

CAMERA ANGLES AS MISE-EN-SCÈNE IN *THE WONDERFUL STORY OF HENRY SUGAR*

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Abstract

This study explores the use of camera angles as integral elements of *mise-en-scène* in shaping the visual identity of *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*, a short film directed by Wes Anderson. Rooted in the assumption that all cinematic representations carry expressive meaning, the study investigates how camera angles: eye-level, high-angle, low-angle, bird's-eye view, and Dutch tilt are contributed to constructing visual narratives and influencing audience perception. Drawing on the theoretical framework of *Mise-en-Scène: Within the Image*, which defines *mise-en-scène* as the totality of expressive content within a frame, this research views camera angles not as neutral tools, but as carriers of meaning shaped by compositional choices. The research adopts a descriptive qualitative method through content analysis, closely examining selected scenes from the film by observing the function and impact of specific camera angles in context. The findings demonstrate that eye-level shots dominate Anderson's style, reinforcing narrative neutrality and intimacy, while high-angle and low-angle shots reflect vulnerability and dominance, respectively. Bird's-eye views are used to evoke detachment, and Dutch tilts mark psychological tension or narrative shifts. Through symmetrical compositions and careful angle selections, the film establishes a stylized yet emotionally resonant visual language. Ultimately, this study affirms that camera angles, as *mise-en-scène* components, function beyond visual aesthetics, they serve as narrative devices that shape the viewer's emotional and interpretive experience, supporting the notion that every element within the frame is a deliberate and expressive cinematic choice.

Keywords: Camera Angles, Mise-en-Scène, Visual Identity, Wes Anderson, *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*

INTRODUCTION

Cinematography as a visual language holds the power to convey complex meanings through carefully planned *mise-en-scène* elements. *Mise-en-scène* is a term derived from French, meaning "putting in the scene," which refers to the direction of everything that appears within the frame of a film (Bordwell dan Thomson, 2008: 112). *Mise-en-scène* encompasses all visual elements within a shot, including camera angles, which contribute to the overall storytelling by revealing or concealing character dynamics and thematic elements (Guthrie, 2019)(Gibbs, 2015). Simply put, *mise-en-scène* can be defined as the



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arrangement or positioning of various elements within a film, such as organizing objects and determining the camera's position for filming (Syadian & Oktiana, 2021). Mise-en-scène plays a critical role in shaping the visual language and emotional resonance of a film. The term mise-en-scène refers to the fundamental aspects of cinematic representation, serving as the initial foundation for analysing how a film constructs and reflects meaning through its visual elements (Sikov, 2010). Therefore, the mise-en-scène aspect becomes crucial in exploring a film. Mise-en-scène includes everything visible within the camera frame, such as composition, lighting, costume, and camera angles, and forms the foundation for creating a distinctive visual identity in a cinematic work (Bordwell et al., 2019). In this context, the use of camera angles becomes essential in understanding and shaping audience perception in reinforcing visual elements.

According to Sikov (2010), in addition to controlling the distance between the camera and the subject, directors also use various camera angles to create a more expressive impression of what they are capturing. In this regard, Sikov identifies five types of camera angles in his book (see table 1 below), therefore several types:

Types of Camera Angle	Definition	Function
Eye-level Shot	Character's eye-level camera	Creates a neutral impression, suggesting equality between the viewer and the character.
Low-angle Shot	Camera from the bottom facing up	Elevates the subject, creating an impression of dominance or strength.
High-angle Shot	Camera looking down from above	Reduces the subject's size, creating an impression of weakness or vulnerability.
Bird's-eye View	Camera taken from a vertical overhead position	Shows a sense of detachment, isolation, or vulnerability
Dutch Tilt / Canted Angle	The camera is tilted along the horizontal or vertical axis.	Indicates emotional imbalance or tension.

Table 1. Sikov's Five types of camera angles

Researcher uses various types of camera angles to visualize scenes in *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*. This film is directed by Wes Anderson and adapted from a short story by Roald Dahl. Wes Anderson's distinctive visual style, characterized by symmetrical compositions, rich and vibrant color palettes, and aesthetically arranged imagery, makes this film particularly interesting to analyze through the use of camera angles as part of its visual identity construction.

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative research method. The qualitative research approach involves the process of collecting various data and factual information, which are then systematically described and analyzed using specific scientific techniques to generate interpretations related to the phenomenon under study (Suwendra, 2018).

