




INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER, CLASS, AND CINEMATIC SPACE: FEMALE AGENCY IN PARASITE AND THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL

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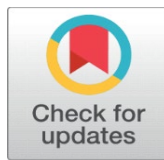
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ABSTRACT

This article develops an intersectional feminist analysis of female agency in Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019) and Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), examining how gender, class, race, and cinematic space intersect in the social and economic portrayal of women. Drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, Laura Mulvey's theory of the gendered gaze, bell hooks's oppositional gaze, Henri Lefebvre's theory of socially produced space, Doreen Massey's gendered spatiality, auteur theory, semiotic analysis, disclosure theory, and triadic power analysis, the study argues that both films present women as tactically capable, emotionally intelligent, and structurally indispensable, yet refuse them durable narrative sovereignty.[2][3][1] In *Parasite*, women's labor is tied to domestic service, class precarity, and architectural confinement, while dangerous disclosures about hidden infrastructures of wealth expose the violent limits of their agency.[4][5] In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Agatha's skill, mobility, and care sustain the film's narrative world, but her significance is filtered through a nostalgic masculine memory structure that turns action into recollection and recollection into male authorship.[6][7] Semiotic mapping of basements, kitchens, stairs, smell, floodwater, pastries, corridors, keys, and Agatha's birthmark demonstrates that the visual grammar of both films encodes women as central to narrative function yet marginal to narrative ownership.[8][9][6] Triad analysis further reveals that female characters often occupy unstable third positions—broker, buffer, mediator, or expendable term—within unequal relational structures that privilege masculine continuity.[10][11][12] By integrating ethos through theoretical credibility, logos through structured comparative method, and pathos through attention to vulnerability, loss, and social exclusion, this article contends that contemporary cinema may visibly animate female agency while still denying women full narrative authority. The comparison between Bong's class thriller and Anderson's nostalgic auteur cinema therefore clarifies a broader transnational pattern: women can be indispensable to how stories move while remaining secondary to who finally owns those stories.[6][13][2]

Keywords: Female Agency, Intersectionality, Cinematic Space, Semiotics, Auteur Theory, Disclosure Theory, Triadic Power, *Parasite*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*



1. INTRODUCTION

Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* and Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* occupy markedly different aesthetic worlds, yet both films offer powerful sites for examining the conditions under which female agency is produced, constrained, and narratively minimized. One film stages the brutal verticality of class through contemporary Korean domestic space;

the other constructs a nostalgic, highly curated memory-world haunted by loss, displacement, and masculine remembrance. Their tonal registers differ sharply, but both texts organize women's lives through structures of service, vulnerability, and partial visibility.[6][13][5]

Intersections of Gender, Class, and Cinematic Space: Female Agency in Parasite and the Grand Budapest Hotel This omission matters because women in both films do not merely decorate the narrative background. They labor, regulate domestic order, interpret danger, manage emotion, preserve objects, and sustain continuity across fragile worlds. Yet these actions rarely translate into lasting narrative authority. Female agency is thus present, but unevenly valued.[6][4][14]

This article approaches that contradiction through an intersectional feminist framework. Kimberlé Crenshaw's account of intersectionality demonstrates that structures of domination overlap rather than act in isolation, making it insufficient to discuss gender without also accounting for race, class, labor, and social location.[2][15][16] Although the racial formations of the two films are not identical, both rely on marked and unmarked bodies, outsider positions, and unequal distributions of belonging. In Parasite, working-class Korean women are placed inside domestic labor regimes that expose them to humiliation, displacement, and violence. In The Grand Budapest Hotel, Agatha's marked body, precarious class status, and mediated presence in a male memory frame position her as central to affect yet secondary to narrative authorship.[6][4]

The article argues that female agency in these films can be understood most clearly through a coordinated use of feminist film theory, intersectionality, auteur theory, disclosure theory, semiotics, and triadic power analysis. This combined method allows a reading of women not only as characters but as classed and gendered social actors whose movement, speech, silence, labor, and visibility are shaped by authorial style and narrative form. The goal is not to force both films into the same ideological mold, but to show how very different cinematic systems can arrive at structurally similar limits on women's narrative sovereignty.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. INTERSECTIONALITY, RACE, AND GENDER

Kimberlé Crenshaw's intervention into legal and feminist theory remains foundational because it clarifies that discrimination is often produced through the convergence of race and sex rather than through either category taken separately.[2] This insight has since expanded into a wider analytical framework for understanding how class, ethnicity, labor, and gender interact across institutions and cultural texts.[15][16] For film analysis, intersectionality makes it possible to ask not merely whether women are present, but what kinds of women they are permitted to be, under what social conditions, and with what forms of recognition or disposability.

In Parasite, the social location of women is inseparable from labor and class. Chung-sook and Moon-gwang inhabit domestic space as workers whose agency depends upon access to a household that never truly belongs to them. Yeon-kyo, by contrast, is insulated by wealth yet limited by a decorative, dependent femininity. In The Grand Budapest Hotel, Agatha's femininity is likewise shaped by class position, affective labor, and outsider marking. These women cannot be fully understood through gender alone; their agency emerges at the intersection of gendered expectation, economic precarity, and unequal access to institutional or narrative power.[6][4][2]

2.2. FEMINIST FILM THEORY AND SPECTATORSHIP

Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" remains one of the most influential statements in feminist film theory because it demonstrates how mainstream cinema organizes looking relations around a masculine subject position.[3] Mulvey argues that women in classical cinema often function as images to be looked at rather than as fully sovereign agents of action and narration.[3] Although Parasite and The Grand Budapest Hotel are contemporary films operating beyond classical Hollywood conventions, Mulvey's account remains useful because both films still unevenly distribute narrative privilege and visual authority.

