

**FILM AESTHETICS: DIRECTORIAL TECHNIQUES AND TECHNICALITIES IN *HAPPILY NEVER AFTER***

**Edem, Richard Enomfon**  
**Department of Performing Arts**  
**Akwa Ibom State University**  
**Richardedem188@gmail.com**  
**07067862074**  
**&**  
**Mbede, Aniebiet Unwana, PhD**  
**Department of Performing Arts**  
**Akwa Ibom State University**  
**aniebietmbede@aksu.edu.ng**  
**08065807601**

**ABSTRACT**

Film aesthetics reveal stylistic elements of cinematic storytelling and demonstrate a director's ability to employ technical and artistic techniques, in creating a unique, engaging, and meaningful cinematic experience. Although Nollywood, one of the world's largest film industries, is often evaluated based on the volume of films produced and box office performance, relatively little attention has been devoted to the technical and aesthetic dimensions of film directing. This study examines the technological infrastructure, cinematography, editing techniques and screening aesthetics of Aniebiet Mbede's *Happily Never After* to determine the innovative aspects of the directorial craft and their contributions to the development of the Nigerian film industry. Specifically, the study investigates the extent to which the director's cinematic literacy and adaptative aesthetic logic affects his technological competence and overall directorial practice. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study analyzes the film using materials obtained from the Akwa Ibom State University Pinnacle Theatre repository and adopts Formalist Theory as its analytical framework. The findings reveal that effective film directing requires the seamless integration of artistic and technical elements to enhance storytelling and create a distinct viewing experience. The study recommends increased investment in modern film making equipment and technological infrastructure to support contemporary directorial vision. It further advocates the revision of film curricula in Nigerian tertiary institutions to strengthen training in film authorship (auteur theory), advanced directing techniques and emerging AI-assisted virtual production technologies that are redefining the technical possibilities of film production.

**Keywords:** Film Aesthetics, Directorial Techniques, Multimedia Technicalities, Nollywood

**Introduction**

Films are a powerful medium that has the ability to transport audiences into a different world, evoking emotions, provoking thought and inspiring action. Film making combines elements of art, storytelling and cinematic technicalities to create a unique and captivating form of entertainment. According to Aniebiet Mbede et al., "The integration of technological inventions to human life positively, makes life easier and more interesting" (135). This view of film as a medium of interest and ease corroborates Chika Asogwa's position that, "Film is an art form, which has evolved over more than a century, becoming a powerful medium of storytelling, entertainment, and cultural reflection" (107). This cultural reflection, however, requires certain techniques and technicalities to make a screen-worthy and audience appealing film. In lieu of this, Bala Musa submits that, "Filmmaking is a complex art form that combines various techniques and technical skills to deliver a visually captivating and emotionally engaging story" (146). Furthermore, Gross and Ward state that, "Filmmaking is a collaborative venture that demands the harmonization of its techniques and technicalities to achieve its artistic goal" (2). From camera angles and lighting to editing and sound design, every aspect of filmmaking plays a crucial role in conveying the director's vision to the audience. Throughout the history of film, these techniques have evolved not just with technological advancements but also with the development of filmmaking as an expressive art form. Barab affirms that, "Film is an essential aspect of mass communication and can be understood as a communication channel through which news, entertainment, education, data or any form of message can be transmitted to a large number of people for mass communication" (22). The creative techniques and technicalities therefore, becomes a necessary tool for the creation of aesthetic film content, capable of satisfying audiences, locally and globally through cinematography, editing, sound, and mise-en-scène (visual composition).

### **Theoretical Framework: The Formalist Film Theory**

The Formalist film theory as propounded by Hugo Münsterberg, Rudolf Arnheim, Sergei Eisenstein, and Béla Balázs in the twentieth century, is a school of thought within film reading that places strong emphasis on the formal elements and aesthetics of cinema. This position views film as an art form that uses specific techniques and devices to create meaning and evoke emotions. Formalist film theory stands in contrast to other approaches that focus on the content, narrative, or socio-political aspects of films. It examines how the various elements of a film, such as cinematography, editing, sound, and mise-en-scène (visual composition), contribute to the film's meaning and emotional impact. In formalist film theory, the role of the director becomes a critical office responsible for the shaping of both the artistic and aesthetic aspects of the film.

