



Visualization of the Main Character's Memory Distortion Through Shot Design in the 2D Animated Film *Death Waits*

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Abstract. In both film and animation, shot design has evolved into a crucial element that supports the development and movement of the narrative. Shot design encompasses aspects such as framing, composition, camera movement, and transitions, all of which together form the visual language of film. This visual language bridges the technical, artistic, and storytelling knowledge possessed by filmmakers and animators. By finding a balanced integration of these fields, animators are able to guide the audience's interpretation and convey deeper thematic meanings, including complex concepts such as memory distortion. In the animated film *Death Waits*, each scene is carefully designed to reflect central themes of memory fragility, life, and death. This research explores the relationship between visual composition and narrative elements, examining how the deliberate use of framing, camera positioning, aspect ratio shifts, and scene transitions supports the portrayal of the protagonist's shifting perception and psycho-logical state. The aim of this study is to demonstrate that shot design not only serves to clarify the narrative structure but also deepens the emotional impact of the portrayal of memory distortion within *Death Waits*.

Keywords: *Death Waits*, Shot Design, Animation, Screen Ratio, Memory Distortion.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the world of filmmaking, storytelling is conveyed through two main media: verbal, which relies on dialogue and exposition, and visual, which depends on what the audience can see on screen [1]. To effectively convey a story through visual media, filmmakers need to design their scenes by considering the principles of visual communication, so that the audience's interpretation can be directed in accordance with the main idea of the story. One important approach in realizing this is through shot design. All of these elements work together to form a coherent visual language, supporting emotional engagement while clarifying the narrative understanding for the audience.

In practice, the shot design process begins with a script breakdown to identify narrative beats [2]. This stage is then followed by the preparation of a shot list, which serves as a guide in creating a storyboard, the initial visual framework that directs the

final form of the film. Through these stages, filmmakers combine the principles of semiotics, symbolism, and iconology, linking abstract meanings with concrete objects and visual cues that depend on cultural and social conventions [3]. In the 2D animated film *Death Waits*, these visual elements serve as the main foundation for conveying the state of mind of the main character, Bintari, who is experiencing disorientation. Through the use of subtle yet structured visuals, the development of Bintari's mental state can be clearly depicted throughout the narrative.

This study emerges from a practice-based research context, where the film production process becomes a site of analytical investigation. The research focuses on examining how shot design principles are conceptualized and applied within the film to construct meaning.

While many studies have explored cinematography and visual narrative as separate areas, this research brings them together by focusing on how shot design can shape the way memory is experienced on screen. In particular, it looks at how elements such as aspect ratio and composition can be used not just for visual styling, but as tools to express and simulate memory distortion.

Rather than concentrating only on narrative structure or editing techniques, this study highlights shot design as an important means of guiding the audience's perception. Through this approach, the research offers a practice-based perspective on how animation can communicate psychological experiences in a more immersive and visually driven way.

1.1. Problem Formulation

How are the elements of shot design in *Death Waits* used to visually represent the distortion of the main character's memory in a narrative and cinematic way?

1.2. Scope and Limitations

This study examines how cinematographic elements such as visual composition, screen ratio, and camera techniques are used to reinforce the representation of memory distortion and recovery in the character Bintari. The scenes to be examined are as follows:

1. Scene 1, shot 4, which uses a frame within a frame technique that narrows the screen's field of view, reflecting the initial state of Bintari's memory, which was distorted, blurred, and incomplete.
2. Scene 2, shot 1, shows a narrowing of the screen ratio, used to mark the boundary between reality and Bintari's perception, which has been distorted by her memories.
3. Scene 6, shot 4, introduces a second change in screen ratio, this time widening, as a symbol of the development of Bintari's memory, which is slowly beginning to recover and become more complete.
4. Scene 9, shot 15, which utilizes a change in depth of field (DOF) to emphasize that Bintari's memory has fully recovered.

These four shots were selected due to their structural significance in representing key phases of the character's memory progression: initial distortion, entry into subjective memory, gradual reconstruction, and final clarity. Each shot employs distinct visual

strategies, making them representative of the overall shot design approach used throughout the film.

