



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„The Quirky in the Work of Wes Anderson.
Metamodern Oscillations at the Basis of a Quirky Sensibility“

Verfasser

Stefan Heiden

Angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magister der Philosophie (Mag. Phil.)

Wien, im Dezember 2012

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt

A 190 344 299

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt

UF Englisch (und UF Psychologie und Philosophie)

Betreuer

Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself.

Quotations from other authors and any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the words of other authors are all clearly marked within the text and acknowledged in the bibliographical references.

Vienna, in December 2012

Thank you, Anna.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to show my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, for his ideas and advice in countless issues and for his great encouragement and reliability.

Many thanks to my family, especially my mother. This diploma thesis would not have been possible without your great support.

I would also like to seize the opportunity to express my warmest thanks to all those people who have encouraged me or lent me an ear in the course of my studies. Special thanks to my dear friends, Michi, Daniel and Robert.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Outline.....	2
1.2. Overview: Wes Anderson.....	4
2. What Does Quirky Mean?.....	7
2.1. How the Quirky Evolved into a Technical Term.....	7
2.2. The Quirky and Its Conceptual Relatives.....	9
2.3. An art movement? A genre? A Sensibility!.....	13
3. The Quirky Film.....	19
3.1. A Useful Definition.....	19
3.2. Recurrent properties.....	20
3.2.1. Light and Darkness: The Themes of the Quirky Film.....	21
3.2.2. Mise-en-scène: How the Content of the Frame is Organized.....	23
3.2.3. Types of Humour: How the Quirky Film Makes Us Laugh.....	28
3.2.4. Intertextual References and Allusions in Quirky Films.....	30
3.2.5. Sympathy versus Detachment: The Tone of the Quirky Film.....	32
3.3. The Quirky and Its “Indiewood” Context.....	35
3.4. What Was Before the Quirky?.....	37
3.5. The Metamodern Structure of Feeling.....	42
4. Structural Oscillations at the Heart of the Quirky Film.....	47
4.1. Spatial Oscillations in <i>Rushmore</i>	48
4.2. Temporal Oscillations in <i>The Royal Tenenbaums</i>	58
4.3. Truth & Deception in <i>The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou</i>	68
4.4. Purpose & Arbitrariness in <i>The Darjeeling Limited</i>	78
5. A Metamodern Way of Viewing and Listening.....	91
5.1. Gratification Provided by the Quirky Film.....	91
5.2. Nostalgia for a Real World.....	93
5.3. Desire for a Life Filled With Meaning.....	97
5.4. Deepening Emotional Engagement.....	100
Conclusion.....	103
Bibliography.....	106
Appendix.....	109

List of Figures

Figure 1: Planimetric long shot in <i>The Life Aquatic</i>	25
Figure 2: <i>Punch Drunk Love</i>	25
Figure 3: <i>Napoleon Dynamite</i>	26
Figure 4: <i>Harold and Maude</i>	26
Figure 5: <i>Buffalo 66</i>	26
Figure 6: <i>Harold and Maude</i>	26
Figure 7: A copy of the book on which <i>The Royal Tenenbaums</i> pretends to be based.....	31
Figure 8: An intertitle simulating the literary source for <i>The Royal Tenenbaums</i>	31
Figure 9: Ben Bradock dives in the swimming pool of his parents.....	38
Figure 10: Herman goes underwater after watching his wife flirt with another man.....	38
Figure 11: A two-dimensional oscillation.....	45
Figure 12: Multiple depth layers.....	51
Figure 13: Multiple depth layers and sharp angles of the vanishing lines.....	51
Figure 14: Effect of flatness.....	52
Figure 15: Self-conscious gaze into the camera.....	52
Figure 16: Extremely sharp angles of the vanishing lines and multiple depth layers.....	56
Figure 17: Very shallow focus.....	56
Figure 18: “Dynamic” framing in the prologue: Chas attempts to shoot at his father.....	61
Figure 19: Richie and Margot run away.....	61
Figure 20: The train: order, symmetry, flatness, planimetric long shot.....	81
Figure 21: The market: disorder, multiple depth layers, multiple lines of sight and movement.....	81
Figure 22: Order and symmetry form part of the greeting ceremony.....	84
Figure 23: A miniaturized theater in <i>Tenenbaums</i> alludes to the diorama-like quality of its visual style.....	99

1. Introduction

Here's our agenda for the next few months.

You'll find everything in order.

– Dignan in *Bottle Rocket* (1992)

Since the middle of the last decade, one buzzword has become “virtually inescapable” which does no longer merely describe a person or someone’s behavior but also a film and a cinematic category. Many recent U. S. American films have been described or marketed as being “quirky” and some critics even use this notion as a defining element of a new cinematic category – the “quirky film” (MacDowell 1). Half a decade before this buzzword spread and a series of similarly themed and styled films were released, Wes Anderson, whose films had a significant share in the rise of the quirky, was already gaining acceptance. His work as the writer, director and producer of *The Royal Tenenbaums* earned him a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 2001. Anderson who has recently been called the “king of quirk” by *The Guardian* (Child) has developed his own recognizable aesthetics, cinematographic methods and tone. The present thesis starts from the assumption that the “work of Wes Anderson as a whole would seem to provide us with the most consistent, as well as probably the most extreme, embodiment of the quirky” (MacDowell 4).

The works of Anderson have set the standards for the category of the quirky film. It is this constituting nature of Anderson’s work with regard to the new category – it is to be demonstrated what kind of category we are dealing with here – as well as the wide attention it has gained among cinema-goers and film critics alike which justifies a comprehensive examination concerning the “quirky” in Anderson’s films. Furthermore, it has to be demonstrated sufficiently how the elusive concept of the quirky can be defined in order to extend its usefulness for the discourses surrounding cinema, such as film criticism and film studies.

As will be argued, the quirky can be understood as a mode of telling stories which subverts itself by a deliberate denaturalization which imposes a unique

perspective on the audience. As has been demonstrated (Hettich; MacDowell, “New Wave”; “Notes”; MacDowell, “Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility”), this process of denaturalization is evoked by a number of formal decisions (camera work, *mise-en-scène*, extradiegetic music, etc.). However, there are also tonal tendencies forming a counterpart of this denaturalizing effect in that they make the films appear authentic and sincere. Similarly, the simultaneous presentation of opposing semantic spheres on the level of narration is characteristic for the quirky film: On the one hand, the films demonstrate representations and attitudes which have been described as typical of postmodernism and postmodern art. On the other hand, Anderson’s films contain forms of representation which deviate strongly from such attitudes.

In order to explain these apparent contradictions, the concept of metamodernism is used. This cultural theory was put forward by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in an attempt to explain various cultural phenomena of the 2000s. As will be argued both Anderson’s works and quirky films by other directors are characterized by oscillations on the narrative and the stylistic level. These multi-polar oscillations, which I understand as typical of metamodernism, are analyzed with regard to the dimensions of space, time, truth/illusion and arbitrariness/meaningfulness. Furthermore, together with a number of recurrent properties, they are used to evoke latent tensions which are the basis for a quirky mode of viewing and listening.

1.1. Outline

After introducing Wes Anderson (p. 4), the present thesis sketches the etymological origins of the word “quirky” as well as its conceptual context. In addition, I will respond to the question to which kind of category the quirky belongs. An outline of different existing approaches to the definition and categorization of the quirky will be given (p. 7, What Does Quirky Mean?).

In the next chapter (p. 19, The Quirky Film), I will summarize what has been said so far about the characteristics of the quirky film. I will take up Katja Hettich’s con-

cept of the melancholic comedy as well as James MacDowell's considerations on the quirky sensibility which represents a compact concept for the description of the phenomenon of the quirky and allows assertions about the style, the theme, the mode of diegesis and the tone which lie at the basis of the quirky (Hettich; "Notes"). Both approaches complement one another in some respects and overlap in others. Hence, it seems reasonable to combine their descriptive potential and use the resulting combination as a basis for further analysis.

The next chapter (p. 47, *Structural Oscillations at the Heart of the Quirky Film*) presents an analysis of Anderson's work with regard to the quirky which I understand as a result of oscillations on the dimensions of time, space, truth/illusion and arbitrariness/meaningfulness. This structural property which will be analyzed in detail is the center of my concept of the quirky.

As has been stated by film theorists (MacDowell), the quirky as expressed in Anderson's films has to be understood as a sensibility, i. e., a structure of perception, feeling and value. We have to consider the quirky film as one of the possible realms where this sensibility has visible effects. In the context of this thesis, four films of Anderson's *oeuvre* are selected (*Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* and *The Darjeeling Limited*). By these examples it will be demonstrated that the effect of the quirky arises from oscillations on "numerous, innumerable" dimensions (Akker, Feßler, and Vermeulen 9). Via this structural property, the quirky film can be understood in connection with the structure of feeling of metamodernism. Among the dimensions upon which metamodern works oscillate, four are chosen, namely time, space, truth/illusion and arbitrariness/meaningfulness. The four above-mentioned films will be analyzed with respect to these dimensions.

The concept of metamodernism was put forward by the cultural theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in an attempt to explain various cultural phenomena of the 2000s (1). According to them, some ongoing discourses face a renaissance of typically modernist mindsets while many postmodernist positions of the 1990s and 1980s have been adapted. The prefix 'meta' in the term refers to Plato's *metaxy* (i. e., a movement between opposite poles as well as

beyond) and is used to signify continuous oscillation (Akker, Feßler, and Vermeulen). Metamodernism, which falls into the category of a structure of feeling, describes a process of constant shifting positions both related to modern and postmodern mindsets. This process however reveals another sensibility that is neither modern nor postmodern and

negotiates between a yearning for universal truths but also an (a)political relativism, between hope and doubt, sincerity and irony, knowingness and naivety, construction and deconstruction. They suggest that the metamodern attitude longs for another future, another metanarrative, whilst acknowledging that future or narrative might not exist, or materialize, or, if it does materialize, is inherently problematic. (“No More Modern: Notes on Metamodernism” 1–2)

The final chapter (p. 91, A Metamodern Way of Viewing and Listening) demonstrates how Anderson’s work simultaneously exhibits and transgresses common axioms and practices typical of postmodernism and postmodern art. This effect of simultaneity is realized by the above mentioned oscillations. Along with the set of recurrent properties described in chapter 3, it gives rise to a unique mode of viewing and listening specific to the quirky. Furthermore, it will be analyzed which implications the quirky has for the audience and for their mode of viewing and listening. This type of experience will be made comprehensible by means of the category of metamodernism.

Before we go on with a biographical overview of Wes Anderson, some words on terminology: In the present thesis, I will apply the word “quirky” according to its general usage, i. e., meaning “having or characterized by peculiar or unexpected traits or aspects.” On the other hand, “quirky sensibility” refers to a special mode of perception and feeling which is tied to the metamodern structure of feeling and which is expressed by a cinematic category which I will refer to as the “quirky film.”

1.2. Overview: Wes Anderson

Let me briefly introduce Wesley Wales “Wes” Anderson. The American film director, screenwriter, actor and producer of features, short films and commercials was born May 1, 1969 in Harris County, TX. He attended St. John’s High School, a

preparatory school where his second feature film *Rushmore* would be shot. Afterwards, he studied at the University of Texas, where he majored in philosophy and met his later collaborators, Owen and Luke Wilson. Working together they wrote and directed the short film *Bottle Rocket* (1992) which tells the story of two young burglars who attempt a life of crime while looking for identity and friendship. In 1993, it is screened at the Sundance Film Festival and attracted the attention, of, among others, producers James Brooks and Polly Platt, whose advocacy made Columbia Pictures provide Anderson with six million dollars for a feature film version of the short (1996). The latter was well received by the critics and important figures of cinema alike, e. g., Martin Scorsese, who considered it one of the best films of the decade.

Anderson's second feature film, *Rushmore* (1998), which was written in collaboration with Owen Wilson tells the story of a preparatory school student, Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman), who commits himself to a broad variety of extracurricular activities but receives failing grades. He falls in love with the first grade teacher, Miss Cross and makes friends with Herman Blume, a thoughtful businessman who deeply irritates his new friend as he takes an interest in Miss Cross.

The Royal Tenenbaums (2001), Anderson's next film, which is set in New York City, tells the story of a family of divorced parents and their three adult children who once were promising child prodigies. However, "virtually all memory of the brilliance of the young Tenenbaums [has] been erased by two decades of betrayal, failure, and disaster" (Anderson). The film combines a wide array of extraordinary characters – Gene Hackman as the paterfamilias, Anjelica Huston as the elegant mother, Danny Glover as her refined admirer, Ben Stiller, Gwyneth Paltrow and Luke Wilson as their adult children and former child prodigies who have never realized their potential as well as Owen Wilson and Bill Murray. Its nostalgic yet denaturalized Upper Eastside setting equally reminds of the sixties, seventies and eighties. *The Royal Tenenbaums* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay.

The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou (2004) tells about the quest of a celebrated oceanographer/filmmaker (Murray) to kill the “jaguar shark” and thereby to revenge the death of his best friend. In addition to this adventure, the film shows how Zissou gets to know his alleged son and how he copes with his failed marriage. The film bursts with literary and cinematic allusions, e. g., to Jacques-Yves Cousteau, *8½*, *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension*, *Jaws*, etc.

In Anderson’s next feature, *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), Schwartzman, Luke Wilson and Adrien Brody depict three brothers who make a journey through India in search of their mother after their father has died. Anderson’s film represents many of the themes portrayed by his older films, e. g., forbidden love, death, absent parents and the relationships of siblings.

In 2009, Anderson directed *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, a stop-motion adaptation of the eponymous children’s novel written by British author Roald Dahl about a cunning fox (voice: George Clooney) and a group of farmers who seek to kill him in order to protect their chickens. Anderson’s acclaimed film earned him an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature.

Anderson’s most recent film, *Moonrise Kingdom*, depicts an adolescent couple who flee their New England home causing a search party to spread out in order to find them. It was released May, 2012.

In addition to his feature and short films, Anderson directed a number of TV commercials. In 2006, he performed in “My Life, My Card,” an American Express commercial, which consists of a mock interview Anderson gives while shooting an action movie. In 2008, he worked together with Brad Pitt for a commercial of a Japanese telephone producer. Just as “My Life, My Card,” it is filmed in one continuous track-shot. Anderson also directed commercials for AT&T (2007), Stella Artois (2010) as well as Hyundai (2012).

2. What Does Quirky Mean?

It is never a waste of time to study the history of a word.

– Lucien Febvre (219)

Certainly, the term “quirky” is not one of the most precisely defined ones. In fact, it is one of those words which can give an impression about a broad variety of objects, individuals, attitudes, emotions, etc. Perhaps this is the reason for the remarkable popularity of this adjective which is used to describe such distinct phenomena as character traits, linguistic subjects, a board game or a category applied in marketing and film criticism. During the 2000s, it has become increasingly common to use the word “quirky” in order to refer to a special kind of film or book while it was still being applied to a certain type of person and their behavior. Obviously, the adjective has already existed prior to the turn of the millennium. In fact, the word in its underlying, nominal form of a “quirk” came into being as early as the 16th century (“Quirk”).

2.1. How the Quirky Evolved into a Technical Term

The word “quirk” was utilized as a verb in the early 16th century, before the noun was coined in 1560 (Stevenson). Up to the present date, the origins of both the noun and the verb are not known. However, Douglas Harper, the author of the Online Etymology Dictionary assumes that the word could share its origins with the German adjective “quer” (i. e., diagonal, horizontal) and would thereby be related to the English “queer.” Besides, Harper states the assumption that the word was first of all utilized to depict a “twist or flourish in weaving”. In the first few years of its use as a noun in the 1560s, the term meant approximately “quibble” or “evasion.” Besides, also the notion of a “verbal trick or subtlety” was meant by the word “quirk,” in the 16th century. In the sense of a peculiarity, the term began to be used only as late as 1600. Then, in the course of the 17th century, the notion of a sudden turn or twist was added to the meaning of the noun (Stevenson). However,

gradually, the semantic meaning which is most familiar to us has asserted itself, i. e., a quirk is understood as a peculiar aspect of a person's character or behavior.

According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the adjective "quirky," which was derived from the underlying noun, has been in use only since the early 19th century when it was recorded for the first time. Then, it denoted a type of behavior which we would call shifty, furtive or shady nowadays. This semantic value survived until the middle of the twentieth century when, in the 1960s, the notion of the idiosyncratic began to be connected to the adjective. Moreover, the latter is the predominant meaning of the word "quirky" today. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, "quirky," as it is currently used, is defined as "having or characterized by peculiar or unexpected traits or aspects: her sense of humour was decidedly quirky." Besides, the word can be used both adjectivally and adverbially (Stevenson).

The term "quirky" has not arrived at its current remarkable popularity before the turn of the millennium when a broad variety of phenomena in relation to popular culture began to be discussed using the word. At this point in time academics, film critics and Internet users alike were beginning to use the word in order to roughly categorize films, TV-shows, music and books.

Today, threads and entries on topics as, e. g., "Please list good quirky indie movies I should watch?" (st.jwil) or "What films paved the way for quirky style?" (TheBallDontLie) can be found in online forums and on blogs of the cinephile community. On the website questions.yahoo.com alone, threads with a total of about 100 entries which rely on the quirky as a cinematic category can be found, e. g., "Need good quirky movies recommendations please." (M F) At this time, there are ten different amazon.com "Listmania! lists" on quirky films. Besides, the notion of the quirky is often applied to women and men. For example, the *Huffington Post* has recently published a so-called video timeline titled "A History Of Quirk From Hepburn To Deschanel." It consists of YouTube clips depicting scenes which are supposed to be representative for these "quirky girls." The accompanying article connects the term of the quirky to the so-called "manic pixie dream girl." The woman who is said to be one of the most pronounced examples of this category is

the American actress, musician and singer-songwriter Zooey Deschanel. She is said to be part of a trend which was disapproved by a blogger in his entry “Zooey Deschanel Stars in ‘Quirk is Killing Indie Movies’” (“Deschanel”). Also, Wes Anderson’s work is frequently cited as a typical example of this category. Recently, he has even been called “the godfather of the quirky American indie” (Utichi).

When it comes to film reviews, we come upon articles as, e. g., “Quirked Around,” by Michael Hirschorn who criticizes “Quirk,” as he tends to call the phenomenon, in addition to stating that it is “the ruling sensibility of the Gen-X indie culture.” His article inspired protest, e. g., an article by Phil Hoad. Besides, every new film which is released and which is slightly related to prior examples of the “quirky comedy” seems to trigger new discussions about the artistic value, the limitations as well as the potential of this category of cinema.

In the field of film and media studies, we can find “Notes on Quirky” (MacDowell) and treatises about “The Rise of the Quirky Indie” (Perren), “The ‘Quirky’ New Wave” (MacDowell, “New Wave”), and so on. Each of these and many similar journal articles and papers stress the importance of Wes Anderson’s work as typical of a new cinematic category. Anderson is “one of a handful of American filmmakers to whom the moniker “quirky” is regularly applied” (Orgeron 18).

After this short overview of its etymological origins and its present day usage, let me now take a look at the conceptual and philosophical context which surrounds the notion of the quirky.

2.2. The Quirky and Its Conceptual Relatives

Particularly with regard to the various statements on the Internet and those of the film critics in the press, it seems as if many users and critics base their argument on the notion of the quirky, pretending it to be invariably defined and without rendering a clear picture of its conceptual origins and its philosophical context. In the following section, these aspects will be addressed before we can treat the question which label suits best as a categorization of the quirky when it is

used in order to describe formal or semantic aspects of cultural artifacts in the next subsection.

The use of the term “quirky” has spread relatively late, as has been demonstrated above. Nevertheless, also before that point in time, certain characteristics and types of behavior were considered as distinctive in a peculiar sense. While I would not argue that quirkiness is synonymous to eccentricity, it is still obvious that the notions of the bizarre, the curious and the quirky are strongly connected to this idea. Therefore, it seems sensible to have a brief look at the notion of eccentricity.

In modern-day usage, *eccentricity* refers to unusual or odd behavior on the part of a person who noticeably deviates from the social norm. In addition to behavior, eccentricity can influence many aspects of a person, reaching from appearance to personal views, opinions and goals. Individuals who demonstrate these properties are referred to as eccentrics and considered the personification of the idiosyncratic, the bizarre, the curious or the quirky. (Gill 1-2)

There seems to be a general tendency to assume that in order to be considered eccentric, one’s behavior must not lead to excessive, negative consequences and does therefore not provoke reactions exceeding amusement, surprise or annoyance. According to this opinion, eccentrics are perceived as basically “harmless and amiable figure[s ...] who provides others with a pleasant diversion from the tedium of everyday life” (Gill, “Rethinking Eccentricity” 1). However, as expressed by Miranda Gill, “[e]ccentricity often elicited violent and conflicting responses, and was associated with potentially disturbing figures such as the insane, social marginals, human ‘monsters’ and the tempestuous Romantic genius.” These contradictive statements might be the key to distinguish eccentricity and its younger relative, the quirky, since, as MacDowell puts it, the latter is “inoffensive” (MacDowell, “Notes” 3). In contrast to the eccentric, the quirky is transgressing the borders of conventionality without provoking aggression, offense, hatred or disgust. As Michael Hirschorn put it in his article “Quirked Around,” “Quirk is odd, but not *too* odd. That would take us all the way to *weird* and there someone might

get hurt.” Thus, we could say that the quirky is rather a target of ridicule than one of direct attack.

But let us now return to eccentricity. Evidently, in order for the notion of the eccentric to be meaningful, there needs to be a standard, a set of “normal” actions, attitudes, appearances and goals which is based on the properties related to behavior of the majority of the society. Subsequently, it depends on the cultural and anthropological assumptions prominent at a point in time which behavior is identified as eccentric. The extent to which “individuals are permitted to diverge from social norms differ considerably between cultures in response to very specific socio-historical factors.” (Gill, “Rethinking Eccentricity” 10) Besides, the application of the label “eccentric” is also influenced by an individual’s social background, class and gender. For one thing, “what was deeply eccentric for women was often considered quite normal for men, and vice versa” (*Ibid.*). Moreover, according to George E. Marcus, wealth does play a role when it comes to eccentricity. “What would be considered to be signs of insanity in a poor person is generally accepted as eccentricity in wealthy, upper-class people.” (48–49)

In his philosophical work *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill stresses the significance of eccentrics for the advancement of a society: “Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigor, and moral courage which it contained.” (Mill, Bentham, and Austin 140) Hence, Mill understands the eccentricity to be adjacent to genius. In any case, the dichotomy of normality versus eccentricity “is inseparable from European modernity: eccentricity represents one compelling set of values (novelty, freedom, individuality) which clashed significantly with other, equally compelling values (stability, order, community).” (Gill, “Rethinking Eccentricity” 10)

Just like Mill’s attitude towards eccentricity, also the concept of the *spleen* is a typical and important element of the romantic literature of the classical modernity. Charles Baudelaire popularized the concept (French: splénétique) which refers to a state of melancholy or pensive sadness in the face of disease, despair, death, loneliness and hatred. The term was already used before – particularly in the

Romantic literature of the 19th century. There is an evident connection between melancholy and eccentricity: Individuals who cannot identify the reasons for their misery, who do not have dreams and have given up their search for meaning, need increasingly eccentric distractions to cope with this situation. (cf. Gill, *Eccentricity and the Cultural Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris* 71–102)

Another, quite obvious approach to the comprehension of eccentricity lies in the morphology of the word (Latin: *eccentricus*, Ancient Greek: ἑκκεντρος *ekkentros*, “not having the earth as the center of an orbit,” from ἐκ *ek*, “out” + κέντρον *kentron*, “point”) (T. F. Hoad). Thereby, eccentricity can be understood as related to feelings of melancholy, i. e., as the loss of an inner center which leads to a state of mental imbalance. Thus, eccentric persons seem to be lacking an emotional foundation which underlies the erection of a sense of values and self-esteem. According to the German educationist and philosopher Käthe Meyer-Drawe, this lack of an inner center leads to a special kind of suffering from one’s “eccentric self” – this kind of suffering is obviously related to the above-mentioned notion of spleen – which is described by Meyer-Drawe as follows:

For not nearly all of us the true center is formed by God. In modernity, His place was taken by a newly established self which perceives itself as the original source of all meaning, as the sole and unchallenged founding element. With this in mind, the longing for one’s own self has always got something nostalgic or melancholic about it. (Meyer-Drawe 362) [my translation]

On the other hand, eccentricity is also closely tied to the comical. When used as a plot element in a film, the eccentric deviation from the norm adds to its comical potential since “[a]ll instances of the comic involve a departure from a norm, whether the norm be one of action, appropriate behaviour, conventional dress, or stereotypical features” (Neale and Krutnik 67). Let me emphasize, however, that eccentricity must not be confused with quirkiness or even the quirky sensibility. Still, analyzing the conceptual background of the quirky via its semantical relative, the eccentric, adds to a deeper understanding of the quirky and hints at possible interpretations, as will be shown in chapters 4 and 5.

