her back. His clothes are still all black while Rusty is in his white collared shirt, symbolizing Danny's foreboding mood. When Rusty confronts Danny about his true intentions by asking why he is planning the heist, Danny still decides to keep it hidden, responding with “why not do it...,” thus continuing to keep Rusty and the audience in the dark about his true motives. To further reinforce this in this frame, the filmmaker could have incorporated darker lighting on Danny when he is standing in the elevator or perhaps even flickered the light above and to the left of his head. At the Las Vegas mansion on the night the plan is revealed to the members of Ocean's 11, frame O11.7A depicts the crew walking inside the house where the two are waiting to reveal the plan. Examining the setting of

this, the mansion backyard is lit up with lanterns, lamps, and pool lights during the night. While the rest of the crew is showered in this light, Danny remains in the dark and gloomy recesses of his thoughts, a testament to his role as the mastermind behind the operation and his true intentions behind the heist. Furthermore, Danny is disconnected from the rest of the group in this frame, revealing how his true intentions are disconnected from the ones of the group, since it is not money he is after but rather love. When the heist is put into action, Danny runs into Tess as she is about to get dinner with Terry as seen in frame O11.10. In this frame, Danny is in the back and in the shadows with a grim look on his face, while Tess and her hands are completely lit up, almost as if there is a spotlight on her. Mise-en-scene elements of setting, lighting, and actor performance are displayed at full force, revealing how Tess is the true prize of the heist and is what Danny is really going after.

As the movie progresses and Tess is revealed, Danny's true intentions of finding love through the heist is portrayed through frames that show Danny's smile and illuminated face when he is with Jess. In frame O12X—when Danny is alone and face-to-face with Tess—he is not in the dark anymore but rather illuminated in light. Not only that but he has a big smile on his face, as opposed to his usual looks of seriousness and gloom. The lighting and the happiness on his face reinforce the fact that it is not money that brings him joy, but rather the love he shares with Tess. After the successful completion of the heist, Danny is sent to jail for a few months following. When he gets out, he is met by Rusty and they are shown walking out of the jailhouse together into the bright day in frame O11.12. The fact that Danny gets out during the daytime symbolizes how after the heist, Danny has gotten Tess back and his emotions and life are seen in a new, positive light rather than ones of darkness. It is the light of a new day and a new start for

Danny with the people he cares and loves the most. He isn't excited about the spoils of his heist, but rather by seeing Tess again as seen in frame 13X, where Danny is seen smiling to Tess who is waiting for him in the car outside the jailhouse. Again, this takes place during the day with Danny's entire face illuminated, as opposed to the frames during the planning and execution of the heist. This contrast demonstrates how the heist was just a means for Danny to get Tess back, and that love is what makes him happy in the end. Danny sits next to Tess in the backseat of the car in frame 13Y, and is portrayed holding Tess's hand as they drive away. Danny is finally the one that is holding Tess's hand as they drive off into the distance and into a happier future that Danny envisioned for himself the entire movie. With the mise-en-scene in this closing scene, there are some things I would change to reinforce the story and theme. To start, I would change the actor's facial expressions, since in the frame, Tess and Danny do not look as happy as they could be, even though they are holding each other's hands. I would also give Danny a different costume that is lighter in color in comparison to the black suit he is wearing to not only better reflect his happiness in getting Tess back but to also show the shift from the darkness of his emotions during the heist to the love and fulfillment he feels now.

Oceans II intricately weaves together the thrill of an intricate heist with the tender pursuit of love and happiness. Through meticulous analysis of the film's frames, it becomes evident that Danny Ocean's motivations extend far beyond mere monetary gain. His journey, depicted through carefully constructed mise-en-scene elements of setting, lighting, and actor performance, showcase a transformation from the shadows of uncertainty and longing to the light of fulfillment and love with Tess.