

## Magical Realism in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* (2001)

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### Abstrak

Realisme magis semakin diminati di dunia perfilman. Salah satu film yang mengadopsi unsur realisme magis adalah film *Amélie* karya Jean-Pierre Jeunet. *Amélie* merupakan film yang menceritakan kisah hidup seorang wanita bernama Amélie Poulin yang hidup dalam kesendirian sejak ia kecil hingga suatu ketika, ia menemukan sebuah kotak harta karun masa kecil yang tersembunyi di balik tembok apartemennya yang kemudian membawanya dalam sebuah petualangan yang dapat mengubah hidupnya. Perjalanan hidup Amélie yang dipenuhi dengan hal-hal di luar nalar yang membuat teori realisme magis milik Wendy B. Faris yang mengandung *Irreducible Element*, *Phenomenal World*, *Unsettling Doubt*, *Merging Realms*, dan *Disruption of time, space, and identity* dirasa tepat. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menganalisa hubungan dari elemen realisme magis dalam mendukung tema film dengan menggunakan teori dari Maggie Ann Bowers. Hasil dari penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa realisme magis dalam film ini digambarkan melalui imajinasi dan sifat-sifat unik para tokoh dan juga melalui kejadian-kejadian yang dialami para tokoh. Selain itu, elemen realisme magis dalam film ini digunakan untuk menguraikan tema film yaitu kesepian dan perjalanan menuju kebahagiaan atau pencarian jati diri.

**Kata Kunci:** *amélie, realisme magis, magis, realisme, peran.*

### Abstract

Magical realism started to be loved in the field of movies. One of the movies that adopts magical realism elements is Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie*. *Amélie* is a movie that tells the life story of a woman named Amélie Poulin who has lived in loneliness since she was a child until one day, she finds a childhood treasure box hidden behind the wall of her apartment which then takes her on an adventure that can change her life. Amélie's life journey, which is filled with things beyond reason, makes the theory of magical realism by Wendy B. Faris that contains irreducible elements, phenomenal world, unsettling doubt, merging realism, and disruption of time, space, and identity is appropriate. In addition, this research will also analyze the relation of each magical realism in supporting the theme of the movie by using Maggie Ann Bowers theory. The result of this study reveal that magical realism in this movie is depicted through the imagination and unique traits of the characters and also through the events experienced by the characters. In addition, the magical realism elements in the movie used to elaborate the theme of the movie which is loneliness and the journey of happiness or self-discovery.

**Keywords:** *amélie, magical realisme, magic, realism, role.*

## INTRODUCTION

Magical realism is a literary genre characterised by the portrayal of the real world intertwined with elements of magic or fantasy. Magical realism constitutes a subgenre within the broader realm of realism fiction. In the realm of Magical Realism, the depiction of the world remains rooted in reality, albeit with the incorporation of fantastical elements that are seamlessly integrated and accepted as ordinary occurrences. Magical realism is characterised by the amalgamation of realism and the fantastic, resulting in the seamless integration of extraordinary elements within the realm of the ordinary, thereby blurring the boundaries between the two (Faris, 2004).

According to its definition, the word 'magic' in magical realism and marvelous realism encompasses extraordinary events, particularly those of a spiritual or inexplicable nature that cannot be explained by rational scientific principles. These events may include phenomena such as ghosts, disappearances, miracles, exceptional abilities, and peculiar atmospheres. However, magic in the magic show does not include. On the other hand, the word 'magic' pertains to the enigmatic nature of existence.

Magical realism has emerged as a significant mode of artistic expression on a global scale, particularly within post-colonial cultures because it is considered to be a

literary foundation for culturally significant works that give voice to marginalized voices and elevate suppressed traditions (Faris, 2004). It also provides individuals a mechanism to question and contest the prevailing western worldview (Hegerfeldt, 2005).

Magical realism is not only a literary genre, but it is also a broad term for works of art that combine the real world with fantasy or surrealism. Magical realism can be found not only in books, but also in movies, art, music, and even video games. As it is mentioned, it is a broad term and not only limited to books but even along with the growth of the era, more and more people are interested in exploring magical realism and applying it to their works. One example that the researcher noticed is in the field of movies, lots of movies try to adopt the elements of magical realism. One of the reasons why magical realism is increasingly in demand is because it enhances the stories, they create much more than if they stick to the standard or boring real world by creating metaphors for the human condition in unique ways or through loopholes in the plot.

