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**ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR**



**Deconstructing the Fantastic World of Wes Anderson:  
The Philosophy Behind the Artificial Surface of a Contemporary  
Director**

**Dekonstrukce fantastického světa Wese Andersona: Filozofie pod  
umělým povrchem současného režiséra**

**BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE**

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V Praze, dne 4. srpna 2016

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Jméno a příjmení

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Erik Sherman Roraback, D. Phil. (Oxon.) for his help, never-ending patience, and supportive manner in guiding my work.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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## Abstract

The subject of this thesis is Wes Anderson's cinematic world. The analysis draws an auteur study of this contemporary director in order to discover what sensibility his cinema demonstrates. Anderson's sentiment causes a reinterpretation of lost values and generates specific thinking, which allow it to be considered as a mediation of his own filmic "philosophy." The backbone theory consists of philosophy, in general, and of postmodernism and metamodernism, specifically. The three postmodern elements to be discussed are the meta-cinematic techniques, pastiche and nostalgia prevalent in Anderson's oeuvre. However, his unique employment of these features transgresses the anticipated postmodern tone and creates a new structure of feeling characterized by metamodern hopefulness. Therefore, Anderson uses postmodern means to create a metamodern sensibility that signalizes sincerity.

Focusing on the three above-mentioned attributes of Anderson's filmography in both a postmodern and metamodern context helps to deconstruct his highly visual and thematically patterned cinema in order to reveal where the particular sensibility of the director stems from. The analysis of Anderson's eight features—*Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *The Darjeeling Limited*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *Moonrise Kingdom* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*—aims to reveal the essential stylistic and content elements as well as the exceptional characterization in his cinema. Anderson's instantly recognizable mode of filmmaking is decidedly self-aware, yet through the films' hopeful response he is able to step outside of his films' diegesis and mark an important new movement. The elaborately stylized universe he brings onto the movie screen serves as a distraction; this artificial surface hides the real values of Andersonian sentiment. He is holding out a mirror to his audience, showing that today's spectator is only allured by a visually appealing cinematic experience where, in fact, important concepts such as memory, innocence, desire and creativity are neglected.

The brief examination of the relationship between film and philosophy relies on various philosophers' and theorists' approaches, such as those of Felicity Colman, Noël Carroll, Murray Smith, Thomas Wartenberg and Daniel Frampton. Concerning postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard's and Fredric Jameson's insights prove to be mostly relevant in relation to philosophy, culture and aesthetics, while metamodernism is

considered through Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's definition. Moreover, film theorists and critics such as Matt Zoller Seitz, James MacDowell and Jim Collins offer insightful views on Anderson himself as well as on film categories where the director is arguably placed. Anderson is recognized as a prime director of present-day American independent filmmaking by being involved with Quirky, Smart and New Sincerity Cinema indie movements. These three sectors are relevant in determining the characteristics of Anderson's films as well as in showing that the creation of a sincere sensibility is a fresh take on cinematic subjects in contemporary cinema. The theoretical background should serve as a means of interpretation for Anderson's eight features, which all bear the same signature look and content and thus disclose what his films mediate.

The thesis by no means delivers blind, one-sided praise to a contemporary director slowly becoming mainstream but rather a critical study of a culturally relevant persona. Building on a theoretical background, the analysis centers on Anderson's formal style, themes and characterization to reveal how his sincere sensibility is crafted and to distinguish his individual philosophy.

Key words: Wes Anderson, *Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *The Darjeeling Limited*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *Moonrise Kingdom*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, film, film-philosophy, sincerity, sensibility, postmodernism, metamodernism, meta-cinema, pastiche, nostalgia.

## Abstrakt

Tématem této práce je filmový svět Wese Andersona. Jedná se o analýzu tohoto současného *auteur* režiséra, jejíž cílem je načrtnout a podrobně popsat atmosféru a cítění Andersonova díla. Andersonovo cítění zahrnuje znovuinterpertaci ztracených hodnot a vytváří specifické smýšlení, díky kterému se díla dají popsat jako meditace nad vlastní filmovou ‚filozofií‘. Základním kamenem teoretické struktury je filozofie, primárně postmodernismus a metamodernismus. Technika meta-filmu, pastiš a nostalgie jsou tři hlavní postmoderní elementy v Andersonově díle. Jeho unikátní užití těchto prvků přesahuje anticipovaný postmoderní tón a vytváří novou strukturu cítění charakterizovaného metamoderní nadějí. Upřímnost vyvěrá z postmoderních prostředků, jež Anderson užívá k vytvoření metamoderní senzibilitu.

Práce se soustředí na tři zmíněné atributy Andersonovy filmografie, které v jak postmoderním tak metamoderním kontextu pomáhají rozložit tematické vzorce a významnou vizualitu jeho filmografie. Práce se zaměřuje na osm Andersonových filmů: *Grázlové*, *Jak jsem balil učitelku*, *Taková zvláštní rodinka*, *Život pod vodou*, *Darjeeling s ručením omezeným*, *Fantastický pan Lišák*, *Až vyjde měsíc*, *Grandhotel Budapešť*. Analýzou těchto děl se dobereme k základním stylistickým a obsahovým prvkům, stejně jako k unikátnímu vykreslení protagonistů. Andersonův osobitý styl filmové tvorby je značně sebeuvědomělý, avšak z jeho filmů je patrný pocit naděje, díky němuž filmy vystupují za hranice své filmové diegése a vytvářejí nový umělecký směr. Stylizovaný svět, jež Anderson přináší na filmové plátno, vytváří umělý povrch, který odvádí pozornost od pravých hodnot jeho cítění. Režisér nastavuje zrcadlo svému obecenstvu a ukazuje, že dnešní divák je tažen pouze vizuálně líbivým zážitkem z filmu, zatímco důležité koncepty jako paměť, nevinnost, touha, a kreativita jsou zanedbány.

Stručná analýza vztahu mezi filmem a filozofií se opírá o přístupy několika filozofů a teoretiků, jako např. Felicity Colman, Noël Carroll, Murray Smith, Thomas Wartenberg and Daniel Frampton. Vhled Jeana Baudrillarda a Fredrica Jamesona byl zejména užitečný v rámci postmodernismu, zejména z hlediska filozofie, estetiky a kultury. Metamodernismus je zvážen v mezích definice Timothea Vermeulena a Robina van den Akkera. Filmoví teoretici a kritici jako Matt Zoller Seitz, James MacDowell and Jim Collins nabízí zasvěcený pohled na Andersona a na filmové

kategorie, do kterých bývá zařazován. Anderson je uznáván jako přední režisér dnešní nezávislé americké filmové produkce díky své participaci v indie hnutích Quirky, Smart a New Sincerity Cinema, jež jsou relevantní pro podrobnou charakteristiku jeho filmů. Navíc demonstrují, že upřímná senzibilita je čerstvým přístupem k filmovým subjektům v dnešní filmové tvorbě. Tento teoretický základ slouží jako prostředek k interpretaci osmi zkoumaných filmů, které jsou protknuté stejným unikátním stylem a obsahem odhalujícím, co dané filmy zprostředkovávají.

Teze v žádném případě není slepou, jednostrannou oslavou současného režiséra, který pomalu proniká do filmového mainstreamu, ale jedná se spíše o kritickou studii kulturně relevantní osobnosti. Buduje na teoretickém základu a jejím hlavním záběrem je Andersonův formální styl, témata a vykreslení postav, což vrhá světlo na jeho individuální filozofii a to, jak tvoří svou upřímnou senzibilitu.

Klíčová slova: Wes Anderson, Grázlové, Jak jsem balil učitelku, Taková zvláštní rodinka, Život pod vodou, Darjeeling s ručením omezeným, Fantastický pan Lišák, Až vyjde měsíc, Grandhotel Budapešť, film, filozofie filmu, upřímnost, senzibilita, postmodernismus, metamodernismus, meta-film, pastiš, nostalgie.



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## 1. Introduction

The subject of this thesis is Wes Anderson's cinematic world. The analysis draws an auteur study of this contemporary director in order to discover what sensibility his cinema demonstrates. The backbone theory builds on postmodern reasoning in philosophy, culture and aesthetics to then examine how this all comes through the cinematic medium, particularly in the films of Anderson. The main postmodern features to be considered are the meta-cinematic techniques, pastiche and nostalgia prevalent in Anderson's oeuvre. However, his unique employment of these elements transgresses the anticipated postmodern tone, which systematically results in detachment and irony. A recent reactionary movement called *metamodernism* demonstrates that nowadays a new structure of feeling is rising in art, which is long past postmodern cynicism and is characterized more with hopefulness. Therefore, Anderson uses postmodern means to create a metamodern sensibility that signalizes sincerity. Focusing on the three above-mentioned attributes of Anderson's filmography in both a postmodern and metamodern framework helps to deconstruct his eminently visual and thematically patterned cinema in order to reveal where the particular sensibility of the director stems from. The analysis of Anderson's eight features—*Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *The Darjeeling Limited*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *Moonrise Kingdom* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*—aims to reveal the films' essential stylistic and content elements as well as the exceptional characterization in his cinema to then interpret it all beyond a postmodern context.

The approach when discussing Anderson's filmography first has to characterize postmodernism and its factors to truly understand how the director exceeds it and consequently aligns himself more with metamodernism. Since both postmodernism and metamodernism have a close connection to philosophy, the study slightly touches upon the relation between film and philosophy. The paper examines thinkers' and theorists' views on cinema in light of philosophy, including that of Felicity Colman, Noël Carroll, Murray Smith, Thomas Wartenberg and Daniel Frampton. In relation to postmodernism, the readings of the films are constructed on the theories by Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson specifically; while metamodernism is considered through Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's definition. Moreover, film theorists and critics such as Matt Zoller Seitz, James MacDowell and Jim Collins

offer insightful views on Anderson himself as well as on the contemporary film categories where the director is arguably placed. Anderson is a part of the present-day “Indiewood” sector of American independent cinema by being involved with Quirky, Smart and New Sincerity Cinema indie movements. The discussion of these three film types helps to spot today’s tendencies in cinema, which are topped with Anderson’s originality. The thesis is not trying to prove an overall philosophical reading of cinema, nor does it suggest that Anderson is a philosophical filmmaker. The theoretical background should serve as means of interpretation for Anderson’s eight features, which all bear the same signature look and content and thus disclose what his films mediate. The title of the thesis pays tribute to Jacques Derrida by using a term inherently associated with him—*deconstruction*—to delve into whether the statement “there’s nothing outside of the text”<sup>1</sup> is true for Anderson’s filmography.

The paper attempts to interpret Anderson’s oeuvre as thought-provoking; the philosophy of Anderson’s cinema is synonymous with the sensibility his films represent. The director’s instantly recognizable mode of filmmaking, being profoundly self-aware, arguably constructs a meta-cinematic world characterized by pastiche and nostalgia; however, through the hopeful response, Anderson is able to step outside of his films’ diegesis and mark an important new movement. The nostalgia in Anderson’s work determines the general tendency of looking back, often resulting in sentimental reminiscing over the past. Even though something tragic and negative happened in the characters’ past lives, which affects their present, too, they still choose the olden days and reject the here and now. This is similarly reflected in Anderson’s formal style, since every possible aspect, from the *mise en scène* through the music to the settings, conveys a retro impression. Anderson’s films are all presented in a way to create nostalgic yearning in the viewers themselves. The longing sentiment of the films thus, necessitates a deep respect for former times, which is also achieved by the use of pastiche. The films resemble artistic compositions made up of selected other works, either through borrowing techniques and certain styles or through incorporating various references to other artists. Generally, the pastiche mode can function in two opposing ways: either by using the references for parody or for homage. Concerning Anderson, certainly the latter is true: his borrowings are acknowledged and praised, so they are far from parody or

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976) 158-159.

from a mocking tone. Overall, Anderson's self-referentiality is throughout signaled; all eight features are composed in such fashion—whether through the visual style, narrative, themes or through the characters themselves—that the artificiality of his own creation is constantly called attention to.

Therefore, the meta-cinematic aspect of his filmmaking very much applies to a meta-understanding of the work he delivers to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, too. The highly stylized universe he brings onto the movie screen in each case serves as a distraction; this artificial surface hides the real values of Andersonian sentiment. He is holding out a mirror to the audience, showing that today's spectator is only allured by a visually appealing cinematic experience when, in fact, important concepts such as innocence, desire, creativity and memory—Anderson's hidden focus—are neglected. Therefore, the divided perception of his work—either the audience loves or hates him—developed for the wrong reasons, Anderson is only recognized for the most eye-catching feature of his films: the elaborate and decorative visual aesthetics. This study thus argues that the principal function of Anderson's cinema is not only to produce pleasure, derived from his exquisite style, nor just to entertain, through his witty tone, but also to provoke. The particular impression his films grant the viewers runs parallel with a challenging rethinking of forgotten values in today's world. In this light, the thesis demystifies what kind of cinematic, philosophical and general cultural sensibility Anderson presents to cinemagoers nowadays in a technology and instant information-driven society, looking only for spectacle and a tenuously defined present rather than reminiscing over the past or considering the future as a clarion of new opportunities. Anderson is celebrating in 2016 twenty years of creative filmmaking in which he has produced eight full-length features, all of which collectively posit him as a relevant director to discuss this year.

The following study is divided into five main chapters; the first introduces Anderson as a director and his characteristic traits along with short summaries of his eight films. The second chapter establishes the backbone of the research—namely, a philosophical understanding of cinema—and discusses postmodern tendencies and thinkers as well as comments on the idea of metamodernism. This is followed by three chapters dedicated exclusively to the filmography of Anderson in terms of his style, plots and characters. Firstly, the chapter on visual aesthetics will mainly focus on Anderson's self-aware retro-stylized visuals dictated by a pastiche mode. Secondly, the thematic pattern determined by the past, and thus designating notions

such as loss, youth and desire, will be reviewed. And lastly, the construction of characters and what they represent and mediate for the audience will be explained. The study then concludes with a summary of what Anderson's oeuvre delivers as well as a possible categorization of his cultural relevance on the grounds of creating authentic art. Therefore, this thesis by no means delivers blind, one-sided praise to a contemporary director slowly becoming mainstream but rather a critical study of a culturally relevant persona in our present-day film-informed, film-saturated, and at times ostensibly film-driven society.

