1. BACKGROUND

Films carry the purpose of delivering certain events to the audience by creating a story the audience can experience in (Bordwell et al., 2019). In the context of film as an audio-visual medium that delivers messages from sequences of pictures (Bordwell et al., 2019), character designs play a major role in the deliverance of the story. The designs of characters' appearance hold the importance of making lasting impact to the audience (Nieminen, 2017). Characters are an integral part of conveying and expressing the experiences (stories) that the film is made for (Purwaningsih, 2018).

A character in a narrative context has the purpose of delivering a story. A good character invites the audience to emphatise with them, so that the audience is able to experience the conveyed messages (Lukmanto, 2013). Narrative stories may be communicated by the mannerisms of the character, their characteristics, the way they interact with the story world; and most importantly, from their visual designs.

Hence why the appearance of characters has a large effect on how a story will be received by the audience (Nieminen, 2017). Part of visual languages that can help support the aesthetic of character design are shapes. According to Tillman (2011) geometric shapes have an underlying symbolism associated with certain traits. For example; triangular and pointy shapes may be associated with tension and conflict, whereas round and circular shapes may be associated with friendliness and joy.

However, it is important to understand that the association of shapes in character design are not meant to stigmatise certain traits and shapes. Utilising shapes in character design are meant to assist the creation of appealing aesthetics and clean silhouettes in character designs so that the audience are able to easily distinguish the characters (Fogelström, 2013). Clear designs in characters are essential in visual communication as the audience are distant from the fictitious setting. In order for the story to be perceivable, character designs need to be able to support the audience to quickly distinguish the characters' traits from sight (visual).

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The media being made and consumed are a representation of the current society and life events (Permana, 2021). As stories will always mirror real life events, characters will also mirror real life experiences. Films are part of the medium that represents reality and offers the audience new perspectives and experiences (Elbaba, 2019). Therefore representation in films has a cultural aspect that reflects real life issues and can be used to bring light to certain matters.

Death and grief are often heavy topics most people would avoid to discuss. The irrational fear and "taboo" aspect that surrounds topics of death made it uncomfortable for people to even consider them. The author experienced this issue since the passing of the author's Father in October 2023; there are difficulties encountered when attempting to discuss grief and how to handle it. The lack of common knowledge to support grieving parties also played a part in having difficulties when processing death in the family. The author found this concerning as people in grief need more support from their communities than ever.

Film as a medium to express and convey messages enables the expression of grief to be shared (Lovey, 2016). This form of expression can be cathartic and supports the grieving process. Representation of grief in media like films allows visibility of grief and the grieving process, thus normalising it in the community and spreading common knowledge of ways to support mourning people. Normalising and destigmatising death and grief as something humane and a part of living helps the coping process and recovery from loss.

"*Anak Pintar*" is a final project film that tells the story of a young girl named Arjuna who had lost both of her parents. The film depicts how Arjuna copes with the deaths of her parents whilst she continues on with her life to study in school and care for herself. It is a slice-of-life film with an emphasis on comfort and feel-good aspects to visualise hope and recovery. Arjuna's character design is meant to reflect grieving stages based on Kubler-Ross' *5 Stages of Grief* model.

The *5 Stages of Grief* model from Kubler-Ross (1969) consists of *Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression*, and *Acceptance*–in no particular order nor

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consistency as Kubler-Ross (2014) herself admitted that grieving is not a linear process. While the model is not reflective nor very helpful for real life patients, this article finds that the model is useful as a guideline to design a character going through grief. The simplified expression of the grieving process is ideal for fictional format where the audience needs to be able to perceive the character's emotions quickly. The process of designing Arjuna is meant to represent what comes after the sorrow from mourning.

1.1. THESIS FORMULATION

How to design a character expressing the grieving process that is based on the *5 Stages of Grief* model?

1.2. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

1. This article's research is limited on the character design of Arjuna from the animated final project film "*Anak Pintar*". The character design of Arjuna that will be discussed consisted of designs that represented Denial, Depression, and Acceptance from the Kubler-Ross' *5 Stages of Grief* model.

2. The *5 Stages of Grief* theory is taken in the context of death in the family–in the stages of Denial, Depression, and Acceptance. The designs are limited to those stages as The Author believes the three stages best represented the narrative of the film. More than three stages will render the growth that Arjuna went through with her visual design as ineffective, as the transitions will be too subtle.

3. The aspects of character design chosen to support the creation of Arjuna's character design are Shapes, Colour, and Costume. The three aspects are chosen as they are easily moulded and remade to create different visual languages for Arjuna's designs, despite being the same character (therefore using the same base).

1.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This article aims to discuss how the *5 Stages of Grief* is implemented in the character design of Arjuna. The representation of the grieving process in

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mainstream media like film allows more visibility and understanding of grief and death as common knowledge. The author hopes that the methods used to implement the grieving stage in character design can help further interest the representations of grief and death in media. More grieving people are able to get the support they need through difficult times by destigmatising and normalising death–and grief–as part of something humane.