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Analysis of Non-Narrative Factors in "the Mood for Love" Movie with a Focus on the Visual Atmosphere

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Abstract

In "the Mood for Love" Wong Kar-way narrates a love story in a special, rarely seen visual atmosphere. Non-narrative factors include filming, scene design, music, and others. This research has investigated the reasons for applying each and also examined the relationship and role of these factors in the overall structure of the film's narration. The visual atmosphere in filming has been investigated from two aspects. First is the created visual atmosphere referred to the 1960s in Hong Kong, which the filmmaker repeatedly refers to this period in intertitles. Wong Kar-way represents the social and political situation of Hong Kong by applying factors such as color, lighting, and camera traveling. On the other hand, we will also examine the atmosphere relevant to love and betrayal in the film's story. While studying both cases, it has been tried to analyze non-narrative factors in the context of their function according to the new formalism theory. The result turned out that many of these visual factors, as non-narrative ones, form a coherent whole responsible for conveying the feeling (air) of the film, and they are not along with the advancement of the story. The method of this research is descriptive-analytical, and applying the technique of visual elements in "In the Mood for Love" and their function in the total structure of the movie will be investigated.

Keywords: Non-narrative factors, Visual elements, New formalism.

1 | Introduction

In the film "Days of Being Wild," Wong Kar-way has proved that visual factors play an important role in his works, and he places the heavy burden of creating a "Mood/an Air" on the visual atmosphere shoulders instead of just allocating dialogues to the characters of the film. Among the most important visual factors, filming at night, special application of colors, not showing the sky too much, filming in narrow streets and alleys, small apartments, and playing with shadows can be mentioned that all of them are repeated in "the Mood of Love" as well.

As Orson Welles(1915-1985) believes, two subjects, namely sex and praying, should not be presented directly on the scene; Wong Kar-way also describes them indirectly in his works. He presents other topics, such as

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suffering, loneliness, confusion, and sadness, using two important factors, i.e., color and frame size. Camera traveling and lighting have complementary roles in this presentation.

All mentioned factors can be categorized as "Non-Narrative Factors". Based on new-formalism theories in film criticism, each of these factors has been examined according to what Christian Thomson calls "tricks," the function of each has been determined in this research.

Thomson and Bordwell [1] explains two important factors in his theory: "Similarity and Repetition" and "Difference and Variation," which are also used in visual atmosphere, especially in color and camera traveling factors. The visual atmosphere and its factors in Kar-way's works (color, lighting, camera traveling, shot size, and depth of the field) are used to define and accurately display the events going on inside the character that cannot be expressed by dialogue or any other element. The visual atmosphere is responsible for showing their feelings, especially in a movie like this, where the characters do not express their emotions clearly.

Sergei Eisenstein believed that by juxtaposing shots using a unique method (editing shots), a coherent system can be created to increase the effect of a particular scene on the audience [2]. It is true that although Kar-way works, this system has not been built coherently. According to Eisenstein's definition, these non-narrative factors can create a special aesthetic space by being placed next to each other to become capable of defining a deeper and hidden meaning of the movie, a meaning that "Roland Barthes" Calls "the Third Meaning" [3].

He believes this "Third Meaning" is beyond "Implied Meaning". He forms a set of colors, speech, and other factors in a category that makes them "companions of the story." In analyzing the visual elements of this film, we deal with factors that create many implicit meanings. Using these factors in this film has been effective to the extent that they present the known and expressed concepts such as "Love" and "Betrayal" from a different angle and add new dimensions to these concepts.

Kar-way's use of unusual camera angles, closed frames, color, lighting, depth of field, and arranged mise en scène add a lot of visual richness to his film. We should also consider a part of the analysis of visual elements according to the theory of new formalism and consider the "Historical Context" and period of the film in Hong Kong in the 1960s [4].

Time is nostalgic and fragile. Between 1962 and 1966, southeast Asia was involved in political issues and problems between China and Vietnam. Kar-way also uses a short documentary from this period in his work, which suggests he cuts the movie and changes its mood completely.

