

## **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF POSTMODERN FILM IN GONDRY'S "*ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND*": A FILM STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

This study is under a postmodernism theory. The purpose of this study is to analyze Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* film using postmodern film theory. This study has two objectives; 1) to analyze the characteristics of postmodernism and postmodern film in Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*; and 2) to explain how the characteristics of postmodern film are presented in Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method since it emphasized on describing the characteristics of postmodern film that are presented in Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Moreover, the findings were presented in narrative or textual description. However, figures were also used to support the analysis of the data. Some steps in analyzing the data were: scrutinizing the cinematography of the film, the dialogue, and the scenes of the film; comparing the cinematography, the dialogue, the scene, and the plot of the film to the concept of postmodern theory and Denzin's postmodern film theory, making a data sheet based to categorize the data based on the classification, analyzing and interpreting the data.

This study reveals two findings. First, of Denzin's six characteristics of postmodern film, only five characteristics found in Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. They are an effacement of the boundaries between past and present, terrorizing the nostalgia for the past; present the unrepresentable, femme fatale as female character, and the using of violence and wild sexuality. The absent characteristic is to locate violent margins into everyday society. Second, how the characteristics of postmodern film are presented in Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Through the using of mise-en-scene including setting of place, time, and lighting, and the using of cinematography including the editing technique, lens, motion, and sound, this study found that Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* can be included in postmodern film based on the characteristics.

Key words: postmodernism, postmodern film, mise-en-scene, cinematography, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The literary value of a film is still underestimated until today. This thought comes up since people discover that it is easier to understand the content of a film than to understand the content of a book. However, the goal of literary and the film language are the same, to tell a story. Both are using different method of communication, the first one uses words and the later uses images. According to Purbani in *Membaca Komik Crayon Sinchan: Dengan Wacana Posmodernisme* (2012:5), influenced by the media and the development of technology, in postmodern era people tend to 'watch' than 'read'. The role of television, films, and internet in daily life is bigger than in the previous era. Due to the emergence of fatigue in old-fashioned texts, especially modern film, in postmodern era people swarm to create various films with various improvisations without losing the moral value and meaning. Postmodern works reject the notion of universal truths and plays with the possibilities of interpretations, multiple perspectives, uncertainties, and contradictions.

Liotard (in Storey, 2004:150) states that postmodernism signified by the collapse of universal truth and grand narratives. Meanwhile, postmodern film upsets the mainstream conventions of narrative structure and characterization, and then rearranges the structure into new structure that has less recognizable forms. The arousing of some films like *Pulp Fiction*, *Blade Runner*, and *Trainspotting* becomes the evidence of the faded boundaries between high art and low art.

The absurdness of postmodern film tends to lead the audience into the confusion between

reality and fiction, and it may cause frustration to the audience who misinterpret the postmodern film. However, the fact that people will not stop improving and exploring new things makes the creation of postmodern film continues so that the audience inevitably has to face it.

According to Strinati in *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (2004), there are five key elements of postmodern texts that differs it from the modern texts. First, Strinati (2004:224) states that the importance and power of the mass media and popular culture mean that they govern and shape all other forms of social relationship. Second, in the form of art, postmodern creates the breakdown between high culture and popular culture. The next one is that people increasingly consume images and signs for their own sake rather than for their 'usefulness' or for the deeper values they may represent. Four, Strinati believed that because of the speed and scope of modern mass communications, time and space become less stable and comprehensible. The last one is the decline of the universal thoughts that came up in modern era.

To clarify the characteristics of postmodern film, the researcher using the theory of Denzin (1991), in his book *Image of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and Contemporary Cinema*, he states six factors that make a film postmodern. First, postmodern films tend to create blur boundaries between past and present. Second, postmodern films tend to show signifiers of the past and portray them as signs of destruction. The next one is to present the unrepresentable. Four, postmodern films use wild sexuality and violence. The fifth is the portrayal

of femme fatale in female characters. The last point that Denzin makes relates to the location of violent margins in the film.

This research also analyzes how the using of cinematography presents the characteristics of postmodern film in Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* using Villarejo and Pratista's theory about film analysis including mise-en-scene (setting, editing, costume and make up) and cinematography (motion, lens, lighting, sound).

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Design

The design of this research is Qualitative Research. Suitable to the subject of the research, the data in the research filled with quotation that appears.

### Data and Source of Data

The data were collected from the dialogue, visualization, characteristics, and cinematography of Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, by watching the films generally and analyzing the details of some important scene.

### Research Instrument

Qualitative research involves the researcher as an instrument. The researcher uses herself as a primary instrument for collecting data.

### Data Collecting Technique

There are several techniques of data collecting in qualitative research include interviewing, observation, autoethnography, ethnographic observation (observing people enacting culture), analysis of documents and

*The Characteristics of Postmodern Film... (Mutia Rizki) 3* material culture, and visual analysis (e.g. interpretation of mediated text such as films or television program), as technique of data collecting.

### Data Analysis Technique

The research uses textual analysis as the data analysis technique since it involves the identification and interpretation of a set of verbal or non-verbal sign. Therefore, to ease in analysing the data, the data are then listed into the table below.

No.	Data	Page	Category	Meaning

## FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. Characteristics of postmodern film in Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

1. The main plot is the scene or story that takes place in the present time. However it is merged with the past and the future for it happens in Joel's mind.

2. Joel cries to the song that becomes the back sound of the scene. The filmmaker makes the song becomes the signifier of the past, and portrays it as signs of destruction.

3. The using of wild sexuality in postmodern is considered as the tools to express the feelings. Slightly drunk, Mary and Stan celebrate the pleasure of having a good time together to a rock n roll song. They unconcerned about their actual duty that they have to perform which is working on Joel's erasure process.

4. Clementine is the reflection of an impulsive spontaneous woman. She is not afraid or ashamed

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to introduce herself to a stranger (man). She leads Joel into destruction for the sake of her own goodness and her irresistible desire of love.

5. The using of Lacuna Inc. technology where people can erase their specific memory indicates the presentation of the unrepresentable thing in reality.

### **B. How the characteristics of postmodern film are presented in Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind***

#### 1. Mise-En-Scene

The setting of time is divided into three, the setting of place follows the movement of setting of time, and the lighting technique is low key lighting and flashlight that focus on the center. Those indicate the merging setting of time and space, terrorizing the nostalgia of the past, confusion over time and space.

#### 2. Cinematography

Beside normal motion, the film uses slow motion as a signifier of past scene and creates dramatic effect. The using of fast motion is to shorten the duration of important scene and to create a comical effect. The lens filter uses rack focus technique and deep focus technique to show the importance of every corner in one frame. Both cut and fade editing technique indicates the merging setting of time and the using of wild sexuality and violence. Meanwhile, the using of non-diegetic and diegetic sound indicates the

merging setting of time and terrorizing the nostalgia of the past.

### **CONCLUSION**

The researcher found that Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is a postmodern film because it contains five characteristics of postmodern film and two characteristics of postmodernism. The analysis of the cinematography and mise-en-scene ensure the postmodern film characteristics and how are they presented in the film.

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