

## Storytelling through the Mise en Scene in the film The Grand Budapest Hotel

**D Kurniawan**

Visual Communication Design Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Jl. Dipatiukur No.  
112-116 Bandung 40132, West Java, Indonesia

E-mail: deddy.kurniawan@email.unikom.ac.id

**Abstract.** This study aims to analyze the film The Grand Budapest hotel from the mise en scene aspect applied in the film. Mise en scene to be analyzed in this film includes: property settings, wardrobe, makeup, and lighting. The method used in this research is a qualitative method with a content analysis approach, namely mentioning the mise en scene aspects of the film The Grand Budapest Hotel descriptively and then analyzing the impression that the film creates. The results obtained from this study are wardrobe selection, lighting arrangement and proper property settings that will produce a great films from cinematic and narrative aspects. Researchers hope that this research can provide a general description of the mise en scene and the aspects of the costume, lighting and property design of The Grand Budapest hotel. The conclusion of this research is that the use of mise en scene in the film The Grand Budapest Hotel is very good in terms of costumes, lighting and property design, so that the narrative and message in the film can be conveyed well to the audience. The costumes used give the impression of harmony between costume design and property design, property design gives the impression of unity between scenes and other scenes and the last is the lighting arrangement that combines low key and high key techniques to give the impression of a deep emotional change in a scene.

### 1. Introduction

Cinema is a medium that can provide diverse experiences as well as ideas and perceptions to the audience [1]. At the beginning of its discovery, the film had a documentary genre where the first film was still in motion picture format without sound. In the following year, a film titled "Voyage to the Moon" appeared, which is claimed to be the world's first feature film. In the film "voyage to the moon" there is an important aspect found in making a film, namely the narrative aspect. The narrative aspect can be in the form of a story that is conveyed through a film and it can also be in the form of other elements besides the story such as what is called "mise en scene".

Sebelum penelitian ini dilakukan, terdapat beberapa penelitian terdahulu yang membantu dalam terlaksananya penelitian ini. J Sreekumar di dalam jurnalnya menjelaskan bahwa pengalaman menonton film akan dapat mendapatkan nilai lebih ketika elemen mise en scene dapat dibentuk dengan baik. Narasi film tidak hanya disampaikan melalui dialog para actor di dalamnya, bahkan segala sesuatu yang ada di dalam sebuah film dan diatur sedemikian rupa dengan maksud menyampaikan pesan merupakan narasi visual yang tidak akan terlewatkan oleh mata penonton[1]. A. Vaughn Vreeland also wrote in his journal that the films directed by Wes Anderson have a unique color pattern so that he deserves to have his own film style called "andersonian"[2]. J Sabol juga mengemukakan pendapatnya tentang mise en scene di dalam film dan teater bahwa film dan teater

dalam pembuatannya memerlukan elemen mise en scene. Hanya saja dalam teater penonton tidak hanya mendapatkan kesan yang dimunculkan oleh mise en scene saja, akan tetapi penonton juga dapat berinteraksi langsung dengan actor dan tempat dimana pelaksanaan teater itu dilakukan [3]. Yunpeng M stated in his journal that the colors used by Wes Anderson as the director of The Grand Budapest Hotel provided the audience with an overview of European-style fairy tales so that the audience seemed to be invited on an adventure of the director's image. [4]. T Welsch memaparkan dalam jurnalnya tentang bagaimana membuat mata penonton tidak akan melepaskan pandangannya dari film yang disaksikan. Salah satunya menggunakan aspek "Lighting Key", dalam mise en scene penataan cahaya merupakan salah satu dari beberapa aspek lainnya. Teknik pencahayaan dapat berupa teknik low key, high key, high contrast dan kombinasi dari semuanya [5].

"Mise en scene" is a collection of elements that make up a film into a narrative that can evoke emotions for those who watch it. Storytelling in films is not only through stories, telling stories in films can be in various ways. The story in the film can be told through color, light, composition, property settings, wardrobe, makeup, and so on. However, in this study the writer will limit the way of telling the story only through the elements included in the "mise en scene", namely wardrobe, lighting and property settings. According to Bordewell and Thomson (2003) Everything that is in front of the camera and what we arrange to be seen by the camera is a mise en scene [6].

The Grand Budapest Hotel is a film made by director Wes Anderson which takes a different story setting in the year, there are scenes with the story set in 1985, 1968 and 1932. From the background of the story, it is interesting to study, namely the background of the story in 1932 because in 1932 it was the year in which the main story is told, where the mise en scene aspect will be applied to the scenes in that year. The reason for doing this research is to determine the depth of using the mise en scene in the film The Grand Budapest Hotel to convey messages to the audience.

