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VISUAL NOSTALGIA IN CONTEMPORARY FILM POSTERS: A DESIGN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BARBIE, THE HOLDOVERS, AND LATE NIGHT WITH THE DEVIL

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ABSTRAK

Kebangkitan estetika retro dalam desain grafis kontemporer turut memengaruhi strategi visual poster film sebagai media promosi sekaligus artefak budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana elemen visual, yaitu tipografi, palet warna, tekstur, dan komposisi, pada poster film kontemporer mengonstruksi nostalgia, serta bagaimana konstruksi tersebut berfungsi sebagai wacana desain (Design Discourse) yang membentuk makna budaya. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif visual research dengan Design Discourse Analysis dan semiotika Roland Barthes sebagai metode utama, penelitian ini menganalisis empat poster resmi: Barbie (2023), dua varian poster The Holdovers (2023), dan Late Night with the Devil (2024). Data dibaca melalui tingkat tanda denotatif dan konotatif, dipadukan dengan Teori Nostalgia Svetlana Boym untuk membedakan nostalgia restoratif dan reflektif, serta Teori Representasi Stuart Hall untuk memahami konstruksi makna melalui kode visual bersama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keempat poster menggunakan strategi nostalgia yang berbeda sesuai genre dan target audiens: Barbie mengonstruksi nostalgia melalui warna dan tipografi ikonik kemasan mainan; The Holdovers memakai grain analog dan tipografi serif klasik untuk nostalgia restoratif era 1970-an; sementara Late Night with the Devil memanfaatkan tekstur siaran televisi analog untuk nostalgia horor retro. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa poster film bukan sekadar alat promosi, melainkan medan wacana visual yang mengonstruksi identitas budaya dan emosi kolektif penonton. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kajian Desain Komunikasi Visual dengan memperluas aplikasi Design Discourse dan semiotika pada objek poster film kontemporer.

Kata kunci: desain diskursus; nostalgia visual; poster film; representasi; semiotika

ABSTRACT

The resurgence of retro aesthetics in contemporary graphic design has shaped visual strategies in film posters as both promotional media and cultural artifacts. This study aims to analyze how visual elements, namely typography, color palette, texture, and composition, in contemporary film posters construct nostalgia, and how this construction functions as a Design Discourse that shapes cultural meaning. Employing a qualitative visual research approach with Design Discourse Analysis and Roland Barthes' semiotics as the primary method, this

study examines four official posters: Barbie (2023), two poster variants of The Holdovers (2023), and Late Night with the Devil (2024). Data were read through denotative and connotative levels of signification, combined with Svetlana Boym's Nostalgia Theory to distinguish restorative and reflective nostalgia, and Stuart Hall's Representation Theory to understand meaning construction through shared visual codes. The findings show that the four posters employ distinct nostalgic strategies suited to their genre and target audience: Barbie constructs nostalgia through iconic toy packaging colors and typography; The Holdovers uses analog film grain and classic serif typography to evoke restorative nostalgia for the 1970s; while Late Night with the Devil exploits analog broadcast television texture for retro horror nostalgia. These findings reinforce the argument that film posters are not merely promotional tools but visual discursive fields that construct cultural identity and collective audience emotion. This study contributes to Visual Communication Design scholarship by extending the application of Design Discourse and semiotics to the object of contemporary film posters.

Keyword: design discourse; film poster; representation; semiotics; visual nostalgia

PENDAHULUAN (ROBOTO,11PT,BOLD, ALIGN LEFT)

Contemporary graphic design is undergoing a revival of past aesthetics marked by the growing use of retro typography, decade specific color palettes, and simulated analog textures such as film grain and television noise. This phenomenon is not merely a passing visual trend; it signals a broader shift in visual culture, in which the past is continuously brought back to build emotional proximity with contemporary audiences (Weber, 2024). Film posters, as one of the most widely distributed and rapidly consumed products of Visual Communication Design (VCD), constitute a fertile field for this kind of nostalgic exploration.

