

Visual Representation and Moral Transformation of the Main Characters in Wes Anderson's *The Phoenician Scheme* Movie

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies on moral transformation in film have primarily interpreted moral change through dialogue and narrative, while cinematic visual elements have generally been treated as supporting rather than primary analytical data. Therefore, this study address this gap by analysing how the moral transformation of the main characters in The Phoenician Scheme is represented through cinematic visuals and how this transformation influences their visual identities. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with observation and documentation techniques. The primary data consists of selected film scenes and footage, which are analyzed through cinematic elements such as color, composition, costume, lighting, setting, and type of shot. This analysis integrates Petrie and Boggs's cinematic framework, Eyre and Richard's theory of moral values, and Kurt Lewin's Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze model. The novelty of this research lies in the systematic integration of Lewin's social psychology theory with the theory of visual language in film, which has resulted in a new analytical framework for interpreting the visual morality of characters. The findings indicate that moral transformation is systematically encoded through recurring visual patterns across the three stages of transformation. Korda transforms from arrogance to humility and responsibility, Liesl from dependence to independence and sincerity, and Bjorn from dishonesty to honesty. These transformations are represented through changes in costume, spatial composition, lighting, and symbolic setting that gradually reconstruct the visual identity of each character. This study concludes that cinematic visuals function as an independent and analyzable system of moral representation.

Keywords: moral values; transformation; visual representation.

INTRODUCTION

Visual representation refers to the way in which cinematic elements such as mise-en-scène, framing and colour are used to construct meaning, characters, or reality through visual language. Filmmakers intentionally use cinematic elements and techniques to convey meaning and achieve emotional responses from audiences, while film itself has long been recognised as a powerful medium for exploring human emotions and social events (Haykal et al., 2025). Petrie and Boggs also assert that visual elements are the primary means of communication in film, as cinema operates through sequences of images, pacing, rhythm, and visual style, all of which form part of non-verbal language (Petrie & Boggs, 2018). Through this visual system, film is able to represent moral states and character identities without relying on verbal dialogue.

Moral transformation refers to the changes in values, attitudes and principles that a character undergoes as the narrative unfolds. Every individual goes through moral changes in

the values they hold, with some values gradually fading away, whilst others begin to emerge (Panizza & Vaccarezza, 2025). This reinforces the view that changes in the moral values of film characters do not occur suddenly, but rather through a gradual process that can be identified through visual representations at each stage. Kurt Lewin formulated a structural framework that can be used to map the stages of a character's moral change, comprising three phases known as Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze. Lewin's methods have an impact that not only alters behaviour but also changes the underlying beliefs that drive that behaviour (Crosby, 2021).

In Kurt Lewin's model of change, the Unfreeze stage is the initial phase that occurs when an individual's old stability is shaken by a crisis or external pressure, forcing them to question the values and beliefs they have long held. Following this, the character enters the Change stage, characterised by a transition from old patterns towards new perspectives and behaviours, marked by uncertainty as the old identity begins to be abandoned whilst the new identity has not yet fully formed. The final Refreeze stage occurs when the new values and behaviours resulting from the Change stage are internalised into a stable identity, allowing the individual to find a new, more adaptive equilibrium (Deborah, 2018). In cinema, these three stages show a gradual shift in cinematic visual elements.

The film *The Phoenician Scheme* was chosen because it depicts the moral transformation of the three main characters in a visual and systematic manner. Wes Anderson also widely recognised for his consistent cinematic approach characterised by a distinctive formalist style, precise compositional symmetry, a strictly curated colour palette, costumes that serve as markers of character identity, and a mise-en-scène rich in meaning (Singleton, 2025). In this film, Anderson presents three main characters, namely Zsa-Zsa Korda, Liesl, and Bjorn, each of whom undergoes a significant moral transformation throughout the film. These three characters begin the film with problematic or inauthentic value systems and gradually move towards the internalisation of more genuine moral values through a series of events that alter their perspectives on themselves and the world around them.

