Johan Chiaramonte & Camille Mathieu

THE MUSEUM OF WES ANDERSON

His Movies and the Works That Inspired Them

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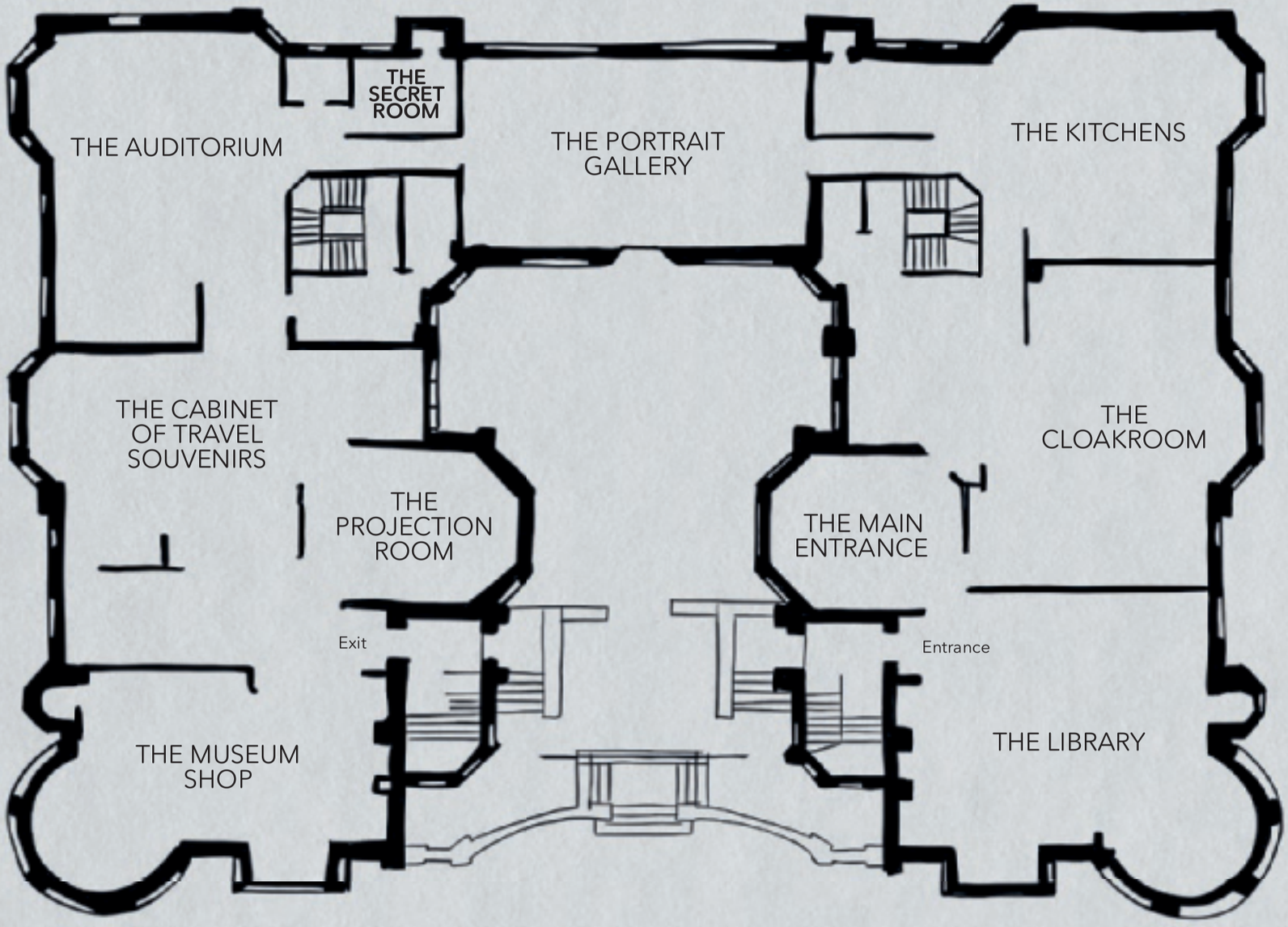
Curated by