1.3. Problem Formulation

This study aims to analyze the application of shot design elements, such as the type of shooting, camera angle, composition, and screen ratio, in the making of the 2D animated film *Death Waits* to visualize the process of distortion, restoration, and development of the main character's memory. Through this approach, the study seeks to de-scribe how structured shot design can create subtle yet meaningful visual cues and shape the audience's perception of the character's psychological changes.

2. LITERATURE STUDY

2.1. Cinematography

Fundamentally, cinematography is a core element in film aesthetics, serving as a visual representation to build narrative, atmosphere, and thematic depth. Cinematography guides audience interpretation by applying visual semiotics and mise-en-scène—the director's overall arrangement of visual elements within the film frame, such as setting, costumes, makeup, lighting, and staging [4]. Through these careful orchestrations, filmmakers can evoke specific emotions, explain thematic motifs, and direct the audience's focus to important narrative details. This deliberate composition is in line with the principles of visual semiotics, where signs and symbols in mise-en-scène convey meanings that go beyond what is communicated through movie dialogues, thereby enriching the depth of the film's communication. Hence, why the strategic application of mise-en-scène becomes an integral tool in shaping the visual narrative of a film, profoundly influencing how audiences perceive and interpret the cinematic experience.

For example, the use of contrasting lighting reminiscent of German expressionism not only builds atmosphere but also reinforces narrative tension and character psychology [5]. Furthermore, cinematographic choices often reflect cultural and historical contexts, providing filmmakers with a window through which to comment on social norms and philosophical questions [6]. In academic discourse, analyzing such visual strategies reveals how films construct meaning and evoke powerful emotional responses, affirming the important role of cinematography in the overall cinematic experience.

2.2. Shot Design

As a fundamental element in the construction of a film's visual narrative, shot design determines multiple aspects of a film's presentation. Not only does it determine the visual composition, shot design also plays an important role in constructing meaning, reflecting the psychology of the characters, and directing the emotions of the audience [4]. According to Wildfeuer and Bateman [7], every frame in a film has narrative potential: composition, camera angle, depth of field, and camera movement can subtly but significantly influence how the audience understands the plot and the characters' inner

experiences. Shot design is not only a technical tool but also a rhetorical strategy for conveying ideas and emotions. They emphasize the importance of cinematic awareness of the space and time represented in a single shot, including the use of negative space, framing, and camera movement to create a more intuitive and empathetic narrative. In the context of contemporary cinema, shot design is often used to express a character's mental state or subjective perception [5]. An example can be seen in works such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), where shifts in focus, changes in lighting, and non-linear camera movements are used to represent the instability of the main character's memory.

2.3. Visual Narrative

The diverse thematic meanings conveyed in animated cinema arise not only from dialogue and narrative structure, but also from the careful orchestration of *mise-en-scène*. This interplay underscores the distinctive narrative potential of animation as a medium. Within the animated storytelling process, visual elements such as lighting, color palette, spatial composition, and perspective function as more than aesthetic embellishments; they operate as deliberate narrative instruments that reinforce thematic depth and guide audience interpretation. As noted by *Art in Motion*, the visual design of animation shapes emotional tone, establishes thematic continuity, and directs viewer response in ways that differ substantially from live-action filmmaking.

Research by Jennifer Lee Poland [8] further supports this view, suggesting that visual narratives derive their communicative power from the interaction between structural arrangement and representational content. According to her findings, shifts in lighting, shadow density, and visual emphasis can evoke a wide spectrum of moods, conveying psychological nuance even in the absence of verbal explanation. Such techniques allow animators to articulate interiority, tension, and thematic symbolism through purely visual means.

This capacity becomes especially apparent in the lighting design practices of animation. Compared to live-action cinematography—which is naturally constrained by the physical properties of light—animated lighting affords complete stylistic flexibility and symbolic precision. As argued by *The Hidden Art of Disney's Golden Age* [9], lighting in animation often functions as a narrative code: soft, diffused illumination may be employed to suggest innocence, memory, or emotional warmth, whereas stark contrasts, saturated hues, or directional shadows can articulate conflict, moral uncertainty, or psychological fragmentation. Through such intentional manipulation, animators construct visual atmospheres that not only support but actively shape the narrative's thematic resonance.