## **2. Metode**

The method used in this research is descriptive analytical method, which describes the mise en scene part of the scene then analyzes the impression and narrative that is generated from the aspects of the mise en scene in the film. The limitations that the researchers did in this study were only limited to the mise en scene of the film based on the year background. The background of the years that will be studied is 1968 and 1932. The selection of these years is based on the core story of the film The Grand Budapest Hotel which is in the background of that year.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

The results obtained in this study are the director Wes Anderson is very careful with the aspects of the mise en scene in the film The Grand Budapest Hotel. The use of costumes that are in accordance with the year in which the film was made, combined with pastel colors makes the costumes in the film The Grand Budapest Hotel give a more story to the audience. Lighting by combining low key and high key techniques together is a novelty in the world of cinematography and can give a different impression. The property design in the film The Grand Budapest Hotel provides a very thick backdrop for the year so that it is easily identified in place and time.

The film The Grand Budapest Hotel was made in 2014, directed by Wes Anderson. The film The Grand Budapest Hotel was written by Wes Anderson himself who was inspired by the story of his favorite book writer named Stefan Zweig. The film tells about the meeting between a lobby boy named Moustafa and the manager of The Grand Budapest Hotel, Gustav H. From a meeting of a lobby boy and a hotel manager to a very close friendship. The two of them passed many days until finally The Grand Budapest Hotel was passed on to Moustafa.

The background of the year in The Grand Budapest hotel story has several years. In 1985, 1968 and 1932. In 1968, he told of a meeting of a book writer with old Mr. Moustafa. In that year Mr. Moustafa told all his life stories including his meeting with Gustaf H to a writer. Then in 1932 he talked about young Moustafa's meeting with Gustav H at The Grand Budapest Hotel.

#### 4. Costume

Over time there are changes that occur between human life. Some of the aspects affected by these changes are lifestyle. Human lifestyle changes according to the times. Changes in lifestyle cannot be separated from changes in the way people dress. Human clothing, which initially only served as a covering for the body, has become a style that cannot be separated by each individual. We can tell someone's dress style just by looking at the model he is wearing.

In making a costume film, it cannot be separated from the background of the story and narrative that will be conveyed. Actors and actresses in a scene not only tell stories through dialogue, but costumes can also provide information and moods that will be conveyed in a film. Pierson (2010) once stated in his study that the constum is an element that is clearly visible to identify in the mise en scene. Constum can provide very clear information to the audience when the film setting is carried out, what is the condition of the status of the social actors who play a role in it, and how the character and nature of the actor is [6].

In the film *The Grand Budapest* which is set in 1968, the costume aspect is divided into several parts. The costume that will be discussed is the costume of a story character, a writer who tells the story of him who was on vacation at *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and met the owner of the hotel, Mr. Moustafa. The author's costume is clearly identified because the costume worn is the same as the costume worn in 1985 [Figure 1]. The use of the same costume as in 1985 to make it easier for the audience to identify the author's character that is conveyed in the story. The lobby boy in 1985 wore the same costume as in 1932, but there are significant differences between the two. In 1985 the lobby boy did not wear a hat and looked more disorganized than in 1932. This was because in 1985 the condition of the hotel was no longer at its prime, and in 1932 the condition of the hotel was at its heyday which affected the condition of the lobby boy's costume style.



**Figure 1.** Author and lobbyboy costume 1968

You can see old Mr. Moustafa sitting in the lobby of his hotel wearing a purple blazer, with a red undershirt and brown pants. Moustafa's old costume in this scene does not identify that he is the owner of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. In 1985 old Moustafa was in a period of sadness because he was left by his wife who he loved so much. Even though he has it all but in his heart he does not feel happy, therefore the costume he uses is very simple to describe his psychic condition which is not in his good times [Figure 2].



**Figure 2.** Mr. Moustafa's costume 1968

### 5. *Lighting*

Lighting is one of the most important aspects of filmmaking. At the beginning of the discovery of photography, the most important element in photography was Light. Photography without light will not display the desired image.

Light can give a certain impression depending on the nature of the light and shadow produced. Light striking directly onto the object creates a strong shadow. The nature of the light will give a strong texture effect to the object that is hit by the light. When the light is reflected or covered, the resulting shadow will be soft. The nature of this light will produce an effect with less depth, a less visible texture, so it is best used for the purpose of providing clear information to the audience.

