

Visual Metaphors in Set and Properties Design for '*Setengah Nada Bergeming*' Film Trailer

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ABSTRACT

In a film production, production design is an important aspect that supports the narrative or story. In production design visual metaphors are often used as concepts for sets and props which have the ability to transform a long text into a shorter visual. Visual metaphor itself is a representation of a place, person, nature, and object that can be a tool to build a narrative as well as describe the nature of a character in a film. The use of visual metaphors can be done by understanding the characters in the film, because each have different characteristics and its own uniqueness. By understanding and using the 3-dimensional aspect of the character as the basis for the design of sets and props, production designers can apply visual metaphors in the design of sets and properties that are suitable for the needs of characters and narratives in films. This paper uses a qualitative approach which elaborates the process of applying visual metaphors into the set and properties design, by using the 3-dimensional character theory as the base for producing the short film trailer entitled *Setengah Nada Bergeming*. This research finds that by dissecting each element of the 3-dimensional character, production designer can intensify not only how a character is represented and how its contributes in building the entire narrative of the story.

Keyword: visual metaphors, 3-D characters, sets, properties, short film, trailer.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social creatures with the need to live side by side with other humans. To achieve this goal, humans are in need of communication and films

are one of today's popular medium of communication. Through films, we can see and hear and even feel what the filmmaker wants to convey. Film is not only about the story, the actors, and the act, but there are other important aspects such as the look and style of the film that has its own unique characteristics. According to LoBrutto (2002) there are three sections in a film production, who are be responsible for designing the look and style of the work, which usually are related to the director, director of photography, and production designer (p. 1). The look and style of a film, depends on several aspect and one of them is the use of set and properties as designed by the production designer and art director. This paper will try to elaborate the process of applying visual metaphors into the set and properties design, by studying and using the 3-dimensional aspect of the character in a short film trailer production entitled *Setengah Nada Bergeming*.

This short film tells the story of a boy named Dodie who is unable to fulfill his dream as a musician, because his father thinks that one's career as a musician will not guarantee success. Therefore, to protect his only son from his own fear, Dodie's father stubbornly demands Dodie to continue his business, which happens to be a furniture shop. Each character in the film, both Dodie and his father has different personalities and characteristics and are represented through different designs of set and properties. There are several previous research that focus on the function of set and properties and its relation to the narrative, such as Afif (2018) that emphasized on how production design supports the narrative function in the short film the apple and its tree. Another previous research done by Benawar (2018) emphasized on the visualization of set & property design to represent the family hierarchy in the short film *kelabu*. Both bachelor thesis serves as grounds for this research that focused on the use of 3-dimensional character through production design elements.

This paper will further focus on the topic of how visual metaphors are used in designing set and properties that represents Dodie's father in the short film. This process of applying visual metaphors is done by breaking down the 3-dimensional aspect of both the father character, who is portrayed as a stubborn and introverted person, and Dodie who is portrayed to be more open and ambitious about his dreams and using it as a basis of the set and properties design of the living room scene in the short film trailer.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper was made using a qualitative research approach. According to (Wahidpure, 2017) qualitative research methods are one of the methods used to answer research problems related to data in the form of narratives sourced from interviews, observations, and documents (p. 1). Every data that exists in this paper is obtained through literature study by reading books and journals to determine the object to be used as a visual metaphor. This paper also conducts visual observations of movies to study the use of visual metaphors that can be referenced in the sets and properties design. The first stage of research was conducted by breaking down the three-dimensional aspect of the father character to determine which aspect will be used as a dominant trait in designing the set and properties for the living room scene. The next phase is to research symbols, objects and color that can be used as a metaphor to visualize the personality of the father character through visual and literature study. Furthermore, as the production designer, the author then applied data of visual metaphors chosen to represent the father's character gathered from the research and apply them to the set and property design for the living room scene of the film trailer.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

LoBrutto (2002) stated that a production designer must be responsible for interpreting the screenplay and the director's vision for the film, translate and then turning the vision into an atmosphere where actors can shape the characters played and run the story (p. 1). The author uses visual metaphors that are applied to sets and properties to describe the father character in the film trailer *Setengah Nada Bergeming*. According to LoBrutto (2002) a set must be able to convey what is related to the scenario, must be cinematic, visual, and convey the vision of the director. Each set that is built will support every atmosphere and feelings released by the characters in the film (p. 99). Furthermore, LoBrutto (2002) says that objects that are around or held by actors are props, including pens, weapons, matches, glasses, and wine glasses (p. 21). In this project, the author designs sets and props with the father's three-dimensional character as a basic reference. As said by Egri (1960) every object has dimensions, there is a height, depth, and

width and humans have similar traits of having three dimensional characters, which consist of physiology, sociology, and psychology (p. 33). Three aspects of a character's dimension, known as 3D character, is what causes differences between one character and the other and is the cause for each characters' uniqueness. In the case of *Setengah Nada Bergeming* short film, the stubborn and idealistic characteristic of the father are used by the production designer as the basis reference for visual metaphors used in the set and properties design of the film's trailer.