Bell hooks complicates and expands this framework by showing that looking is also a site of resistance and that feminist film theory must account for racialized spectatorship and black female critical agency.[17] Her intervention is especially valuable methodologically because it pushes film analysis beyond a universalized female subject and insists on differentiated structures of visibility and exclusion.[17] Together, Crenshaw, Mulvey, and hooks make possible a more nuanced account of women's cinematic agency, one that connects looking, embodiment, race, and institutional power.

2.3. SPACE, CLASS, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Henri Lefebvre's theory of socially produced space enables this study to treat houses, corridors, service zones, hidden rooms, and architectural thresholds as ideological structures rather than neutral settings. Space is made by social relations and in turn reproduces them. That principle is especially useful in *Parasite*, where the semi-basement, the villa, the staircase, and the hidden bunker become visible diagrams of class power, and in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, where the hotel's corridor system, lobby, bakery, and framed interiors constitute a curated world of rank, hospitality, and access.[5][6]

Doreen Massey's work on space, place, and gender deepens this account by showing that mobility is socially differentiated and that women's relation to space is historically bound to questions of domesticity, movement, and control.[18] Her framework helps explain why women in both films are mobile yet constrained: they move through highly coded spaces, but their movement does not guarantee ownership, authority, or durable presence.

2.4. AUTEUR THEORY

Auteur theory is relevant here because both Bong Joon-ho and Wes Anderson construct highly recognizable filmic worlds through recurring thematic and visual signatures.[6][13][19] Anderson's cinema is characterized by curation, symmetry, miniaturization, nostalgia, and worlds organized through memory and arrangement.[6][20] Bong's cinema repeatedly returns to class hierarchy, enclosed systems, institutional violence, and unstable tonal movement between satire and threat.[13][5]

Reading these directors as auteurs does not mean ignoring collaborative production. Rather, it means recognizing that female agency in these films is not incidental but shaped by durable patterns of world-making. Agatha, Chung-sook, and Moon-gwang exist inside authorial systems that determine what counts as heroism, who receives remembrance, and which lives become expendable within the film's moral and aesthetic design.

2.5. DISCLOSURE THEORY

Disclosure theory from communication studies offers a narrower but still useful lens for examining moments in which power turns on revelation, concealment, confession, and risky self-disclosure.[21][22] In these films, information is not equally distributed, and the consequences of speaking or revealing differ dramatically according to class and gender. Moon-gwang's revelation of the hidden bunker in *Parasite* reorders the narrative and exposes a violent underside of domestic order.[4] In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, the nested narration of Zero's memories transforms the film itself into an act of selective disclosure, one in which male voice frames and absorbs female contribution.[7]

Disclosure theory, however, cannot stand alone because it privileges verbal revelation over visual code, spatial organization, and stylistic authorship.[21][22] It is therefore used in this article as a supporting framework within a broader feminist and semiotic analysis.

2.6. TRIADIC POWER

Triadic power analysis builds on sociological understandings of triads as relational formations qualitatively different from dyads because the third position introduces mediation, coalition, brokerage, and exclusion.[10][11][12] This is crucial for both films, which repeatedly organize power not simply between two opposing forces but across unstable three-part structures. In *Parasite*, class struggle is not adequately described as rich versus poor; it becomes legible through shifting relations among the Park family, the Kim family, and the hidden household beneath the house.[4][10] In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, the relation among Gustave, Zero, and Agatha reveals how emotional, professional, and narrative loyalties are distributed unevenly, with Agatha occupying a necessary but structurally weaker third position.[7][10]

2.7. SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

Film semiotics allows the article to move from narrative event to signification by asking how meaning is produced through visual codes, repeated objects, spatial motifs, and material details.[9][23] This approach is indispensable because many of the most important expressions of female agency in the two films are not verbal but visual: a staircase descent, the discipline of a kitchen, a birthmark, a pastry box, a corridor, a hidden door, a smell, a frame.[8][9][6] Semiotic analysis therefore complements disclosure theory by making visible what cannot be captured through speech alone.