Here are some well-known movies that contain magical realism such as *Water for Chocolate* (1992), *The Green Mile* (1999), *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and last but not least *Amélie* (2001) which is the main source of data in this study. The researcher chose this movie because this movie has a unique storyline and is interesting to be discussed further.

Jean-Pierre Jeunet is a well-known French film director, producer, and screenwriter. He made his debut as a director in 1991 with *Delicatessen*, a black comedy film. In the next project, he collaborates with Caro in *The City of Lost Children* (1995). Further, he then takes a challenge by exploring the science fiction and horror genre later crowned him in 1997 as the director of *Alien: Resurrection*, making him the fourth person to oversee the Alien film series. In 2001, he directed a movie that became his biggest success as a director, *Amélie*. Through this movie, he gained more international recognition and made it to the BBC's 100 Greatest Films of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain or *Amélie* is a French drama, comedy, and romantic film released in 2001. *Amélie* is a movie that tells the story of Amélie's life from childhood. Amélie is portrayed as an honest, innocent, and naive girl. She spent her childhood in solitude because she was diagnosed with a heart condition by her father and her mother's death made her even more helpless. As she grew up, Amélie decided to move to Montmartre, France, to work as a waiter at a café called Two Windmills. She has always lived a good and monotonous life, she has done many ways to get rid of the emptiness inside her but nothing works until one day the news of Lady D's death changes her life into an adventure

that drives away the emptiness inside her and leads her to a sweet love story.

A lot of study has been done covering Magical Realism, from painting to the more common novel. This part of the study will show two previous studies of Magical Realism to support the idea of the current study related to this discussion.

The first previous study is from Fahmi (2019) with an article journal named "Magical Realism and Kafka's Construction of Identity in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore*". In this research, the study aims to provide light on the novel's magical realist depictions and Kafka's post-disaster identity construction. The researcher then found that magical realism is depicted by the presence of events inside the novel and by using Lacanian hero theory he also discovered that Kafka constructs his identity by being a hero for himself, which means he must accept and face his destiny.

The second previous study is by Asmida (2020) with an article journal named "Magical Realism in Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife*". In this research, the researcher tries to figure out whether this novel is considered magical realism or not and through this research she found out that this novel contains five elements of magical realism proposed by Wendy B. Faris which means this novel could be considered as magical realism. Besides, she also found out the cultural history of Chicago through the novel as a result of the postcolonial side of magical realism.

Two previous study above has the difference and similarity with this study. The first study by Fahmi (2019) discuss about magical realism and Kafka's post-disaster identity construction. Although both of study use the same theory of magical realism. However, the aim of this previous study is not only to describe the element of magical realism but also to construct Kafka identity by using Lacanian hero theory, while this study only focus on the element of magical realism and the relation of the element to support the theme of the movie. So, this study discusses the element of magical realism deeper than the previous study. The second study by Asmida (2020) discuss about magical realism. Although both of study use the same theory of magical realism. However, this previous study only analyses the element of magical realism found in the novel as to prove whether the novel is considered magical realism or not, while this study analyse the element of magical realism to also analyse the use or the relation of magical realism in supporting the theme of the movie. So, this study will be more richer in term of findings.

Recently, there have been a lot of researches regarding magical realism, which comprise the emergence of

magical realism. However, most of the research found, mostly discusses the elements or characteristics of magical realism. The purpose of this study is not only to discuss the elements or characteristics of magical realism but also to find out how the element of magical realism can help in supporting the themes of the movie which is loneliness and the journey of happiness and self-discovery.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach to describe the elements of magical realism and elaborate the relation of magical realism element in supporting the theme in the movie *Amélie*. This research apply the magical realism theory by Wendy B. Faris, where she proposed five element of magical realism such as irreducible element, phenomenal world, unsettling doubt, merging realms, and disruption of time, space, and identity. The main source of data in this research are taken from the narration, dialogue, and action of the characters. To support this research, the researcher provide several resource such as book and internet journal. To collect the data, the researcher watch the movie several times then screenshotted the subtitles of the narration, dialogues and scene that are related to the topic which is magical realism.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Characteristic of Magical Realism in *Amélie*

In 2004, Wendy B. Faris published her book *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* which discusses the elements or the characteristics of Magical Realism. She then proposed five characteristics of Magical Realism which are the irreducible element, phenomenal world, unsettling doubt, merging realm, and disruption of time, space, and identity.