Formalist film theory argues that films should be treated as works of art that can be analysed and appreciated for their formal qualities. One of the key principles of formalist film theory is the idea that the visual composition of a film is of utmost importance. Filmmakers are encouraged to carefully consider the arrangement of elements within the frame, such as the positioning of characters and objects, the use of color and lighting, and the overall balance and harmony of the image.

Hugo Münsterberg, a German-American psychologist and philosopher, made notable contributions to the formalist approach to film theory in groundbreaking work, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), offers a unique perspective on the psychological and emotional impact of cinema. Münsterberg draws upon his background in psychology to analyse how the formal elements of film, such as editing, lighting, and composition, could manipulate and affect the emotions of viewers.

Münsterberg's work laid the foundation for understanding the role of formal elements in film, particularly the ways in which editing and visual composition could create emotional responses. According to Robert Edgar-Hunt, "Films are nothing but moving pictures or pictures in motion; they are a series of slightly different pictures (still pictures) passing before our eyes in sequential order and at a regular speed to tell a story" (20). This movement is referred to as optical illusion. Münsterberg's focus on the psychological aspects of cinema was groundbreaking and influential in shaping the early discourse on the formalist approach to film.

Rudolf Arnheim, a German-born author, art and film theorist, and psychologist, also a prominent advocate of the formalist approach to film theory, supports this view. In his seminal work, *Film as Art* (1932), Arnheim argues that cinema should be analysed as a visual medium, highlighting its composition, framing, and visual aesthetics. Arnheim believes that film, like other visual arts, can effectively convey meaning and evoke emotions through its formal elements. Arnheim's emphasis on the visual aspects of cinema paves the way for a deeper appreciation of film as a visual art form. Sergei Eisenstein, the pioneering Soviet filmmaker and theorist, remains a central figure in the development of formalist film theory. His theory of montage argues that, meaning and emotions are created through the juxtaposition of images, effectively using editing as a key formal element to convey intellectual and emotional impact. Eisenstein's concept of montage revolutionised the way films were analysed and appreciated. In his essays and books, including *The Film Sense* and *Film Form*, he explores the artistic and formal possibilities of cinema. Eisenstein submits that, "meaning in film arises from the arrangement and collision of images. His use of montage, the juxtaposition of shots to create intellectual and emotional effects, became a hallmark of formalist filmmaking" (25). Works like *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) exemplify Eisenstein's formalist approach by utilizing editing techniques to convey powerful messages and emotions. Béla Balázs, a Hungarian film critic, screenwriter, and theorist, contributes significantly to the formalist approach to film theory. In *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* (1924), Balázs explores how cinema could convey emotions, moods, and psychological states through its formal elements. He focused on the unique capabilities of cinema, both visually and auditorily, to create a profound artistic experience. Balázs emphasized the expressive potential of film, highlighting how elements like cinematography, lighting, and sound could be harnessed to create a unique emotional impact. The techniques and technicalities employed in filmmaking have transformed the way stories are told but have also revolutionised the ways in which audiences experience narrative and visuals. His work provided a framework for understanding the art of filmmaking as a complex interplay of formal elements.

Formalist film theory promotes the idea that filmmaking is an art form that should be appreciated and analysed for its formal qualities. By lining up elements such as visual composition, editing techniques, and emotional impact, filmmakers can create meaningful and engaging cinematic experiences. This theory reflects the importance of careful planning and deliberate choices in order to create a visually captivating and emotionally resonant film. Ultimately, formalist film theory encourages filmmakers to approach their craft with a focus on artistic expression and aesthetic appeal.

### **The Nigerian Film Industry: A Historical Overview**

The foundation of what we could call “the Nigerian film industry was laid by the British colonialists. With the introduction of the film culture to Nigerians, not just as a form of entertainment, but they actually had the intention of using it to justify their imperialism and to transmit British values and norms” (Azeez 5). However, the history of Film in Nigeria is closely related to vital periods in the history of Nigeria (Uchenna 177). Film was introduced into Nigeria in 1903, precisely eleven years before the official proclamation of the entity called Nigeria with a film show at the Captain Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos. The first film shot in Nigeria was in Jos, Plateau State (in the then Northern Protectorate). The film was titled *Palaver* (Nigerian Film Corporation 1).