CAMILLE MATHIEU & JOHAN CHIARAMONTE

A COMPACT PLAN

PLAN OF THE MUSEUM

FIRST FLOOR



I

THE MAIN ENTRANCE

1975. The Imaginary Museum is both delighted and proud to host a great exhibition devoted to the American movie director Wes Anderson. Like many other movie enthusiasts, you too may have dreamed of entering the mind of one of your favorite filmmakers. Better still, to discover its secret nooks and crannies, to lose yourself in its corridors, to unearth the treasure trunks, to wander around and visit it like a stroller visiting a museum… With its abundance of details, its rich universe and its evocative power, Wes Anderson's films are more inviting than any other to this phantasmagorical stroll.

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Throughout this exhibition, which is not comprehensive, our museum will attempt to draw the contours of a body of work which, despite its detractors, has never ceased to evolve, to mutate and to transform. Much has been said about the undeniable formal qualities of Anderson's cinematographic works: a whimsical, old-fashioned aesthetic, instantly recognizable among thousands, infinite attention devoted to every shot, films reminiscent of picture books, overflowing with trinkets and small objects. Anderson's cinema is indeed art that teems with details, a swarm of features,

an accumulation of meticulously distilled references and of elements arranged with maniacal rigor. This is Anderson's gentle madness, entirely contained within this rigorously organized disorder, where nothing is ever left to chance.

We too sought to forsake the wide-angle lens, and instead, focus on the details, the accessories, the references and the characters that populate his world. In the guise of humble archivists, we will seek to dust them off, to list them and to catalogue them, so that we can better arrange them within the walls of a genuine "imaginary museum."

The book that you are holding in your hands is the catalogue of this fantasized exhibition. From this guided tour will emerge a vast cartography of the Texan filmmaker's imagination. Here, you are free to wander throughout a museum devoid of any real boundaries, whose shape-shifting architecture will gladly adapt to your pleasure. Don't be afraid to act as the passer-through-walls: in this place, nothing is set in stone. In this book, you will read about Indian cinema, French pop music, speeding trains, jaguar sharks, pancakes, fur hats, flashing and buzzing electronic machines, picturesque Italian villages and mysterious islands.

We wanted this meander to be a reflection of Anderson's cinematographic approach: playful and containing a wealth of details; some real, others made up, springing from a universe that one can imagine to be vast, infinite even. Because reality and fiction are constantly intertwined throughout the filmmaker's entire body of work, we too felt that it was necessary to build a bridge between the world of reality and the imaginary, between what is and what could be. Finally, to those of you who find it preposterous, absurd, impossible even, that this exhibition was held in 1975, we ask: when did Wes Anderson and his characters ever allow themselves to be hindered by such practical considerations? The laws of time and physics do not apply here.

Let us now undertake a journey from the priceless captain Zissou to the underwater adventures of Captain Cousteau, from the Grand Budapest cake hotel to Stefan Zweig's World of Yesterday, from the pages of The New Yorker to the columns of the French Dispatch, from the roadrunner's cartoonish deserts to the Technicolor horizons of Asteroid City. Let us sail upon the seas of a movie director that one would be misled to perceive only as a precious stylist, and let us scrape off a little of the varnish from The Darjeeling Limited's sleeper cars and attempt to enter the secrets of Anderson's (occasionally) aquatic world.

Welcome to the Museum of Wes Anderson!

PLEASE FOLLOW THE GUIDE…

II

THE CLOAKROOM

Once your entry ticket has been punched by our friendly ticket seller, it's time for you to remove your overcoat, your bags and your hat and to leave them in the care of your hosts. Be warned, however: the cloakroom in our Imaginary Museum is no ordinary cloakroom. In this room, silky fur coats hang beside terrycloth tennis headbands. Impeccably folded scout outfits, covered with patches, hang beside the purple liveries of the bellhops. Everything holds its rightful place, and everyone wears the uniform given to them. Indeed, in Wes Anderson's movies, there is no room for happenstance; every item in this cloakroom carries its own story, its own intimate meaning, its own share of fantasies, of hopes—and, of course, of intense neuroses. Whether they delineate the contours of a family, a clan or a vocation, Wes Anderson's costumes can never be ignored. While it is true that our clothes do reveal a part of ourselves, this rule could bot be any truer than in the filmmaker's works. In Wes Anderson's world, you are always what you wear; so it is wise indeed to trust appearances. Hence, a red cap that never leaves your head might well make you a worthy heir to Captain Cousteau. To begin the tour, let us explore a few emblematic pieces from this great Andersonian cloakroom. Don your finest suits—preferably Italian— and step out onto the thick carpet of our imaginary cloakroom.