Magical realism in the movie *Amélie* is depicted with the presence of magical realism element proposed by Wendy B. Faris such as the irreducible element, phenomenal world, unsettling doubt, merging realm, and disruption of time, space, and identity. To comprehend the data more deeper, the researcher will present all the findings found in the following discussion.

### Irreducible Element

The first characteristic is the Irreducible element. Faris (2004) describes the irreducible element as something that we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe in western thought, which means it cannot be explained by logic, familiar knowledge, or received belief.

The unrealistic events in the movie started since *Amélie* was young. The uncommon things that cannot be explained by human logic was triggered by the loneliness experienced by *Amélie*. *Amélie* who is an only child and diagnoses unfit to go to public school felt lonely because her parents are too busy to take care of her. To entertain

herself, she plays with a crocodile which was formed by her imaginary.



*Figure 1. Amélie plays with her imaginery friend (05:27-05:38)*

*Amélie* was playing as a doctors and patient with a crocodile as it shown in figure 1. From the *Amélie* facial expression she really takes serious her role as a doctor and the crocodile as a patient perfectly displays a look of pain and worry as if the crocodile really sick. From figure 1 these are the things that *Amélie* as a child do to entertain herself from loneliness, she played at being a doctor because of the influence of her father who was a doctor, where in her childhood she was not too close to her rigid father. By playing doctor and patient with her imaginery friends, she felt more connected to her father. The way she cope with loneliness by playing doctor and patient is a common things, however the patient here is logically unconfirmed by people thoughts. In real life a childlike *Amélie* cannot go near a wild animal like crocodile also it is uncommon to have a crocodile inside the home and even play with it. But it is that actually happened, *Amélie* play with the crocodile because the crocodile it is not real, all this time everything was just the imaginery form by lonely *Amélie*. These irreducible elements are well assimilated into the realistic textual environment, rarely causing any cooment by narrators or characters, who models such an acceptance for their readers (Faris, 2004). *Amélie* do not comment the presence of the crocodile because it exist due to her imagination and her parent did not seem to care at all, as if they accept the crocodile existence.



*Figure 2. The paintings and the lampshade are talking while Amélie asleep (57:47-57:50)*

There is other irreducible element emerges while *Amélie* was asleep as shown in figure 2. The irreducible

element can be seen from the appearance of the duck and dog paintings that suddenly move their head and start talking to each other about the fate of Amélie's love life with Nino, they thought that Amélie is pathetic because she is a coward for not daring to meet Nino in person. The paintings later ask the pig lampshade beside Amélie for opinion and only look at Amélie with pity face. Where all of these things are illogical to human thought and should not be happen because the paintings and the lampshade are inanimate objects even though they resemble the shape or image of real animals. This magical realism event could may not have happened, it could have been the content of Amélie's dream while she was sleeping. She represented her worries and nervousness about Nino by dreaming of the paintings and lampshades in her room as if they were alive and talking to each other like humans. Magical images or events, glowing alluringly from within the realistic matrix, often highlight the central issue (Faris, 2004). Where the issue in this events is how Amélie try to project her worriedness through the conversation of the paintings and the lampshade.

### Phenomenal World

The second characteristic proposed by Wendy B. Faris is the phenomenal world. Faris (2004) stated that in its characteristics, Magical Realism requires detailed descriptions and a definite sense of the phenomenal universe. This is what defines Magical Realism as distinct from fantasy, its emphasis on realism. A fictitious world with realistic descriptions is more like the real world, and it is always described in a detailed and specific way.

The existence and value of phenomenal world in the movie *Amélie* (2001) mostly depicted through places. The place such as Amélie's work place and Amélie's parents house. These places are ordinary places that still exist in real world.



