

## CHAPTER 2

# The Wes Anderson brand: New sincerity across media

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Wes Anderson's films are dominated by an aesthetic-affective response called 'new sincerity', a contemporary sensibility based on dynamic tension between two opposing forces: sincerity and irony. The values embodied in new sincerity are not located in sincerity or irony taken separately, or in rejecting one in favour of the other, but only emerge from their synthesis – more specifically, from their oscillation or alternation. Raymond Williams's concept of the 'structures of feeling' embodies a similar tension based on the synthesis of formal structures and transitory experiences:

We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension.<sup>1</sup>

For Williams, literature constitutes a 'laboratory' of new structures of feeling, a claim we can also extend to narrative cinema, for film narratives synthesize new structures and experiences. Everyday lived experience only becomes visible when mediated through an abstract symbolic system such as writing or film, which means experience is understood retrospectively, when fixed in a symbolic structure. Everyday experience is not purely individual, private or subjective but constitutes an integral part of the collective social fabric

of everyday life. Like ‘structures of feeling’, ‘new sincerity’ is a synthetic and collective mode of knowing.

In this chapter I argue that, first, Anderson creates a storyworld that elicits an aesthetic-affective response called new sincerity and, second, this response migrates across multiple (official and unofficial) media platforms and into the everyday reality of the film audience, some of whom are transformed into fans. Anderson’s storyworld is therefore transmedial in that its new sincerity is not confined to his films but migrates to other media. Storyworld also influences fan behaviour like ‘cosplay’, a form of performative self-branding whereby fans imaginatively pretend to be film characters by dressing up in their costumes.<sup>2</sup> I investigate Anderson’s new sincerity storyworld by analysing *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and by examining the transmedial migration of this storyworld on several levels: from Anderson’s extension of it in his TV advert *Come Together* (2016), to fans extending it in their own artworks (‘An Unpaid Intern’ (2017) by painter Matt Linares), to fans modifying their everyday behaviour via cosplay. I therefore adopt a broad definition of transmedia, one that includes the migration of a fictional storyworld not only across several media platforms but also across the fiction/nonfiction border into the practices of everyday life.

## Inhabiting storyworlds

‘Storyworld’ names an abstract totality consisting of all the possible permutations of narrative events, only some of which are manifest in individual filmic texts. Anderson’s storyworld is an abstract totality encompassing everything fictionally possible in all his films, although each film represents only part of that storyworld. Narratives create worlds, not just a sequence of divisible events; each narrative text therefore implies a larger fictional world beyond the boundaries of (or distinct from) the manifest text. Storyworld is an emergent quality arising from codes and narrative structures but is not reducible to them.

Furthermore, a storyworld is not autonomous but depends on the audience’s affective and emotional response – a type of aesthetic engagement that determines whether or not they can imaginatively inhabit that storyworld. David Herman argues that ‘interpreters of narrative do not merely reconstruct a sequence of events and a set of existents, but imaginatively (emotionally, viscerally) inhabit a world in which, besides happening and existing, things matter, agitate, exalt, repulse, provide grounds for laughter and grief’.<sup>3</sup> Inhabiting a fictional storyworld is a two-way process: imaginative projection into a film’s fictional world and the expansion of that fictional storyworld across several media and into daily life, where it functions as a collective resource for structuring everyday

experience. Film theorists have already developed the first idea – in the psychoanalytic theories of identification (Christin Metz) and suture (Jean-Pierre Oudart; Stephen Heath)<sup>4</sup> and in cognitive theories of sympathetic and empathetic engagement with characters.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I work my way towards the second idea, particularly the expansion of storyworld across several media platforms.

## Subsystem, system and supersystem

Systems theorists (like Mario Bunge) developed a model of reality comprised of three levels – subsystem, system and supersystem – nested inside one another.<sup>6</sup> Renira Rampazzo Gambarato developed a theory of transmedia storytelling from this model: ‘A transmedia project can be characterized as a supersystem that incorporates a series of complex objects, its systems and subsystems, in the process of unfolding content and evolving the storyworld.’<sup>7</sup> Storyworld is an emergent system generated from the integration of multiple subsystems; it can in turn migrate into the realm of the supersystem. Anderson’s distinctive brand identity can be understood in terms of this abstract nested model of subsystem, system and supersystem.

### Subsystem

Anderson’s subsystem refers to individual codes, themes and values, including the specific pattern of distributional functions that create his distinctive storylines; the indices that create idiosyncratic character traits (e.g. characters who possess quirky eccentricities based on the tension between the hypocrisy many of the male characters manifest in their public personas and the sincerity they manifest in their inner lives); and a peculiar visual style, or *mise en scène*.