Marlina et al. (2021) define moral values as values relating to good and bad deeds that guide human life in general, whilst encouraging individuals to act and behave well. The cause of moral values changed is addressed by Paul Bloom, who asserts that moral change is influenced by two main factors. The first factor is an emotional and non-rational process, in which our judgements of good and evil are influenced by emotional reactions such as empathy and disgust, so that an emotionally stirring experience is capable of profoundly altering a person's moral orientation (Alfarina & Hartono, 2025). The second factor is human contact or the expansion of one's social circle, whereby interaction with new people who share common goals broadens what Bloom refers to as a person's 'moral circle', that is, the circle of people towards whom we feel a moral responsibility (Bloom, 2010).

The classification of moral values draws on the theory of Eyre and Richard, which divides moral values into two main categories. The first category is 'Values of Being', which refers to the intrinsic values that form the foundation of a person's character, encompassing honesty, integrity, humility, self-awareness, understanding, potential, responsibility and motivation (Avatara et al., 2024). The second category is 'Values of Giving', which focuses on how individuals interact with and dedicate themselves to others, encompassing kindness, compassion, empathy, understanding, appreciation, responsibility, consideration, and respect (Eyre and Ricard, 2010, in Danial, 2025). 'Values of Being' are internal and reflect moral qualities that grow from within the individual, whilst 'Values of Giving' are relational and manifest in the quality of human relationships.

Research into moral values in literary works, including films, has been extensively conducted. However, these studies employ different theoretical frameworks and analytical data from those used in this study. Liliana and Dewi analyse the moral transformation of the

character Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) using the Aristotelian framework of virtue ethics and Kantian deontology, primarily analysing narrative, dialogue, and character interactions through ethical theory, while visual aspects are not examined as the primary analytical focus (Liliana & Dewi, 2025). Permadikusumah analyse the transformation of Henry Sugar's character in Wes Anderson's short film *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* (2023) using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, combining narrative descriptions with references to Anderson's visual style, but without treating visual elements as primary data (Permadikusumah et al., 2025). Pandia and Wijaya analyse changes in moral values in the musical film *The Greatest Showman* and identified eight changes in moral values experienced by the six characters, along with four contributing factors. and specifically employed the same analytical model (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and the same explanation of the triggers for change (Bloom, 2010) with this study (Pandia & Wijaya, 2023). Although their data consisted entirely of dialogue transcripts and song lyrics, and the moral changes identified were organised as discrete changes that were often characterised by cyclical shifts between two paired states (for example, from one state to another), rather than through a structured, one-way model of stages.

These three studies share a relatively consistent understanding of what drives moral change, despite drawing on different theories. Despite these differences, they share a common limitation, none of the three studies treats cinematic visual elements as the primary unit of analysis. Moreover, none of them organises moral transformation using a structured stage model such as Lewin's Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze framework, to organise the transformation process into distinct stages. This study aims to address both of these gaps by treating visual elements as the primary data and integrating a structural phased model with a typology of moral values, thereby yielding a more systematic understanding of how moral transformation is visually encoded.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze how moral transformation of main characters in *The Phoenician Scheme* is visually represented through cinematic visual codes and to explain how moral transformations affect the visual identities of the main characters in Wes Anderson's *The Phoenician Scheme* (2025). The novelty of this study lies in the use of visual elements or language as primary data for moral analysis in film, unlike previous studies that primarily interpret moral transformation through dialogue, narrative, or ethical philosophy, this study positions cinematic visual elements as the primary analytical data while integrating Petrie and Boggs's cinematic framework, Kurt Lewin's staged transformation model, and Eyre and Richard's moral values into a unified analytical framework. This integrated approach is expected to yield a more comprehensive understanding of how cinema functions as a medium capable of encoding the complexity of the human moral journey through a precise and systematic visual language.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, chosen because the focus on the research is interpreting the moral meaning contained in the visual language of the film. Qualitative research emphasises data exploration and interpretation through non-numeric analysis to understand a cultural and social phenomenon (Darmalaksana 2020), based on data sources that include primary data (interviews, observations, and subject behavior) and secondary data (documentation, notes, photographs, videos, and artifacts) (Agustini et al., 2023), here applied through a literature-based analysis. This orientation emphasizes that qualitative inquiry is not limited to factual assessments but is process-oriented, focusing on meaning and perception, where researchers construct meaningful narratives through in-depth interpretations of the research subjects.