2.4. Screen Ratio

Changes in screen ratios in cinema represent a technical evolution that has significantly shaped how stories are communicated visually. The screen ratio, or aspect ratio, refers to the proportional relationship between the width and height of the image, functioning as a core element of the viewer's visual experience [4]. In early cinema, the

dominant format was 4:3 (1.33:1), later formalized as the Academy ratio by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1932. Its adoption was closely tied to the technological standards of the era, making it the industry norm for decades.

By the 1950s, the growing popularity of television pushed the film industry to reassert the distinctiveness of the theatrical experience. This spurred the development of widescreen innovations such as CinemaScope (2.35:1, later adjusted to 2.39:1 in 1970) and Vista Vision (1.85:1), formats that remain widely used today [10]. Beyond their technical significance, these ratios expanded the possibilities of visual storytelling: the wider frame enabled broader spatial composition, heightened the sense of scale, and allowed filmmakers to explore more dynamic visual relationships between characters and their environment.

Aspect ratio has since become a deliberate narrative tool. The 4:3 ratio, now largely historical, is often reintroduced in contemporary films to evoke nostalgia, intimacy, or thematic confinement. Conversely, widescreen ratios like 2.39:1 are commonly used to emphasize vast landscapes, openness, or expansive narrative worlds, providing room for complex visual interactions within a single shot [11].

Some modern filmmakers even shift between ratios within the same film to strengthen narrative structure or signify temporal distinctions. For instance, Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) employs three different aspect ratios to mark separate time periods, while *First Reformed* (2017) uses a 4:3 frame to underscore the protagonist's psychological isolation. These examples illustrate how aspect ratio operates not merely as a technical specification but as an integral part of cinematic visual language, guiding audience perception and shaping emotional resonance.

2.5. Memory Distortion

Memory distortion refers to alterations or deviations in a person's recollection caused by shifting perceptions, emotions, or contexts that differ from the original event. Genova [12] emphasizes that human memory is both constructive and reconstructive, which makes it inherently vulnerable to errors such as contextual misattribution or the formation of false memories. Neurodegenerative diseases, particularly Alzheimer's, represent one of the most significant contributors to severe memory distortion, as they progressively damage neural pathways. According to the World Health Organization [13], more than 55 million people worldwide live with dementia, a condition that affects not only memory but also one's understanding and interpretation of reality. Historically, scientific perspectives on memory distortion have evolved considerably. Early psychoanalytic theory, such as Freud's concept of repression, proposed that memories could be altered or suppressed due to psychological conflict. Decades later, Elizabeth Loftus' influential research on false memories in the 1980s demonstrated how suggestion and external cues can lead individuals to confidently recall events that never occurred. A compelling phenomenon within this field is terminal lucidity—the unexpected return of mental clarity in some Alzheimer's patients shortly before death—which challenges conventional assumptions about irreversible cognitive decline [14].

In cinema, memory distortion and dementia have become resonant narrative themes, often explored through visual and structural experimentation. Films like *Still Alice*

(2014) and *The Father* (2020) attempt to represent the subjective experience of cognitive deterioration through shifts in production design, non-linear storytelling, and disorienting montage sequences. *The Father*, in particular, employs cinematographic manipulation—such as subtly altered room layouts and repeated scenes—to evoke confusion and spatial instability. Through such techniques, filmmakers use visual language not simply to depict neurological decline, but to invite audiences into an empathetic, experiential understanding of the character's psychological condition.

From a cognitive film perspective, memory distortion can be understood as a disruption in perceptual continuity. Visual strategies such as constrained framing, shifting aspect ratios, and selective focus mimic this disruption by limiting or expanding what the viewer is able to perceive at a given moment. In this sense, shot design does not merely depict memory distortion, but actively simulates the subjective experience of cognitive instability, positioning the viewer within the character's fluctuating mental state.

3. CREATION METHODS

3.1. Film's Description

Death Waits is a fantasy-drama short film produced by Vellichor Pictures as part of the graduation requirements for the Film Program at Multimedia Nusantara University. The narrative follows the personification of Death as he navigates the fragmented memories and delusions of Bintari, an elderly woman with Alzheimer's, who envisions him as her late husband. Through this encounter, Death seeks to guide her toward peace in the final moments before the afterlife.

This study is positioned within a practice-based research framework, where the creative process of the film serves as both the subject and method of inquiry. The dual role of the researcher in the production process enables an in-depth exploration of how conceptual decisions in shot design are translated into visual narrative outcomes.