In the same vein, Ohiri observes that, “film made its first entry into Nigeria through efforts of business merchants, the church and the colonial government and the 1903 exhibition was made possible by a Spanish firm, Balboa and Company who were invited by Herbert Macaulay” (53). Herbert Macaulay’s love for theatre-related practices and their embodiments as tools for nationalist activities during the struggle for independence in the colonial era was so much that one of Nigeria’s foremost theatre practitioners, Hubert Ogunde submits that, “the overt political plays which were either composed to expose the evil machinations of the colonial rule or to demand outright freedom are *Worse Than Crime*, *Strike and Hunger* (both 1945). Although *Herbert Macaulay* appears political in character, Ogunde still insist, as he stated in his advertisement for this play in 1946, that it is basically a historical documentation on that famous politician’s life (83). This goes to substantiate the report that Herbert Macaulay actually brought Balboa and Company from Spain for the exhibition that year as he was a man interested in the arts. Studies on the films available during this period indicate that “the content of these films were largely documentary and focused on topics of education, health, agriculture and industry amongst others.

One of the earliest cinema operators in Lagos was the West African Pictures Company owned by Mr. S. Khalil, a member of the Syrian Community in Lagos. The company was granted the right to use Glover Memorial Hall Lagos, including its Tennis Court Gardens and bar for three nights a week for cinematographic shows. Later, the West African Pictures Company established Rex Cinema in Ebute Metta, Regal Cinema and Royal Cinema, Lagos in late 1930s and early 1940s. The other cinema house in Lagos during this period was the Capitol Cinema.

It was until 1947 that “an indigenous film unit called Federal Film Unit was established to replace the Colonial Film Unit (CFU). However, because it was still under the administration of the colonial government, it did little in terms of energizing local content” (National Open University of Nigeria 20). It was under the administration of Richardson that this was done as Musa, Auwalu and Ndalina Alhaji declare that, “Other pre-colonial constitutions that were made before Lyttleton, with the exception of Richard constitution of 1947 to some extent, all others were repugnant to a purposeful federal constitution” (318). The Cinematographic Law of Nigeria was enacted a year later in 1948 which touches on licensing of cinema premises, moral protection of the public and film censorship. This paved the way for the takeoff of film production in Nigeria unlike in the early years when most of the films exhibited were produced overseas. In the list of films produced during this period are *Empire Day Celebration in Nigeria* (1948), *Small Pox Leprosy* (1950), *Queen Elizabeth II’s visit to Nigeria* (1956) which were all documentary films while feature films of this era include *Moral Disarmament* (1957). The colonial administration’s activities regarding film in Nigeria culminated with the passage of the Entertainment Law in July, 1959 a year before the independence of Nigeria (Ohiri 54). October 1st, 1960 witnessed the independence of Nigeria with Lagos as its new capital. This gave room to the video film era in the 1990s, the New Nollywood era of the 2000s witnessing cinema rebirth in Nigeria in the mid-2000s. According to Aniebiet Mbede’s view, “in the wake of post-Covid in 2019, the rise in low budget and high-volume release of YouTube movies received a boost in patronage with high numbers in views as well as box office returns”. This creates visual aesthetics to the extent which other users perceive these presentations to be visually appealing and aesthetically impressive.

### **FILM AESTHETICS IN *HAPPILY NEVER AFTER***

The waning interest of audiences continues to pose a threat to the performing arts venture as a production is not successful without the presence of an audience. To keep audiences coming to see productions, there is an increasing need to create film productions with visual aesthetics deliberately crafted to satisfy the taste of contemporary audiences. Especially as new trends in productions take on a combination of sound, video, and text for expressing ideas. *Happily Never After* seems to bridge this gap in theme, technicalities and technology of production.

#### **Synopsis: *Happily Never After***

*Happily Never After* is a story of passion and pain. The play captures the audacity of two loving hearts in the face of trials and celebrate the power of trust and truth, over lies and deceit. This is the story of Ukem, a hardworking barber who is steadily rising to fame for his skills and diligence. He proposed to his beautiful friend Uyai (the

Senator's daughter) and all hell loose. Uyai is the only daughter of a high-ranking politician, Senator Mkpang Edemakai, who vows to frustrate Ukem's marital desire by arranging a richer suitor to frustrate the barber's ambition; in his words, "you both can only have a *Happily Never After*, because this marriage will never happen". Desmond is the son of Senator Duke and is going the extra mile to woo Uyai (with expensive gifts and money) into marriage, but she refuses his advances. In the drama that ensues Uyai's hope is crushed as she experiences first hand pain of betrayal and family hypocrisy. All of this will only be, if the puzzle about her suitor's sister's kidnap is fixed! What about the police indictment of Senator Mkpang in a One Hundred Million Naira office procurement scam? Will this love triumph over these torrents of trials? Yes, it does! The conspiracy is unraveled and the perpetrators are brought to book by the help of Ukem and his friend. He wins the Senators freedom, heart, trust and ultimately his daughter's hand in marriage.