The primary data source of this research is from *The Phoenician Scheme* movie by Wes Anderson as the object of analysis. This data consists of still images (screenshots) taken from HBO Max streaming platform, scene descriptions on visual elements. Meanwhile, the secondary data includes various scientific literature, journal articles and academic reference sources relevant to the research topic, covering theories of moral values, character transformation, models of change, and a framework for cinematic analysis used as the basis for interpretation. Data collection in this study was carried out using two main techniques which is observation and documentation. Given that the subject of this study is film as a visual text, the observation technique employed involved repeated viewings of the film *The Phoenician Scheme*. Creswell (2018) explains that observation in qualitative research allows researchers to understand the context of the data directly and comprehensively, so that meanings that are not apparent through written text can be captured more fully. The second technique was documentation, recorded based on timestamps and described in terms of the visual elements of interest for the analysis, namely costumes, colour, composition, lighting, setting, and the type and angle of the shot.

Scenes were selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 2015), based on the criterion that each scenes convey moral values visualised through at least one of the six visual element codes listed above. These six visual element codes were formulated based on the cinematic analysis framework by Petrie and Boggs (2018), resulted in 28 scenes being chosen as the research sample. Data analysis process in this study refers to the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which comprises three concurrent components; data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data condensation, the 28 scenes were further screened to eliminate redundancy and ensure relevance to the research focus; 7 were excluded for overlapping visual codes already represented by other scenes, and 4 were excluded because their moral content was not directly related to character transformation, leaving 17 scenes for in-depth analysis. These scenes were organised according to the six visual-element codes and mapped onto Lewin's phases of change (Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze), with layered linking cinematic meaning to Eyre and Richard's ricmoral typology, and to Bloom's triggers for change. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) emphasized that the qualitative data analysis process is cyclical and interactive, where the stages of data presentation, reduction, and drawing conclusions occur simultaneously and reinforce each other. The entire process concludes with the drawing of conclusions to identify consistency in their moral transformations.

The credibility of the analysis was maintained through an audit trail that documents the process of selecting and simplifying scenes, so that analytical steps can be traced and verified. These interpretations are further supported by theoretical triangulation, which links findings across various theoretical frameworks to ensure that the patterns identified are consistent across theoretical perspectives, rather than relying solely on a single, unverified interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of the seventeenth scenes from the film *The Phoenician Scheme* (2025) demonstrates that moral transformation in films is not merely established through narrative, but is systematically constructed through visual elements such as lighting, color, setting, composition, costumes and shot types, which develop gradually from Unfreezing, through Change, to Refreezing. The main findings reveal that each character undergoes a distinct moral transformation in terms of original values, unfreeze triggers for change, and final outcomes, with Korda shifting from arrogance towards humility and responsibility, Liesl from dependence towards independence and sincerity, and Bjorn from dishonesty towards honesty.

These differences indicate that moral transformation is not universal, but contextual and influenced by each character's visual experiences and social relationships.

KORDA'S MORAL TRANSFORMATION

Prior to the event that triggered his moral transformation, Korda's original moral state is visually depicted at 00:02:17 through an extreme long shot showing his plane flying with its engines ablaze. As Kurniawan (2020) notes, the simultaneous use of costume and lighting can construct a character's psychological and social identity within a single frame. This principle is evident here: Korda is seen sitting in the co-pilot's seat, with a low-angle shot depicting him gazing at the burning engine with an expression of indifference, as if convinced he is immune to harm. The low-angle camera position encodes his perceived sense of dominance, while the white color, the muted, cool tones, and the dim, natural exterior lighting from outside the aircraft collectively encode emotional alienation and an illusory sense of control. The long shot serves not only to emphasize the physical and emotional separation, but also to heighten the ironic contrast between the visual serenity and the unseen violence (Haykal et al., 2025). These visual elements coalesce into a representation of arrogance as Korda's fundamental moral condition or the absence of humility, self-awareness, and true responsibility.

