CINEMATOGRAPHY IN GABRIELE MUCCINO'S
THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS (2006)

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to study cinematography elements presented in Gabriele Muccino's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006). To analyse the object of the research, it used cinematography theory by Blain Brown. The study used descriptive qualitative research design. Drama genre is one of the biggest and popular genre in the movie industry, since it shares some empathy, hopes, aspirations, dreams and fears (Editors, 2018). It focused on analysing the dramatic aspect through cinematography using Gabriele Muccino's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006) movie. The study found that many cinematography elements in Gabriele Muccino's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006) are proven using dramatic aspect from both lighting and camera technique. In conclusion, the movie shows a drama genre movie which has cinematography elements that need to be added to deliver the emotion of the story and to increase dramatic elements in the movie.

Keywords: cinematography, genre, drama

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, when individuals are in the market for a car, they will be presented with an abundance of options. Similarly, when individuals seek to enjoy a film at the cinema, they will encounter a selection of movies with various genres to choose from. Within the realm of cinema, drama is a significant genre, however, in literature, the genre of drama differs slightly from that of movies, as it refers to works of literature rather than film.

Drama, is a form of literature that involves the presentation of written stories, conversations, and stage actions to an audience. Therefore, drama is a representation of reality that is transformed and performed on stage (Teasdale, 2021). Anyone involved in the creation or enactment of dramatic compositions, whether through writing or performance, can be referred to as a dramatist. Dramatic literature is specifically designed for theatre, where characters play assigned roles and bring the story to life through their actions on stage (Lee, 2022).

According to Roger Ebert, dramas are popular because they share common human emotions such as empathy, hope, aspirations, dreams, and fears (Editors, 2018). Movies are a powerful visual aid because they combine

movement, color, and sound (Hennig-Thurau, 2021). Drama genre typically involves dramatic elements and showcases the best and worst of human nature while offering a moral stance on the world. However, most people need to comprehend in identifying the drama as a movie genre and classify the characteristics accurately.

According to Kamalesh (2015) genres can be defined using a specific set of conditions that all experts or regular movie-goers would agree on. Despite this, the drama genre in film and literature share similarities and are related to each other as noted by Nagnath in Ramrao (2016: 2). Film and literature influence and improve one another through their use of action, images, words, and portrayal of human life. The focus of this study will be on *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Muccino, 2006), a film directed by Gabriele Muccino from Italy. The movie *The Pursuit of Happiness* was released on December 15th, 2006. It's a biographical drama that tells the story of Chris Gardner, a salesman and father who is facing many difficulties in his life. He and his son, Christopher, fight through their financial crisis together and work hard to achieve happiness. The film depicts Chris Gardner's struggle to find a good job and improve their living conditions. Films are an effective medium for conveying true impressions and concepts, even with animation (Tan, 2018).

A previous study by Ledy Heryanti and Ngestirosa (2022) reveals that there has existed a stereotype of Afro-American fathers. They are often absent from their children's lives. The study focuses on the theme and characterization, not on the drama genre.

The the *Pursuit of Happiness* is widely recognized as a biographical movie depicting the life of Chris Gardner. However, when it comes to the drama genre, there is a need to understand how people generally describe it and what qualifies a film to belong to this genre. Films are an authentic medium that can convey true impressions and concepts with animation Sun (2022). Therefore, the researcher intends to analyze the cinematography elements used in the film to determine its classification within the drama genre. Specifically, the researcher will focus on lighting and camera techniques as key elements of cinematography.

This study aims to examine the cinematography elements of Gabriele Muccino's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006) in light of its classification as a drama film, despite the absence of a romantic aspect. Many viewers rely on genre categorization to select films, so that the study tried to address issues with the drama genre and formula used in the movie.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The classification of drama within the genre can be problematic since it is often mistaken by the general public as being solely associated with love and romantic themes. However, it is essential to note that drama goes beyond romantic productions. In reality, the drama genre revolves around moral storytelling that addresses issues within social realities. According to Cawelti (1976) melodrama serves as one of the fundamental archetypes of moral fantasy. It emphasizes the clear establishment of poetic justice, where a happy or morally satisfying ending is achieved. Melodrama typically presents the challenges and hardships that virtuous characters endure due to the actions of wicked characters, culminating in the triumph of the good and the punishment of the wicked. The appeal of melodrama or drama lies in its ability to offer audiences a unique insight into various personalities. It aims to immerse people in the story and allow them to empathize with the characters'

emotions. Melodrama often stems from a sense of injustice and disorder, eventually reaffirming a benevolent moral order in the world. It remains popular because it illustrates conventional moral or philosophical principles at work in the lives of both virtuous and wicked characters.

Cinematography and photography are often misconceived as being the same, with some people even considering cinematography a subset of photography. However, this is a misunderstanding as the two fields are fundamentally different. While both deal with visual media, cinematography involves more than just capturing images; it encompasses the art of translating ideas, emotions, and nonverbal communication into visual storytelling (Brown, 2012).

