



Aesthetic Color Allegory and the Return of Civilizational Metaphors in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*

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Abstract: Hue is a physiological phenomenon that is produced by the human eye and brain, and it is a concentrated expression of color characteristics. One of the most important ways to convey hue through film is through hue, which is considered the color soul of film. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* highlights Wes Anderson's distinctive creative personality, but breaks traditional narrative structure by combining ancient history, culture, art and aesthetics of Europe with the spirit of Hollywood entertainment. This narrative with strong metaphorical interpretation makes the film extremely personal. The purpose of this research paper is to analyze in depth not only the visual aesthetics of the film but also the dramatic conflict in the film. Which is a metaphor for the centralized power of Europe's upper classes and a philosophical metaphor for the faces of society at that time. As well as illustrating the ugliness of human nature, the decline of European civilization, and the display of national exile culture, the metaphors also reveal the strong humanistic concern of the original author Zweig.

Keywords: *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Wes Anderson, Stefan Zweig, color theory

1. Overview of the film content

A magical story unfolds from layer to layer at the Grand Budapest Hotel. Every chapter seems to be interconnected. A series of conversations between the writer who lost his inspiration and Mr. Mustafa, the owner of the Budapest Hotel, transports the audience back to early Europe, the legendary age of civilization. Mr. Gustav is the hotel's lobby manager, and his doorman is a third-class immigration official. Mustafa's interesting stories tell an absurd and sad story to the audience based on his experiences. Through his language, Wes Anderson creates an absurd sense of humor in the film. This film takes place in 1960s Europe. Even though the play is titled Budapest Hotel, it does not specifically mention the location, but the audience can see a variety of scenarios and scenes in the play. A prototype of the Budapest Hotel can be found in Europe. Hotel manager Mr. Gustav was accidentally involved in Mrs. D's family heritage battle, and around the famous painting *Apple Boys*, Gustav had to deal with murder, love, friendship, prison break, war, etc. In the end, Mr. Gustav was killed by fascist soldiers in order to protect Mustafa and his girlfriend Agatha, but in this barbarous slaughterhouse, humanity remained as the faint light of civilization. Mr. Gustav eventually left his life savings to his little sidekick, a doorman with a third-class immigration visa. Eventually, the picture fades. Years later, the doorman of that year has become a famous rich man in Europe, with properties all around the continent. While the Budapest hotel has long lost much of its former glory and its decor is old and dilapidated, Mr. Mustafa still loves a place that is no longer profitable. Mustafa's last connection to the disappearing world may be this.

2. Color theory

Cinema has been a social lens through which norms and values have been presented cross-culturally since the early 20th century. An effective film is influenced by many factors that make a particular story compelling. The value of a production is heavily influenced by a unique script, popular actors, state-of-the-art cameras, lighting, and sound design. The box office success of blockbusters is largely due to their promotional appeal, but the seventh art, or the seventh art of cinema, is based on artistic interpretation. A director's aesthetic input is one of the most powerful tools he or she has to set a specific tone and connect with the audience. Directing style transcends cinematography. In many cases, it becomes a defining feature of a generation or a way of life. Wes Anderson and his whimsical color palette are a perfect example. "Cinema as a microcosm of contemporary societal structure has an innate power to shape the perception of those who are exposed to it. Of all the elements of visual design, color may be the most difficult to understand in how it psychologically affects humans." (Vreeland, Vaughn A. 2015). With its sensual appeal, color can mobilize the viewer's thoughts and emotions. Similarly, the interconnectedness of the senses, intellect, and emotions represents a synergistic understanding in a broader sense. Viewers

of Anderson's films often experience synergistic effects that involve more than one sense.