UNFREEZE STAGE



FIGURE 1: (00:03:39)

In Figure 1 (at 0:03:39), an asymmetrical wide shot shows a cornfield devastated by a plane crash, with a crow perched on an abandoned diplomatic bag in the foreground and the wreckage of the aircraft's tail visible in the background, rendered in warm tones. The asymmetrical composition and scattered scene layout encode the collapse of the orderly, controlled world upon which Korda's arrogance was built, while the lying diplomatic bag signifies the collapse of the power structure underpinning his excessive sense of superiority. As Parmar (2020) observes in his analysis of Wes Anderson's framing, asymmetrical compositions are consistently employed to signal a disruption of a character's perceived control, with the imbalance of visual weight directly encoding psychological instability. The crow, as a conventional symbol of death, further undermines the fundamental arrogance that positions Korda as a figure immune to consequences.



FIGURE 2: (00:04:28)

In Figure 2 (at 0:04:28), the reduced aspect ratio leaves black bars at the top and bottom of the frame in NDE scene (Near-death-experience), with a dominance of monochromatic grey and white, whilst a younger Korda appears in a surreal divine courtroom, depicted within deep space composition. The compressed frame encodes the shrinking of Korda's world, eliminating the spatial dominance that visually reinforces his arrogance. As Parmar (2020) demonstrates, the manipulation of aspect ratio in Anderson's films functions as a formal device to mark temporal and psychological thresholds, with each ratio shift signalling a fundamentally altered relationship between the character and their world. The setting of the divine courtroom places Korda before a moral authority that transcends himself, forcing a re-evaluation of his value system centred on arrogance and indifference.

CHANGE STAGE



FIGURE 3: (00:10:50)



FIGURE 4: (01:05:20)



FIGURE 5: (01:15:47)

In Figure 3, the low-angle shot places Korda at the centre of a symmetrical composition within the palazzo, surrounded by white walls and two doors behind him, with his hands folded on the table. To the right lies a skull, with subdued lighting and cool tones that darken the background and draw attention to him. The striped clean blue suit, which he is still wearing indicate he still has original moral values, and the camera angle suggest that his arrogance has not entirely vanished, but his physical conditions, covered in bandages and injuries, indicate that this identity is no longer intact. As Petrie & Boggs (2018) explain, a low-angle shot exaggerates a subject's size and conveys dominance and power. The skull signifies the emergence of an awareness of death that was previously absent from his arrogant demeanour. In Figure 4 (01:05:20), the asymmetrical composition shows Korda kneeling on the left before a larger divine figure on the right. This compositional imbalance indicates a submissive position towards a higher power, signalling the emergence of humility as a new moral value that is beginning to replace his previous sense of superiority. In Figure 5, four visual elements work in tandem. The grey dust covering Korda's entire costume signifies the gradual loss of his former identity as a businessman. The eye-level shot represented Korda is no longer in a position of superiority as he once was. The armrest, made from aircraft fabric, illustrates a shift in function from a symbol of power to a practical tool. The artwork covered in white cloth in the background signifies the closure of the old value system. The presence of the abbey mother and Liesl within the frame indicates the existence of social interaction playing a role in the process of moral transformation.

REFREEZE STAGE



FIGURE 6: (1:18:15)



FIGURE 7: (01:25:00)



FIGURE 8: (01:34:06)