Figure 1

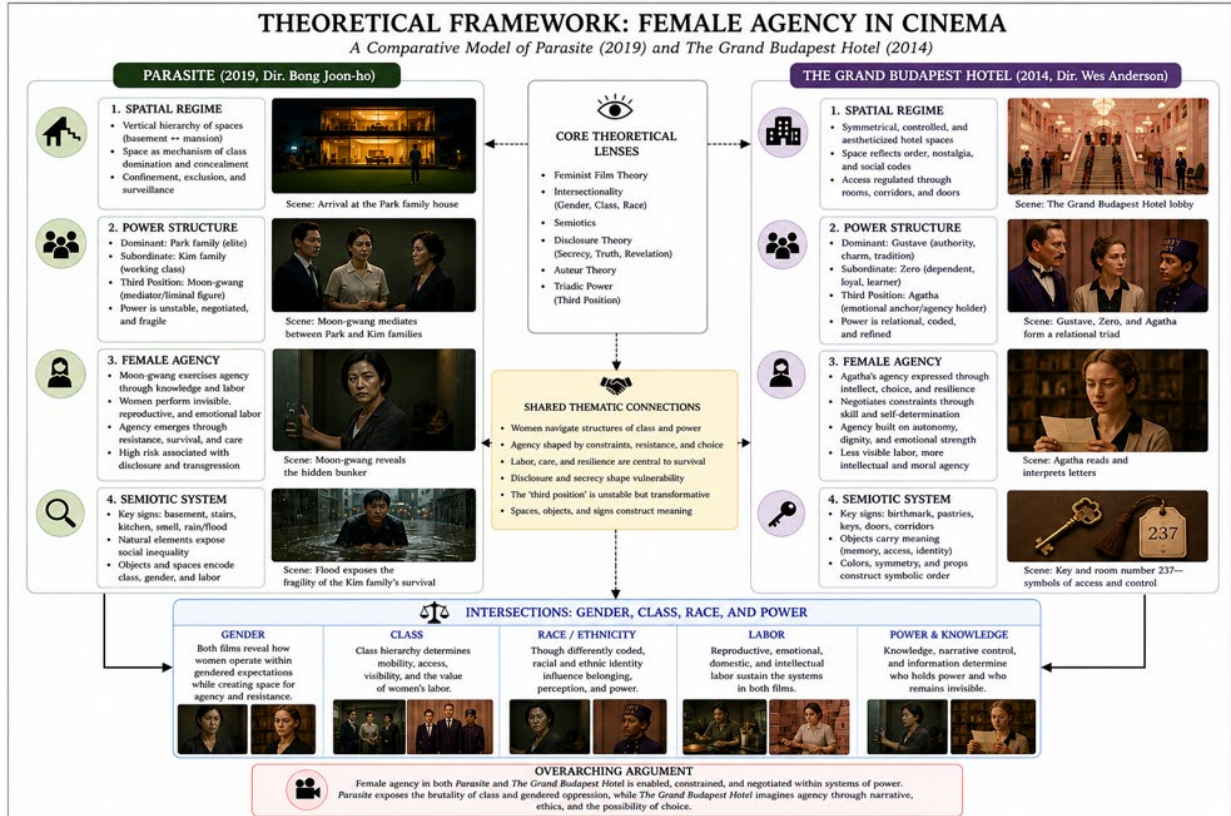


Figure 1 Comparative Theoretical Framework of Female Agency in Parasite and The Grand Budapest Hotel

Image Credit: Film stills from Parasite and The Grand Budapest Hotel are included under fair use for academic criticism and analysis. Images have been enhanced using AI-based tools (such as DALL·E / Adobe Photoshop) for improved resolution, clarity, and layout, without altering original narrative meaning.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1. FEMINIST FILM THEORY AND GENDERED SPECTATORSHIP

The literature on feminist film theory provides the conceptual foundation for any study of female agency in cinema. Laura Mulvey (1975) established a decisive critical vocabulary for examining the gendered logic of visual pleasure and the masculine organization of narrative identification.[3] Her work has been expanded, challenged, and reformulated by scholars who insist that the question of spectatorship cannot be reduced to a universal female position. Bell hooks (1992), for instance, reframed the gaze as a site of black female resistance and argued that race must be central to any credible account of cinematic looking.[17] E. Ann Kaplan (1983), Mary Ann Doane (1987), and Tania Modleski (1988) further diversified this field by examining women's cinema, masquerade, and gendered narrative forms.

This body of literature is directly relevant to the present study because both Parasite and The Grand Budapest Hotel stage women who are visible and active but unevenly authorized. The gaze in these films does not simply objectify women in a conventional sense; it often grants them tactical intelligence while withholding sustained narrational

privilege. Feminist film theory therefore helps move beyond a binary of presence or absence and toward a more precise account of agency, spectatorship, and narrative value.[3][17]

3.2. INTERSECTIONALITY, RACE, CLASS, AND FEMINISM

Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 intervention remains central to scholarship on intersectionality because it demonstrates how race and sex discrimination converge in ways that cannot be understood through single-axis models.[2] More recent syntheses of intersectionality confirm its continuing value as a framework for media analysis, particularly in cases where gender, class, ethnicity, and institutional vulnerability overlap.[15][16] This scholarship matters to the present project because it cautions against reading women in film as generic female subjects. Instead, it requires attention to the way social power is layered and situational.

In relation to these two films, intersectional thought clarifies why Moon-gwang, Chung-sook, Yeon-kyo, and Agatha occupy profoundly different positions within systems of work, belonging, and authority. Their gendered experiences are inseparable from class location, service labor, and outsider status. The literature on intersectionality thus strengthens the article's argument that female agency must be read as socially differentiated and structurally conditioned rather than as a simple matter of character strength.[2][24][16]

3.3. SPACE, MOBILITY, AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Studies of space and gender offer another major strand of relevant scholarship. Doreen Massey (1994) demonstrated that space and mobility are politically uneven and that women's relation to public and domestic space is tied to broader gendered structures of power.[18] Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Henri Lefebvre's theory of socially produced space remain equally important for understanding how class becomes embodied and spatialized. These frameworks are especially fruitful for films where homes, thresholds, corridors, and service spaces organize the social world.

Applied to *Parasite* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, this literature highlights how women are not merely located in space but shaped by spatial discipline. They know the house, the hotel, the corridor, the bakery, and the hidden room through labor and bodily repetition. Yet that intimacy with space does not produce sovereignty. The literature on spatial politics therefore helps clarify the distinction between movement and ownership, access and authority, presence and power.[5][18]

3.4. SCHOLARSHIP ON PARASITE

Existing scholarship on *Parasite* has understandably concentrated on class allegory, capitalist inequality, and the architecture of the Park household. Marxist readings emphasize class consciousness, material resentment, and the ideological function of domestic design.[25] More pedagogical and interpretive discussions have also noted the relation among class, colonial residue, and gender in the film.[26] These studies have laid important groundwork for understanding Bong Joon-ho's use of space and concealment.