From the numerous analyses of Anderson’s visual and aural style,<sup>8</sup> we can identify the following eight characteristic components of Anderson’s *mise en scène*: (1) Tableau shots: ‘A static, flat-looking, medium-long or long ‘planimetric’ shot [...] that appears nearly geometrically even, depicting carefully arranged characters, often facing directly forward, who are made to look faintly ridiculous by virtue of a composition’s rigidity (seen particularly plainly in Anderson’s character introductions).’<sup>9</sup> The tableau shot becomes an integral part of Anderson’s film-making from *The Royal Tenenbaums* onwards. Via this tableau shot, Anderson’s camera develops a specific strategy – what Jeffrey Sconce calls the ‘clinical observation’ of eccentric characters.<sup>10</sup> (2) Close-ups of characters (still facing forward): The

close-up typically shows the character (like Bill Murray in *Rushmore* (1998)) with a deadpan expression.<sup>11</sup> (3) Overhead shots in which the direction of the camera's look is perpendicular to the horizon, which is achieved when the camera points straight down – either at objects (usually on a table) or characters lying down.<sup>12</sup> (4) Within the tableau shots, there is a general lack of camera movement, which helps to convey a precise, static quality to the film (although this applies more to his earlier films – later films use more camera movement). When movement is introduced into a shot, it becomes noticeable: either in the form of a 90-degree whip pan or extensive tracking shots (numerous examples exist in his later films, especially the credit sequence of *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012)). (5) Anderson's early films contain at least one montage sequence. In the montage the images are unified by an abstract theme and are accompanied by a song.<sup>13</sup> In *Rushmore*, a montage sequence accompanied by the song 'Making Time' (1967) by The Creation depicts Max's (Jason Schwartzman) membership to many clubs; in *The Royal Tenenbaums* a montage sequence accompanied by 'Judy is a Punk' (1976) by the Ramones depicts Margot's affairs and so on. Lara Hrycaj uses Claudia Gorbman's term *auteur mélomane* to label Anderson a director with a passion for music.<sup>14</sup> (6) Brief slow motion shot (in all films, except *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009) and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014)). (7) Centred framing, or a proclivity towards symmetrical composition, which has been explored in Kogonada's exemplary video essay 'Anderson//Centered'.<sup>15</sup> (8) Kim Wilkins defines Anderson's dialogue as hyper-dialogue – the 'intensified, unevenly fluctuating, and often ironically inflected use of dialogue in the place of action'. She argues that hyper-dialogue 'stems from the presence of a deep, unspoken anxiety'.<sup>16</sup> Hyper-dialogue is new sincerity dialogue, which emphasizes the disparity 'between what is said – the dialogue – and what is felt – the anxiety'.<sup>17</sup>

Anderson's film style broadly serves the themes of his stories. In Adrian Martin's terms, this type of film style falls into the category of expressionist (rather than classical or mannerist) *mise en scène*.<sup>18</sup>

## System

A system consists of a set of internally organized subsystem components. Anderson's storyworld combines codes, themes and values from his subsystems into an integrated system. The focus falls on the combination of subsystems manifest in all of his films. Although a storyworld is not reducible to the components in its subsystems, it is nonetheless dependent on those components. The storyworld and the new sincerity affects it generates are emergent concepts that develop out of the relation between the subsystem components, plus the audience's imaginative and affective engagement with the storyworld.

Like a select group of other contemporary transmedia directors, Anderson's storyworld has become a brand that exceeds the boundaries of his films. The codes and values embedded in and the affective responses to his films are no longer confined to the films themselves but are expanded, transformed and manifest in other media and in fan-based products. This leads to the third level: supersystem.

### **Supersystem**

Anderson's storyworld brand is transmedial, for his storyworld extends into other media platforms: for example, his TV ads, officially sanctioned online media such as websites and trailers, the design of a café (Bar Luce) in Milan, plus unofficial fan-generated content such as fan magazines, parodies, recut trailers, merchandise (cards, posters, t-shirts and film props), cosplay and art exhibitions are based on his films. Peter Bradshaw identifies 'an online cottage industry of mini pastiches, with a *Shining* mashup; an X-Men spoof; a *Forrest Gump* skit; a State of the Union sketch from CNN's news team; and SNL's glorious quasi-horror film *The Midnight Coterie of Sinister Intruders*. The three-minute Anderson spoof is now almost an accepted genre.'<sup>19</sup> Bradshaw discusses Anderson's three-minute H&M Christmas advert *Come Together* (2016), exclaiming that it looks like an Anderson imitator made it. This, in part, is because it appears to be a mini pastiche of *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), for both are set on a train, both involve 'coming together' (three brothers in *The Darjeeling Limited*, train passengers in the advert) and both star Adrien Brody, this time playing a train conductor who has to inform passengers that the train is delayed and will not get them home for Christmas. But, most importantly, both elicit from the viewers the same affective new sincerity response. It is the new sincerity dimension of Anderson's storyworld that migrates across to the advert. The Anderson oddball characters who inhabit his storyworld are present on the train, including a father figure (Brody) and a young orphan boy (most of Anderson's heroes are orphans). The pastiche is also evident in Anderson's exaggeration of his own film style (his tableau compositions are more stark and symmetrical and he amplifies the movements of his tracking shots); the script contains snippets of new sincerity dialogue; he adds 1970s Rock music (John Lennon's 'Happy Xmas (War Is Over)' (1971)); and he creates a 'group shot' – happy ending infused with sincere, naïve sentimentality (which was prevalent in his earlier films but less frequent in his later darker films).

