

SIMULACRUM AND MYSTICAL LOGIC IN THE COMMODIFICATION OF COMMUNICATION IN THE NARRATIVE OF THE FILM "GHOST IN THE CELL"

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Abstract

This research focuses on supernatural entities, religion, satire, parody, and codes, through simulacrum and mystical logic in the commodification of communication in the narrative of the horror-thriller genre film entitled "Ghost in the Cell" which takes place in Labuhan Angsana prison. In this film, it is narrated that prison is not only filled with evil and greedy people, but also people who are actually innocent. In prison there is also an invisible ghost figure, then incarnates and duplicates itself to resemble a potential victim who will be killed sadistically and aesthetically. This research uses the concepts and theories of Commodification (Vincent Mosco), Simulacrum (Jean Baudrillard), Intertextuality (Julia Kristeva), and Binary Opposition Narrative Analysis (Vladimir Propp and Claude Levi-Strauss). The use of several concepts and theories to reveal the entity and narrative of the film contained in the characters and a number of scenes. The results of the study show that simulacrum and mystical logic in the horror genre continue, when an invisible ghost enters someone's body and appears, and presents something that is not real to be real (simulacrum) which is arranged into a narrative (intertextuality), and is represented functionally by the characters - a binary opposition narrative structure - as an attraction and interest for the majority of the audience through capitalist logic (communication commodification) and mystical logic.

keyword: commodification, simulacrum, mystical logic, intertextuality, narrative

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus pada entitas gaib, religi, satire, parodi, dan kode, melalui simulacrum dan logika mistika dalam komodifikasi komunikasi pada narasi film bergenre horor-thriller berjudul "Ghost in the Cell" yang terjadi di penjara Labuhan Angsana. Dalam film ini, diarasikan, penjara bukan hanya berisi orang-orang jahat dan serakah, pun orang yang sebenarnya tidak bersalah. Di penjara hadir pula sosok hantu tak kasat mata, kemudian menjelma dan menduplikasi dirinya menyerupai calon korban yang akan dibunuh secara sadis dan estetik. Penelitian ini menggunakan konsep dan teori Komodifikasi (Vincent Mosco), Simulacrum (Jean Baudrillard), Intertekstualitas (Julia Kristeva), dan Analisis Naratif Oposisi Biner (Vladimir Propp dan Claude Levi-Strauss). Penggunaan beberapa konsep dan teori tersebut untuk mengungkap entitas dan narasi film yang terdapat pada karakter tokoh dan sejumlah scene. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, simulacrum dan logika mistika pada genre horor terus berlanjut, ketika hantu tak kasat mata masuk ke dalam tubuh seseorang pun muncul, dan menghadirkan sesuatu yang tidak nyata menjadi nyata (simulacrum) yang disusun menjadi narasi (intertekstualitas), serta direpresentasikan secara fungsi oleh para karakter tokoh – struktur naratif oposisi biner sebagai daya pikat dan minat dari mayoritas penonton melalui logika kapitalistik (komodifikasi komunikasi) dan logika mistika.

Kata kunci: Komodifikasi, Memetika, Simulacrum, Intertekstualitas, Narasi.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian film industry in recent years has shown a significant increase, both in terms of production and the number of viewers. After the COVID-19 pandemic period, the national film industry experienced a rapid recovery and even recorded growth in certain genres, especially horror, mystery, and comedies (FilmIndonesia.or.id, 202). These genres not only dominate the number of productions, but also consistently occupy the highest position in cinema audience acquisition in Indonesia (Kompas, 2024). This phenomenon is clearly seen through the achievements of a number of Indonesian horror films that have managed to achieve very high viewership. *The film KKN di Desa Penari* (2022), for example, is recorded as one of the highest-grossing Indonesian films of all time with an audience of more than 9 to 10 million viewers (Medcom, 2022). This success was then followed by various other films in the 2023–2025 period which showed that the horror genre is still the main attraction for national cinema audiences (Liputan6, 2023).