## 2. Who is Wes Anderson?

This chapter serves as an introduction to Wes Anderson by giving a general outline of his filmography. Starting off with a short biography of his life in order to understand his background—which to some extent influences the universe of his films—the analysis moves on to a possible classification of Anderson’s position in contemporary American cinema. His work is generally discussed as part of independent cinema of which three “categories”—Quirky, Smart, and New Sincerity cinema—are especially relevant when it comes to the detection of his sensibility. The essential trademarks of these three prominent indie-film types are easily applicable to Anderson’s works and overall facilitate the understanding of all the strata in his films. However, the quirky, smart and new sincerity characteristics are only discussed briefly, since evaluating Anderson as a director in light of auteur theory is more essential. If considered an auteur, he must exhibit authentic and autonomous traits formally as well as thematically; thus the chapter offers an outline of Anderson’s typical features in terms of his visual style, themes, construction of characters and prevailing tone. Since the tone is closely linked to Anderson’s sensibility, the chapter considers the contribution of the meta-cinematic quality, nostalgia and pastiche to the mode of his films. The chapter concludes with short summaries of his eight features, which will assist the interpretation of specific scenes and motifs in the following chapters.

Wesley “Wes” Anderson, born on May 1, 1969 in Houston, Texas, was educated at Westchester High School and then at a private school in Houston, St. John's School. The privileged environment became a great inspiration for his films later on, since he often portrays high-class society characters. The second most important childhood event in Anderson’s life was the divorce of his parents, which may be the origin of the dysfunctional-family theme pervasive in his films. Although he began staging plays and writing stories from his early school years, he did his BA in Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin; proving a distant, yet explicit, connection between the director and philosophy. Finally, he teamed up with his college roommate Owen Wilson (now a famous Hollywood star who is a regular actor for most of Anderson’s films), and the pair co-wrote their first short movie,

which they later developed into a full-length feature, *Bottle Rocket*,<sup>1</sup> released in 1996. Anderson has produced seven long features since, several short movies and even directed some advertisements for Prada<sup>2</sup> and American Express.<sup>3</sup> He currently resides in Paris, and in fact his obsession with French filmography, music and culture, in general, has developed into a distinctive trait in all his work. From a technical point of view, Anderson is a self-taught director, but him being an ardent cinephile characterizes his filmography influenced by other auteur directors. Moreover, Anderson's oeuvre is like a mosaic of influences: one can discern traces of pop culture, literature, magazines, photographs and paintings.

Anderson is recognized as a prime director of contemporary American indie cinema, often called as "an Indiewood icon."<sup>4</sup> Geoff King describes the "Indiewood" sector in his book *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema*<sup>5</sup> as a current popular film type that combines both hallmarks of the independent cinema and Hollywood.<sup>6</sup> This division of American cinematography has been pervaded in the recent years by a quirky mode of expression. James MacDowell, in his groundbreaking text "Notes on Quirky,"<sup>7</sup> argues that this distinct cinematic experience is achieved by specific patterns reoccurring in the mode, the style and the themes of quirky films. Once these patterns are identified, the seemingly offbeat subject on the surface and the stylized mise en scène communicate directly to the audience on an emotional level. More importantly, however, the backbone of the quirky feeling ("it is not a genre, yet is also consistently drawn to certain genres,"<sup>8</sup> writes MacDowell) is characterized by tensions and shifts: on the one hand, being ironic and remote; on the other hand, creating sympathy for the characters and thus serving a covert therapeutic function. These quirky elements are all present in Anderson's oeuvre; thus the following chapters will, to a certain degree, rely on MacDowell's model.

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<sup>1</sup> *Bottle Rocket*, dir. Wes Anderson, distr. Columbia Pictures, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> WeLiveWorkCreate, "PRADA CANDY L'EAU," Online Video Clip, *Youtube*, 27 March 2013 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbRE10bmmmpc>> 12 February 2016.

<sup>3</sup> hst74, "Wes Anderson: American Express Commercial," Online Video Clip, *Youtube*, 18 Nov 2009 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbO3BS0Uzm0>> 12 February 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Peter C. Kunze, *The Films of Wes Anderson: Critical Essays on an Indiewood Icon*, ed. Peter C. Kunze (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Geoff King, *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> King 93.

<sup>7</sup> James MacDowell, "Notes on Quirky," *Movie: a Journal of Film Criticism* 1 (2010): 1-16.

<sup>8</sup> MacDowell, "Notes on Quirky" 2.

Moreover, Anderson undeniably stands close to another established indie category beginning in the early 1990s, specified as Smart cinema. Jeffrey Sconce's influential paper "Irony, Nihilism and the New American 'Smart' Film,"<sup>9</sup> on which Claire Perkins' book *American Smart Cinema*<sup>10</sup> is based, considers Anderson as a "smart" director. Although these types of films are typically cynical and ironic, Perkins proves Anderson's position in this category since he encapsulates this cinema's exemplary tone, which confuses parody with sincerity<sup>11</sup> and often brings forward a bittersweet view on the world. The third type of indie film Anderson is often associated with is the so-called New Sincerity film. Jim Collins coined the term in his essay "Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity,"<sup>12</sup> where he argues that these films, by means of rewriting, attempt to recover a lost purity. These films are typically "in pursuit of an almost forgotten authenticity, attainable only through a sincerity that avoids any sort of irony or eclecticism,"<sup>13</sup> corresponding with what Anderson is trying to achieve. These three categories are applied to determine the characteristics of Anderson's films as well as to show that the creation of the sincere sensibility is a fresh take on cinematic subjects in contemporary independent cinema.

However, whether Anderson really belongs to a genre, category, or sector is only of secondary importance, since he should be, first and foremost, recognized as an auteur director. Anderson is involved in every aspect of filmmaking: writing, directing and producing, all while maintaining a consistent style. He is often viewed as a perfectionist who meticulously controls each feature of his work, as he claims himself: "I have my own rules, and they're not rules that I made in order to achieve a certain effect; they're sort of genetic."<sup>14</sup> According to Andrew Sarris in his "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,"<sup>15</sup> the criterion for an auteur theory is primarily the distinguishable personality of the director who must exhibit a particular style, which

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<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Sconce, "Irony, Nihilism and the New American 'Smart' Film." *Screen* 43.4 (2002): 349–69.

<sup>10</sup> Claire Perkins, *American Smart Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Perkins 94.

<sup>12</sup> Jim Collins, "Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity," *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993) 242–63.

<sup>13</sup> Collins 242–63.

<sup>14</sup> Scott Feinberg, "Wes Anderson on His Life, Career and Biggest Success Yet, 'Moonrise Kingdom' (Q&A)," *The Hollywood Reporter.com*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, Dec 2012 <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/race/wes-anderson-his-life-career-406295>> 23 March 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," *Film Theory and Criticism 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 451–454.



becomes his signature. Anderson has become one of those directors whose work is instantly recognized and could not be attributed to anyone else. He brings to the screen reoccurring models in an “Andersonesque fashion,” which today bears a major influence on other filmmakers and on popular culture. His specific way of filmic communication is, for instance, even used for a video about the State of Union Address in the USA,<sup>16</sup> and several trailers of other well-known movies<sup>17</sup> are remade to mimic Anderson’s style. This underlines how a particular way of seeing is attributed to Anderson, marking him as an original artist of today who constructs his own separate imaginative world. However, for a more aware viewer, Anderson’s borrowings from other major directors, mainly Orson Welles, François Truffaut, and Stanley Kubrick, call critics to question his authenticity and originality. Several reviews dismiss the director for his allusions; however, Anderson does not try to mask or hide his influences, he rather points back to the importance of these “masters” and raises awareness of their work. Moreover, since his cinematic influences are widely recognized philosophical directors—most of them discussed even by Gilles Deleuze—it suggests that his persona could be also connected to philosophical filmmaking even though not generally considered as such.

Therefore Anderson, as an auteur, is always exploring similar if not the same themes. Typically, the plots of his films are circulating around the basic unit of our society, showing fragmented familial or complex father-son relationships. The films are always somehow determined by childhood and the impact it has on the individual characters. Besides the overruling presence of youth and past traumas, Anderson frequently comments on the concept of belonging not only within domestic boundaries, but in general terms by being part of a group, class or system. Through this the films question ideas about nonconformity and alienation, since generally all Andersonesque characters are outsiders refusing to integrate who thus fall victim to the utmost loneliness. Therefore, within peaceful limits, the plots often exhibit mischief, violence, and even murder, which indicate that the characters want to break out from their suffocating situation. Mostly the distance from others is due to their thwarted-genius personae, which causes them a great deal of trouble to relate to their environment and to the people around them. Therefore, another prevailing theme is

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<sup>16</sup> CNN, “The State of the Union Address as a Wes Anderson film” Online Video Clip, *Youtube*, 10 Jan 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2nP-hci-AQ>> 23 March 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Louis Paquet, “Forrest Gump by Wes Anderson,” Online Video Clip, *Youtube*, 24 April 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3p3mMJsd1jQ>> 23 March 2016.

the problems of identity or self-realization, which together comment on artistic creation itself. Since the characters have a difficult time adjusting or coming to terms with the events in their lives, Anderson also displays a great contrast between the reality of the films and the protagonists' illusionary worlds, positing desire and ideals as the driving forces behind the plots.

The visual aesthetics of Anderson is the most distinguishable element of his filmmaking. His sets, costume design, characters' look and general *mise en scène* of his films are meticulously stylized to the last detail, where spontaneity or haphazardness plays no role. There is a strong focus on the interior where the characters belong—be it a house, a room, a tent or a hotel—resembling a mock-up or a dollhouse packed with objects. Formally, his style seems theatrical, often applying therefore a kind of baroque aesthetics. Anderson is not trying to imitate reality but rather to put as many details into one shot as possible—however, in an ordered manner. The framing and composition are symmetrical and rigidly fixed almost unnaturally, which illustrate Anderson's self-awareness and point to the meta-cinematic aspect of his way of expression. Even the editing underlines the proportionality inherent to the director: the scenes generally shift in 180 degrees shots between the characters or the camera zooms in on them. Consequently, close-ups or complicated extended dolly shots oscillate with Anderson's famous overhead birds-eye-view perspective. The retro style is evident from all the visual aspects as well as from the sound. Anderson's films collectively have an emblematic soundtrack, usually of music inherent to 1960s and 1970s British pop culture.

The biggest focus in Anderson's oeuvre, however, is on the characters. The whole essence of his work is centered on these unique outsiders who construct an illusionary world around themselves to hold their controlling personalities. Anderson always uses his group of actors, who, by now, have become inseparably associated with their roles. The returning stars of his films are part of a big Andersonian family—a piece of evidence of a strong union between the cast and the director, even beyond the screen. Anderson's protagonists could easily walk from one film to another and fit altogether within the setting. Whether an adolescent, a fox, a man struggling with middle-age crisis, or a motorbike accident survivor, each character is presented in the same manner without exception: they all have a similar look and behave awkwardly. This oddness mostly stems from their paradoxical portrayal—adults are like children and vice versa—or from how they stand in opposition to their

surroundings. Moreover, the peculiarity of these personae is achieved by a common speech pattern that Anderson practices. His protagonists talk in a blunt fact-like way and then suddenly say something unexpected, forming absurd and entertaining dialogues topped with “surprising sentimentality.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, the wit in an Anderson film as well as the whimsical style are based on these oppositions.

This leads to the last essential aspect to be considered with Anderson, which is the mode of his cinema. Although this paper argues that Anderson has a prevailingly sincere sensibility—which logically and likewise requires a sincere mode—his films are rather characterized with a fluctuating nature in terms of tone. This is a typical trait of Quirky Cinema, where the films consistently have “a tone that exists on a knife-edge of judgment and empathy, detachment and engagement, irony and sincerity.”<sup>19</sup> Characters saying something tragic in a withdrawn manner, a discrepancy between what is shown and what is to be considered, or what the audience already knows and the characters are unaware of, collectively point towards an ironic mode. The subtle mockery as well as the protagonists’ sarcastic humor comes from a notable intent to entertain. On the other hand, the three focus elements of this paper—nostalgia, pastiche and Anderson’s self-reflexivity—establish a serious and candid mode, far from a disinterested cynical one. Therefore, as John Gibbs states about *Life Aquatic* specifically but which could be applied to Anderson’s whole oeuvre, “marked shifts in tone are a feature of the film which contribute to the framework of competing tonal elements that make up the whole.”<sup>20</sup>

The oscillating tone is tightly connected to Anderson’s systematic mixing of genres, too, which reverts certain audience expectations and is often the main source of humor in his films. The atmosphere of the Andersonian plot always somehow shifts from comedy to drama; his movies could be described with the fitting term “melancomi.”<sup>21</sup> Anderson plays along with comedy traditions: he portrays absurd romances, incorporates slapstick as well as deadpan temperament, and moreover, the genius characters often behave as if doing their own stand-up shows. The dramatic, or more precisely melodramatic, features such as death, divorce, and loneliness are regularly overshadowed with laughter. As MacDowell asserts:

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<sup>18</sup> Sconce 351.

<sup>19</sup> MacDowell, “Notes on Quirky” 13.

<sup>20</sup> John Gibbs, “Balancing Act: Exploring the Tone of *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 10.1 (2011): 132-151.

<sup>21</sup> Warren Buckland, “Wes Anderson: A ‘Smart’ Director of the New Sincerity?,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 10.1 (2012): 1-5.

Quirky films often combine various types of comedy. There's the deadpan: dry, perfunctory, taking moments that we might expect to be made melodramatic and downplaying them for comic effect.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore the other, melancholic mood typical of Anderson's films does not derive from tragic events that the characters encounter. Even though Anderson's films are overall entertaining, there is an underlying melancholy which stems from Anderson's obsessive preoccupation with past.

The three focus elements this study is concerned with—the initiators of the sincere sensibility of Anderson's cinema—are also crucial in determining the “melancometic” mood prevailing. Reminiscence over the past, which comes through all the levels of an Andersonian film, lends his work a depressive undertone. Nostalgia, as one of the most prominent traits of his films, functions as a constant reminder of loss being an inherent part of one's life. Similarly, the persistent backward-looking attitude in a meditative way is achieved by the use of pastiche. The myriads of references in Anderson's films are not incorporated in order to parody other artists' works. According to Fredric Jameson, “pastiche is a parody that has lost its sense of humor,”<sup>23</sup> it is a “blank parody”<sup>24</sup> which results in a neutral mimicry devoid of laughter or any political or historical awareness. On the other hand, it can also have a more hopeful agenda and function as paying homage rather than criticizing, which logically excludes the interpretation of it as being ironic or subversive.<sup>25</sup> In particular with Anderson the pastiche mode comes through as humorous only when he seemingly imitates a genre whose “flavor” he then freely undermines. Moreover, the melancholy is balanced out with the meta-cinematic aspect achieved mostly visually in the films, by which Anderson appears to mock himself as a creator. He inscribes his own work with a self-referential playful attitude rather than just showing sentimental idealistic praise of the past. Therefore, the humor often created by irony is referring to the cinematic mode and Anderson's self-awareness about himself as a “copying” director rather than serving as a vehicle to generate a satirical sensibility.