The consistent clean white outfit worn by Korda in all three scenes of Refreeze is the most explicit marker of the consolidation of moral values. This is emphasized by Petrie & Boggs (2018) note, filmmakers often charge color with symbolic meaning specific to a film's own context, such as deep reds, muted tones, or a recurring costume color accumulate meaning through repetition and association rather than through any fixed, universal signification. In Figure 6, an eye-level medium shot shows Korda receiving the sacrament with all characters from his transformative journey present in a single frame. The consistent white costume signifies the stabilisation of his new identity, whilst the act of baptism affirms the 'Refreeze' stage. Baptism is understood not merely as a symbolic act, but as an expression of faith and obedience that reflects a total transformation of life (Cibro & Sinamo, 2025). The public setting, witnessed by all the characters, signifies that this renewal has received social validation, rather than being merely a personal decision. In Figure 7, the same white costume is retained as Korda makes the biggest financial decision of his life, with the edited text "ENTIRELY KORDA FORTUNE/ASSETS" displayed in the background. This cross-contextual consistency in costume signifies that the new identity is now stable, whilst the composition of total transparency signifies the internalised values of justice and responsibility. In Figure 8, a more intimate medium close-up shows Korda wearing a white chef's shirt with cooking stains on it, in the setting of a simple small bistro. The contrast in setting from luxury to simplicity, the gesture of working with head bowed, and the wall clock signifying a regular rhythm, signify the values humility that now live within daily habits.

The finding that the white costume serves as a marker of the 'Refreeze' phase in the character of Korda constitutes an original contribution of this study. In previous studies of Wes Anderson's films, aesthetic elements such as symmetrical composition and a pastel colour palette have been recognised as stylistic signatures that reinforce the narrative atmosphere (Permadikusumah et al., 2025), yet they have never been specifically mapped as a simultaneous, staged system of moral coding for characters. This study demonstrates that these visual elements are not merely aesthetic choices, but a structured system of moral signalling.

The consistent use of white by Korda whilst receiving the sacrament, making the biggest financial decision of his life, and working in a simple bistro demonstrates that the stability of moral identity is encoded through a costume that remains unchanged across contexts, a visual strategy functionally equivalent to an explicit narrative statement regarding character development.

LIESL'S MORAL TRANSFORMATION

Liesl's starting moral values are visually constructed in the scene at 00:10:21, which shows that Liesl lacks on independency. She positioned in the centre of the frame in a medium long shot with distant framing, so that her body appears small and the space of the Korda's Palazzo dominates the visual, reinforced by the symmetrical composition and the cool, muted colour palette, which underscores the character's alienation within her own environment. Her bowed posture, with her hands folded clutching a rosary, combined with her nun's costume, constructs an image of submission and dependence on an external value system. The wooden table in the foreground forms a perspective line that directs attention towards Liesl while creating a visual distance that reinforces the fact that she is not free to determine her own destiny. Visually, the dominance of the space over the subject, the lack of expressive movement, and the emphasis on religious symbols indicate that Liesl's identity is not yet independent, but remains dependent on religious structures and values, thus signifying a lack of self-reliance.

UNFREEZE STAGE

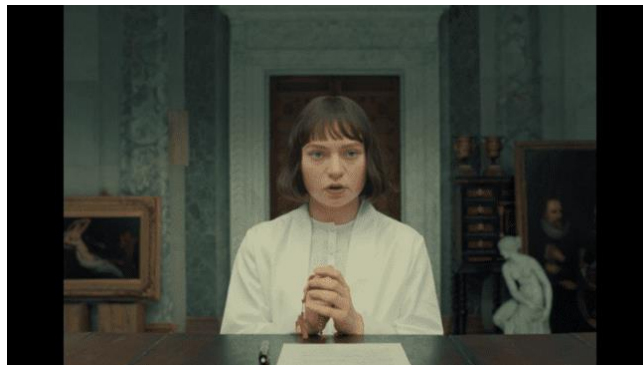


FIGURE 9: (00:21:02)

In Figure 9, Liesl is shown in an eye-level medium shot at Palazzo Korda, wearing white pyjamas and no make-up while holding a red rosary, with the 'Assertion of Birthright' document and a pen in front of her. This visual composition signifies the 'Unfreezing' stage, not as the emergence of a new identity, but as the beginning of the melting away of her long-standing dependence on a religious value system. The inheritance document serves as a convincing message that halts the continuation of her religious identity, while the rosary she clutches tightly and symmetry composition represent a restraining force in the form of an attachment that is still being maintained. Ebaugh (1988, in Gull & Cragun, 2024) "The beginning stage of this process is typically some event or circumstance that introduces doubt." This moment of doubt conveys the confrontation between a secular inheritance and a sacred symbol initiates the reinterpretation of values, marking the fragile but decisive onset of detachment from her religious identity. The lighting, which grows darker towards the background, signifies that the old environment no longer provides a sense of security, thereby reinforcing internal instability. Kurniawan (2020) demonstrates that in Anderson's visual grammar, the transition from high-key to low-key lighting within a scene encodes a shift in a character's emotional orientation from security to uncertainty, a principle directly applicable