#### **About the Writer-Director**

Aniebiet Unwana Mbede is a Lecturer in the Department of Performing Arts, Akwa Ibom State University with PhD in Media Arts and special interest in Multimedia, Directing and Film Aesthetics. She serves as the Departmental Postgraduate and Examination Officer. She has written and directed productions for the stage, radio, screen and multimedia which include: *Arise* (2016), *My Portion* (2017), *Osusu Owo* (2018), *Once upon a Parade* (2019), *Our Cartel* (2020), *Echoes of Life* (2022), *Uyio Obio* (2023), *Happily Never After* (2023), *The Rising Sun* (2024), *The Remnant* (2024) *The Remnant* (2024), *Marriage O'clock* (2025), and *The Untold Story* (2026). She has also directed works from other scholars: Bassey Ubong's *Entangled Lives* (2008) and *My Brother's Keeper* (2021) and *Vicky Bon Uzuazor's Diary of a Pastor's Wife* (2023). Outside her academic engagements she works as a certified family and relationship coach serving as Director of Training Marriage Made Easy Academy (2017-2026), Co-author of the books; *Marriage Made Easy* (2017), *Defending Your Marriage* (2020) *Love Goes to School* (2022), *Walking in Love* (2024) and *The Courage to Conquer* (2026). Aniebiet has served as publicity secretary, Association of Nigerian Authors (Akwa Ibom Chapter) and a member of International Association of Lions Clubs (Uyo Metropolitan Lions Club). Dr. Aniebiet Mbede She is the President at Prevailing women prayer network (PREWON). She is married to Pastor Unwana Mbede (Soulbroda) with children: Rejoice, Delight and Blossom.

#### **Exploring Themes in *Happily Never After***

The directorial techniques involved in any production is the procedure and sets of protocol the individual director deploys in transforming the script into an effective production that communicates meaningfully to the audience. the practical and creative tools available to tell the story as seen and heard and experiences b viewers. This was achieved in the production *Happily Never After* through careful script analysis and interpretation, examining themes, the characters, plot and also the use of composition and other elements of visual design, applicable to the film medium. The themes explored in *Happily Never After* are as stated:

#### **Love and Marriage**

The theme of love and marriage takes centre stage in the intricate relationship between Ukem (the diligent barber) and Uyai (the graduate), Senator Mkpang Edemakai's eldest daughter. Despite Ukem's earnest desire to marry Uyai, her father vehemently opposes their union. Determined to maintain his social standing and control over his daughter's destiny, the senator orchestrates a marriage between Uyai and Desmond, (a fellow Senator's son). This forced alliance by the Senator serves as a significant obstacle in Ukem and Uyai's path to matrimony, injecting tension and conflict into their love story.

However, their love prevails against all odds, as Ukem and Uyai navigate the challenges thrown their way. Despite the senator's attempts to thwart their love affair and impose his own matrimonial plans, Ukem and Uyai manage to defy his schemes. In the end, their unwavering commitment and resilience lead to the fruition of their love, culminating in their marriage. This narrative underscores the enduring nature of true love, triumphing over societal expectations and parental opposition. The theme music, *My Endless Love* speaks loudly about the depth of affection and care they share, despite Ukem's disparaging economic status.



Plates 1 and 2: Uyai wedded to Ukem in *Happily Never After*  
Source: Pinnacle Productions, 2023.

### **Betrayal**

At the heart of this narrative lies the pervasive theme of betrayal, where Senator Duke orchestrates a treacherous act against his once-loyal friend, Senator Mkpang. In a shocking turn of events, Senator Duke engineers a setup through the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), falsely accusing Senator Mkpang of fraudulent involvement with office vehicles and equipment valued at a staggering One Hundred Million Naira. This betrayal is fueled by Senator Mkpang's inability to successfully arrange the marriage between his daughter and Senator Duke's son, Desmond. This act of betrayal not only tarnishes the bond of friendship between the two senators but also leads to severe consequences for Senator Mkpang.