At the same time, scholarship that isolates class as the film's only significant category can flatten the gendered organization of domestic labor. Women in *Parasite* are not secondary to class analysis; they are among its primary agents. Moon-gwang and Chung-sook mediate access to the household, regulate its rhythms, and embody the precarity that the house disavows. The present study therefore extends existing work by centering the social and economic portrayal of women within Bong's class architecture.[4][25][26]

3.5. SCHOLARSHIP ON THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL

The literature on Wes Anderson tends to privilege authorship, style, nostalgia, symmetry, and affective curation. Donna Kornhaber's study of Anderson is especially relevant because it presents his cinema as a world of collection, melancholy, and deliberate arrangement.[6] Such work makes clear that Anderson's films are less realistic social worlds than stylized environments in which memory and loss are aesthetically managed.[6][20]

Yet feminist attention to *The Grand Budapest Hotel* has been comparatively limited. Critical essays have noted the relative marginality of women in Anderson's films and the tendency for female figures to function as emotional anchors

rather than narrators of their own complexity.[14] Agatha is therefore a particularly revealing figure: she is operationally central but narratively compressed. The current article extends Anderson scholarship by placing Agatha’s labor, marked body, and mediated presence at the center of a feminist intersectional reading.[6][14]

3.6. SEMIOTICS, AUTEUR STUDIES, DISCLOSURE, AND TRIADIC ANALYSIS

Scholarship on film semiotics provides the conceptual basis for decoding visual signs, recurring motifs, and symbolic objects as structured carriers of meaning.[9][23] Auteur studies, meanwhile, underscore the importance of directorial signatures in organizing narrative worlds and critical interpretation.[19][27] Though disclosure theory has been more common in communication studies than in film studies, it remains useful for addressing how secrets, confessions, and selective revelations redistribute power within stories.[21][22] Triadic analysis, finally, offers a way of understanding relations that exceed simple opposition by focusing on the unstable dynamics introduced when a third actor enters an already charged structure.[10][11][12]

These strands of literature are seldom brought together in a single analysis of contemporary cinema. That gap is precisely where the present study positions itself. By combining feminist film theory, intersectionality, space theory, disclosure theory, auteur analysis, semiotics, and triadic power, the article offers a more integrated account of how female agency is made visible, instrumentalized, and constrained across two very different films.

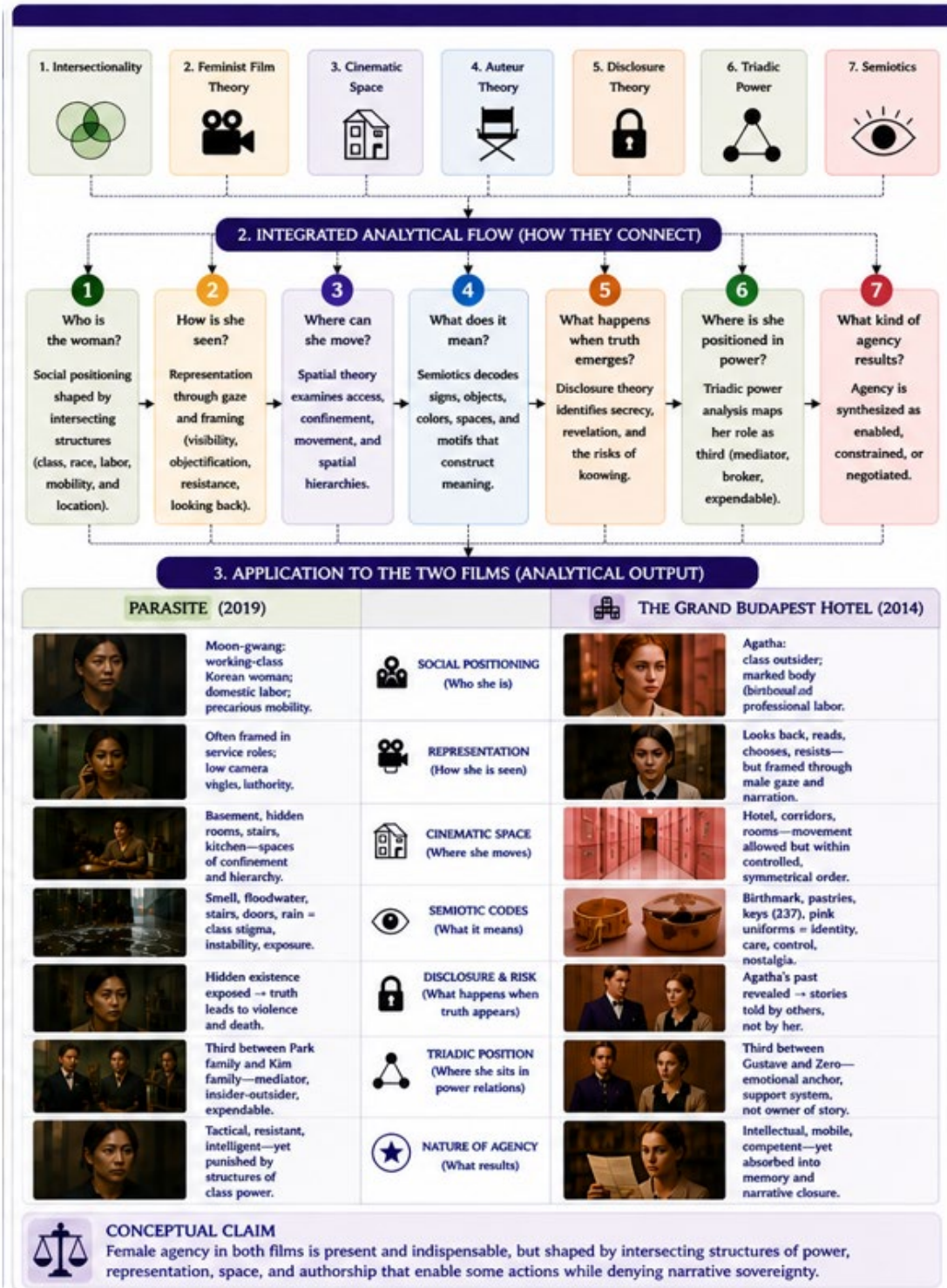
4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK MAPPING