Over the past few years, film poster scholarship in Indonesia has grown considerably, with the majority of studies applying Roland Barthes' semiotics to read the denotative and connotative messages of a single poster: for instance, the poster of Coco (Sulistyaningrum & Sabri, 2024), Vina: Sebelum 7 Hari (Islamudin et al., 2024), The Chronicles of Narnia (Steven et al., 2023), Miracle in Cell No. 7 (Fitriani et al., 2024), Perempuan Berkabung Sorban and Homeland Season 4 in comparative form (Alifia & Jasjfi, 2023), the Nightmares and Daydreams series (Wardhana, 2024), 1 Kakak 7 Ponakan through Feldman's art criticism lens (Rohmatillah, 2025), public service posters (Batubara et al., 2024; Febimaesuri & Pratama, 2021), and typographic studies of film titles (Annisa Iskandar & Maslan Sihombing, 2022). Studies on Y2K aesthetics and retro popular culture have likewise begun to emerge, such as the analysis of K-Pop visual aesthetics (Himawan & Prawira, 2024) and broader accounts of cultural and communicative approaches within visual communication design practice (Yudhanto et al., 2023). Yet most of these studies stop at denotation and connotation readings of a single object and rarely situate their findings within a broader Design Discourse framework, nor do they systematically compare posters across genres or across multiple poster variants of the same film.

This gap constitutes the Research Gap addressed by the present study: little scholarship has systematically treated the retro aesthetics of the 2023 to 2024 film posters as a design discourse that constructs nostalgia through interrelated visual units, namely typography, color, texture, and composition, while also comparing these strategies across genres. The Research Novelty of this study lies in two contributions: first, treating visual nostalgia not merely as an aesthetic trend but as a construction of meaning that can be unpacked through an integrated Design Discourse Analysis and Barthesian semiotics; second, presenting an intratextual case study of two poster variants of The Holdovers to demonstrate how a single film title can be marketed through two distinct visual nostalgia strategies within one campaign.

Theoretically, this study positions Design Discourse (Buchanan, 1992) as its primary analytical perspective, viewing design, including film posters, as a rhetorical practice that produces and circulates meaning rather than a neutral aesthetic product. This perspective is combined with three complementary analytical lenses. First, Roland Barthes' (1972) semiotics is used to read visual signs at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth, so that elements such as color or typography can be read not merely as form but as cultural signifiers. Second, Svetlana Boym's (2001) Nostalgia Theory is used to distinguish restorative nostalgia, which seeks to reconstruct the past as a coherent, authentic whole, from reflective nostalgia, which instead celebrates distance and fragments of the past without pretending to literally restore it. Third, Stuart Hall's (1997) Representation Theory is used to understand how nostalgic meaning is constructed collaboratively through visual codes shared and understood collectively by audiences, rather than transmitted one way from designer to viewer.

Building on this framework, the present study critically examines how visual elements in four contemporary film posters construct nostalgia, how this construction operates as a design discourse that shapes audiences' collective identity and emotion, and how differences in genre and poster variant reflect distinct visual strategies. In doing so, this study is expected to enrich Visual Communication Design scholarship in Indonesia, which has so far been dominated by single object semiotic readings, while offering an analytical model that can be replicated for other film poster objects.,

METODE PENELITIAN (ROBOTO,11PT,BOLD, ALIGN LEFT)

This study employs a qualitative visual research approach that combines Design Discourse Analysis with Barthesian semiotic analysis. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to read film posters not merely as a collection of visual elements, but as cultural texts carrying denotative, connotative, and ideological layers of meaning.

Data Sources and Unit of Analysis

Primary data consist of four official posters released by studios between 2023 and 2024: Barbie (Warner Bros. Pictures), two poster variants of The Holdovers (Focus Features), and Late Night with the Devil (IFC Films/Shudder). The unit of analysis covers ten visual aspects: typography, layout, composition, color palette, texture, grain, imagery, iconography, visual hierarchy, and symbolism.

Sampling, Criteria, and Data Collection

The sample was selected purposively based on three inclusion criteria: (1) official, high resolution studio released posters; (2) representing genre diversity (comedy and fantasy, drama, and horror); and (3) holding critical relevance or festival recognition (Telluride, Toronto International Film Festival, SXSW). Unofficial or fan made posters, as well as promotional stills other than posters, were excluded. Data collection was carried out through thorough visual observation (close reading) and digital documentation of each poster.