Having traced the conceptual background in which the quirky is embedded, I will now look at the notion of the quirky in a narrower sense, i. e., in its function as a marker or category applied to films in the discourses surrounding cinema.

2.3. An art movement? A genre? A Sensibility!

In what follows, I want to pose the question what it means if we apply the label quirky to a film. According to Phil Hoad, “we all know what quirkiness is” (P. Hoad 1). Still, even if we may think we recognize it intuitively when we face it, this is not the same as being able to precisely determine its boundaries. For one thing, we have to find out to which kind of category the quirky belongs. Does the quirky represent a new genre or an art movement? Does it go hand in hand with a recently established dominant attitude of screenwriters, directors and producers or is it due to changed conditions of cinematic production? Could it possibly be the case that there is no such cinematic category as the quirky but merely characters and plots which are described as being quirky? The last-mentioned idea is underlined by a complaint Jim Jarmusch expressed in an interview for *The Guardian*.

Aw, man, is that the only adjective they know? [...] It’s like every time I make a goddamn movie, the word “quirky” is hauled out in the American reviews. Now I see it’s being applied to Wes Anderson, too. All of a sudden, his films are quirky. And Sofia Coppola is quirky. It’s just so goddamn lazy. (O’Hagan 2)

According to this interpretation, the quirky is a deliberately vague term applied to any director (or film) who somehow subverts the dominant cinematic conventions and resists classification or categorization of any kind. Interpreted this way, the quirk acts merely as a label for difference, for the Other (MacDowell, “Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility” 3). A similar definition is given by Michael Hirschorn who describes quirkiness as “an embrace of the odd against the blandly mainstream” (Hirschorn 1). Obviously, this watered down version of the quirky ultimately makes it useless, as this category would encompass a considerable share of existing works of cinema, literature and art. Moreover, this idea of the quirky does not correspond to the way the term is used in the discourses surrounding cinema. We have to acknowledge that both in on-line forums about

cinema and in the realm of electronic commerce, the category of the quirky has gained acceptance. It is used and understood by the participants of the discourse as has been demonstrated in section 2.1. It would seem, we apply the quirky as well as the terms “quirky movie,” “quirky comedy,” etc., in order to express the membership to a set of films which share a number of distinctive similarities. Does this mean the quirky represents a new genre?

The concept of *genre* is subject to controversial debates. For one thing, it is perceived as problematic that the membership to a genre is determined by a variety of incoherent indicators. In other words, the basis on which a genre is applied to a certain film differs depending on the nature of that genre. These indicators include

[t]ime and place of action and a highly stereotypical iconography in westerns, the narrative function of diegetic music in musicals, intended audience effects in comedies, thrillers, or melodramas, etc. Ambiguities in the categorization of individual films are in the nature of such vague criteria [...]. (Hettich 11–12) [my translation]

Even if we acknowledge the concept of the genre, the quirky does not suggest itself to be called one itself. This is because all the films which are described as being quirky, seem to conform to another genre as all of them seem to involve an element of comedy. As the British film scholar James MacDowell notices about the quirky, “[i]ts films may fuse comedy and melodrama very intimately [...], or they may be more ‘pure’ comedies [...] but a commitment to a certain comedic mode seems key to [it]” (“Notes” 3). It will be demonstrated in chapter 5 that the quirky subverts the conventions of the comedy without transgressing them. According to MacDowell, the quirky is “consistently drawn to certain genres” (“Notes” 2). Still, while quirky films may include certain types of characters and settings, stylistic conventions and recurrent themes, the quirky is not reducible to these properties. For these reasons, it does not seem appropriate to assume that the quirky represents a new, independent genre.

The German film scholar Katja Hettich has taken the view that the “melancholic comedy” – this is how she calls a type of film which is in many respects similar to the quirky comedy – falls into the category of a “temporary cycle” (12). However,

she submits that a cycle is usually defined as a set of films which are purposefully created by the film industry by producing several profitable follow-up productions according to the model of one or some earlier published, successful films (Altman 54–56). However, it seems that neither quirky films nor Hettich's melancholic comedies are reducible to this definition. Furthermore, the popularity of the quirky as a cinematic category, its reception and application as well as the fact that the number of quirky films which are produced per annum remain stable, indicate that the quirky is more than a trend or a circle and that it could be a cinematic expression of a change in society or one of its subsets. For Jeffrey Sconce, there is “[n]o doubt there is a new sensibility at work in certain corners of North American cinema and culture” (350). But actually what is a sensibility?

In the course of the socio-cultural revolutions of the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century, categories like race, class and gender, ethnic identity, the body or colonial subjects have become the center of interest in many areas of study. According to the resulting model of culture, these categories are considered to be of special significance for societies and are regarded as the central objects of cultural analysis. Culture is interpreted as an area of practice which functions as a forum where these categories are constituted via representation. This identity-forming, representational practice is called discourse, i. e., the totality of visual or written texts regulated, produced and consumed by a society. This approach to culture centering on “representation focuses on the primacy of the objects being represented.” However, apart from this approach, another perspective has coexisted which “focuses on the primacy of the various modes of perception and feeling, the terms and forms in which objects were conceived, experienced, and represented in the past”: The history of sensibilities. (Wickberg 2)

In the twentieth century, the concept of *sensibility* was controversially discussed and subject to a broad variety of interpretations. For the categorization of the quirky however, Susan Sontag's use of the term seems most useful. She appropriated the term in her famous essay “Notes on Camp” in order to describe the so-called camp sensibility. Moreover, in the influential essay “One Culture and the New Sensibility” she based her detailed analysis of the modern sensibility on

this concept. In a footnote to the latter essay, she explains the reasons for her using the term.

The sensibility of an era is not only its most decisive, but also its most perishable, aspect. One may capture the ideas (intellectual history) and the behavior (social history) of an epoch without ever touching upon the sensibility or taste which informed those ideas, that behavior. (276)

Sontag's concept of "the modern sensibility" contrasts the modes of feeling and experiencing the world in modern societies with the modes characteristic of the past. According to Sontag, the sensibility of a certain society and era manifests itself in art and literature where it is expressed in a "codified or articulated form." In addition, sensibilities which Daniel Wickberg describes as "structure[s] of perception, feeling, and value" are constituting elements of collectives (nations, classes, ethnic groups, civilizations, religions). Hence, it is among other things the sensibility of a collective which defines it and sets it apart from others (13-14). The question arises: Which difference does it make if we look for sensibilities instead of exclusively concentrating on the elements of discourse? What Sontag's reinvention of the concept of sensibility achieved is that it broadens our perspective and extends our understanding of culture.

By looking at the modes of perception and emotion within a society instead of exclusively focusing on the objects of the discourse, categorization of cultural phenomena into sensibilities and their subsequent interpretation and analysis allow to shed light on changes in society or groups which have only subtle, unobtrusive repercussions on the surface, i. e., the discourse. Evidently, this does not mean that we can do without a close analysis of the cultural artifacts which make up the discourse. However, we do not stop at a mere enumeration of typical, recurrent and defining properties of a cultural phenomenon but we also attempt to find out which ways of feeling and perceiving form its basis.

When it comes to the quirky, it is especially beneficial to concentrate on attitude, feeling and perception since it seems as if the external properties of a quirky film do not so much distinguish themselves via radical deviations with regard to *mise-en-scène* or structure of narration but rather via a variation of the

basic attitude which is presented. This is what makes the quirky “harmless” or “inoffensive” and it is one reason why quirky films are commercially successful, reach a wide audience and attract many commentators. As will be demonstrated in chapter 5, films which express the quirky sensibility for the most part adhere to cinematic conventions typical of the classical cinema. Such films do neither transgress the classical structure of narration nor do they introduce fundamentally new ways to represent reality. However, what a quirky film achieves is a change in emotion and perception which is reflected in its *tone*, i. e., in the quality of the narration, in the feeling and the attitude towards the world which is expressed – often by very subtle measures (cf. Sconce 352). This does not mean, however, that the quirky does not have distinctive formal properties which distinguish them from Hollywood mass-market films. When it comes to the context of production, the majority of the films described as quirky are closely connected to Hollywood but, with regard to their attitude, their types of feeling about and perceiving the world, the quirky is in opposition to Hollywood. For the given reasons, I want to take up MacDowell’s assumption that the quirky can be understood as a sensibility.

Categorizing the quirky as a sensibility leads to a number of questions which will be the subject of the following chapters. For one thing, the question arises: Who is the one who feels? What is their background? Where are the roots, the origins of the quirky? In this connection, we need to look at both the aspects of production and consumption. Who are the people who express this quirky perception of the world and who are the ones who share it – at least temporarily while sitting in front of the screen (cf. 3.3)? A sensibility can announce itself, it can catch on, persist, evolve, thrive and perish. Hence, where has the quirky announced itself? When and where has it emerged? What are its ancestors, its predecessors and the context of its origination (cf. 3.4)? Evidently, we also need to take a look at the cinematic measures by which this special kind of feeling is expressed and which allows the audience to perceive in a unique, quirky way. I will examine these formal characteristics and the semantic aspects which express the quirky sensibility in Anderson’s films in section 3.2.

Why and how this representation can be understood as being based on a number of metamodern oscillations is explained in chapter 4. Moreover, the question arises which change the “alignment” with the quirky sensibility causes in the audience. What does the representation of the quirky achieve and how is it consumed (chapter 5)? These questions implicated by the categorization of the quirky as a sensibility help to structure our approach to the quirky in Wes Anderson’s work.

3. The Quirky Film

I, like most other right-minded people, hate the word ‘quirky’

– James MacDowell (“New Wave”)

The present chapter presents a review of the state of the art when it comes to the description of the quirky film with regard to its recurrent properties (themes, *mise-en-scène*, comedy, intertextuality, and mood/tone), its context of production, its historical context and precursors as well as its connection to the metamodern structure of feeling.

3.1. A Useful Definition

In the present thesis, the quirky is neither considered as a cycle, nor as a genre, nor as any other *fixed* category. Instead it is understood as a sensibility, “a way of feeling and perceiving,” which expresses a current attitude among a segment of society and hence the audience and, thereby, transcends the postmodern structure of feeling. Subsequently, the “quirky film” is not an independent concept or term but it is merely to be understood as the cinematic expression of the quirky sensibility. In addition, the quirky film is not considered as constituted by its physical or semantical properties but by its function as a means of expression of the quirky sensibility. Nevertheless, we can examine quirky films with respect to the mentioned criteria and thereby not only learn about the films themselves but also about the quirky sensibility. Additionally, it is sensible to think of the quirky as a “sliding scale of representational possibilities,” rather than of a “box that one film or another may simply fit into or not.” As MacDowell puts it, quirky films do obey “a number of conventions [... Still], there seems no reason to suggest that a film need employ every one of them in order for us to recognise it as sharing in the sensibility” (“Notes” 2). Quirky films¹ may contain many of these conventions,

¹ *Magnolia* (1999), *Ghost World* (2001), *Tadpole* (2002), *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), *Adaptation* (2002), *I ♥ Huckabees* (2004), *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), *Me, You and Everyone we Know* (2005), *Little Miss Sunshine* (2005), *Thumbsucker* (2005), *Science of Sleep* (2006), *Nacho Libre* (2006), *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007), *Eagle vs. Shark* (2007), *Does Your Soul Have A Cold?* (2007),

which would position them on one end of the scale, or they may use only one, which would position them on the other.

3.2. Recurrent properties

In this section, the formal and semantic aspects which characterize the quirky films will be discussed. It is necessary to look at the recurrent properties of this category and to narrow it down before we can examine its historical background, context of production and portray its connections to metamodernism.

The present section builds upon MacDowell's theory of the quirky and Hettich's notion of the melancholic comedy. Both film scholars approach the quirky from the perspective of *Cognitive Film Theory*. MacDowell analyzes the quirky mainly with regard to tone, i. e., "the ways in which the film addresses its spectator and implicitly invites us to understand its attitude to its material and the stylistic register it employs" (Pye 7). That means, MacDowell examines quirky films with regard to the question which emotional attitude they adopt towards the characters and how they represent them. MacDowell sums up his stance on the quirky as follows:

The 'quirky' is often recognisable by its approach to comedy, a visual style that courts a fastidious 'artificiality', a thematic interest in childhood and innocence, and – most pervasively – a tone which balances ironic detachment with sincere engagement (MacDowell, "Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility" 1)

Hettich, on the other hand, concentrates on the mood of the films she analyzed. Her method consists in the identification and description of emotional cues which result in *Mischgefühle* (mixed feelings).

One reason why quirky films are classified under a common label is the fact that they tend to treat a number of recurrent themes.

Rocket Science (2007), *Be Kind Rewind* (2008), *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), *Bunny and the Bull* (2009), *Beginners* (2010), *Son of Rambow* (2007), *(500) Days of Summer* (2009) and *Submarine* (2011).

3.2.1. Light and Darkness: The Themes of the Quirky Film

At this point, I would like to look at themes which tend to recur in quirky films and illustrate them by looking at their protagonists. In her approach, Hettich stresses the importance of *melancholy* for the quirky film. She argues that the protagonists in these films suffer from an inner void, boredom caused by inactivity and the loss of an inner center. According to her, life seems tiresome and monotonous to them (Hettich 42–44). In fact, however, it seems as if the characters of the quirky film are not only bored. They face the *absurd*, the arbitrariness of life and the resulting need to choose one's own meaning. In this situation of contingency they look for a meaning, for a right way of living which makes life purposeful and valuable. Life, however, does not provide answers.

Quirky films present a number of possibilities how to react to the human condition: art, literature, spirituality, romantic love but also escapist strategies like disavowal, infantile behavior, traveling or nostalgia. Some characters staged in quirky films respond to the above-mentioned state of dissatisfaction with feelings of helplessness and *fatalism*. Others aim at an extraordinary life, thereby opposing the contingency, the absurdity of life. In *Rushmore*, Wes Anderson has Miss Cross cite Cousteau: "When one man, for whatever reason, has the opportunity to lead an extraordinary life he has no right to keep it to himself." *Personal success* and how to achieve it is a dominant topic in quirky films. The self-reflexive individuals which fill quirky films ponder whether they have succeeded in life or not. Often dissatisfaction and discontentment dominates these musings as well as the wish to change one's past and many of the (mostly male) main characters are convinced of their own inadequacy. They philosophize about their past, the meaning of life and death and the reasons for their suffering. The disillusion perceived by some of the characters makes it impossible for them to open themselves, to act spontaneously or to have erotic feelings. In the face of these negative feelings, the quirky film stresses the difficulties connected to but also the potential of personal goals, courage, hope, desire and love.

In quirky films, *romantic love* is presented as a potential solution to the existential problem of life. The main characters who often suffer from poor self-confidence, resignation and cynicism, draw new hope from romantic feelings which gives their life meaning and purpose. However, love is depicted as problematic, as a struggle with their own and their lovers' needs and desires, with calculation and genuine feelings, with the restriction of freedom and irresponsibility. Quirky films tend to have open endings which cautiously imply the possibility of love fulfilled but never fully satisfy the audience by resolving the plot (Hettich 52). What the quirky film shows are the doubts and difficulties of love and yet it creates the impression that hope might be justified.

Often, characters who approach their own desires and hopes are contrasted with those who deny them for fear of failure. The characters of the quirky film often try to escape from their present environment and constantly long for a different time. They are haunted by decisions which they have made or have failed to make and feel an intense regret. They long for a time before those decisions had to be dealt with. What they want is to regain a childlike innocence. As Susan Orlean in *Adaptation* explains, they want "to be [...] bab[ies] again[,] to be new." (MacDowell, "Notes" 9) This attitude as well as the noticeable absence of sex and erotic is closely connected to the themes of *purity* and *innocence*. The latter seem to serve as ideals for the protagonists as they are unable or unwilling to grow up which is evident by their childish behavior.

The theme of purity is closely connected to the depiction of *nostalgia* in the quirky film. The protagonists often wish they could go back in time as they consider adulthood to be disillusioning, disappointing and characterized by a loss of ideals, options and future. It is this dissatisfaction with the here and now which makes them feel nostalgic. In Anderson's films, the yearning for the past is not only evident on the level of the plot but also through his approach to *mise-en-scène* which is characterized by the use of an extensive repertoire of historical items and his films' music whose "pitch, repetitiveness, and insistent prettiness [...] often lends it a sound and feel reminiscent of the tinkling purity of a child's music box" (MacDowell, "Notes" 8). Anderson's style evokes a distinctive temporal feeling

reminiscent of the sixties and seventies which is often historically inconsistent, for example, due to the simultaneous presence of typewriters and mobile phones in *Rushmore*.

In quirky films, *illness and death* constantly reminds the characters of human transience and imperfection. Although quirky films are often marketed as comedies, the main characters, who are presented in a way which allows the audience to identify with them to a certain degree, lose relatives, friends or lovers to illnesses or accidents. Often, the death of a character or one of their relatives, lovers, etc., is a fundamental element which forms the basis of the narration. For example, in *Rushmore*, the death of Chas's wife is one necessary precondition for the central element of the plot – the homecoming of Etheline's children. Besides, the end of the story is overshadowed by Royal's lethal heart attack.

As has been showed, the quirky film tends to portray a number of recurring themes. It presents its main characters as struggling with the absurdity of the human condition, as reflexive individuals who call common sense into question and concern themselves with philosophical problems. Their personalities are often dominated by lethargy, existential boredom and self-doubt. In addition, quirky films treat the desire for love, the notion of innocence as well as feelings of nostalgia. Another aspect which adds to the special quality of the quirky film is its *mise-en-scène*, i. e., the content and the structure of the frame.

3.2.2. *Mise-en-scène*: How the Content of the Frame is Organized

In addition to the recurrent set of themes which are portrayed in the quirky film, its visual style is one of the reasons why it is perceived as characteristic and original. This visual style is the result of a number of decisions with regard to *mise-en-scène* which – in similar configurations – can be traced back to the sixties and seventies of the last century (cf. section 3.4). It is this set of characteristic measures which is cited or imitated when the quirky sensibility is expressed in

visual media². The *mise-en-scène* encompasses “the contents of the frame and the way they are organised” (Gibbs 5).

What are the contents of the frame? They include lighting, costume, décor, properties, and the actors themselves. The organisation of the contents of the frame encompasses the relationship of the actors to one other and to the décor, but also their relationship to the camera, and thus the audience view. So in talking about *mise-en-scène* one is also talking about framing, camera movement, the particular lens employed and other photographic decisions. (Gibbs 5)

The definition of the quirky film as the expression of a quirky sensibility entails the fact that the categorization of the quirky focuses on a distinct quality of mood and tone, rather than on material parameters like, e. g., shot-types, average shot length, cutting techniques, etc. In other words, the quirky film is not as closely defined with regard to *mise-en-scène* as other cinematic categories are. Many combinations of stylistic measures seem possible while still evoking a quirky feeling. Nevertheless, there are some recurrent, characteristic aspects. One especially emblematic feature of the quirky film is a type of shot which has been described as “*planimetric long shot*” (Bordwell and Thompson).

The *planimetric long shot* distinguishes itself due to the position of the characters and the vanishing point as well as the rectangular quality of the background which lead to an especially symmetrical appearance. In this type of shot, the camera directly faces a wall, or another type of straight surface. Within the frame the characters are positioned so that they form a horizontal line. Either the characters look directly towards the camera, thereby creating the impression of a police lineup, or the characters are seen in profile or from behind.

The used shot sizes vary between very long and medium shots. As David Bordwell emphasizes, the *planimetric long shot* refrains from positioning the characters along the diagonals of the frame. If it contains a visible vanishing point, it is situated in the center of the frame. Often, the presence of vertically lined up objects together with the horizontally aligned back surface creates the

² For example, commercials (Anderson, “My Life, My Card”; Anderson, “Your Seamless World. Six AT&T Commercials”; Anderson and Coppola; Anderson, “Talk to My Car”; Anderson, “Modern Life”), music videos (*Oxford Comma. Music Video*; *Mother Theresa Can’t Dive. Music Video*) and youtube clips.

impression that the character is framed which evokes the notions of rigidity, powerlessness or incarceration.

As MacDowell has argued, the planimetric long shot, along with other elements, like the carefully designed props and settings, adds to an “aesthetic of exquisitely mannered tidiness” and to an impression of “excessive neatness” “that borders on the obsessive-compulsive” (“Notes” 5). Obviously, the planimetric long shot establishes a notion of “constructedness,” as the symmetry of the composition does not conform to the images of reality we perceive. In addition, the fact that the characters directly face the audience transcends dominant cinematic convention and does therefore direct the attention of the audience to the constructedness of the composition. In addition, these “static, flat looking, medium-long or long shots” depict “isolated or carefully arranged characters, sometimes facing directly out towards us, who are made to look faintly ridiculous or out-of-place by virtue of the composition’s rigidity,” as MacDowell argues (“Notes” 6).

Among other directors associated with the quirky sensibility, Anderson uses this kind of shot, yet frequently he modifies it by using extremely wide-angle anamorphic lenses leading to the impression that the center of the frame bulges out. This effect is called barrel distortion (Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* 169). In his 2012 film, *The Moonrise Kingdom*, Anderson makes a self-reflexive allusion to the planimetric long shot by indirectly comparing it to the composition of *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci. There, he shows a number of boy-scouts and their leader gathered around a rustic table on a meadow. The composition of this scene closely resembles da Vinci’s painting.



Figure 1: Planimetric long shot in *The Life Aquatic*



Figure 2: *Punch Drunk Love*



Figure 3: Napoleon Dynamite



Figure 4: Harold and Maude



Figure 5: Buffalo 66



Figure 6: Harold and Maude

Another visual feature of the quirky film which is typical of this category is the use of the self-conscious *tracking shot*. This shot technique entails the use of a camera which can be easily moved as it is mounted on a dolly, i. e., a wheeled platform placed on rails. Certainly, the tracking shot is not at all exclusively used in quirky films, as it is a frequently applied method of filming. Nevertheless, the use of this technique in the quirky film distinguishes itself by its function, as it is not used in order to create a seamless, realistic representation which resembles human perception but to make an ironic remark about the constructedness of both the content of the frame and its structure. “My Life, My Card,” Anderson’s commercial for American Express, as well as a scene from *The Life Aquatic* serve as good examples which illustrate this use of the tracking shot. As Steve and Ned walk through the various compartments of the Belafonte, the camera pulls back to reveal that the characters are only inside the model of a ship cut open so that the interior can be seen. Again the film alludes to its nature as an artifact. After we are presented a forgery, a studio model of a ship, also Ned’s line “I’m just a character in your film,” though serving the narration, transcends the strict diegesis and adds a self-conscious layer. Finally, the scene is finished by Zissou’s statement “It’s a

documentary. It's all really happening." This is an unconcealed contradiction which stages the evident tensions between truth and deception and thereby hints at the metamodern structure of feeling (cf. section 3.5).

On the whole, it is a characteristic of the quirky film that it features a broad variety of distinctive cinematographic techniques as opposed to examples of mainstream cinema. E. g. Anderson, who "would seem to provide us with the most consistent, as well as probably the most extreme, embodiment of the quirky sensibility" (MacDowell, "Notes" 4), presents similar aesthetics in each of his films, using a deliberate, methodical cinematography. For instance, he frequently makes use of insert shots foregrounding the details of books and other documents. Also a type of overhead shot which is used by Anderson to foreground documents, pictures or other items and to show them from the pseudo-realistic perspective of a character is characteristic of the quirky film (cf. the opening title of *Napoleon Dynamite*) and has become one of its staples. It is realized by a camera being orthogonally directed towards a straight surface, as, e. g., a desk or the ground. While the audience is presented books, notes, maps, or other items, we see the lower body – often including the hands – of the character in question in front of the properly arranged objects.

The quirky film also distinguishes itself by the use of rear views and shots in profile (Hettich 97). These uncommon representations are applied by Anderson as well as by Zach Braff (*Garden State*).

Finally, the *mise-en-scène* of quirky films is characterized by a number of measures which evoke a notion of *immaturity*, *innocence* and *naivety*. It has already been mentioned above that quirky films are characterized by an especially neat, purified style which, according to MacDowell, "bespeaks an effort to remake the world in a less chaotic, more simplified, and, in a paradoxical sense, a more unaffected, form" (MacDowell, "Notes" 7). On the level of *mise-en-scène*, this attitude is evoked by

- the props used which contain many "childhood objects" (drawings, model theaters, hand-made toys, puppets, animal masks, photos of children, etc.)

- the fact that some quirky films are partially or entirely realized in stop-motion animation
- a preference for soundtracks consisting of compositions in $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz time signature as well as pop songs which “favour the sweet and simple” or whose lyrics tell about childhood (MacDowell, “Notes” 7–9).