*Figure 3. Amélie's work place (09:38-09:41)*



*Figure 4. The atmosphere at the cafe (10:54-11:00)*

Figure 3 show when Amélie grew up, she decided to move out and worked at a café called Des 2 Moulins. Later, from figure 4 we are clearly shown the inside of Des

2 Moulins, there is a bar for drink, a coffee machine, a worker making drinks, customers chilling out. From here we can presence that Des 2 Moulins is just an ordinary café, there are no such strange things found. So, Des 2 Moulins is not difference from real world café and that makes it the phenomenal world according to Faris (2004) magical realism requires detailed descriptions and strong presence of real world. The world in which this movie is set is the real world where it is set in Paris, France and the cafe where Amélie works is a cafe that really exists in the real world and is still operating today.

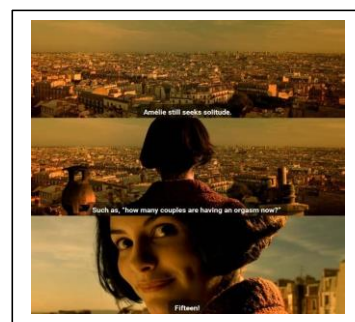


*Figure 5. Amélie visit her father (11:18-11:40)*

Amélie who already move out and leave her father alone on their house, regularly visit him every couple of weeks to catch up on their life. Through the scene shown in figure 5 we can see the presence of ordinary objects such as bowls, chair, cutlery, glass, napkin, and food on the table. These objects are representation of real world. It is an object that we could easily found in daily life. The presence of these objects is to empashize the audience that the movie still heavily based in real world and to build the sense of familiar out of audience. Realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in, often by extensive use of detail (Faris, 2004).

### Unsettling Doubts

The third characteristic proposed by Wendy B. Faris is unsettling doubts. Faris (2004) stated that Magical Realism brings out doubtfulness, the doubts in distinguishing irreducible elements according to whether they exist in the magical world or the real world. The reader may encounter hesitation when confronted with two conflicting interpretations of events, leading to a sense of uncertainty. In this context, the question of belief assumes a central role



*Figure 6. Amélie wandering while doing questionable thing (13:37-14:00)*



In figure 6 , the narrator explains even though Amélie become older and move from home, however she still feel lonely. To kill the loneliness, she did something questionable while wandering alone, looking the city from above. She excitedly counted how many people in the city were orgasming at that moment and with confidence she answers fifteen.

Through this scene it raises a question how Amélie could hear the sound of people having orgasm in the city at the moment and answered in a confident tone. The city where she lives clearly not a small city. This phenomenon clearly brings out the doubtfulness, how a normal human like Amélie could hear that sound from where she was and in the scene there are no visible aids that Amélie uses. This could not be accepted by human's logic except Amélie has a super hearing power or perhaps Amélie is lying. This is in line with Faris (2004) state that sometimes the audiences are instructed to hesitate to the event that occur, however if they not they may hesitate, both in doubt because we are unsure about the nature of the events and in wonder, in awe, at their remarkable properties.

### Merging Realms

The fourth characteristic of Magical Realism is Merging Realism. Faris (2004) states that there is an open space between the spaces of uncertainty that causes the reader to experience the closeness or almost merging of the two worlds. It's like being lost between two worlds, the human and animal world or the human and supernatural world; being in the middle, not really belonging to either. The convergence of ancient or traditional societies with modernity is a prevalent phenomenon within the realm of cultural history. In a theoretical framework, the text incorporates both elements of magic and materiality. The work amalgamates elements of realism and the fantastical in a comprehensive manner.



*Figure 7. Nino talking with the men inside the photo (01:11:47-01:11:56)*

Figure 9 show that there are two worlds merging become one, the real world or the human world and the supernatural world. The merging of two realms happen inside Nino's room. The human world represented by Nino and the supernatural world represented by the men inside

the picture because as the human logic, photo is inanimate object, it can not move and talk by on its own but in this scene it can move, so there must be some magic or supernatural thing behind this. It could be say that the link between these two worlds is through Nino's unconscious, because Nino was in a deep sleep before suddenly awakened by four men inside the picture. Through their conversation we can experience the closeness or the merging of two worlds. Magical realism blurs borders between categories (Faris, 2004) where here it blurs the line between human and supernatural world.

### Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity

The last characteristic of Magical Realism is disrupted time, space, and identity. Faris (2004) Along with merging different worlds, Magical Realism challenges conventional notions regarding temporal, spatial, and personal constructs. The conventional notions we hold regarding the temporal dimensions of the past, present, and future may be subject to disruption, as the possibility arises that these divisions lack clear demarcations or may not have ever existed. Our sense of space is disrupted and identities are also disrupted due to the merging of different worlds or activities of the magical world in the real world.