Entering 2025, this trend is getting stronger with the presence of films such as *Agak Laen: Nyala Pantiku* which reached around 11 million viewers, and *Jumbo* which also penetrated more than 10 million viewers (CNN Indonesia, 2025). This shows that horror and comedy-horror films have become one of the main pillars of the Indonesian film industry in terms of commercialization and market attractiveness. Apart from the number of viewers, interesting developments can also be seen in the narrative aspects and cultural representation in Indonesian horror films. If in the previous period, the dominance of stories was mostly centered on urban ghost figures such as *kuntilanak*, *pocong*, and *genderuwo*, then in the 2023–2025 period there will be a shift towards exploring local mythology from various regions in Indonesia. This phenomenon can be seen in the emergence of representations of supernatural beings from outside Java, such as in film narratives based on folklore in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Belitung. This shift indicates a process of "localization of horror" that expands the scope of culture in national cinema (The Guardian, 2024). On the other hand, even though the horror genre dominates, films with the theme of family drama and comedy also continue to show quite good performance in attracting audiences, such as *Super Economical Family* (2025), *1 Brother 7 Nephew* (2025), to *Wait for Me to Succeed Later* (2026). However, overall, the data shows that horror remains the most dominant genre in the Indonesian film industry, both in terms of production and audience consumption.

Based on this phenomenon, it can be concluded that the Indonesian film industry has not only increased quantitatively, but also experienced a cultural transformation in the representation of stories, especially in the horror genre. Therefore, this phenomenon is important to be studied further to understand how the Indonesian film industry builds narrative strategies, commercialization, and cultural representation through the development of the horror genre in the 2020–2025 period.



Three Films About Local Ghosts (2026) in Indonesia: *Ghost in the Cell* , *Songko* (Ghost in North Sulawesi), *The Bell* (Ghost in Belitung)

The horror or thriller genre in the Indonesian film industry has shown increasingly massive development in recent decades, especially in the 2020–2025 period. This phenomenon has nothing to do with the increase in the number of productions and the number of viewers, but also with how the genre is transforming into a form of cultural commodification that works within the logic of entertainment industry capitalism. In this perspective, film is no longer just a medium of artistic expression, but also a product that is constantly reproduced through a pattern of imitation (repetition of the genre) in order to maintain exchange rates in the market (Mosco, 2009). Historically, Indonesian audiences' interest in the horror genre has actually been formed from the 1970s to the 1980s, when local horror films were widely circulated in conventional cinemas. Some of them are *Breathing in the Mud* (1970), *Beranak Dalam Kubur* (1971), *Pursued by Sin* (1974), *Servant of Satan* (1980), *Queen of Black Magic* (1981), *Sundel Bolong* (1981), *Nyi Blorong* (1982), *Friday Night Kliwon* (1986), to the *White Crocodile Queen* (1988) is an early representation of how Indonesian horror builds a strong audience base through elements of mysticism, the body, and collective fear (Sen, 1994; Heider, 1991). At that time, the film industry was not dominated by modern cinema networks such as XXI, CGV, and Cinepolis. In contemporary developments, especially in the 2020–2025 period, the horror genre has experienced a significant resurgence again. Films such as *KKN di Desa Penari* (2022), *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* (2022), and *Siksa Kubur* (2024) show that horror is not only a

popular genre, but also a major driver of the national film industry in terms of the number of viewers (FilmIndonesia.or.id, 2023; Kompas, 2024). Even in 2025, films such as *Agak Laen: Nyala Pantiku* and *Jumbo* are recorded to reach more than 10 million viewers, showing that horror and comedies have become the main commodities in the Indonesian cinema industry system (CNN Indonesia, 2025). This phenomenon can be read as a form of cultural commodification, in which horror elements such as ghosts, myths, and supernatural entities are constantly reproduced as narrative strategies to capture audiences in the capitalistic logic of the film industry. In this context, the use value of local folklore and myths shifts to the exchange value in the form of audiovisual products that are consumed en masse (Mosco, 2009). In addition, the trend also shows how popular culture works through a mechanism of constant repetition and adaptation to elements that are considered to have high market appeal.