Hong Kong in 1960s

Wang Kar-way can be grouped among "New Wave" filmmakers. This category is related to filmmakers who were born after the war and usually spent the first years of their lives outside China and returned to their country later.

In the book "Cities and Cinema" there is a quote from Kar-way that says [5]:

These influences may relate to my migration from Shanghai to Hong Kong. When I got there, I couldn't speak any language other than Shanghainese, while Cantonese was the local dialect at that time and still is. For a while, I felt completely isolated, and it was like the biggest nightmare of my life. Maybe not very consciously, but I strongly feel about geographical changes.

However, Kar-way tries to express and show the period's suffocation, pressure, and unsuitable conditions. The resulting imagery signs can be divided into three categories:

- I. Full detailed close-ups.
- II. Not showing the sky (except for a few limited times).
- III. "Spying" and "Rebelliousness" shots.

1.1| Full Detailed Close-Up

Such frames can be seen from the very beginning of the film. We see Mrs. Chan and the landlord's character in a closed close-up of a narrow, pressurized corridor. All sides of this closed shot are filled with details, such as household items, photo frames on the wall, and lampshades [4].

This type of social situation and livelihood, which belongs to Hong Kong's 60s, is depicted as living in communal houses, narrow corridors with doors all opening to the same corridor. To visualize these conditions, Kar-way displays all the shots related to the corridor and house in closed frames (medium shot and close-up), with characters pressed against each other. The main scene of this category is the moving day when Mrs. Chan, Mr. Choaw, the landlord, and all the workers are depicted in closed and tight frames.

Kar-way also places the characters in narrow, dark, and seemingly dead-end alleys to show how love formed during that particular period.

1.2| Not Showing the Sky

Except for a very short plan, we never see the sky, and as a result, we do not benefit from its light and brightness. Spaces are usually depicted with dark and rich colors.

1.3| Shots Relevant to Rebelliousness

The relationship between KarKar-way's work and the society he experienced is completely dialectical and focuses on the artist himself. He was a child during that suffocation period and lived during those days. Many of the visual parts of the film are shots like nosing around. In this type of frame, the camera is usually placed behind objects or people, which induces the feeling of "Spying" and "Being an Informant" in the audience.

We can assume Kar-way himself is the camera. As a playful child, he wanders around everywhere, and this betrayal and falling in love are like games for him. He constantly follows this man and woman and leaves no privacy for them.

2| Presentation of Love and Betrayal

Kar-way's method of using non-narrative elements that we mentioned earlier leads to the creation of new concepts and innovations in the representation of daily life issues such as love and betrayal, which have been discussed a lot before. We investigate the five most important factors:

Color

In this film, two emotional relationships are destroyed at the beginning, and another is created. However, we are not supposed to watch these issues in normal and familiar frames, such as husband-and-wife fights or long love speeches between two lovers. Kar-way narrates all these events and the emotional ups and downs that characters go through by using "Color" as an important factor.

A specific color is chosen as the scene's main theme and then expanded by using its complementary colors or different shadows of that color. According to Itten's color wheel, red and green are opposite and complementary colors [6]. These two colors are used in different scenes, which is usually a sign of conflict between narration and scene, the same thing debated as "Difference and Variation" in new-formalism theory. In the scenes of this movie, we have color variations. In general, red, green, blue, and dark gray are the colors that have been used the most in this work.

