

“THE EXPLORATION OF SEMIOTICS IN FILM TO CONVEY MORAL MESSAGE IN *BINTANG JATUH* SHORT FICTION”

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ABSTRACT

Andre Bazin once said in his book that human has a tendency to preserve a life in a form of statuary or in any kind of forms. The invention by Auguste and Lumiere of the moving picture is a point where moving picture is regarded as the perfect form of expression and representation of life, not only it captures the reality as a whole, but also gives the creator space to manipulate. Moving pictures grows and develops into cinema and not merely just a preservation of life, rather it is an expression of the reality in a form of art as new medium of communication.

The civilization that we live now is almost impossible to imagine without the contribution of the internet that created many platforms that allows us to share parts of our life. Big platforms like Instagram and YouTube creates a worldwide sensation such as ‘influencer’ in which a person who has the power to affects their audience mainly for marketing purpose. The level of the influence mostly determined by the numbers of the followers. In some cases, parents are tempted to share their children activity in social media to showcase their children. However, in some occasion children are unwillingly to share their private life. This action could lead to child exploitation even abusing the children for the sake of fame and fortune.

Bintang Jatuh is a short fiction that reflects the society’s behavior towards social media more specifically the sensation created by influencers which is known as ‘selebgram’ in Indonesia. Besides, becoming an influencer does not have an age restriction, hence everyone can be an influencer. Child influencer, which sparks a lot of

criticism on the style of parenting today's. Many accuse the parents of exploiting their own children by gaining profits from sharing their children's photo and video online. The case goes deeper than just sharing photos or videos, public questioning the effectiveness of parental control to protect their children's privacy online.

INTRODUCTION

Film as a representation of reality of the society is interconnected with social cultural aspect as what Andre Bazin has said in his book, "What is Cinema?". Cinema was found to be not just a form of art but as a medium of communication, often cinema bring a moral value as a reflection on the social cultural aspect of the society. Internet, one of the most valuable discoveries of this century provides information that easy to be accessed. As the internet grows, it created platform like social media to share and connect people around the globe. Moreover, the internet and social media is the trademark of this generation. The expanding of the social media created another opportunity for business and as a powerful tool of marketing. Social media such as Instagram created a phenomenon of '*selebgram*' in Indonesia where, a *selebgram* has an impactful effect on decision making of the audience. With this powerful impact, *selebgram* become one of the most efficient tools for marketing. The understanding and the influence of a *selebgram* can be traced back to the nature of social media itself, where it was designed for people to be addicted and keep using it. As described by an article from *Visual Interaktif Kompas* states that, the fees for an influencer are determined by the numbers of the followers. On the same article states that, the factors that makes influencer or *selebgram* is adored and followed is no other than the image that was portrayed on the social media itself, where it focuses more on the portrayal rather than the reality. In recent years, social media has gained more and more controversies regarding its age restriction and the harm it did to people especially teenagers and children.

As Social media such as Instagram getting more popular, it has also strengthened its regulation by increasing the users age restriction to 13-years-old. Issues regarding child exploitation and child's privacy protection has become complicated as the children spend more and more time online getting information as well as exposing themselves online without parent's supervision. Parents' role on the issues is extremely critical, as children get more vulnerable online. On the contrary, most of the time parents are tempted to share their children's moments by showcasing them to the public ignoring the children's consent. One trend that spike the issues regarding child's privacy and child exploitation is child influencer while the account and online activity was entirely controlled by their parents. One of the most famous influencers in Indonesia is a 4-years-old child named Moonella, while her account is managed by her mother, Merry. As captioned by an article from

WanitaIndonesia.co.id, Moonella's family got a lot of criticism around child exploitation where her mother was accused of her overworking Moonella for the sake of money. As more and more parents exposing their children online, public doubt the effectiveness of parental supervision and control.

Through this short fiction, *Bintang Jatuh* is portraying an unhealthy relationship of a child influencer with her mother, without realizing the mother was exploiting her own daughter. Semiotics are used in order to help audience to better understand the moral message of the film. According the Christian Metz in his book called "Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema", semiotics in general is a universal system of language without the barrier of the language itself. The purpose of making this short fiction is to rise an awareness of the issues in Indonesia today's where parents are freely sharing the photo and video of their children. Child's privacy often overlooked and underestimated. This issue might not be big, but it has surfaced, where people and mostly parents have to be cautious for the act and responsibility of what they committed to their children especially when it comes to the children protection.