When viewed from the context of popular culture, Indonesian horror films are not only a space for entertainment, but also a space for the production of symbolic meaning. The concept of memetics (Dawkins, 1976) can be used to explain how ideas about ghosts, myths, and superstitions spread and persist in popular culture through audiovisual reproduction. Meanwhile, Roland Barthes' semiotics allows the reading of signs in horror films as a modern mythical system that shapes a certain meaning in society. Furthermore, Jean Baudrillard through the concept of simulacrum explained that representation in popular culture no longer reflects reality, but creates a new reality that is considered real by society. In this context, horror films such as *Ghost in the Cell* (2026) can be understood as a form of simulation that combines social reality, satire, and myth in one hyperreal narrative construction. Meanwhile, Julia Kristeva's approach to intertextuality and Vladimir Propp's narrative structure allow for an analysis of how the film reconstructs folklore patterns into more complex modern narrative forms. In addition, the concepts of myths, signs, and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991) are important in understanding how horror films not only present fear, but also reproduce social structures and cultural beliefs in a seemingly natural form. According to Hoed (2011), text is not only written language, but also includes various forms of cultural expression such as images, sounds, architecture, and other sign systems. In line with that, McKee (2011) states that text includes all forms of representation such as films, photographs, graphic design, and song lyrics that produce meaning (Ida, 2014).

Based on this, the film *Ghost in the Cell* was chosen as the object of study because it not only managed to attract millions of viewers, but also presented a different form of horror narrative through a satirical approach, parody, and the use of visual pieces that are intertextual.

The film utilizes horror elements such as ghosts and myths, but is constructed in the form of a narrative mosaic that symbolically reflects social events. Thus, the film not only becomes an entertainment product, but also becomes a representation of the logic of the cultural industry that works within the framework of capitalism. Therefore, this research is important to analyze how the film *Ghost in the Cell* constructs the meaning of horror in the context of cultural commodification, as well as how various theories such as the commodification of Mosco, Dawkins' memetics, Barthes' semiotics, Baudrillard's simulacrum, Kristeva's intertextuality, and Propp's narrative can be used to dismantle the structure of meaning in the film.

II. THEORETICAL STUDIES

Commodification

Commodification in the media and film industry is the process of transforming use *value* into exchange *value* oriented towards economic profit. In the context of the film industry, audiovisual works are not only positioned as artistic expressions, but also as commodities in the system of cultural capitalism. The film industry works through a production structure involving producers, directors, screenwriters, and distribution networks that are all tied to market logic. This process includes pre-production, production, and distribution stages that are directed to reach the audience as consumers. Mosco (Lestari, 2025) explained that the political economy of media consists of three main processes: commodification, spatialization, and structuring. Commodification is at its core because it turns content, audience, and communication processes into economic commodities. Research shows that the post-pandemic film industry has experienced significant growth with the dominance of certain genres, especially horror, which has proven to be the most economically and audienceably stable (Wibowo et al., 2022; Screen Daily, 2025). In fact, Indonesian films in 2024 will record more than 80 million viewers with the dominance of local films reaching more than 60% of the national cinema market (The Jakarta Post, 2025; Screen Daily, 2025). This phenomenon shows that horror has not only become a popular genre, but also a form of cultural commodification that is constantly reproduced in the logic of the capitalistic industry (Andra, 2025).

Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs and systems of meaning in social and cultural life. According to Piliang (2012), semiotics studies how signs work and produce meaning in society. Roland Barthes developed the concept of semiotics into two levels of meaning, namely denotation and connotation, and myth as a second-level system of meaning. Myths in this case are not just fictional stories, but cultural constructions that are considered natural by society

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The Logic of Mysticism

Mystical logic is a concept in *Madilog* by Tan Malaka that explains a mindset based on belief in supernatural things, myths, and superstitions, instead of using scientific rationality. Within this framework, social phenomena and everyday occurrences are often understood through a supernatural lens that cannot be empirically verified. Tan Malaka criticized this way of thinking because it was considered to hinder the development of critical reason and the advancement of science. Despite this, in modern discourse mystical logic is often criticized, its existence remains strong in popular culture, especially in Indonesian horror films. The representation of mystical elements is still the dominant element that forms the main appeal of the genre, as it is able to build suspense, fear, and emotional engagement of the audience. This shows that supernatural elements still have an important place in people's cultural consumption (Susanto, 2020; Ardhana, 2020). Furthermore, belief in mystical things not only serves as a narrative element in the story, but also develops into an effective commercial strategy in the film industry (Andra, 2025). The use of mystical themes has proven to increase market appeal, which is reflected in the dominance of horror films in Indonesian cinemas in recent years terakhir (Writers, 2025). Thus, mystical logic not only survives as a cultural heritage, but also transforms into part of the economic mechanism of the film industry