3.2.3. Types of Humour: How the Quirky Film Makes Us Laugh

There is no such thing as a single kind of quirky comedy. It is the nature of the quirky to be characterized by intertwining tendencies. The same is true for comedy in the quirky film which can be understood as consisting of a variety of alternating types. Both comedy of situation and comedy of character add to the comic effect evoked by quirky films.

Quirky films make use of a variety of cinematic techniques which can be described as *comedy of situation*: For one thing, quirky films feature *deadpan*. This dry, cursory kind of comedy is the result of a process in which a melodramatic moment is foreshadowed but then the expectations of the audience are not fulfilled as the moment is downplayed for comic effect. After Raleigh in *The Royal Tenenbaums* is informed by a private investigator not only about his wife’s habit of smoking but also about her love affairs with a number of women and men and her secret first marriage, he tersely replies: “She smokes.” In addition, questions which are (deliberately) misunderstood and laconic answers belong to this category. (MacDowell, “Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility” 4; Hettich 74)

Another type which can be observed could be called *comedy of discomfort*. A Quirky film will often present its characters in situations of embarrassment. Sometimes a character appears completely out-of-place, sometimes they make a fool out of themselves as a result of eccentric behavior. The resulting humor is painful as it entails both a repulsive and a poignant element. In order for this kind of comedy to work the audience has to be sympathetic towards the character (MacDowell, “Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility” 4). Closely connected to this type is *black comedy* which plays down existential issues as, e. g., illness,

death, or desperation for a comic effect which arises from inadequacy and incongruity. At the same time, these existential issues are also discussed seriously in quirky films. One of the scenes in *The Royal Tenenbaums* serves as an example which demonstrates how these two types, *comedy of discomfort* and *black comedy*, occur in combination: As the Tenenbaums consider visiting the grave of Royal's mother, Richie mentions that Rachel was buried on the same cemetery. After Royal asks "Who?," and his son, Chas, informs him in a disturbed manner that Rachel was his wife, Royal casually suggests "to swing by her grave, too." (Hettich 73)

In addition, quirky films regularly but unexpectedly demonstrate instances of *slapstick* or *physical comedy*, as Hettich prefers to call it. It seems as if this type is not in the first place applied in order to entertain the audience at the expense of a character but to modify a moment which has the potential for a melodramatic reading. MacDowell stresses that slapstick is a measure which allows quirky films to maintain an equilibrium of emotional detachment versus involvement since it is via unexpected instances of slapstick that the film reminds the audience of its being a film ("Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility" 4).

On the other hand, quirky films demonstrate instances of *comedy of character*: The main characters of quirky films will often seem comical as they behave in a quirky manner, deviating from dominant conventions. In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Royal acts like a child while his grandchildren make a serious, even melancholic impression. In *Rushmore* Herman destroys Max' bicycle, an act of revenge one would rather expect from an adolescent than from a businessman who is worth millions.

Often quirky films will depict characters which are excessively characterized by conspicuous costume and recurrent, stereotypical patterns of behavior, e. g., *The Live Aquatic*, features a German who wears shorts and a homosexual sailors. As we look back on Margot's former love interests in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, we are presented a number of stereotypical characters: a New Guinean "savage" in full war paint, a naked Parisian girl on whose window the Eiffel tower is reflected, and a punk whose cheek is pierced by a safety pin (Hettich 74). In addition, quirky films often benefit from a tradition which makes fun of comical men with strange

accents, as does Wes Anderson with Max' Scottish colleague and adversary in *Rushmore* as well as all characters played by Kumar Pallana (Kumar, Mr. Little Jeans, Pagoda, Old Man).

Another technique which adds to the comical effect of the quirky film, is closely connected to its visual style: The characters are often represented in a type of "static, flat-looking, medium-long or long 'planimetric' shot" (Bordwell and Thompson, "Shot-consciousness"). This rigid, geometrical composition which has the quality of a painting makes the characters appear defenseless and ridiculous (cf. Anderson's character introductions). (MacDowell, "Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility" 4)

The effect of some comical scenes in quirky films is due to a presence of visual elements which do not add cohesion, nor do they seem to serve a narrative function. These above-mentioned elements include visual gags, absurd scenic details whose presence cannot be explained by narrative logic, e. g., a small, animated salamander which Steve Zissou abruptly flicks of his hand while he is talking to his wife. Instead of serving a narrative function, these visual elements serve as emotion markers, "configurations of highly visible textual cues for the primary purpose of eliciting brief moments of emotions" (Smith 118). In the quirky film, they help to maintain an equilibrium of emotional detachment versus involvement: They are either applied to evoke a comical mood in the audience when the plot situation would suggest a melodramatic mood, or vice versa (Hettich 71). In addition these visual elements depict an image of the world characterized by contingency, where anything no matter how improbable is possible. For the given reasons, these seemingly arbitrary elements can neither be understood as comedy of character nor as comedy of situations. Hence, it seems sensible to call them instances of *absurd humor*.

3.2.4. Intertextual References and Allusions in Quirky Films

Both on the levels of the form and the content, quirky films display a tendency towards self-reflexivity as well as forms of meta- and intertextuality. Many

instances of this type of film contain references to their own nature as cinematic “texts” by alluding to the history of cinema and television. In *Rushmore*, for example, Max stages *Serpico* as well as a Vietnam-Drama, reminding of *Apocalypse Now* at the school theater. In *Garden State*, Mark’s mother makes a reference to *Star Trek* by praising her son’s great command of the Klingon language (Hettich 83). Furthermore, the quirky film strongly alludes to the world of cinema, as central characters are depicted as actors, screen-writers, playwrights or directors (*Garden State*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Adaptation*, *Rushmore*, *The Life Aquatic*).

The Life Aquatic presents an especially illustrative example for intertextual references as its main character is a documentary film maker and the plot of the film centers on the production of another film. The audience can watch scenes of Zissou’s new movie being shot, re-shot, cut and dubbed. In addition, the mise-en-scène of the film, its costumes and its visual style mirrors Cousteau’s work as a documentary film maker for whom there is a dedication in the end credits.

By using cinematic conventions connected to adaptations, *The Royal Tenenbaums* pretends to have been inspired by a literary work which is presented in the opening scene and bears the same title as itself. The film is divided into prologue, eight chapters and an epilogue by intertitles and a narrator with an omniscient point of view introduces the Tenenbaums and their family history (cf. *Magnolia*’s intertitles giving weather conditions). (Hettich 84)

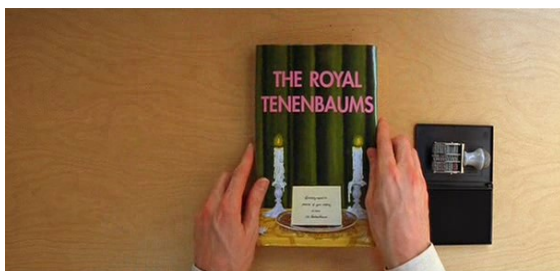


Figure 7: A copy of the book on which *The Royal Tenenbaums* pretends to be based

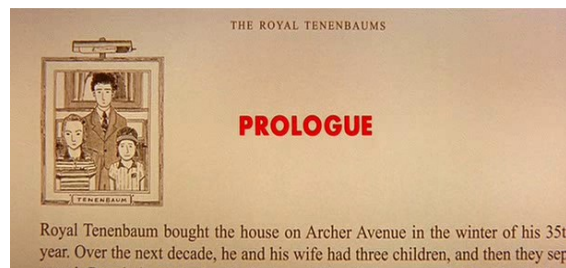


Figure 8: An intertitle simulating the literary source for *The Royal Tenenbaums*

Spike Jonze’ *Adaptation* serves as a radical example of the notion of auto-referentiality, as the center of the narration is a virtual representation of its own creator, screen-writer Charlie Kaufman. Furthermore, the film portrays the

shooting of *Being John Malkovich* which was released three years before itself. In addition, the script which is at the center of the plot is conceiving or constructing its writer (an image of Charlie Kaufman). Hence, the script “speaks” about its own creator, its own background.

In addition to allusions to other “texts” on the level of content, the *mise-en-scène* as well as the types of comedy which are present in quirky films add to their self-reflexive nature and emphasize their status as constructed cinematic texts, as has been mentioned in 3.2.2 and 3.2.3

3.2.5. Sympathy versus Detachment: The Tone of the Quirky Film

MacDowell, who approaches both Wes Anderson and the quirky sensibility from the perspective of cognitive film theory, analyzes in particular the style of the quirky (“Notes”) which he exemplifies with the help of Anderson’s films (“Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility”). Instead of concentrating on the “oversimplified” notion of “spectator-identification,” MacDowell stresses the importance of mood, i. e., “a pervasive emotional orientation that can be affected by anything from the nuances of an actor’s performance to aspects of visual style,” and tone, i. e., “the ways in which the film addresses its spectator and implicitly invites us to understand its attitude to its material and the stylistic register it employs” (Pye 7). This is how MacDowell uses the terms “mood” and “tone”:

Whereas a film’s mood relates to feeling alone, tone is closer to a standpoint, an outlook. Thus, where in certain circumstances a film’s mood could be dictated by a character’s emotions, tone will instead be a matter of the attitude we are encouraged to take towards those emotions – which can of course, in turn, affect mood. [...] One way of discerning what a film’s tone is doing, then, is by looking at how we seem to be invited to view characters’ emotions. (MacDowell, “Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility” 9)

In a nutshell, MacDowell thinks that the tone evoked by Anderson’s films is characterized by *tonal tensions* rather than *tonal shifts*, an aspect which he analyzed with respect to the attitude they represent with regard to the success or failure of their characters.

There has been a tendency to understand Anderson's films to be characterized by the stylistic motif of a tonal seesaw signifying a succession of opposite tonal configurations (Browning 62). The metaphor of the tonal seesaw represents a constant alternation of scenes which encourage the audience to form an emotional bond with the characters and scenes which demonstrate an ironic perspective. While the latter draw attention to the film as an artifact, the empathetic scenes have the potential to provoke emotion in the spectator. However, according to MacDowell, this approach is too simple. He considers Anderson's films not to be characterized by successions of different perspectives, one of them being ironic and one empathic, but rather by an emotional tension which consists in the simultaneous co-existence of ironic and sincere elements and adds to a fragile balance characterizing the quirky. In contrast to the metaphor of the tonal seesaw which represents an either-or situation, tonal tensions mean that "we are never allowed to forget the potential for ironic appreciation, yet are encouraged to be genuinely moved nonetheless." ("Notes" 12) The result of these tensions is a "mongrel mood even at his films' ostensibly melodramatic moments." Furthermore, according to MacDowell, there might be a sign of a post-ironic, "post-post-modern" structure of feeling evident in attempts to establish an earnest representation in the middle of an ironic world by means of a self-conscious, detached style ("Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility" 13).

One of the scenes which MacDowell uses to exemplify this kind of tonal tensions is the death of Steve's son, Ned (Owen Wilson), in *The Life Aquatic*. The accident in which Steve's helicopter malfunctions and crashes onto the surface of the ocean happens surprisingly. Contrary to cinematic conventions in connection with adventure films, this lethal accident happens all of a sudden, without being foreshadowed. Hence, the audience is not in the least expecting any physical danger which seems absent or irrelevant in the world of *The Life Aquatic*. As has been stated in 3.2.2, the *mise-en-scène* adds to a denaturalisation of the events which occur on the screen allowing the audience to keep an emotional distance. Ned's death serves as reminder how dangerous life can be and makes the spectator question and adapt their perspective on the plot. While this scene is by no means

sentimental – we see Steve carry Ned’s body in an extreme long shot and can neither make out his gestures nor his facial expression – the incident changes the tone of film and reestablishes the balance between detachedness and emotion. It is a serious, a sincere emotion which is elicited by this scene, yet the audience is never forced into taking an emotional, empathetic perspective as the possibility of an ironical reading persists.

3.3. The Quirky and Its “Indiewood” Context

Although it would be misguided to suppose that the similarity and the common categorization of quirky films are primarily based on their similar context of production and distribution, an examination of the industrial location and the conditions of production/distribution of the quirky film adds to its understanding.

It appears obvious that the quirky film is closely connected to the independent/indie movement which is suggested by terms as, e. g., “quirky indie” (Perren; st.jwil). Still, the concept of “independence” is hardly tangible and there is a great bandwidth of what it can mean for a film to be indie or independent. Today, the borders between the Hollywood studio system and alternative forms of financing, producing and distributing become increasingly blurred. Often, films which are described as indie are funded and marketed by companies which are intertwined with the Hollywood studios. In contrast, there are Hollywood blockbusters which are produced independently, i. e., by independent companies without the financial backing of one of the Hollywood studios.

Evidently, the industrial location of a film – aside from the aesthetic and formal strategies it applies as well as its attitude regarding social, cultural, political or ideological conditions – is one of the criteria which determine if it is called independent (King 1-2). Perceiving the quirky film as an expression of the metamodern structure of feeling involves that we understand the quirky film to be characterized by “greater license and substantial formal or socio-political departure from the dominant norms.” One precondition for such a transgression or deviation appears to be a “degree of distance, industrially, from the Hollywood studio system” which is realized by “lower budgets and less marketing-driven filmmaking” (King 2). Still, it is true for quirky film projects that they

are often initiated and pursued by entities that exist [only] formally beyond the bounds of the majors. These include production companies set up by producers, directors and stars, often working closely with one studio or another, and some larger independent companies. [...] Hollywood remains the principal source of funding and distribution, even when only a relatively small proportion of production is conducted entirely in-house. (King 5)

As Fehler: Referenz nicht gefunden (p. Fehler: Referenz nicht gefunden) shows, most quirky films have in common that they are produced and distributed by the big Hollywood studios or their affiliates. Only few of them are produced by independent financial backers, or the artists themselves, without any financial or structural help of one of the big studios. In addition, the few films which are produced independently, e. g., *Adaptation*, *Garden State* or *Eagle vs. Shark*, are distributed by major labels. Moreover, the budget of many quirky films exceeds the financial basis of independently produced films by far. For these reasons, “most of the films definable as quirky [...] – and certainly those of Wes Anderson – would also be definable as Indiewood” (MacDowell, “Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility” 3), i. e., “a territory in which the indie/Hollywood distinction is blurred.” (King, “Definitions”). During the latter part of the 1990s, when this “grey area” has emerged, the clear-cut distinction of the Hollywood studio system and the independent film dissolved, as some aesthetic and economic strategies which had been characteristic of independent films were taken up by the Hollywood studios. In order to handle films inspired by the independent film community, the Hollywood Studios founded affiliated “specialist” or “independent” labels (e. g., Miramax, Focus Features, Fox Searchlight Pict.). These speciality divisions operate usually semi-autonomously from the parent studio (King, *American Independent Cinema* 9–10). For example, Walt Disney founded Miramax and Touchstone Pict., Universal Pict. established its subsidiary Focus Features and 20th Century Fox has Fox Searchlight Pict. produce their indie-type motion pictures. But why do the Hollywood studios show an interest in films which substantially deviate from dominant formal and socio-political norms? Geoff King summarizes a number of advantages for the studios due to their “involvement in the propagation of more ‘elevated’, challenging or ambitious work” (*Indiewood, USA* 6–8). With the help of their Indiewood subsidiaries, the studios can

- profit from the box-office receipts of occasional independent hits which translate more directly into profits as the production costs of Indiewood films are lower than those of mainstream productions,
- broaden their overall portfolios,

- introduce emerging talents, both directors and actors,
- provide star performers with prestigious opportunities, allowing the studios to maintain valuable relationships with them,
- increase their chances of achieving awards and nominations and thereby increase their prestige and reputation.

It is this special structural background, characterized by an oscillation between the pressure to succeed economically and a relatively generous scope of aesthetic expression – a structural framework whose target is to maximize both artistic value and audience appeal – which is the basis of the quirky film. However, limiting the definition of the quirky film to its context of production and distribution (i. e., Indiewood) would be too minimalistic and would make the term useless. As has been mentioned above, this motif of oscillation is also perceivable when we look at the visual style, the recurrent themes as well as the tonality of the quirky film.

3.4. What Was Before the Quirky?

The definition of the quirky as a sensibility implies the question where and when this way of feeling and perceiving appeared for the first time. Hence, the question arises: What are the “precursors” of the quirky film? As will be demonstrated in the following pages, the recurrent features of the quirky film can be traced back at least as far as the sixties and seventies of the last century.

An example which could be described as one of the precursors of today’s quirky films is Mike Nichols’s *The Graduate* (1967). On the one hand, its plot centers on the life of a young male adult who makes life more difficult for himself due to his uncertainty and doubt making it hard for him to take decisions and to progress into a direction which matches his personality. Just as *The Royal Tenenbaum*’s Margot and Richie, *Little Miss Sunshine*’s Dwayne and Frank (the suicidal Proust-scholar), the Foxes’ sullen son Ash in *Fantastic Mr. Fox* or Andrew in *Garden State*, this protagonist is well-situated but cannot realize his potential due to his melancholy and uncertainty. In addition to these similarities, all these films are

characterized by innovative use of pop songs as their soundtrack and by a visual style which often reminds of classical paintings.

Especially Anderson's films have much in common with Nichols's work. Just as Anderson, Nichols often depicts defunct upper or upper middle class families. In addition, it is the attitude assumed by Nichols's film towards its characters, the tone, which particularly reminds of the quirky films of today. For one thing, the isolation, the loneliness, the powerlessness and the ridiculousness of the characters are portrayed in an ironic way. On the other hand, however, the films assume an attitude towards their characters which could be best described as acknowledging and sympathizing – an attitude which, as MacDowell would argue, adds to tonal tensions (cf. "Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility" 14).

Furthermore, *The Graduate* tells about a clash, a confrontation between adolescence and experience, which often is the subject of the quirky film. It is via the behavior of his films' characters which is only seldom appropriate for their age that Anderson treats this confrontation. As has been argued above, Anderson's characters are sometimes childish and sometimes precocious. On the whole, their behavior tends to be inappropriate in the light of their age: Think of *Rushmore's* Max Fischer who takes an interest into his at least fifteen years older, widowed teacher, or Herman who wants to reverse the time and start anew from a point in his life when everything seemed possible.



Figure 9: Ben Bradock dives in the swimming pool of his parents.



Figure 10: Herman goes underwater after watching his wife flirt with another man.

Similarly, in *The Graduate*, Ben Bradock seems hopeless and dissatisfied, cannot decide what to do with his life and has, just as Herman, reached a point where he cannot find any meaning in his life. These parallels between *Rushmore* and *The*

Graduate are explicitly stressed by Anderson's quotation of the pool scene in Nichols's work.

In one of his video essays, *The Substance of Style*, the US-American film critic and director Matt Zoller Seitz, has argued that *The Graduate* also reflects today's quirky films in its embrace of a broad a variety of different types of comedy.

The Graduate audaciously mixes seemingly incompatible modes, from deadpan comedy of manners (the celebrated "plastics" moment) to dark-night-of-the-soul melodrama (Ben's revelation to Elaine that he's sleeping with her mother, the high point of which is an unfocused close-up of Elaine that slowly sharpens again as she absorbs the reality of her predicament) to over-the-top farce (the climactic melee at the church, ending with Ben grabbing a huge cross, swinging it at the wedding party as if warding off vampires, then using it to seal the doors and trap them inside the building). (Seitz Pt. 2)

In addition, according to Seitz, the utilization of music in Nichols's films has set an example which inspired many quirky films of today – especially Anderson's films. He argues that Nichols frequently "gives the movie over to the song" meaning he has the images step back and then directs all the attention to the music. This observation could equally be made in connection with Anderson's films. There, many scenes which are characterized by long shots, static imagery and little action on the level of the characters – they are not moving, gesturing or speaking – are transformed into "subjective montages" by the use of music. Instead of representing the psychological events by sound, action or imagery, extra-diegetic music draws the audience's attention to the psychological state of the protagonists (Seitz Pt. 2). As, in these scenes, the characters do not express themselves via their action, there is no visual indication of their feelings. Hence, the audience has to rely on the sound – the song – which, together with the static tableau of the *mise-en-scène*, forms a *subjective montage*. It is by this deliberate simplification that the audience's perception, their attraction and connection to the characters' emotional landscape and, thereby, the tone of the film is determined. Two of many examples of these subjective montages, which Anderson seems to have borrowed from Nichols, are the scene in which Margot Tenenbaum arrives "by way of the Green Line Bus" – there, he uses slow-motion to further purify the visual effect – as

well as the scene of *The Graduate* portraying Ben's increasing depression as he carries on his affair with Mrs. Robinson.

Apart from Nichols, also Hal Ashby can be considered one of the precursors of today's quirky film. Especially, his films *The Landlord* (1970), *Harold and Maude* (1971), and *Being There* (1979) are relevant in this connection (Seitz Pt. 3). But what is it which makes Ashby a precursor of the quirky film in the manner of Wes Anderson? One of the idiosyncratic elements of Ashby's films which have found their way into the work of Anderson is Ashby's approach to tone. When we look at Ashby and his films we have to take into account the cultural environment in which he worked: During the 1970s, when Ashby directed *The Landlord*, *Harold and Maude*, and *Being There*, he was considered a dominant figure of a group of directors and producers whose works were classified under "New Hollywood." However, while it was usual for members of this group to present the protagonists of their films from a cynical or even contemptuous perspective – at least they made it difficult for their audiences to identify or even sympathize with their characters – Ashby differs in this respect. If we think of the protagonists of Robert Altman's films *That Cold Day in the Park* (1969) and *Images* (1972), it is difficult to imagine oneself feeling compassion for the damaged young women who, unable to cope with the pressures and the isolation of the urban mass society of the 1970s, tend to confuse past and present, reality and fantasy, and do not hesitate to provoke pain and suffering in others in order to drive away their own. In addition, also Altman's satires "often teetered on the threshold of disdain for their characters," as Seitz puts it. In contrast,

Ashby regularly tempered his irony with a more gentle and heartfelt warmth for hapless protagonists; one might say he rejected Hollywood's sense of heroism less completely than some of his New Hollywood peers. (Seitz Pt. 3)

In consequence, it seems reasonable to assume that Ashby served as one example who inspired Anderson's tendency to provoke tonal tensions. On the one hand, at times, Ashby portrays his protagonists as disturbed and desperate underdogs, losers and eccentrics – isolated in the middle of urban mass society – who do not hesitate to put themselves into risky or simply absurd situations. On the other

hand, Ashby does not make fun of them. Rather, he represents their environment which is at least as absurd as the eccentric actions demonstrated by his protagonists. By pretending his own suicide in a more and more theatrical manner, Harold chooses the appropriate reaction in the face of his circumstances – the chilly, superficial relationship to his mother as well as the lack of a father and a meaning in his life, etc. The absurd events which befall Ashby's characters are not treated as something special but as a matter of course which is not commented on. The resulting detached and at the same time affirmative tone is but one of the elements which adds to the humor in Ashby's films which has inspired Anderson as well as other film-makers whose works are described as being quirky. Just as Anderson, Ashby blends deadpan, comedy of discomfort, black comedy and slapstick.

Apart from Nichols, also Ashby uses subjective montages depicting slowly moving, seemingly apathetic characters backed by pop songs which sometimes hint at the characters' emotional landscape and sometimes represent an absurd counterpoint to it. The soundtrack adds a layer of information to the images which are characterized by exaggerated uneventfulness. One of these subjective montages can be found in *Harold and Maude's* opening scene. It shows Harold with a deadpan expression on his face, preparing what the viewers expect to be his suicide while they are listening to Cat Stevens's *Don't Be Shy*.

If we look closer at Wes Anderson's film, further influences can be identified. As this section focuses on the quirky sensibility, these will only be mentioned briefly. For one thing, it has been argued that Anderson was inspired by some of the idiosyncrasies of Charles Schulz, the creator of Peanuts. Anderson himself stated, that, in *Rushmore*, Max's father, Bert Fischer, was inspired by Schulz and that the love triangle of Miss Cross, Max and Mr. Blume is modeled after Charlie Brown, his teacher and the little red-haired girl. Another distinctive feature of Schulz' work which reappears in Anderson's films are "preternaturally eloquent kids" who are "frozen in a dream space between childhood and maturity" (Seitz Pt. 1).

In addition, it has been noted that Orson Welles was another inspiration for Anderson. Just as Anderson, Welles controlled every aspect of his films and

surrounded himself with a number of actors who performed in many of his films, again and again. Evidently, the title of Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums* alludes to Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons*, both films depicting families "wrestling with real or perceived decline." Besides, both directors share a preference for wide-angle shots which distort the displayed objects and persons (*Ibid.*).

Finally, also Martin Scorsese has been called one of Anderson's precursors in that he presents certain shots in slow-motion in order to "italicize emotion" (Seitz Pt. 2). Via this type of emphasis, Anderson adds to the purity, minimalism and simplicity of subjective montages as the deceleration of the images further reduces the flow of action. According to Seitz, also Anderson's distinctive "whip pan" as well as his frequent use of overhead shots (cf. 3.2.2) were inspired by Scorsese.