This approach also enables the researcher to explore how the use of camera angles characterizes the uniqueness of the visual elements in Wes Anderson's film.

The data collection process was carried out through content analysis of the film *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*, by systematically observing and documenting the use of camera angles in each scene. Each scene will be analyzed for its function within the narrative structure and visual motifs, using screenshots and shot breakdowns as supporting evidence.

In order to validate the findings, the author has reviewed several previous studies that focus on similar areas of research. Therefore, there are a few studies that support the researcher's findings. First come from article entitled *An Analysis of Shot Types and Camera Angles in the Feature News "Transforming Scrap Fabric into Artwork" on the TVRI Jawa Barat News Program* written by (Firman & Nugroho, 2024). The results show that the combination of shots such as wide shots, close-ups, and over-the-shoulder, as well as high, low, and eye-level angles, play an important role in highlighting the message and uniqueness of the covered object. This study emphasizes the importance of choosing a visual composition in forming an effective narrative, relevant to the focus of this study. Two relevant studies discuss the influence of camera angles on storytelling and audience perception.

The article *The Psychology of Camera Shots: A Determinant for Audience Perception of Film Images* written by (Hanmakyugh, 2023) examines how the composition of camera shots plays a significant role in shaping audience perception of film images. He highlights D.W. Griffith's early contribution in revolutionizing cinematography techniques through the combination of point of view and structured shots to actively direct the audience's attention. This finding is in line with the focus of this study which also explores the relationship between shooting techniques and audience responses to visual meaning.

(Savardi, Kovács, Signoroni, & Benini, 2023) in article *Recognition of Camera Angle and Camera Level in Movies from Single Frames* highlight the importance of camera position and orientation i.e. camera level and angle, in shaping audience perception of film scenes. This study proposes a technology-based approach using Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) to automatically identify five categories of camera angles (Above, High, Neutral, Low, Dutch) and six camera levels (Aerial to Ground). With a classification accuracy above 95% from over 24,000 film frames, this study demonstrates that technical aspects of cinematography can be systematically analyzed to understand visual style and its impact on audiences.

This study discusses how camera angles as elements of *mise-en-scène* contribute to the formation of visual identity and emotional resonance in *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*. The discussion will focus on how each angle supports the narrative, enhances character portrayal, and reflects the stylistic signatures of Wes Anderson.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Mascelli (2005) in which he emphasizes camera angles as a crucial element of cinematography. Mascelli highlights their significant role in shaping storytelling,

perspective, and emotional engagement. His work discusses various angles such as high, low, and eye-level shots, and analyses how each affects audience perception and the dynamics of a narrative. Research conducted by Shoemaker (1964) provided a strong starting point for subsequent studies; the findings showed that the angle at which a photograph is taken has the potential to influence the connotative meaning of photographic material.

The meaning that emerges from each angle of the shot does not always come from a cinematic understanding or learned convention, but can come from a real visual relationship between the audience and the characters depicted (Kraft, 1987).



Figure 1: The narrator tells the story about Henry Sugar.
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:01: 39)

Eye-level shot

Narrative neutrality of Roald Dahl who is the narrator. In the initial sequence, on the figure 1 of the film *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*, the director uses eye-level angle to give the impression that he is equal to the audience. This supports Wes Anderson's storytelling style, which often involves direct narration and breaking the fourth wall which is boundaries between story and audience. Shoemaker (1964) stated the eye-level shot creates a sense of balance between the audience and the actor because of the parallel visual position.



Figure 2: Henry Sugar, in Sir William W.'s living room, was staring at the rain.
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:03:21)

Eye-level shot

In the initial shot from figure 2, the camera does not need to tilt or zoom in, Anderson wants to treat them all equally. Roald Dahl also enters the world which he narrating. The angle remains eye-level, he is not given excessive visual power, reinforcing Wes

Anderson's theatrical style. (Kraft, 1987) Eye-level aim created equal visual interaction between the audience and the actors.

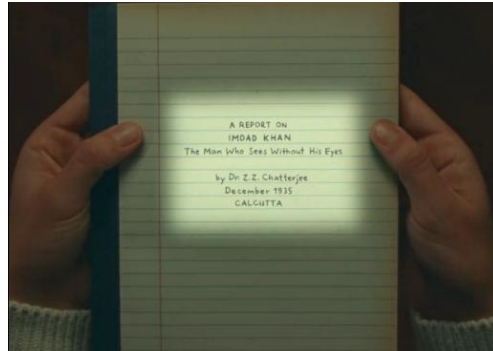


Figure 3: Henry Sugar looking at the first page of the book
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:04:06)

Bird's-eye shot

Here the audience can clearly see the writing in the book without having to guess. This is a form of openness between the audience and the contents of the film. From the figure 3 above, as (Giannetti, 1982) stated high angles contain the meaning of weakness also passivity.