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a concept that states that each text always has a connection to other texts that have existed before. Kristeva (in Culler, 1975) explains that a text is essentially a mosaic of quotations from various other texts, so it never really stands autonomously. Thus, the meaning of a text is always formed through its relationship with other texts in a wider cultural network. In film studies, intertextuality is used to analyze how a film references or adapts elements from other texts, be it previous films, cultural myths, legends, or social realities (Dahlan, 2025). This process makes the film not only understood as a stand-alone work, but as part of an ongoing dialogue with the various forms of cultural representation that already exist. Through intertextuality, the audience is invited to recognize and reinterpret the references that appear in the film's narrative. Recent research shows that modern films often use intertextual strategies to build various effects, such as nostalgia, humor, and social criticism (Fahmi, 2025). Intertextuality is seen from the repetition of classic ghost themes that are then re-adapted in a more modern form and context. This shows that the horror genre not only repeats traditions, but also reproduces and reconstructs meaning according to the times.

The Narrative of Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss

Narrative is a series of events that are arranged causally in space and time (Eriyanto, 2013). In structuralist studies, Vladimir Propp explains that stories have a relatively fixed structure through repetitive narrative functions, although the characters or characters may be different. These functions form the archetype of stories that can be found in various stories, especially in folklore traditions. Meanwhile, Claude Lévi-Strauss added that meaning in a narrative lies not only in the flow of events, but also in the binary oppositions that shape the human way of thinking. Oppositions such as good–evil, life–death, and order–chaos become fundamental structures that help build understanding of conflict and meaning in stories (Hidayat & Lestari, 2021). Thus, narrative is understood as a system of signs that works through the contradiction of these basic concepts. In the development of contemporary studies, the narrative of modern films shows an increasingly complex tendency with the emergence of moral ambiguity and the blurring of boundaries between protagonist and antagonist. Figures no longer fully represent good or evil in black and white, but are in a more realistic gray area (Sutrisno, 2024). This suggests a shift in narrative structure from classical patterns to a more dynamic form that is reflective of modern social complexity.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a **descriptive qualitative** approach to uncover commodification, memetics, simulacrum, and intertextuality in the narrative of the film *Ghost in the Cell*. The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on the interpretation of visual texts and film narratives, not on numerical measurements. Qualitative research methods "rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs" (Creswell, 2020). This shows that qualitative research focuses on data in the form of text and images, has distinctive stages of analysis, and produces interpretations based on various research designs. The data sources in this study consist of two types, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from the film *Ghost in the Cell* which is the main object of the research. The researcher conducted a live screening at the Margo XXI cinema, Depok, to observe firsthand the narrative, visual, and symbolic elements in the film. Secondary data were obtained from various written and digital sources, such as scientific articles, websites, and digital media that discuss Indonesian cinema, especially horror genre films that have a high number of viewers and are relevant as a comparison in this study. The data collection technique in this study is carried out through several stages, namely:

Movie Viewing. Researchers watched *the Ghost in the Cell* movie live to gain a thorough understanding of the storyline, characters, and visual and audio elements. Documentation. Data collection was carried out through recording important scenes that contained mythical, supernatural, symbolic, and social representation elements. Literature Studies. The researcher collected data from various references such as scientific journals, books, and articles relevant to the research topic, particularly those related to cinematography, semiotics, and film studies. The main source of data in this study is the film *Ghost in the Cell* which was watched live at the Margo XXI cinema, Depok. This film is analyzed as an audiovisual text that contains narrative, visual, and symbolic elements. In addition, secondary data sources in the form of Indonesian horror film articles from digital media and academic literature that discuss film phenomena are also used, especially in the context of the horror genre and the development of the Indonesian film industry. For data analysis techniques, the steps taken by the author are, (a) Listening to the narrative and *scenes of the Ghost in the Cell film*, which contain mythical or supernatural elements; (b) Observe several scenes that have been categorically selected; (c) Analyze some of the characters that have been narrated in the film.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on the results of the analysis of the film *Ghost in the Cell* (2026) by Joko Anwar, it was found that this film represents a combination of horror, comedy, and thriller genres with the main setting of a penitentiary. This film not only shows conflicts between characters, but also presents supernatural elements in the form of ghostly entities that are the main drivers of narrative conflict. Narratively, this film puts Anggoro as the main character who is portrayed as having an empathetic nature and often helping other inmates, even though he himself is a prisoner of a robbery case. The Labuhan Angsana prison environment is described as a social space full of unequal power relations, violent practices, discrimination, and abuse of authority by prison officials. The figures of Sapto as the head of the prison and Jefry as the main warden represent a corrupt and repressive power system, while other groups of prisoners form a social structure divided into several gangs with intense internal conflicts. On the other hand, the presence of ghostly entities becomes a non-human element that serves as a catalyst for chaos as well as a moral balancer in the story.

Sinopsis Film *Ghost in the Cell*

The film *Ghost in the Cell* tells the story of life in the Labuhan Angsana Correctional Institution, a prison in which inmates live in unsafe and stressful conditions. The situation inside the prison is filled with violent practices, oppression by a warden named Jefry (Bront Palarae), and conflicts between gangs of inmates led by Anggoro (Abimana Aryasatya) and Bimo (Morgan Oey). Conditions are even more tense with the arrival of Dimas (Endy Arfian), a former journalist who is imprisoned for the murder of his boss, Endy (Rio Dewanto). Since Dimas' presence, various strange incidents have occurred that have caused some inmates to die mysteriously and unnaturally. At first the death was thought to be a conflict between prisoners, but later there were indications of an unseen supernatural force. The ongoing terror encourages the inmates to unite in the face of an increasingly chaotic situation, including against the corrupt power system under the corrupt Head of Sapto Prison (Kiki Narendra) and giving special treatment to certain inmates. In the end, the inmates try to survive by facing the forces of the ghosts that are at the center of various mysterious events inside the prison.

Narrative Structure and Binary Opposition of Figures

The analysis shows that the narrative structure in the film can be understood through a binary opposition approach that refers to the concepts of Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In this structure, the characters in the film are mapped into functional categories that not only move at the level of characters, but also at the level of relationships of meaning that

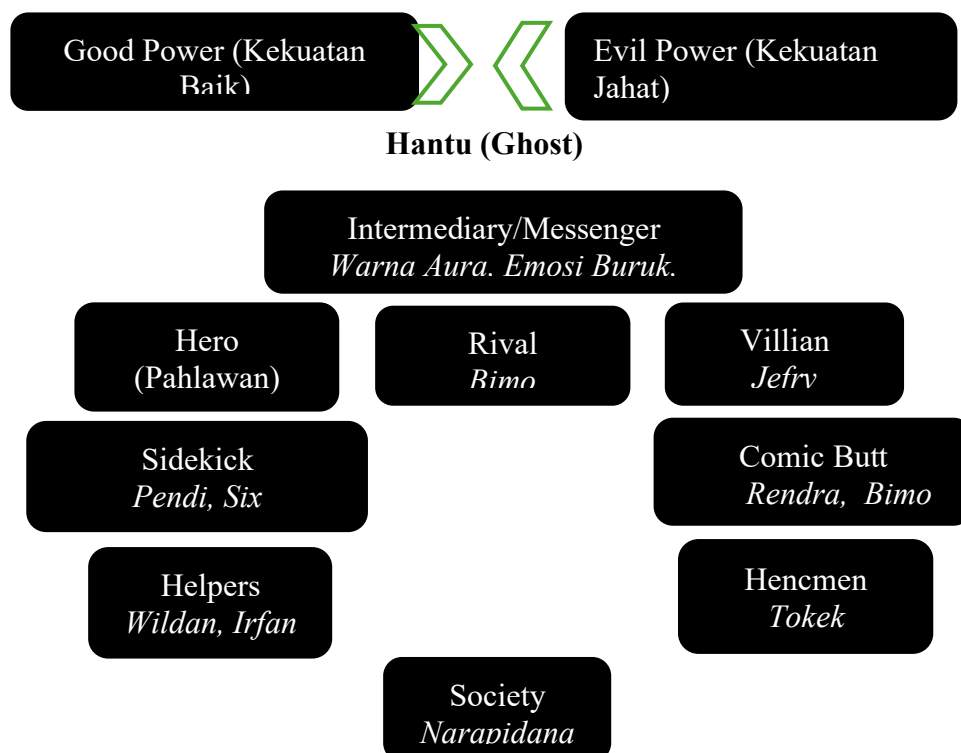
are opposite and form each other. Functionally, characters can be positioned into several main opposites, such as protagonist versus antagonist (good–evil), living humans versus supernatural entities (life–death), and victim versus perpetrator (order–chaos). This reading shows that each character does not stand independently, but rather functions within a broader narrative system as explained by Propp through the functions of the story, as well as by Lévi-Strauss through the binary opposition structures that shape the workings of meaning in the text.