As a consequence of the false accusations, Senator Mkpang may ultimately be sentenced to as long as, twenty-four years in prison without bail. The gravity of this betrayal becomes even more pronounced as it jeopardizes Senator Mkpang's freedom and reputation. However, amidst the web of deceit, there emerges a glimmer of justice. Ukem's friend, a lawyer, plays a pivotal role in revealing the truth. With the barrister's legal expertise, Senator Mkpang is eventually discharged and acquitted. The tables turn as the betrayer becomes the betrayed. Senator Duke and his son face legal charges for their false accusations and the kidnapping of Uyai. This intricate tale of betrayal and its eventual reckoning highlights the complexities and consequences that unfold when trust is shattered and loyalty is replaced with deception in a family, friendship or community.

### **Corruption**

The theme of corruption pervades the narrative as Senator Duke shamelessly exploits his power and position to manipulate situations to his advantage. The embodiment of this corruption is evident when Senator Duke orchestrates a scheme to frame Senator Mkpang and his son, Desmond, showcasing the abuse of authority for personal gain. By abusing influence, Senator Duke not only undermines the principles of justice, but also tarnishes the political landscape with his unethical actions. Furthermore, the insidious nature of corruption is vividly portrayed when Senator Duke's son (Desmond) extends his malevolent reach to control the personal lives of others. Leveraging his father's position, he coerces Ukem, the hardworking barber, by threatening him in his salon. The corruption seeps into the intimate sphere of Ukem's life as Desmond attempts to dictate the tone of Ukem's relationship with Uyia. He pressuring Ukem to step aside so that Uyia can marry him. This manipulation of power and interference in personal relationships highlights the corrosive impact of corruption, not only in the political realm but also in the private lives of individuals who become victims of such abuse of authority.

### **Director's Formalist Approach in *Happily Never After***

The foundational concept for contemporary directing hinges on realism and a satisfying psychological experience that mirror everyday life believably through cinematography, editing, sound, and mise-en-scène (visual composition). Multimedia experimentalist and director Aniebiet Mbede suggests that, "In the light of the evident global shift, it becomes essential for theatre practitioners to reinvent the mode and modalities for publicity and production" (Mbede et al. 96); Andrew Sarris in the same vein supports that, "the first premise of the auteur theory is the technical competence of a director as a criterion of value" (562). If the director does not have the basic technical competency, he will automatically be out of the auteur pantheon. Even though the directorial talent is very abstract in nature, an auteur director exhibits an allrounder's grip over the various aspects of film conception,

filmmaking, film technology. Firstly, an auteur director has to be creative to be able to take apart and bring back the production, meaningfully.



Plate 3: Film Aesthetics coordinated by Director Aniebiet Mbede, assisted by Ani Wilson  
Source: Proposal Scene *Happily Never After*, Pinnacle Theatre (Film Production Unit).

The director, Aniebiet Mbede deploys Otto Brahm's, Style and Substance technique using the auteur directing model for the film, *Happily Never After*. In this project, Mbede seamlessly integrates various artistic and technical elements to enhance the storytelling and create a unique viewer experience. Firstly, the distinct auteur style carefully curates appealing visual aesthetics, thematic consistency, which softens the emotional tone of the film. Her personal creative touch is evident in every frame, ensuring that the film carries a cohesive and recognisable signature throughout the run time. To leverage the use of technology, the director collaborated with experts in different fields, to put together a multi-mediated collage of technologically driven expertise for the film production. "Multimedia production is a multi-faceted creative construction of dramatic pieces with audio-visual content that is disseminated to tell a story, pass a message or make a statement in the society" (12). She worked closely with skilled cinematographers to capture visually stunning sequences, a sound designer for a captivating audio landscape, and visual effects artists to incorporate seamlessly integrated CGI elements. The synergy among these professionals was to elevate the film beyond traditional boundaries. In *Happily Never After*, Mbede deploys interactive storytelling. The viewers also experienced the film through a mobile app that allowed them to make choices at key narrative points, influencing the direction of the story. This interactive element not only engaged the audience but also added a layer of unpredictability, making each viewing a unique and personal experience. Moreover, Aniebiet Mbede used augmented reality (AR) elements strategically. Certain scenes were enhanced with AR overlays, providing viewers with additional information or immersive visual experiences. This integration of AR not only contributed to the film's innovative appeal but also showcased Mbede's ability to leverage emerging technologies. The film resonates with audiences who appreciate the visionary approach of the production team, setting a precedent for future filmmakers to explore the possibilities of achieving aesthetics in film productions.