A defining stylistic element of *Death Waits* is its use of dynamic aspect ratios, which shift to mirror the protagonist's emotional state and evolving memory. These changes work in tandem with the film's black-and-white palette to evoke the atmosphere of an old film, symbolizing Bintari's gradual journey toward clarity, acceptance, and inner peace.

3.2. Analytical Framework

This study adopts a practice-based research approach combined with qualitative visual analysis. The creative process of the film serves as both the subject and method of investigation, allowing the researcher to examine how conceptual decisions in shot design are translated into visual narrative outcomes.

The analytical framework is informed by semiotic and cognitive film theory, focusing on how visual elements function as signs that construct meaning and guide audience perception. Each selected shot is analyzed based on four main aspects: (1) composition,

including framing and spatial arrangement; (2) aspect ratio; (3) camera techniques, such as movement and focus; and (4) the perceptual effect produced for the viewer.

Through this framework, the study aims to interpret how shot design not only represents, but also simulates the subjective experience of memory distortion, positioning the audience within the character's psychological state.

3.3. Conception Phase

Death Waits examines the relationship between death, memory, and identity through symbolic visuals and a poetic narrative structure. Central to the film's concept is the idea that memory functions like a reel of film unspooling at the end of one's life, an idea visually articulated through sequences inspired by early cinema. This motif is reinforced through the deliberate use of shifting aspect ratios, which serve as metaphors for the protagonist's fluctuating cognitive state. The transitions from 16:9 (the present), to 1.33:1 (distorted or fragmented memory), and finally to 2.4:1 (clarity and acceptance) operate not only as stylistic evocations of vintage film but also as narrative markers that distinguish reality from recollection and chart Bintari's gradual re-construction of her past.

Rather than relying on explicit flashbacks, the writing and animation team employ a more subtle visual strategy to portray the protagonist's memories. The film foregrounds shot design and mise-en-scène as tools to externalize the instability of Bintari's recollections, using visual cues derived from old film imagery to signal shifts in her internal state. This approach creates an environment where the surrounding world becomes a reflection of her recovering memory, while also inviting the audience to experience a deliberate sense of emotional and perceptual disorientation. Through this method, the film constructs an immersive narrative that allows viewers to inhabit the fluidity and fragility of memory alongside the protagonist.

3.4. Work Stages

Preproduction.

Idea and Concept. The initial concept for *Death Waits* emerged from a short TikTok video recounting the experience of an elderly woman with Alzheimer's nearing the end of her life. The video sparked broader discussion within nursing and healthcare communities, who shared parallel experiences involving a phenomenon they frequently observed: moments of mental clarity that occur shortly before death. In these instances, patients briefly regain access to memories long obscured by illness, recalling events or loved ones they had forgotten and sometimes speaking as though they were interacting with those who had already passed away.

This phenomenon prompted the writer to reflect on the intricate relationship between memory, dying, and cultural or spiritual interpretations of the final moments of life. These reflections laid the foundation for the creation of Bintari, a fictional elderly former actress living with Alzheimer's. Through her, the film explores the internal journey of a person undergoing gradual memory reconstruction while forming a personal, almost intimate encounter with Death as a tangible presence. The creative process was further informed by accounts of near-death experiences among the elderly, particularly narratives in which individuals describe being greeted by deceased spouses, family members, or entities such as gods, angels, or mythological figures akin to the Grim Reaper.

In developing the film's visual and narrative direction, the writer and production team sought to reinterpret the figure of Death: not as the frightening entity often portrayed in popular culture, but as an empathetic presence offering comfort. This reimagining was inspired by both contemporary and classical artworks, including Jenny Jinya's *Loving Reaper* and Johann Georg Leinberger's *Death Blowing Bubbles*, which similarly present death as gentle and compassionate. These influences became central to shaping the thematic and aesthetic grounding of *Death Waits*, a film that approaches death not solely as tragedy, but as a profoundly human transition imbued with tenderness and meaning.

Observation. The author observed films and animations that featured the use of visual composition, camera shots or angles, and the application of visual techniques in accordance with the planned shots. The results of these observations were used as a reference source in the visual design for animations to be developed in the future. Specifically, this thesis will focus on film shot references that are relevant and in accordance with the defined scope of the problem.