The conceptual framework used in this article coordinates the major theories rather than treating them as separate tools. Intersectionality identifies the overlapping structures of race, class, gender, labor, and belonging. Feminist film theory clarifies how looking relations and narrative privilege are distributed. Auteur theory explains how each director’s stylistic system organizes the terms of agency. Disclosure theory tracks who reveals and who pays for revelation. Triadic power analysis maps unstable relational structures in which women often occupy the brokered or sacrificial third term. Semiotic analysis decodes the visual and spatial signs through which these structures become legible.

Table 1

Table 1 Comparative Theoretical Matrix				
Theory	Core analytical concern	<i>Parasite</i>	<i>The Grand Budapest Hotel</i>	Value for this study
Disclosure theory	Secrecy, revelation, selective self-disclosure, information risk	Moon-gwang reveals the bunker; truths circulate among the precarious and trigger punishment.[4][21]	Male narration frames the past; Agatha’s interiority is filtered through Zero’s recollection.[7][21]	Explains how information control affects female vulnerability and narrative access.
Auteur theory	Authorial signature, recurring motifs, directorial world-making	Bong’s vertical class architecture, institutional satire, and enclosed domestic systems.[13][5]	Anderson’s symmetry, curation, nostalgia, and framed memory-world.[6][20]	Shows that women’s narrative positioning is embedded in each director’s larger aesthetic system.
Semiotic theory	Signs, symbols, recurring visual and spatial codes	Basement, kitchen, stairs, smell, flood as signs of classed and gendered precarity.[8][9]	Birthmark, pastries, keys, corridors, frames as signs of marked femininity and narrated memory.[8][6][9]	Decodes how the image-system itself constructs constrained female agency.
Triadic power	Three-part relations, coalition, brokerage, exclusion, unstable third term	Park family / Kim family / Moon-gwang-Geun-sae relation exposes shifting alliances and sacrificial exclusion.[10][4]	Gustave / Zero / Agatha relation reveals unequal narrativization of loyalty, affection, and agency.[10][7]	Explains how female characters become brokers or excluded third terms rather than sovereign centers.

Figure 2



5. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case-study design in which Parasite and The Grand Budapest Hotel are treated as two distinct but productively comparable texts in global auteur cinema.[28][29] The methodology combines feminist textual analysis, intersectional discourse analysis, auteur reading, disclosure analysis, triadic power mapping, and semiotic decoding. These methods are not applied as isolated modules. Rather, they are coordinated through a single

research question: how do the visual and narrative systems of the two films enable female agency while limiting female narrative sovereignty?

The first stage of the method involves close textual analysis of scenes in which women regulate domestic order, move through institutional space, preserve or reveal crucial information, and absorb the social costs of class conflict or masculine remembrance. Attention is given to framing, gesture, spatial positioning, movement, service labor, narration, and consequence. The second stage applies disclosure theory to sequences in which secrets, confessions, and selective revelations redistribute power. This is especially relevant to Moon-gwang's revelation of the bunker in *Parasite* and to the layered narration through which Zero recounts Agatha's world in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. [4][7][21]

The third stage applies triadic analysis to relations that cannot be explained through dyads alone. In *Parasite*, shifting relations among the Parks, the Kims, and Moon-gwang/Geun-sae reveal the instability of classed domestic order. [10][11] In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, the relation among Gustave, Zero, and Agatha demonstrates how a woman can be essential to the narrative chain while still remaining structurally weaker in terms of narration and remembrance. [7][10] The fourth stage employs semiotic analysis to decode recurring signs such as basements, kitchens, corridors, keys, pastries, birthmarks, stairs, smell, and floodwater. These signs are read as visual condensations of gender, labor, class, and belonging. [8][9][23]

Finally, the comparative stage draws the two cases together through ethos, logos, and pathos. Ethos is secured through grounding in established theory and original scholarly sources. Logos is produced through structured comparison across repeated categories—space, labor, disclosure, authorship, and relational power. Pathos emerges not as sentimentality but as an attention to the affective cost of structural inequality: humiliation, exhaustion, precariousness, memory, erasure, and grief. This rhetorical balance enables a scholarly argument that remains analytically disciplined while still attentive to the human stakes of female disposability in cinema.

6. ANALYSIS

6.1. DISCLOSURE, SECRECY, AND FEMALE VULNERABILITY

Disclosure functions differently in the two films, but in both cases it marks the point where women's knowledge becomes dangerous. In *Parasite*, Moon-gwang's revelation of the hidden bunker is not simply a plot twist. It is a classed disclosure that exposes the concealed underside of the Park household and reorders the hierarchy of knowledge among the poor. [4][5] She reveals what the owners do not know about their own home, and in doing so briefly gains leverage over the Kims. Yet her disclosure circulates only among the precarious. The truth never destabilizes elite power directly; instead, it intensifies conflict below. This is precisely why the revelation becomes fatal. The woman who knows and reveals too much becomes expendable to the restoration of broader narrative movement.