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<sup>22</sup> James MacDowell, “Wes Anderson, Tone, and the Quirky Sensibility,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 10.1 (2011): 6-27.

<sup>23</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto, 1985) 114.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Constable, “Postmodernism and Film,” *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steven Connor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 48.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000) 277.

All these archetypal traits considered above are more or less apparent in the whole oeuvre of Anderson starting from his first feature, which already establishes high expectations for this auteur. His directorial debut, *Bottle Rocket*, starts off with Anthony, who voluntarily locked himself up in a psychiatric unit waiting for Dignan to “rescue” him. Anthony, an instable and melancholic persona, gets easily tricked to Dignan’s childish plots involving robbery, apparently under the lead of a legendary criminal, Mr. Henry. After accepting one more member into the team—Bob, the rich “kid” bullied by his brother—just because he has car, they rob a bookshop together. As a temporary hideout they stay in a cheap motel, where Anthony starts a romantic relationship with Inez, a Paraguayan housekeeper. Dignan’s illusion of leading a criminal life falls apart after Bob leaves with the car, and Anthony likewise abandons him after having found out that he lied about being an accomplice to Mr. Henry. After a while the three members are united again through Dignan’s final master plan, this time actually with the help of Mr. Henry. However, in the end it all breaks down: Mr. Henry turns out to be a fraud who robs Bob’s house while they are on the mission and Dignan ends up imprisoned.

Anderson’s second feature, *Rushmore* (1998),<sup>26</sup> similarly depicts a great dreamer and control freak. Max Fisher is an enthusiastic student of Rushmore who leads every possible extra-curricular activity and would pour his heart out for the academy, except that he neglects studying. Because of his poor grades and his obsessive pursuit of his teacher, Miss Cross, he gets expelled and has to enroll in a public school. Meanwhile, Herman Blume, a depressed middle-aged man close to having a divorce, similarly falls for the teacher when trying to help Max to get her. The friendship of the two then crumbles due to the ridiculous competition over Miss Cross, who is still grieving her dead husband. Eventually Max has to let go of his imaginary scenarios: to accept the fact that he is a barber’s son, that a romantic relationship with his teacher is not possible, and that a public school is just as good as Rushmore. In the end he makes peace with his new reality: he stages a play which provides a great opportunity to invite everyone, and the film ends with reconciliation.

*The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001)<sup>27</sup> is the picture most preoccupied with family issues. The movie starts off with the separation of Etheline and Royal, the parents of three genius children. They each have special characteristics: Chas is a businessman,

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<sup>26</sup> *Rushmore*, dir. Wes Anderson, distr. Buena Vista Pictures, 1998.

<sup>27</sup> *The Royal Tenenbaums*, dir. Wes Anderson, distr. Buena Vista Pictures, 2001.

Richie is a sportsman, and the adopted child, Margot, is a playwright. Although successful as children, now in their adulthood they struggle: Chas is overcoming the loss of his wife, Richie destroyed his tennis career and is still in love with his half-sister, and Margot is trapped in a loveless marriage. Royal, after having been kicked out from his hotel, makes up an excuse to stay with his family, stating that he is dying of cancer, to then be able to carry out his selfish plan preventing Etheline from remarrying. The family is thus all united once again in the Royal “mansion,” which makes them face past traumas. Ultimately Margot and Richie can finally pursue their love for each other, Chas reconciles with his father, Eli—a family friend and Margot’s temporary lover—is institutionalized due to his drug problem, and Etheline, after finally divorcing Royal, is able to marry her colleague. Although, Royal does really die in the end, he does so with his supportive family around him.

The fourth film, co-written with Noah Baumbach, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004),<sup>28</sup> is Anderson’s most visually surreal and absurd film. Steve Zissou, a middle-aged, burnt-out oceanographer with his own documentary, sets sail on a journey to avenge the death of his friend killed by a mysterious jaguar shark. Unexpectedly, Ned, who may or not be his son, joins the Zissou crew, making Steve face the difficulties of fatherhood. The plot of the film is mostly preoccupied with Zissou, who is going through a great depression; he has seemingly lost everything from his talent to his wife. The presence of a pregnant journalist determined to destroy Steve in her article further adds pressure on the main character, especially because he fails even in the pursue of her. During his obsessive quest, however, Steve is eventually able to accept Ned as his son; Ned’s sudden death changes his self-pitying and stagnant attitude towards life. Thus, in the end, his encounter with the monster who killed his friend is peaceful, and he is finally able to finish his documentary.

*The Darjeeling Limited* (2007),<sup>29</sup> written in collaboration with Jason Schwartzman and Roman Coppola, similarly portrays a plethora of obsessive characters. The film is concerned with the Whitman brothers, who embark on a spiritual journey to India in order to reconcile with their past trauma of losing their father and to track down and confront their absent mother—all rather under duress. Instead of pursuing inner peace, however, they use drugs and cling to objects rather

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<sup>28</sup> *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, dir. Wes Anderson, distr. Buena Vista Pictures, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> *The Darjeeling Limited*, dir. Wes Anderson, distr. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2007.

than to each other as brothers because they are obviously still stuck in the past. Their quest suddenly gains meaning when they encounter death itself, failing to rescue an Indian boy. Having been invited to the funeral, the characters are forced to reconcile with the funeral of their father, shown in a flashback. After this experience the acceptance of their mother's different way of mourning seems easier, too, and they are finally able to let go of their destructive lifestyle and simply get along with their lives in the moment.

The director's only animated feature, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009),<sup>30</sup> is Anderson and Baumbach's adaption of Roald Dahl's children's book. The plot follows Mr. Fox, who is bound to let go of his inherent wild nature as a hen-hunter to settle down and be a family man with a proper job. However, unable to rein in his instincts, he makes up a plan for how to rob chickens, geese, turkey as well as cider from the three local farmers: Boggis, Bunce and Bean. The three dehumanized characters, after finding out Mr. Fox was behind the crime, are determined to hunt him down, which forces every animal to escape underground. Here they are all united and thanks to their special animalistic skills prepare themselves for a final battle to rescue Kristofferson—the visiting cousin—who has been taken hostage by Bean himself. The conflict between humans and animals result in a compromise: the animals end up living peacefully in a sewer system, left alone by the humans. Mr. Fox, however, once again finds a way out, pointedly to a supermarket where they all raise their drinks to survival, and what is more, to the fact that Mrs. Fox is again pregnant.

Anderson's seventh film, co-written with Roman Coppola, depicts two young lovers' escape from the adult world. *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012),<sup>31</sup> set on an island off the coast of New England in the 1960s, tells the story of Suzy and Sam, who commence an adventure together after a short epistolary romance. Both of them are "troubled children" unable to fit in among their peers and constantly misunderstood by grown-ups. They create their own little Eden, but eventually the adults find them and are determined to separate the two. Unlike the miserable and passive adults, the young lovers do not give up, and with the help of the scouts they manage to escape once again and get married unofficially. The ending of the film culminates in the church where the children are hiding, attracting the whole town there to finally break them apart while a huge destructive storm is approaching. Just like there is calm after

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<sup>30</sup> *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, dir. Wes Anderson, distr. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> *Moonrise Kingdom*, dir. Wes Anderson, distr. Focus Features, 2012.

a storm, Sam finds his new home with the lonely police officer and Suzy reconciles with her parents.

Anderson's most recent feature, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014),<sup>32</sup> is very grand, indeed. The director combines his characteristics of artifice and sincerity to the highest level with a plot affected by the real tragic events of the changing period for Central Europe before WWII. It presents a story of an orphan refugee lobby boy, Zero, who is lucky enough to have the most inspiring and devoted mentor, a symbol of what this fading world represents, Monsieur Gustave. Even if the movie runs on several story lines, it is mainly concerned with the adventures of these two seemingly different figures. The film resembles "a screwball comedy chase extravaganza,"<sup>33</sup> which essentially begins because of mysterious murder investigation; thus, dark matters such as theft, blackmail and imprisonment are incorporated. Seemingly everything is resolved by settling the inheritance of the hotel; however, the story ends on a tragic note when M. Gustave—because of defending Zero on a train ride—is shot by the fascists. The whole narrative runs of three main levels—the 1930s, 1960s and 1980s—and the majority of the movie is retold by Zero Mustafa, an aged man encountering a young writer in the 1960s, which shows that not only has the hotel changed but also the atmosphere generally. The silence after all the suffering from the war has left its mark on *The Grand Budapest*, on *Zubrowka* as well as on *Zero*.

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<sup>32</sup> *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, dir. Wes Anderson, distr. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Isabel Stevens, "The Anderson Touch," *Sight & Sound* 24.3 (2014): 30-34.



### 3. Postmodernism and Metamodernism

The aim of this chapter is to throw light on the theoretical background this thesis is building on being philosophy, in general, and postmodernism and metamodernism, specifically. Considering that the paper's focus is the interpretation of Anderson's sensibility the study demands a philosophical commentary. Anderson's filmmaking contemplates overlooked values nowadays, overall creating a sincere sentiment and peaceful reasoning. Therefore, the Andersonesque sentiment stimulates thinking, or more accurately rethinking, through which the director's sensibility becomes an interchangeable term with philosophy. Even though Anderson is not a particularly pronounced philosophical filmmaker so to speak, his enclosed filmic universe suggests an interpretation that it is Anderson's own "philosophy." In order to establish a thoughtful and specialized reading of Anderson's films, it is first essential to include a brief overview of how cinema and philosophy can possibly interact. The essay's aim, however, is neither to examine whether the relation between philosophy and film is viable nor whether all films exhibit a certain philosophical reading, as this would require a much more insightful and detailed research. The following outline of film and philosophy's connection will be concerned exclusively with two approaches from the various speculations, namely film-philosophy and filmsophy.

On the one hand, this chapter establishes the grounds on judging cinema from a philosophical point of view to reveal Anderson's thinking pattern behind his oeuvre. On the other hand, it discusses postmodernism both as a philosophical and as an art movement due to the director's close attachment to it. In particular, Anderson's transgression of a postmodernist attitude proves as relevant subject that consequently aligns him with a reactionary movement, metamodernism. However, categorizing Anderson as postmodernist or metamodernist director is greatly problematic, since it opens up questions as to how his films are able to communicate these two trends' philosophical arguments. However, Anderson's considerable relationship to philosophy is more about mediating a sentiment and a particular thinking rather than philosophizing about postmodernism or metamodernism in his case. His works do not exhibit specific and deliberate references to any philosophical argument, in fact. Nevertheless, the two movements are relevant to Anderson culturally and

aesthetically; their fusion gives birth to his idiosyncratic ideology and worldview. This opens the sole focus of the paper—leaving behind the general components of Anderson’s cinema as well as the analysis of philosophy and film’s relation—to reveal his sensibility.

Philosophy, since its very beginnings, has always sought ways to explain and understand the significance of art forms. Although the connection between film and philosophy is problematic, their relationship has never been a conflicting concept. The basic opposition between them is that philosophy belongs to sphere of the real and cinema to the realm of the unreal; it is the medium of illusions, re-interpretations and imagination. This is, however, a limited view of the connection between the two, since film, as philosophy, offers a space on reflection, meditation, analysis and criticism. Therefore some thinkers consider the relation as more of a reciprocal one, that film and philosophy affect one another.<sup>1</sup> The thesis tries to utilize this symbiosis to show how the films of Anderson could offer modes of reflection, and thus it will only comment briefly on the opposite view that film and philosophy are incompatible. According to Thomas Wartenberg, the first issue arising between the two is that, “while philosophy is a practice guided by the desire to attain truth, films are normally made to engage their audience.”<sup>2</sup> This marks entertainment as a film’s primary aim and thus dismisses the possibility of generating or projecting thinking. For this reason especially, Murray Smith claims that films should be only taken seriously as works of art but should not be considered as works of philosophy,<sup>3</sup> since “thought experiments” and “artistic storytelling” serve different purposes.<sup>4</sup> However, in order to attain the relation between Anderson and philosophy, the arguments against philosophy in film generally need to be neglected. The study accepts as an established fact that, “Philosophy offers specific methods for film analysis, and the medium of film in turn offers specific models for philosophical reflection.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Louise Burchill, “Jacques Derrida,” *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers* (Durham, US: Routledge, 2014) 175.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas E. Wartenberg, “Beyond Mere Illustration: How Films Can Be Philosophy,” *Thinking Through Cinema: Film as Philosophy*, ed. Murray Smith and Thomas E. Wartenberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 20.

<sup>3</sup> Murray Smith, “Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity,” *Thinking Through Cinema: Film as Philosophy*, ed. Murray Smith and Thomas E. Wartenberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 41.

<sup>4</sup> Smith 35.

<sup>5</sup> Felicity Colman, “Introduction,” *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers* (Durham, US: Routledge, 2014) 14.