1. Compositions

The clip from scene 1 shot 4 takes visual references from several films, with one of the main examples coming from the film *Anastasia* (1997). In this clip, the use of the frame within a frame technique frames Anya's reflection in a mirror with an intricately carved frame. This composition serves as a visual metaphor for her fragmented identity and buried memories of the past. The mirror frame creates a physical boundary that separates Anya's figure from the surrounding space, emphasizing her psychological confinement as if she were trapped within the confines of forgotten memories. Instead of being fully present in the cinematic space, Anya is framed narrowly and symbolically, indicating that her true identity is still hidden. The reflection in the mirror also creates an alternative layer of reality: it reflects Anya's existence but does not fully reveal the truth. The frame-within-a-frame composition technique not only beautifies the visual composition but also plays an important role in deepening the narrative, depicting the main character's inner conflict with her memories and identity.

2. Compositions

Scene 9 shot 15 in *Death Waits* draws visual and narrative inspiration from two contemporary animated films: *Finding Dory* (2016) and *Coco* (2017). From *Finding Dory*, the author adopts the rack focus technique, particularly referencing the moment when Dory encounters other fish of her species while searching for her parents. In that scene, Dory initially appears in sharp focus before the camera shifts to reveal the group of fish in front of her, causing her figure in the foreground to blur. This change in focus functions as a narrative device that guides the viewer's attention toward the newly revealed subject without altering the shot's overall composition. A similar strategy is employed in *Death Waits* to transition emphasis from Bintari to the photographs behind her, symbolizing the resurfacing of her memories. From *Coco*, the author draws inspiration from the upward pedestal movement used to follow the ofrenda—a tiered altar displaying family photos arranged from the most recent generation at the bottom to the earliest ancestors at the top. This vertical motion, reinforced by the ascending arrangement of images, leads the audience through a visual chronology that highlights lineage, remembrance, and the passage of time. In *Death Waits*, this influence informs the camera movement that traces Bintari's photographs, echoing the thematic emphasis on memory, legacy, and the reconstruction of personal history through visual form.

3. Screen Ratio

For scene 2 shot 1, the visual concept draws inspiration from the cinematic techniques used in Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014). The film is notable for its deliberate use of three aspect ratios, 1.37:1, 1.85:1, and 2.40:1, each corresponding to a different historical period within the narrative. Scenes set in 1932 employ the 1.37:1 Academy ratio, evoking the visual character of early cinema. The 1968 sequences use the 2.40:1 ratio with Techno-vision anamorphic lenses, creating the expansive, stylized look characteristic of the widescreen era. Meanwhile, the present-day scenes adopt the 1.85:1 ratio, which aligns with the conventions of contemporary filmmaking.

This multi-ratio strategy functions not only as an aesthetic signature, but also as an effective visual storytelling device that clearly delineates shifts in time. By adjusting the frame according to the era depicted, the film constructs a coherent temporal framework that enhances both narrative clarity and viewer immersion, allowing the audience to intuitively inhabit the atmosphere of each period.

4. Memory Distortion

Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) stands as a pivotal reference in the author's observation, particularly for its exploration of memory through unconventional visual structure and narrative form. The film constructs its story through two intersecting timelines—one rendered in color and presented in reverse sequence, and the other in black-and-white unfolding chronologically. This dual structure creates a viewing experience that mirrors the protagonist Leonard's disoriented cognitive state, allowing the audience to inhabit his fragmented perception of time.

The film's shot design further amplifies this sense of instability. Unsteady handheld camera movements, lingering close-ups on objects such as Polaroid photographs and tattoos, and the deliberate absence of traditional establishing shots collectively evoke Leonard's perpetual uncertainty. Through these techniques, *Memento* demonstrates how visual language can articulate subjective perception and cognitive vulnerability, offering a significant point of inspiration for considering how cinematography can embody the fragility of memory.