Coding Framework and Trustworthiness

Data were analyzed through a coding framework that maps the ten visual units against indicators of restorative and reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001), then interpreted thematically into eight major themes presented in the Results and Discussion section. Trustworthiness was maintained through credibility (repeated visual engagement with each poster), triangulation (cross reading between semiotics, Design Discourse, and Nostalgia Theory), dependability (consistent application of the coding matrix across the entire sample), and confirmability (documentation of the interpretive rationale for each unit of analysis, as shown in Table 1).

Unit of Analysis	Restorative Nostalgia Indicator	Reflective Nostalgia Indicator
Typography	Period accurate classic serif	Mixed old and new lettering, ironic
Color	Decade specific, accurate palette	Pastel saturation free of a specific era
Texture/Grain	High precision analog simulation	Grain as symbolic gesture
Composition	Layout follows period convention	Contemporary layout, partial quotation

Table 1. Coding framework for visual units of analysis and nostalgia indicators

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN (ROBOTO,11PT,BOLD, ALIGN LEFT)

Typography as Nostalgic Identity

The Barbie poster (Figure 1) features a bold cursive logotype in pink that directly quotes the visual identity of Barbie toy packaging since the 1960s, paired with the tagline “She's everything. He's just Ken.” in a lightweight, contemporary sans serif typeface.

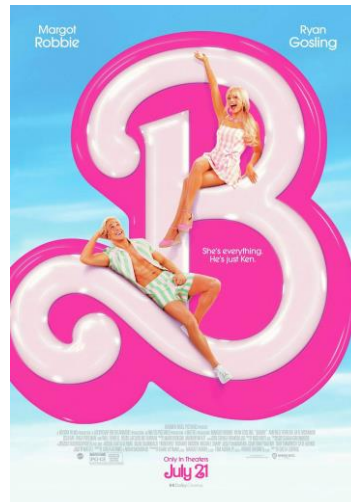


Figure 1. Official poster of Barbie (2023)

This typographic combination produces what Barthes (1972) calls myth: the cursive logotype does not merely mark the film's title but constructs connotative meaning about cheerfulness, femininity, and a toy heritage recognized across generations. Within the Design Discourse framework (Buchanan, 1992), this typographic choice is a deliberate rhetorical act that positions the film as both a continuation of, and a critical commentary on, that popular culture icon, consistent with typography's demonstrated role in shaping a film title's visual identity (Annisa Iskandar & Maslan Sihombing, 2022). By contrast, the ensemble variant of *The Holdovers* poster (Figure 2) uses bold mustard yellow serif type that imitates the design conventions of 1970s American drama posters, a typographic strategy that, following Boym (2001), leans closer to restorative nostalgia because it seeks to reproduce the aesthetics of the period accurately and coherently, rather than merely quoting it ironically.

Color Palette and Emotional Construction

The color palettes of the four posters serve a dual function: marking genre while also constructing collective audience emotion, consistent with the finding that color and lighting choices in film visuals shape viewers' emotional response (Wahyuni & Heryanto, 2022) and with studies of Y2K aesthetics in popular culture showing how decade specific palettes can evoke intergenerational collective memory (Himawan & Prawira, 2024). The *millennial pink* that dominates the *Barbie* poster functions as a shared cultural code (Hall, 1997) that audiences immediately recognize as a marker of the Barbie universe without requiring additional verbal explanation. Conversely, the muted brown and yellow palette across both *The Holdovers* variants constructs a mood of loneliness and wintry warmth in 1970s New England, while the smoldering orange and black palette of the *Late Night with the Devil* poster (Figure 4) signals danger alongside the mystical allure typical of retro found footage horror.

Composition and Visual Hierarchy

The two *The Holdovers* poster variants offer a productive intratextual case study. The first variant (Figure 2) arranges three characters in a narrative composition inside the boarding school dining hall, positioning the viewer as an observer of a moment of domestic intimacy.



Figure 2. Official poster of *The Holdovers* (2023), ensemble variant

The second variant (Figure 3) abandons this narrative context altogether, arranging the three characters in a frontal, side by side composition against a plain white background and foregrounding star hierarchy through the lead actor's central position.