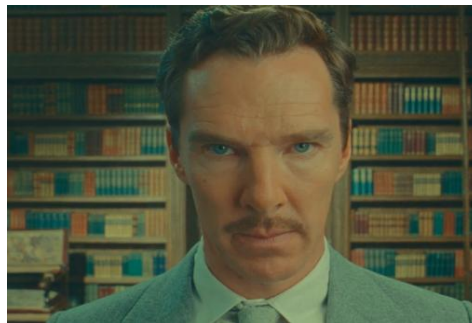


Figure 4: Henry Sugar is going to read the book
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:04:19)

Eye-level shot

From the figure 4 shows eye-level shot, but close-up framing and direct address into the camera. The camera is positioned right in front of Henry's body, level with his face. Symmetrical composition gives a sense of emotional intensity without manipulation of point of view.



Figure 5: Dr. Chatterjee, Dr. Marshall, Dr. Mitra, Dr. Macfarlane were in the doctors' room
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:04:20)

High-angle shot

The character Dr. Chatterjee becomes the narrator. He tells about his encounter with a yogi named Imdad Khan. From the figure 5, the camera being higher than the character makes the audience feel somewhat above or outside the story. (Kraft, 1987) High angle shots allow the audience to view the actor from above, providing a higher vantage point and placing the audience in a position of visual dominance. This physical relationship between the camera and the actor can form certain connotative meanings, either through metaphorical processes or literal perceptions of those meanings.

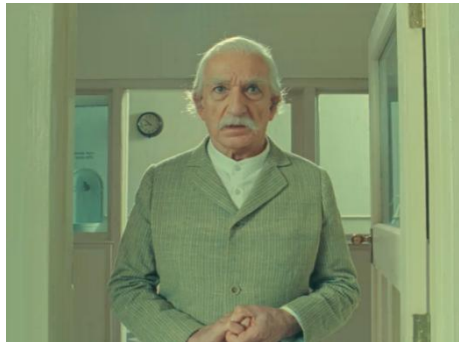


Figure 6: Imdad Khan was shown at the doctor's room
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:04:57)

Low-angle shot

When Imdad Khan, the yogi who can see without eyes, appears on stage in front of the doctors (figure 6). From the initial sequence, figure 4, the camera looks up at Khan which makes the character appear powerful. (Kraft, 1987) A low angle shot forces the viewer to look up at the actor, making the actor appear to have power and dominance visually.



Figure 7: Dr. Chatterjee examined Imdad Khan
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:06:40)

Eye-level shot

The use of camera on figure 7 is an eye-level shot emphasizes the equality of interaction between the characters. It creates an impression that Dr. Chatterjee and Imdad Khan are on equal footing, engaging in a direct, personal conversation. Giannetti (1982) states that camera angles in visual narratives can be equated with the function of adjectives in linguistic narratives. The shooting angle plays a role in modifying the visual content, forming connotative meanings for the characters and events shown.



Figure 8: Dr. Chatterjee and Dr. Marshall walk fast, followed Imdad Khan
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:08:10)

Dutch tilt (or canted angle)

The camera used on the figure 8 above is the Dutch tilt technique, which is the camera is tilted to the right so that the lines in the image appear slanted. This angle shows their movements more dynamically and provides a deeper visual space. The camera position also strengthens Dr. Chatterjee's role as both narrator and character. Giannetti (1982) states that camera angles in visual narratives can be equated with the function of adjectives in linguistic narratives. The shooting angle plays a role in modifying the visual content, forming connotative meanings for the characters and events shown. (Nazarruddin & Manesah, 2024) concluded that one of the typical techniques in cinematography is the Dutch Angle or Dutch Tilt. This technique is done by tilting the camera so that it produces a strong visual effect, creates a sense of tension and instability, and represents conflict or unusual situations in the storyline.



Figure 9: Dr. Chatterjee and Dr. Marshall running ran downstairs
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:08:26)

High-angle shot

By looking from above as shown in figure 9, the audience is invited to observe from the outside, as if they were neutral witnesses. (Shoemaker, 1964) The overhead shot angle makes the audience look down at the actor from a height, giving the impression that the audience is in a more visually dominant position.