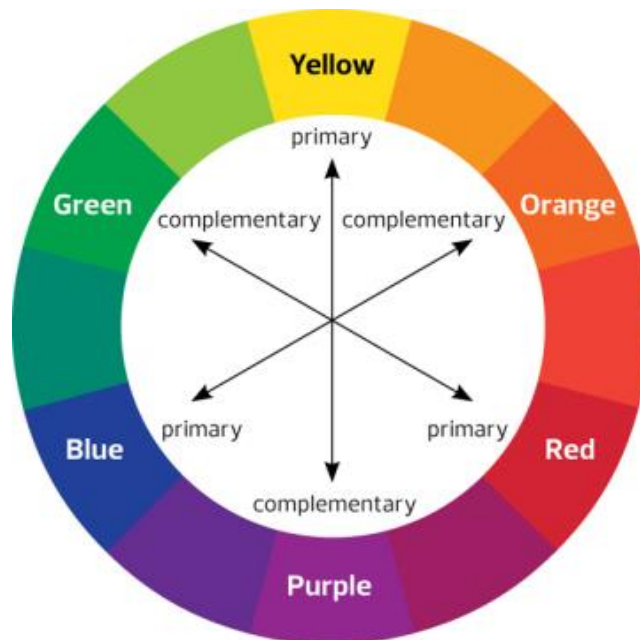


Fig. 1. Color wheel Itten.

Colors move parallel with the emotions of the characters. From the beginning of the frames, Ms. Chan is present between red and green colors; her presence is more dominant in green because her romantic feelings have not yet been revealed. For example, in the scene where Mrs. Chan is present in her office, due to a green curtain behind her, the equipment's color on the stage, and the existing lights, she seems to be in a green background. Due to the color of her dress, we have a small amount of red in the frame, but it does not overpower the green color.

Moving forward through the story, where she finds out about her husband's betrayal, the dominance of the red over the green color begins. Now, she is wearing a dress full of red flowers, and the color of the cupboards and part of the office wall is red, which overcomes the green color in previous scenes.

The starting point of the presence of red happens in the restaurant, where despite the existence of green color in details such as the cup, the lamp overhead, the vase, etc., the color of the chairs that form a large part of the scene is red. In this shot, understanding of betrayal happens to the characters, and perhaps the green color can be related to the decay of their relationship; on the other hand, a kind of relationship starts between these two characters, which is supposed to overcome the story of betrayal. During these romantic scenes, where doubts start to rise in their hearts, color contrast also begins. The woman's red dress contrasts with the green wall behind her, creating a different image.

The climax of using red color is in the scene of "Dating in Hotel". The floors, walls, curtain, and staircase are all in red, which informs of the creation of a romantic relationship or possibly love between these two characters. Mrs. Chan also wears a red coat in this scene, and we also see Mr. Choaw in a red corridor surrounded by red doors and curtains [7].

Since this relationship will not continue and, according to the film's characters, they don't want to cheat like their spouses, it won't take long for them to feel lonely and isolated. The most important scene for presenting these feelings is where these two characters are in significant doubt about staying or leaving. Mrs. Chan's husband congratulates her on her birthday by asking for a song from the radio, and it seems that both of them are listening to that song, and the gray color dominates the frame.



Fig. 2. Increasing the amount of red color and its dominance to green color.

3 | The Depth of Field

Kar-way emphasizes the subject with special use of depth of field. Simon Shu-yeng Chu mentions this in his article, reading perspective and architecture in the film "In the Mood of Love" [8].

In this article, Chu compares Kar-way's shots with a famous painting called "Flagellation of Christ" by Piero Della Francesca. This painting dates to 1469, during the Renaissance era, and is 60 x 80 cm in size. It is considered the most complete painting with small dimensions in painting history.

Francesca has placed the main subject in the background of this work and, instead, with the help of three factors: depth of field, perspective, and lighting (which is mutual with the cinema field), has drawn attention to the main subject, which is Christ.

The lines in the painting are formed according to the hall's ceiling, and the floor coverings admit that the viewer's point of view in this artwork is very low and is located somewhere close to the knees of the observers. Another noteworthy point is that the two sides of this painting are not related to a common period. Since the face of Christ is lit from the right side, it can be concluded that the light source should be on the right side, but it seems that the light enters from the left side of the picture, which gives the feeling of asynchrony in this painting.

Also, it is clear that two of the three people who stand on the left side of the painting lived in the same period as Francesca (15th century), and the third one is an imaginary one whose olive crown also confirms that he is not from the same period as the others. This is another strong reason that confirms that the two sides of this painting do not narrate the same period.