The lighting technique can also be divided into 2 techniques. The first technique uses the high key technique, namely the light arrangement technique where the highlights are more dominant than the shadows. Another technique is the low key technique, which is a light arrangement technique where the shadow or darkest area of an image is more dominant than the bright area or highlight. Pierson (2010) adds that the arrangement of light with high key techniques makes the elements in a frame more visible and brighter so that the shadows in the frame are reduced [7]

The lighting in the film *The Grand Budapest Hotel* uses a combination of several techniques. The scene to be studied is the scene where the lighting uses high key and low key techniques.

In 1885 [Figure 3] in the same scene as [Figure 4] saw a significant difference in the lighting aspect. In scene [Figure 3] the lighting uses a high key technique. The use of high key techniques in the scene is to make it easier to identify the place that the place is in a very large dining room by showing all the parts in the dining room. Not only as an identification of a place, but there is a narrative to be conveyed that their meeting was a happy one because Mr. Moustafa idolized the writer he was talking to at the table, and the writer also wanted to hear an interesting story from Mr. Moustafa.



**Figure 3.** High key lighting technique 1985

In the 1985 setting [Figure 4] there is a scene where the lighting uses the low key technique where t. Old Moustafa is chatting with the writer at the dinner table. In that scene there is a technical change from high key to low key directly. The use of low key techniques in the scene is because Mr. Moustafa is talking about his past with his girlfriend. T. Moustafa loved his girlfriend so much that Mr. Moustafa was very sad when his girlfriend, Agatha, died. The Low key technique is very effective in conveying a deep impression of sadness and loneliness to the audience.



**Figure 4.** Low key lighting technique 1985

#### 6. Property Setting

Property design in film making is a must. With a good property design the audience will be able to identify the story setting time, the location of the story and the relationship between the character and the place. Not only as an identification, Pierson (2010) adds that property design can give the audience a feeling of being one with the space and time of the film [6].

The property design in 1985 was different from the design in 1932. In 1985 The Grand Budapest Hotel was so old that many of its property designs were made dull and old. Irregular laying of tables

and paintings, and not brightly colored walls. The old design that was retained at The Grand Budapest Hotel in 1985 indicates that the hotel owner, Mr. Moustafa, wants to maintain the authenticity of the hotel and invites visitors to enjoy the beauty and elegance of The Grand Budapest Hotel.



**Figure 4.** Bath room set design 1985

## 7. Conclusion

The Grand Budapest Hotel is a film that uses an excellent mise en scene in its application. The light arrangement provides a spatial dimension that brings the audience into the setting of the year in the film. The property setting with pastel colors does not only shape the mood of the audience, but more than that it gives the impression of unity from the film so that the audience will be able to easily identify the film The Grand Budapest hotel by just seeing one scene. The costume designer of The Grand Budapest Hotel deserves an award at various film awarding events, because with his genius, the costumes he achieved in the film gave a different feel to other films. The choice of model and color not only provides information about the film year setting, more than that the costume design gives a harmonious impression with the property setting colors and the overall film colors.

## Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the Visual Communication Design Department for having services and facilities as well as countless motivations and support. The author also appreciates the knowledge we have and extraordinary knowledge during this research

## References

- [1] J Sreekumar. “*Creating Meaning through Interpretations: A Mise-En-Scene Analysis of the Film 'The Song of Sparrows'*” Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies  
Special Issue – September 2015
- [2] A. Vaughn Vreeland. “*Color Theory and Social Structure in the Films of Wes Anderson*”. Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications, Vol. 6, No. 2 • Fall 2015
- [3] J Sabol. “THEATRICAL MISE-EN-SCENE IN FILM FORM”. The Slovak Theatre – 2018 – Volume 66 – Issue 3
- [4] Yunpeng M. “A Brief Analysis on the Use of Color in Film Scenes” Taking The Grand Budapest Hotel as an Example. Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, volume 341 (2019)

- [5] T Welsch. "Teaching Mise-en-Scene Analysis as a Critical Tool". *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Winter, 1997), pp. 101-106
- [6] Acker, A. (1991). 'Reel Women: Pioneers of the Cinema, 1896 to the Present'. *New York: Continuum*.
- [7] Bordwell, D. and Thompson, K. (2003). 'Film Art: An Introduction, 7th edition'. *New York: McGraw-Hill*.
- [8] Pierson, I. (2010). 'Mise-en-scene'. *College Film and Media Studies: A Reference Guide*.
- [9] Preston, W. (1994). 'What an Art Director Does: An Introduction to Motion Picture Production Design'. *Silman-James Press, U.S.*
- [10] J Sreekumar. "Creating Meaning through Interpretations: A Mise-En-Scene Analysis of the Film 'The Song of Sparrows'" *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*  
Special Issue – September 2015