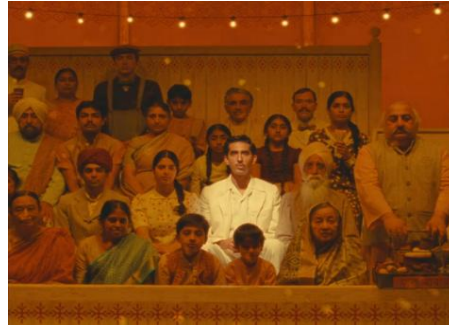


Figure 10: Dr. Chatterjee watched Khan's show at Royal Palace Hall
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:09:16)

Eye-level shot

The use of eye-level shots as shown in figure 10 is to make the audience feel like they are on the same level as his characters, as if they are watching the show with them. The combination of camera angles and lighting makes the audience feel involved, but still aware that this is a story being told.



Figure 11: Dr. Chatterjee met Khan's at the backstage
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:10:09)

Eye-level shot

Chatterjee is still the narrator, and now more involved by interviewing him directly. Figure 11 uses the eye-level shot, by keeping the perspective eye-level, the audience still feels like they are part of the investigation, not just an outside observer. Wes Anderson adds a magnifying glass close-up to a part of Imdad's body. (Giannetti, 1982) Stated that eye level shot shows equality.



Figure 12: Imdad Khan tell the story about his 'super-power'
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:10:41)

Eye-level shot

In this scene, from figure 12, Wes Anderson again uses the eye-level angle with a symmetrical composition and a theatrical stage setting. Imdad Khan is now the narrator. This angle gives the impression that Imdad is speaking directly to the audience, as if he is telling his life story honestly and openly.



Figure 13: Imdad Khan met a great yogi
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:15:24)

Eye-level shot

Although the camera is physically low as shown on the figure 13, the framing remains eye-level in the context of sitting on the floor. This ambiguity between low angle and eye-level is actually part of Wes Anderson's signature style, which often places the camera precisely to the subject.



Figure 14: Imdad Khan met a great yogi
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:19:31)

Eye-level shot

Chatterjee returns as the narrator. He sits facing the camera head-on, with an eye-level perspective. This position creates the impression that he is speaking directly to the audience, giving rise to a sense of intimacy and closeness in the delivery of the story.



Figure 15 - 16: Dr. Chatterjee and Dr. Marshall tell about them, trying to reach Khan's again
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:19:49 to 00:20:40)

Eye-Level Shot

(Figure 15, left) In this scene, Dr. Chatterjee and Dr. Marshall sit next to each other in what looks like an office. The camera captures them at eye level, as shown in figure 15, making viewers feel equal to both characters.

(Figure 16, right) In these scene, Dr. Chatterjee and Dr. Marshall standing next to each other perfectly centered in the frame at eye level. The camera's on the figure 16 straight-on angle keeps viewers on the same level as the characters, creating the close and watchful feeling that's typical of Wes Anderson's movies.



Figure 17: Henry Sugar finish reading the book
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:21:19)

Eye-Level Shot

Henry Sugar stands alone positioned perfectly in the center of the shot at eye level as shown on figure 17. The camera films him straight-on, pulling viewers into his moment of discovery. He looks completely still as he reads about Imdad Khan's story. The quiet, motionless shot reflects his inner amazement and disbelief.



Figure 18: Henry Sugar telling about his experience
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:24:50)

Eye-Level shot

Figure 18 is still eye-level, the camera films him directly, and the precise, cold setup highlights how alone and mentally drained he is. Henry has been training his focus for three years and three months, only leaving his house to buy food and drinks.



Figure 19: Henry Sugar back to the casino
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:25:58)

Eye-level but slightly off-center shot

In this scene, Henry Sugar stands confidently in a fancy red casino. From the figure 19 above, the shot filmed at eye level slightly off-center. The camera lets him speak directly to viewers while showing the busy gambling scene behind him. The framing shows Henry's new sense of power. This is when he wants to prove to everyone, including himself, that his years of intense training have given him an almost magical advantage.



Figure 20 – 21: The dealer of the casino
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:26:18 – 00:26:22)

Eye-Level shot and High-angle shot

Eye-level shot (figure 20, left), the camera in the figure 20, films the casino dealer straight-on at eye level, making viewers feel like they're sitting right across from him at the table. This direct angle shows his strong presence, he looks calm, steady, and very serious.