This is precisely what happens in Kar-way's shots. In the shot where Ms. Chan is sitting next to a lampshade and reading a newspaper, Mrs. and Mr. Ku are playing and placed in the foreground, and many light sources are on them. On the left side of the scene, a big lamp covers a large part of the frame; this object is also applied to create a perspective to direct eyes towards the main subject. "Ms. Chan" is the main subject in the background. Next to her is a lampshade that clarifies her presence to the audience and attracts attention. All

seemingly unimportant factors in this scene that are placed in the foreground eventually draw the audience's attention toward her.



Fig. 3. Covering an insignificant object in the foreground of the frame on Ms. Chan's body.

This also happens in several other scenes, where the main subject, usually "Ms. Chan," is in the background, and an insignificant object is placed in the frame's foreground and sometimes covers a part of her body.

4 | Deletion and Isolation

Intentional deletion is one of the important non-narrative factors that helps to expand the visual ideas of Kar-way. He intentionally deletes someone or something from the frames. The clearest example of this deletion in the movie happens about that cheating man and woman. The shots directed at them are from behind, and we never have a full presence of them in the frames. We only hear their voices or see them from behind during a conversation with one of the main characters. Although the director could create many exciting and inflammatory scenes by depicting their confrontation with the ones they betrayed, he decided not to put them in the center of the frames.

When the two characters discover their spouse's betrayal, their presence is completely removed from the film. But this is only one of the small deletions in the film. As mentioned, their presence in the film is only in over-shoulder frames. In one of the scenes where we have a relatively fuller presence of "Mr. Choaw's wife," they are playing mahjong, and we see an almost complete figure of this woman entering the room or sitting next to her husband. This removal of the characters refers explicitly to the use of the outside space of the frame in the visual entirety of the film.

Minor characters include the man who bought Mr. Choaw's apartment in 1966 and the character Ku, the employee who swaps shifts with Mrs. Choaw. These characters are only voices, and in the case of their physical presence in the frame, only a small part of their body is seen, or we generally see them from behind. Kar-way's method for doing this is that in inter-personal conversations in a shared house, he usually removes one party from the conversation so that the first character stands outside the frame door. The talking character is inside the house, and we see an over-the-shoulder view of both characters. The implicated meaning of this view refers to "rumor," one of the film's most important issues. The key scene is when Mrs. Chan returns home; the landlady stops her in the corridor and advises her to come home earlier. This scene takes place exactly in a frame where we stand behind Mrs. Chan and listen to the rumors and conversations behind her back, and because of her figure in the frame, a part of the land lady's figure has been removed from the frame.

Another example of these types of scenes is where Ms. Chan is having a conversation with Mr. Ku. Mrs. Chan is outside the frame, and we see her in a medium shot but not Mr. Ku. This moment continues with Mrs. Ku's leaving and lending back the borrowed books, but here again, the image is reflected in an old mirror and does not show a clear view to the audience. These deletions occur with the help of the frame borders and elements like walls, lampshades, decorative things, and these kinds of details.

Kar-way uses this trick when Chow goes to Ku's house in 1966. Here again, only Choaw is present in the door frame, and we only hear the voice of the new landlord. Even in the next shot, we don't see much of the landlord when we enter the apartment.



Fig. 4. Deleting the second party of conversation.

The same non-narrative element, removing characters that attract attention somewhere outside the frame, occurs in the shots related to Ms. Chan's office and repeats three times. The first and second times, the clock covers part of the scene, and we only hear the phone conversations and background music. The scenes, including these types of moments, usually end early. The third time, the clock covers the scene for a few moments longer, and we only hear a whisper about the tie that Mr. Chan received as a gift from his lover while we see the image of the clock.

But the most important time is the fourth time we go to the office. The clock completely covers the frame, and Mrs. Chan talks about the letter that Mr. Chaw received from his wife.



Fig. 5. Covering Ms. Chan by the clock.

This complete or partial removal of something also happens frequently about Ms. Chan's figure in the frames. Kar-way shows her in frames where we usually only see a part of her waist and hand. In a scene where Mrs. Chan is hastily trying to hide or leave Mr. Chan's room, a closed shot of her feet is used to emphasize her anxiety.