The presence of disruption in the movie *Amélie* (2001) shown in the form of identity such as the disruption of Amélie and Mr. Raymond identity that disrupted due to unexpected event and also the presence of magic or extraordinary things.



*Figure 8. Amélie feeling lonely (13:37-14:00)*



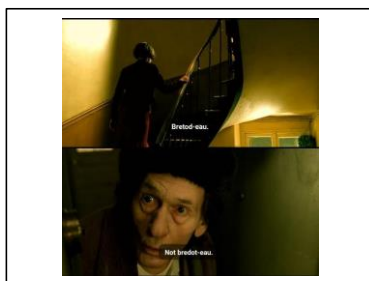
*Figure 9. Amélie walk with heart full of happiness and love (34:53-35:02)*

As shown from the figure 8 and 9 there was a disruption of identity experienced by Amélie. She who at first is told as a lonely child and only think how to cope with the loneliness she felt by seeking temporary fun is disrupted by the presence of an unexpected event where she finds a childhood treasure box belong to the previous resident of her apartment which suddenly appears behind her bathroom wall. Through this unexpected event she began find the meaning of her life and shifted her way to find happiness by doing good deeds. Disruption of identity here shown by the change of how Amélie sees the world and change how she act. If previously she did strange and unique thing to fill the void in her life and always wondered about the meaning of life. Now she feels like she founds her purpose in life, she become more sensitive and attentive to the people around her. She found the joy in helping people. The disruption here fit Faris (2004) statement that magical realism reorients not only our habits of time and space but our sense of identity as well.

This unexpected event not just disrupt Amélie's identity, but also disrupt Mr. Raymond or The Glass Man identity. This unexpected event dares him to step out of his comfort zone and unintentionally helps Amélie in her journey towards her new identity.



*Figure 10. Mr Raymond who never leave his home (13:17-13:30)*



*Figure 11. Mr. raymond approach Amelie first (27:34-27:38)*

As shown in figure 10 and 11 there was a disruption of identity experienced by Mr. Raymond. Mr. Raymond who is an anti-social person due to his fragile body. He always stays at his place for 20 years and never socialize

with his neighbors is disrupted by the presence of unexpected event that happened to Amélie. Mr. Raymond, who rarely socializes but likes to observe his neighbors, became interested in what Amélie was doing. Driven by his interest, he ventured out of his comfort zone and started socializing with his neighbor, Amélie. Through the disruptive of identity that happen to Mr. Raymond he became more talkative and more caring to his surroundings, his once hard nature began to soften.

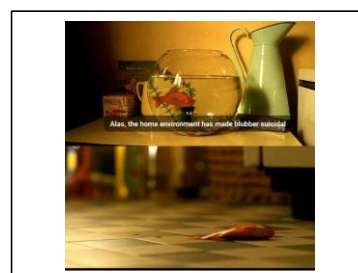
The disruption of identity that occurred to Amélie and Mr. Raymond here fit Faris (2004) description that magical realism reorients not only our habits of time and space but our sense of identity as well. Where the unexpected event here changes their identity and the way they see the world.

### **Relation of Magical Realism in Supporting the Theme**

Magical realism combines realism and the fantastic (Faris, 2004) which means the role of magical realism is to create a world that is both familiar to the audience but did not escape the fantastical element and also used to bring the uniqueness of each character which enriches the standard realistic world. Ann Bowers (2004) also stated that magical realism plays a role in initiating the questions concerning philosophical issues.

After watching and understanding the role of magical realism, the researcher found several roles or use of magical realism in the movie. To comprehend the data more deeper, the researcher will present all the findings found in the following discussion.

The first role of magical realism here is to highlight the loneliness feel by main character Amélie. Since Amélie was little she had to be homeschooled and taught by her mother who was a principal because her father who was a military doctor misdiagnosed her with a heart defect when the actual reason Amélie just feel nervous to be near her dad. This causes Amélie to be lonely. Before she ever has a fish pet to be her only friend, however the atmosphere of Amélie's house which too quiet and tense, making the fish often act up as shown in figure 12,



*Figure 12. The fish depressed*

This kind of event drive Amélie's mom crazy that she decide to throw the fish to the lake. This is made little Amélie who deprived of playmate finally began to create

imaginary friend. As shown in the figure 18, little Amélie plays as a doctor and patient with a crocodile which one of her imaginary friend.