On another note, quirky films can also be understood as a reaction to the tendency towards cynicism, nihilism and detachedness demonstrated by some independent films of 1990s, as, e. g., the early films of Neil Labute or Todd Solondz. Seen from this perspective, also Jim Jarmusch, Hal Hartley, and the Coen Brothers could be considered precursors of the quirky film as they introduced a tone of dry absurdity which simultaneously provokes attachment and detachment in the audience (MacDowell, "Defining 'Quirky'").

These precursors have had a determining influence on how quirky films are produced today. Still, there is more to it than that. In the following, it will be argued that the quirky film is an expression of a unique quirky sensibility which is on its part one element of a broader cultural "movement" – a structure of feeling. This idea which is semantically related to the concept of sensibility can help us to understand the relationship between the quirky sensibility, postmodernism and metamodernism.

3.5. The Metamodern Structure of Feeling

Critical theorist Raymond Williams used the concept of a *structure of feeling* in order to describe the experienced quality of life at a specific place and point in time. According to Williams, a structure of feeling is "as firm and definite as

'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible part of our activities" (64). A "structure of feeling" could also be described as "Culture of a particular historical moment" (Taylor). On the one hand, the concept presupposes that such things as generations exist whose members share a set of common elements, namely values and experiences.

Methodologically, then, a 'structure of feeling' is a cultural hypothesis, actually derived from attempts to understand such elements and their connections in a generation or a period [...] The hypothesis has special relevance to art and literature (Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 133).

In the course of each generation a unique structure of feeling emerges which has a determining influence on its members' approach to social conventions and art. Therefore, it is expressed by a number of cultural practices and aesthetic sensibilities. The latter are influenced by and, in turn, influence social circumstances being formed both in "reaction to previous generations and in anticipation of possible futures" (Akker, Feßler, and Vermeulen 8). On the other hand, "the concept does not obliterate difference and project an idea of the historical period as massive homogeneity. [It is] a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features" (Cahoone 566). Williams points out that a structure of feeling may not be understood as a monolithic, homogeneous entity but should rather be imagined as unevenly extending throughout a culture. In other words, some members of a generation will usually represent the dominant structure of feeling more obviously while others will not at all. Williams also acknowledged that a generation's experience cannot be seen as a separate category, as it is in a constant, interdependent relationship to dominating ideologies. (Taylor)

As has been stated, structures of feeling are in a process of exchange with prevailing ideologies as the latter inform the values which motivate our actions and thereby set the conditions under which we make and interpret experiences. It will be demonstrated in chapters 4 and 5 which system of values and which felt experience underlie the quirky sensibility. As has been argued by Sconce, the so-called *smart film*, among which he counts many films produced in the 1980s and

1990s by directors like Todd Solondz, Neil LaBute and Quentin Tarantino, expresses a feeling and perception of the world characterized by irony, detachment, disillusionment and skepticism all of which are frequently linked to postmodernism. According to Sconce, it is the latter which can be seen as the structure of feeling setting the parameters for the smart film. It seems sensible to assume that in the same manner as postmodernism lies at the basis of the “smart sensibility,” the quirky sensibility has its roots in a structure of feeling called metamodernism which was recently put forward by Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen (1). It seems that the quirky sensibility is but one of a number of cultural phenomena which challenge the alleged dominance of irony within a postmodern structure of feeling. Before I will analyze how metamodern oscillations characterize Anderson’s films (chapter 4) let me define metamodernism and explain in which respect it is different from postmodernism.

In 2010, Vermeulen and van den Akker postulated the emergence of a new structure of feeling, *metamodernism* describing a cultural metamorphosis within western societies. They have used it as a model which helps to understand “recent changes in aesthetics and culture and [...] to periodize these changes” (Akker, Feßler, and Vermeulen 4). According to van den Akker et al. the metamodern structure of feeling can be understood as a “generational attempt to surpass postmodernism and a general response to our present, crisis-ridden moment.” The metamodern attitude entails a hope for progress, for “another future, another metanarrative,” a hope which is simultaneously questioned in the face of the history of the 20th century, post-structuralist thinking, etc. Besides, it also includes an awareness that this hope is always part of a contingent narrative which is inherently flawed and problematic regardless of the success or failure of this ambition as it cannot be universally justified (“No More Modern: Notes on Metamodernism” 2).

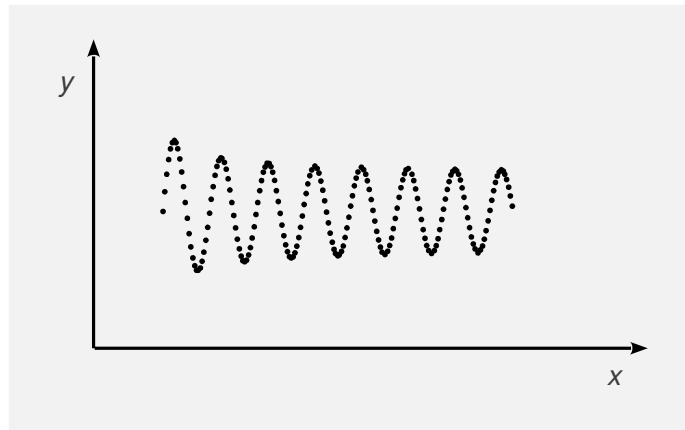


Figure 11: A two-dimensional oscillation

The prefix “meta” (Ancient Greek: μετά, “after,” “beyond,” “adjacent,” “self”) in the term refers to the concept of *metaxy* which was introduced in Plato’s Symposium (Lidell and Scott). There, *metaxy* describes an “ontological betweenness,” a state of being one thing and another at the same time. Metamodernism present itself as a simultaneous presence of both modern and postmodern mindsets with modern positions constantly being put in question by postmodern ones and vice versa. For van den Akker et al. the prefix signifies the facts that metamodernism lies beyond postmodernism in history and that it oscillates between the modern and the postmodern on an ontological level while it maintains the epistemological positions of postmodernism (Akker, Feßler, and Vermeulen, “Etymology of the Term Metamodernism” 2).

By deconstructing deconstruction, questioning skepticism, parodying irony, etc., metamodernism complements and extends the postmodern positions of the 1990s and 1980s:

The metamodern structure of feeling evokes an oscillation between a modern desire for sense and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all, between a modern sincerity and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy and empathy and apathy and unity and plurality and purity and corruption and naïveté and knowingness; between control and commons and craftsmanship and conceptualism and pragmatism and utopianism. Indeed, metamodernism is an oscillation. It is the dynamic by which it expresses itself. One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance however; rather it is a pendulum swinging between numerous, innumerable poles. Each time the metamodern enthusiasm swings towards fanaticism, gravity pulls it back towards irony; the moment its irony sways towards apathy, gravity pulls it back towards enthusiasm. (“What Is Metamodernism?” 9)

In the realms of architecture and art, this effort is evident in that the underlying aesthetic principles of postmodernism which were distinctive because of their prevalence of *deconstruction*, *parataxis* (van den Akker et al. use the term to describe cultural texts in which a series of elements or scenes are presented side by side in no particular order or hierarchy), and *pastiche* are increasingly replaced by such principles as *reconstruction*, *myth*, and *metaxis* (Ancient Greek: μεταξύ, “in-between” or “middle ground,” used by van den Akker et al. to describe a movement between opposite poles as well as an oscillation between a yearning for truth and the awareness of contingency, hope and doubt, sincerity and irony, empathy and detachment, construction and deconstruction, etc.) (“What Is Metamodernism?” 3).

As it is one aim of the present thesis to show that the quirky sensibility in Anderson’s films serves as an expression of the metamodern structure of feeling, I will analyze the above-mentioned oscillations in some of his films (*Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* and *The Darjeeling Limited*). Contrary to van den Akker et al., I use the term “oscillations” in plural, as, in order to arrive at an overall picture of the quirky in the work of Wes Anderson, an analysis of the films according to separate criteria is necessary.

4. Structural Oscillations at the Heart of the Quirky Film

Everything that we said was a joke, but [...] while we were talking about
ridiculous, funny things we were sincere about them.

– Jesse Thorn (Valania)

In the present chapter, four of Wes Anderson's films are discussed. By taking a close and systematic look at these films, a new perspective on the nature of the quirky sensibility is presented. It proceeds from the assumption that Anderson's films offer "perhaps [the] most potent and consistent expression" of the quirky sensibility (MacDowell, "Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility" 3) which is the reason why Anderson's films are selected as representative. In the following analysis, it is shown that the quirky sensibility is determined by a motif of oscillation. It will be argued that quirky films demonstrate at least four different types of oscillation both with regard to their narrations and their audiovisual properties. These types of oscillation are analyzed in detail as well as the question why they arise, and what their presence in quirky films means.

It will be suggested that spatial and temporal oscillations feature prominently in quirky films. In addition, quirky films demonstrate oscillations between the poles of truth and deception as well as purpose and arbitrariness. As will be discussed, the co-occurrence of various forms of representation, themes and tonal tendencies evoke tensions which lie at the heart of a unique quirky experience – a quirky way of viewing and listening. Often, these forms of representations conflict with what is presented as "natural" in conventional cinematic representations. In other words, both the aesthetics and the themes of the quirky film are denaturalized.

The above-mentioned oscillations are approached by micro-analyses of a number of individual shots and scenes. They will shed light on how these parts work and which role they play in the occurrence of the oscillations. On the basis of these micro-analyses, several conclusions are drawn for the themes and motives which are present in quirky films. After it becomes obvious where these oscillations

occur, how they emerge and how they influence the narration and the tone, it can be demonstrated why they are referred to as “metamodern oscillations.” Put briefly, they can be understood as metamodern in that they turn against tendencies of disaffection present in postmodern cultural artifacts and introduce a tentative, self-conscious hopefulness. Among other elements, this perspective defines quirky films and establishes a unique quirky experience, a mode of viewing and listening, which is connected to the metamodern structure of feeling. This quirky experience and its connection to the metamodern structure of feeling is the topic of the final chapter.

4.1. Spatial Oscillations in *Rushmore*

Owing to a renaissance in scholarship in geography, also other fields have begun to consider space an important dimension in connection with their own research. This renaissance, often called “spatial turn,” has evolved on the basis of a prominent view across arts and sciences – the opinion that naturalistic, universal explanations about single-voiced historical narratives are not trustworthy. Instead, it is increasingly acknowledged that all construction of knowledge is at least partially determined by spatial parameters. The orientation of literary and cultural studies, sociology, political science, anthropology, history, and art history has increasingly included the aspect of space (Warf and Arias 1).

Also film is closely connected to space. For one thing, watching a film presupposes that the audience is ready to move to a special location, the cinema, and to imagine being in yet another space – the *film-space*. The latter is the sphere in which the real and the cinematic blend. Furthermore, film has the ability to represent space, thereby allowing the spectator to experience a simulation of space. When we watch a film, we immerse ourselves in a film-space which is determined by both the real, our ideas, concepts, schemata, etc. and the content of the screen. We cross the film-space in the same manner as we cross a building or a landscape and only via this process we transform the film into an understandable,

meaningful text. Therefore, the lens of the camera is the link connecting the real space with the imaginary space of the film.

Anderson's second feature film *Rushmore* makes an issue out of the film-space, the sphere between the real and the imaginary, and the boundary which is situated between both of them. The film is populated by numerous voyeurs and agents, spectators and actors, listeners and speakers as well as students and teachers – watching and being watched is a central theme of the film. In addition, *Rushmore* features constant oscillations regarding the extent to which the audience is allowed to leave the real and to enter the imaginary space. Sometimes, the audience is drawn into the film-space, sometimes the audience “bounces off” the screen. In other words, the boundary between the real and the imaginary is not fixed – it moves back and forth. It oscillates.

In the following, *Rushmore* is examined with regard to a number of related questions in order to demonstrate how this oscillation works. This analysis entails the questions which part of space is represented, which hidden, how the film-space is structured and how these structures change over time. Furthermore, it is asked which narrative functions these structures and the corresponding changes serve and how our experience of the film-space is altered by them.

One scene in particular encapsulates the role which oscillations play for the way of feeling and perceiving in Anderson's films. At about 26 minutes into the film, we see the first night of the stage adaptation of *Serpico* performed by the student theater of Rushmore, an ensuing quarrel among Frank, the student who acts the part of the priest, and Max, as well as the applause given to the actors. To put it in a nutshell – before the scene is analyzed in greater detail: First, during the performance and even more during the argument of the boys, the film makes use of immersive strategies – the audience is being “drawn into” the film-space. Then, as the audience is applauding and the actors on the stage are bowing these strategies are reversed. The spectators become aware of their being immersed and suddenly “bounce off” the screen. It seems necessary to look at this scene in greater detail.

After the talk between Miss Cross and Max we find ourselves in front of the stage where the “Max Fischer Players” perform *Serpico*. Shaky images, evidently shot by a hand-held camera, depict a number of students playing a scene in which the characters O’Reilly, Burnum and Fields, try to convince Frank to act as a police informer. The mood is tense. The film-space changes constantly due to quick pans and tilts of the camera which leads to a dynamic, action-centered atmosphere depicting a documentary film aesthetic. Via pans and tilts the camera movement imitates the vision of an imaginary bystander who is turning his head in order to follow the course of action. This strategy is evident from both the speed of the camera movements and the angle of the pans. The gaze of the camera transforms into the gaze of a human, the gaze of the audience. As can be seen in Figures 12 and 13, this part of the scene is characterized by an emphasis on the effect of depth within the film-space. This effect is realized by a configuration of the screen which features multiple depth layers and sharp angles of the vanishing lines. Due to the fact that the contents of the frame are organized along multiple horizontal planes, the gaze of the spectator is vertically directed from the lower to the upper edge of the screen, meaning from the front to the back of the scenery. In other words, the perception of the screen increases in depth and spatiality. It seems as if this effect were antithetic to the flatness which usually dominates quirky films (cf. 3.2.2). However, it is the spatiality which serves as a background in front of which the flatness of quirky films can be perceived and vice versa.



Figure 12: Multiple depth layers



Figure 13: Multiple depth layers and sharp angles of the vanishing lines

In addition to these visual aspects, also the noise caused by the movement of the characters and a number of diegetic off-camera sounds as, e. g., a train passing behind the building where the *Serpico* scene is set, add to the effect of immersion.

The above-mentioned effects of depth, realism and immersion contrast with the fact that the action which the audience is being presented is happening on a stage. A shot showing Max' father eating popcorn just as if he were watching a movie in the cinema is an ironic allusion to this fact. In spite of the applied immersive strategies, via these allusions, the film undermines itself in that it makes the audience aware of the fact that the film-space is an illusion. However, as the scene progresses, the immersive strategies are becoming increasingly prominent. The tension is rising and it reaches its climax in the shot set in the corridor in which Max tells the actor who played Frank off for a line he left out. Max is excessively critical and after Frank has tried to soothe him the actor finally gets angry and punches Max in the face. In this climactic moment the pendulum starts swinging in the other direction leaving behind the effect of immersion.

The audience is confronted with a planimetric long shot which is directed at the stage forming an orthogonal angle. There, the actors stand in a row and acknowledge the applause of the audience. Due to the horizontal arrangement of the characters, the impression of depth vanishes. In addition, the view of the horizon is blocked by a wall only a few meters behind the characters. This is more visible than from the shots before, since then, the scenery and props – a window, an imitation of a passing train, modifications of the walls and the floor which evoke the effect of depth (cf. Figure 12, left and down) – have created the illusion of

a space open towards all directions. However, in the “applause shot” (Figure 14), the view is blocked a few meters behind the characters and hits a wall. While, before, the audience has been drawn into the film-space, now, they bounce of a two-dimensional barrier. This flat boundary can be understood as a wall, but also as a painting, a photograph or as a window. All these are objects of observation not of immersion. Hence, we are approaching the lower end of the oscillation where the immersive effect has been suspended and the contrast between the subject and the object, the spectator and the spectacle is most pronounced. The accessible, open space of the stage transforms into an unchangeable and unattainable object.



Figure 14: Effect of flatness



Figure 15: Self-conscious gaze into the camera

Also the role of the spectator has changed: Earlier on, the *mise-en-scène* evoked the feeling in them that they are part of the action. Now, they are pushed into the role of the spectator who watches from the outside. Since the film expresses its role as an object of observation and determines that the role of the audience be that of spectators, it simultaneously reminds us of its nature as a cultural artifact and of its createdness.

On another note, the dynamics have changed: Instead of the shaky, seemingly authentic images of a hand-held camera, we are presented a static long shot of the stage without any zooms, tilts, pans, etc. Besides, the speed, which characterized the action on the screen one moment ago, is replaced by a slow pace. When Max enters the frame from the right hand side, the audience notices that the succession of the images is decelerated using slow-motion technique. The tense atmosphere, which was evoked by the mentioned cinematic measures earlier on, is now suddenly deconstructed and the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, between the spectator- and the film-space are re-established. Now, the

oscillation reaches its high point as the film comments on its own being an artificial artifact. It ironically alludes to its own createdness:

Over Max' shoulder we look into the auditorium of the high school theater. We can see the audience from the perspective of the actors. This finally reverses the state of immersion. The gaze of the spectator is directed towards the audience. Thereby, they are reminded of the fact that they are mere voyeurs rather than part of the action on the screen. But how is this realized? As described by Bordwell and Thompson, the over-the-shoulder shot, a part of the 180° system, is a common technique which helps the audience to orient themselves in the film-space and simultaneously directs the attention towards the object of the gaze (*Film Art* 238 ff.). Hence, the gaze of the diegetic audience in the theater is transformed into the object of the gaze of the spectator. This transformation destroys the illusion of immersion of the spectator into the film space, as it reminds of the illusory nature of the film. Finally, Max even turns to the camera in slow motion and gazes directly at the spectator in a cheeky manner (cf. Figure 15). This type of representation of the character is highly uncommon in mainstream cinema as it subverts the illusion of realism. It is a deliberate denaturalization and once again establishes a boundary towards the audience. Thereby, it relegates the spectators to their role as mere voyeurs. From this low point, the degree of immersive potential increases once again towards spatiality, dynamics, realism, illusion, inclusion, etc. This again is reflected by the film's *mise-en-scène*.

The type of oscillation, which has now been described in detail, is spatial by nature as the effects of increasing and diminishing degrees of immersion are caused by changes in the film-space and its boundary towards the audience. These changes concern the framing, i. e., the selection of the content of the frame, the movement of the characters and objects within it as well as the lines of sight and movement which exist between them. As a whole, the mentioned cinematic measures are applied to construct and deconstruct the impression of a simulated physical/spatial connection between the audience and the action displayed on the screen. One consequence of the variations of this relationship is a constant change on the level of mood and tone – an important aspect of the quirky sensibility –

which will be discussed in Chapter 5. Sometimes, the pendulum which describes the above-mentioned oscillation swings stronger, sometimes weaker. In addition, the speed of the transitions between the poles varies. Furthermore, the measures by which the immersive effect is achieved and reversed differ on a case by case basis. In the following example, the opening scene of the film, the role played by the soundtrack is just as important as that of the images.

The opening scene starts with a shot sequence which emphasizes the artificiality of the film and, thereby, cuts off the emotional involvement of the audience. Right at the beginning, this effect of exclusion is constantly increased by as many as four shots which can be understood as walls or boundaries between the spectators and the film-space. The soundtrack – a lively melody played in unison by a pizzicato violin, a glockenspiel and a plucked guitar, reminding of a classical piece – can already be heard during the opening credits. The next shot presents a painting to the audience – a portrait of Mr. Blume’s family. It stands on a wooden easel in front of a red curtain reminiscent of a theater. The portrait shows Mr. Blume in the lower left corner apathetically smoking a cigarette. His redheaded wife and two sons are located in the upper right corner, thereby strikingly separated from Mr. Blume. After a straight cut, the next shot shows another curtain: a blue one which opens and reveals yet another “curtain” – a planimetric long shot depicting the enclosing walls of Rushmore high school and the iron fence on top of them. On this fence, metal letters forming the name of the school, are attached. This serves as a replacement for a regular title card. Obviously, theater is an institution which traditionally involves the spatial separation of the action and the audience. The curtains as well as Anderson’s version of a title card allude to this separation. Hence, these four shots have in common that they relegate the spectator to their role of a voyeur and refuse them the potential of inclusion.

Now, the pendulum is beginning its path to the opposite pole. We see an opened window through which we can see the quadrangle, the courtyard of Rushmore high school. The image is static and the soundtrack is silent. Since the lens of the camera acts as a link between the spectator and the film-space, this shot serves as a spatial simulation conveying that the audience is now located within a classroom

of Rushmore high school. Then, starting from the view through the window, the camera rotates by approximately 90 degrees towards the blackboard. The teacher walks into the frame while we hear a student give an answer to the teacher. Now, the frame, evidently shot on tracks, is moving parallel to the blackboard, past the backs of some students, directly towards the back of Max' head. The tracking shot through the classroom is "at eye level" with the characters, depicting the vision of an imaginary bystander who is walking through the classroom in order to follow the course of action. This simulation allows the spectators to imagine that they are physically present at the site of action. "Sound can actively shape how we perceive and interpret the image. [...] The audience will construe the same images differently, depending on the sound track" (Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* 265). That is precisely the case here as the commencing non-diegetic music encourages emotional involvement of the audience.

For one moment, we see the neck of the protagonist from behind. In the subsequent reverse-shot Max, hidden by a spread out newspaper, is presented. These shots both exemplify common strategies of delay which temporarily hide the protagonist in order to raise expectations on the part of the audience. Thereby, the effect of immersion is further increased. A few shots later, when Max walks towards the blackboard in order to solve the "hardest geometry equation of the world," the pace of the cuts starts accelerating and the non-diegetic music is getting more and more dynamic. Finally, when Max is writing down his solution on the blackboard, pounding, jazzy snares come in, further increasing the audience expectations. After the teacher confirms the correctness of the solution, the volume of the music increases and cheerful flutes become audible. During this shot sequence the volume, the dynamics and the tempo of the soundtrack as well as the pace of the cuts increase steadily leading to "what the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein called 'synchronization of senses' – making a single rhythm or expressive quality unify both image and sound" (Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* 265). Closely associated with this increase is a rise of the immersive potential which is also achieved via visual measures. As has been analyzed above, the illusion of depth can be evoked by arranging various props and characters on multiple

depth layers as well as staging the events in a way which results in sharp angles of the vanishing lines. This becomes especially evident from the shot displayed in Figure 16. In addition to these measures, the effect of depth is also created by the choice and the adjustment of the camera and the resulting depth of field. As can be seen in Figure 17, the extreme closeup (more precisely a choker shot) of Max in front of his classmates and the quadrangle, which can be seen through the windows, features great differences on the level of sharpness (i. e., a very shallow focus) leading to an exaggerated effect of depth.



Figure 16: Extremely sharp angles of the vanishing lines and multiple depth layers



Figure 17: Very shallow focus

The resulting increase in the immersive potential culminates in Max' moment of fame. His classmates erupt into ecstatic applause and hoist him into the air. Suddenly, this triumphant moment dissolves and Max finds himself in a seat of the auditorium of Rushmore high school.

The transition is realized by means of a reversed L-Cut. For some seconds, while the soundtrack of the classroom scene still goes on, the content of the frame switches back and forth rapidly, via straight cuts, between the classroom-shot and the shot depicting Max sleeping in the auditorium. The link which connects both scenes is the soundtrack, to be more precise the diegetic sounds. The applause of the classmates in the classroom seamlessly transforms into the applause of the listeners in the auditorium of the high school. The “film's narration deliberately blurs boundaries between different spatial categories. Such a play with convention can be used to puzzle or surprise the audience, to create humor or ambiguity, or to achieve other purposes.” (Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* 279)

The pendulum has gone beyond its high point. At the same time as Max's dream comes to an end, also the immersive potential which was built up before is now slowly cut off forcing the spectator once more to watch from the sidelines. After Max has been presented from bird's eye view, we look at him in a symmetrical, excessively tidy long shot. The visual measures which evoked the effect of depth in the classroom scene have disappeared. This reversal stresses the flat, two-dimensional character of the images. Furthermore, the camera remains static and the pace of the cuts is slow. In addition, the non-diegetic music has vanished and it is replaced by Mr. Blume's stately lecture. The immersive effect is no longer present.

In addition to these two scenes which have been analyzed in detail, numerous further scenes display this kind of spatial oscillation, e. g., the final scene. As has been stated above, these scenes have in common that they are characterized by playful shifts of the simulated physical/spatial connection between the audience and the action on the screen causing the effect of increasing and diminishing degrees of immersion. In conclusion, it can be said that the mentioned spatial oscillation veers back and forth between two poles – one which allows the audience to immerse themselves into the action on the screen and another which underlines the boundary between the audience and the film-space. The following table sums up some of the typical aspects of both these poles.