The high-angle shot (Figure 21, right) focuses on the dealer's open hands in the figure 21, just above the neatly arranged poker chips. The composition is symmetrical and

precise. His open palms suggest neutrality and fairness. The neatly stacked chips behind him emphasize themes of order, control, and high stakes.



Figure 22: Henry Sugar, The Dealer, and the other two playing blackjack
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:26:24)

Bird's-eye shot

In this scene, the camera films the blackjack table from directly above in figure 22, giving a godlike view of the players. This bird's-eye shot shows all the details; cards, chips, and faces, in perfect balance. The characters look up at the camera, which creates a strange, theatrical feeling that's typical of Wes Anderson's movies.



Figure 23: Henry Sugar on his way home from the casino after winning
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:30:07)

Eye-level shot

The character is framed at eye level in figure 23 and the audience is positioned as equals. This reflects Wes Anderson's style, creating a direct and intimate connection between character and viewer. Symmetrical composition and natural lighting would enhance the impression of direct narration, much like Roald Dahl's narration earlier in the film.



Figure 24: Henry Sugar throws his money away from the balcony
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:31:51)

Low-angle shot

The scene from figure 24 captured from this low-angle shot is the of power or authority of the character. In this moment, Henry is seen giving away his money because he doesn't know what to do with the large amount he possesses, and people are shown catching it as if it were raining money. (Shoemaker, 1964) The angle of shooting from below makes the audience have to look up at the actor, so that the actor appears more powerful and visually dominant.



Figure 25: A police come to Henry because of his action
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:33:18)

Eye-level shot

From the figure 25 above, Henry's direct gaze and tight facial expression suggest confusion or pressure. It creates a neutral yet emotionally intense impression, especially because the character looks directly into the camera, giving the impression that the audience is involved.



Figure 26: Henry Sugar standing in his living room tell about his plan
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:33:27)

Eye-level shot

The camera that shows in figure 26 is positioned at eye level with the character, placing the audience in a visually “equal” position. This creates a neutral and intimate impression, the viewer is neither judging from above nor admiring from below, but is instead invited to directly understand the character’s condition. At this moment, Henry has just received “an idea that will change everything.” This shot marks a turning point in the narrative, a moment of enlightenment. His upright posture, serious expression, and centered framing emphasize the transition from confusion to the discovery of a life’s purpose.



Figure 27: Henry Sugar flying
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:35:38)

Eye-level shot

This eye-level showed in figure 27, symmetrically composed shot captures Henry in a moment of perfect balance, both visually and spiritually. He has reached a condition of high inner state, literally and metaphorically, that sets him apart from his past versions of himself. The camera places the audience as equal observers, and this positioning also gives Henry an impression of stability.



Figure 28: Back to the narrator tell the end of the story
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:36:15)

Eye-level shot

This eye-level shot from figure 28 places Roald Dahl on the right side of the frame. His direct gaze into the camera, accompanied by a calm expression and a slight smile, enhances the impression that he is speaking directly to the audience. The neutral angle

creates a sense of intimacy and honesty, reinforcing his role as narrator and storyteller while drawing the viewer into the narrative.



Figure 29: The Narrator, John Winston, and Max Engelman
(Anderson, 2023, Timestamp: 00:38:02)

Eye-level shot

The last shot from figure 29 is the eye-level shot, symmetrically composed shot captures a visual epilogue or frame story-where all the important characters are present, as if standing on stage to give a final greeting to the audience. Roald Dahl returns as the narrator, holding the book and giving the impression that the story has come to an end.

CONCLUSION

In line with the initial expectation that camera angle, as part of *mise-en-scène*, forms visual identity and meaning in a film, the analysis of *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* shows that Wes Anderson uses shooting angles strategically, not only as visual aesthetics but also as a narrative device.

Eye-level shots are consistently used to create a sense of equality and intimacy between the characters and the audience, while high-angle and low-angle shots are employed to convey vulnerability or authority. These findings reinforce the idea that camera angles play a crucial role in building an emotional connection between the film and its viewers. Additionally, other angles such as bird's-eye view and Dutch tilt enrich the narrative dimensions, highlight emotional tones, and mark shifts between storytellers. The camera functions as a visual narrator that shapes the audience's perception and experience of the story. Therefore, the use of camera angles in this film not only reinforces Anderson's distinctive visual style, characterized by symmetry, theatricality, and layered storytelling, but also affirms that *mise-en-scène* holds a central role in delivering cinematic meaning in a profound and reflective way.

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