Using an element on the edges of a frame to cover something or someone also conveys another meaning. The elements surrounding the character somewhere (due to placing on two edges borders of the frame) act as two locks or shells surrounding the character. In addition, in two important scenes where the man and woman are walking down the street with gray visual space- we are watching them through a barred window. Each man and woman are placed in the space between two bars. This is the visual trick that Kar-way used to show people's confinement, isolation, and loneliness. These bars lock each person separately, and after a while, when the two characters hug each other, the space becomes narrower as they get closer to each other, and we see them in the space between two bars. He shows love's birth in a narrow, dark space without privacy.

5 | Slow Motion

Another aspect of society's conditions that should be considered is that in this decade, "fashion" has developed significantly and become an industry. Kar-way tries to visually present his works' main of "parody" fashion. He does this by showing narrow and dark alleys with specific semi-open frames where actors walk in them, just like the models, and these alleys are surrounded by windows on both sides, which remind the audience of seats on both sides of a fashion runway. The camera travels behind these windows for many moments and watches the actors.

These scenes are generally in slow motion mode. The movie's most obvious example of this type of scene is the famous scene of "buying noodles". This type of camera travel keeps the characters in a position to be directed towards a rhythm of the relationship, the conditions of which are provided by their spouses.

In these slow-motion scenes, the people behind the main characters seem like ghosts, and the slow movement of the characters in the frame and the camera completely resembles a fashion show.

Usually, emotional and breathtaking moments are present in slow-motion mode in classic movies, but in Kar-ways works, slow-motion mode occurs when the characters are doing a normal daily task like buying noodles. Of course, these slow-motion modes arise when a new feeling or understanding happens to the character.

Najafi [9] says in the book "Love and Cinema":

"This Kar-way method recalls Herbert Read, who says, " film must be made directly from the material of the real visible world, the material that moves slowly."

When the filmmaker loses control of this material, the characters' feelings are bubbling up, and they think of cheating and being together or doing the same as their spouses did, he slowly motions the scene.

6 | Pan

One of the most important scenes in the movie is when these two characters learn about their spouses' betrayal and fully understand the situation.

Ms. Chan and Mr. Choaw are in a restaurant for dinner and are sitting across each other at the table, but this is not the view that we see clearly from the beginning of the shot. We first see a shoulder view of Mrs. Chan at the table with Mr. Chow sitting in front of her. During the scene, we see these two characters repeatedly in medium shots and separate from each other. If it wasn't for the opening scene, it could be assumed that these two characters are sitting in two restaurants. Still, when Mr. Choaw fully realizes the "betrayal", "Pan" occurs between them, and for the first time, a visual connection is made between them, as in the story, the betrayal of their spouses connected them. This twist, or "Pan," happens exactly when understanding occurs for the characters. The following key moment of this scene is when the character lights up a cigarette, and the scene goes into slow motion mode.

7 | Conclusion

This research examines non-narrative factors focusing on the visual elements in " the Mood for Love" by Wong Kar-way. An attempt was made to identify and explain these elements and their function. The result showed that this "New Wave" generation filmmaker used visual elements instead of dialogue or conventional methods to convey a deeper message or concept than the story intends to narrate. The most important factors were color, slow-motion mode, pan movement, closed frames (medium and close-up), and depth of field.

Using these elements does not build a coherent system but opens a space for conveying a deeper concept and meaning. These factors, along with two features of "Repetition" like slow-motion scenes, and "Difference" like the use of contrasting complementary colors (red and green) that constantly overcome each other throughout the film, have been used to create a certain "mood."

While harmonious with the work's overall structure, these factors also manifest themselves as separate elements and leave a deep impact on the audience.

Author Contribution

Shahab-Al-Din Adel and Tahmineh Mansoori Roshan jointly contributed to the conceptualization, analysis, and writing of the research. Shahab-Al-Din Adel focused on the theoretical framework and methodology, while Tahmineh Mansoori Roshan conducted the visual analysis and case study examination. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Data Availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during this study. All data used in this research are derived from publicly available sources and the film itself.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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