From the various approaches when considering the two fields together, the most important category is the philosophy of film—that is film-philosophy—which acknowledges the similarities and differences between the two domains. As Felicity Colman claims in her book *Film, Theory and Philosophy*,<sup>6</sup> “at the core of most film-philosophy lies an interest in approaching the philosophical possibilities offered by the screen form.”<sup>7</sup> This proposition does not consider the two as equals, nor as hierarchical; but rather focuses on how film is able to project philosophy in its cinematic context. Film-philosophy thus “begins with the moving sound-image,”<sup>8</sup> which supports the medium with its own mode of argumentation, and “in these terms, film-philosophy is a study of dynamic forms and conditions.”<sup>9</sup> At the dawn of cinema, film was often viewed as moving photography; later on it was precisely this ‘movement quality’ of cinema that separated it from other art forms and allowed for a relationship to be established with philosophy. Colman’s suggestions thus circulate around the screen medium and its particularities, such as the moving image and the sound affecting the content of these images to then explain what defines the “cinematic.”<sup>10</sup> In this light, arguably, film is able to “question, dismiss, create and destroy philosophical beliefs concerning perception, memory, the imagination, knowledge, aesthetics and scientific laws.”<sup>11</sup>

Taking the connection between the two fields one step further, a recent revolutionary approach suggests that a film has a separate thinking, a “filmind.” Daniel Frampton in his book *Filmosophy*<sup>12</sup> conceptualizes cinema as an organic intelligence, which functions and thinks separately from other art forms or from reality. Having this power, film bears an effect on its audience and generates new understanding for cinema as well as carries a possibility to change the perception of everyday life: “It must seek, its own natural philosophicalness—that of revealing a new thinking, a new point of view about the world.”<sup>13</sup> Arguably, films dominate today’s thinking whether they portray reality or a fictionalized world; they both set an example and function as a useful tool for criticism. Contemporary cinema bears such

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<sup>6</sup> Felicity Colman, *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers* (Durham, North Carolina: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Colman 1.

<sup>8</sup> Colman 1.

<sup>9</sup> Colman 1.

<sup>10</sup> Colman 3.

<sup>11</sup> Colman 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Frampton 212.

a significant role in the society's everyday life that it is simply compulsory to discover its philosophical significance. Moreover, because nowadays cinema has become a major cultural phenomenon; the philosophical analysis of a film can reveal not only its aesthetic matters but also its position in a societal context. The philosophy of art has an omnipotent presence—be it a deliberate purpose or an accidental one—which enlivens the understanding of both high and low culture.

Today accessibility, circulation, and globalization all have a definite effect on the reception of cinema. Films not only attract wide audiences but more and more thinkers who recognize but at the same time question the rising position of cinematic reality in ordinary lives. As Noël Carroll observes: “It would be surprising if a social enterprise as substantial as a motion picture did not attract philosophical attention.”<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, “what both disciplines emphasize is that how we see things does not always depend on vision: on physical sight,”<sup>15</sup> on the other hand, one discipline is argumentative and static whereas the other is visual and dynamic. Therefore the crucial question to be asked is what can possibly classify a film as “philosophical.”<sup>16</sup> Daniel Shaw proposes a hierarchy which culminates around three essential steps: a film can be regarded philosophical if it can be interpreted from a philosophical perspective, if a film deliberately illustrates a philosophical theory, and thirdly, if a film contributes to an ongoing philosophical inquiry.<sup>17</sup> In regard to Anderson, as an original voice in contemporary culture embodying a specific sensibility, his work fits into the third aspect. His cinema stands out from the technology- and innovation-obsessed culture by cultivating a predilection of looking back and revaluing seemingly lost ideas, which then contributes to present-day discussions and mentalities.

Having established the elementary theoretical framework and its pragmatic role in relation to Anderson, the second part of this chapter now moves on to consider postmodernism and consequently metamodernism. These two movements will be reviewed mainly culturally and aesthetically to better estimate in what context Anderson works. The most important thinkers relevant to postmodern relations include Jean Baudrillard—a French philosopher, sociologist, cultural theorist as well

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<sup>14</sup> Noël Carroll, “General Introduction,” *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An Anthology*, ed. Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 1.

<sup>15</sup> Colman 14.

<sup>16</sup> Colman 13.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Shaw, “Philosophical and Being John Malkovich,” *Thinking Through Cinema: Film as Philosophy*, ed. Murray Smith and Thomas E. Wartenberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 112.

as political commentator—and Fredric Jameson—an American literary critic and political theorist—who both offer views on philosophy, culture, society, and on films in general. Anderson’s linkage to postmodernism similarly often blends philosophical, cultural and aesthetic aspects of this movement together. Correspondingly, the scope of research is narrowed down to concepts such as skepticism and the problem of reality, which correlate with the thesis’s targets: pastiche, nostalgia and self-referentiality. Since metamodernism has limited sources, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker’s influential article “Notes on Metamodernism”<sup>18</sup> will be used as a frame of reference to outline this movement’s traits. Metamodernism is an ongoing cultural response that attempts to contextualize what is going around in the world.<sup>19</sup> According to Vermeulen and Akker, metamodernism prides itself with “a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism”<sup>20</sup> sensibility that becomes predominantly applicable for Anderson.

“One of the best ways of describing postmodernism as a philosophical movement would be as a form of skepticism—skepticism about authority, received wisdom, cultural and political norm, etc.”<sup>21</sup> This is reflected in films by their being skeptical about reality, which works on three levels: either a film becomes reality itself, the film critiques outside reality, or the film questions its own reality. Challenging reality in postmodernism is unsurprising since ontological questions are inherent to this movement.<sup>22</sup> The first of these questions considers that film becomes reality itself, a suggestion by Baudrillard, who coined the term “hyperreality.” According to Baudrillard, hyperreality is a characteristic mode of postmodernity where the “real” and imaginary implode into each other, and then they are experienced together operating on a continuum.<sup>23</sup> He discusses this term in his preeminent book *Simulacra and Simulation*,<sup>24</sup> stating that hyperreality is without an original referent; it creates a simulation of something that does not even exist but

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<sup>18</sup> Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2 (2010): 1-14.

<sup>19</sup> Cher Potter, “Timotheus Vermeulen talks to Cher Potter,” *Tank* (2012): 215.

<sup>20</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 5.

<sup>21</sup> Stuart Sim, “Postmodernism and Philosophy,” *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Stuart Sim (London: Routledge, 2001) 3.

<sup>22</sup> Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 15.

<sup>23</sup> John Storey, “Postmodernism and Popular Culture,” *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Stuart Sim (London: Routledge, 2001) 149.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

appears real. Therefore reality as such is pushed to the background; in fact, we live in a copy world today: “these death pangs of the real and of the rational that open onto an age of simulation.”<sup>25</sup> As he claims, postmodern simulacra and simulation “is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real.”<sup>26</sup> Baudrillard furthermore claims that “life is cinema,” meaning that the filmic culture became so incorporated into everyday life that people essentially live “in” films rather than in reality. Likewise, Catherine Constable argues, “reality that has been completely pervaded by cinema, resulting in the apprehension of the real as film, is one of the key metaphors for the postmodern.”<sup>27</sup> The “annihilation of reality is said to be the result of capitalism,”<sup>28</sup> postmodern society is exposed to films, TV shows, advertisements and thus inhabits a world of surfaces and obsessive consuming. Especially because of this, the task of cinema should be to explore “the insignificance of the world through the image,”<sup>29</sup> according to Baudrillard.

The second relation to be discussed between film and reality in a postmodern context is when the film critiques the current real world. Science fiction films are said to be bringing the most coherent critique of the contemporary society.<sup>30</sup> The latest blockbusters routinely having dystopia settings show the dangers of how science and technological innovations can lead to a life of misery, destroying the inherent human essence in the world. However, these films are paradoxical since they characteristically use computer-generated images (CGI) and an abundance of special effects. Baudrillard is highly skeptical about technology in general, fearing that in our modern world we are forgetting that power actually emerges from absence; this technological modification will lead us, he argues, slowly to indifference and boredom.<sup>31</sup> Therefore an opposite approach is to reject the future, exclude robots and all the modern gadgets and rather look back to the past as an example. The past becomes a form of an escape and in this respect it encapsulates a critique of the

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<sup>25</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 43.

<sup>26</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 2.

<sup>27</sup> Constable 44.

<sup>28</sup> Constable 44.

<sup>29</sup> Gerry Coulter, “Jean Baudrillard and Cinema: The Problems of Technology, Realism and History,” *Film-Philosophy* 14.2 (2010): 6-20.

<sup>30</sup> Mark T. Decker, *Industrial Society and the Science Fiction Blockbuster: Social Critique in Films of Lucas, Scott and Cameron* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016) 8.

<sup>31</sup> Coulter 6-20.

present day by reminiscing about better, former times. As Steven Connor asserts, “reproduction of records of the past, the past appears to be included in the present, or at the present’s disposal.”<sup>32</sup> The constant looking back attitude is reflected in cinema likewise, as Jameson comments on a nostalgia film, it “either recaptures and represents the atmosphere and stylistic features of the past and/or recaptures and represents certain styles of viewing of the past.”<sup>33</sup> This statement already suggests a prominent pastiche mode developing in postmodernism, since the awareness of the stylistic allusions is what cultivates the experience of a postmodern film.<sup>34</sup>

As Constable suggests, “postmodern artists cannot invent new perspectives and new modes of expression; instead they operate as bricoleurs, recycling previous works and styles;”<sup>35</sup> therefore pastiche and nostalgia are intertwined because they are both rooted in the past. Nevertheless, “postmodern pastiche, recuperating elements of a past, of different pasts, is not about the claim to an authoritative view of history;”<sup>36</sup> as Ingeborg Hoesterey points out, it is only a way of imitating the past. Furthermore, Jameson’s views about pastiche become especially relevant to nostalgia when he connects pastiche to time: “Jameson’s pastiche marks the annihilation of temporality. It is the pervasive quality of the image that systematically destroys the possibility of reaching the real and the past.”<sup>37</sup> Jameson thus rejects the chronology of time, since it is only “an effect of language”<sup>38</sup> and builds on atemporality. He defines the postmodern condition as being “condemned to perpetual present”<sup>39</sup> which leads to a schizophrenic state. Accordingly, for Jameson, pastiche does not mean to evoke any real identification with an existing time; pastiche can only be considered as nostalgic as in being yearning and sentimental. Anderson’s pastiche does connect with the past to some extent, but never in order to reach it, only to reminisce about it. The use of pastiche connected to a nostalgic tendency is not meant to go back to it or view past as superior; it does not even try to present it as real but only to formulate something influenced and still original.

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<sup>32</sup> Steven Connor, “Introduction,” *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 10.

<sup>33</sup> Storey 151.

<sup>34</sup> Storey 151.

<sup>35</sup> Constable 48.

<sup>36</sup> Ingeborg Hoesterey, *Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, Literature* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press) 52.

<sup>37</sup> Constable 49.

<sup>38</sup> Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 119.

<sup>39</sup> Constable 49.

As a consequence, a postmodern film's consideration of reality can also result in challenging its own medium, creating a meta-world where the fictionalized reality is deliberately pointing towards its own construction. According to Colman, what postmodern philosophy "produced was new ways of thinking: metacritical methods that provide critical analyses of traditional ways of doing philosophy and critiquing the criticism itself."<sup>40</sup> This was then similarly extended to postmodern art, since "postmodernism [...] is concerned almost exclusively with the nature of its own presentness."<sup>41</sup> With films, this runs parallel with how meta-cinema similarly questions the modes of representation and the cinematic conditions: issues such as how an idea is presented, what it is trying to communicate to its audience and, most importantly, what it refers to, are the essential points to discuss. A postmodern film in this manner shows explicitly that what is taken for real and that the surface the audience is mostly obsessed with are intentionally constructed. Once the artificial universe is believed to be deliberate then it points back to the audience culminating in a skeptical and harsh criticism again. Already in 1984 Jameson "observed that contemporary culture seemed to be expressing a new form of 'depthlessness'—a concentration on style and 'surface.'"<sup>42</sup> Jameson furthermore critiques the tendency to impress the audience by creating "intensities," which is a whole new type of emotional ground tone;<sup>43</sup> but which results in superficiality anyway. The meta-element—in other words self-referentiality—as a reemployed stylistic choice of postmodern artists thus, on the one hand, points out the importance of creation and art; on the other hand, it can be the essential vehicle to mirror the audience's often unconscious demands.

The problem of reality, pastiche, nostalgia and meta-cinema as postmodern elements are essential to discuss in relation to Anderson. Nevertheless, he cannot be considered as a straightforward postmodernist director; after all, his special sincere sensibility brought on the screen connects him more to metamodernism. This aesthetic tendency is characterized by oscillating between modernism and postmodernism; it presents oppositions such as enthusiasm, hope, naïveté, purity in

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<sup>40</sup> Colman, "Politics of the Cinematic Century," *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers*, 119.

<sup>41</sup> Connor 10.

<sup>42</sup> Val Hill and Peter Every, "Postmodernism and Cinema," *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Stuart Sim (London: Routledge, 2001) 101.

<sup>43</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 6.



contrast with irony, melancholy, knowingness and ambiguity.<sup>44</sup> Vermeulen and Akker's discussion circulate around the "post-postmodern" debate; however, they reject this term since it adopts approaches that "radicalize the postmodern rather than restructure it."<sup>45</sup> For instance, metamodernism is similarly concerned with concepts such as time and space yet—taking a different stance from postmodernism—it deliberately expresses atemporality and displacement, in trying to show that they are actually possible.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, the looking back tendency in metamodernism neither operates as parody nor as a tactic to make someone cry, but rather as means of re-signification and to look to the future with a new perception. Therefore, the postmodern elements and tendencies remain; they just need to be reanalyzed in terms of their effect and can no longer be viewed in a postmodern context,<sup>47</sup> as Vermeulen and Akker assert. What has previously argued for cynicism now acquires a positive attribute, "another structure of feeling, intimating another discourse."<sup>48</sup> This renewed oscillating expression of aesthetics takes a neoromantic turn—an attempt to romanticize the world once again. On the whole,

Metamodern neoromanticism should not merely be understood as re-appropriation; it should be interpreted as re-signification: it is the re-signification of "the commonplace with significance, the ordinary with mystery, the familiar with the seamliness of the unfamiliar, and the finite with the semblance of the infinite."<sup>49</sup>

Having established the philosophical background of the study, the discussion of postmodernism and metamodernism, as well as having pointed out the primary qualities of Anderson's presumed filmic categories (see Chapter 2), the concluding paragraph attempts to define sincerity and sensibility. As brought up previously, sensibility is an exchangeable term for philosophy in this sense, or more accurately, the thinking Anderson's cinema portrays and promotes. Sincerity, on another hand, is a notoriously difficult term to define. In relation to Anderson, it is crucial to state that his sincerity does not denote the supposed emotional context his work arose from, but

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<sup>44</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 7.

<sup>45</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 3.

<sup>46</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 12.

<sup>47</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 2

<sup>48</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 2.