<i>Spatial Connection:</i>	<i>Spatial Separation:</i>
allusions to openness/transparency (e. g., open windows)	allusions to closedness/opaqueness (e. g., closed curtains, walls, fences)
allusions to depth (e. g., multiple depth layers, shallow focus, sharp angles of the vanishing lines)	allusions to two-dimensionality (e. g., flat images with only one depth layer, deep focus, flat angles of the vanishing lines)
realistic effect via moving camera, fast cuts and changes of the framing	denaturalizing effect via symmetry, static camera and framing
dissolving borders between the audience and the action on the screen	impenetrable borders

Table 1: Recurrent aspects of the poles of spatial connection and spatial separation

4.2. Temporal Oscillations in *The Royal Tenenbaums*

The Royal Tenenbaums (henceforth *Tenenbaums*) exhibits an obsession for time, both on the level of the narration and the level of mise-en-scène, which is expressed, for example, by the stopwatches used by Raleigh and Chas as well as numerous featured wall clocks. In addition, the importance of time and the passing of time is alluded to by Royal's allegedly approaching death. In contrast to most people, Royal claims to know the exact date of his death. Besides, an unusually large amount of temporal information, such as dates, are given throughout the film. Also names of temporal units are mentioned frequently. The word "year," for instance, appears already in the first line and is uttered 21 times in total. This information, which is for the most part given by the narrator (Alec Baldwin), forms such a dense network that it would be a simple (albeit laborious) task to determine the exact dates of almost any event in the lives of the characters, such as their birth, weddings, divorces, etc. Via this network of temporal information, *Tenenbaums* creates a unique temporal universe which has its own underlying logic. This is also true for various other quirky films, some of them directed by Anderson. Besides, this is one of the reasons why *Tenenbaums* can be used to demonstrate how temporal oscillations work in this type of film.

As will be argued in this section, quirky films are characterized by temporal oscillations which take place between the two poles of *variability* and *constancy*. First of all, the meaning of both these concepts needs to be defined. In his paper "Time and Tense in Cinema," Alexander Sesonke enumerates three basic relations, which can exist between points in time.

[U]nderlying all our temporal talk two primitive relations provide the real content for this illusion: before and after. With, of course, their negation, neither before nor after, which means, obviously, at the same time or simultaneous. Theoretically almost all of the temporal content of our talk is reducible to these relations: before, after, simultaneous. [...] The significance of this is that the concept of time applies usefully or sensibly only where the relations of before and after are discernible. (Sesonke 420)

It is the change of the audiovisual information throughout the film which makes these relations discernible, as it forms the basis on which the audience understands a represented moment to occur earlier or later than another. Only because of the fact that the images of the film do not necessarily resemble one another, the audience can detect if images represent events which occur simultaneously or at different times. Hence, a scene could be described as demonstrating *constancy*, if the audiovisual information represented during this moment of the screen-time³ *resembles*, or *refers* to the information which was conveyed in an earlier moment or will be conveyed at a later time. The notion of *variability*, on the other hand, is used to describe the fact that the audiovisual information conveyed at some point in screen-time resembles and refers to itself, exclusively. This definition involves that variability will never be found in a pure form as similarity and reference are – at least to some extent – subjective attributions. However, in combination with the definition of constancy, it suffices to conceptualize the temporal oscillations in *Tenenbaums*.

In *Tenenbaums*, both constancy and variability are applied for the sake of the plot. Lorenz Engell, a German film scholar, stresses the importance of the themes of nostalgia and melancholy for the film. He understands the flashback scene, which portrays the facts revealed by the private investigator, and the prologue as “instruments of memory.” In addition, Engell identifies numerous plot elements and their underlying themes all of which add to a tonal atmosphere of melancholy: the constant presence of death (Royal and Rachel) and failure, the futility of all efforts as well as the dissatisfaction over missed opportunities. Besides, also Royal’s inability and unwillingness to behave in accordance with his age and his role as a father could be added to this list. Common to all these items is that they are closely connected to the concept of change: grief and nostalgia as signs of an inability to *accept change*, melancholy as well as Royal’s problem as signaling the inability to *initiate change*. Engell put his perspective on *Tenenbaums* in a nutshell by comparing the film to a “*stehendes Gewässer der Zeit*,” a stretch of standing

³ “the time, i. e., the order and duration, of the images in the screen-space, the lights and shadows on the surface of the screen” (Sesonske 420)

water of time. Thereby, however, he neglects the fact that the representation of inability always holds the potential of its reversion. The latter plays an important role in the film's process of meaning making as the Tenenbaums' downfall only becomes meaningful because of their promising past and their melancholy and their incapacity to act and decide only appears tragic since the family members once appeared to be brilliant, dynamic and adaptable. For the Tenenbaum children, change and overcoming their problems are possible. This is especially true for two parts of the film which translate the resulting notion of variability into a distinctive type of *mise-en-scène*. Seen from this perspective, it can be observed that while the prologue is full of change or variability, in the next part, the *mise-en-scène* as well as the plot depict an image of stagnation. It is this part, lasting from chapter one through five, which was referred to as a *stehendes Gewässer der Zeit*. In chapter six, however, the facts revealed by the private investigator set a causal chain in motion which culminates in Richie's attempted suicide and the wedding of Etheline and Sherman as a result of which the melancholic stagnation of the Tenenbaums comes to an end.

The initial scenes of *Tenenbaums*, forming the prologue, are bursting with a plethora of distinctive shots, many of which depict an individual scene. This prologue reveals events which – compared to the time span represented in the remaining part of the film – have happened in the past. It allows the audience to understand the circumstances the characters live in and to interpret the events displayed later on. This is also indicated by a comment of the narrator. During the prologue, the audience is watching selected scenes which shed light on significant events in the Tenenbaum children's youth. The number of scenes of which this prologue is made up amounts to several dozens. They follow one another in quick succession, thereby creating a time-lapse effect. Hence, the amount of information which is conveyed within a certain amount of time is very high. In addition, the duration of the shots varies strongly and it is below average, compared to the remaining part of the film. Besides, scenes with entirely different momentum and tonal qualities are taking turns. All these cinematic measures evoke the feelings of

velocity and variability. In the following, the prologue is analyzed in greater detail as it sheds light on this aspect of variability.

The scenes which form the prologue are characterized by movement and dynamism. This effect is evoked by varying the cut rhythms and by special types of framing, such as high-speed whip-tilts (which move from head-on view to God's eye or the reverse) or snap-zoom shots reminiscent of the sixties or seventies (Seitz). A scene depicting Royal and Chas in a BB gunfight, which is characterized by fast-paced cut rhythms in combination with "dynamic" framing (cf. Figure 18) represents one pole of the above-mentioned temporal oscillation. Such scenes evoke the feeling of rush, of speed and of immersion. From time to time, this effect, however, is briefly interrupted. Then, shots which evoke the feeling of extraordinary speed and dynamism are followed by shots, which display an extreme lack of action – both regarding camera movement (and thus framing) and the movement of characters and items on the screen. The camera work in these shots/scenes is static and the characters on the screen often appear as if they were posing for a portrait (cf. Figure 19).



Figure 18: "Dynamic" framing in the prologue: Chas attempts to shoot at his father.



Figure 19: Richie and Margot run away.

Sometimes, the content of the frame is slightly in motion, as, for example, in the scene displayed in Figure 19. Most of the time, however, the represented image is totally motionless. This is the reason why these shots rather resemble *photographs* than a part of a film. Still, these images do not serve to calm down the tonal atmosphere. Rather, the sudden appearance and disappearance of these photographs adds to the enrichment and compression of the narration and highlight the contrast between the shots which stand out due to their conspicuous

camera work, framing or mise-en-scène and themselves. This effect is even intensified by the fact that some of these shots contain captions which have become paradigmatic for Anderson's visual style.

While the above-mentioned dynamic scenes/shots serve to increase the emotional involvement of the audience, these static shots act as short breaks delaying the momentum for a moment, only to make the following increase in speed appear more intensive. Because of their symmetry and their flat character, these images refer to their own pictorial nature and refer the audience to the fact that they are looking at a cultural artifact. The static photograph shots are often realized via long planimetric portrait shots depicting a character in the center of the screen within a symmetrical frame. This frame often appears in the eye of the spectator due to the organization of the props and the nature of the set. In Figure 19, for example, this impression of a frame results from the fact that Richie is surrounded by two bystanders as well as the horizontal and vertical lines on the bus in the background. Sometimes, these photographs also show overhead shots or close-ups of inanimate objects, such as a doll house or a filing cabinet. The fact that this type of shot reminds of a frame as well as its perceived flatness prevent the audience from involving themselves emotionally, from immersing into the action. What all of these images have in common is the enormous amount of conveyed information and the difference between images. Seemingly unconnected events are represented one after another at a fast pace. Due to these factors the audience cannot establish expectations as to how the film will continue. Therefore, it is obvious that the notion of variability is predominant in this part of the film.

Tenenbaums as a whole is staged as a literary work, including a cover, chapters, a narrator, etc. With regard to this fictitious book, the above-mentioned photograph shots in the prologue resemble illustrations. Similar to illustrations, they often contain captions. Just as an illustration serves to preserve knowledge and insight in an object, also these shots act as a physical memory which prevents stories and insights from being forgotten and explains the present circumstances. These captioned images do not refer to memories. At least for the moment, the audience can neither see any connection between the events on the screen nor

their causes. For example, they do not learn how Margot happened to start writing dramas. Later, in what will be called the *main part* of the film (chapters one through five), these events, however, are staged as memories, as there they are used as objects of reference and comparison. Only by this reference, the notion of constancy which characterizes the main part of the film comes into being.

Besides giving rise to the notion of constancy by acting as objects of reference, these captioned images also add to the effect of variability. Besides the additional textual information given by the captions as well as the meticulously detailed *mise-en-scène* also the often rapid succession of images, which could not be explained, if they were not captioned (e. g., the filing cabinet filled with files), adds to the fast pace of the prologue.

The use of the captions allows to provide additional text which complements the visual information within the frame. Besides, it allows to increase the speed at which content is delivered, i. e., the amount of information which is given in a particular amount of time. The gaze of the spectator is attracted by numerous stimuli on the visual level which are only present for a short amount of time. This amount even appears lower as it is since the frames, which contain a plethora of props, are characterized by “the cluttered *Andersonian* *mise-en-scène*” (Orgeron 23). All these measures add to the fact that the prologue seems to be characterized by variability. If the prologue is compared to the main part, a contrast of variability versus constancy becomes evident. Both on the levels of the plot and the *mise-en-scène* a radical change is apparent after the prologue.

Regarding time and causality, the main part of *Tenenbaums* is marked by constancy. In other words, the dimension of time fades into the background. From chapter one onwards, many scenes, shots and images repeat or refer to others which have already been showed in the prologue or in a flash-back. They repeat stimuli which have already been perceived by the audience. Thereby, they subvert the expectations of the audience concerning the causal development of the plot and its orientation towards consequences and targets.

There are many plot elements which illustrate this theme. The most obvious one is the fact that Etheline’s children and her husband return to what was once

Royal's house. Also Eli, despite not being related to the Tenenbaums returns to "the house on Archer Avenue." Besides, Chas's children who all dress identically, the numerous suits of the same color and style in Chas's wardrobe as well as the constant reappearance of the countless mice roaming the rooms of the Tenenbaums' house exemplify this theme. Most remarkably, however, this theme of return, repetition and constancy is evoked by the representation of Margot and Richie.

On the one hand, there are numerous scenes which depict the siblings, Margot and Richie, in the same clothes – no matter if they are set in the seventies or more than twenty years later. Margot does not seem to age for a large part of the film. At the age of thirty, she looks exactly the same as she did at the age of eleven, when she found her real parents, or at the age of twenty, when she married for the first time. Her dress, her coat, her haircut and her face have not changed at all. Also her attitude and her behavior reflect this notion of repetition and the disappearance of time. She does not seem to have any goals or make plans. Instead, she makes a habit of spending her time smoking and soaking in the bathtub. It seems reasonable to argue that her utmost discretion allows her to suppress the knowledge of the deeds she is not proud of, thereby reversing the effects of time. Indeed, Margot is not regarded as an experienced or widely traveled woman who can look back on countless affairs and two marriages by her family or her husband. This becomes evident, for example, when she is invited for ice-cream by her father, as if she were still a girl. Another scene which alludes to innocence and childhood shows her being told off by her mother who advises her to quit smoking. In that Margot has been hiding an important aspect of her biography – her smoking, her first marriage and many extramarital affairs – as well as suppressing some of her memories and the passage of time, she creates a construction of constancy which has become real for her and which extends to her personal environment, her family and her husband. But where and when did this figment, this construction of constancy come into existence?

It seems as if Margot has been existing both mentally and physically at the very moment her brother, Richie and she had been destined to express their love for

each other – the evening they spent in the museum after they had run away from home. The same is true for Richie. He still wears his Björn Borg haircut, his sunglasses, his headband and his Fila Polo although twenty years have passed. Besides, he is still committed to his love for his stepsister. In addition to these obvious plot devices which give rise to the theme of constancy and repetition, also the *mise-en-scène* of *Tenenbaums* does its share.

As has been mentioned above, the symmetry which characterizes many of the shots in the main part gives rise to a recurrent visual organization of the frame. By appearing again and again, this systematical type of framing introduces a persistent order into the film which serves to structure it. In addition, these shots often serve as a self-reflective device in that the characters look directly towards the camera, thereby referring to the constructedness of the image. This is how the illusion of time is subverted which only comes into being as the spectators accept the moving images as depicting a series of chronologically ordered events. Also the selection of the colors used throughout the film serves to deconstruct the illusion of time.

Each character is assigned a specific color spectrum: red and white for Etheline, blue for Henry, brown for Margot, yellow for Richie (cf. Figure 19), red for Chas, and gray for Royal. The fact that the Tenenbaums seem to wear the same clothes and colors almost all their lives is contradictory to the idea of reality the audience has. Due to this denaturalized aesthetic, the artificiality and the constructedness of the film becomes evident. In addition to its tonal function – its effect on the emotional attachment on the part of the audience – this distinctive color aesthetic subverts the illusion of reality created by the moving images on the screen. In that the film refers to its own artificiality also the illusion of time evoked by the successively presented images is uncovered and thereby subverted. Besides, the invariable system of colors serves as a means of identification and characterization of the figures.

The connection between the characters and their respective colors remains unchanged throughout the prologue and the main part. In part, it can also be observed in the *final part* of the film, comprising chapters six to eight. As has been

mentioned above, the fact that the physical appearances as well as the clothes of the characters remain basically the same throughout the main part serves to establish the impression of timelessness. However, this tendency towards constancy comes to an abrupt end as the order of colors changes in the scene depicting Richie's suicide attempt. In this scene, Richie who has been associated with the color yellow, is bathed in a cool, bluish light. Thereby, the character transcends the order of colors which has been established before this scene (Hettich 95). According to Hettich, this transgression of the order of colors symbolizes both loss of self and existential danger (47). More important, however, it can be understood as a commentary on the opposition of staticity and variability regarding the structure of the self. This becomes also evident due to the fact that Richie is represented indirectly – via his reflection on the bathroom mirror.

In the suicide scene, Richie is no longer represented as a subject acting on his own terms within the film space. What the spectator is presented instead, is the mirror image of the character. What has just been a self-directed agent is transforming into a second-order subject which comes into existence only via another object – the mirror. As has been argued, this mode of representation symbolizes Richie's loss of self. The transgression of the order of colors as well as Richie's changed representation via the mirror can also be understood as critical commentary on idealist, essentialist conceptions of the self. Richie's identity is no longer characterized by constancy. Instead, the film moves towards an image of the self determined by variability and fragmentation, thereby subverting the “essentially-everything-remains-the-same” motif of constancy.

On another note, the above-mentioned transgression of the suicide scene with regard to the color order seems to increase the potential for empathetic reactions on the part of the spectator. It serves to direct the attention of the audience to the fact that the scene is emotionally relevant. Nevertheless, the change of colors is an entirely artificial, obvious measure referring to the fact that the film only represents a constructed reality. This shift from a strictly ordered visual style characterized by symmetry, a rigorous code of colors and a neatly arranged *mise-en-scène*, on the one hand, to scenes which break and reverse these rules, on

the other, could hence be considered as an oscillation between essentialist and constructionist viewpoints on the individual and reality in general. Still, neither of both perspectives is entirely approved nor dismissed. The link to the dimension of time is obvious as constructionists consider identity to be created and tentative whereas essentialists accept the notion of a static, persistent essence. In addition, along with the change in the representation of (Richie's) identity, also the stagnation of the story seems to be overcome in the suicide scene.

Also on the level of the plot the motive moves away from constancy towards variability. The final part of the *Tenenbaums* is characterized by this shift. After Richie "checked [him]self out" of the hospital, the plot refers back to the prologue: Just as in their teens, when Margot and Richie spent a night in a museum, pressed together tightly beneath a bench for visitors, they meet and cuddle in Richie's old tent – once again in somewhat cramped conditions. In addition, also the fact that Eli is wearing a colorful war paint for the second time when he causes a serious car accident does represent such a link to the initial scenes of the film when he has already been portrayed with this kind of decoration – at the BB shoot-out with Richie, Chas and Royal showed in the prologue. These two links connecting the final part to the prologue underline the similarity of the two parts and direct the attention of the spectator towards the motif of variability which is present in both the prologue and the final part of the film. The most obvious change, however, is the fact that the *personal development* of the characters gets going once again: Royal and Etheline are finally divorced. Ari and Uzi are nearly ran over by Eli. Etheline and Henry get married. Margot releases a new play based on her family and Richie starts a career as a junior tennis coach. The film is concluded by Royal's death.

As has been shown, *Tenenbaums* is characterized by oscillations between variability and staticity. However, these oscillations may not be understood as homogeneous transitions. Rather there are numerous instances where the respective notion is briefly reversed and subverted, e. g, the scene showing a conversation between Royal and Pagoda in the park. At one point in the conversation, there is a cut and the conversation is continued at another setting.

Although taking place during the main part of the film, this scene subverts the motive of staticity dominating this part. Moreover, also the final part features such conflicting interludes, as, for example, close-ups that go on a beat too long which counteract the impression of speed and variability. It seems sensible to assume that these short but emphasized conflicting stimuli serve to constitute the dominance of the opposing pole just as there is no light without shadow. Still, generally speaking, *Tenenbaums* consists of an initial part – the epilogue and the “cast of characters” – characterized by velocity and variability, by a central part where the representation shifts towards staticity and a final part where variability dominates once again.

4.3. Truth & Deception in *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*

“You don’t know me. You never wanted to know me,” Ned goes on, “I’m just a character in your film.” Steve contradicts him and maintains, “It’s a documentary. It’s all really happening.” In this dialogue between Steve Zissou and his supposed son, Ned Plimpton, a leitmotif of Anderson’s *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (henceforth *The Life Aquatic*) becomes evident – the contradiction between fact and fiction, truth and deception as well as reality and illusion. As will be demonstrated, this contradiction serves as a basis for the plot but also for the audiovisual style of *The Life Aquatic*.

By means of numerous plot devices as well as some elements of the *mise-en-scène* *The Life Aquatic* expresses constantly varying attitudes about the question, if humans have reason to believe that they can comprehend the circumstances by which they are surrounded or if every such attempt necessarily means that they entertain mere illusions. This is connected to the question, if we consider films (or *texts* in general) to be aiming at authentic representations of reality or at spectacular illusions. As will be shown, *The Life Aquatic* demonstrates two conflicting attitudes towards representation: first, a mode of truthfulness or authenticity versus, second, a mode of illusion or spectacle. It will be argued that by moving back and forth between these modes, the film oscillates between

optimism and pessimism with regard to the human faculty of representation and comprehension by means of texts in the broadest sense.

The film portrays a development: The main protagonist, Steve, who has been understood less and less by his ex-wife, colleagues and friends in the past few years has lost much of his fame and reputation. He has to recognize that he has maintained a distorted image of himself. Steve has an important psychological insight. He admits to himself that he has a son, a fact which he has suppressed for thirty years, that he regrets having ignored him and that he has lost his success and maybe also his talent. In addition, he recognizes that he does not know how to proceed – he can neither save his marriage nor his reputation. Furthermore, he does not know how to finance his research nor his extravagant lifestyle. However, his self-knowledge is within narrow limits: He uses the opportunity provided by the arrival of his supposed son to indulge immediately in another fantasy – the illusion that he could make up for his fatherhood, that he could turn back the wheels of time. He wants to adopt him and even give the thirty year old man a new name, just as if he were a newborn infant. Especially with regard to the ladies, Steve demonstrates that his grasp of reality is prone to error. Gradually however, Steve seems to develop a somewhat more precise image of himself. He realizes that “people [...] think, [he is] a showboat and a little bit of a prick” and that this assessment is true. Finally, he “can live with that.” Whatever our understanding of the end of *The Life Aquatic*, it seems Steve has found his way to a somewhat more authentic and responsible way of life and he looks to the future in a positive way. *The Life Aquatic* is also a story of search and discovery. Steve is looking for the jaguar shark and for revenge. In addition, he wants to get to know his supposed son. Ned is in search of his father and his identity. Jane wants to find out more about Zissou, the hero of her youth, and she “need[s] to find a baby for [her] father.” With regard to this epistemological motif of the plot, it could be argued that *The Life Aquatic* asks which of our expectations, opinions and beliefs correspond to reality and which do not. This is done in a funny way.

The humor of *The Life Aquatic* is often due to the discrepancy between audience expectations and the actually occurring events. One instance which exemplifies

this discrepancy is the scene before the crew of the Belafonte rescues Bill and Hennessey from the pirates. Steve acts the leader and calmly orders “to check out” of Hotel Citroën. Instead of going ahead with superior ease, as the hero of an action film is expected according to cinematic convention, he slips out on one of the marble steps and rolls all the way down the stairs to the lobby. Also another scene – Steve attempts to corner the “bond company stooge” and warns him not to cause any problems – is based on the incongruity between expectations and actual events. Instead of the clever retort, the audience expects the bank employee to come up with, he seems to be deeply hurt and points out to Steve that he is “also a human being.”

It could be argued, that by the use of this style of humor, *The Life Aquatic*, plays with the question which of our assumptions – in this case expectations – are true and which are not. Since various scenes demonstrate to the audience that their expectations do not always agree with reality, the film implies that it can be determined if the statements of a text agree with reality or fail to do so. By that *The Life Aquatic* also implies that the properties of reality can be depicted by means of “texts.” Besides, the concept of authenticity, which becomes more and more important for Steve in the course of the plot, is not possible without this precondition. However, *The Life Aquatic* does not stop at this point. Many elements of the film remind the audience, that it is not as simple as that. *The Life Aquatic* obviously alludes to the fact that itself is a constructed text rather than a symbolic representation of reality. Evidently, its plot and mise-en-scène aim to create an illusion, which can be identified as such and this process itself is emphasized by various elements of the film:

The film is characterized by a number of elements which are easily recognizable as being “fakes.” The luminescent jellyfish washed ashore on the beach of Zissou’s island, Pescespada, can easily be identified as lit up plastic discs, though lovingly designed. The images of the “crayon pony-fish” which Zissou receives as a gift from Klaus’s nephew, as well as the representations of the colorful salamander which is mercilessly flicked off Zissou’s hand and the jaguar shark are easily recognizable as man-made props. By their design all three of them remind of

child's drawings. Also the sequences set underwater can easily be identified as attempts of deception.

Due to its bright water and its colorful, luminescent flora and fauna, Anderson's representation of the underwater world seems like an excessively stylized version of the depths of the sea. What the journalist, Jane, says about Steve's most recent film – "some of it seemed quite fake" – is also true for *The Life Aquatic* itself. Obviously, this is the result of a deliberate decision expressed in both the plot and the mise-en-scène. Hence, it could be argued that the humor of the film arises not only from the fact that the main protagonist is unable to assess his situation but also that the narration which surrounds him fails to create a believable illusion for the spectator. Both the pursuit of realism and of illusion remain fruitless. This is especially remarkable as the plot implies the exact opposite. After all, the subject of *The Life Aquatic* is the production cycle of a documentary film – a genre which promises to present the facts especially truthfully and honestly rather than a spectacular work of fiction. However, with regard to this promise, the film adopts a rather pessimistic attitude.