Figure 3. Official poster of *The Holdovers* (2023), minimalist character variant

This compositional difference reinforces the Design Discourse argument that a single visual campaign can carry more than one discourse at once, echoing formalistic readings of layout principles (sequence, emphasis, unity, and balance) in other Indonesian film series posters (Wardhana, 2024): the first variant constructs reflective nostalgia through a narrative specific to the period fragment, while the second leans toward restorative nostalgia that imitates classic Hollywood character poster conventions in a more generic, way that is replicable across titles.

Texture, Grain, and Analog Simulation

Texture is the most explicit visual unit constructing nostalgia across the sample. The *Late Night with the Devil* poster (Figure 4) simulates analog television signal distortion together with a flame effect consuming half of the protagonist's face, directly referencing the aesthetics of 1970s late night television broadcasts that form the film's setting.



Figure 4. Official poster of Late Night with the Devil (2024)

This textural simulation aligns with Steven et al.'s (2023) finding on *The Chronicles of Narnia* poster, which shows that textural elements play an important role in constructing a film's fantastical, mystical atmosphere before audiences ever see the film itself. However, unlike that study, which stops at describing texture, the present study connects this finding to Boym's (2001) restorative nostalgia: the analog signal distortion on the *Late Night with the Devil* poster is not merely decorative but functions as a promise of period authenticity that must be sustained consistently throughout the film to preserve audience trust.

Iconography and Symbolic Representation

At the iconographic level, the giant pink “B” in the *Barbie* poster functions as a visual synecdoche for the entire Barbie universe, while the mounted deer antlers in the background of *The Holdovers* ensemble poster (Figure 2) become a symbol of the institutional loneliness of a boarding school abandoned by its residents over the holidays. Following Hall (1997), both icons operate as codes of representation that are fully meaningful only to viewers who share the same cultural frame of reference: Western audiences familiar with classic Barbie aesthetics, or viewers acquainted with the visual conventions of the American prep school film.

Retro Aesthetics as Design Discourse

Taken cumulatively, the four posters show that retro aesthetics is not a self contained stylistic choice but a design discourse (Buchanan, 1992; Yudhanto et al., 2023) that actively positions each film within the contemporary field of cinematic culture: *Barbie* positions itself as a critical revision of pop culture; *The Holdovers* positions itself as a continuation of the humanist New Hollywood drama tradition; *Late Night with the Devil* positions itself as a revival of the televised found footage horror genre. Table 2 summarizes this cross-case comparison.

Poster	Typography & Color	Texture	Nostalgia Type
Barbie	Iconic pink cursive	Smooth, digital, glossy	Reflective
Holdovers (ensemble)	Mustard yellow serif	Narrative analog grain	Reflective
Holdovers (minimalist)	Mustard yellow serif	Generic analog grain	Restorative
Late Night with the Devil	Cream serif, orange and black	Analog TV signal distortion	Restorative

Table 2. Cross case comparison matrix of visual nostalgia strategies

PENUTUP (ROBOTO,11PT,BOLD, ALIGN LEFT)

This study shows that nostalgic aesthetics in contemporary film posters are constructed through the mutually reinforcing interaction of typography, color palette, texture, composition, and iconography, and that this construction can be mapped onto Boym's (2001) restorative and reflective nostalgia spectrum in ways that differ by genre and target audience. The Barbie poster and the ensemble variant of *The Holdovers* tend toward reflective nostalgia that celebrates fragments of popular culture in an ironic, affective register, while the minimalist variant of *The Holdovers* and the *Late Night* with the Devil poster tend toward restorative nostalgia that seeks to sustain period authenticity consistently.

This study contributes to design discourse scholarship by demonstrating that visual choices in film posters are rhetorical acts that position a film within the field of cinematic culture; contributes to Visual Communication Design scholarship by offering a layered analytical model that can be replicated for other poster objects; and contributes to visual culture scholarship by affirming the role of film posters as a field of collective meaning production rather than mere promotional media. Practically, these findings can serve as a reference for graphic designers and film marketing teams in determining a visual nostalgia strategy aligned with genre and audience expectation.

The main limitation of this study is its small sample, oriented toward the American market, meaning the findings may not directly apply to film industries with different visual traditions. Future research is encouraged to expand the sample to Indonesian and other Asian film posters, and to consider complementary methods such as interviews with poster designers to deepen understanding of the decision making processes behind the construction of visual nostalgia.

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