Rushmore's Uniform

The Hallmark of Excellence

A pair of tortoiseshell glasses, a sensible blue Oxford shirt, a neatly knotted striped tie, a navy blue blazer adorned with two honorary pins boasting some unspectacular accomplishments. Only the bright red beret pressed deeply onto the young Max Fischer's skull might provide any indication of the storm that rages within the confines of his well-shaped head. Overly proud to be a member of the eminent Rushmore Academy, Max always looks sharp indeed, in his preppy uniform. On the private school campus, he dreams of being an exemplary student, solving impossible equations, earning unanimous praise from his teachers, and even the affection of the highly respected dean. And yet, while he certainly attempts to compensate by looking like the best student in the classroom, Max Fischer is far from achieving academic miracles. On the contrary, his school years prove to be rather haphazard, and instead, he accumulates extracurricular activities in the hope of concealing mediocre, if not downright poor results.

However, if Max Fischer wears the school uniform with such aplomb, it is foremost because he feels that he belongs, body and soul, to Rushmore's noble institution. His uniform is filled with symbolism, as is often the case in Anderson's world; indeed, this working-class child was granted access to Rushmore's prestigious benches after being awarded a scholarship thanks to one of his many extracurricular talents: playwriting. While his comrades seem to belong to Rushmore by privilege and birth, Max Fischer constantly needs to prove that he indeed deserves to be here. In the absence of an impeccable educational record, it is important, if not absolutely essential, for him to "keep up appearances" by donning an impeccably ironed shirt, while

also lying about his modest social background. However, far from blending in with the rest of the student body, this overdressed suit actually sets him apart from the rest of the students, for the simple reason that he is the only one among them who wears it. Through this chosen, rather than imposed, uniform, Max Fischer dons the outfit of the young man that he projects himself to be, rather than the young man who he really is.

Beneath the surface, the evolution of Max Fisher's outfit symbolizes a quest for identity, an extensive initiatory journey. So when the Rushmore academy dismisses him out of hand, Max's destiny is shaken to the core. For the young man who must now remove Rushmore's noble uniform and return to the benches of the public school, it is the beginning of a genuine identity crisis that manifests through sartorial symptoms.

Max soon seeks refuge with his father, a humble hairdresser, by adopting his vocation… and also his outfit. Embracing a true social legacy and a family heirloom, Max immediately dons an outfit consisting of a fur hat, a thick brown coat and a trusty Thermos, identical to that worn by his "old man." The young Max Fischer no longer dresses as the person he hopes to become, but as the person that he resigns himself to being.

A movie that narrates the tumultuous transition into adulthood, the difficulty of becoming "one's own" in a society that is obsessed with superficial social success, Rushmore leads us along the initiatory and bumpy pathway of adolescence. When at last, in a final burst of emancipation, Max Fischer decides to embrace his individuality, he finally liberates himself from social uniforms. This liberation is expressed through a new selection of clothing: a forest green velvet suit accompanied by a pale pink bow tie—an outfit that reminds us somewhat of the movie director's own choice of clothing. For Wes Anderson, as for Max Fischer, it is much easier to truly be oneself.