The advantage of films over written literary works lies in their ability to present a detailed and visual narrative, going beyond the limitations of the reader's imagination. Through cinematography, films can employ various tools like lighting, music, and camera angles to effectively tell a story and become cultural artifacts that incorporate societal conventions. When analyzing a film's visual style, factors like composition, lighting, and camera movement are crucial considerations. Directors may use composition in formal or dramatic ways, or opt for an informal and subdued effect. In narrative filmmaking, camera movement should always serve a purpose and not merely be for the sake of motion. Lighting plays a significant role in setting the mood and tone of a scene, enhancing its dramatic and emotional impact.

METHOD

In this study, a qualitative descriptive method was used to produce insights that cannot be attained through statistical procedures or quantification. The data analyzed in this study were collected from scenes depicted in the movie "The Pursuit of Happiness" (2006). The qualitative approach seeks to comprehend the phenomena experienced by the research subjects in a comprehensive manner, relying on descriptive language and observations within a specific natural context, while employing various scientific techniques (Moleong, 2007). The researcher collected data and meticulously describes the events that occurred, and subsequently conducts a thorough analysis for the research objectives.

In analyzing visual style, the researcher must first consider the composition. Some directors use composition formally and dramatically; others prefer an informal or lowkey effect. In this case, the researcher would focus on lighting and camera movement. In narrative filmmaking, a key concept of camera movement is that it must be motivated. The movement should not just be for the sake of moving the camera. He also states about lighting that the goals of good lighting are many and varied, one of them is mood and tone for dramatic and emotional content (Brown, 2012: 210).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Movies is like a dream; it can tell the story and show the world that never existed before to become exist. They're like a window between the world and lives that aren't our own, and it allowed people to peek inside. While cinematography is the ability to manipulate that window on how it want to be seen. Cinematography is not about how to capture the screen, but it also how to deliver the story. Cinema is a language and cinematography is how the audience can communicating with the movie that they watch. If it's just with the flat recorded screen, the story will sure still be deliver. But without cinematography, it will be difficult to deliver the emotion.

The Pursuit of Happyness (2006) is a drama genre movie that tell the struggle of Chris Gardner to out of his problems and achieve happiness. It is a movie that brings out the audience's emotion as it have many relatable obstacle that occurs in real life. But not only that, The Pursuit of Happyness (2006) movie is also use many cinematography elements to bring out more power in their scene. As it have many cinematography data, the researcher will only focus on lighting effect and camera movement (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Camera focus on Chris Gardner and change focus to Frakesh. (Timestamp at 1:02:44)

Camera shot technique is one of the elements in cinematography. Without the camera technique, there will no effect at all and the shot taken will feel plain, flat, and emotionless. Camera technique itself have many types when it comes to cinematography like bird's eye, point-of-view, long shot, over the shoulder and many more. In this case of the scene, The Pursuit of Happyness (2006) movie using a selective focus in many of the scenes. Selective focus is when there is a correlation between the in focus and out of focus. It select what portion of the scene that want to be in focus while blurring out the rest.

Selective focus bring the attention to the primary subject of the scene. When a camera taking a shot of the scene, the camera capture all the situation happening in the scene. Surely the audience's attention will be divided. There's someone who focus on the actor, the other one focus on the background, and this one focus on detail, etc. Selective focus control the audience's focus to where the scene want to be focused of. The first example is the scene from the picture above. At first the camera only focus to Chris Gardner when he still talking, and then the camera's focus change to Mr. Frakesh when he ask Chris Gardner to buy him donuts. Another example is from the picture below, it is the scene where Chris Gardner first time entering the employee area only. The movie want the audience to look and focus at the office situation first, so it blurry Chris Gardner and focus on the background. After the cut and the camera angle change, the focus also change from the condition of the office to Chris Gardner's expression.
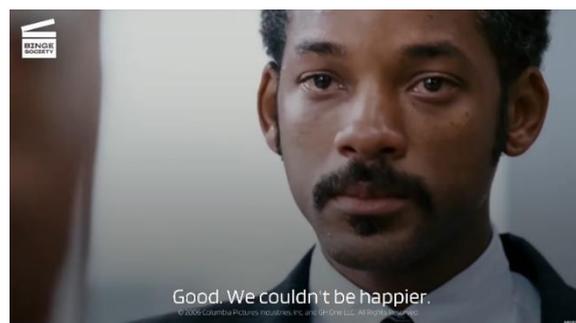
Figure 2. Camera position very close to Chris's face focusing his expression.
(Timestamp at 1:50:05)

Another cinematography element come from camera is called close-up shot (Figure 2). A close-up shot is an optical change of focal length. It moves the point of view in or out without moving the camera. From the picture shown below and above, some audience might realize that there's something weird happened in the scene. That is the camera position, the camera position in that scene and on another certain scene is actually designed to put too close to the character.