THEORY AND METHODS

A. Understanding Semiotics of Film by Christian Metz.

One of the most important aspects in cinema is the impression of reality by the audience that has been mentioned by Christian Metz. Cinema is believed to be able to bridge the gap between the true art and general public because the appeal of the cinema to the audience in no other than the feeling of witnessing an almost real moment. The impression that is created in the cinema was developed by the using of semiotics to better convey the moral of the film. Semiotics in film contains symbols that represent meaning. As mentioned before, *Bintang Jatuh* is about a girl, Barbara who is a rising star (*selebgram*) as well as 8-years-old girl, whose childhood and privacy were exploited by her mother. Her mother is blinded by the ambitions to make her daughter famous. The mood of this short fiction would be intense and uncomfortable. One of the tools of semiotics found in cinema is known as *mise en scene*, where the main purpose of *mise en scene* is to as captioned from Michael Rabiger in his book called *Directing Film and Aesthetics*, states that all aspect in frame which is called *mise en scene* are used to support building the narration. *Mise en scene* is elements in a frame such as setting, costume, make up, lighting, and actors.

Mise en Scene

Artificial color such as pink, purple and pastel color also some bright colors are used in most of the setting, property and costume to represent childhood and unnatural setting. These unnatural and bright colors give the impression of uncomfortable and distance since the main character whose name is Barbara as a resemblance of a doll rather than a normal 8-years-old girl. All the scenes were taken indoor to represent the suffocating life of a *selebgram*, more importantly as a girl. As for lighting the film use natural lighting as minimal as possible, again to convey the unnatural feeling and relationship between mother and daughter. Since the film is about a *selebgram*, make up is one of the most important things to show how Barbara live as a doll that being controlled by her mother.

To show the oppression and unhealthy relationship of mother and daughter, this film uses Barbie and doll's house to foreshadow ending of the story where each day Barbara is slowly resembling a doll. Other properties like music box is indicating the loss of childhood, since music box often connected with innocent and a gift for a girl. Other properties like plushies and teddy bear is the representation of fame and fans. Most of the fans give dolls or plushies to show their gratitude and admiration to someone famous. Since it was given by the fans, the plushies and dolls represent the pressure of the social media to Barbara. The plushies and dolls were placed in Barbara's bed, to show how the fans are close and suppressing Barbara. Gesture is also one factor that could determine the nuance and mood of a scene. Most of the close ups and extreme close up of Barbara's face was covered by hands or things such as mascara's wand or lip gloss, this gesture depict how Barbara was controlled by her mother as well as people around her. The use of hands as to cover parts of Barbara face also portrays the life of a child *selebgram* when her does not have the freedom to decide.

B. Technical Concept

The other aspects that film can't be ignored is the cinematography, how a story was told through visual. In this film, to express the intense, uncomfortable and oppressed feeling are represented by using a tight framing such as close up, extreme close up and macro shot. All the scenes are dominated with tight scene to better delivering the mental state of Barbara. Nevertheless, Barbara's expression and reaction also dominating the film, in order to show that Barbara was the center of all attention figuratively and literally.

Close up mainly is used to show the expression and reaction of a character and the advantages of using a tight shot can be seen in the way how a tight shot shows more emotion

and the mental state of a character rather than medium shot. Therefore, close up are the perfect shot to show the mental state of Barbara that slowly being oppressed by her mother, as seen as the picture below.



Figure 1. Example of Close Up Shot Used in Bintang Jatuh Film Source: Bintang Jatuh (2019)

Other framing that dominates this film is the using of macro shot. Rather than just an extremely tight shot it gave depth to the frame. Macro shot is focused on just one specific object. This advantage gives the audience the feeling of closeness and at the same time audience can better observe the details.



Figure 2. Example of Macro Shot Used in Bintang Jatuh Film Source: Bintang Jatuh (2019)

For example, by using macro shot audience can better look on the transformation of Barbara's lips compare just adding the expression of Barbara while putting on makeup. Macro shot give a different impact on the audience impression of closeness. The tight framing that dominates this film give the audience feeling of the artificial closeness, oppression and as a symbolization of privacy exploitation.

***BINTANG JATUH* PRODUCTION PHASES**

1. Pre Production

During the pre production, team that consist of Madeleine Aubrey as director and Felicia Sugianto as director of photography as well as screenwriter. As a team this film production was started with brainstorming on the topic and start writing script. In this phase, team focuses on casting and building the scripts, both script and casting were done

at the same time. The purpose of this method is to make sure that the actors are sound with the script. The process of developing a character is adjusted to the actors who has been casted. After finishing the script and casting, team start working on the art department and finding crew to help with the production. The timeframe for pre production is 30 weeks.