<sup>49</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 12.

it is more describing the nature of his cinema and consequently its effect on the viewers. A. D. M. Walker defines this concept as follows:

The key to understanding the nature of sincerity is given, I believe, by etymology. 'Sincere' and 'sincerity' come from the Latin 'sincerus' and 'sinceritas' [...] the dominant idea in sinceritas emerges indisputably as that of purity. This is borne out, for example, by the frequent harnessing of 'sincerus' with 'mundus' or 'purus'; and indeed when 'sincere' made its first appearance in English, the idea of purity seems to have been very close to the surface.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, Walker refers to Augustine's writings, from which he generally deduces that being sincere excludes the harboring of evil desires.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, sincerity stands in close association to purity, truthfulness which in Anderson's case could be interpreted as the authenticity of his cinema. Although, the motives of Anderson are unknown and perhaps irrelevant, his characters are never "motivated by some reprehensible desire."<sup>52</sup> The following chapters, thus, discussing his style, themes and the characters themselves, should prove that the effect and sensation of the particularities of Anderson's cinema exhibit the upmost sincerity. His self-referentiality, pointing towards his filmic universe's crafted nature and thus its falsity, is what ultimately makes his work sincere.

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<sup>50</sup> A. D. M. Walker, "The Ideal of Sincerity," *Mind* 87.348 (1978): 481-497.

<sup>51</sup> Walker 492.

<sup>52</sup> Walker 495.

## 4. Style

Anderson's formal style marks him as an original artist of today with a very distinctive manner of visualizing his own, self-crafted world. The highly stylized universe, the miniature sets noticeably theatrical, however, are meant to point out Anderson's self-referential artificiality in his works. The pastiche dominates every aspect of his *mise en scène*; whether it is a direct borrowing from another director, writer or artist, all the details on the screen are deliberately signifying something. Moreover, the retro way of expression coming through visually as well as aurally register the director's formal features, all conducted in a nostalgic mood. The aim of this chapter is to discuss particularly the visual means of Anderson when creating his sensibility while referring to postmodern arguments drawn out before. The main elements to be analyzed are: how is the meta-quality apparent through the camera, framing and sets, how Anderson creates hyperreality, to what extent his *mise en scène* is regarded as kitsch and how the tendency of looking back to the past is established by a nostalgic mode and by pastiche. Most importantly, in light of metamodernism, the chapter is concluded with an explanation of how sincerity is achieved by formal means in Anderson's films.

The director's aesthetics is, first and foremost, very self-aware by preserving the basics of the postmodern tradition. A postmodern film's self-reflexivity highlights its own making; with Anderson, the viewer's attention to the fact that the movie itself is a work of imaginary is hinted at throughout. As MacDowell states generally about quirky films, the constructions of the scenes with "the act of having characters look out towards the camera"<sup>1</sup> constantly designate "forthright artificiality."<sup>2</sup> Anderson's cinematography generally organizes

a static, flat-looking, medium-long or long 'planimetric' shot that appears nearly geometrically even, depicting carefully arranged characters, often facing directly forward, who are made to look faintly ridiculous by virtue of a composition's rigidity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacDowell, "Notes on Quirky" 6.

<sup>2</sup> MacDowell, "Notes on Quirky" 8.

<sup>3</sup> MacDowell, "Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility" 9.

The most deliberate example of this layout comes across in *Life Aquatic*, where Steve Zissou is the ultimate self-referential hero documenting his own life, which comes through visual strategies as well as through narration. As Jacques Rivette states, “Every film is a documentary of its own making,”<sup>4</sup> which gains a double meaning in *Life Aquatic*. Steve is followed by his documentary crew with a camera in their hands that consciously illuminates the making of a film, so just like everything is controlled and constructed on the Zissou boat, the same can be said about Anderson’s universe likewise. “Let me tell you about my boat,”<sup>5</sup> says Steve, facing the audience and holding a miniature of his ship Belafonte, while behind him is the actual Belafonte cut in half for the audience to observe it. Steve then guides Ned through all the bizarre rooms on the ship, by which the film exposes its own way of filming the scenes and deliberately points out that the set is a large mock-up.

Not only in this feature, but generally all Andersonian films’ camerawork is managed with complex tracking shots moving through walls and laying out for the audience the whole set, like the Tenenbaums mansion, or Suzy’s house in *Moonrise*. As Matt Zoller Seitz summarizes:

Young Margot lights up the theater set model. This close-up almost feels like a filmmaker’s self-deprecating joke on his fondness for cross-section shots that photograph life-size interiors as if they were dollhouses or dioramas.<sup>6</sup>

The self-referentiality of Anderson is furthermore carried out by his habitual involvement of theatre and theatricality in his films. *Rushmore* could be regarded as a movie about theatre—not only plot-wise but also visually—since the film’s structure resembles a drama piece. This is mainly employed by camerawork, framing, and by the use of props which theatricalize daily life. The movie starts off with curtains rising; the stage drapes then reappear cyclically with months name written on the screen used as a backdrop for constructing the plot chronologically. Moreover, the film frequently positions the camera outside windows, as well as makes use of props such as doors and entrances, which delineate the boundary between inside and outside, mirroring the similar borderline between the stage and audience at the

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Rivette in Dennis Lim, “It’s Actual Life. No, It’s Drama. No, It’s Both.,” *New York Times.com*, Aug 2010 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/movies/22hybrid.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/movies/22hybrid.html?_r=0)> Nov 2015.

<sup>5</sup> *Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* 13 min 30 sec.

<sup>6</sup> Matt Zoller Seitz, *The Wes Anderson Collection* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 2013) 151.

theatre. Additionally, the camera is often static, letting the plot happen for itself and creating an impression that the characters are playing out the actions onstage.

In *Rushmore* the self-conscious principle functions as an enlightening hint in order to understand Max's character: as he is creating an imaginary world around himself and escapes reality in his plays, it is likewise visually echoed on the screen. Moreover, the movie not only comments on the theatre itself but also reveals what is literally "behind the curtain." This deprives the audience of the possibility to relate to Max's plays: fake blood applied on the face of student actors can be seen, as well as Max's arguments with them behind the whole production. The theatrical, sometimes over-the-top, aspect of Anderson's style thus points to the hyperreality previously discussed in regards to Baudrillard (see Chapter 3). Anderson's universe is often a simulation—created by the characters—rather than a reality, which is a general trait of this director's technique for creating a visual space.

As mentioned already, there is a great focus put on the interiors in Anderson's films, which typically exceed realistic representation. In *Grand Budapest*, for instance, a matter-of-fact perception of the hotel is right away eliminated due to the introduction of the estate through an artificial picture. What is more, the elaborate set Anderson brings on screen comes close to being associated with kitsch. As Tomas Kulka observes: "Kitsch images are usually used as self-conscious subversions, as part of irony, parody, anti-art, or some other artistic ideology."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the cake-like perfect universe of Anderson's *mise en scène* does argue for a certain self-mockery: as the audience cannot accept it as genuine, it cannot project itself as such. The kitsch, as part of Anderson's sweetened universe, is mostly achieved by his use of color palettes. Like in *Moonrise* the picture is filtered with yellow, or *Life Aquatic* contrasts bright red and blue, the fabrication of colors culminates in *Grand Budapest* with the intense crimson and soft pink. Kitsch can also function as a means of bringing forth visual clichés, which are considered more as stylistic processes that do not pretend to be art and cannot evoke emotional responses due to their overuse. Watching the movies of Anderson in a row certainly evokes recognition from the audience; his directorial trademarks are always repeating visually, and as such Anderson arguably creates clichés for himself. However, when viewing the effect of

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<sup>7</sup> Tomas Kulka, *Kitsch and Art* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 9.

kitsch as deliberate it acquires a self-referential meaning, since kitsch in itself is not bad or harmful provided that it is recognized as ostentatious.

Baudrillard also recognizes kitsch as part of the postmodern aesthetics and as a rising cultural tendency in recent years:

This proliferation of kitsch, which is produced by industrial reproduction and the vulgarization at the level of objects of distinctive signs taken from all registers (the bygone, the 'neo', the exotic, the folksy, the futuristic) and from a disordered excess of 'ready-made' signs, has its basis, like 'mass culture', in the sociological reality of the consumer society.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore Anderson's whimsical and often corny world, in addition with the plethora of objects constructing his *mise en scène*, backs up the postmodern criticism of superficiality. The disapproval of the surface-driven society goes hand in hand with the rejection of blind consumption. Anderson, as directorial persona, is often discarded for only sustaining an imposing façade, yet his spectacle can also function as an exposition of a problematic and dominant cultural want for such an idealistic visual universe. His exaggerated aesthetics are thus meant to point out that the real essence is lying beyond the kitschy sets, just as real values in the world are beyond the bounds of consumerism.

However, it is through the prevailing retro stylization in all the movies when it comes to creating the important nostalgic mood inherent to the director. Firstly, Andersonian settings are either explicitly in the past or, even if happening in the present, look as if from a previous era due to a vintage design. The fictional town of Zubrowka in *Grand Budapest* is a combination of various Central European towns, carrying an atmosphere of the unsteady climate between the wars. A nostalgic view of this period is shown explicitly by depicting the luxurious estate in three different periods. The impeccable, ostentatious world of the hotel changes when occupied by the fascist towards the end, and thirty years later only a shadow of its former self remains. The whole narrative runs on three main levels—the 1930s, 1960s and 1980s—which is indicated by a shift in aspect ratio as well as by ascribing dominant colors to each era. For instance, M. Gustave's hotel is pink and red while the decaying estate in the 1960s is principally orange and brown. Moreover,

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<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage, 1998) 110.

regardless the time period, the *mise en scène* is haunted by the past in all Anderson's films. Objects such as record players, old furniture, binoculars, old-fashioned suitcases, and many more confuse the audience expecting a contemporary representation of the scenery. The films are never meant to evoke a present vibe or a modern spirit; there are no high tech gadgets, no latest innovations, and no fast cars on display.

The "outdated" quality furthermore underlines how Anderson's films have a hand-made feel to them; it is unthinkable to relate his visuals with CGI. Supposedly unintentionally, Anderson thus connects himself to Baudrillard's rejection of high tech<sup>9</sup> especially in his animated movie *Mr. Fox*, where he uses stop-motion and miniatures throughout. Another strategy of creating a nostalgic atmosphere besides the setting and objects is costumes. Anderson's characters are mostly dressed in a style that systematically resembles that of the 1960s and 1970s, mainly, or they just have a different look than the present vogue would dictate. Although *Moonrise* is evidently set in the 1960s, the temporal setting of *Tenenbaums* and *Life Aquatic* remains unknown; the retro air is thus chiefly suggested through the fashion of the characters. This invokes the metamodern "atemporality,"<sup>10</sup> since the films are often positioned deliberately out of time, and it is impossible to determine the eras of the plots. Apart from all the visual clues, another indicator of the past is definitely the films' musical accompaniment. Typically, the films' soundtracks very much resemble each other in terms of having bands from the same era: The Kinks, Nico, The Rolling Stones. These bands interestingly add a certain rebel feel to Anderson's cinema via the connection with British pop culture of the mid-twentieth century.

As Seitz observes, Anderson's heart belongs to this era;<sup>11</sup> thus, unsurprisingly, most of the director's references come particularly from the 1960s or 1970s. Since all his borrowings stem from the past, the nostalgic visual elements thus run along with the pastiche mode in the films. For instance, many of the scenes in Anderson's third feature are designed according to old *New Yorker* covers by which the Big Apple is revealed "as dreamed by a young person who has never been there and only knows it secondhand, through literary and cinematic and musical sources."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil Or The Lucidity Pact*, trans. Chris Turner (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005) 96.

<sup>10</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 12.

<sup>11</sup> Seitz 309.

<sup>12</sup> Seitz 109.

Anderson's inspirations stem from various sources and often combine different eras, which eliminate the interpretation of his nostalgia as trying to present the "real" past. Although the over-the-top Zubrowka, New York City and the island off the coast of New England bear some resemblance to existing places in real life, they are obviously idealistic fabrications of the director. The use of pastiche in this manner is meant to rather point backwards to eras in which handmade craft, an authentic innovative voice and cultural importance were the essential elements of a quality cinema. The past as a contributing element to Anderson's imagination proves that in order to create something idiosyncratic nowadays an artist has to involuntarily look back to former works of geniuses. There are several remarkable allusions to other directors: slow-motion tracking shots and zooms from Kubrick or picturesque compositions from the Nouvelle Vague réalisateurs.

Moreover, Anderson also incorporates elements beside the cinematic medium; his rigidly constructed sets, as Seitz describes: "recall Cornell's boxes—the strict, steady, four-square construction of individual shots, by which the cinematic frame becomes a Cornelian gesture, a box drawn around the world of the film."<sup>13</sup> This is often seen as Anderson's exaggerated artificiality, however, as with Cornell, this "high degree of artifice is somehow inimical to seriousness, to honest emotion, to so-called authenticity."<sup>14</sup> Notably, Anderson's incorporations do not only derive exclusively from "high" culture. In terms of music, Anderson's use of popular culture in *Life Aquatic* flourishes in a very interesting way by playing with the idea of how something can be familiar but extraordinary at the same time. One of the crewmembers is a real-life Brazilian musician, Seu Jorge, who recorded remakes of David Bowie songs in Portuguese especially for the soundtrack of the film.

As Anderson summarizes himself, "everything's kind of inspired by something, and everything's done in some converted place."<sup>15</sup> It is thus the "converted" aspect which becomes relevant. The looking back attitude, the portrayal of faded worlds, and the pastiche mode all imply Anderson's own self-aware usage of these elements. He adapts and transforms them to finally give a frank impression. As MacDowell asserts about quirky aesthetics in general, its

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<sup>13</sup> Seitz 23.

<sup>14</sup> Seitz 23.

<sup>15</sup> Seitz 120.



style often tends towards both an “artificiality and a simplified purity.”<sup>16</sup> The handmade feel, the incorporation of childish drawings, and even the “exquisite tidiness”<sup>17</sup>—typical for Anderson—somehow come through not only as calculated, but also intentionally purified.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, to consider Anderson’s style only in terms of the fabricated stage design would allude to Jameson’s argument about depthlessness (see Chapter 3) and bring a very limited understanding. Anderson’s great concentration on the surface is in fact connected directly to the characters and argues for a recovery of “a lost purity.”<sup>19</sup> Trying to achieve an immaculate attribute externally—bringing a symmetrical and meticulously designed Andersonesque surface—supposedly mirrors his idealist and innocent protagonists’ inner values. Therefore, the non-ironic, not based on borrowings and non-nostalgic side of Anderson’s style is linked with a sincere treatment of his characters. His idiosyncratic approach is highlighted by his intimate use of close-ups. As Jean Epstein observes, “the close-up is the soul of the cinema;”<sup>20</sup> for Anderson it is the soul of his visual sincerity. To conclude, Anderson’s formal strategies all end up in creating a sincere sensibility when following closely the characters and creating the whole visual world around them.