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2. **Villain (Main antagonist):** Jefry
3. **Rival:** Bimo
4. **Helpers:** Irfan and Wildan
5. **Sidekick:** Six dan Pendi
6. **Henchmen:** Tokek
7. **Society:** All inmates in Labuhan Angsana Prison
8. **Intermediary/Messenger:** Entitas hantu (Ghost)

In this structure, the ghost not only serves as an antagonistic entity, but also has an ambivalent role because it kills based on the "negative energy" conditions of the characters. This shows that there is an unclear boundary between good and evil in the film's narrative.

Struktur Naratif Oposisi Biner Vladimir Propp – Claude Levi-Strauss Dalam Film “Ghost In The Cell”



Representations of Power and Symbolic Violence

The film also represents power relations in the prison system through the practice of symbolic violence. Jefry as a warden is described as having domineering control over inmates, including in the form of discrimination, abandonment of basic rights, and repressive actions. Sapto as the head of the prison strengthened the power structure through the practice of bribery and partiality towards certain prisoners, especially corruption prisoners. This condition creates social inequality that strengthens conflicts between groups of prisoners. This power relationship shows that prisons are not only a space for punishment, but also a space for the production of complex structural violence.

Supernatural Elements and Ghost Simulacrum

One of the most dominant aspects of the film is the presence of a ghostly entity that has the ability to duplicate the victim's body. The ghost is described as a creature that emerges from the supernatural realm and has a killing pattern based on the psychological and emotional state of the target. The ghost in this film serves as a symbol of "simulacrum", which is a representation of reality that is not entirely real but has a real impact in the world of the story. Its presence also reinforces the element of horror through the visualization of the mutilated body aesthetically and symbolically. In addition, ghosts also serve as a metaphor for a broken social system, where the individuals who are in it are trapped in a cycle of violence that keeps repeating. Visual Semiotics and Symbol Analysis in Film Semiotically, the film uses various visual symbols that have a deep meaning. Some of them are:

1. **Yellow inmate uniform** as a symbol of hope in the dark (social and spiritual symbolic interpretation).
2. **The color of the aura (red, brown, gray)** as a representation of the emotional and moral state of the character.
3. **Prison numbers** that contain symbolic references to Qur'anic verses, laws, and socio-political innuendo.
4. **A hollow ghost face (simulacrum)** as a metaphor for social breakdown and human alienation in the system.

According to Danesi (2010), characters and visual elements in the film's narrative function as signs that represent certain meanings in the structure of the story. This is evident in the use of visual symbols in *Ghost in the Cell* which are not only aesthetic, but also ideological.

Comparison with International Prison and Horror Genre Films

When compared to prison-themed films such as *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) or *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979), *Ghost in the Cell* has a different approach because it incorporates elements of supernatural horror into the prison room. In addition, the elements of aesthetic violence in this film also have similarities with international horror films such as *Suspiria* (1977) and *The Conjuring* (2013), especially in the use of symbolic and atmospheric visuals. However, *Ghost in the Cell* has its own peculiarities because it combines social criticism, comedy, and horror in one complex narrative.