In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, disclosure takes the form of narration rather than exposure of hidden architecture. Zero's retrospective telling organizes the film's emotional and historical world, and his disclosure to the Author determines what counts as memory, what counts as significance, and whose life becomes legible. [7] Agatha's interiority, by contrast, reaches the audience only through Zero's narrational filter. Her courage and care are visible in action, but her own self-disclosure is limited. The asymmetry matters: men narrate expansively, while the woman is remembered. Disclosure theory helps clarify that female agency here is not absent but mediated, narrowed, and folded into male recollection. [21][7]

6.2. AUTEUR WORLDS AND THE FORM OF FEMALE AGENCY

Auteur theory is especially revealing when the two films are read comparatively. Bong Joon-ho's authorial world is one of systems under pressure: class hierarchy, domestic labor, and institutional violence are inseparable from architecture and concealment. [13][5] Women in this system become experts in the practical rhythms of survival. They know how houses function, how care is performed, how bodies are managed, and how emotional labor sustains class order. Yet Bong's system also shows how quickly such competence can be turned into vulnerability once hidden structures are exposed.

Wes Anderson's auteur system is different, though no less consequential. Anderson's cinema is composed through symmetry, collection, framing, nostalgia, and the delicate preservation of loss. [6][20] Agatha's agency belongs to this world aesthetically and emotionally, but the world remains narratively anchored in male mentorship and male

remembrance. Her competence is made beautiful and meaningful, yet also compressible. The auteur comparison therefore strengthens the article’s core claim: female agency is not merely a property of individual character; it is shaped by the rules of the cinematic world each director builds.[6][13]

6.3. TRIADIC POWER AND THE UNSTABLE THIRD TERM

Triadic analysis reveals the relational structure through which female agency is often subordinated. In *Parasite*, the Park family, the Kim family, and Moon-gwang/Geun-sae form an unstable triad in which the hidden third term holds crucial knowledge yet lacks institutional protection.[10][11][4] Moon-gwang’s return is powerful precisely because she enters as the suppressed third party whose presence reveals the incompleteness of the house’s official social order. But triads resolve instability by coalition or exclusion, and the narrative ultimately expels her. The third term is not simply marginal; it is structurally necessary and therefore especially vulnerable.



In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, the triad of Gustave, Zero, and Agatha operates differently but with a similar effect. Gustave and Zero form the privileged narrative axis through mentorship, service, and retrospective memory, while Agatha sustains the triad materially and affectively without receiving equal narrational authority.[7][10] She is central to survival, movement, and emotional continuity, but the memory structure of the film redistributes that centrality into male-authored remembrance. Triadic power therefore clarifies how women can occupy indispensable positions without becoming sovereign centers of the narrative.

6.4. SEMIOTIC MAPPING OF FEMALE AGENCY

Semiotic analysis makes visible the codes through which women are positioned in both films. In *Parasite*, the basement, the hidden bunker, the kitchen, the staircase, smell, and floodwater form a sign-system of hidden labor, class contamination, constrained mobility, and unequal exposure.[8][9][5] These signs repeatedly attach women to domestic knowledge and bodily precarity. Chung-sook’s competence is strongest in the service zones of the house; Moon-gwang’s power is tied to underground knowledge. Yet neither sign-system permits secure ownership. The visual world translates female labor into usefulness without converting it into sovereignty.


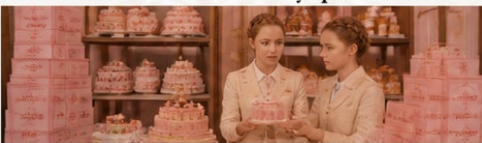
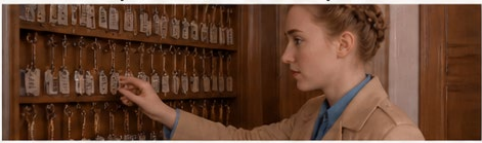
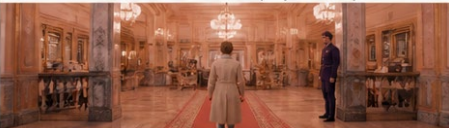

In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Agatha’s birthmark, the bakery, pastry boxes, hotel corridors, keys, framed portraits, and nested visual compositions construct a different but equally telling code.[6][8][9] She is marked, mobile, careful, and brave, but also symbolically softened through signs of sweetness, delicacy, and curated memory. Her labor is materially important, yet the semiotic world around her aestheticizes it. The result is a paradox central to the film’s gender politics: the woman’s contribution is indispensable at the level of action but diminished at the level of memory and symbolic authority.