to Liesl's darkening background here. The white pyjamas indicate a transitional state in which Liesl is no longer fully within her old identity, yet has not yet found a new one. The door behind her functions as a threshold symbol, highlighting Liesl's position of transition. The visuals in this scene affirm that Liesl is in the early stages of breaking free from dependence, where the old identity is beginning to lose its power but has not yet been fully replaced.

CHANGE STAGE



FIGURE 10: (00:37:51)

In Figure 10, setting inside the train, featuring warm lighting suggest a shift in atmosphere from rigid adherence to a more open state, shows Liesl in a two-shot with Bjorn that is not entirely symmetrical, signalling the 'Change' phase through the visual tension created by her costume, which combines a white nun's costume with bold makeup such as red lipstick and nail polish. This contrast suggests that the old identity has not yet been fully abandoned whilst elements of the new identity are beginning to be adopted. The presence of an empty beer glass indicates that Liesl has begun to act outside the bounds of the religious norms that previously governed her behaviour. Petrie and Boggs (2018) observe that an object acquires symbolic weight when a character assigns extraordinary value and importance to it, thus conveying a meaning beyond the ordinary and offering direct insight into the character's inner state. Seen in this light, the replacement of a simple wooden red rosary with a Cartier rosary is not a superficial exchange of accessories, but rather a visual declaration, the object Liesl now holds encodes the value system she is moving toward, transforming a devotional tool into a non-religious marker of self-determination. This change is in line with Eyre & Richard (1993) opinion that teaching values by internalizing principles so that they become part of their identity, not just external rules. Liesl's transformation towards independence and sincerity is a form of internalizing values that she chose herself, not simply following rules. Liesl's transformation during the 'Change' phase was influenced by social interaction as a form of human contact, as this phase also became evident after Liesl signed the contract, marking her entry into a new social circle.

REFREEZE STAGE



FIGURE 11: (01:33:44)

In Figure 11, Liesl displays a state of ‘refreezing’ in which she has completely shed her old moral framework and fully embraced a new one. This is characterised by the setting she’s in a narrow, rocky corridor with high, dark grey walls, wearing a dark dress with white apron without her nun’s costume, but with her striking makeup and red nail polish still intact. The absence of the nun’s habit signifies the shedding of a religious identity previously shaped by the institution, whilst the persistence of elements of self-expression indicates the formation of a more independent identity, where actions are no longer dictated by external authority. In line with what Ebaugh (1988) describes in her book *Becoming an Ex*, this moment as the stage of creating the ‘ex-role’, where those leaving emit external cues including through dress, behavior, and appearance that signal to others that a fundamental change in identity has occurred. For former nuns in particular, Ebaugh notes that changes in dress and personal style are the primary markers used to communicate and socially acknowledge the new role identity. This shift also represents the emergence of sincerity, as the self-expression displayed stems from personal choice, not institutional obligation. The simple, unstructured setting emphasises that the resulting moral actions are more authentic, rooted in self-awareness and direct experience. In line with the ideas of boo & Eyre (1993), this stage shows consistency between beliefs, words, and actions, so that the new values that Liesl chooses are truly internalized as part of her identity.

BJORN’S MORAL TRANSFORMATION

Unlike Korda and Liesl, whose original moral states had been gradually revealed in scenes prior to the Unfreezing phase, Bjorn’s original moral state is revealed all at once and collapses within the Unfreezing scene itself. This is due to the traumatic nature of the crisis he experiences and how well Anderson hides Bjorn’s moral value, which directly erases the boundary between the ‘before’ state and the moment of disruption, causing the two to merge into a single visual event.