#### **Technicalities in *Happily Never After*.**

Film making technicalities are essential components of the filmmaking process. Through the skillful use of cinematography, lighting, production design, editing, and sound design to effectively transported the audience into 'different worlds', evoke emotions, and enhance the storytelling experience. In *Happily Never After*, each of these elements play a unique role in creating a visually compelling and emotionally engaging film. The technicalities in handling gestures, dialogues, body language, symbols, costumes, camera movements, angles and all other visual illustrations, communicates the intended message of the production, semiotically. Semiotic cinematography "is a useful tool for studying the ways by which visual images form a system for the communication of meaning" (Gorman 39). Every image captured by the camera is a deliberate act to convey meaning to the audience as it relates to and contributes to the overall film content.

From music to architecture, set design, mise-en-scene, montage and even carefully chosen dialogue in a film are all intended to signify something that aids in narrating the story. Metz submits that, "it is the film-makers who create the art of the cinema; it is through reflection on those individual films that we have liked (or those we

have disliked) that we have gained insights into the art of the film in general” (3). Therefore, cinematic techniques cut across all phases of production. Techniques such as type of shot, camera angle and movement, lighting, colour grading and sound design; require technical operations in directing the production. The intimacy of the film image is related to the camera’s ability to see things in greater details than human eye. “This is revealed by the size of shots that are classified into establishment shot, long shot, medium shot, extreme close-up shot, close-up shot, medium close-up shot and over-the-shoulder shot” (Martin 77). With the proper technical shots, the overall aesthetics of the film produced draws viewers to see the film and also markets the film as audience members recommend the same for more views.

According to Aniebiet Mbede, “Contemporary film marketing should seek ways to engage digital competence through the use of social media platforms for film promotion, providing ways to drive the message across to audiences, sharing ideas, conveying feelings and disseminating information” (Mbede 187). These camera techniques are deployed to uncover the inner meaning of the production and communicate the same, honestly to the audience, especially as contemporary audiences are skilled at reading screen productions even through new media channels. “The new media channels (which mostly used social media platforms) provide endless opportunities for viewers to act as both creators and consumers of the media products” (Mbede 3). In this case the film, *Happily Never After* was packaged by the director’s technical skills and the technological expertise of the production team and the product consumed by willing audience members.



Plates 4 and 5: Drone shots - Kidnap scene and school scene in the film *Happily Never After*  
Source: Pinnacle Theatre (Film Production Unit), 2023.

The technicalities to enhance the aesthetic value of the production includes the camera movement techniques – from panning, to tilting the camera; the use of dolly to the drone shots (see plates 4 and 5), the director used the bird eye view of the lens for proper storytelling. In addition, another major shot that is used in the film *Happily Never After* is the medium shot. This shot is a framing in which the scale of the object show is fairly large. Object will be seen from chest to the top of the head. The background details become minimal, since the location is probably being established earlier in scene medium shot as ideal for capturing characters in a way that engages the audience emotionally. It provided enough framing to focus on the characters’ facial expressions, gestures, and body language, allowing viewers to connect with the characters on a more personal level. This shot size is commonly used in dialogues, revealing nuances of the characters’ emotions and reactions. Another technical aspect witnessed in the film as employed the director to show mastery of the traditional and technological elements which come in a multi-mediated formalist composition.

According to Aniebiet Mbede, “In the digital age where there is convergent use of multiple media channels of communication, multimedia serves as an effective communication system which allows for the digital integration of texts, graphics, pictorials, audio, still images, animation and motion videos in a way that provides a user with a high level of control and interaction” (Mbede and Etuk 43). Multi-mediation provides a converging effective outcome of the artistic composition of elements in filmmaking. This is a critical technical aspect that allows directors to visually communicate their narrative, evoke emotions, and engage the audience. Here are some key elements of composition employed by the director:

**The Rule of Thirds:** The director often used the rule of thirds in the film, *Happily Never After* to divide the frame into a grid, placing key elements along these lines or at their intersections. This technique adds balance and visual interest to the composition.