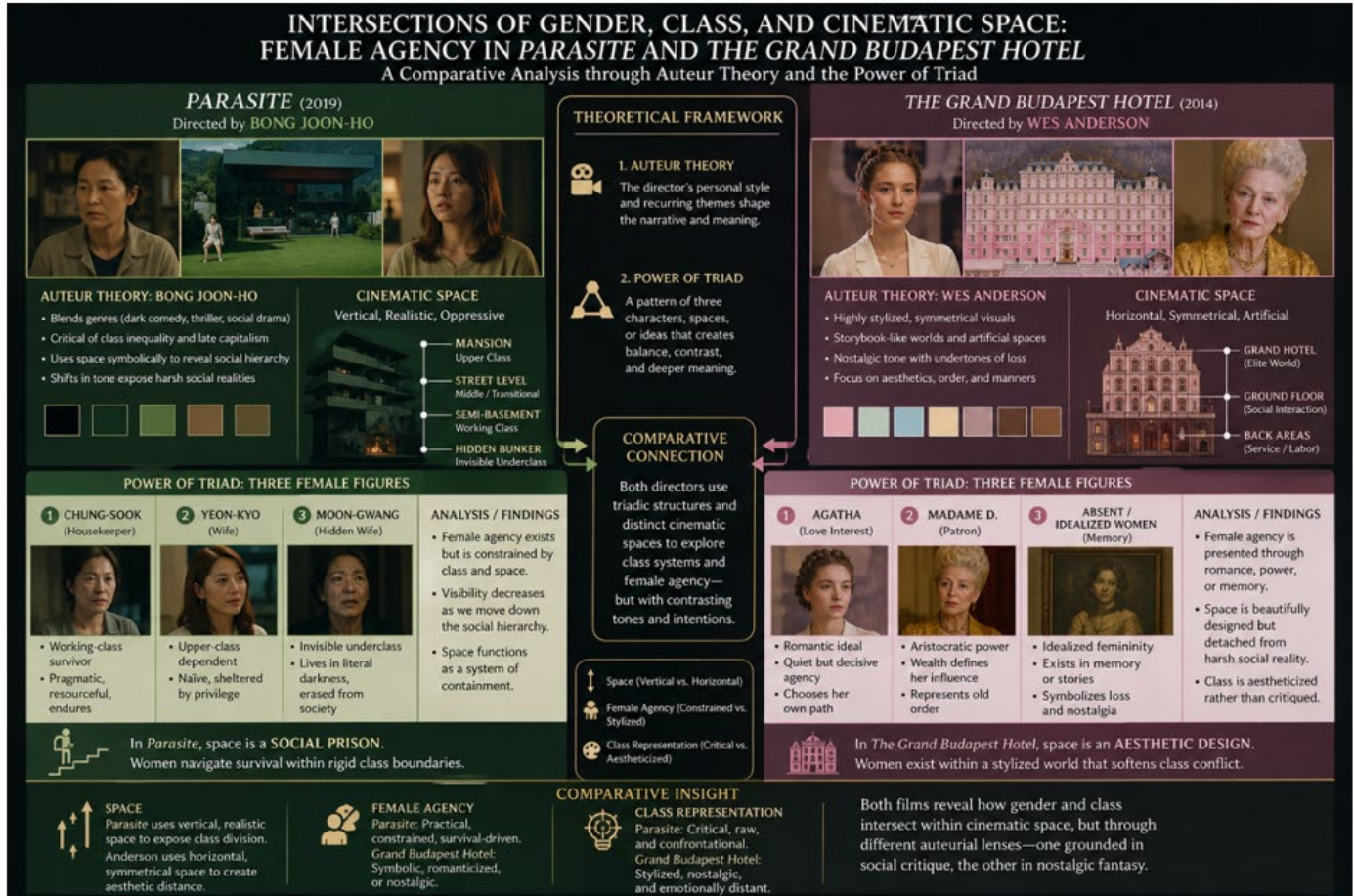
Table 2

Table 2 Semiotic Codes of Female Agency in <i>Parasite</i>		
Sign	Signified concept	Implication for female agency
Basement / sub-basement 	Abjected labor, hidden dependence, social erasure	Moon-gwang’s knowledge of the underground gives her tactical power, but the same space becomes the site of her violent re-erasure.
Kitchen and service zones 	Feminized labor, discipline, routinized care	Chung-sook’s authority is strongest here, but the sign-system confines her competence to service space.
Stairs and vertical descent	Class hierarchy, aspiration, social fall	Women’s movement is powerful but bounded; vertical mobility is a risky crossing rather than a stable right.

	Smell	Bodily class stigma, inescapable origin	Even competent female labor cannot erase the class mark imposed on the body.
	Rain and flood	Unequal catastrophe, class-differentiated exposure	The storm briefly enlarges Chung-sook's authority while simultaneously destroying the world she comes from.

Table 3

Table 3 Semiotic Codes of Female Agency in The Grand Budapest Hotel		
Sign	Signified concept	Implication for female agency
Agatha's birthmark 	Marked difference, singular vulnerability, outsider status	Her competence emerges from a position of markedness rather than institutional belonging.
Pastries and bakery space 	Feminized craft, care work, sweetness, delicacy	Her labor is crucial but symbolically softened and depoliticized through aesthetic coding.
Keys, doors, and access systems 	Institutional authority, male professional solidarity	Agatha can cross boundaries, but she is not recognized as a formal gatekeeper within the film's power network.
Corridors and lobby symmetry 	Curated order, masculine world-building, public staging	Her movement through space is efficient, yet the world remains visually coded as belonging to Gustave and Zero.
Frames, portraits, and memory devices 	Authored history, curated remembrance	Agatha's action survives as someone else's memory, not as her own narrative authority.



The comparative analysis of *Parasite* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* demonstrates that female agency is not a fixed construct but is shaped by the intersection of class structures and cinematic space, as articulated through Auteur Theory and the triadic narrative principle. Under the direction of Bong Joon-ho, *Parasite* employs a vertical spatial logic—ranging from semi-basement to hidden bunker—to materialize class hierarchy, where female characters such as Chung-sook, Yeon-kyo, and Moon-gwang form a triad that reveals diminishing visibility and power across class positions. Drawing on spatial theory (Henri Lefebvre; Edward Soja), this structure positions space as a mechanism of containment, limiting women’s agency to forms of survival and adaptation. In contrast, Wes Anderson’s *The Grand Budapest Hotel* constructs a horizontal, symmetrical, and highly stylized spatial environment in which female figures—Agatha, Madame D., and the absent idealized woman—operate within a triadic framework that aestheticizes rather than critiques class dynamics. Informed by auteurist formalism (David Bordwell) and feminist perspectives (Laura Mulvey), Anderson’s mise-en-scène transforms female agency into symbolic and nostalgic representation, distanced from material struggle. Thus, the findings reveal that while both auteurs deploy triadic structures to organize gendered roles within cinematic space, Bong Joon-ho mobilizes space as a site of social constraint and critique, whereas Wes Anderson reconfigures it as an aesthetic surface that softens class conflict, ultimately demonstrating how cinematic form mediates the visibility, limitation, and meaning of female agency.