	KEGIATAN	2018											
		AUG				SEPT				OCT			
NO	PRE-PRODUCTION	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	Melakukan riset dan menentukan konsep dari cerita												
2	Pembahasan konsep cerita												
3	Pengembangan cerita berupa storyline dan sinopsis												
4	Pengembangan menjadi alur cerita												
5	Perancangan Moodboard												
6	Penulisan naskah "Bintang Jatuh"												
	KEGIATAN	2018											
		NOV				DEC				JAN			
NO	PRE-PRODUCTION	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
7	Bedah naskah "Bintang Jatuh"												
8	Pembentukan Kru Untuk Produksi												
9	Costing Peran Utama & Pembantu												
10	Recce Lokasi (Rumah)												
11	Recce Lokasi (Kamar Barbara)												
12	Recce Studio Ballet & Studio Foto												
13	Finalisasi Naskah "Bintang Jatuh"												
14	Breakdown Script												
15	Shot List												

Table 1. Pre Production Timeframe Source: Personal Documentation
 Source: Personal Documentation

Mood board and visual reference were inspired by a film called "The Florida's Project" directed by Sean Baker. Sean Baker use children's eye perspective to show and emphasize that this film is about the optimism of children who live in poverty. The colors are bright and vibrant to represent how children always look at the world as their playground. This idea inspired the film to use vibrant and bright colors to represent a child. After deciding on color and finishing the script, team start looking for the desired location.

2. Production

In this phase, team are focused on formatting crew that consist of Unit Production Manager (UPM), who's responsible for daily logistic and daily budgeting; Assistant Director, who's accountable for UPM and also the planer of the production; Camera Operator, as the person who help operates the cameras; Gaffer, known as the person who responsible for lighting; Sound Director; Sound Recordist; Makeup and Hairdresser.

When the crews have formed, the next task is to make sure the mise en scene elements such as property, costume, makeup and lighting are carefully prepared. This phase includes blocking of the setting and character positioning. Since this film is shot indoor, the positioning of the character must be accurately placed. Considering the shot are mainly tight frame, blocking of the camera are done infrequently. The choice of the equipment especially lenses are crucial to determine the result of this film production. Other equipment like gimbal is also necessary, since the shot are mostly without tripod to get the elevated effect. The using of macro lenses gives another depth of the visual, since macro lenses are close and extremely tight makes the visual are just focused on one part only.

When all preparation such as casting crew, designing mise en scene, and choosing the equipment have been done, the next step is the making of the film itself. There are six locations in total for the shooting.

3. Post Production

After finishing production phase, team will work with raw files and sorting the file in accordance to the script. After the picture was locked team sent the file to sound department that consist of sound editor. This phase includes rough cut editing, grading, and putting subtitle.

	KEGIATAN	2019											
		FEB				MAR				APR			
NO	PRE-PRODUCTION	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
16	Budget Plan												
17	Casting Ekstra												
18	Shot List												
19	Perancangan Storyboard												
20	Props List												
21	List Konsumsi												
22	Callsheet												
23	Reading & Poster Photoshoot												
NO	PRODUCTION	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
24	Syuting (Scene, Lokasi)												
NO	POST- PRODUCTION	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
25	Rough Cut Edit												
26	Picture Lock & Sound Editing/ Mixing												
27	Grading												
28	Finalisasi												
29	Subtitle												

Table 2. Production and Post Production Timetable Source: Personal Documentation
Source: Personal Documentation

CONCLUSION

Film industry in Indonesia will keep developing with the growing numbers of people interested in learning cinematography and film studies. The driving force of Indonesia's film industry will be on the hand of young people who believe that change is needed and possible. Understanding the technicality of cinema is one of the few aspects required to be a filmmaker. Understanding concept and being aware to the social culture happening in the society also required to better understanding film as one of the mediums of communication. Bintang Jatuh short fiction is a representation of the reality of what the society is facing, which are child exploitation in social media. Nevertheless, child exploitation only one of the many problems this generation and Indonesia are dealing with. Child exploitation can come from many forms, and the most famous one is through a platform like YouTube and Instagram. Cases like using children for the sake of seeking fame is not a new finding. The infamous YouTube channel 'Daddy0Five' is sentenced to five years probations for what they called 'pranks' on their own children. It took one year for public to realize it was a child abuse and exploitation. Parent often ignores their children's consent to share what supposed to be their private life. As a medium of communication, this film is hoped to reflect people's behavior on using social media to be wiser.