J.L.W.'s Suitcases

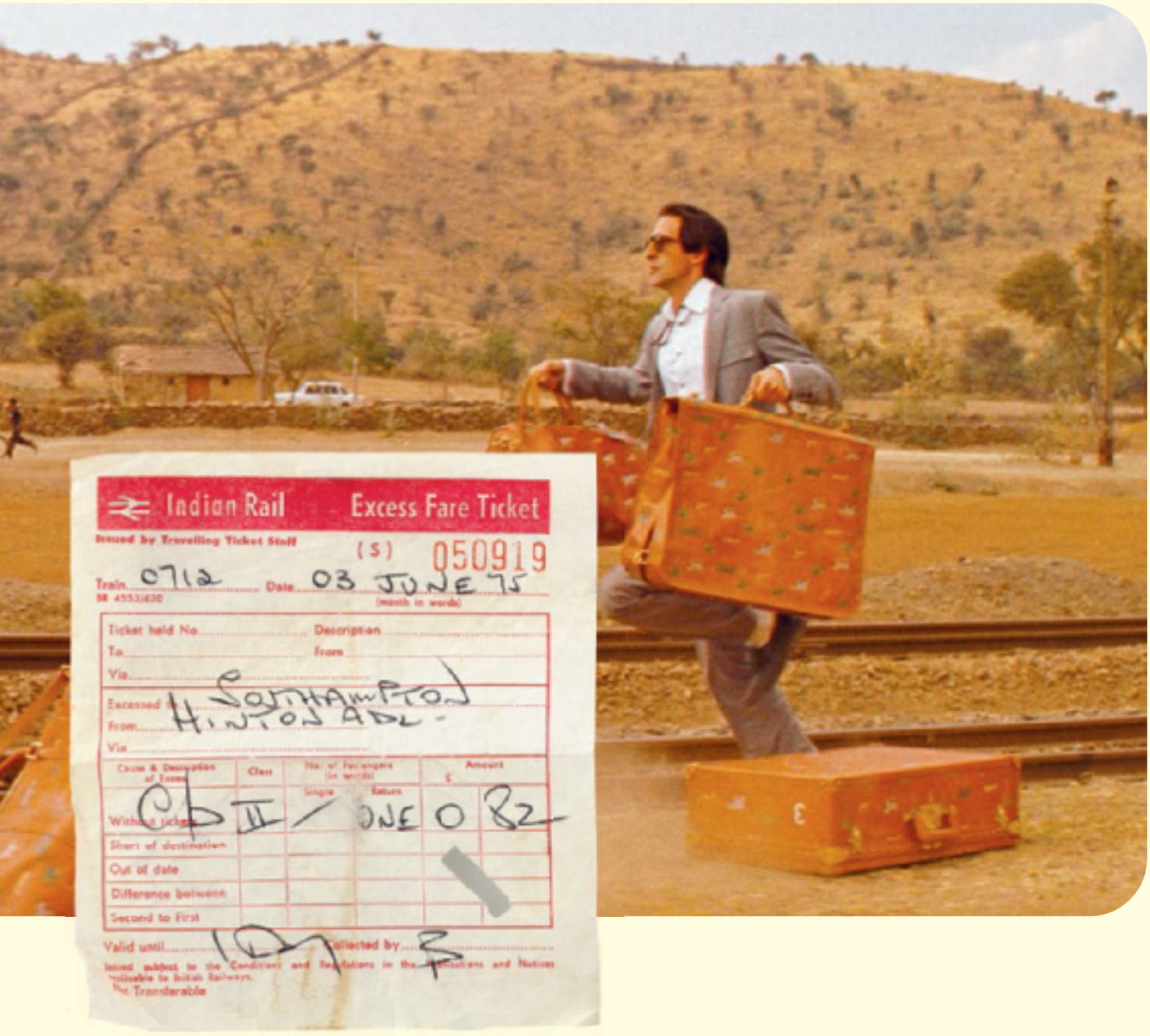
Coming With Baggage

In French, the expression "*plier bagage*" means "to leave, to flee, to scram," "to pack up and leave, to take off, to take to one's heels"—or, when used in a more colloquial context, "to die." It is this last meaning that applies to the enigmatic character J.L.W., whose initials adorn the trunks, bags and suitcases making up this extraordinary assortment of baggage. This one-of-a-kind collection, with its carefully numbered items, is a creation of the very chic François Voltaire, if one should believe the closing credits of the short film *Hotel Chevalier*. In fact, designed by Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton, these baggage items are remarkable, owing to their curious motifs. Instead of the expected monogram, they feature an eye-catching "wildlife" print, created by illustrator Eric Chase Anderson, the director's brother.