Literature Review. In this writing, the main theories used are cinematography, storyboard design, composition, and screen ratio. The following is a list of the main references used in the creation:

Table 1. Literature Review

Theory	Example	Theory Application
Mise-en-scène and Composition	Bordwell & Thompson (2017)	Used to understand how visual elements (lighting, blocking, props) in the frame can convey changes in the character's internal state.
Screen Ratio	Stanke (2017)	Serves as a theoretical basis for discussing the evolution of the widescreen format and its impact on film narrative, as well as how technological innovations in aspect ratio have been used by filmmakers to enhance visual and emotional communication within stories.
Cinematography	Lamarre (2018)	Used as a theoretical reference in subjective perspective and how camera composition, extreme angles, and camera movement reveal the psychology of the characters.
Shot Design	Katz (2019)	Used as a reference and manual in visualizing shot designs both technically and creatively.

Form and Technical Experiments. From the earliest stages of shot design, the writer developed a visual approach centered on small moments in which reality appears subtly distorted, such as blurred or shadowed photographs and the incongruity between the characters' ages within certain scenes. These visual cues were intended to signify disruptions in the main character of Bintari's memory. However, the Vellichor Pictures production team ultimately agreed to guide the film toward a more romantic and contemplative aesthetic, drawing inspiration from the pacing and tonal qualities of classic black-and-white cinema. This direction was chosen to symbolize the fragility, obscurity, and long-buried nature of Bintari's memories. This conceptual framework naturally

limits the use of overtly surreal or expressive techniques, including explicit flashbacks or abstract visualizations of memory and death, whether in terms of character depiction or thematic representation. Instead, *Death Waits* employs more understated methods to convey the evolution of Bintari's recollections within a grounded visual language. One key method is the strategic use of shifting aspect ratios, which function not only as temporal markers or references to vintage film aesthetics but also as narrative devices that articulate the fluctuating condition of the protagonist's memory. The classic films referenced during development generally rely on fixed, stage-like compositions, minimal camera movement, and prolonged shot durations. This stylistic foundation was intentionally adopted as part of a formal exploration in which elaborate camera dynamics and complex compositions were deliberately avoided. By embracing these constraints, the film evokes the technical limitations characteristic of early cinema while reinforcing the thematic focus on memory, distortion, and emotional introspection.

Form and Technical Explorations. In the initial phase of visual development, the writer designed several scenes using a dynamic cinematographic approach, including non-static camera movements intended to heighten visual and dramatic intensity. However, further discussions with the two-person team at Vellichor Pictures revealed that such an approach would be difficult to execute effectively within the constraints of the available production resources. These limitations prompted a reassessment of the shot design strategy and opened an opportunity to explore a visual style that was both contextually resonant and technically feasible. Together, the writer and the Vellichor Pictures team examined the aesthetics of classic films from the 1920s to the 1960s, noting that many works from this era employed static framing reminiscent of theatrical stage compositions. In these films, the camera typically remains fixed, with minimal movement, emphasizing performance and spatial arrangement rather than kinetic cinematography. This historical reference provided both artistic inspiration and a practical rationale for adopting a more static visual approach. By shifting the emphasis toward internal frame composition, the team was able to enrich the *mise-en-scène* and strengthen the presence of symbolic visual elements. With reduced camera movement, the audience's focus is directed toward character gestures, facial expressions, and subtle environmental details that reinforce the film's atmosphere and deepen its thematic concerns. After the writer completed an initial sketch of the shot design, the Vellichor Pictures team agreed to maintain a simplified aesthetic and to foreground dialogue in scenes designed to evoke a vintage cinematic sensibility.

Production.

Sketching Phase.

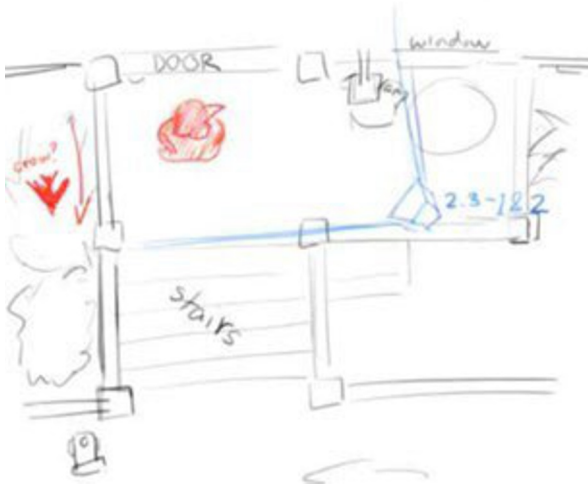


Fig. 1. One of the results of the discussion on camera position and background layout
(Personal documentation)

Before describing the shot design, the author first held a discussion with members of Vellichor Pictures regarding the script breakdown via the Discord communication platform. During the session, the Whiteboard feature was used to sketch out a rough concept of the shot using simple stickman illustrations (Figure 1; Figure 2).