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<sup>16</sup> MacDowell, “Notes on Quirky” 8.

<sup>17</sup> MacDowell, “Notes on Quirky” 5.

<sup>18</sup> MacDowell, “Notes on Quirky” 7.

<sup>19</sup> Collins 242–63.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Epstein in Frampton, *Filmosophy*, 127.

## 5. Themes

As mentioned above, Anderson has a specific thematic pattern in his oeuvre, but the aim of this chapter is to only reflect on those that are related to the three focus fields, and to then reveal the sincerity lying beneath. Arguably, the nostalgic mode is as strong thematically as well as formally. The plots of the films are determined by the past, either by the prevalence of childhood's influence on adult life or by obsessive mourning, which stagnates the protagonists. Stemming from these entanglements, the themes also open the analysis of the protagonists' and the audience's desire. Typically, Anderson's main subject matters evolve around the characters' familial relationships and the difficulties they encounter in their environment as outsiders. However, it is important to note that these issues derive from the essential concerns of his films—the rejection of the present and the refusal to grow up. Therefore, the pastiche mode alludes to films and books that are similarly attentive to either the themes of youth, coming of age, or the time gone by. Moreover, this chapter comments on the great attention allotted to storytelling in Anderson's films since it is also a form of keeping the past alive and it serves as a meta-cinematic commentary about the plot itself. The constructions of meta-worlds by the characters connect to Baudrillard's ideas about reality as well as point out the reasons for which the characters feel the need to flee to their own imaginary worlds. Therefore, the critique of present reality is a thematic motif seemingly urging nonconformity and escapism. However, the exhibition of these issues does not cross the line towards extremism. Anderson's films never manifest aggression, but rather pacifism and harmless individual fights, which again, lead to honest resolutions, evoking sincerity rather than judgment.

The presence of nostalgia is indicated on three main thematic levels, all somehow pointing backwards rather than forwards. Firstly, the films display a preoccupation with childhood; secondly, the past comes through the subtext of death, which generally happened a long time ago and still affects the characters' lives. And thirdly, desire either stemming from childhood or representing a longing for these early years of life similarly signals the omnipresence of the past. From the thematic aspect nostalgia acquires a negative tone; it shows the dangers of constantly looking back and being controlled by past traumas. Therefore, the themes often stand in

contrast to the joyful and idealistic visual artifice. However, commonly, reminiscing also generates idealization; as Linda Hutcheon claims about nostalgic representation, it “is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire.”<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, the nostalgic mood functions as a vehicle to show the power of the past in the diegesis of the films, on the other hand, it offers a commentary beyond the screen suggesting a cultural vogue of today. Childhood, loss, death, nostalgia, desire are all interconnected in search for purity and hope, the characters steep themselves in memories rather than face present-day struggles. As Robert Pogue Harrison points out in his recent book *Juvenescence*,<sup>22</sup> looking back to better times is a common tendency intertwined with childhood:

In truth, childhood is what every adult has lost, regardless of whether one has an accurate or distorted recollection of its condition. Precisely because it persists in the mode of loss, we have a marked tendency to mythologize its golden age or transfigure its reality through selective memory, fantasy, nostalgia, and retrospective projection. Certainly the loss of childhood is our first ‘intimation of mortality,’ if not our first taste of death itself.<sup>23</sup>

According to MacDowell, the notion of childhood dominating the screens of Quirky Cinema is indicated through the characters’ childish behavior, through the *mise en scène* stuffed with objects from their childhood, or by the presentation of a difficult coming-of-age story.<sup>24</sup> Anderson similarly follows this trend; however, the predominant childhood aspect in his films is more connected to the reworking of traumas. For instance, in *Tenenbaums* the plot explicitly starts with the separation of parents, which happened at an early age for the children, and then moves on to present how their lives remain completely affected by it. Moreover, Chas and Margot still deal in their adulthood with disturbances due to their uncaring father: a flashback scene of Royal shooting Chas in a game—even though they were on the same team—defines Chas’ attitude towards his father for the rest of his life. His issues of not being

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<sup>21</sup> Linda Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern,” *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory*, ed. Raymond Vervliet and Annemarie Vestor (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 195.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *Juvenescence: A Cultural History of Our Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Harrison 31.

<sup>24</sup> MacDowell, “Notes on Quirky” 9.

included and even betrayed by his own parent makes him a grown-up full of cynicism and detachment, as well as encourage him to be an overtly protective father of his two sons. Royal's treatment of Margot is on even more extreme grounds of seclusion; he constantly refers to her as his adopted daughter and does not consider her as part of the Tenenbaum family. Even though Chas makes peace with Royal, thanks to the help of his sons, the film does not try to idealize the complex relationship that children can have with their parents. Margot never really makes up with Royal, which somehow makes the love-relationship with Richie possible without being scorned upon as incest. In Anderson's other films childhood traumas are similarly rooted in imperfect fathers, hence the portrayal of manifold father-son relations is laid out in *Life Aquatic*, *Mr. Fox* and *Darjeeling*.

Another form of dealing with past traumas is the process of grieving in the films. Death is an especially hard concept to come to terms with in an Andersonian world since it is something that the control freak personages have no influence over. A tragedy happening prior to the films' story line extends its effect on the present for the characters, which is especially evident in *Rushmore* and entirely drives the plot of *Darjeeling*. In *Rushmore*, Max lost his mother in his early childhood, which is interrelated with his enthusiastic clinging to Rushmore itself. He desperately tries to stay in the time when his mother encouraged him to write the play for which he got accepted to the academy. Miss Cross is similarly stuck in the past; she cherishes a "dead fingernail" of her husband more than Herbert's pursuit of her in the present. In *Darjeeling*, the difficulty of grieving is aligned with material replacements of the unbearable loss; the brothers' attachment to objects screams for their need to find surrogate parents. The suitcases—bearing their father's initials—are literally a burden for them that they carry around throughout the film, since they are not able to depart from their dead parent's memory. Just like the father's spirit is controlling their life and is omnipresent whether they are on a train, on a bus or just about to take a plane, there is always attention given to the luggage on the screen. They are finally able to let it go in the end when running together, which is a symbolic way of showing how they untangle themselves from the burdening past. Peter, the second child, is confronted throughout by his brothers because he has appropriated their father's belongings. Wearing the father's glasses, through which he cannot even see properly, signifies how he is not able to perceive and live in the present and has the most

difficult time getting over his old man's death. Joshua Gooch suggests the importance of

[linking] Anderson's use of these freighted psychoanalytic thematics and studied mise-en-scène to his self-construction as a postmodern (capitalist) auteur. [...] Anderson's focus on objects speaks to these desires, most especially the objects that characters use to connect to other objects and desires.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore the predominant attitude of looking back, the importance of childhood and the construction of ideals in the films open the discussion about desire. This thematic concept constitutionally points towards psychoanalysis; however, the study only touches mildly on Jacques Lacan's theories since it is not the thesis's focus.

Andersonian desire can specifically have its base in childhood. For Richie Tenenbaum, Margot represents the unfulfilled object of his love, which culminates in myriads of paintings produced in his early years and is the cause of his gradual depression. Moreover, the constant reminiscing mindset signifies a desire to relive childhood—the period of careless joy and innocence—which signals escapism. This temperament is most thoroughly expressed in *Moonrise*: the film is set during the adolescence of the two main protagonists, who reject the grown-up world and flee together. Suzy and Sam's belief in finding a possible Eden stands in contrast to the adult characters in the film, for whom a positive rejuvenation of their lives seems a lost opportunity already. This extensive focus given to childhood could also function outside the diegesis of Anderson's plots and reflect more widely on postmodern philosophy. The characters' creation of their separate world runs parallel with Elizabeth Wilson's claim about a postmodern search for a romanticized infancy and loss of happiness.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, metamodernism described with neoromantic attitudes similarly aligns itself with a tendency such as “to turn the finite into the infinite, while recognizing that it can never be realized.”<sup>27</sup> The discourse naturally evokes Lacan's theory; as Wilson explains,

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<sup>25</sup> Joshua Gooch, “Objects/Desire/Oedipus: Wes Anderson as Late-Capitalist Auteur,” *The Films of Wes Anderson: Critical Essays on an Indie-wood Icon*, ed. Peter C. Kunze (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 186.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, “Fashion and Postmodernism,” *Postmodernism and Society*, ed. Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi (London: MacMillan Press 1994) 228. Lacan's mirror stage claims that infants recognize themselves in the mirror by turning oneself into an object from outside.

<sup>27</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 8.

this utopian nostalgia is expressive of the wish to recall the lost—narcissistic—object of desire, the idealized image of Lacan’s mirror stage, in which the unstable infant body is magically ‘fixed’ in a never-to-be-realized perfection.<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, the idealization presented on the screen points towards the audience’s longing, as Slavoj Žižek asserts: “the cinema of desire offers spectators the opportunity of recognizing and embracing their position as desiring subjects.”<sup>29</sup> This raises a question: why is the nostalgic mood so appealing to the audience, and how come there is a promise of better and more promising world in Anderson’s oeuvre when his topics are rather tragic? In Walter Benjamin’s critical viewpoint, hope resides in the past; thus the connection between past and sincerity has a suggested philosophical background:

In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, as Todd McGowan observes, “the very existence of desire indicates the subject’s dissatisfaction with the social order, and this gives desire an incipient radicality.”<sup>31</sup> The characters’ unfulfilled desires and their dissatisfaction thus often result in the their desperate attempt to construct illusionary spheres around themselves, which characterizes Anderson’s cinema with meta-worlds. In light of postmodernism, meta-cinematic worlds reject naïve realism since they are only conceptual constructs and instead promote subjectivity. As Žižek sees it, films are structures, fantastic systems literally and symbolically showing us the desire for subjectivity. It is not

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<sup>28</sup> Wilson 228.

<sup>29</sup> Slavoj Žižek in Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007) 70-71.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *On the Concept of History* (New York: Classic Books America, 2009)

<sup>31</sup> McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan*, 79.

about choosing illusion or reality but see the reality in the illusion.<sup>32</sup>

*Rushmore* starts off with Max dreaming about being a math genius, which introduces him as a childish hero who lives in an idealistic world. He not only stages plays at school; he attempts to stage reality, too, by making up false scenarios (e.g. claiming to be a son of a neurosurgeon). Dignan similarly creates “master plans” in *Bottle Rocket* to live in an illusion of being a successful criminal. Even the youngsters from *Moonrise*, whose ideal Eden is destroyed by the adults and who are forced to return to reality, keep the deception until the very end. They maintain their relationship secretly: Sam escapes out of the window after painting their “Moonrise Kingdom” at Suzy’s house.

The meta-creations of the characters, besides commenting on desire, are also significant in relation to Baudrillard’s simulation, using the example of Disneyland:

Disneyland exists in order to hide that the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America that is Disneyland [...] is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to a hyperreal order and to the order of simulation.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore the constructed realities within the films are meant to reveal the falseness that surrounds the characters. Their constant opposition to the “mainstream” environment corresponds to Baudrillard’s view on how America is blindly following fake idols. Moreover, if reality is no longer real then the criticisms of Anderson’s works as “whimsical,” “not believable” are invalid since the meta-cinematic techniques should point out that reality is subjective. Arguably, as Munsterberg claims, the more a film is moving away from reality, the more it moves towards the mind;<sup>34</sup> the illusionary worlds the characters are creating around themselves should thus illuminate the thinking behind these protagonists rather than simply present reality.

The construction of illusionary worlds puts much importance on storytelling. The narrative of Andersonian films serves a different function than to reveal

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<sup>32</sup> Slavoj Žižek in Christopher Silva, “2006 The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema,” Online Video Clip, *Youtube*, 10 March 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7PgBGrAeD8>> 5 April 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 12.

<sup>34</sup> Frampton 22.

explicitly the characters; it is more about stressing the importance of fiction and recapitulation. Whether the way a story is told happens in a third-person book narration form, like in *Tenenbaums*, or it is constructed in a documentary form as in *Life Aquatic*, the reproduction of an event, memory and the significance of talking about it are apparent subjects in every Andersonian story. The most complex, yet obvious, homage to narration is shown in the plot of *Grand Budapest*, which runs on four different time sequences. A girl in the beginning holds a book; its author then tells how he encountered the story written in his book. In his early years he met the mysterious owner of several estates across Europe—Zero Mustafa—who then narrates his adventures as a young lobby boy to him. This assembled narration becomes a strategy of keeping the past, as Harrison argues: “Storytelling is a basic trait of the human species, a childlike way we have of making sense of the world’s enigmas, above all the enigma of our being in it.”<sup>35</sup>

Even though one would expect the pastiche to mark the illusions so deliberately used in Anderson’s filmography the thematic allusions focus more on the idea of childhood and the refusal to grow up. The most influential films—concerned with adolescence, rebellion, and nonconformity—Anderson refers to are: Mike Nichols’s *The Graduate* (1967),<sup>36</sup> Francois Truffaut’s *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (1959)<sup>37</sup> or *Jules et Jim* (1969),<sup>38</sup> and Terrence Malick’s *Badlands* (1973)<sup>39</sup>. The link between *The Graduate* and *Rushmore* is established by two crucial subject matters. On the one hand, alienation from a rich domestic environment is indicated through Herbert’s struggles; on the other hand, the Mrs. Robinson phenomenon is played out by Max’s pursuit of the older teacher. *Rushmore*, however, takes a different turn and explicitly suggests that Max is not yet part of the adult world, mostly demonstrated in the scene where Miss Cross has to take a meaner stance against him to finally make him understand her rejection. The love triangle of *Jules et Jim* is absurdly re-used in *Life Aquatic* where a weird father–son–pregnant journalist relationship develops. *Moonrise* portrays a younger version of Kit and Holy from *Badlands* in regards to their escape and how they build up their own “paradise” far from civilization. The youngsters are not criminals, but *Moonrise* arguably depicts the most violence,

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<sup>35</sup> Harrison 22.

<sup>36</sup> *The Graduate*, dir. Mike Nichols, distr. AVCO Embassy Pictures, 1967.