With the existence of magical realism here, is try to help to highlight the loneliness felt by Amélie. The loneliness she felt made her create imaginary friend to accompany her, where this is in accordance with what Bowers (2004) stated in her book that magical realism allows children to explore the world from various perspective. Without the element of magical realism here, the audience would not fully understand how lonely Amélie was and how she overcome it. Magical realism also helps the audience to understand Amélie's thoughts or imagination as a child.

The second role of magical realism in the movie is to help Amélie discover herself journey to escape from the loneliness she felt and to find happiness. Magical realism here plays a role as a means of initiating questions concerning philosophical issue (Bowers, 2004). The concerning philosophical issue in *Amélie* (2001) is how Amélie asking the purpose of her life and how Amélie fill the void inside her.

This all started when Amélie old enough, he decide to get out from her house and work as a waitress in Des 2 Moulins. In here the void inside her is little by little gone, however its still not enough. She do anything to reduce it by finds pleasure through small things such as watching the faces of people in the cinema, paying attention to small details in movies, having intercourse, dipping her hand into sacks of grain, cracking crème brûlée with a teaspoon, and skipping stones at St. Martin's canal. These things that previously brought little happiness to Amélie. However, it was not enough, she still felt lonely, she felt alone in such a vast world. So on this occasion magical realism plays a role in Amélie's life by bringing up something that previously did not exist or was not realized by Amélie, which is the childhood treasure box hidden behind the walls of her apartment.

She then takes the initiative to return the childhood treasure box to its owner and in her journey to return and find the identity of the owner, the elements of magical realism appear such as the presence of unsettling doubt elements that appear when Amélie believes that Mr. Bretodeau will definitely pick up the phone from a payphone where this raise the doubt in the audience mind, how can Amélie be so sure that this kind of way will work and then the disruptive of identity that occurs with Mr. Raymond or The Glass Man who suddenly helps her which also raise a doubt about how Mr. Raymond know who is Amélie and what she is doing. However, this incident brought thrm closer together. These things are the role of magical realism in Amélie's journey to fill the void in

herself by doing good deeds by helping the people around her and being more open to the people around her.

After analysing all the evidence found in the movie, the researcher find two role of magical realism in the movie, such as to highlight the loneliness felt by Amélie and to help Amélie discover herself journey to escape from the loneliness she felt and to find happines

## CONCLUSION

Magical realism is a literary genre that combines reality with element of magic. By using five elements of magical realism propose by Wendy B. Faris, the researcher found that the movie *Amélie* (2001) contain five element of magical realism except disruption of time and space. First element, the irreducible element can be found through the presence of Amélie's imaginary friend and inanimate object that talk to each other while Amélie asleep. The second element, phenomenal world, can be found in the places and objects that resembling the ones in the real world. Third element, unsettling doubt, shown by how Amélie could hear the sound of one city's orgasm from a distance that raise the doubt of the audience. Fourth, merging realms, can be identified by the merging of two world, human and supernatural world that occur in Nino's room. Last, disruption of identity, can be found through the change in Amélie and Mr. Raymond's identity.

The second conclusion is how the element of magical realism support the theme of the movie. The main theme of this movie is loneliness which portray by how the movie describe Amélie background since childhood till she becomes adult, the element of magical realism such as irreducible element, unsettling doubt used in order to help portray and describe to the audience how Amélie coping with the loneliness which is by using her imagination to entertain her and the element of magical realism here is also help to support the other theme which is to discover Amélie self journey to escape from the loneliness and find happiness. The other theme in the movie is self-discovery, the presence of unexpected event which is the discovery of childhood treasure behind her apartment wall bring her to initiating questions concerning philosophical issue where in the movie it is the purpose of her life and how Amélie fill the void inside her. The unexpected event bring disruption to Amélie identity. Amélie's heart now full of happiness and love by doing good-deeds.

Through this research, the resarcherer would like to recommend several things to the next researcher who are interested in analysing magical realism, especially the element or the characteristic and the role of magical realism in movie. Magical realism is not only found in the novel, a lot of movie already adopt magical realism into their work. Magical realism could help us to understand more the unlogically things surround us.

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