UNFREEZE STAGE



FIGURE 12: (01:04:48)

Figure 12, depicted a high-angle shot shows a completely scattered and asymmetrical pattern of documents lying on the green grass following the plane crash, without showing Bjorn’s body at all. The absence of the character within the frame is the most significant cinematic choice: the scattered fake passports serve as a visual representation of Bjorn’s identity itself. The high-angle shot encodes total weakness and vulnerability. The random and asymmetrical pattern encodes the uncontrolled disintegration of identity. Bjorn’s entire life is the polar opposite of honesty and sincerity. He lies about his identity every single day. Within the framework of ‘Unfreezing’, this scene depicts the collapse of the lies that previously underpinned Bjorn’s identity. This situation is triggered by a driving force, a traumatic external event which the plane explosion, which directly shatters the restraining force, false identity he had maintained

until then. The representation of the bodily absence as a statement of identity is an original finding that has not been explored in previous research, including in the study by Haykal et al. (2025), which analysed the irony in *The Zone of Interest* through the use of long shots, where the absence of elements within the frame is employed to create a sense of ironic distance, rather than as a statement of the character's identity itself.

CHANGE STAGE



FIGURE 13: (01:18:22)



FIGURE 14: (01:18:30)

In Figure 13, the warm red velvet suit without the glasses and bow tie he usually wears positions Bjorn as the focal point in the centre of a democratic, eye-level medium group shot. The removal of the glasses and bow tie as elements of disguise signifies the shedding of the first layer of pretence. The red suit, same color when he in disguise represented that he still affiliated with some parties either Korda or other parties. The open and expressive hand gestures encode an emerging openness, distinct from the ever-closed behaviour of a spy. In Figure 14, Bjorn stands in the doorway of Korda's room in the same outfit as in Figure 13. The threshold symbolism of the doorway position signifies the process of entering a new territory both literally and metaphorically, whilst Korda's position in the foreground leading, with Bjorn behind following voluntarily, signifies that this transition is a genuine moral choice. Within Bloom's framework, this change is triggered by human contact and emotional experiences arising from direct interaction, thereby encouraging a shift from a dishonest orientation driven by self-interest towards a value of loyalty based on trust (Bloom, 2010).

REFREEZE STAGE



FIGURE 15: (01:32:38)

A mid-20th-century-style classroom, with a blackboard covered in notes about insects and rows of pupils, features Bjorn wearing a short-sleeved yellow OCBD paired with a tie but without a suit. This lighter, more informal variation in attire signifies a stabilisation of identity without elements of disguise, whilst active hand gestures indicate direct engagement in tangible social activities. The structured and legitimate classroom setting affirms the Refreezing stage, in which Bjorn's position is now integrated into a social context consistent with his new moral values. The key value that emerges is honesty, marked by the absence of disguising attributes and a transparent self-representation. Bjorn's identity is no longer shaped by his role as an agent or by his affiliation with another party, but stands as an individual acting on his own behalf. He becomes a legitimate and authentic teacher.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORAL TRANSFORMATION AND VISUAL IDENTITY

The preceding analysis of Korda, Liesl, and Bjorn collectively demonstrates that moral transformation in *The Phoenix Scheme* (2025) does not only operate through dialogue or internal monologue, but also inscribed directly onto the visual identities of the characters. Visual identity, as understood in this study, refers to the totality of appearance-based signals that collectively encode a character's moral position at any given stage of the narrative. As Petrie and Boggs (2018) note, characterisation in film has a great deal to do with what is revealed visually and instantaneously, since the minute a character appears on screen, audiences make certain assumptions based on their dress, physical appearance, and the way they carry themselves. In Wes Anderson's film, this visual logic is systematically extended. The appearance of each character does not remain static, but undergoes a series of deliberate and traceable transformations that mirror the internal moral arc through the Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze stages.