The reason of why dramatic scene in drama genre movie usually have some a close-up shoot is simple. It's because a close-up shoot calls attention to focus on something and it makes the audience aware and focus on what's in the scene and what's the impact. When a close-up shot is implemented, it is important that the shot must be motivated. The example is the picture above and below, the scenes got zoomed in because it tells the audience there's something happening at that scene. The audience forced to focus on what's the impact of what's happen in the scenes to squeezed and burst out their emotional feeling. The scene from the picture below is an example of an Extreme close-up shot. That is the shot framing a part of the character's face, like Chris Gardner's eyes for example. It increases the drama and intensity of the scene. The viewer is captivated by the Chris Gardner's emotion.

Lighting is another element in cinematography that boost dramatic elements into the drama movie scene. As the picture above shown, there's lighting source from the side of Chris Gardner and that is called side lighting. Side lighting is a light comes from the side, relative to the actor. It Usually to increase dramatic aspect to the scene and creates great chiaroscuro. The side lighting in drama genre movie give a big difference with just normal lighting source. Lighting that is dark and shadowy with little or no fill can be descried as low-key light. Although some people might think it's just a lighting, but people can see the big difference when both scenes compared between using side lighting and not using side lighting.

Figure 3. Side lighting on Chris Gardner giving an intense drama effect.
(Timestamp at 0:49:51)

The scene on above showing an argument between Chris Gardner and Linda about who are going to take care of Christopher when they both decide

to life separated (Figure 3). This dramatic scene is sure perfect to be modified more to become more dramatic by adding cinematography elements, in this case which is lighting element.

The scene shows Chris Gardner running to chase a thief that stole his scanner machine (Figure 4). This shaking camera shot is random movement or camera shake. Most camera movement are highly precise and controlled, but not with random camera movement. It is a shot technique that defined by camera shake. Camera shake is often added subtly to create a subjective experience for more intimate effect. Random movement gives the impression that events are happening in real-time when nothing is planned and anything can happen.

Camera shake are often used in action movies or intense action scenes, which in this scenario is when Chris Gardner running chasing the thief. Although the Pursuit of Happiness (2006) is a drama movie and not an action movie, but as the film told that running is an important part of his life. So, the director gives random camera shake to a simple running action to adding the drama effect as Chris Gardner's life is depends on his run, which is true.

Figure 4. The camera of the scene above are shaking randomly when Chris running.
(Timestamp at 0:20:49)

Figure 5. High-key lighting used on Chris Gardner and his acquaintances.
(Timestamp at 1:14:21)

Another cinematography elements that comes from lighting that boost the dramatic elements into scene is called high-key light. High-key lighting is

lighting that is bright and fairly shadow less with lots of fill light. It is a style of lighting where one side of the actor's face is almost the same within the other side of the actor's face as the scene, the lighting that shine Chris Gardner and his friends is brighter than most of the lighting in all the movies scene (Figure 5). In The Pursuit of Happiness (2006) movie, it often use low-key lighting in their most scene as most of it scene is shows sadness and struggle. But in some scene like the picture above, it uses high-key light to support the condition of the scene.

Another necessary element of high key lighting is that there is enough color and life in the seam to really sell the scene of the movie for .If the whole scene was dark, gloomy, black and white they wouldn't work nearly as well. The brightly lit scenes often suggest an upbeat mood and positive message. This look can also imply truth and openness, as like the scene showed above where Chris Gardner get many clients at once.

CONCLUSIONS

The Pursuit of Happiness (2006) is a drama-biographical film created in December 15th 2006 by Gabriele Muccino. It tells a story about a man, salesman, and a father named Chris Gardner who is struggling in his life. The movie categorizes as biographical movie genre since it tells a story of the character, even the story itself is based on true story. However, the drama genre in *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006) movie is might get a bit questioned by some common people who don't understand much about drama genre. Although the focus of drama genre movie is a struggle and the process of life of the character in the story, but still many people thought that drama is related with romance and love story.

Besides the characteristics and formula of drama genre in *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006) movie, drama genre movie also has cinematography elements that need to be added to deliver the emotion of the story and to increase dramatic elements in the movie. Cinematography have many part and element in it that can change the flow of story that will affect in the audience's emotion. *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006) movie using many aspects in cinematography, two of them that the research analyze is camera technique and lighting. *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006) uses many low-key lightings in it scenes many of the scenes tells a dramatic sad events. But although the movies have many sad scenes using low-key lighting, it also uses high-key lighting to improve the mood when the story have a happy mood in it. Not only lighting, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006) movie also uses many camera techniques in the movie. The camera technique that often used in the movie was a selective focus. It forced the audiences to focus on what the movie wants the audience to focus. Some other camera techniques that used in many scenes on the movie are close-up shot and random camera movement.

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