On the camel leather, cheetahs, elephants, zebras and other wild creatures are extending their limbs, seemingly caught in the heat of the moment, running an immobile race—mindlessly forging ahead. From this impressive accumulation of paraphernalia emerges a portrait of the Whitman patriarch, whose real name remains unknown, summarized here only by three initials: *J.L.W.* This portrait *in absentia* is drawn up, throughout the movie, through the belongings of the missing father: a razor, some sunglasses customized to his eyesight, the keys to a sports car, and finally, this exceptional collection of baggage, which was split among the three sons that he left behind. These objects, which Francis, Peter and Jack are fighting over, follow them everywhere, like talismans. However, in the context of this journey, embodied by a spiritual

retreat, itself taking the form of an ambush (Francis failed to mention all the details regarding the reasons for the trip), one can legitimately ponder upon the need to carry such a cascade of baggage. The imposing suitcases provide an incongruous contrast with the narrowness of *The Darjeeling Limited*'s carriages, unquestionably encumbering our characters—especially when they will need to drag these suitcases through the Bengalese wilderness.

Behind the sons' unwavering determination to haul this heavy equipment, one perceives the baggage's symbolic charge. For Francis, Peter and Jack Whitman, who seem to have carefully avoided each other since their father's funeral, the journey is above all a mourning process. "*I guess I still got some more healing to do,*" Francis admits as he contemplates at his wounds, reluctantly acknowledging that the pain of losing his beloved father is still with him. For these brothers, who are literally haunted by absence, the imposing set of baggage is a metaphor for the weight of the grief that they are unable to overcome. Considerably weighed down by this burden, they are attempting to move forward, however, in vain. The



expression "*To come with baggage*" precisely refers to the emotional baggage that we all carry with us, filled with unresolved traumas and unfortunate experiences. This metaphor has never been more appropriate than in the case of the Whitman brothers. Here, it is taken literally—and, apart from the baggage's symbolic value, one has no indication whatsoever of what the precious shipment contains. It is only at the very end of this journey of reconciliation and acceptance, rife with adventures, that the three brothers finally relinquish their baggage. In a last-ditch effort to board the return train, the *Bengal Lancer*, the Whitman brothers set off in a frantic pursuit, dropping their suitcases and bags on the platform. An insane race, filmed in slow motion, where the characters no doubt remind us of wild animals, they are in turn caught mid-stride, in the heat of the instant. Fortunately, for our three wildcats, it is no longer a matter of running away, but instead, returning home.

The Lobby Boy's Uniform

Dressed Up to the Nines

1932. In the interwar period, overlooking the snowy landscapes of the Zubrowka Alps, the splendid Grand Budapest Hotel is living out its last days of glory. A veritable institution for the declining aristocracy of the Old Continent, the Grand Budapest is a beehive, teeming with a humble staff that busy themselves, buzzing about like bees. Sauntering down corridors covered with thick, purple carpeting, hastily lunching in the hotel's kitchens or secretly sneaking into the rooms of lonely wealthy widows, the staff of the Grand Budapest Hotel are recognizable by their good manners and their impeccable violet suits. Whether elevator attendants or concierges, waiters or bellboys, all, without exception, proudly wear the colors of the Grand Budapest Hotel. Among them, the young and ambitious Zero Moustafa dons his uniform with formidable seriousness: a floor attendant's outfit with an officer collar, edged with red trim, carefully buttoned up, topped with a cap adorned with the following inscription, in large gold embroidered letters: "LOBBY BOY". In this hotel world, where the clothes always make the man, every protagonist zealously plays the role assigned to them. And, far from concealing employees from the prying eyes of the clientele, as is customary in such establishments, their gleaming uniforms stand out starkly against the pale pink decor, always captivating the viewer's attention. Indeed, there is no doubt for spectators that the staff of the Grand Budapest are the beating heart of this noble institution, the last guardians and protectors of a world doomed to disappear.