Visual Metaphors design and application in the Living Room Scene

In the set of the living room, the author places a display cabinet which contains photographs and also some displays belonging to Dodie's mother which are still kept by Dodie's father. This relates to the psychological aspect of the character who is still having a hard time letting go of the past and of the memories of his late wife. There is a window behind the TV to illustrate how Dodie wants to look out for his future, but is blocked by the curtains (placed and chosen by his father). Dodie can then only see the outside world through the television. This metaphor is used to represent the insecurities and fear of Dodie's father that resulted in Dodie unable to fulfill his dreams. Kitchen sets are designed to look cramped with objects and messy. There are dirty dishes that had not been washed and some groceries that were still on the floor used as a metaphor of Dodie's father and his emotional clutter. The floor plan of the living room can be seen here in Fig.1.

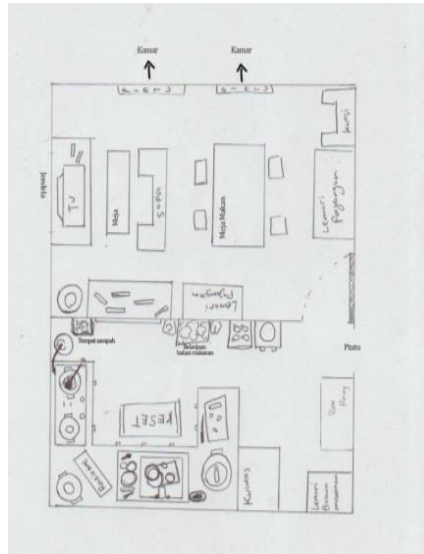


Figure 1. *Floorplan*
Source : *personal Documentation*

In films, space can describe power, oppression, freedom, fear, joy, paranoia, various emotions, moods and atmospheres according to the relationship between characters and their environment (p. 99). Therefore, the author designed the set as a space that represents the controlling aspects of the father's character and the absence of freedom given by the father to Dodie. In his journal, Zainullah (2017) writes that being free means that we as humans can be free from all obstacles, distractions so that we can move, speak, and act freely (p. 141). Referring to this statement, the author designed the room to look dense with properties so that it gives the impression that there is no room to move.

Properties as Visual Metaphors

The author also used the Chinese culture background from the 3 D character, and chooses the zodiac as a reference to determine the use of several properties. Based on the physiology aspect of the character who happens to be born on the year of the horse in Chinese zodiac, the author uses a horse statue object as one of the property that function as a metaphor for the father's personality. By using a horse statue as props, the author draws from the father's tireless work ethics and strong will. The father's tireless characteristic can be seen from the 12 hours working hours in his shop and still manage to take care of the

house when he comes home. As he is strong willed, the father character also always forces his son, Dodie to continue his business, regardless of Dodie's dream to be a musician.

The father's character traits are metaphorically represented by using the horse statues. Villiberto (2017) stated that the astrological horse statue, as is shown here in Fig. 2, is a symbol of individuals who are independent and are tireless at work. At the same time the astrological horse statue can also symbolize a person who always imposes their will and tend to be careless. In Chinese culture, people with the auspices of the horse zodiac are very suitable to work as politicians, traders, athletes, astrologers, and entrepreneurs (p. 51).



Figure 2. Horse Statue
Source : *Personal documentation*

In addition to using horse statue props, the author also uses dragon paintings as a metaphor that represents the father's character from the sociological aspect of character's dimension. The dragon painting used in this short film trailer is a Chinese dragon painting, as shown here in Fig.3, which for the Chinese culture is associated as a symbol of prosperity. As stated by Villiberto (2017) the dragon has a meaning as a symbol that symbolizes prosperity, a high spirit of life and is willing to sacrifice in order to defend what is considered right (p. 47).



Figure 3. Chinese Dragon Painting
Source :*Personal documentation*

Texture and Shapes as Visual Metaphors

In this trailer, the author uses a lot of wood textures to describe the sociology and psychological dimension of the character. The father has a tough personality and also is a leader in his shop. Underneath the tough exterior, the character of the father still holds on to past wounds that cannot be completely forgotten. Ayu (2020) writes that wooden chairs are often used to describe objects that will eventually be fragile (p. 30). Therefore, the wood texture was chosen as a metaphor for the father tough personality because wood looks very strong and sturdy, but it is in itself an object that can easily rot over time. Just like the character of a father who is seen tough from the outside, but carries a deep unforgettable trauma and past wounds not yet healed.