7. FINDINGS

This study demonstrates that female agency in *Parasite* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is not absent but structurally conditioned, spatially regulated, and narratively redistributed through intersecting systems of class, gender, and authorship. Drawing on Auteur Theory, intersectionality, semiotics, disclosure theory, and triadic power analysis, the findings establish that both films construct women as operationally indispensable yet narratively non-sovereign.

First, cinematic space emerges as a primary mechanism through which agency is produced and constrained. In *Parasite*, vertical spatial stratification materializes class hierarchy, positioning women within domestic labor regimes that grant tactical authority but deny structural mobility. Female characters such as Chung-sook and Moon-gwang possess critical spatial knowledge; however, this knowledge becomes dangerous when disclosed, ultimately rendering them expendable within the restoration of narrative order. In contrast, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* organizes space horizontally and symmetrically, transforming class relations into aesthetic arrangements. Within this curated spatial system, Agatha's mobility and competence are visually affirmed but narratively absorbed into a masculine memory structure.

Second, triadic power structures reveal that female characters consistently occupy unstable third positions—mediators, facilitators, or sacrificial figures—within relational systems that privilege male continuity. In *Parasite*, the triad of the Park family, the Kim family, and the hidden bunker household exposes how women become brokers of knowledge and labor while remaining structurally vulnerable. In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, the triad of Gustave, Zero, and Agatha demonstrates how female contribution sustains narrative progression without granting equivalent narrative authority.

Third, disclosure operates as a critical turning point in both films, disproportionately affecting women. In *Parasite*, revelation produces immediate material consequences, linking female knowledge to risk and punishment. In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, disclosure is mediated through retrospective narration, where male voice appropriates and frames female experience. Thus, women are not excluded from narrative action but are limited in their capacity to control narrative meaning.

Finally, semiotic analysis confirms that visual codes—such as basements, kitchens, corridors, pastries, and marked bodies—encode female agency as functional yet bounded. These sign systems repeatedly associate women with care, labor, and mediation rather than authorship or legacy. Across both films, agency is therefore visible, active, and necessary, but ultimately constrained by broader ideological and aesthetic structures.

8. CONCLUSION

This study has argued that female agency in contemporary global cinema must be understood not as a binary of presence or absence, but as a condition shaped by the interplay of spatial design, class hierarchy, narrative structure, and auteurial vision. Through a comparative analysis of *Parasite* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, it becomes evident that two formally distinct cinematic systems—one grounded in social realism and class critique, the other in stylized nostalgia and narrative curation—arrive at a shared structural limitation: women are central to the functioning of the story yet peripheral to its ultimate authorship.

The integration of Auteur Theory with intersectionality, feminist film theory, and spatial analysis reveals that directorial style operates as an ideological framework that shapes the conditions of agency itself. Bong Joon-ho constructs a world in which female labor and knowledge expose the violence of class systems but are ultimately contained within them. Wes Anderson, by contrast, reconfigures female agency into an aesthetic and affective register, where women sustain narrative continuity but are absorbed into masculine memory and authorship.

The study therefore contributes to film scholarship by demonstrating that female agency is not negated in these films but reframed—rendered visible in action yet limited in narrative consequence. This paradox reflects a broader transnational pattern in contemporary cinema: women may drive the story forward, but they do not fully own the story that is told.

9. RESEARCH GAPS

Despite its interdisciplinary scope, this study identifies several critical gaps in existing scholarship. First, there remains limited integration of intersectionality, spatial theory, and narrative structure within comparative film analysis. While individual frameworks—such as feminist film theory or class analysis—are well developed, their combined application to questions of female agency across different cinematic traditions is still underexplored.

Second, existing research tends to privilege either auteur style or socio-political content, rarely examining how these dimensions interact to shape gendered experience. This results in an incomplete understanding of how aesthetic form itself becomes a vehicle of ideological constraint.

Third, the role of triadic structures in gender analysis remains insufficiently theorized. Although triadic relations are recognized in sociology, their application to film—particularly in relation to female agency as a structurally unstable third term—has not been systematically developed.

Finally, there is a notable absence of audience-centered research that examines how viewers interpret and internalize representations of constrained female agency. The current study remains textually focused and does not address reception, affective response, or cross-cultural interpretation.

10. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Future research should expand the comparative scope beyond two films to include a broader range of global cinemas, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how female agency is constructed across cultural, industrial, and historical contexts. Studies incorporating non-Western, postcolonial, and transnational perspectives would be particularly valuable in extending intersectional analysis.

Empirical research on audience reception should also be prioritized to assess how different viewers interpret female agency within these cinematic frameworks. Such work could integrate qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, or reception studies to complement textual analysis.

Further theoretical development of triadic power in film studies is strongly recommended. Specifically, scholars should examine how the “third position” functions across genres and narratives, and whether it consistently correlates with marginalization, mediation, or narrative sacrifice.

Additionally, future studies should move beyond Auteur Theory to consider collaborative production contexts, including screenwriting, performance, editing, and production design, in order to provide a more holistic account of how gendered meanings are constructed.

Finally, expanding the analytical lens to include race, disability, and affect theory would deepen the understanding of how female agency operates within overlapping systems of visibility, embodiment, and power, thereby advancing both feminist film theory and interdisciplinary media studies.

IMAGE CREDITS AND ETHICS NOTE

No copyrighted images are embedded in this draft. If film stills, posters, or original diagrams are added later, permissions, fair use limits, and journal image-credit requirements should be checked carefully before submission.[1]

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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