Codes transition from the subsystem to the system, and storyworld transitions from the system to the supersystem. Affective and emotional processes make these transitions possible. Storyworld cannot therefore be reduced to its representational content but must also include the audience's

perception of and feelings towards that storyworld, for it is the audience's perceptions and especially their feelings that make possible the transition from system (storyworld) to supersystem (transmedia). The rules of and affective responses to Anderson's storyworld need to be maintained in these other media, in order to be considered an expansion of (rather than a transformation of or deviation from) that storyworld. For Mark Wolf: 'The growth and adaptation of a world [...] goes beyond narrative and may even have very little to do with narrative. Some degree of a world's aesthetics (the sensory experience of a world) and a world's logic (how a world operates and the reasons behind the way it is structured) must be carried over from one work to another or from one medium to another.'<sup>20</sup> What must be carried over from Anderson's films to other media is therefore the storyworld's aesthetics, internal logic and affective (new sincerity) response, which Anderson achieves in *Come Together*, although he risks self-parody by creating a mini version of his own storyworld.

The following sections of this chapter investigate the values and affects embedded in the new sincerity and examine how they migrate to other media and to fan behaviour.

## New Sincerity: Sincerity + irony

The meaning of sincerity overlaps with honesty, truthfulness and integrity and is the opposite of the fake, the false, lying and the hypocritical. Sincerity strives for transparency, for taking everything at face value. Irony is the opposite; it sets up a hierarchy between deceptive surface appearance and true covert meaning and rejects received opinions located on the surface. It creates distance from the immediate engagement with appearances – a detached intellectual judgement that enables one to critique appearances. The distance irony establishes undermines the so-called transparent surface truths.

Sincerity and irony are modalities that frame the expression of emotions, as when we say that someone expressed their emotions sincerely/ironically and so on. But this example also points to the distinctive quality of sincerity, made clear by Arthur M. Melzer when he argues that sincerity is not the same as honesty: 'The latter [honesty] involves a self-disciplined adherence to the truth or to one's word, the former [sincerity] an adherence to the self.'<sup>21</sup> The consequences of this distinction are far ranging. The key to sincerity is self-belief and self-interest, not an abstract criterion of truth or authenticity. Echoing Richard Sennett,<sup>22</sup> Melzer argues that the rise of sincerity in the latter half of the twentieth century is due to the 'demotion of the public, political realm of life and the concomitant elevation of the world of the personal, the private, and the intimate'.<sup>23</sup> Sincerity upholds the bourgeois

notion of the autonomous self, of independence and self-sufficiency (an affirmative form of humanism and individualism defined by an inner essence), and Romanticism's emphasis on self-expression, introspection and self-realization – a combination that encourages the narcissistic outpouring of the personal inner self. But sincerity can also lead to a complete withdrawal into the private realm if the public realm becomes intrusive and provokes anxiety. For these reasons, sincerity generates a sense of moral superiority, of the sincere person living an uncompromising life free from falsity and social constraints, and a withdrawal from public commitments if the realm of the personal and private is endangered.

Irony has its own form of superiority – a knowingness possessed by those who go beyond the surface meaning and reconstruct the covert opposite meaning. Irony therefore instigates a distancing or disengagement from the surface meaning; an ironic text does not mean what it says. For irony to work in a dramatic or narrative text, the audience needs to reject the literal (sincere) meaning, or at least put it in parenthesis, and instead needs to reconstruct the covert underlying opposite meaning (irony works only when the audience recognizes a dissonance between literal surface meaning and underlying covert meaning). This ironic knowingness and disengagement in turn leads to cynicism, suspicion, disbelief and mistrust of what others do and say.

'New sincerity' creates both distance and closeness; it oscillates between sincerity (closeness) and irony (distance) without being reducible to either. Sincerity undermines the cynicism and nihilism of irony, but irony undermines the earnest, transparent surface statements of sincerity. Irony and sincerity are co-present, but not harmoniously. Jay Magill argues that, in new sincerity, 'irony has the task of conveying sincerity',<sup>24</sup> suggesting that irony frames and incorporates sincerity, while painter Sean Landers talks about an alternation-oscillation between sincerity and irony: 'Looking for truth or purity in oneself through making art is like peeling an infinite onion. Each layer alternates between irony and sincerity. I feel more comfortable being ironic and the audience seems to dig my sincerity.'<sup>25</sup> Finally, Linda Hutcheon conceives of irony as 'an oscillating yet simultaneous perception' of stated (surface) and unstated (hidden) meanings.<sup>26</sup> In the new sincerity, sincerity and irony are at once interlocking and in dialectical tension, with the tension expressed via the continual alternation and oscillation of the two terms without resolution.

## Anderson's new sincerity

Like other new sincerity texts from contemporary literature (David Foster Wallace, Dave Eggers), music, poetry, art and television, Anderson's films

are organized around the tension between the two interlocking concepts of sincerity and irony. In the remainder of this chapter I examine the new sincerity in Anderson's storyworld and investigate how it migrates to other media platforms.