The author uses a lot of square shapes in selecting the properties to describe the character's rigid nature. As stated by Bancroft (2006) square shape usually depicts a solid and reliable character, but has a stiff impression (p. 34). The square shape has corners that make this shape have a stiff impression. Therefore, the square shape was chosen to represent the father's psychological character dimension who is rigid and does not want to open up to the present. There is also the use of a round shape but it does not dominate. The square shape is widely used in photo frames, tables, radios, display cabinets and televisions as can be seen here in Fig. 4.



Figure 5. Use of squares shapes for props
Source: Screenshot of the *Setengah Nada Bergeming* trailer

Color as Visual Metaphors

In representing the father character, the author also uses color as a visual metaphor. According to LoBrutto (2002) color has many functions in the world of production design, not only to achieve authenticity in the image but also to provide information about time and place, describe a character and create mood, emotion, atmosphere, and psychological aspects. In visual storytelling, color is one of the greatest asset that must be thought out, designed and planned with care. Color is not only made to attract attention, but color is used to describe a character, establish an atmosphere or location (p. 77).

In the *Setengah Nada Bergeming* film trailer, the author uses two colors as a metaphor to represent the father's character, namely gray and brown. Adams (2006) stated that the color gray is symbolically associated with several positive meaning such as neutrality balance, security, reliability, modesty, classic, maturity, intelligence, and wisdom. On the opposite more negative side, the color gray symbolically represents a lack of commitment, uncertainty, moodiness, old-fashioned, doubtful, boring, and sad. The color gray is also recognized to represent silver or money. (p. 30)

The gray color in this trailer is applied to the clothes of the father's character and also to the radio props belonging to Dodie's father in the kitchen. The color gray is used as a metaphor to illustrate the father's psychology aspect which still has many doubts in life. The father character is still torn between

moving on leaving his burdens or holding on to his old wounds. The color gray is used to describe the father's conventional character and still has an "old school" approach and perspective about things. The father's character appears to shut himself from the outside world, rejecting to open his thoughts to the progress of the time.

There is also the use of brown on cabinet props, tables, horse statues, sofas, and chairs. According to Adams & Harfand (2017) brown is a complex color because brown is a mixture of several colors (p. 209). It is a color that often appears in everyday life and symbolically represents pessimism and a lack of tolerance. The color brown was chosen as a metaphor to illustrate how the father character in this trailer is very pessimistic about Dodie's dream to become a musician. The pessimism arises because of the trauma of losing his wife and him not wanting break away from the comfort zone of his stable business.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that by using visual metaphors the author can represent specific dimension of the character's personality through the choice of set and properties that conveys symbolic meaning related to each trait. The author can also bring the audience to understand more about the character's nature through the set and property designs. In the case of the father character for *Setengah Nada Bergeming* film trailer, who has a stubborn nature, demands his desires from others, but is also a hard worker production designer can use the cultural background of the character as base for determining objects to use as metaphors that can describe certain details of the character's dimension. For example, referring to the father's character background of Chinese descent, the author took a zodiac sign as basis for choosing properties as metaphors that could describe this cultural descent of the character.

Through studying the 3-dimensional character of the film, the author uses the data as reference in choosing objects as visual metaphors to portray the father. For example, as a character that is hardworking and demanding the author choose to use objects like a horse statue. As a character who is stubborn but has a past wound inside of him, the author chooses the wood texture to

represent that trait. As a character who still has doubts, the author uses the color gray on the father's character's clothes to describe this trait. The rigid nature of the father's character is illustrated through the square shape applied to the property in the family room. The square shape was chosen because the square has corners that give the impression of rigidity to the shape. The arrangement of the family room is made solid to describe the character of the father who does not give Dodie the freedom to choose his future. Using metaphors as concepts also makes the writers learn a lot about designing sets and properties in films.

In the production of *Setengah Nada Bergeming* film trailer, the author can further design a space that not only function as a set for the story but also describe the character's traits and personality in details. Breaking down the three-dimensional aspect of a character is an important stage of this design process and is useful as basis for determining visual metaphors to be included in the set and property design. An intensive breakdown of the 3-dimensional aspect of a character in a story can further benefit the depth of how a character is represented.

This research emphasized more on exploring the physiological and sociological dimension of the character and how these aspects can be represented through the use of set and properties. The physiological dimension of a character that is visual by nature are often under-explored in the design of sets and properties in films and in this study, psychological and sociological elements are emphasized and explored more thoroughly. Physiological aspects actually provide a more challenging space to be presented metaphorically through the use of colors, shapes and textures which are not discussed in detail and specifically in this study. This certainly provides space for further research that can place more emphasis on exploring the physiological aspects which are symbolically represented through the design of sets and properties in short film production.

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