Discussion

Narrative Structure and Binary Oppositions in *the Ghost in the Cell* Movie

The results of the study show that *the film Ghost in the Cell* not only functions as an entertainment work, but also as a representation of social criticism of the power system, morality, and structural conditions in correctional institutions. The film builds a complex narrative through character divisions and opposition relationships that can be analyzed using the approach of Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss (Sutrisno, 2024). In general, the narrative structure in this film is not simple linear, but is formed through a binary opposition system that shows the fight between various moral, social, and supernatural forces. The opposition is not only limited to the relationship between protagonist and antagonist, but also includes the relationship between truth and evil, order and chaos, and moral consciousness and unconsciousness in the prison cell. This approach is in line with contemporary narrative studies that emphasize that modern films tend to construct meaning through structural conflict and relational ambiguity (Hidayat & Lestari, 202). The ghost character is placed as an ambivalent entity. On the one hand, he acts as a punisher of characters who have "negative energy", but on the other hand remains an uncontrollable threat. This ambivalence suggests that the forces in the film are not always absolute, but rather move within the moral gray area. This kind of representation also reflects the tendency of modern horror films that combine elements of social criticism and mystical logic as narrative and commercial strategies in the Indonesian film industry (Andra, 2025).

Character Representation and Narrative Function Classification

The character structure in this film can be classified into several narrative functions, namely hero, villain, helper, messenger, and society. Each character not only functions individually, but also becomes part of a broader system of meaning in building conflicting

relationships and narrative structures of the story. This approach is in line with contemporary narrative studies that emphasize that characters in films work as functional elements in an interconnected sign system (Sutrisno, 2024). The character of Anggoro plays a hero who represents the value of caring and courage, although he does not explicitly claim himself to be a hero. Bimo is present as a rival who creates social conflict in the prison environment, while Jefry plays a villain who represents repressive power and oppressive practices. Character opposition structures like this show a narrative pattern that is not only personal, but also structural in describing power relations (Pratama & Nugroho, 2022). Supporting characters such as Six and Pendi function as helpers who provide help both spiritually and intellectually, while Irfan and Wildan strengthen the hero's position through moral and religious support. The society is represented by inmates who tend to be passive to the conflicts that occur around them. This collective representation shows how social groups in films are often positioned as structural settings that reflect the dynamics of power and social inequality (Kurniawan, 2025).

Ghost Symbolism and Social Representation

The presence of ghosts in the film not only serves as a horror element, but also as a metaphorical symbol of social injustice, trauma, as well as a system that fails to deliver justice. In this context, ghosts can be understood as representations of a collective memory that is neglected in the social structure, which then re-presents in the form of supernatural disturbances in the narrative space. Symbolically, ghosts represent traces of unresolved social conflicts. It becomes a medium that connects the past with the present, especially in terms of experiences of violence, oppression, and injustice that never get a complete resolution. Its presence not only serves as an element of horror, but also as a marker of ongoing social wounds. Widodo (2023) states that supernatural elements in modern horror films are often used as metaphors for unresolved social conflicts, especially those related to inequality and structural repression. Ghosts are not only a source of fear, but also serve as a critique of the unequal social system and the repressive and unjust mechanisms of power.

Moral Ambiguity and Narrative Complexity

The film also shows the existence of moral ambiguity in the division of protagonists and antagonists. There is no hard and fast line between good and evil, as each character has complex motivations, backgrounds, and actions. This condition makes the audience unable to simply group the characters into black-and-white categories, but must understand the context behind each action. This ambiguity shows that the narrative not only functions as a linear story structure, but also as a space for the negotiation of meaning between the various perspectives

of the characters. Each action taken by the character can be understood from a different point of view, thus opening up the possibility of a wider interpretation of the conflicts that occur in the film. Danesi (2010) explained that the narrative of a film is built through the interaction between characters, plots, and settings that form each other's meaning. Each narrative element does not stand alone, but influence each other in building the audience's understanding of the story as a whole. Hidayat and Lestari (2021) added that contemporary films tend to present characters with gray morality to represent the complexity of social reality. Thus, the moral ambiguity in this film reflects that social reality is not simple, but rather full of contradictions, dilemmas, and ethical uncertainties.