The experiences an audience has through diegetic space on screen are a combination of action and sound presented in color to mimic real life. By implementing color in an image, viewers are able to form associations with specific objects and emotions through the use of their brains (Gegenfurtner & Sharpe, 2000, p. 317). In society, color has an important meaning, whether it is consciously acknowledged or not. The use of color in film has been controversial and misunderstood throughout its history. Since the advent of the film medium in the late 19th century, dyes and other manual color correction methods have been used. The application of color in the silent era is linked to the correction and control of "natural" color in contemporary cinema, which makes it possible to determine the high aesthetic value of color in film. "The color grading of acetate film in the early 20th century and the enhancement of digital video relies on the same principle: manipulating what is perceived as reality." (Vreeland, Vaughn A. 2015).

Wes Anderson's routine production designer, Adam Stockhausen mentioned that Anderson examines imagery that is associated with specific components of his scripts and breaks them down into component pieces based on Anderson's color palettes. (Grobar, 2015). As a result of this meticulous attention to color and detail, one or very few colors are often overwhelming on screen. The color palettes of his films become dominant factors in the mind of a viewer by moving them to the "projective foreground." Cinema of the postmodern era, when films are viewed as social commentary, uses intense visual effects. Many viewers were affected by visual fatigue. The elements have been praised and criticized. Some say they enhance the viewing experience while others find them distracting. "The importance of aesthetics increases as the interface between the artifact and the affected people (e.g., in terms of visual saliency, length of interaction or co-habitation) becomes more comprehensive." (Tractinsky, n.d.) The evidence presented here contextualizes the psychological effects of exposure to hyperbolic visual effects, which are typical of Anderson's style.

Zettl (1973) emphasizes the importance of stylized aesthetics in his book *Sight, Sound, Motion; Applied Media Aesthetics*. He explains how color perception is influenced by production design, as well as how color can create psychological comprehension in an audience (Zettl, 1973, p. 55). Our ability to adapt to different color signals in films helps us to identify certain themes or focuses. Color mixing and saturation can be additive or subtractive in terms of content analysis. Color relativity with objects in the diegetic space can affect how viewers perceive an environment (Zettl, 1973, p. 63). Lighting and color temperature also have a huge effect on establishing a mood or tone in a film. Surrounding colors (contrasting or similar) can establish relationships between objects that otherwise would not be connected. Zettl also explains color energy in terms of the juxtaposition of light and color, thereby generating aesthetic energy that is related to psychological responses (Zettl, 1973, p. 67). The interaction of Anderson's light and color with his characters and other objects produces fascinating visual effects. Our minds segment objects based on their inherent color and attribute meaning to them. An individual's perception of a "visual modality" is affected by its surroundings. As a result, viewers categorize objects on screen and ascribe relationships based solely on visual components. The rhythm and pace of visual design create a pattern that evokes feelings in the viewer that mimic those of contemporary society. Seeing the same colors repeatedly can establish mental biases about colors based on certain cultural nuances that viewers might find displeasing, such as patriarchal power or laziness, two themes we often see in Anderson's films.

3. Analysis

3.1 Color production & design

Wes Anderson's visual aesthetic is characterized by the use of color, and the director has a habit of using color to set the mood. Color palettes can be grim, like a thriller, suggesting a tense climax, or can be warm and inviting, as if the viewer is transferred to another sunny film. As for costume design, pictorial balance, fashion, and color, the director also draw inspiration from art design, advertising, and flat design. While Anderson does not make this film vapid or superficial, it is equally profound at its core. The metaphor of the film is as profound as its core. A simple, symmetrical composition is visible in every frame of the film. The director uses symmetrical compositions extensively in the photography of the film, and he deliberately uses the symmetry of order that is not rigid but finds subtle variations in form. Film colors are often bright and pink, like a dream, and the smell and taste and costume are traditional to the 1930s. The restaurant halls, cable cars, and costumes will make people feel like they are in the sweetness of the thirties. Examining the historical reasons for this, it becomes evident that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not broken up before 1918, but was composed of Hungary, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and other countries. The first time they get on the train to check on Gustav, the police officer played by Edward Norton wears a uniform with a stand-up collar and a ground gray color, as opposed to the German field gray or black uniform. But in the process of costume design, a Prussian design is used, and these represent the old Austro-Hungarian Empire or the Austrian Republic.