**Leading Lines:** The director strategically used lines within the frame to guide the viewer’s eyes to specific focal points. This technique led the audience through the narrative and drew attention to essential elements in the composition.

**Depth and Layering:** Creating depth in a shot adds visual interest. Director, Aniebiet Mbede used foreground, midground, and background elements to layer the composition, enhancing the three-dimensional feel of the scene.

Point of View (POV): Consideration of the camera's perspective is crucial. Whether it's a character's POV or an omniscient viewpoint, the chosen perspective influences how the audience perceives the story. Mbede effectively utilised this technique as illustrated in plate 6.

The point of view here is the ring as displayed by Uyai during her bridal shower. The POV here contributes to character development by providing insight into a character's thoughts, feelings, and motivations. It offers a window into the internal world of characters, helping the audience connect with and understand them on a deeper level. In terms of Lighting, the production uses light to create mood, atmosphere, and visual interest. In the film *Happily Never After*, natural light is often used, but artificial lighting is also employed for specific effects as illustrated \_ Filming with natural light often results in visually striking and cinematic aesthetics. The director leveraged the natural interplay of light and shadow, creating compositions that are aesthetically pleasing and memorable. She also employed natural lighting to establish a connection between the film and its environment. It allowed her capture the beauty of natural landscapes, cityscapes, or specific architectural elements, enhancing the overall visual experience. Natural light allows characters to seamlessly integrate into their environments. She carefully used this because it has a unique ability to set the mood and atmosphere of a scene.



Plate 6: Uyai and her Bride's maids filmed inside the hotel room with lights *Happily Never After*  
Source: Pinnacle Theatre (Film Production Unit), 2023.

Another technical aspect in *Happily Never After* is the technical aspects of color and contrast. These play a pivotal role in shaping the visual narrative and eliciting emotional responses from the audience. The director meticulously manipulates color palettes and contrast levels to convey mood, emphasize themes, and guide the viewer's attention as illustrated in *Happily Never After*. The use of color grading, a post-production process, allowed the director to fine-tune the color and contrast of each frame, providing a powerful tool for storytelling. In *Happily Never After*, the director demonstrated a keen understanding of how to effectively use sound to enhance the storytelling experience. One key aspect was the strategic integration of authentic ambient sounds. By capturing the rich soundscape of the film's Nigerian setting the school bells, students talking, urban traffic, or the sounds of nature, the director immersed the audience in the cultural milieu, creating a more immersive and realistic environment. This attention to ambient sound not only served as a backdrop but also became an integral part of the film's identity, enriching the narrative with a sense of time and place.

The director also showcased a mastery of music and soundscapes to evoke emotions and emphasize pivotal moments in the storyline. By collaborating with a skilled composer, the film featured a carefully curated soundtrack that complemented the emotional beats of the narrative. Whether it was the use of traditional Nigerian music to underscore cultural moments or an original score to heighten tension, the director's choices in music were precise, adding depth and resonance to key scenes. Additionally, the film utilized sound effects judiciously, enhancing the impact of action sequences or intensifying dramatic moments, showcasing the director's understanding of sound's narrative power.

Furthermore, the director employed strategic silences as a creative element. Recognizing the potency of silence in building tension or emphasizing critical moments, the director allowed for pauses in dialogue or sound, letting the visual storytelling breathe. One key challenge is the financial burden associated with high-quality equipment and professional expertise. These deliberate moments of quiet created a dynamic interplay between sound and silence, showcasing a nuanced understanding of how sound, or its absence, contributes to the overall cinematic experience.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, achieving aesthetic excellence in film production requires a dynamic negotiation between indigenous storytelling traditions and the technical demands of contemporary cinema. The aesthetic quality of a film is shaped throughout the entire production process, from pre-production, and production, to post production,

and requires technical proficiency in script selection, budgeting, casting, auditions, rehearsals, cinematography, editing and other post production activities. Mastery of these artistic and technical components is essential for advancing the quality, competitiveness, and sustainable development of the Nigerian film industry.