The Life Aquatic satirizes the promise of documentary films, to authentically represent reality. Instead, the documentary films present in *The Life Aquatic* represent a parody of an escapist entertainment. The scene approximately 14 minutes into the film, which is introduced by Steve's line, "Let me tell you about my boat," demonstrates how much a documentary can deviate from this promise of realism in an amusing way. The scene consists of only one continuity shot. The representation of the boat as a huge studio model cut open at the front gives the audience the chance to take a look at the various compartments and reminds the spectators of the fact that they are looking at a prop, a fake, even though an elaborate one. While the camera moves along the compartments, we hear Steve's voice offstage who explains the functions of each of them thereby adhering to one of the most prominent conventions of the documentary film. Indeed, as the audience is looking right into the cutting room, one scene is just being dubbed by Renzo and Vikram. Apart from the fact that the selection of the compartments and

their function are absurd more often than not, there are many references to the process by which this representation was created:

Steve demonstrates the “observation bubble” which he claims to have “thought up in a dream.” Furthermore, he explains the origins of the sauna “which was designed by an engineer from the Chinese space program.” On the one hand, the boat provides a plethora of spectacular however useless details which make it appear quirky in the first place. Why do a crew of oceanographers need a sauna or a hot air balloon on their boat? On the other hand, the *Belafonte* fails to cater for the most vital needs. The radar is not working and the helicopter on board the boat lacks the necessary maintenance, which results in a lethal accident causing Ned’s death. Due to this contradiction characterizing the *Belafonte*, the boat can be considered an allusion to *The Life Aquatic* itself. Despite the fact, that the film is about the production of a documentary film, the spectacle is often dominating. The film features many of the characteristics of the cinema of attraction, e. g., visual effects, explosions, stunts, sharks and a hero. The motif of artificiality is embraced instead of adhering to the puristic, conventions of documentary films which first and foremost strive for authenticity rather than the spectacle. However, as has been argued above, also the illusive effect or the spectacle are subverted as the constructedness of the film is revealed.

Obviously, *The Life Aquatic* also alludes to the fact that the production of an attractive illusion often serves a hidden purpose. In the above-mentioned scene, for example, Steve refers to the “top-notch research library [...] with a complete, first-edition set of the *Life Aquatic* companion series.” This allusion to marketing and product placing satirizes the economic goals of both the oceanographic project and the film called *The Life Aquatic*. These economic aspects of cultural artifacts appear again and again throughout the film – think of Drakulias and the Saudi Arabian investor. Such allusions shed light on the process of construction of cultural artifacts as well as on their hidden economic and ideological preconditions. However, most important in this context is that they subvert the promise of *The Life Aquatic* to create a cinematic illusion.

Anderson's conscious use of clichés is another device which comments on the construction of representations of reality, thereby subverting the cinematic illusion. They range from the stereotypical representation of a young female crew member, Anne-Marie Sakowitz, whose name indicates an Eastern European descent and who does not miss any opportunity to tan her bare breasts to the depiction of German individuals with their characteristic accent and their traditional costume. In addition, also the representation of the "Filipino pirates" as a chaotic bunch of unkempt, uncivilized, dark-skinned Southeast Asians who are not allowed a single line in the entire film appears highly stereotypical. About Péle dos Santos, the South American crew member who sings Portuguese translations of David Bowie songs and accompanies himself on guitar in a bossa nova style we learn just as little as about Vikram, the Indian Sikh whose difference becomes evident only due to his skin-color and his traditional headgear.

The use of clichés throughout Anderson's films has often been interpreted as unaware and negative. It has also been argued to disseminate attitudes of racism and sexism (Weiner; Bose). If, however, the tonal background which surrounds these plot elements – which, especially in *The Life Aquatic*, is characterized by irony – is taken into consideration along with the fact that they are highly exaggerated, this may lead to another conclusion: Hence, Anderson's use of clichés could be understood as a parody of mainstream cinematic representations of difference rather than as an unaware and repetitive affirmation of racist and sexist attitudes. Instead of supporting these ideologies, *The Life Aquatic* makes them an object of ridicule. For example, the portrayal of the blond Swedish masseuse, shown in the above-mentioned scene, can be understood as stereotypical. On closer inspection, however, this plot element is the result of a pun – the Swedish massage turns into a person: the Swedish masseuse. This personification can be understood as exemplifying the formation of a stereotype. By such jokes, *The Life Aquatic* comments on the creation and dissemination of clichés and, more generally, on the process of meaning making in cultural artifacts. Thereby, the formation of opinions, which nowadays is under the influence of consumerism and the mass media, is made an object of irony and skepticism.

The Life Aquatic questions not only the ability of the mass media to represent reality but also the ability of the consumers to deal reasonably with these attempts. This skepticism is expressed by demonstrating the significance of hearsay and the role which the repetition of images (both metaphors and pictures) plays for the formation of our attitudes. This becomes evident from one of the key scenes: As Ned asks Steve, since when he has known that he has fathered a son, Steve replies, "Around five years ago, I guess. I read it in an article about myself." After a pause, Ned asks his supposed father if he gave credence to the article. Steve explains "It was in the paper. I assumed they checked their facts." For the most part of *The Life Aquatic* the main protagonist is depicted as unable to see through his own illusions. In fact, all the characters do not seem interested in revealing the facts. Instead, illusions, images, metaphors and stereotypes are the basis of their perspective towards life. It is obvious to the spectator that most of the characters of *The Life Aquatic* have in common that they are incredibly naive. However, also the actually critical journalist, Jane, tells Steve as they go up on his hot air balloon, "I had this exact image of you tacked-up on the wall above my aquarium all through elementary school." This image – Steve in profile pointing ahead – has been the basis for her idea of him. Still, it is a mere illusion which Steve himself finally admits, "Well, maybe it's just me, but I don't feel like that person. I never did." Another example for this is the fact that Ned is more interested in calling Steve "dad" in an underwater scene than in finding out if he really is his son. Also the scenes showing the redesign of the logo of Team Zissou demonstrate the significance of images, clichés and stereotypes for the human perception of reality: In one scene Klaus speaks to Ned, "Thank you for putting me on the flag. [... Y]ou stitched me onto the dolphin, and I want you to know how much it means to me!"

For the time being, it can be concluded that as images, clichés and stereotypes are at the center of the representation in *The Life Aquatic*. Furthermore, the audience is made aware of these aspects of meaning making by means of exaggeration, self-conscious allusions and irony. This is how the constructedness of the film is emphasized. Thereby, the cinematic illusion is subverted. Even more, it is made an object of irony, as the film cheekily admits being a fake. To put it

differently, *The Life Aquatic* expresses pessimism about its ability to portray events and facts realistically and to provide an accurate representation of reality. However, this is not true for the entire film. There are elements which express an entirely different perspective, as they appear truthful and authentic to the audience. These elements could be understood as the opposite pole of the above-mentioned oscillation. But how is this realized?

In the following, three scenes are briefly analyzed which appear authentic and truthful rather than spectacular or deceptive. Contrary to many others, the scenes have in common that they do not subvert the narration. They also forebear from emotionally exaggerating the events on the screen. It seems as if they represent the depicted events in an authentic, meaningful and deep manner. This is achieved by simplifying the camera work. Along with the camera, the basis of the cinematic illusion and a symbol of artificiality moves to the background.

Both Esteban's and Ned's deaths are not displayed on the screen. The fact that Esteban was killed by the jaguar shark only becomes evident due to Steve's horrified description which is a part of the film presentation comprising the initial scenes of *The Life Aquatic*. Still, this confrontation is crucial for the remaining part of the film. It is the reason for the sequel film and the cause of Steve's insecurity.

This retreat of the camera becomes even clearer in the scene which shows Ned being killed in an accident. While the helicopter is in free fall to the surface of the sea only ambient sounds can be heard. Later, as the characters are under water, they are not shown at all. Instead, the entire screen displays a rapid succession of numerous shots of bubbly water. In between them, there are brief shots comprising nothing but the color red. By means of this hint as well as the rapid succession of shots, the danger the characters face becomes obvious. What is especially remarkable, is that both Ned and Steve are absent. Only some long seconds later, as both characters emerge from the water, they can be seen in the center of a medium-long shot. Apart from the couple of exclusively red frames, nothing indicates that something serious has happened to the characters, although Steve sounds worried when he calls for his supposed son. Then, Ned, looking somewhat worn-out, explains calmly what could have been the cause for the accident. In the

meantime, the camera keeps its distance and shakes a little, just as if it were also on the water. Only ambient sounds can be heard in addition to the words of the characters. In the next shot, which shows Steve, carrying the body ashore, the distance of the camera to the events has even increased. In an extreme long shot, Steve is depicted motionless, keeping a straight face, holding his dead son in his hands.

Ned's death is not portrayed in a dramatic way. It is depicted without any obvious strategies arousing sympathy, excitement or causing worry. It is due to this restraint that the audience is given the opportunity to experience the full scope of this dramatic turn in the plot. Instead of subverting its own effect, *The Life Aquatic* thereby achieves the illusion of truthfulness and authenticity. Ironically, this is achieved by withdrawing, by concealing the act of representation. The strategies of representation which lie at the center of attention for much of the rest of the film are now applied in a more subtle manner. Thereby, the constructedness of the film is hidden and the scene seems realistic. This realism even appears more intensive as it is perceived in the context of the cheeky, deceptive mode which has been treated above. As a consequence, Ned's death is perceived as tragic by the audience instead of becoming the subject of black humor. Ned's death is not staged as overly dramatic, e. g., by extra-diegetic music, dynamic camera movements, etc. Instead, it is observed from a distance – both locally and emotionally. Thereby, the audience gets the chance to experience Ned's death as existentially meaningful, truthful and authentic.

Another scene characterized by this type of cinematic minimalism, a distanced, seemingly authentic perspective, shows Steve go ashore on the island of Port-Au-Patois. When he sits opposite Eleonor and apologizes, it does not seem as if he attempted to take advantage of his ex-wife or to presume upon her good nature. Rather, his apology seems honest and Steve demonstrates that he has, in fact, gained an important insight about his past when he admits that he hasn't "been at his best for the last decade" and that maybe he has even lost his talent. During their dialog the two characters are located within the left and the right third of the screen, both depicted separately in alternate medium shots. The 180° rule is

obeyed. When Steve talks about his supposed son, Ned, a transition from the medium shot to a close-up takes place, thereby emphasizing Steve's emotional facial expression. The entire scene leaves behind a calm impression. The audience only hears Steve's and Eleanor's low voices. No ambient sounds can be heard. Furthermore, the camera remains static throughout the scene, just as if the events were watched by an invisible, calm observer. Since these cinematic measures are very subtle, they probably remain unnoticed by the audience. While *The Life Aquatic* for the most part does not conceal its artificial origin, here, it leaves behind the feeling of fidelity with common human perception. By applying a subtle or even invisible style, the film creates an illusion of authenticity. However, even this authentic mode cannot but subvert itself. The fact that this illusion of authenticity is, in fact, an artificial construction is even expressed explicitly: As part of his monologue at Hotel Citroën, Steve announces: "We'll give them the reality this time."

As has been demonstrated, *The Life Aquatic* is characterized by a coexistence of two modes of representation, one of them seeming realistic and the other deceptive. In addition to its epistemological motif (represented by Steve's search for the jaguar shark, his search for himself and Ned's search for his father, etc.) also its humor which is based on the discrepancy between expectations/illusions and the actually occurring events is based on this oscillation. As has been shown, the two conflicting modes of representation are defined by a number of properties regarding their *mise-en-scène*. However, the attitudes represented by these poles are continuously being subverted: The illusory or deceptive mode is undermined by the presence of ridiculously obvious stereotypes, the depiction of Steve's naïve trust in the media as well as his documentary which is all but authentic. Its counterpart, the realistic mode, is subverted by Steve's hint that even "the reality," if it is "given" to the audience, is a deliberate construction.

4.4. Purpose & Arbitrariness in *The Darjeeling Limited*

Anderson's *The Darjeeling Limited* (henceforth *Darjeeling*) tells the story of three grown-up brothers who go on a spiritual journey to India from which they expect "to find [them]selves and bond with each other," to find their mother and to experience a spiritual breakthrough. As described in section 3.2.1, often the characters of quirky films are looking for a purpose, a mission, a place and a function in the world which is appropriate for them. They experience an ideological and spiritual emptiness which is depicted as typical of the culture of the 21st century. They also suffer from the absence of ethical and philosophical guidelines which provided desirable ways of acting for most of the history of the western culture. In addition, to this feeling of spiritual and ideological emptiness, they suffer from the fragmentation of society. They are not rooted in their families and lack a sense of belonging together. This is why they are looking for a purpose and for emotional connections. The ways in which Anderson's characters handle this situation vary greatly. While some of the characters prepare themselves via auto-suggestion to finally become successful and happy, e. g., Dignan's 75 year plan in *Bottle Rocket*, others react with absurd acts or sarcasm to these circumstances. This holds also true for *Darjeeling*.

Darjeeling stages the dichotomy of purpose and arbitrariness. It portrays the journey of three brothers who cannot gain an insight into the principles of existence nor find a purpose in life. At the same time, the film tells about their courageous and often tragicomic attempts to overcome their isolation and disorientation, both closely connected with the attitude of relativism which is a pillar of the post-modern condition.

According to Albert Camus, it is due to the human inability to ultimately identify the value and the meaning of existence, which he calls the *Absurd* and which leads to the perceived arbitrariness of all things, that humans are confronted with the unsurmountable problem of *Existence* (Camus 164). They cannot do other than make a choice, as the choice to refrain from a decision is still a choice. By acting or refraining from action, they *revolt* against the Absurd, to use Camus's

term. The Absurd is an inevitable element of human existence. However, the ways in which humans can react to this condition are manifold. It is typical of quirky films and especially of Anderson's that they present a wide selection of potential ways to react to the perceived arbitrariness of our existence. In *Darjeeling*, the actions of the Whitman brothers serve to establish a basis of order and purpose. The success of their actions, however, is often threatened by circumstances which destabilize this project. Subsequently, the plot of the film can be understood as oscillating between elements which promise to add to order/purpose and such elements which stress the arbitrariness of existence. Again, it seems that this type of oscillation is a defining feature of the quirky film and that it expresses a fundamental aspect of the quirky sensibility. On the one hand, the quirky film exhibits a type of humor which arises due to the characters' failure in the face of the Absurd. On the other hand, it evokes hope and sympathy due to the fact that the characters refuse to give in and do not cease to strive for their often hardly realistic goals.

The thematic oscillation between the attempt to create order/purpose and the plot elements which hinder this effort also find their expression in the mise-en-scène of *Darjeeling*. How this is implemented will now be discussed along with the oscillation on the level of the plot.

Peter, Francis and Jack Whitman carry with them the pain associated with the death of their father. As it is often the case with Anderson's films, the past – here: the deceased father – is still present in everything the characters own and in the way they act. Peter, for example, suffers from headache which is considered the result of his grief by his brothers. In addition, he has an obsession for items which belonged to his father, for example, his father's car key, shaver and his glasses as well as the belt worn by Francis. The latter confesses to his mother having attempted suicide by intentionally crashing his motorcycle into a rock. The damage the death of his father caused in him is obvious from the outside. All three brothers abuse medicine and alcohol as ways to suppress their problems and pain.

For the Whitman brothers, the death of their father was without purpose. As Francis explains: "He got hit by a taxi. [...] His change was scattered all over 72nd

street". There is nothing comforting about this way of dying. It can neither be influenced nor explained. It is emblematic for the Absurd.

The death of the father is the key element of the theme of arbitrariness in *Darjeeling*. In addition to this thematic center, there are numerous other plot devices which illustrate this theme, e. g., the recurring disappearance of Patricia, the mother of the Whitman brothers, the presence of the tiger at the convent headed by Patricia, the death of the Indian child and the fact that it happens exactly when the brothers come along. In addition, the fact that Mr. Whitman's Porsche is "not ready" after three months in a garage as well as the unlikely event that a train gets lost exemplify this notion. What have all these plot elements in common?

The principle of cause and effect is a pillar of Western narrative tradition. The reader of a novel and the spectator of a film expect to learn why things happen (Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* 77–80). However, in *Darjeeling*, the Whitman brothers are confronted with numerous events whose causes and purpose they cannot fathom, which are beyond their influence and which cannot be explained. These events should appear entirely random and illogical to them as if they did not adhere to causality or any other underlying, hidden system. In the face of this fact, one plot element of *Darjeeling* is especially interesting.

Francis, who has not told his brothers what to expect on this "spiritual journey," has instructed his friend and assistant, Brendan, to secretly make, print and laminate an itinerary, for the three brothers. An updated itinerary is put "under [the brothers'] doors every morning" and it contains among other things "the temples and spiritual places [they] need to see." The symbolism of the itinerary may not be underestimated. The function of this element is to bring purpose and order into the lives of the brothers who constantly have to face events beyond their comprehension and control. In addition, the fact that the itinerary is created secretly "in a different compartment on another part of the train" is remarkable. This could be interpreted as a metaphor symbolizing eschatological conceptions such as Christianity, historical idealism or rationalism. All these ideas require a *leap of faith* or the belief that there is an invisible

dimension of reality which is hidden from us but still decisive. Similar to the itinerary such *grand narratives* propose that an order or system exists which underlies the universe and which humans can turn towards and partially understand or experience by means of religion or rationality. Patricia's statement that "there are greater forces at work" summarizes such an attitude – the belief that there exists something or someone which or who created the world, gives purpose and order.

In the late twentieth century, idealistic conceptions proposing a system which underlies the universe and all events, have been identified as potentially dangerous, excluding and epistemologically untenable constructions. This disillusionment has also found its way into popular culture. By having an itinerary made in secret, Francis transforms the train into a place which is more simplified, less chaotic, less arbitrary than this "real world," thereby reversing this epistemological development. The train acts as a base where principles, procedures, order and purpose dominate rather than randomness. The contrast between the train and the outside is also stressed by the *mise-en-scène*. While symmetry and order dominate inside the train, outside, the visuals are charged with tension (cf. Figures 20 and 21).



Figure 20: The train: order, symmetry, flatness,
planimetric long shot



Figure 21: The market: disorder, multiple depth layers,
multiple lines of sight and movement

This becomes evident as soon as the Whitmans leave the train, e. g., when they visit a local market. In that scene, a number of plot elements are introduced which endanger the order on the train such as the snake which will ultimately lead to the brothers' expulsion from the train as well as the theft of Francis's shoe.

In addition to the plot element of the itinerary also the short film *Hotel Chevalier* which was shot in the same year as *Darjeeling* can be understood as such a hidden system of purpose and causality. The short film is not officially considered a part of the feature. Still, it is closely connected to it: Towards the end of the feature, Jack shows a short story to Francis which obviously includes a fictional version of the encounter he had earlier at Hotel Chevalier. Furthermore, there are plot elements in *Darjeeling* which are hard to understand if one has not seen the short film, for example, the label “Hotel Chevalier” embroidered on Jack’s bathrobe and Natalie Portman’s cameo-appearance as his ex-girlfriend. Similar to the itinerary, also this short film can be understood as an underlying, hidden system which sheds light on the purpose and the causal relations of the events depicted in *Darjeeling*.

In addition to the itinerary, also the numerous agreements and rules, which are laid down throughout the plot, present a system, an invisible framework which determine how the characters act and why events occur in the way they do. The importance of these rules is stressed by a ritual which is carried out by Francis, his mother and his brothers again and again in order to agree on new rules. This ritual always follows the same pattern: Somebody states, “Let’s make an agreement.” Then she or he enumerates three elements of this agreement and gives reasons why these elements are necessary. Often, she or he uses the letters “A,” “B” and “C” to structure the argument. Finally, the question “Can we agree to that?” follows. Then, the listeners agree. By means of this ritual, it is laid down that the brothers strive for demanding goals such as that they “stop feeling sorry for [them]selves,” that they “find [them]selves,” that they “bond with each other” and that they are “completely open and say yes to everything.” It is evident that these expectations are very ambitious and that they will sooner or later lead to failure. Similar to the train, which serves as a metaphor symbolizing order and purpose and which is threatened by the snake, the rules and agreements the Whitman brothers’ have laid down are subject to threat as they are constantly broken. This holds also true for less ambitious goals such as that the brothers are not to “splinter into factions” or that they are to “ask first” before borrowing something.

Over the entire length of the film, these rules are being broken again and again. Thereby, the supporting framework of purpose and meaning which the brothers attempt to establish, is subverted. Once again, the apparent arbitrariness of reality gains the upper hand. The scene at approximately 24 minutes into the film, when the Whitmans pray at an Indian temple, illustrates this process of constant subversion. While they are praying, Frank notices that Peter is wearing his belt. After Peter admits that it does not belong to him, Frank reminds his brother that one ought to “ask first” before borrowing someone else’s things. One moment later, Jack notices that he seems to have lost his passport and starts to panic as he supposes that it has been stolen. Jack is deeply disappointed when he learns that Frank took it without asking in advance. Ironically, Frank has to admit that he has broken the rule one moment after he has reminded his brother about it.

In addition to the ceremony mentioned above, numerous other ones are part of the plot of *Darjeeling* such as the reception aboard the Darjeeling Limited. The chief steward enters and calls the surnames of the passengers. After canceling the tickets and putting them on a wall-mounted board, he bids the passengers welcome. Finally, after he has left, the stewardess enters, offers sweet lime and decorates the Whitman brothers by putting a bindi, the traditional South Asian decoration, on their foreheads. This ceremony is carried out twice by two crews aboard two trains. The focus on order is once again stressed by the clear, simplified, “excessively neat” visuals. Figure 20, which shows the stewardess entering the compartment of the brothers is characterized by a striking simplicity. It appears flat and almost symmetrical. The next shot, an overhead view of the tray she carries, shows an ordered, purposefully arranged set of selected items (cf. Figure 22).



Figure 22: Order and symmetry form part of the greeting ceremony

It is obvious that ceremonies such as the mutual agreement on rules or the reception aboard the train represent possible responses to the perception of arbitrariness. On the one hand, *Darjeeling* portrays all of these responses as threatened by subversion. The Whitmans' attempts to find peace and purpose by means of spiritual practices seem to fail miserably. Still, the Whitman brothers are portrayed as suffering from disorientation and spiritual emptiness. It seems, they cannot do without religion. In addition, traditions and ceremonies are portrayed as an undisputed and integral part of the lives of the Indian population, thereby presenting their way of life as a viable response to the human experience of arbitrariness.

Darjeeling also features traditional Hindi ceremonies. However, the brothers fail miserably at their attempts to participate in the spiritual ceremonies of the country. While the locals are praying, the brothers talk loudly in the temple and stand out because of the strange wreath of flowers they are wearing around their necks. At another occasion, during a religious service, the Whitman brothers attract attention due to the headscarves they are wearing. In addition, they are lying extended on the ground and are praying silently as opposed to all other attendees who are sitting upright and listening to the religious chants.

The room where the ceremony takes place, which is represented as dignified and illustrious, is full of religious locals who participate. Still, the brothers have doubts as to whether the ceremony is going to “work.” Interrupting his prayers, Frank asks his brothers “Do you think, it’s working?” Peter responds, “I hope so. It got to.” In this scene, another attempt of the Whitmans to add purpose to their

lives and to become part of “something greater” is presented. The doubt they are having if this attempt leads to success becomes evident from their conversation.

Also the representation of Patricia’s religious beliefs is characterized by various conflicting tendencies containing both respect for and doubt about practices which serve to gain insights into the nature and the purpose of reality. Religion being an institution which institutionalizes such practices, attempts to respond to these metaphysical problems. The Whitmans’ attitude towards religion is portrayed as ambivalent and characterized by both their wish for purpose and order as well as their doubt about the authenticity of religious claims. The facts that the brothers embark on a spiritual journey and that they have laid down numerous ambitious rules indicate that they are ready to embrace religion and acknowledge its value. However, when they receive a letter from their mother containing the words “God bless you and keep you with Mary’s benevolent guidance and the light of Christ’s enduring grace,” they agree that the belief of their mother is not authentic and point out that Patricia’s letter “sounds like bullshit.” The representation of Patricia and the nuns as well as the convent, which is headed by Patricia and depicted as an inhospitable, stormy place on the top of a steep mountain does not promote faith or trust in the ability of religion to guide and to explain life. The convent is inhabited by nuns of very small stature and also young orphans are present. The fact that Patricia seems to be the abbess of the convent and that she is at least a head taller than all of her sisters creates a comical effect.

At a service which takes place on the day of the Whitmans’ arrival, the nuns and other attendees sing a religious hymn. Contrary to conventional representations of religious choral music, not the powerful sound of a professional choir but ridiculously unbalanced, unprofessional vocals can be heard. In addition, the fact that the hymn is accompanied by a “plastic, electric organ” (95) adds to an impression which is anything but solemn or graceful. Moreover, there is nothing graceful about the tone of the single church bell of the convent which sounds poor and tinny. In addition to these plot elements, a dark joke at the expense of the nuns add to the sarcastic tonal tendencies of the film towards Patricia’s religiosity.