Representation of the Prison Room as a Social Critique

The prison room in this film not only serves as a setting where the story takes place, but also as a symbol of the power system and social control mechanism. Prisons are represented as closed spaces that shape, limit, and regulate the behavior of individuals in them through a hierarchical power structure. Furthermore, prisons are spaces that reproduce structural violence and show the power relations between actors, both between officers, prisoners, and the dominant groups in it. These relationships show that power is not only formally present through institutions, but also works informally through everyday social interactions within these closed spaces. Pratama and Nugroho (2022) stated that the institutional space in films often reflects the power structure in society. Prisons in *Ghost in the Cell* can be understood not only as physical locations, but also as symbolic representations of the broader social system. In this film, prison is a symbol of limitations, injustice, and social pressure experienced by the characters. This representation shows that space is not just a passive setting, but an active element that also shapes the meaning of narrative and social criticism in the film.

Cinematography and Atmospheric Amplification Approach

From a cinematography aspect, this film uses contrasting lighting, narrow spaces, and dynamic camera movements to build an intense psychological atmosphere. These visual elements not only serve as a purely aesthetic aspect, but also serve as a narrative device that reinforces the meaning and emotion in the story. The use of dark lighting and shadow play creates a consistent sense of tension throughout the film. Meanwhile, the narrow framing reinforces the sense of confinement and isolation, in line with the conditions of the prison room that is the main setting of the story. The unstable camera movement in some scenes also adds to the psychological intensity felt by the audience. Sutrisno (2024) explains that cinematography in modern horror films combines visual realism with symbolism to create a

deeper emotional experience for the audience. In this context, visual elements not only record reality, but also construct the inner atmosphere and psychological tension of the characters in a more immersive way. Thus, the cinematography approach in this film plays an important role in strengthening the horror atmosphere while emphasizing the narrative message. The visuals used not only support the story, but also become an integral part of building more complex emotional experiences and symbolic meanings.

Film as Social Criticism and Contemporary Representation

Ghost in the Cell is a film that is not only entertainment-oriented, but also presents a social critique of the power system, morality, and structural injustice. This film uses horror elements not only to build fear, but also to open up a space for reflection on various social issues presented in the narrative. This social criticism is seen through the way the film constructs conflicts, characters, and spaces that are full of power relations and inequality. Each narrative element serves not only as part of the story, but also as a symbol that represents broader social conditions, particularly in the context of repressive institutions and societal structures. Kurniawan (2025) states that modern horror films are often used as a medium of social criticism through visual symbolism and metaphorical narratives. *Ghost in the Cell* shows that cinema can function as a space for social reflection that raises complex issues artistically, while presenting a diverse layer of meaning to its audience. Thus, the film shows that contemporary cinema functions not only as entertainment, but also as a medium of artistic expression capable of representing social reality in a critical, reflective, and multilayered way in the context of modern visual culture.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on this discussion, it can be concluded that this horror-thriller film not only presents an element of entertainment through a combination of supernatural entities, violence, and satire, but also builds a critical representation of the social reality in prison institutions. The prison room in the film does not simply function as a story setting, but as a complex social space, where various forms of violence—both physical, symbolic, and structural—occur simultaneously due to unbalanced power relations. In addition, this film shows that the boundary between good and evil is not absolute, because all characters are placed in situations that allow moral shifts to occur according to the conditions and interests of each character. In this context, each character has an interrelated narrative function in forming a dynamic story conflict. The presence of ghostly entities in prison rooms can also be understood as a symbol of the accumulation of negative energy, injustice, and violence that occurs within the system.

Thus, the supernatural element serves not only as an element of horror, but also as a metaphor that reinforces social criticism of prison institutions. Overall, the film shows that the horror-thriller genre can be used as a medium of social reflection that not only showcases narrative tension, but also uncovers the structural realities hidden behind power and legal systems.

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