In his *lobby boy* costume, awkwardly drawing a thin Errol Flynn moustache—the hallmark of sophistication—on his upper lip, Zero has found more than a mere livelihood in this adopted country: he has become part of a surrogate family, brought together by the strength of its vocation. "*Why do you want to be a lobby boy?*" M. Gustave enquires. "*Well, who wouldn't?*" replies Zero Moustafa candidly. M. Gustave's presumably modest origins and Zero Moustafa's not entirely compliant legal papers are of little importance; once they don the uniform of the Grand Budapest Hotel, with its flamboyant colors, they become members of a society apart, a world that exists under a dome, governed by rules from another time, sheltered from the outside world… or almost. On spotting the soldiers posted on the railways leading to Lutz, the carefree M. Gustave sniffs with disdain, appalled by the blandness of their uniforms.

While totalitarianism lurks outside, in its morose gray uniform, the dazzling concierge fervently maintains the hotel's standing; elegance becomes a last bulwark against barbarism, and poetry, as a means to combat the horrors of war. It's a losing battle for both the idealist M. Gustave and for the eminent Grand Budapest Hotel, both caught up by the tides of history. Many years later, in the grounds of the aging hotel, Zero Moustafa remembers his comrade in arms: "*To be frank, I think his world had vanished long before he ever entered it—but, I will say: he certainly sustained the illusion with a marvelous grace!*" In memory of his lost love, of his friend M. Gustave and of the fallen glory of the hotel, Zero Moustafa, now in the twilight years of his life, recounts the incredible adventure of the Grand Budapest Hotel. He is dressed in a velvet jacket in deep shades of purple, the color of days gone by.

Margot's Fur Coat

The Tenenbaum Mystery

"She was wearing a sheared-raccoon coat, and Lane, walking toward her quickly but with a slow face, reasoned to himself, with suppressed excitement, that he was the only one on the platform who really knew Franny's coat. He remembered that once, in a borrowed car, after kissing Franny for a half hour or so, he had kissed her coat lapel, as though it were a perfectly desirable, organic extension of the person herself."[1]
This is how the character of Franny is depicted in J.D. Salinger's work *Franny and Zooey*, all dressed in fur, stepping off the train, while Lane, seeing her coming, fails to repress a gesture that betrays his emotion. Franny Glass and Margot Tenenbaum might well be distant cousins. The two New Yorkers certainly have a lot in common: their love of books and theater, their feverish chain-smoking habit (even though Margot smokes cigarettes of the imaginary brand "Sweet Afton"), a certain affinity for kissing in cars, and finally, their iconic fur coat. In fact, Franny's "entrance" could just as easily describe Margot's arrival as, wrapped up in her long coat, she steps off a Green Line bus to meet her adopted brother, in a slow-motion sequence that speaks volumes about the latter's feelings toward her.

One might point out that Margot's fur coat, too, appears to be "*an organic extension*" of her person. Like all Tenenbaum children, Margot is bound to wear what resembles a uniform, which she only removes on the rarest of occasions. The brief glimpse the film allows us to take into her closet indeed reveals a room invariably filled with silky fur coats. In Anderson's movies, every character wears an outfit of their own: the

1. J.D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey*, *Back Bay Books*, January 30, 2001.

elevator attendants don the purple suits worn by modest bellboys, while the Tenenbaums wear the Tenenbaum uniform. This strange attire, which remains unchanged throughout the years, reveals an insight into the young woman's troubled psyche. *"In* The Royal Tenenbaums, *the 'uniform' also helps to reinforce the idea that the Tenenbaum children peaked in childhood. We see these people at age 10, and then suddenly at age 30. And part of the story is how they're connected to the way they were then,"*[2] explains the filmmaker. During our guided tour, we will return to take a closer look at this strange *Andersonian* disorder that sees adults and children swap roles, as if in a game of mirrors. As a result, the precocious siblings soon grow into barely functional adults, entangled in the memory of a certain golden age of the Tenenbaums.