Sincerity and irony organize the narrative, thematic structures, style and, ultimately, the storyworld of Anderson's films. This type of organization differs from the binary oppositions embedded in classical Hollywood films and the imaginary resolution of those oppositions. In his structural analysis of John Ford's Westerns, Peter Wollen identified binary thematic oppositions, noting that 'the most relevant are garden versus wilderness, ploughshare versus sabre, settler versus nomad, European versus Indian, civilised versus savage, book versus gun, married versus unmarried, East versus West'.<sup>27</sup> 'Wilderness versus garden' is, according to Wollen, the 'master antinomy in Ford's films'<sup>28</sup> – and, in fact, one of the master antinomies of American culture, structuring its founding myth. A second related antinomy structures the relation between nomad (living in the wilderness) and settler (in the cultivated garden). Both pairs feed into the quest for the Promised Land, a major theme in Ford's films, realized through an imaginary resolution in which the settlers and their cultivated garden win out over the nomad and the wilderness.

Unlike Ford (and other classical Hollywood directors), Anderson's storyworld is organized around synthetic structures that continually juxtapose and combine oppositional terms (rather than repress one in favour of the other): the master trope of new sincerity (sincerity/irony) plus structures of feeling (structure/feeling) and intimacy/distance (rather than the Brechtian opposition between emotional engagement and distanciation-alienation). The new sincerity attempts to keep these values in balance. An imbalance in favour of sincerity can lead to naivety and sentimentality (evident in the group 'happy endings' of Anderson's early films, such as *Bottle Rocket* (1996), *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou* (2004), as well as his TV advert *Come Together*), while an imbalance towards irony can lead to cynicism (arguably a dominant trait of key scenes in Anderson's later films *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *Isle of Dogs* (2018)).

Anderson's films are specific in the way these synthetic structures infiltrate and organize the themes, narratives, characters and even the style of each film, which need to be studied scene by scene, together with the viewers' affective responses to those textual features. In his 'mood cue' approach to the analysis of narrative films, Greg M. Smith identifies 'the cinematic structures that appeal to audience emotions'.<sup>29</sup> He sets up a hierarchy between low-level diffuse moods and high-level short bursts of emotion and argues that they sustain one another in a fiction film. New sincerity functions more like a mood in Smith's sense, although it is not continuous; instead, new sincerity's alternation or oscillation signals a dramatic change in affect



and mood. Nor should new sincerity be identified with the film's boundary, which means we do not need to talk about new sincerity *films*, but new sincerity *moments*. We can therefore study Anderson's new sincerity affect in a wide variety of scenes in his films, but we can also examine how this affect migrates to other media.

## The Royal Tenenbaums

Smith argues that narrative film is structured to establish the spectator's 'consistent emotional orientation toward the text'.<sup>30</sup> In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, this orientation is established in part by Anderson's choice of music and by the voiceover in the opening fourteen minutes of the film narrating the long expositional scenes charting the childhood and current lives of the Tenenbaum family. First, the music. Anderson's music choice consists primarily of slow ballads with an acoustic guitar accompanied by a quiet whispery voice, ranging from The Rolling Stones ('She Smiled Sweetly' (1967), 'Ruby Tuesday' (1967)) – both played within the film's diegesis – to Elliott Smith ('Needle in the Hay' (1995)), Nick Drake ('Fly' (1971)), Emmitt Rhodes ('Lullaby' (1970)), John Lennon ('Look at Me' (1970)), The Velvet Underground ('Stephanie Says' (1968)) and Nico. Anderson uses the first two tracks from Nico's first album *Chelsea Girl* (1971) – 'Fairest of the Season' and 'These Days'.<sup>31</sup> The second song accompanies Margot (Gwyneth Paltrow) as she descends (filmed in slow motion) from the bus to meet Richie (Luke Wilson). Both characters are framed head-on, looking directly towards the camera. Carol Piechota skillfully analyses the song's relevance to the scene in terms of the mood it creates, its sincerity (especially Nico's vocal delivery) as well as the meaning of its lyrics (which express the sad melancholy that unites brother and adopted sister). Hrycaj also notes that '“These Days” was an inspiration for this scene and the film as a whole. In the audio commentary for the film, Anderson talks about how before he even had the script written, he had this scene in mind featuring a woman walking with a specific look on her face as “These Days” played on the soundtrack'.<sup>32</sup> Margot even looks and acts like Nico (blonde hair, never smiling, uninflected voice, liked to stay in the bath for hours). Anderson's choice of music (acoustic guitar and quiet whispery voice), which is generally interpreted as sincere and honest, acts as an emotional cue that supplements the ironical distancing created by the deadpan acting and clinical framing. In other words, the songs, in a productive tension with Anderson's visual style, create the affective state of new sincerity.