Approximately 74 minutes into the film, Patricia has a conversation with her sons. When Jack tells Patricia that he had considered the story of the tiger as an excuse, Patricia leads her sons to the tracks of the tiger and asks them, “You call that bullshit?” The sons look unconvinced and Patricia says, “He ate one of the sister’s brothers.” Then her sons laugh heartily. Immediately after a straight shot, the scene showing the above-mentioned service follows which depicts the nuns and other attendees singing “Praise him, praise him.” The transition between both scenes is realized by means of an L-Cut with the singing of the nun becoming audible already in the previous scene. Due to this technique we can understand both shots as being connected causally, chronologically or locally. For this reason the dark joke and the Whitmans’ laughter can be understood as referring to the attendees of the service, who praise the lord in spite of the recent death of the brother of a nun. The mentioned plot elements as well as the depiction of Patricia and the nuns can be understood as an ironic statement about religion and its goal of unveiling the nature of reality and the purpose of life. In spite of this tendency of the film, to use religion as an object of amusement and the fact that it frequently adopts an ironical or detached perspective on faith, it does not dismiss religiosity altogether.

The pivotal moment, when the representation of this theme is beginning to change, is depicted in the scene which shows Patricia and her sons trying to “express [them]selves more fully [...] without words.” From this point, the pendulum is heading away from an attitude of relativism, irony and detachment towards the opposite pole, which expresses a perspective of hope and enthusiasm regarding the ability of religion to provide order and meaning. This scene together with its successor could also be understood as the climax of the film. This will be explained in an instance. The scene can be interpreted as a transition which is also indicated by the diversity on the level of *mise-en-scène*. This diversity does not serve to make the events on the screen seem realistic but it serves as a denaturalizing device which emphasizes the importance of the scene for the understanding of the entire film and increases the emotional intensity: The first shot consists of a slow 360 ° pan. It shows Patricia and her sons silently looking at

each other. There is a close-up for each of the characters after which the camera continues its rotation. The shot ends with a left-to-right wipe which serves to indicate the connection of the shot with its successor. This succeeding shot consists of an eye-catching track-shot, staging various settings. All of them are thousands of miles apart and yet, staged on the same train: a group of praying orphans in the convent, Rita (the stewardess) smoking in her cabin, the chief steward caring for the snake in a terrarium, the two brothers of the boy who died in the accident in their hut, Peter's pregnant wife, Brendan on his way home by plane, Jack's ex-girlfriend watching TV in a hotel and the tiger growling in the jungle. The shot presents a longer version of the above-mentioned subjective montage in several parts. It conveys the impression that the spectator walks from left to right, thereby passing one train compartment after another and looking at a number of carefully arranged montages. As usual for subjective montages, the shot is characterized by extra-diegetic music, long shots and static, inexpressive characters. Furthermore, a number of montages are connected via a tracking shot in this case.

The images of these two shots do not add much to the plot, as we already knew that Peter's wife is pregnant, that the tiger is probably sitting in the jungle, etc. Still, they transform something which is merely cognitively known to the audience into an audiovisual sensation. Similar to the concept of the religious inspiration, it elevates the experience to a higher, more sophisticated level. In addition, the soundtrack ("Play With Fire" by the *Rolling Stones*) as well as the track-shot technique establish a solemn, affectionate and at the same time mystical and opaque tone. As the simulated movement through the train connects places which are far apart in geographical terms, the portrayed event cannot be understood as actual or realistic. Instead, the glance at the train compartments could represent the mental images which the Whitman brothers have in their minds, while they are compassionately watching the fate of their friends and acquaintances. Hence, the scene could be understood as a moment of spiritual awakening, of inspiration which fulfills the hope of the brothers for a spiritual breakthrough. It seem as if

the Whitmans had found a place of order and purpose, as if they had a deep insight into the variations of human living and suffering.

Some cuts after this shot sequence, we see a scene which shows the “feather ritual” succeeding marvelously. In contrast, the ritual failed miserably in an earlier scene as Peter and Jack had not understood which actions they were supposed to take. Now, the pendulum is reaching the second pole of its oscillation which corresponds to a representation of the world as a place where sovereign subjects can gain deep understanding. At this point, the tone is characterized by hope and benevolence instead of hopelessness, nihilism and irony. However, on the whole, the tone of *Darjeeling* is neither ironic nor enthusiastic about the human ability to reveal the cause and the order of existence. Instead, *Darjeeling*’s tone keeps oscillating between these two extremes.

In addition to the mentioned themes, *Darjeeling* also makes a statement about consumerism as well as the hopes pinned on the acquisition, consumption and possession of luxury goods in the Western industrial nations. The mise-en-scène of the film is characterized by valuable props such as suits designed by Marc Jacobs, “\$3000 loafers” with hand-painted stars and a customized “\$6000” belt which form an important part of the plot. Besides, *Darjeeling* features a “Porsche 911 from the seventies” (74), an Apple iPod and an extensive set of equally absurd and elegant cases built by Louis Vuitton according to Anderson’s design. Rather than representing a celebration of abundance, these goods symbolize the imperfection inherent in life. For example, the initials of the deceased father of the Whitman brothers, stitched on the Louis Vuitton cases, remind of his painful absence. Also the Porsche reminds of the father. The fact that after three months in a garage it still has not been repaired presents an annoying counterpoint to its beauty. Furthermore, Francis’s expensive loafers do not attract the attention of the audience before they are stolen by a shoeshine boy on the market. The stolen shoe could be regarded as another symbol for the absence of order and perfection. The fact that after the theft Francis wears two shoes of different pairs also expresses this notion. In spite of all these instances of symbolism which carry critical overtones, the sight of the above-mentioned luxury goods contribute to the

elegance which is typical of *Darjeeling*. The audience are neither likely to look upon these items with disdain, as they have to admire the elegance and refinement of the selected props – a feeling which might stir up the desire for a life of luxury. On the other hand, the audience are denied the opportunity to uncritically enjoy the aesthetic wealth of the props since ironizing, denaturalizing tendencies subvert too intensive an emotional involvement on the part of the audience.

Naturally, the above-mentioned plot devices, such as ceremonies, spirituality, religion, the promise of consumption, etc., can be understood simply as elements of the narration or as objects of amusement. However, as has been shown, it seems obvious that the oscillation between an attitude of hope, which entails the faith that reality is characterized by order and purpose, and an attitude, which considers all events as arbitrary and, thereby, life as ultimately pointless, is the predominant motif of *Darjeeling* as well as other films directed by Anderson. Along with the use of specific ways of representation, some plot devices, such as religions, institutions and ceremonies are portrayed in a way which makes it seem possible that this attitude of hope is appropriate. At the same time, also tendencies are present which subvert these hopes and expectations. From the tension which results from these contradictory tendencies, a kind of tone arises which is typical of the quirky film.

5. A Metamodern Way of Viewing and Listening

There's a fine line between fishing
and just standing on the shore like an idiot.

– Steven Wright (Letterman)

The present chapter deals with the consumption of the quirky film in the style of Wes Anderson. We start from the assumption that it is justified to speak of a unique quirky mode of viewing and listening which shapes the relationship between the audience and the film. Evidently, the structural oscillations which characterize Anderson's films have a strong influence on this relationship. An analysis of the process of viewing and listening provides an insight into how, why and by whom quirky films are consumed. In connection with these questions, the metamodern attitude is of great importance as it has a strong impact on the relationship between the audience and the film.

5.1. Gratification Provided by the Quirky Film

If we assume that spectators are guided by a desire for a certain kind of gratification they wish to gain by watching a film, the question arises: Which kind of gratification does the consumption of a quirky film provide? To begin with, it needs to be clarified as to whether the quirky film presents an elitist entertainment. With regard to this question, Hettich maintains that the films she refers to as melancholic comedies are characterized by their “violation of the conventional genre expectations of many cinema-goers” (Hettich 104). In addition to their distinctive types of tone and visual style (cf. 3.2) also these transgressions add to the gratification quirky films provide. In consequence, melancholic comedies allow the spectators to experience themselves as insiders who are able to identify genre expectations as well as transgressions of these expectations (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, the audience can obtain gratification from the fact that they are aware of the numerous intertextual and autoreferential allusions. For this reason some spectators could consider themselves part of an in-group. This perception of

inclusion may result in a feeling of superiority towards those who cannot reveal this hidden layer of meaning. The resulting potential for self-reassurance may add to the popularity of the quirky film. It is plausible that quirky films provide such an “elitist” type of gratification. However, it seems this can only be true for a minority of the audience as the popularity of the quirky film would seem to contradict the notion that most of the gratification it provides is exclusively accessible to film enthusiasts, insiders and film-makers themselves.

As has been discussed in section 3.3, the majority of quirky films are produced with financial assistance by the major production companies or by their subsidiaries. While the artistic freedom of Indiewood directors is more pronounced than that found in mainstream productions and the resulting works tend to be more challenging and ambitious, audience appeal and, thus, financial success is still one of the main aims of the stake holders. For this reason it does not seem sensible that quirky films do only aim at “experts” as such an exclusive definition of the target group would certainly not justify the financial support by the backers, namely the major production companies. Therefore, this potential of self-reassurance does not represent a comprehensive explanation for the attention quirky films receive.

In the following, it will be argued that the attraction of the quirky film is due to the fact that it reflects an attitude towards reality which is becoming increasingly popular among a significant share of Western audiences: the quirky sensibility. This leads me to the assumption that its gratification arises among others from the fact that the quirky film demonstrates a sensibility which – apart from the precursors of the quirky film – has not found expression and thereby fulfills a need for a new interpretation of reality. Hence, quirky films can be understood as instruments which provide the audience with the opportunity to align themselves with or against.

A quirky film, just as any other cultural artifact, adds to the multitude of existing representations. By watching, a relationship between the film and the audience is formed. The spectator finds herself vis-a-vis the film both in a spatial and an emotional sense. The resulting relationship constantly varies between a

number of emotions (e. g., enjoyment, disgust, etc.) but also between different amounts of intensity (e. g., sympathy/apathy, excitement/boredom, etc.). Some films leave a profound emotional impact. Others do not. One way or another, cultural artifacts influence the mental state of the audience, their emotions, attitudes or judgments by provoking them to adopt a certain perspective on the content of the screen. However, the relationship between the artifact and the spectator goes beyond being a process of identification whereby the spectator identifies with one of the characters. Also the tone and mood of the artifact are not simply assumed by the spectator.

From this perspective, it is remarkable that the structural oscillations which characterize the quirky film (cf. p. 47) and consequently influence the mental state of the spectator have the following effect: No matter which pole of a given oscillation is being represented, the relationship between the spectator and the audience remains unaffected. By constructing her standpoint in relation to the content of the screen, the spectator is affected by this oscillation. If, for example, her attitude towards a given plot element is characterized by approval, it is evident that by oscillating, the artifact also causes the mental state of the spectator to shift. In the opposite case, if the tone of a scene is in conflict with the mental state of the spectator, the latter is equally reversed by a tonal oscillation. If, for instance, a film evokes a feeling of hope and then shifts towards a tone characterized by cynicism, it does not matter if the spectator is aligned with the tone or not: Her mental state either shifts in unison with the film or in the opposite direction. In both cases, the mental state of the spectator is reversed by the tonal oscillation. From this effect it can be inferred that the gratification of the quirky film which is partially caused by these processes of alignment, opposition, identification and dissociation, is connected to its structural oscillations.

5.2. Nostalgia for a Real World

In the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the idea that truth evades human comprehension has increasingly been asserting itself – also within

the bounds of everyday culture. During these fifty years, several schools of thought have turned their back on what has been called a notion of “epistemic certainty” and have oriented themselves to an attitude which had appeared much earlier, e. g., in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche: the “destabilization of the univocity of meaning” (Aylesworth).

This shift in thinking did not only raise doubts about the human faculty of comprehension. It was reality itself which was put into question. A number of fundamental breakthroughs across several disciplines undermined the trust in the idea of a “real world”, e. g., Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle (Quantum Physics), Gödel’s incompleteness theorems (Logics), Tarski’s theorem on the undefinability of the truth predicate, Lyotard’s work on the *condition postmoderne*, Baudrillard’s concept of Hyperreality or Derrida’s *différence* (Semiotics). This paradigm shift also led to the conviction that we cannot ascribe absolute truth to any statement.

On the one hand, these insights have the potential to liberate thinking from restrictions of ideology which are thereby exposed as untenable and potentially dangerous. On the other hand, they go against the human desire for principles of thinking, for irrefutable facts which serve as a basis for our considerations, decisions and actions. Consequently, this process of “derealisation” is not only liberating (Aylesworth). Attempts to make generally valid statements or to formulate guiding principles of action can no longer be defended. As Aylesworth puts it: “all values, including ‘truth’ and ‘the new,’ collapse under critical appropriation.” It seems sensible to assume that this development provoked cynicism and melancholy.

As has been discussed in detail (cf. sections 3.2.1, 3.2.4, 4), this process of derealisation is portrayed in Anderson’s films. Their *mise-en-scène* frequently alludes to their own constructedness and thereby exposes its object of representation as an “effect of symbolic processes [...] technologically generated and coded before we actually perceive [it]” (Aylesworth).

In addition, the frequent intertextual references subvert the notion that the function of a work of art is to reveal an essential truth. Rather, they point to the fact that every artificial artifact is a copy of something which has always already

been a reproduction (cf. Aylesworth). Furthermore, the numerous autoreferential allusions which run through Anderson's work undermine the assumption that a fictitious work ought to represent the world truthfully and that an object of such a representation exists. Max Fischer's look into the camera presents a good example to illustrate this tendency: The perception of the audience is an illusion created by an interaction of the human senses and the cinematic technology. However, also the object of this illusion – the apparent fact that Max is standing on the stage – has always already been an illusion. His look towards the spectator alludes to this fact in a humorous way. This scene can be interpreted as a cynical comment on the illusory, tentative and unjustifiable nature of our ideas of reality. Apart from cynicism, the process of derealisation also becomes apparent from the plots of quirky films which frequently depict melancholy and lethargy (e. g., in *Tenenbaums*) as well as denial or suppression of the process, namely the hope for truth and authenticity in *The Life Aquatic* and the striving for existential insights in *Darjeeling*.

A conflict of the temptation to surrender to the instability of thought versus the hope to acquire an authoritative and guiding insight lies at the heart of the quirky sensibility. In Anderson's works, this conflict is reflected in the representation of several processes of construction. The characters of Anderson's films are constantly trying to stabilize their own identity (e. g., via the itinerary of the Whitman brothers in *Darjeeling*). Furthermore, the films depict the planning and execution of theft (*Bottle Rocket*), documentary films (*The Life Aquatic*) or plays (*Rushmore*, *Tenenbaums*). Via these processes, the characters create an autonomous space of thought where they can engage in their own version of reason which is based on unshakable and often idiotic premises (e. g., that a spiritual breakthrough can be planned). Thereby, the reasoning of the characters often takes the form of an absurd "private logic" which makes the characters appear quirky. There are innumerable examples for this in the four examined films, e. g., the cowboy hat wearing scholar and author whose behavior seems to be inspired by one of his novels, or Max Fischer whose distorted world view leads him to believe he could

make his fifteen years older teacher love him by having Latin reintroduced at Rushmore.

Although it could be assumed that the idiocy of the premises which these characters base their projects on as well as their final failure should turn the protagonists into a laughing-stock, their aim to fulfill their lives with an ultimately true or holy set of values is not ridiculed. While the tone of the mentioned films does not conceal the embarrassing nature of the characters' actions, their tone which oscillates between sympathy and cynicism does never take sides against their ambitions. Instead, it has even been argued that the nature of the representation of these characters provokes the audience to encourage them secretly in their quest for a reconstruction of reality (MacDowell, "Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility" 13).

Although the private logic on which Anderson's protagonists base their actions make them seem quirky, it does not allow the audience to feel superior over them. According to MacDowell, Anderson's

films do in fact strike at least a *partly* ironic attitude towards them; if they did not, it would not be suspected that characters might be behaving questionably, ridiculously or misguidedly in the first place, since the films would simply deny us this kind of perspective. [...] [T]he tones of Anderson's films often prompt us to view characters' schemes and achievements as perhaps comically absurd or potentially bound for failure – and thus open to a certain amount of ridicule – *at the same time* as they are treated with greater or lesser degrees of sympathy. (MacDowell, "Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility" 14)

By adhering to a private logic, an individual version of reason, Anderson's protagonists reconstruct a "real world" as they refuse to accept the perceived loss of reality mentioned above. If, however, their attempts to respond to these feeling of uncertainty in the face of the tentativeness of our existence and the unjustifiability of our reasonings fail, the protagonists can no longer decide nor act. In this context, the quirky sensibility is tied to melancholy. Since the characters cannot decide, they are forced to be idle. Especially in *Tenenbaums* this motif of melancholy and stagnation is at the center of the plot. In this context, melancholy is represented as a consequence of the opinion that any form of resistance against the loss of truth and reality is doomed to failure from the outset.

Even though these attempts are staged in a favorable light, Anderson's film do never indicate that an ultimate perspective on reality exists let alone the fact that such a perspective could be provided by a cultural artifact. The meaning making process of these film does hence not duplicate or reconstruct modernist, utopianist or historicist hopes. Nevertheless, the ambitions and the emotions characterizing Anderson's protagonists are portrayed in a believable, sincere manner inviting the spectator to align herself with their point of view. In an interview, Owen Wilson expressed this thought: "It's a world that Wes creates ... slightly artificial, but I think within that world the emotions and the feelings are very real." (Anderson, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*)

It can be concluded that in Wes Anderson's quirky films there is a critical, analytical tonal tendency which exists in opposition to a hopeful, idealistic one. On the one hand the films evoke hope and the characters are "cheered on". Quirky films adopt a favorable attitude towards the attempts of discerning or recreating reality as a basis of reasoning, decision and action. On the other hand, the trust of the spectator in the cinematic illusion is constantly being subverted. Both tendencies are two sides of the same coin which represents human behavior in the face of derealisation. While one side symbolizes the acknowledgment of the unjustifiability of the foundations of human reasoning, the other side alludes to the human ambition to discern the structure of reality or at least to reconstruct an individually valid "real world". Regarding the gratification provided by the quirky film, this means that the spectators who align themselves with the plot, the characters, the tone and the attitude of the quirky film (or in opposition to these elements) can feel both consoled or encouraged in their detached, cynical attitude.

5.3. Desire for a Life Filled With Meaning

While according to numerous grand narratives of modernism the history of mankind strives towards an ideal and ultimate goal which rectifies and integrates all existing views, attitudes and interests, the conviction that history should be understood as nothing but an "eternal recurrence" is typical of the postmodern

condition. The attitude that “history is the repetition of an unhistorical moment, a moment that is always new in each case” inevitably entails that the hope for progress and an essentially different, better future seems inappropriate (Aylesworth). The actions of an individual who resembles an elementary particle in this continuity of change may affect the universe. From a post-historicist perspective, however, it cannot help fulfill an ultimate purpose.

This conception of time and the resulting conclusion that facts and actions do not have an absolute meaning or purpose can be traced throughout Anderson’s work (cf. p. 78ff.). Particularly, Anderson’s peculiar use of jump cuts can be understood as a metaphor for this postmodern approach to time. Anderson usually bridges jump cuts using some dialog. While jump cuts are typically used to evoke disorientation or the feeling of discontinuation (Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* 254), here their function is to quickly advance the plot and to accelerate the diegesis. Hence, the jump cut makes the events on the screen unforeseeable – a feeling which corresponds to the aforementioned succession of “unhistorical moments”. However, Anderson also subverts this impression of contingency.

On the one hand, Anderson applies jump cuts in order to introduce arbitrariness into the cinematic illusion, since the jumps prevent the audience from anticipating what will happen. On the other hand, the technique does not confuse the audience because the jumps are bridged by dialog and no essential information is withheld.

Anderson’s use of jump cuts demonstrates among other things⁴ that he does not duplicate postmodern ways of representation. Instead, he always contrasts them with other cues. By simultaneously presenting and questioning postmodern mindsets, Anderson’s films express a metamodern attitude. This is also evident when we look at Anderson’s choice of stylistic devices.

⁴ Also on the level of the plot the impression of contingency is undermined as has been demonstrated in section 4.4.



Figure 23: A miniaturized theater in Tenenbaums alludes to the diorama-like quality of its visual style

The practices of bricolage or sampling are considered stylistic devices typical of postmodern art. Since it is often obvious that the elements which make up the style were originally created in another context, for another purpose, etc., the use of this device often leaves a heterogeneous impression. Such impressions of heterogeneity, disorder or randomness which can be the consequence of sampling and bricolage, however, have no place in Anderson's work, although his visual style is characterized by a combination of former styles and numerous intertextual references. To a certain extent, Anderson's visual style can be compared to a diorama. It is obvious for the audience that the worlds Anderson stages are filled with elements which have been taken from former eras. Yet, the overall picture Anderson creates is characterized by homogeneity, coherence and even excessive order. The inclusion of individual plot elements or props is never left to chance. The effects of each detail and of each seemingly decorative element seem exactly calculated.

Instead of an incoherent, arbitrary mixture of influences from varying sources, quirky plots and visual elements make up a structure of sense and purpose, a distinctive and unique teleology. The stylized intertextual aesthetics, the carefully selected props demonstrate a metamodern hope that a reconstruction of reality is not necessarily useless or bound to fail. Instead, Anderson creates his own fictional version of reality characterized by an individual order and truthfulness and presents it alongside the epistemological disorientation brought about by the loss of an inherent meaning of human existence. Although Anderson makes use of aesthetic practices which are considered typical of postmodernism, his works stage

a battle against the disorientation caused by one of its central points – the surrender of the notion of an absolute purpose of existence.

It seems sensible to assume that representing this confrontation brought about by the relativism which dominates parts of today's Western societies and the opposing human desire for a life filled with meaning is gratifying for the audience. Since this existential conflict is staged in an entertaining and humorous manner, quirky films reassure their audience and leave the feeling of being understood without appearing ridiculous or naïve.

5.4. Deepening Emotional Engagement

Apart from expressing nostalgia for a real world and a desire for a purposeful existence, quirky films provoke more emotional proximity to the protagonists than what is usual for comedies. As has been stated above, the protagonists are staged as quirky eccentrics whose decisions and actions are mostly doomed to failure. In addition, they are often depicted as ignorant and naïve. They can neither adapt nor learn from their mistakes. On the other hand, Anderson often employs cinematic measures which reduce the emotional distance to the protagonists. As has been discussed, these transformations are often realized by a change of the physical/spatial connection between the audience and the action, e. g., in *Rushmore*. Along with the distance of the protagonists to the camera, the emotional proximity to the audience is changed.

According to Vermeulen and van den Akker, the metamodern structure of feeling is characterized by an ongoing battle of a cynical, detached, postmodern perspective, whose gratification lies in the self-confidence caused by comprehending and “standing above it all”, versus a more emotional perspective. The latter is characterized by empathy, alignment or even identification with the characters. For Van den Akker and Vermeulen, this perspective is connected to “modernist hope” and “naivety” (“What Is Metamodernism?”). Similarly, on the visual level there is a transformation between proximity and distance which corresponds to this battle. At one point, the audience is motivated by such

structural variations to take sides with the protagonists. At another, it is motivated to laugh about them.

As has been explained above, the planimetric long shot is characteristic for the quirky film. It depicts the characters as if they were butterflies displayed in a showcase. This shot type puts the viewer into the role of a distant observer instead of provoking sympathy or identification. Then again, this detached perspective is subverted by another type of representation: Suddenly, the events on the screen can be seen through a character's eyes. Alternatively, the events are perceived from a close distance. What Vermeulen and van den Akker say about metamodern artists in general sheds light onto these scenes:

“What happens with these artists is that for a moment, they put on this sort of sincerity or earnestness, and it's just suspending irony. They know it's there, but for a moment they say 'I love you,' or for a moment they will say 'this is real.'” (Forbes)

How thoroughly many spectators deal with Anderson's films is demonstrated by a plethora of fan-art and fan-fiction which can be found on the Internet – the fictional sneakers especially designed for Steve Zissou's team have been copied by some fans and are currently even produced commercially (Team Zissou Shoes, San Francisco, CA). The motivation leading to these creative responses proves that quirky films cause an emotional engagement which is above average and that many spectators develop a strong emotional connection to the characters in Anderson's fictional universe. Also from this perspective, the representation and the consumption of the quirky film deviate from unemotional, detached meta-perspective which is often associated with postmodern art and cinema.

In conclusion, it can be said that Anderson's films demonstrate two conflicting tendencies which can be understood as a dichotomy of a modern versus a postmodern perspective: Hope, empathy and inclusion versus cynicism, emotional and spatial detachedness.

Conclusion

We did it, though, didn't we?
– Dignan in *Bottle Rocket* (1992)

Since the middle of the last decade, the term “quirky” has continuously been gaining popularity. Today, it is an integral part of debates about cinema, television, fiction and popular music. As regards marketing and distribution, it is applied to categorize cultural products. Recently, the concept has been introduced into film studies where it is regarded as a sensibility. The latter concept was used by Susan Sontag to describe the camp aesthetics and refers to a specific “way of feeling and perceiving” (MacDowell, “Notes” 2).