The Grand Budapest Hotel conjures an image of a story set in Hungary, but the film's content appears to have nothing to do with Hungary. Although the film is set in Germany, the original novel metaphorically depicts Austria during World War II, which was also known as Little Paris, the center of European art and culture, as well as the meeting place of European thought and spirit. In an interview with NPR, biographer George Prochnik argued that it was critical to realize how deeply Zweig identified himself with Europe. Zweig's overwhelming objective was the creation, preservation and proclamation of the Europe that was already inside him. When Zweig began to feel that the Europe that he had known was gone for good, he lost a lot of his motivation to keep going ...This Europe that was so invested in aesthetics, in beauty, in civilized tolerance was very much gone by the time of his suicide. But he knew that, in letting that dream go, he was going to be also relinquishing his hold on the will to live (2020). This sense of melancholy nostalgia, in what was lost in Vienna after World War I, is what *The Grand Budapest Hotel* seems to be all about.

3.2 Layering of color applications

In the beginning, different perspectives of time and space are shown, and the film then returns to the original setting at the end. There is also a distinct tone for each time and space. The film begins with the Prologue, a little girl standing in front of the statue of the author of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. The snow echoes the graveyard while reflecting the purity of the little girl and her pure life. This episode has significant implications. A young admirer visiting the grave of a deceased writer introduces us to this idea at the very beginning. The scene suddenly shifts to the past, with the author (played by Tom Wilkinson) alive and well and directly addressing the audience. During the author's recount of his trip to the Grand Budapest Hotel, a mysterious man launches onto his own story, and once more we are transported further into history, guided by a new storyteller. As Anderson described it to the Telegraph, "it's such an effective way to set the stage, to set a mood. It creates this kind of a 'gather around' feeling." (2020)

The second layer is revealed by a writer who has lost inspiration, telling the story of the decline of civilization in Europe from his point of view. This layer's yellow is very different from the previous layer. Bright yellow depicts the prosperous world and the prosperity of Europe before the war. When the plot is developed, the director uses the corresponding time frame, and selects the color to emphasize time. The director sets each chapter's color range differently on the fourth floor of the building. The story is divided into five chapters on the fourth floor. The main location of the first chapter is held at *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, and the combination of pink and purple forms the beginning of the dream of the whole story. The old castle of Mrs. D, the rich lady, was full of black, an atmosphere of conspiracy, since a contest of conspiracy was about to take place around inheritance. Blue seeps into the details of prison and murder in Chapter III. The main color of Chapter IV is pure and noble white, which promotes each character. Towards the end of the film, the color of the film turns pink and purple again. The whole story is consistently changing between dream and reality, which gives the audience strong visual impact and clear visual guidance. As the story unfolds, the depth change of color becomes an important part of the narrative.

4. Dramatic conflict and humaisim

The story of the era is told by three different narrators in three different eras, with highly saturated tones, tight dramatic conflicts, and a witty approach that appears to be comedic black humor, but at its core is the tragic imprint of the era. As Stefan Zweig wrote in "The World of Yesterday" (the source of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*): "Only the person who has experienced light and darkness, war and peace, rise and fall, only that person has truly experienced life" (Zweig & Bell, 2014). The author's strong humanist concern is embedded in the words of both the film and the text.

4.1 Analysis of the conflict setting in the film

In this film, the conflict between the characters is very clever and unique. There are many clever parts in the plot, such as the battle over Madame D's inheritance, the aggressive fighter and the strict lawyer. These characters are constantly entangled and fighting with one another. In a film exaggerated by the author and given a darkly witty touch, all these characters and stories are as distinctive and glorious as the film itself, so much so that the artistry and comedy of this originality are given full scope in the struggle between Madame D's son and Mr. Gustave for the painting and the possession of it. In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Zero's wandering and solitude are some of the most iconic scenes of conflict. Zero is alone at the end of the film, clinging to his obsession and remembering the short but happy years he shared with his late wife while suffering the pain of her departure. Conflict shows the inner tangles and struggles of the characters, expressing fully their loneliness and helplessness. In addition, it is also the most essential element of the film; the setting of interesting and rich conflicts adds color and depth to the film and makes it more interlocked and progressive.