<sup>37</sup> *Les Quatre Cents Coups*, dir. Francois Truffaut, distr. Cocinor, 1959.

<sup>38</sup> *Jules et Jim*, dir. Francois Truffaut, distr. Les Films du Carrosse, Sédif Productions, 1969

<sup>39</sup> *Badlands*, dir. Terrence Malick, distr. Warner Bros, 1973.



aggression and blood among all of Anderson's films. Moreover, Anderson was greatly inspired, like almost every director since the 1940s,<sup>40</sup> by Orson Welles, whose ideas about family and corruption are retraceable thematic elements too in the Andersonian filmography. In terms of his borrowings, Welles' second feature, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942)<sup>41</sup>, is the most relevant. This "unabashedly nostalgic film, which parallels the turn-of-the-century decline of a proud and wealthy provincial family,"<sup>42</sup> just like *Tenenbaums*, is concerned with the same ideas about a rich family of geniuses. Overall the incorporations from every particular film Anderson uses manage to hint at the criticism and concepts these cult movies are notably known for.

In the sphere of imaginative literature, one of Anderson's biggest influences is the prophet of adolescent struggles, J. D. Salinger. In *Bottle Rocket*, Anthony's experience of emptiness and pretense and his consequent rejection of it serves as a reminder of Salinger's most famous character, Holden Caulfield. Like in *The Catcher in the Rye*,<sup>43</sup> a relationship between an older lost brother and a moralizer little sister is also briefly explored in the film. Moreover, as Salinger had young, teenage characters who are somewhat between two worlds—adulthood and childhood—so does this first Anderson movie show characters who are as if too young at heart to live in the "real" world. Anthony ends up in a mental institution because he "lost it," he follows the idealist Dignan and pursues a woman he barely knows rather than live in a "phony" and banal adult world. Moreover, *Franny and Zooey*<sup>44</sup> is a generally acknowledged major influence on the original screenplay<sup>45</sup> of *Tenenbaums*. The three Tenenbaums kids, who struggle to exist in the outside world of their family diegesis, run parallel to the famous Glass family characters in Salinger's stories. Therefore, as Salinger stresses the importance of making literature about youth, Anderson seems to be the ambassador of the same idea in cinema. As Seitz concludes:

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<sup>40</sup> François Truffaut, "Foreword," *Orson Welles: A Critical View* (Los Angeles: Acrobat Books, 1978) 2.

<sup>41</sup> *The Magnificent Ambersons*, dir. Orson Welles, distr. RKO Radio Pictures, 1942.

<sup>42</sup> David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004) 346.

<sup>43</sup> J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (New York: Little Brown & Company, 1991).

<sup>44</sup> J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey and Nine Stories* (New York: Monarch, 1966).

<sup>45</sup> Seitz 120.

Beyond lifting certain events and situations, Anderson shows an affinity for Salinger in his tone and style. Like Salinger's fiction, Anderson's films have a crisp directness and bouncy energy that can initially be mistaken for escapist until the artist springs a grim surprise or brings an undercurrent of dissatisfaction or despair to the surface.<sup>46</sup>

Another indication of returning to childhood through borrowing is the adaptation of Roald Dahl's novel *Fantastic Mr. Fox*.<sup>47</sup> According to Seitz: "Dahl's black wit bubbles up through the film's sunny surface and fuses with Anderson's flair for the incongruous."<sup>48</sup> However, with Anderson the story points more to, once again, familial relationships and the conflict between one's desires and responsibilities. The desire motif—a man obsessed with an agenda to avenge in *Life Aquatic*—is evidently reminiscent of the ultimate cult book of American fiction: Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*.<sup>49</sup> This takes a rather humorous course in the film, however, since the "enemy" is not an enormous white whale demanding respect, but a jaguar shark whose existence is highly doubtful throughout the film.

Stefan Zweig's characteristically nostalgic writing and his theme of lamenting the old Central European world completely dictate the pastiche mode in *Grand Budapest*. Critics disagree on the fact which book of Zweig's rich oeuvre was the basis for the film, but Anderson does not try to copy Zweig's plots specifically anyway. The film, more importantly, brings forward Zweig's sentimentally pacifist personality itself. Through Zweig, Anderson is able to put on display a deeper and more complex theme of pacifism and longing for a lost world of true values rather than just be preoccupied with childhood. His latest feature incorporates comments on war, fascism and even immigration and, by doing it with grandeur and the utmost elegance, it anticipates a more mature phase in Anderson's filmmaking.

In regard to the themes, the subject matter is so large that the sincerity is hard to detect. Concepts such as desire, youth, pacifism, and a longing for the past certainly do not indicate harsh criticism or detachment, but rather hope. Although the films regularly exhibit tragic themes, the sad tone is subverted by the reconciliation at the

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<sup>46</sup> Seitz 125.

<sup>47</sup> Roald Dahl, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (London: Puffin Books, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Seitz 238.

<sup>49</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (London: Constable & Co., 1922).

ends of the films, which creates a sincere aftereffect. The happy ending can be explicitly celebratory: in *Rushmore* Max invites everyone to his play and then they dance together in slow-motion, and in *Mr. Fox*, the animals similarly rejoice together in a supermarket. Furthermore, a happy ending can also be suggested by the amelioration of the struggles the characters need to face, often encouraging their development. The young lovers in *Moonrise* find a way to be together, and the brothers in *Darjeeling* once again embark on a journey on a train where all their actions are repetitive yet their inner realities and attitude have changed. Anderson's endings also show the director's incredible admiration of art in general. Steve has the screening of his documentary in *Life Aquatic*, and the girl in the cemetery puts a key to the author's bust as a symbol of appreciation in *Grand Budapest*. Primarily his work is meant to prove that art matters over all, and by the use of pastiche, including various inspirations, he shows that new art has to be constructed from the loss of other masters' work.

## 6. Characters

“Every movie I’ve done is this accumulation of information about these characters and who they are and what their world is, and slowly figuring out what’s going to happen to them.”<sup>1</sup> As Anderson asserts himself, every attribute of his films is essentially there to contribute to the characters. His heroes are the ultimate key to understanding his distinct approach and deserve the most attention since they are the mediators of his transgressed postmodern “philosophy” and sensibility. Although, similarly, their construction is achieved through pastiche—incorporating real-life personas as well as characters from other films—they come across as unique identities in the diegesis of Anderson’s films. Their childish behavior makes them distinguishably innocent and naïve, pointing towards the sincere sentiment. More importantly, the subtle criticism of Jameson’s depthlessness, hinted at throughout, is most clearly argued through the analysis of the protagonists. Concepts such as consumerism, glorification of the surface or the obsession with youthfulness arise along with the analysis. Moreover, the self-aware depiction of these personas often makes them seem like meta-characters directly addressing the audience and commenting on artistic creation. To disclose these matters the section first discusses the visual characterization of the Andersonesque heroes—evidently influenced by nostalgic and pastiche modes—and then examines their meta-quality. Finally, their particular behavior and personality traits are discussed according to Anderson’s earnest treatment of them.

Characterization, in general, can go in two distinct directions: either to represent an individual through their actions—behavior, manners, way of speaking—or through external matters such as visual and aural representation. It is precisely the latter that is widely used in cinema, which is able to transcend the general descriptive tendency of literature and not only rely on the narration, but rather on motion and visual expression. With Anderson, the visual means of depicting themes, concerns, and atmospheres are equally crucial in understanding his individuals. The image of the characters is greatly indicated by their specific costumes and by their tight connection to objects—forming a unity with the *mise en scène*. The first rule when determining the visual portrayal of Andersonesque heroes is that their clothes and

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<sup>1</sup> Seitz 96.

their look in general always reflect their inner minds. Their problems, the traumas they have to deal with, their desires and interests are commented upon by expressionistic means rather than through dialogues and narratives.

Although in *Tenenbaums* a third-person narrator gives a general introduction of the characters, the three children are easier to comprehend through their composed visage. Chas—categorized as a successful businessman—wears a suit as a child; however, after the death of his wife he switches his outfit for red sweatpants. This reflects on Chas's new obsessively active attitude; furthermore, his sons wearing the same indicates how the recently fragmented family has to always be ready to fight any kind of danger. Their matching outfits also suggest Chas's motivation to be as closely banded together with his sons as possible due to his bad experiences with his own father. On the one hand, Richie is defined as a sportsman since he wears tennis gear throughout. On the other hand, he has a sensitive artist hidden in him with secret obsessions that he protects with his long hair, beard and glasses. After losing his romantic ideals about Margot he undergoes ritualistic cleansing—he cuts his hair and beard—and finally reveals the true and vulnerable face to the audience before attempting suicide. Richie thus destroys his image; the scene symbolically shows how his outside identity is subjected to a great change due to his inner distress. Lastly, Margot's look is similarly suggestive about her personality: her strong black eyeliner and fur coat are supposed to reflect her enclosed and secretive nature. Moreover, her defining trademark is the missing half finger, which is explicitly related to a missing part in her life as an adopted child: a stable family connection.

Another strategy to uncover the inner lives of the characters is through materialism: the *mise en scène* of Anderson is swarming with items to which the characters are greatly attached. This could underline Baudrillard's fear of cinema's movement towards television, as if placing advertisements within the film and thus setting up a "cinema of consumption."<sup>2</sup> The visual universe of *Darjeeling* specifically connects to Baudrillard's vision of how society has become characterized as a consumerist one to such a degree that it will consume itself.<sup>3</sup> The value system of the Whitman brothers is twisted since they worship objects more than each other, or more than spiritual matters. The entire film is thus formally conducted by object-orientation, placing great importance visually on the particular belongings each

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Baudrillard in Gary Genosko, *The Uncollected Baudrillard* (London: Sage, 2001) 42.

<sup>3</sup> Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* 193.

brother is carrying. Since the brothers are in India for spiritual cleansing the critique is made even stronger when they prefer shopping to visiting a temple, or when they try to control rituals shallowly rather than undertake them. All this is set up in order to criticize these characters who, with their immense drug abuse and useless shopping, will eventually deplete themselves. Their characterization thus serves as a perfect example for Anderson's critique of current society; they are defined through objects rather than their personalities. Nowadays, as Baudrillard argues "the requirement to produce a personality is inextricably bound up in the consumer 'choices.'"<sup>4</sup>

The consumerist theme is carried further in *Mr. Fox*: throughout the plot there is a constant opposition between inherent nature and corruption, basic needs and sheer consumerism. The fight between the animals and the three farmers results in shooting off Mr. Fox's tail, which is literally a part of him, and he claims it is the most humiliating thing that has ever happened to him. Franklin Bean then wears it as a tie; thus he "commodifies" something natural, which forms an elaborate critique on the human cast of the film. The "tie" is first spotted when Bean's son watches TV, which furthermore objects to commodification represented in media. More importantly, the arguable consumerist aspect of Anderson—the attention given to objects and belongings—speaks for something more abstract rather than just a pure need of items. It is the heroes' great want for unity, a desire for substitution of something or someone they have lost. As for the Whitman brothers, it is the loss of familial unity; for the characters in other films it can easily be a loss of illusions, ideals, self-identity, or a loss of control overall.

This also runs parallel with the ultimate loss everyone experiences in a lifetime—the loss of childhood and thus falling out of innocence, as pointed out by Harrison previously (see Chapter 5). To retrieve it, the adult characters often act like children: they run away from trouble, they are unable to articulate their needs and feelings, and they are unwilling to take responsibility for their actions. Their immature and naïve manner of conducting themselves mostly comes through in their stances on love. Herbert in *Rushmore* is too afraid to declare his love for Miss Cross, and he rather stalks her and competes secretly with Max over her; Steve in *Life Aquatic* claims Jane—the pregnant journalist—for himself and gets offended when

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<sup>4</sup> Kip Kline, *Baudrillard, Youth, and American Film: Fatal Theory and Education* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 2016) 98.

she herself picks Ned. As a result, the childish behavior connotes the presence of nostalgia: the protagonists' mindset is as if stuck in the past and reveals their obsession with staying young. Harrison outlines this prevailing sensibility in our culture nowadays, "turning a large segment of the human population into a 'younger' species—younger in looks, behavior, mentality, lifestyles, and, above all, desires."<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the juvenility of the characters achieves to portray them as immaculate and harmless. The mistakes and wrongdoings they occasionally commit are pardoned because they are to be blamed on childish naiveté. Furthermore, their dreamy and inexperienced nature discards the possibility that the audience will see them as villainous and rather shapes them as sympathetic idealists. "They'll never catch me, man... 'cause I'm fucking innocent,"<sup>6</sup> says Dignan in Anderson's first feature, and M. Gustave shouting out "I'm innocent"<sup>7</sup> in Anderson's most recent film, set up an unshakable trait. According to Seitz, "even the characters who seem burn-out cynical or who've given up in some way have this core of almost Truffaut-like innocence."<sup>8</sup> The assertion of their innocence and childlike desires is necessary in, for them, an alien environment to prove their opposition to the surrounding corrupt diegetic.

The characters' estrangement also runs parallel with how their surroundings constantly dress them up with expectations, require them to conform and be responsible adults. In addition, since the pastiche mode constructs the characters on existing models, an anticipated behavior is similarly required of them from the audience itself. Anderson seems to follow the great American literary tradition as well as Hollywood's schemas for creating a fascinating character who enchants a typical observer figure. Just as Ishmael or Nick Carraway is mesmerized by an outstanding persona, likewise Anthony is manipulated by Dignan, the whole documentary crew is led by Steve, and so does Zero follows M. Gustave devotedly. Moreover, Seitz establishes that the Andersonian characterization seems "a celebration of the type of personality represented in the form of a movie star."<sup>9</sup> In *Rushmore*, Max's formation goes as follows:

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<sup>5</sup> Harrison x.

<sup>6</sup> *Bottle Rocket* 68 min 02 sec.

<sup>7</sup> *The Grand Budapest Hotel* 76 min 10 sec.

<sup>8</sup> Seitz 312.

<sup>9</sup> Seitz 258.

the character is a borderline parody of the supercompetent iconoclast jerk heroes who defined Hollywood in the Tom Cruise–Robin Williams–Bill Murray–dominated eighties and nineties but Max’s youthful gawkins makes him more endearing than annoying.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, *Life Aquatic* is undeniably not even trying to hide that it is a film based on Jacques Cousteau’s persona: an explorer, mariner, filmmaker, inventor. Ironically, however, Andersonesque characters do not meet the set standards of these iconic heroes that they supposedly resemble. Dignan’s plan fails and Anthony is better off without him; Steve is an unsuccessful and unhappy version of Cousteau, and Max’s rebellious personality only causes him trouble. Therefore pastiche in terms of characterization leads to a meta-commentary, provided that their failure according to the borrowed model is recognized.