In the present thesis, Wes Anderson's films whose works are considered the most consistent and probably the most extreme manifestations of this sensibility served as examples which shed light on the quirky sensibility. In addition, the relationship between the quirky and the metamodern structure of feeling were revealed. Before, the etymological origins of the concept were traced back to the sixteenth century when “quirky” had another meaning as it signified “diagonal” or “horizontal.” The present-day meaning of the word “quirky” has only been common since the 1960s. Until the end of the 2000s, when it began to refer to a category of films, TV-shows, music and fiction, it was mainly used to describe persons and actions as “having or characterized by peculiar or unexpected traits or aspects” (Stevenson). Eventually, James MacDowell defined “quirky” as a sensibility and introduced it into film studies. Moreover, he began to analyze the nature of the “quirky film” according to tone, style, plot-devices and mise-en-scène. The analysis which forms the central part of this thesis continues his efforts.

In quirky films several recurring properties can be observed. On the level of the plot, Anderson's works deal with the confrontation of the individual with the absurdity of life. While his protagonists rebel against the absurd and strive for personal success, spiritual insights or romantic love, they also experience failure, resignation and melancholy. Furthermore, the themes of nostalgia and innocence

as well as illness and death are omnipresent in his work. The auteur's recognizable visual style is created by particular shot techniques, e. g., the planimetric long shot, excessively decorated sets and an approach to mise-en-scène which causes a supernaturally neat appearance. Among the types of humor which run through Anderson's films deadpan, comedy of discomfort (amusement about embarrassments and morbid allusions) and slapstick can be distinguished.

In order to improve our knowledge of the category of the quirky film, Anderson's predecessors, e. g., Mike Nichols and Hal Ashby as well as its context of production and distribution, which is called "Indiewood", were examined. The term "Indiewood" refers to a group of subsidiaries of big Hollywood production companies (Columbia, Universal, Walt Disney, etc.) which allow a degree of artistic freedom due to their financial and structural support. Nevertheless, this support aims at financial profits as well as certain image goals. This is why Indiewood productions differ significantly from independent films.

What Anderson's films have in common is that they embody a "quirky sensibility" which is connected to the metamodern structure of feeling. For the cultural studies scholars Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, Metamodernism presents a foundation on which the way is based how some Western communities feel and perceive in the early twenty-first century. This set of attitudes is neither modern nor postmodern and "negotiates between a yearning for universal truths but also an (a)political relativism, between hope and doubt, sincerity and irony, knowingness and naivety, construction and deconstruction." ("No More Modern: Notes on Metamodernism" 1-2)

To examine why Anderson's films are considered quirky and to demonstrate why they are related to metamodernism, four of his films were selected and analyzed: *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic* as well as *Darjeeling Limited*. It could be demonstrated that these films exhibit oscillations with regard to the four dimensions of space, time, truth/deception and purpose/arbitrariness.

Concerning the spatial dimension, an oscillation between the themes of openness and closeness, transparency and opaqueness as well as depth and two-dimensionality could be traced in *Rushmore*. At one point, space is represented

realistically via the use of camera work and cutting. Then again, space is denaturalized as it is portrayed in a two-dimensional way. As regards *The Royal Tenenbaums*, it was showed that the representation swings back and forth between two temporal modes: one characterized by velocity and variability, the other by staticity. Similarly, in *The Life Aquatic* two contradictory attitudes coexist with regard to the human faculties of comprehension. On the one hand, the film expresses the hope that it is possible for humans to gain insights into the truth via artificial artifacts or more generally by statements. On the other hand, this hope is also made an object of ridicule. Eventually, *The Darjeeling Limited* demonstrates an oscillation between two types of representation of reality. At one point the existence of meaning and purpose is implied, then again it is dismissed. Various stylistic properties and plot devices create tensions based on the conflict of two contradictory attitudes: first that the universe is structured by order and meaning and second that all events are arbitrary and, eventually, meaningless.

Finally, it was the aim of this thesis to identify a specific kind of viewing and listening which is typical of the consumption of the quirky film. In this regard, it was clarified why quirky films are consumed and what kind of gratification they provide. The central point is that the nature of the structural oscillations of the quirky film brings about the fact that the audience cannot escape the tonal cues provided by the films: Either they align themselves with how the events on the screen are represented or they watch from an emotional distance. Because of the oscillating nature of the representations, however, either such decision is bound to become obsolete quickly. This puts the audience into a metamodern state: Although quirky films use forms of expression and reconstruct attitudes which are usually regarded as postmodern the audience deepens their emotional engagement instead of remaining emotionally detached. Postmodern skepticism over the existence of one reality and an inherent meaning have reached parts of the popular culture. Anderson's audience is nevertheless encouraged to feel a desire for a real world and a life filled with meaning.

Bibliography

- Akker, Robin van den, Nadine Feßler, and Timotheus Vermeulen. "Etymology of the Term Metamodernism." *Notes on Metamodernism* 26 July 2010.
- . "What Is Metamodernism?" *Notes on Metamodernism* 15 July 2010.
- Akker, Robin van den, and Timotheus Vermeulen. "Notes on Metamodernism." *Journal of AESTHETICS & CULTURE* 2 (2010): n. pag. Web. 15 Jan. 2012.
- Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. London: BFI Publishing, 1999. Print.
- Anderson, Wes, Roman Coppola, and Jason Schwartzman. *The Darjeeling Limited (Screenplay)*. 2006.
- Aylesworth, Gary. "Postmodernism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Fall 2012. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 2012. Web. 3 Nov. 2012.
- Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction with Tutorial CD-ROM*. McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages, 2006. Print.
- . "Shot-consciousness." *Observations on film art*. Web. 16 Mar. 2012.
- Bose, Nandana. "The Darjeeling Limited. Critiquing Orientalism on the Train to Nowhere." *Mediascape: UCLA's Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* (2008): n. pag. Print.
- Browning, M. *Wes Anderson. Why His Movies Matter*. Greenwood Pub Group, 2011. Print. Modern Filmmakers.
- Cahoone, Lawrence E. *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2003. Print.
- Camus, Albert. "An Absurd Reasoning." *The Existentialist Reader: An Anthology of Key Texts*. Ed. Paul Macdonald. Routledge, 2001. 151–184. Print.
- Child, Ben. "After Wes Anderson's Fantastic Fox, What Next?" *the Guardian* 4 Nov. 2009. Web. 13 Jan. 2012.
- Febvre, Lucien. *A New Kind of History. and Other Essays*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. Print.
- Forbes, Alexander. "The Metamodern Mindset. A Study on Contemporary Reality." *berlin art journal*. 23 Mar. 2012. Web. 3 Oct. 2012.
- Gibbs, John. *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation*. Wallflower Press, 2002. Print.
- Gill, Miranda. *Eccentricity and the Cultural Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Oxford: OUP, 2009. Print.
- . "Rethinking Eccentricity." *University of Cambridge. Research Features*. Abstracts of New Publications. 1 May 2009. Web. 16 Feb. 2012.
- Harper, Douglas. "Quirk." *Online Etymology Dictionary* 2012.
- Hettich, Katja. *Die Melancholische Komödie. Hollywood Außerhalb Des Mainstreams*. Schüren Verlag, 2008. Print.
- Hirschorn, Michael. "Quirked Around." *The Atlantic* Sept. 2007.
- Hoad, Phil. "In Defence of Quirkiness." *the Guardian* 20 Nov. 2007. Web. 14 Feb. 2012.
- Hoad, T. F., ed. "Eccentric." *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* 1996.
- King, Geoff. *American Independent Cinema*. I.B. Tauris, 2005. Print.
- . "Definitions." *IndieFilm. A Site dedicated the study of American indie film*. Film Studies. 2012.
- . *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema*. I.B. Tauris, 2009. Print.

- Lidell, Henry George, and Robert Scott. "Μετά." *A Greek-English Lexicon*, on Perseus Digital Library 1940.
- MacDowell, James. "Defining 'Quirky'." *Alternate Takes. The dual-review film criticism site: first a spoiler-free review, then an in-depth Alternate Take*. Film Criticism. Web. 14 Mar. 2012.
- . "Notes on Quirky." *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* 1.1 (2010): n. pag.
- . "The 'Quirky' New Wave." *Alternate Takes. The dual-review film criticism site: first a spoiler-free review, then an in-depth Alternate Take* 21 July 2005.
- . "Wes Anderson, Tone and the Quirky Sensibility." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* (2011): 1–22.
- Marcus, George E. "On Eccentricity." *Rhetorics of Self-Making*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 43–58. Print.
- Meyer-Drawe, Käte. "Das Exzentrische Selbst." *Transitorische Identität: der Prozesscharakter des modernen Selbst*. Ed. Joachim Renn. Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2002. 360–373. Print.
- M F. "Need Good Quirky Movies Recommendations Please." *Yahoo! Answers*. 2009. Web. 20 Feb. 2012.
- Mill, John Stuart, Jeremy Bentham, and John Austin. *Utilitarianism: And, On Liberty: Including Mill's "Essay on Bentham", and Selections from the Writings of Jeremy Bentham and John Austin*. Ed. Mary Warnock. Wiley-Blackwell, 2003. Print.
- Neale, Stephen, and Frank Krutnik. *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- "No More Modern: Notes on Metamodernism." *Arthouse Squat Forum*. Curatorial Statement. 2011.
- O'Hagan, Sean. "Wandering Star." *the Guardian* 2 Oct. 2005. Web. 20 Feb. 2012.
- Orgeron, D. "La Camera-Crayola. Authorship Comes of Age in the Cinema of Wes Anderson." *Cinema Journal* 46.2 (2007): 40–65. Print.
- Perren, Alisa. "From Cynicism to Sentimentality: The Rise of the Quirky Indie." *Flow* 27 Feb. 2008. Web. 1 Feb. 2012.
- Pye, Douglas. "Movies and Tone." *Movies and Tone. Reading Rohmer. Voices in Film*. Ed. John Gibbs & Douglas Pye. London: Wallflower, 2007. 1–80. Print. Close-Up 2.
- "Quirk." *Merriam-Webster.com* 2012.
- Sconce, J. "Irony, Nihilism and the New American 'Smart' Film." *Screen* 43.4 (2002): 349. Print.
- Seitz, Matt Zoller. "The Substance of Style. A Video Series on Wes Anderson and His Influences." *Moving Image Source*. Film Criticism. 30 Mar. 2009. Web. 3 July 2012.
- Sesonske, Alexander. "Time and Tense in Cinema." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38.4 (1980): 419–426. Print.
- Smith, Greg M. "Local Emotions, Global Moods, and Film Structure." *Passionate Views: Thinking About Film and Emotion*. Ed. Carl Plantinga & Greg M. Smith. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 103–126. Print.
- Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation And Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966. Print.
- Stevenson, Angus, ed. "Quirky Adjective." *Oxford Dictionary of English* 2010.
- st.jwil. "Please List Good Quirky Indie Movies I Should Watch." *Yahoo! Answers*. Web. 14 Feb. 2012.

- Taylor, Jenny Bourne. "Structure of Feeling." *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* 2010 : n. pag. Print.
- Team Zissou Shoes, San Francisco, CA. "Zissou Shoes. The Best Place For Team Zissou Shoes." *Company Web Page*. 2012. Web. 26 Nov. 2012.
- TheBallDontLie. "What Films Paved the Way for Quirky Style?" *Boxden.Com - Stay First. Follow BX*. 17 Dec. 2010. Web. 14 Feb. 2012.
- Utichi, Joe. "Wes Anderson Talks Fantastic Mr. Fox. The Director on Moving into Stop-motion." *Rotten Tomatoes*. Film Criticism. 21 Oct. 2009. Web. 14 Feb. 2012.
- Valania, Jonathan. "Q&A: With Jesse Thorn, America's Radio Sweetheart." *PHAWKER.COM*. 15 Sept. 2009. Web. 8 Oct. 2012.
- Warf, Barney, and Santa Arias. "Introduction. The Reinsertion of Space into the Social Sciences and Humanities." *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Ed. Barney Warf & Santa Arias. Routledge, 2008. 1-10. Print.
- Weiner, Jonah. "Unbearable Whiteness." *Slate* 27 Sept. 2007.
- Wickberg, Daniel. "What Is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New." *The American Historical Review* 112.3 (2007): n. pag. Web. 22 Feb. 2012.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: OUP, 1977. Print. Marxist Introductions.
- . *The Long Revolution*. New York: Broadview Press, 2001. Print.
- "Zooey Deschanel Stars in 'Quirk Is Killing Indie Movies'." *The Frustrated Dinosaur* 11 Mar. 2009. Web. 14 Feb. 2012.

Films, Episodes from Television Series, and Other Visual Material

- Anderson, Wes. *Bottle Rocket*. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1998. Film.
- . *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. 20th Century Fox, 2010. Film.
- . *Rushmore*. Walt Disney Video, 1999. Film.
- . *The Darjeeling Limited*. 20th Century Fox, 2008. Film.
- . *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*. Miramax Home Entertainment, 2005. Film.
- . *The Royal Tenenbaums*. Touchstone Pictures, 2002. Film.
- . "Modern Life. Commercial for the 2012 Hyundai Azera." *youtube.com*. 21 Feb. 2012. Web. 16 Mar. 2012.
- . "My Life, My Card. American Express Commercial." *youtube.com*. 2004. Web. 16 Mar. 2012.
- . "Talk to My Car. Commercial for the 2012 Hyundai Azera." 21 Feb. 2012. Web. 16 Mar. 2012.
- . "Your Seamless World. Six AT&T Commercials." *youtube.com*. Sept. 2007. Web. 16 Mar. 2012.
- , and Roman Coppola. "Le Apartomatic Int Post Mastergrade 60. Stella Artois Commercial." *youtube.com*. 11 Oct. 2010. Web. 16 Mar. 2012.
- Letterman, David. "Late Night with David Letterman." NBC, 8 Jan. 1988. Television.
- Mother Theresa Can't Dive*. Music Video. 2010. mp4 video clip.
- Oxford Comma*. Music Video. 2008. mp4 video clip.

Appendix

<i>Title (Year)</i>	<i>Est. Budget</i>	<i>Production</i>	<i>Distribution⁵</i>
Adaptation (2002)	\$19M	Independent Collaborators	Columbia Pict.
Being John Malkovich (1999)	\$13M	Propaganda Films, Gramercy Pict. (affiliate of Universal Pict.)	Focus Features (FF, formerly called USA Films, affiliate of Universal Pict.)
Bottle Rocket (1996)	\$7M	Columbia Pict.	Columbia Pict.
Eagle vs. Shark	n/a	New Zealand Film Commission and Independent Collaborators	Miramax (Walt Disney)
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)	\$20M	FF	FF
Garden State (2004)	\$2.5M	Independent Collaborators	FSP
I ♥ Huckabees (2004)	\$22M	Fox Searchlight Pict. (FSP), Scott Rudin Productions, etc.	FSP
Little Miss Sunshine (2005)	\$8M	FSP	FSP
Me, You and Everyone we Know (2005)	n/a	Independent Collaborators, IFC Films, FilmFour	IFC Films
Napoleon Dynamite (2004)	\$400K	FSP, Paramount Pictures, MTV Films	FSP
Rushmore (1998)	\$20M	American Empirical Pictures (AEP, Wes Anderson's production Company), Touchstone Pictures (TP)	Buena Vista Pict. (BVP)
The Darjeeling Limited (2007)	\$17.5M	FSP, AEP	FSP
The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou (2004)	\$50M	AEP, TP	BVP
The Royal Tenenbaums (2001)	\$21M	TP	BVP
The Science of Sleep (2006)	\$6M	Partizan Films, Gaumont, France 3 Cinéma, Canal+	Warner Independent Pict.
Thumbsucker (2005)	\$4M	FSP	FSP

Table 2: Production/distribution data for selected quirky films (source: IMDB.com)

⁵ Theatrical Distribution in the USA

Abstract in German • Zusammenfassung

Seit dem Ende des letzten Jahrzehnts hat ein Schlagwort sich immer mehr verbreitet und ist schließlich unvermeidlich geworden, wenn im englischsprachigen Raum über Filme debattiert wird. Heute wird der englische Begriff „quirky“ (in etwa „schrullig“, „verschroben“, „sonderbar“) nicht nur als eine Kategorie verwendet, die zur Vermarktung von Filmen, Serien, Büchern oder Popmusik dient, sondern er wird auch im filmwissenschaftlichen Diskurs verwendet, wo er für eine Sensibilität im Sinne Susan Sontags steht: für eine besondere Weise des Denkens und Erfahrens.

Das Werk Wes Andersons, dessen Arbeiten von vielen Filmwissenschaftlern als die nachdrücklichste und wohl extremste Manifestation der „quirky sensibility“ aufgefasst wird, soll in der vorliegenden Arbeit als Beispiel dienen, um diese Sensibilität eines genaueren Blicks zu würdigen. Darüber hinaus wird auch die Verwurzelung des „quirky“ in der Metamoderne aufgedeckt. Zuvor wird jedoch der etymologische Ursprung des Begriffes beleuchtet, der bereits im 16. Jahrhundert Verwendung fand, damals jedoch noch einen anderen Bedeutungsinhalt aufwies, der dem deutschen „quer“ entsprach.

Im gegenwärtigen Sinn wird der Begriff „quirky“ erst seit den 1960ern verwendet. Bis zum Ende der 2000er, als er begann als Kategorie für Filme, Musik und Bücher eingesetzt zu werden, beschrieb er die Eigenschaften „eigenartig“, „sonderbar“, „schrullig“, usw. Schließlich definierte James MacDowell den Begriff für die Verwendung im filmwissenschaftlichen Diskurs.

Der „quirky“ Film, dessen hier vorliegende Analyse an MacDowells Bemühungen anschließt, zeichnet sich durch eine Reihe wiederkehrender Eigenschaften aus. So kreisen Andersons Filme in thematischer Hinsicht vor allem um die Konfrontation des Individuums mit dem Absurden und den menschlichen Versuchen dem Leben gerecht zu werden bzw. ihrer Kehrseite: Resignation und Melancholie. Andersons Protagonisten lehnen sich gegen das Absurde auf indem sie nach persönlichem Erfolg, spiritueller Einsicht oder romantischer Erfüllung streben. Auch Nostalgie und Unschuld sowie Krankheit und Tod sind im Werk Andersons allgegenwärtig. In

stilistischer Hinsicht, lässt sich bei dem Auteur eine wiedererkennbare Handschrift erkennen, die beispielsweise durch spezielle Aufnahmetechniken wie etwa der planimetrischen Totale oder durch eine von übernatürlicher Ordentlichkeit geprägter Inszenierung charakterisiert ist. Der Humor, der Andersons Filme durchzieht, speist sich aus trockener, verbaler Situationskomik, einem lustvollen Mitleiden bei Peinlichkeiten und Blamagen sowie morbiden Anspielungen. Doch auch klassischer Slapstick erheitert die Zuschauer von „quirky“ Filmen.

Für ein näheres Verständnis der Kategorie des „quirky“ Films werden auch Andersons künstlerische Vorläufer wie etwa Mike Nichols and Hal Ashby und sein wirtschaftliches Umfeld, das oft als „Indiewood“ bezeichnet wird, untersucht. Bei Indiewood handelt es sich um eine Gruppe von Töchtern großer Hollywood Produktionsgesellschaften (wie z. B. Columbia, Universal, Walt Disney, usw.), die durch finanzielle und organisatorische Unterstützung einigen künstlerischen Freiraum schaffen. Nichtsdestoweniger verbinden diese Unterstützer wirtschaftliche und imagemäßige Interessen mit ihrem Engagement. Andersons Filmen ist gemeinsam, dass sie einer „quirky“ Sensibilität zum Ausdruck verhelfen, welche mit dem Begriff der Metamoderne in Verbindung steht.

Die Metamoderne ist für die beiden Kulturwissenschaftler Timotheus Vermeulen und Robin van den Akker ein Rahmen, der dem Empfinden in Teilen der Westlichen Zivilisation des frühen 21. Jahrhunderts zugrunde liegt und der oszilliert zwischen einer Sehnsucht nach Wahrheit und Bewusstheit der Kontingenz, Hoffnung und Zweifel, Aufrichtigkeit und Ironie, Empathie und Distanziertheit sowie Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Um zu untersuchen wie die Empfindung des „quirky“ in Andersons Werk hervorgerufen wird und seinen Zusammenhang mit dem Metamodernen aufzudecken, wurden vier seiner Filme herangezogen: *Rushmore*, *Die Royal Tenenbaums*, *Die Tiefseetaucher* sowie *Darjeeling Limited*. Bei dieser Auswahl konnten anschließend in Bezug auf vier Dimensionen räumliche, zeitliche, epistemologische und teleologische Oszillationen festgestellt werden.

In Hinblick auf die räumliche Dimension lässt sich in *Rushmore* eine Pendelbewegung zwischen Motiven der Offenheit und Geschlossenheit, der Transparenz und der Undurchsichtigkeit sowie der Tiefe und der Zwei-

dimensionalität ausmachen. Zum einen wird der Raum durch den Einsatz der Kamera und des Schnitts realistisch dargestellt. Dann wieder wird er als flächig dargestellt und auf diese Weise denaturalisiert. In Bezug auf *Die Royal Tenenbaums* konnte gezeigt werden, dass sich Phasen, die Veränderlichkeit zum Ausdruck bringen, abwechseln mit solchen, die statisch erscheinen. Analog dazu lässt sich in *Die Tiefseetaucher* die Koexistenz zweier sich widersprechender Motive feststellen, welche die menschliche Erkenntnisfähigkeit betreffen. Zum einen wird die Hoffnung ausgedrückt, dass Menschen durch künstlerische Artefakte oder auch im Allgemeinen dazu fähig sind, Wahrheit zu erkennen. Andererseits wird aber auch Häme über diese Zuversicht zum Ausdruck gebracht. *The Darjeeling Limited* hingegen weist eine Oszillation auf, die einmal die Bedeutung und ein andermal die Bedeutungslosigkeit der menschlichen Existenz ins Zentrum rückt. Verschiedene thematische und stilistische Merkmale erzeugen dabei Spannungen, denen der Konflikt zweier Auffassungen zugrunde liegt: dass das Universum von Ordnung und Sinn erfüllt ist bzw., dass alle Ereignisse willkürlich und letztlich sinnlos sind.

Eine weitere Aufgabe beim Versuch, den "quirky" Film zu verstehen, ist die Suche nach einer Art des Schauens und Hörens, die dem Genuss dieser Art von Filmen eigen ist. Zentral ist hier, dass die Natur der oben beschriebenen Oszillationen dazu führt, dass das Publikum sich dem Geschehen nicht entziehen kann. Beim Betrachten eines "quirky" Films bestehen die Möglichkeiten, sich empathisch an den Repräsentationen auszurichten oder aber in eine kritische Distanz zurückzuweichen. Durch die oszillative Art der Repräsentation jedoch wird jede diesbezügliche Entscheidung bald wieder hinfällig. Dieser Umstand bewirkt, dass das Publikum sich in einem metamodernen Dazwischen befindet. Obwohl Haltungen, die weithin der Postmoderne zugerechnet werden heute bis in die Alltagskultur vorgedrungen sind, empfindet das Publikum beim Betrachten von Wes Andersons Filmen eine Nostalgie nach einer wahren Welt, eine Sehnsucht nach einem sinnerfüllten Leben und eine Vertiefung des emotionalen Engagements.

Curriculum Vitae

Name	Stefan Heiden
Geburtsdatum	7. August 1984
Nationalität	Österreich

Berufliche Erfahrungen

2002 bis 2004	Private Nachhilfe an Mitschülerinnen und Mitschüler der BHAK Linz (Englisch, Mathematik, Wirtschaftsinformatik)
08/2002	Ferialpraktikum bei der Oberbank St. Martin bei Traun
10/2004 bis 09/2005	Zivildienst in einem Linzer Seniorenzentrum
seit 05/2011	Lehrkraft bei <i>LernQuadrat OG/Bildungsmanagement GmbH</i>
seit 08/2012	Gesellschafter der Stefan Heiden OG deren Gegenstand schulbegleitender Nachhilfe- und Förderunterricht ist.

Studium

10/2005 bis 09/2006	Lehramtsstudium Englisch und Französisch
ab 10/2006	Lehramtsstudium Englisch und Philosophie & Psychologie
ab 03/2008	Diplomstudium Anglistik und Amerikanistik
02/2009	Abschluss des ersten Abschnitts meines Lehramtsstudiums Englisch und Philosophie & Psychologie
ab 03/2009	Bachelorstudium Medieninformatik

Schulbildung

09/1991 bis 07/1995	Besuch der öffentlichen Volksschule Leonding
09/1995 bis 07/1999	Besuch des Bundesrealgymnasiums Linz Fadingerstraße
09/1999 bis 06/2004	Besuch der Bundeshandelsakademie Linz Rudigierstraße Schwerpunkt: Marketing in englischer Sprache Thema der Projektarbeit: „rockArt – Organisation und Durchführung eines Rockkonzerts im Posthof Linz“