Second, the opening voiceover charts the early successes of the three Tenenbaum children as they entered the public realm as a tennis player (Richie Tenenbaum), financier (Chas Tenenbaum) and writer (Margot Tenenbaum, Richie and Chas's adopted sister) and also charts the separation of their

parents, Royal and Etheline Tenenbaum. As adults, the three Tenenbaum children withdraw emotionally into themselves, for different reasons. The successful businessman Chas (Ben Stiller) is the victim of irony, the sincere individual who remains on the surface, who reads everything literally, at face value. He adheres to what David Brooks calls the ‘dull, joyless, unimaginative, conformist’ bourgeois individual who aims only to make a profit and keep to his schedule.<sup>33</sup> He is also the victim of a tragic accident, the death of his wife in a plane crash, which leaves him emotionally stunted and withdrawn. The adult Richie and Margot separately follow the Romantic lifestyle, focused on introspection, rebellion and anti-materialism, unhindered by falsity, irony and cynicism. After initial success and recognition in their careers, they both retreat from public life into themselves due to their secret undeclared love for each other. Their withdrawal takes different forms: Richie goes travelling, while Margot remains at home, locked in the bathroom; their friend Eli Cash (Owen Wilson) represents the opposite – he performs the public role of a postmodern ironic writer. Etheline Tenenbaum (Anjelica Huston) is an archaeologist, while her husband Royal Tenenbaum (Gene Hackman) is characterized by a series of traits and narrative actions that initially define him as dishonest and insincere (he is a disbarred lawyer). He lives in The Lindbergh Hotel, estranged from the rest of the family. He embodies the quintessential new sincerity character: in the first half of the film his actions are governed entirely by self-interest and are coded as cynical, but in the second half he undergoes a transformation. When he runs out of money, he pretends to be terminally ill in order to return to the family home. But his wife’s new suitor, Henry Sherman (Danny Glover), an accountant and upmarket property owner, exposes his fakery. He phones up the hospital where Royal is receiving treatment. Before the telephone conversation ends, the scene shifts to Henry marching up the stairs accompanied by loud non-diegetic organ music. He gathers all the family members together next to Royal’s sick bed and exposes his deception, announcing that the hospital supposedly treating Royal closed down years before. Royal gets dressed and makes a short speech before leaving:

Royal swallows one of his pills. He turns and stands in front of everyone.

ROYAL (CONT'D)

Look. I know I’m the bad guy on this one, but I just want to say that the last six days have been the best six days of, probably, my whole life.

A strange, sad expression crosses Royal’s face.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Immediately after making this statement, Royal realized that it was true.

Royal begins to gather his possessions.

INT. HALLWAY. DAY.

Royal comes out of Richie's room with his suitcases.  
Etheline stands at the end of the hall.<sup>34</sup>

Royal gives his estranged wife Etheline (Angelica Huston) two reasons for the deception: in a sincere voice he says he thought he could win her back, and he ran out of money and needed a place to stay.

The new sincerity is not only evident in the characters and their actions but also in the way Anderson films the scene. At the beginning of the excerpt, Sherman's investigations create dramatic irony by placing the audience in a quasi-omniscient position: his discovery is hinted at but remains secret (the outcome of the telephone call is cut before his discovery is disclosed to the audience). But the audience does experience an abrupt transition, a sudden change in action and sound: a direct cut from the motionless Sherman speaking quietly on the phone to the animated Sherman marching purposely upstairs accompanied by loud non-diegetic organ music sets a dramatically different mood. All intermediate action is eliminated, making the change in mood from one shot to the next all the more noticeable. The scene of revelation in the bedroom is standard: the liar is exposed in front of the whole family and ejected from the house. But the sudden return of the voiceover, the omniscient narrator expressing Royal's thoughts, is unusual (for the voiceover has not intervened in twenty minutes of screen time). Over the images of Royal's duplicitous actions and a short speech he gives, the narrator expresses Royal's thoughts to the non-diegetic audience, pointing out that his words are sincere (Figure 2.1). It is unusual that the narrator suddenly intervenes to spell out the sincerity of a character's words. The narrator's reliability is not in doubt;



FIGURE 2.1 *Royal Tenenbaum* in *The Royal Tenenbaums* (Wes Anderson, 2001).

his voiceover functions to encourage empathy and pity towards Royal, who has been experiencing a reversal of fortunes and has reached a low point in his life. The voiceover conveys to the film audience that Royal has undergone a moment of recognition, a sincere moment of self-knowledge (the narrator is informing us that Royal believes what he just said). Later scenes in the film reinforce this impression, where we see Royal acting in a more generous and sincere manner. There is a discrepancy between Royal's previous duplicitous actions and his thoughts in this scene, a discrepancy not evident to the characters within the storyworld but shared by the director, the extradiegetic narrator and the audience. In narrative terms, this scene represents a turning point in Royal's attitude, and the abrupt transition in mood (plus the intervention of the voiceover) makes this a powerful new sincerity moment.

The second example appears earlier in the film, when Royal first informs his estranged wife that he is terminally ill. Her response is immediate: she begins sobbing hysterically. Royal is taken aback by this display of emotion and partially retracts what he says ('I'm not dying, but I need some time'). In reaction, she changes her mood and hits him, before walking off, out of frame. He makes her return by repeating his initial assertion that he is dying. The scene ends with Etheline asking him if he is dying or not. He confirms in a weak unconvincing voice that he is in fact dying. In terms of character action and dialogue, this scene constitutes another exemplary new sincerity moment, due to the oscillation between Etheline's sincere emotional, compassionate reaction to Royal's illness and Royal's insincerity. Royal momentarily alternates from insincerity to sincerity when he experiences his wife's sudden outpouring of grief. This abrupt transition (also evident in the scenes where Sherman exposes Royal's fakery) transforms the mood of the shot, before Royal reverts back to his initial position, that he is terminally ill. At this early stage in the film, the audience is privileged into knowing that Royal is being thrown out of his hotel, but we also see him at the hospital in an inconclusive scene that suggests he is indeed ill.