The visual narratives of Korda, Liesl and Bjorn demonstrate that the moral transformation in *The Phoenix Scheme* is conveyed through the systematic interplay of cinematic visual codes. These visual elements collectively serve to construct a moral identity that evolves throughout the narrative. This finding supports Petrie and Boggs's (2018) argument that audiences interpret character identities through visual information, whilst also expanding their framework by demonstrating that recurring visual changes convey the progression of moral transformation, rather than merely establishing character identities. As a result, cinematic visual elements function not only as aesthetic devices, but also as a structured system of representation through which moral development can be observed.

Pandia and Wijaya (2023), identified shifts in moral values through transcripts of dialogue, character utterances, and song lyrics. They identified four drivers of moral change: emotional and non-rational processes; human touch or social circles; income generation; and

self-interest. This study confirms the findings regarding human contact as a mediator of moral change, which is visually evident through the presence of another figure within the frame during the third stage of the characters' transformation. However, this study differs methodologically as it does not rely on verbal transcripts at all. Rather than identifying moral change through the characters' speech, this study demonstrates that the same change can be discerned through shifts in visual codes, as seen in the tension between Liesl's nun's costume and red makeup as a visual representation of the Change stage, equal to any verbal statement. This study found that physical trauma in the form of a plane explosion can function as a driving force for the Unfreeze phase, encoded visually through the absence of the character's body within the frame, a mechanism not identified in the study conducted by Pandia and Wijaya.

This visual analysis also reveals patterns that differ from Danial's (2025) findings in his study of Carl Kollhoff's moral values in the novel *Door-to-Door Bookstore*. Danial found that motivational values dominated with the highest frequency, as the novel relies on the characters' internal thoughts and actions expressed through dialogue. In the context of the film *the Phoenician Scheme*, the 'value of being' component is dominated by visual representation because cinema inherently operates through visible visuals and coded spaces, rather than through internal monologues. This demonstrates that the medium of the artwork helps shape the way moral values are represented; thus, a comprehensive moral analysis requires an awareness of the distinctive nature of each medium under examination. This study also confirms that cinematic visual analysis is capable of revealing moral dimensions that are not always apparent through narrative or verbal approaches alone. The film *The Phoenician Scheme* (2025) demonstrates that cinema possesses a unique capacity to represent human moral transformation through a structured, repetitive, and scientifically analysable system of visual representation.

Aside from confirming and expanding on previous research findings, this study also makes a theoretical contribution to Lewin's model of change itself. Although originally formulated for organisational contexts, the Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze framework presupposes the existence of verbal or behavioural indicators that signal transitions. The findings demonstrate that the model can be coherently applied to the purely visual domain, where each stage can be identified through consistent and codable visual markers, rather than through reported utterances or documented behaviour. This suggests that the model's structural logic is media-independent and could serve as a productive framework for future visual analyses of character development, extending beyond the specific theoretical combination employed in this study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that the moral transformation of the main character in the film *The Phoenician Scheme* (2025) is systematically represented through a structured visual language. These findings confirm that cinematic elements serve not only to support the aesthetics or narrative, but also as a system of representation capable of effectively communicating the characters' moral development. Thus, this study demonstrates that visual language plays a significant role in communicating moral change throughout the narrative.

Theoretically, this study expands the application of Kurt Lewin's model by showing that this framework can be used not only to explain behavioural change, but also to analyse the visual representation of moral transformation in films. Furthermore, this study affirms that visual elements can be positioned as an independent system of moral representation, thereby broadening the use of cinematic analysis in the study of moral transformation. In practical terms, the findings of this study offer an analytical framework that researchers, academics and

students can use to examine character development through visual language in a more systematic manner.

However, this study has its limitations as it focuses solely on visual representation. Further research is recommended to combine visual analysis with these elements in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of moral representation in cinema. In addition, future research could also apply this analytical framework to other films by Wes Anderson, as well as films from different genres, to examine whether the patterns of visual representation of moral transformation identified in this study also emerge in different cinematic contexts. Future scholars also could use model to develop to a comparative analysis, a comparison could be made between *The Phoenician Scheme* and other works by Wes Anderson (such as *The Grand Budapest Hotel* or *Isle of Dogs*) to understand how Anderson's formalist style consistently incorporates ethical content within various narrative contexts

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