Furthermore, as Seitz asserts, in *Tenenbaums* the effect of the close-ups somehow indicates the burdening look of how the public stares at the protagonists<sup>11</sup> in the film, which reflects on how the audience has expectations of them likewise. The family of geniuses has produced a successful businessman, a sportsman and an artist; the characters are thus completely limited to their specialization and forced to behave accordingly, resulting in unstable personal lives. *Tenenbaums*, in this respect, is highly inter-textual, especially because it includes an introduction of the actors in the beginning, as if all getting ready for their roles indicating the superficiality that rules the film. More explicitly, the “narrator” figure in *Moonrise*, who reports throughout the film about an upcoming storm, is ignored by all the others in the film, but by breaking the fourth wall warns the audience about an eventful climax approaching. As Kim Wilkins’ interpretation suggests, Anderson “reminds the audience of the constructed nature of character identification in cinema as a medium.”<sup>12</sup> Their representation and formulation on the screen have almost a stage-like quality.

More importantly, the meta-quality with the characters roots in their controlling nature, as Seitz says particularly about *Darjeeling*: “Here again, Anderson has made a

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<sup>10</sup> Seitz 72.

<sup>11</sup> Seitz 152.

<sup>12</sup> Kim Wilkins, “Cast of Characters: Wes Anderson and Pure Cinematic Characterization,” *The Films of Wes Anderson: Critical Essays on an Indie Wood Icon*, ed. Peter C. Kunze (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 25.



meticulously controlled film about control freaks trying to micromanage their own narratives.”<sup>13</sup> As discussed with the themes before, the narratives of the films generally create a meta-commentary since they reflect on the problem of artistic creation. It cannot be ignored that the Andersonian heroes are all typically creators themselves: writers, documenters, plan makers, poets, and painters. According to Wilkins, “the performative nature of the cinematic medium is recognized by Anderson in the recurring use of theater, film, and literature, both diegetically and formally.”<sup>14</sup> This is not only Anderson’s repeated tribute to works of art, but it is also a way for the characters to overcome difficulties in their lives. A significant focus given to creativity and the process of creation acquires a form of therapeutic meaning in Anderson’s films. For instance, *Life Aquatic* is, as a Steve Zissou documentary, a desperate attempt of a man suffering from middle-age crisis to produce something meaningful for the last time.

As for the concluding element constructing Anderson’s characterization, the study finalizes with the discussion of sincere revelations. The witty dialogues and speeches in the films are not only the source of a particular Andersonian humor but also a strategy to surprise the audience. The characters talk in a detached, emotionless way yet suddenly reveal something honest and private about themselves. For instance, in *Darjeeling Limited* Francis, the oldest, suddenly asks the question: “Did I raise us? Kind of?”<sup>15</sup> which explains a lot about this particular family’s troubles. However, just after this he requests a power adaptor, so his speech remains seemingly unimportant and shallow. More importantly, these typically control-freak, self-obsessed, “larger than life” heroes all suddenly face an unexpected incident which forces them to stop for a second and encourage the audience to do likewise. Accordingly, these sincere moments cause a development in the characters and bring out the honest essence of Anderson’s cinema. As Seitz observes: “Wes Anderson often tells stories of visionary artist-leaders who try to master every aspect of their lives, only to realize that this goal is impossible and that pursuing it closes them off from enlightenment.”<sup>16</sup>

These great idealists’ acceptance of failure is the chief factor that goes against the pastiche construction on existing models, which develop expectations. The

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<sup>13</sup> Seitz 159.

<sup>14</sup> Wilkins 31.

<sup>15</sup> *The Darjeeling Limited* 11 min 25 sec.

<sup>16</sup> Seitz 197.

characters are not meant to fall into the category they are anticipated to: a lobby boy can become a successful hotel owner, a teenager can produce a meaningful play and a selfish brother can admit his own faults. By this the Andersonesque heroes stand out and are capable of change. Only after they lose and step out of “themselves” can they undergo transformation and experience sincerity with a hope of improvement. Steve, obsessed with revenge, peacefully cries when he finally faces the jaguar shark; the Whitman brothers stop with their meaningless pursuit of temporal and material things after experiencing the death of an Indian boy; and Monsieur Gustave changes his attitude towards Zero when he finds out he is an immigrant who lost his whole family and home. From a filmsophical point of view, as Frampton states: “by thinking ‘as’ a character the filmind can alter the film in any way it wishes to give us an idea of the motive or feelings of the character.”<sup>17</sup> Essentially, the development of the characters’ discloses their honest and vulnerable sides and as a result alters the interpretability of the films as relatable and sincere works of art.

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<sup>17</sup> Frampton 127.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present thesis has attempted to deconstruct the unique sentiment Wes Anderson represents in contemporary cinema. The aim was to prove that through the use of postmodern elements, which all collectively mark Anderson's self-awareness, the films promote a specific thinking. The director's reasoning runs parallel to a sincere sensibility that posits him as a part of a new cultural and aesthetic tendency referred to as metamodernism. The principal method was to analyze Anderson's style, themes, and characterization within these two—culturally, aesthetically, and philosophically relevant—contexts. The thesis primarily focused on three postmodern elements that Anderson employs extensively: nostalgia, pastiche and meta-cinematic strategies. Their analysis in the three main strata of cinema always came to an agreement that all of them exceed the postmodern tone and contribute to a sincere sentiment. Moreover, since the characters play a central role in the understanding of Andersonian films, the sincerity mostly comes through their attentive and devoted treatment by the director. The thesis thus arrived at the conclusion that the philosophy or sensibility of sincerity represented by Anderson's oeuvre is argued through the characters—either by their representation, their struggles with themselves and with their environment, or generally through the values they stand for and preserve.

On the one hand, Anderson's films appear postmodern; he comments on the filmic reality—its functioning and construction—in taking a meta-cinematic approach. This is carried out in his neat visual style, in the commentary on artistic creation as well as in storytelling, and through the self-aware characters controlling the whole diegesis of the films. It has been shown that a nostalgic quality governs all the layers of his films, whether with the characters' retro fashion, with the settings in the past, or through the general tendency of looking back as a prevalent subject matter. On the whole, the characters' lives are systematically determined by their past experiences, which hold them back from progress. Without the pastiche mode Anderson's cinema would not even exist, since the style, the themes, even the characters are all formed out of his collage of inspirations. His references and allusions in most cases blend high and low culture together, which is also a postmodern trend.

According to Jameson's critical viewpoint, recent postmodern works of art are: particularly depthless, and drained of real emotion, filled instead with an euphoric celebration of the disintegration of the self, relating to other works only in the form of pastiche, a fake nostalgia taking the place of any real connection with the past, while any critical distance from the present is cancelled.<sup>1</sup>

However, this is where Anderson transgresses postmodern detachment and stands in opposition to a claim that his work is "depthless." The real emotion is shown through the characters' sincere moments, so the films are trying to unify the protagonists with their inner selves as well as with their surroundings rather than fragment them further. Their multi-layered portrayal adds depth even to the themes and visuals; essentially everything gains a profound meaning in the film once it is associated with these important individuals. The pastiche and the nostalgic mood are not meant to connect to the real past but rather to offer a space for meditation and self-reflection. Moreover, the looking back is an alternative to the superficial rushing way of life today, which covertly incorporates in itself a critique of the present, too.

On the other hand, Anderson thus uses these elements in his cinema, but the result departs from the expected postmodern effect. With the postmodernists, "nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited, *and* ironized;"<sup>2</sup> however, with Anderson, nostalgia is the mediator for respect and genuine values still important in the past. The gap between childhood and adulthood—as one of the biggest concerns of the characters—similarly represents the gap between present and past. Through the prevailing nostalgic mood Anderson offers a meditative space to look back and revise; his cinema thus represents a protection of a past way of life devoid of rushing, extensive consumerism, technology-orientation and false desires leading everyday life nowadays. Moreover, Anderson argues for a reanalysis of time in the present-day, linked to art specifically. The pastiche—another way of reusing of past materials—argues for an organic method of contemporary creation that incorporates familiar artworks to then create something new and meaningful. All of this culminates with the methods of self-referentiality throughout to offer a thoughtful and effective mode

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Callinicos, "Reactionary Postmodernism," *Postmodernism and Society*, ed. Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1994) 105-6.

<sup>2</sup> Hutcheon 200.

of filmic experience rather than just pure entertainment and something aesthetically appealing.

The analysis of these three postmodern elements as a result also found that Anderson's cinema—accepted as a thinking one—brings a subtle criticism on itself. The whole staging of his films concentrated, on the past, argues for a rejection of the present. This renouncement develops into a reevaluation of lost concepts, also somehow pointing backwards and to childhood specifically. Anderson's cinema is thus an endorsement of notions such as purity, innocence and naiveté which come to determine his filmic style, above all, as sincere. However, since the films argue for sincerity, the argumentation itself happens within safe limits. His critique can only be revealed if the viewer is attentive enough to their pointing backwards towards the process of creation itself. He only uses postmodern features in order to reconstruct and so takes a more hopeful route when establishing principal arguments about a worldview in general. Anderson's criticism is never meant to condemn, but only make the audience face its own limitations owing to the “mirror effect.”

As a result, the perimeters within which Anderson's films function are more accurately characterized by metamodernism. The safe space within which Anderson communicates is also meant to show the restrictions of the art piece itself, since a metamodern artwork “redirects the modern piece by drawing attention to what it cannot present in its language, what it cannot signify in its own terms.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore Anderson's protection of certain values and the aim of his cinema are both often left hanging in the air, indicating his work's own failure when trying to bring back these values. Even though the humor in the films is often ironic and the self-awareness argues for detachment, the special treatment of the characters argues for a positive and rewarding cinematic experience. As the critic Mark Olsen observes, unlike some of his contemporaries, Anderson “does not view his characters from some distant Olympus of irony. He stands beside them—or rather, just behind them.”<sup>4</sup> The characters are allowed to be neurotic, they can fail as well as daydream; so to center the style and plot around them is creating a genuine and heartfelt shared feeling sneaking out from each of Anderson's films. As Seitz comments: “it's a highly

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<sup>3</sup> Vermeulen and Akker 10.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Olsen, “If I Can Dream: The Everlasting Boyhoods of Wes Anderson,” *Film Comment* 35.1 (1999): 12–13.

stylized universe [...] but psychologically, it's a very realistic interpretation of how human beings are."<sup>5</sup>

Although the study's aim was to prove that Anderson's cinema is effective in creating its own autonomous sincere universe, there are some shortcomings of this director. As already mentioned, his cinematic argumentation happens within boundaries; he never exceeds the style, the themes and the construction of his characters to such an extent that it would result in a distressing debate or in a polemic. Occasionally the dreamy representation of childhood and its values come through as unnecessarily idealistic, lacking any real argumentation. The absurd humor blending together various comedic strategies furthermore leads one to believe that Anderson's cinema is yet another work only providing entertainment and is devoid of critical thinking. Despite the verification that it is easy to relate to Anderson's meditative way of filmmaking, the over-the-top visuals and the characters' representation make it impossible to consider the director's creation as serious and constructive. Moreover, the constant repetition of the same strategies—plots always concerned with the past and kitschy visuals—is for some viewers a sign of Anderson's inability to create anything challenging and out of his comfort zone. Such as his filmic world is limited, so is the director—he always uses the same formal and thematic means to represent his thinking, which are similarly also arguing for the same concepts as a rule. For some it is a drawback; however, especially for the recurring elements associated with Anderson, the thesis was able to draw out an auteur study and detect his general sensibility.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that Anderson never reveals his strategies and techniques as intentional, nor does he presents himself as a director trying to criticize contemporary issues; in this way this study is only an independent understanding of what he brings to the movie screen. Further research should develop a more detailed analysis of filmic sensibilities in general to then provide a better understanding of Anderson's sentiment specifically. Since materials on the philosophical understanding of Anderson's cinema are extremely scarce, this paper could only offer a narrow view on the relation between philosophy and film. Therefore, a more thorough understanding of these two disciplines could perhaps enlighten the sensibility that films can represent culturally. In addition, a study

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<sup>5</sup> Seitz 209.

concentrated solely on Anderson's tone would be sufficient for a separate paper. By what means the tone comes through in the cinematic medium—how irony, humor, or sarcasm are apparent in a film—is definitely interrelated with what Anderson is able to bring onto the screen. Overall, as proven by the immense work written on Anderson by film critics, the director is more consistently approached from a social point of view: what audience he is essentially targeting and what his work means for these viewers. Therefore, another topic for research could be Anderson's defined audience and his strategies for creating identification with his work.

As a result, the sensibility Anderson brings to cinema leans towards a form of presentation which is, though suggestive, never exceedingly so. There is criticism, but not a rebellion; there is an idealized past world but not one that is promoted as superior; there is a bad side to the characters but never to an unbearable extent. Anderson's sentiment is as much alternative as delicate. Going back to Shaw's model, Anderson's candid sentiment definitely contributes to certain ongoing philosophical exploration regardless of whether he has postmodern or metamodern features in his films. His sincerity mediates respect and argues for awareness today that together exceed the sphere of his films and offer a form of thinking on a wider, philosophical level. Herbert Read summarizes sincerity thus: "the whole exercise is one of exquisite perception and instinctive judgment,"<sup>6</sup> which undoubtedly fits this director's output, too. From a filmsophical point of view, Anderson is able to change the perception of the present life by arguing for a more idealistic, symmetrical, peaceful life; yet at the same time an artist should always maintain self-referentiality and the acknowledgment of one's own limitations.

To finish up the thesis and summarize in one sentence what Wes Anderson's work really represents cinematically, philosophically, and culturally, nothing could describe it better than a quotation from his last movie. As M. Gustave elegantly delineates: "You see, there are still faint glimmers of civilization left in this barbaric slaughterhouse that was once known as humanity. Indeed that's what we provide in our own modest, humble, insignificant... oh, fuck it."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Herbert Read, *The Cult of Sincerity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) 16.

<sup>7</sup> *The Grand Budapest Hotel* 22 min 52 sec.

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