But I want to focus on the way Anderson films this scene. The scene consists of four shots; the fourth one lasts ninety-eight seconds, and the camera remains locked down in a medium-long shot; it does not move (Figure 2.2). The camera is not tied to character movement or to character emotions. It does not follow Etheline as she walks away from Royal, even when she walks off screen. And there is no camera movement or cut to a close-up when she becomes upset on screen. In other words, the camera does not become close and intimate with the characters but remains still and at a distance. Anderson does not tie the camera to the characters but observes them from an aloof, detached position. (This is an example of what Jeffrey Sconce calls 'clinical observation'.) The frame is important in this type of shot; it acts as a container, delimiting on-screen space but also masking off-screen space. The stillness of the frame in shot 4 in relation to character



FIGURE 2.2 *Etheline and Royal in The Royal Tenenbaums (Wes Anderson, 2001).*

movement (walking off screen, walking on screen) draws attention to the frame and its masking of off-screen space. Drawing attention to the frame distances and detaches the viewer from the storyworld, which contains a strong, sincere emotion expressed by one of the film's central characters. Film style therefore contributes to the new sincerity affect.

## The supersystem and self-modifying behaviour

We can finally work our way to Anderson's supersystem, the migration of his new sincerity affect to other media, by reviewing four ways spectators engage emotionally with films: (1) immediate evaluation of a film based on overall impression (enjoyment, pleasure and satisfaction); (2) identification with characters (especially via sympathy or empathy); (3) appreciation of film form; and (4) self-modifying behaviour.<sup>35</sup> The first three categories are familiar and well known; they are triggered by a film's subsystem and system (and Anderson's films are renowned for eliciting appreciations of their form and style).

The fourth category is transmedial: it operates at the same level as the supersystem and comprises of the creation of new texts and/or self-modifying behaviour. A popular activity involves producing artworks that are based on (and extend) Anderson's storyworld – including paintings, screen prints and sculpture, many of which are displayed at the 'Bad Dads' art exhibition the Spoke Art Gallery curates. In this annual exhibition, artists extract colour palettes, costumes, characters and props from Anderson's storyworld and present them in isolation (single portraits of prominent characters) or in new configurations. With regard to the latter, the pop surrealist painter Matt Linares created a painting called 'An Unpaid Intern' (2017), which is ostensibly a portrait of Suzy Bishop from *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012).<sup>36</sup>

It condenses into one image several character traits from the film (she is dressed as a raven and her hand is bandaged), but she is also holding a box of Mendl's cakes in one hand (*The Grand Budapest Hotel*) and the seahorse in a wineglass in the other (*The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*). She stands in water, which contains miniatures of the shark and submarine from *The Life Aquatic*, while in the sky we see the helicopter from the same film as it crashes. A small yellow lizard rests on her bandaged hand, another reference to *The Life Aquatic*. She wears one of Margot's dresses and her iconic fur coat, plus Margot's false finger, and the falcon Mordecai is perched on her shoulder (all from *The Royal Tenenbaums*). The Darjeeling train is in the background, as is Kristofferson, the young fox from *Fantastic Mr Fox* (2007), meditating and wearing a 'bandit hat' (a tube sock). A large tree dominates the background, together with three hills (*Fantastic Mr Fox*). The title of the painting refers to the interns aboard the ship *Belafonte* in *The Life Aquatic*.

'An Unpaid Intern' creates a hierarchy of knowingness: Anderson fans recognize the elements extracted from six of his films and the way they have been reconfigured into one static image, whereas non-fans see an unusual, slightly surreal portrait of a young woman. But both types of viewer will see a sinister portrait of a conflicted woman (for Anderson fans, a fusion of two alienated female characters – Suzy Bishop and Margot Tenenbaum) with a bandaged hand and a missing finger, surrounded by elements of death and destruction (the helicopter crash that kills Ned, the shark that killed Esteban, the submarine seeking revenge on the shark, the large tree the three farmers destroy, the small lizard that Zissou carelessly flicks away) but surrounded by symbols of hope (the young, naïve but always optimistic Kristofferson, the Mendl cakes, the seahorse that the young boy Werner gives to Zissou, the falcon that signifies the deep love between Richie and his adopted sister Margot). The painting therefore condenses into one image the two sides of Anderson's new sincerity storyworld: the sincere and the sentimental framed by the darker cynical and ironical elements.<sup>37</sup>