In this respect, the only Tenenbaum daughter's outfit constantly blurs boundaries, revealing to what extent Margot is at odds with the world that surrounds her. As a child, this thick fur coat—a symbol of femininity, charged with a whole imaginary world of luxury, even sensuality—appears to weigh heavily on the little girl's frail shoulders. In adulthood, on the other hand, while the luxurious fur coat no longer appears incongruous, Margot's entire outfit suddenly seems inordinately childish. Margot still wears the moccasins that she wore throughout her youth; her never-changing Lacoste dress, decorated with colorful stripes, has become too short, a symbol revealing the secret influence of her feelings for Richie, a tennis player himself. When one gazes upon Margot's impassive face, one notices the same features: her large, light-colored eyes are heavily rimmed with black, while her smooth, blond hair is held back in a sensible parting by a little girl's red plastic clip. Looking terribly sophisticated in her caramel-colored fur coat, carrying a timeless *Birkin* bag designed by Hermès on her arm, Margot nevertheless looks like a child dressing up in her mother's clothes. Beneath her elegant coat,

2. *The Royal Tenenbaums*, press kit, Touchstone Pictures, 2001.

her rebellious soul shines through, manifesting in her smoky make-up, her nasty habit of smoking on the sly, her repeated attempts at running away and her secret adventures. The mysterious Margot is reminiscent of a number of glamorous and marginal idols, among which the singer Nico, whose deep, unyielding voice resonates when Margot makes her first appearance, to the track *These Days*.

Here, the movie director's love of props and costumes truly shines through; during the preparation of the film, he imposed a significant restriction: no item should be purchased, everything should be made.[3] Created by Fendi from sketches and notes by Anderson and his costume designer, Karen Patch, this uniform, like many others envisioned by the filmmaker, becomes a narrative element in its own right. The siblings wear their neuroses on their sleeves, like Richie, who never leaves his Björn Borg-style tennis headband, the vestige of a broken career, and Chas, whose family uniform reveals the extent of his trauma: since the death of his wife, Chas has imposed it on all in his clan, as if to better bring his shattered family together, fearing that it would otherwise disintegrate before his eyes. Margot's uniform, however, is even more remarkable. From the age of eleven, the little girl took to the stage in the role of a wounded zebra, draped in a striped fur costume. This totem animal, to call it that way, even appears on the crimson tapestry of her childhood bedroom, on the third floor of the family home. Attentive viewers will recognize many of the animal prints, zebras and leopards, among the furs hanging in the closet. Beneath the young woman's apathetic appearance, the fur coat may indeed betray a dormant wild nature. Silent and distant, cultivating the utmost secrecy about all details of her life, Margot remains an elusive character. And since it is never a good idea to ask too many questions about mysteries, perhaps at the risk of giving them away, Margot's outfit with all its superb contradictions, ensures that the aura surrounding the young woman is never dissipated. On the contrary, the heavy, coppery fur coat further adds to the mystery embodied by Margot Tenenbaum.

3. Mary Sollosi, "*The Royal Tenenbaums costume designer looks back on dressing 'a family in decline'*", *Entertainment Weekly*, 18 October 2021.

The Yellow Jumpsuits From *Bottle Rocket*

Amateur Bank Robbers

Dignan's choice of outfit for a heist is indeed a curious one. Dressed in bright yellow jumpsuits, Dignan and his gang storm a refrigerated warehouse, where they rob a safe. A first "big score" for these weekend criminals, who are a little more accustomed to robbing local bookstores, or even their own parents. Of course, these canary-yellow jumpsuits have one definite disadvantage: they are rather flashy. However, they also offer the not inconsiderable benefit of boosting team cohesion—and this feature, both for Dignan and for Wes Anderson, is by means no means unimportant. Here is a point that Anderson feels particularly strongly about, and which he already openly expresses in *Bottle Rocket*: the need to belong to a family, in the broadest sense of the term—families bound by blood, like the Tenenbaums, but also other kinds of families, brought together by the strength of a calling, such as a strange brotherhood of butlers, by their sense of adventure, such as a tribe of little scouts in khaki outfits, or around a charismatic, but misguided leader, such as a crew of oceanographers aboard a rickety submarine… When the whole world turns its back on Andersonian characters, they turn toward their own small, offbeat, marginal communities, for good. Dignan is therefore the founder of the first "battalion" in Wes Anderson's cinematographic works, and his need to belong—a slightly more obsessive pursuit—already foreshadows the obsession that will run throughout the director's filmography. Yellow is hardly a discreet color, that much is true. However, Dignan is not one to let himself be concerned about such minor details—which is a pity, we shall