### Recommendations

This study recommends technical training and re-training of personnel in film making, this is to foster growth in the film industry. Film directors should continue to embrace and expand their proficiency in cutting-edge techniques and technicalities in the digital era. Embracing innovative cinematographic methods, directors should leverage advancements in camera technology, visual effects, and virtual reality to create visually stunning and immersive narratives with indigenous stories. Independent filmmakers often encounter challenges in utilising key filmmaking techniques and technicalities due to budget constraints, limited resources, and the need for multifaceted skills. This technical prowess not only enhances the overall cinematic experience for audiences but also positions directors at the forefront of a rapidly evolving industry. Also, periodic cultural exchange programmes be encouraged in Nigeria whereby artists from diverse cultures of the world interact and collaborate with one another in search of innovative new filmmaking ideas that is capable of taking Nollywood to the next level.

Furthermore, collaboration and cross-disciplinary engagement should be encouraged within the film industry. Directors can benefit from a deeper understanding of sound design, music composition, and emerging technologies by fostering partnerships with experts in these fields. This collaborative approach not only broadens the director's skill set but also cultivates a rich and diverse cinematic landscape. As the industry continues to evolve, a multidisciplinary approach to filmmaking, coupled with a commitment to staying abreast of the latest technical advancements, will undoubtedly propel directors and the film industry as a whole to new heights of creativity and innovation. To address this, seeking collaboration with fellow filmmakers, leveraging affordable yet effective equipment, and exploring crowdfunding platforms can alleviate financial pressures. Overall, fostering a supportive community, staying adaptable, and continually learning are essential recommendations for independent filmmakers striving to optimize filmmaking techniques and technicalities in the Nigerian film industry.

### WORKS CITED

- Asogwa, Chika E. "The Representation of Indigenous Culture in Nollywood". *Journal of Scientific Research & Reports*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2015, pp. 97-107.
- Azeez, Adesina. "From Informality to History and Evolution of Nollywood: A Look at Early and Late Influences". *Nollywood in Global Perspective*, vol.2, no.1, 2019, pp. 3-5.
- Bala, Musa. *Nollywood and the Globalization of Prosocial Entertainment*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Edgar-Hunt, Robert. *Basics Film-Making 03: Directing Fiction*. AVA Publishing, 2010.
- Haynes, Jonathan. *Evolving Popular Media: Nigerian Video Films*. Kraft Books Ltd, 2021.
- Mbede, Aniebiet, OU Jacob, EH Andrew-Essien, ET Enang. "Interrogating the Use of Multimedia for Audience Engineering in the Nigerian Theatre Milieu". *Akwa Ibom State University Journal of Arts (AKSUJA)*, 2024. Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 135.
- Mbede, Aniebiet Unwana. "A Director's Aesthetic Toolbox in the Production of VickyBon Uzuazor's *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*". *Akwa Ibom State University Journal of Arts (AKSUJA)*, 2023. Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 12.
- Mbede, Aniebiet, OU Jacob, EH Andrew-Essien, ET Enang. "Exploring Social Media as an Apparatus for Audience Engineering in the Nigerian Theatre Milieu". *Integrity Journal of Humanities*, 2024. Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 96.
- Mbede, Aniebiet Unwana. "Contemporary Film Marketing: Leveraging Social Media for Film Promotion in *Marriage O'clock*". *Journal of Development Communication and Applied Theatre (JODCAAT)*, 2026. Vol. 2, No. 7, pp. 187.
- Mbede, Aniebiet Unwana. "New Media and the Evolution of the Fifth Estate of the Realm". *Nigerian Journal of Arts and Humanities (NJA)*, 2026. Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 3.
- Mbede, Aniebiet Unwana and Etuk, Jackson A. "Communicating in the Multimedia Age: Exploring the Use of Emojiology in Selected X Comments on Mirabel's Alleged Rape Saga". *Nigerian Journal of Arts and Humanities (NJA)*, 2026. Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 43.
- Ohiri, I. *Introduction to Media Arts*. Lilino Ventures Publishers, 2020.
- Ojukwu, C.C. and Ezenandu, P. E. "A Paradigm Shift from Tradition to Modernity in Nollywood's Projection of African Narratives". *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2018, pp. 21-26.
- Okilagwe, Oshiotse A. "Exploring Cultural Engineering and the Film in Nigeria". *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship*, vol.1, no. 3-5, 2018, pp. 54-56
- Opubor, A. and Nwuneli, N. *The Development and Growth of the Film Industry in Nigeria*. Lagos: Third Press International, 1979.
- Oyewole Sandra and Olajide Oyewole. *A Peek inside Nigeria's Film Industry*. Wipo Press, 2020.