4.2 The metaphor and humanism behind the dramatic conflict

While in the movie *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, when the hotel manager, Mr. Gustav, has accumulated wealth in his community, he is very popular with extremely vain and old customers, and he will use their flattery and body to meet them. The film is not very explicit about Mr. Gustav's own sexual orientation. He is responsible for serving and satisfying the spiritual needs of most people. This is also a self-portrait by the author Zweig. During the war period, Zweig's works were appreciated and popular because of their humanist and humanitarian concerns. The story is centered on a profound cultural interaction reflected and expressed in a way that is understood and accepted by the public. That is the most appropriate expression in the war years of humanism (Ma, 2019).

4.3 Understanding the core of the film through the historical background of Zweig's original author

Zweig's novels are also characterized by their exile culture; he was an Austrian Jew who was persecuted by Nazis. Zweig's experience is not simply a metaphor for Gustav's; Gustav's satisfaction of the upper aristocracy is different from Zweig's social concerns. Gustav is, in a sense, a metaphor for the history of Jewish exile, the Jews, who were shrewd and hardworking. As a manager of the restaurant, Gustav shows care for each woman that comes into the establishment, providing a variety of services that are neither hypocritical nor insincere, but are what one would expect a manager to do, as part of his job. As a recompense, the old woman left him a painting that represented and metaphorized European capitalist society's wealth, which the Jew, Gustav, felt he deserved, but the "Nazi," the eldest son, felt that it was impossible for him to take over his mother's assets, because he was not related by blood, but by speculation he was taking it. Gustav went into exile after the Nazis began hunting him down, but his wisdom was also evident in his exile, which is the subject of many books and films. Gustav always had a very positive attitude in his struggle in exile, as he was a strong humanitarian in his novels before the Second World War. Zweig also explores this theme in several of his novels, including "A Wedding in Lyon". Zweig was friendly to people or races other than the Nazis. Thus, in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, there are descriptions of a capitalist group and the shadow cast by a Jewish exile culture, as well as a sense of the warmth and the coldness of human nature (*The Grand Budapest Hotel* 2014).

5. Conclusion

Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is one of the most famous films with a unique aesthetic style, as well as elaborate design of props, lighting layout, costumes, etc. Each frame is a work of art. As a metaphor, color represents the social groups of the time as well as the turbulence of the changing times in many political parties. The film's characters symbolize the life and spirit of the Jewish, Nazi, and European upper classes during World War II. In its reflection and metaphor, the film expresses the contrast between the former glory of the European era and its afterglow of desolation, the roots of human nature, and the cultural nationality of the exile.

6. Patterns of metaphor



Figure 1. Art-Nouveau Style metro entrance in Paris



Figure 2. Art-Nouveau Style in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*



Figure 3. Gustav Klimt-Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I (1907)



Figure 4. Madame D. from *The Grand Budapest Hotel*



Figure 5. Symbol of SS Germany

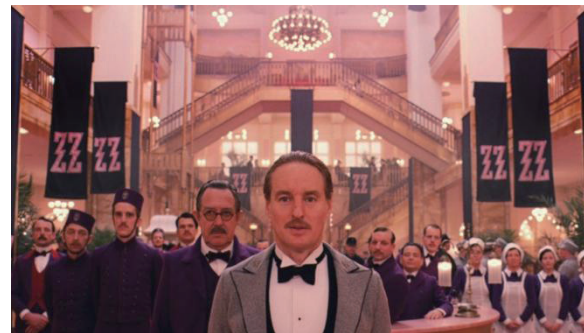


Figure 6. The flags of ZZ hanging all over the Grand Budapest Hotel

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