The audience's involvement with Anderson's new sincerity storyworld can go deeper. The phrase 'self-modifying behaviour' refers to the internalization of a storyworld's affective and emotional values, which goes beyond the production of artworks and beyond the psychological processes of identifying/sympathizing/empathizing with characters. 'Self-modifying behaviour' results in a reconfiguring of the spectator's behaviour, feelings and beliefs. Carl Plantinga calls this 'projection', 'in which a spectator's pro attitude toward a character spills over markedly into her or his actual life, leading to emulation and fantasy'.<sup>38</sup> Projection and self-modifying behaviour constitute a strong affective engagement with characters and their storyworld. To react affectively to a film always involves a first-person subjective component – the film is not an entity in itself ('This is an important film') but is significant with regard to how it relates to the



individual's personal world ('This film is important *to me*'). David Herman's list of the ways audiences imaginatively inhabit a storyworld – 'things matter, agitate, exalt, repulse, provide grounds for laughter and grief' – is relevant to delineating further how they react. Plantinga quotes Jackie Stacey on different types of fan behaviour, including pretending, resembling, imitating and copying.<sup>39</sup> Employing concepts from Judith Butler, Nicolle Lamerichs develops this idea further, arguing that cosplay, like drag, is performative.<sup>40</sup> Lamerichs conceives of cosplay as a performance that creates a new identity for fans – an identity that involves a crossover from fiction to physical reality. From this performative perspective, cosplay brings the fan's physical body into a closer, immersive relation to a fictional body. With projection, performativity, and self-modifying behaviour, the storyworld and fans' personal world merge.

The ideas of 'the supersystem' and of 'self-modifying behaviour' are based on the rationalist assumption that language and cognition do not passively record and reflect a pre-existing reality but that its grammar and semantics actively structure the individual's experiences and the meanings of reality. This rationalist assumption pervades cultural theory (including Raymond Williams's 'structures of feeling'), which argues that one perceives and understands reality through language, myth, fiction and fantasy (which is why cultural theorists analyse these discourses). Rationalists such as Kant argued that reality is perceived through a system of *a priori* concepts; the language analysis tradition of the twentieth century (including Saussure, Peirce and Sapir-Whorf) reworked Kantian epistemology to emphasize the role of language in structuring experience and meaning, a concept then expanded by semioticians to all systems of discourse. Claude Lévi-Strauss's important concept of symbolic efficacy demonstrates the power of language, rituals and other symbolic systems in shaping and modifying ideas and behaviour.<sup>41</sup> Lévi-Strauss gives the example of a Shaman helping a woman give birth via ritualistic storytelling, a notion, he points out, also prevalent in the West in the form of psychoanalysis, defined as the talking cure – a cure effected through words. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann expanded rationalism to sociology in their aptly titled book *The Social Construction of Reality*,<sup>42</sup> while Slavoj Žižek draws upon Lévi-Strauss and Lacanian psychoanalysis to argue throughout his work that perception and experience of reality are dependent upon fantasy (take away fantasy, he argues, and our sense of reality disintegrates).

Discourse, storytelling, myth and fantasy inform fan discourse surrounding Anderson's storyworld. The fans reify the imaginary fictional storyworld, turning it into their dominant reality (quite literally in terms of imitative merchandise, for the replicated objects that only exist in the storyworld become physical objects one can hold and keep in one's own world).

\* \* \*

I have delineated three levels of Anderson's world (subsystem, system and supersystem), listed four ways the audiences engage emotionally with films and linked up the second (identification with characters) and the fourth (self-modifying behaviour), respectively, with Anderson's storyworld and the new sincerity affect it elicits. I have argued that the fictional realm of the storyworld is created via affective engagement and that the new sincerity affect is *the* vital ingredient that migrates to other media (television, video mashups and painting) and to certain practices of everyday life, such as the creation of merchandise and cosplay. The new sincerity affect involves a sudden and dramatic oscillation between the values found in sincerity and those found in irony. Both sets of values are important to the success of Anderson's storyworld and to its migration to other media platforms, for irony prevents his films from becoming too sentimental and sincerity prevents them from becoming too cynical.



## Chapter 2

- 1 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.
- 2 'A radical form of an appropriation, enhanced agency, fandom, self-rule and identitarian practice is "cosplay" (costume + role playing), i.e. the practice of dressing up and pretending to be a fictional character.' Adriano D'Aloia, Marie-Aude Baronian and Marco Pedroni, 'Fashionating Images: Audiovisual Media Studies Meet Fashion', *Comunicazioni Sociali* 1 (2017): 12.
- 3 David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 119.
- 4 Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen* 16, no. 2 (1975): 14–76; Jean-Pierre Oudart, 'Cinema and Suture', *Screen* 18, no. 4 (1977/78): 35–47; Stephen Heath, 'Notes on Suture', *Screen* 18, no. 4 (1977/78): 48–76.
- 5 See, for example, Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, eds., *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, Emotion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Amy Coplan, 'Caring About Characters: Three Determinants of Emotional Engagement', *Film and Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2006): 1–19; Carl Plantinga, '“I Followed the Rules, and They All Loved You More”: Moral Judgment and Attitudes Toward Fictional Characters in Film', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (2010): 34–51; Margrethe Bruun Vaage, 'Fiction Film and the Varieties of Empathic Engagement', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (2010): 158–79.
- 6 Mario Bunge, *Treatise on Basic Philosophy. Volume IV: Ontology – A World of Systems* (Amsterdam: Reidel, 1979).

- 7 Renira Rampazzo Gambarato, 'Signs, Systems and Complexity of Transmedia Storytelling', *Estudos em Comunicação* 12 (2012): 74.
- 8 Carole Lyn Piechota, 'Give Me a Second Grace: Music as Absolution in The Royal Tenenbaums', *Senses of Cinema* 38 (2006): [http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/on-movies-musicians-and-soundtracks/music\\_tenenbaums/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/on-movies-musicians-and-soundtracks/music_tenenbaums/) (accessed 8 March 2019); James MacDowell, 'Notes on Quirky', *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* 1 (2010): 1–16; James MacDowell, 'Wes Anderson, Tone and Quirky Sensibility', *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 10, no. 1 (2012): 6–27; Elena Boschi and Tim McNelis, "'Same Old Song": On Audio-Visual Style in the Films of Wes Anderson', *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 10, no. 1 (2012): 28–45; Lara Rose Hrycaj, 'What Is This Music? Auteur Music in the Films of Wes Anderson', unpublished PhD thesis, Wayne State University (2013); Sunhee Lee, 'Wes Anderson's Ambivalent Film Style: The Relation between *Mise-en-Scène* and Emotion', *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14, no. 4 (2016): 409–439. Peter Kunze also points out that 'Robert Yeoman's cinematography has immeasurably impacted the visual style we too often credit to Wes Anderson alone'. 'Introduction: The Wonderful Worlds of Wes Anderson', in *The Films of Wes Anderson: Critical Essays on an Indiewood Icon*, ed. Peter C. Kunze (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 4.
- 9 MacDowell, 'Wes Anderson, Tone and Quirky Sensibility', 9. See also Lee, 'Wes Anderson's Ambivalent Film Style', 414–17.
- 10 Jeffrey Sconce, 'Irony, Nihilism, and the New American "Smart" Film', *Screen* 43, no. 4 (2002): 360.
- 11 Donna Peberdy, "'I'm Just a Character in Your Film": Acting and Performance from Autism to Zissou', *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 10, no. 1 (2012): 48, 50; Lee, 'Wes Anderson's Ambivalent Film Style', 431–7.
- 12 MacDowell, 'Notes on Quirky', 5; Lee, 'Wes Anderson's Ambivalent Film Style', 417–20 and 431–7. Francesco Casetti calls this the 'unreal objective shot'. *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, trans. Nell Andrew and Charles O'Brien (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 50. This type of shot is 'unreal' because it refers to unusual camera angles and is 'objective' or omniscient because it takes a God's eye viewpoint and cannot be attributed to any character in the diegesis (the spectator identifies with the camera's look).
- 13 Piechota, 'Give Me a Second Grace'; Boschi and McNelis, "'Same Old Song" '.
- 14 Claudia Gorbman, 'Auteur Music', in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, eds. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 149–62; Hrycaj, 'What Is This Music?'
- 15 Kogonada, 'Wes Anderson//Centered' (2014): <http://vimeo.com/89302848> (accessed 9 March 2019).
- 16 Kim Wilkins, 'The Sounds of Silence: Hyper-Dialogue and American Eccentricity', *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 11, no. 4 (2013): 412–13.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 417.
- 18 Adrian Martin, '*Mise en Scène* Is Dead, or the Expressive, the Excessive, the Technical and the Stylish', *Continuum* 5, no. 2 (1992): 87–140.

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- 23 Melzer, 'Rousseau and the Modern Cult of Sincerity', 5.
- 24 Jay Magill, *Sincerity: How a Moral Ideal Born Five Hundred Years Ago Inspired Religious Wars, Modern Art, Hipster Chic, and the Curious Notion That We All Have Something to Say (No Matter How Dull)* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 225.
- 25 Landers, in Magill, *Sincerity*, 190.
- 26 Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 66.
- 27 Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, revised edition (London: Secker and Warburg/British Film Institute, 1972), 94.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 29 Greg Smith, *Film Structure and the Emotion System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 31 The lyrics of the third song on the album, 'Little Sister' (not used in the film) suggest incest between a brother and a sister, one of the main themes in *The Royal Tenenbaums* (although Margot is Richie's adopted sister).
- 32 Hrycaj, 'What Is This Music?' 117.
- 33 David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 66.
- 34 Wes Anderson and Owen Wilson, *The Royal Tenenbaums* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 101.
- 35 David S. Miall and Don Kuiken, 'A Feeling for Fiction: Becoming What We Behold', *Poetics* 30 (2002): 221–41.
- 36 The painting is currently available at <https://spoke-art.com/collections/vendor?s?q=Matt%20Linares> (accessed 27 July 2018).
- 37 Other artworks from the 'Bad Dads' exhibitions are available on the Spoke website: <https://spoke-art.com/collections/bad-dads-prints> (accessed 27 July 2018).
- 38 Plantinga, '“I Followed the Rules”', 43.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 40 Nicholle Lamerichs, *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 211.

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- 42 Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966).