Fig. 2. Rough sketch for scene 1 shot 4
(Personal documentation)

In scene 1, most of the scenes were designed to foreshadow the film's storyline. The environment is visually represented by Bintari's memories, particularly through the walls covered with photo frames. To depict this scene (scene 1 shot 4), the writer chose an eye-level shot from a slightly lower angle to match the height of the Thian Kok altar table as a visual symbol that supports the story's dialogue. The shot uses a long shot to

cover all the photo frame elements in the environment, while obscuring other irrelevant parts of the environment through framing techniques.

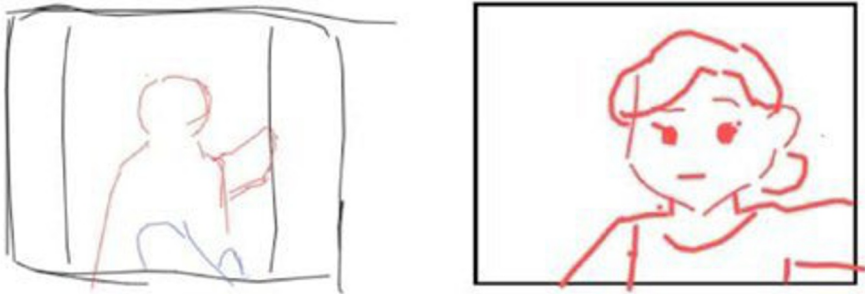


Fig. 3. Rough sketch for scene 2 shot 1
(Personal documentation)

Scene 2 shot 1 is designed to direct the audience's visual focus entirely on Bintari, who is placed centrally in the medium shot composition (Figure 3). As the first moment of the young Bintari's appearance, the framing in this scene uses the door frame as the main visual element that guides the audience's attention. This approach also serves to maintain visual concentration on the character of Bintari, even when there is a change in the screen ratio, so that the visual transition does not distract the audience's focus.

Meanwhile, for scene 6 shot 4, the writer chose a long shot to show Bintari's house in its entirety (Figure 4). This scene is combined with the concept of changing the screen ratio to reveal elements of the environment that contain symbolic meanings, such as a tricycle and an old swing, which signify traces of past life and serve as visual clues related to the character's journey of memory.

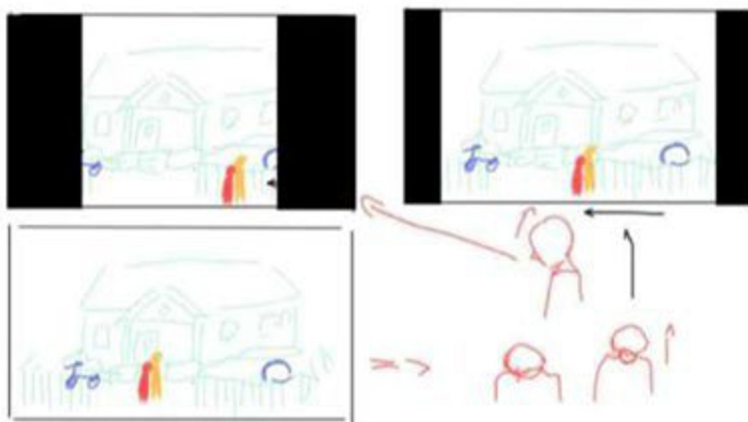


Fig. 4. Rough sketch for scene 6 shot 4
(Personal documentation)

Final Shot Exploration. During the finalization stage of the *Death Waits* storyboard, several refinements were made to optimize the visual narrative, especially in terms of

the symbolism that depicts the memories of the character Bintari. One of these refinements was applied to scene 6 shot 4 (Figure 4), where the writer and members of Vellichor Pictures added a slight zoom-out effect. This adjustment was made to ensure that at the beginning of the scene, background elements representing the presence of children, such as bicycles and swings, were not immediately visible in the 4:3 frame ratio. Thus, the zoom-out process maximized the appearance of these elements into the visual composition as the ratio expanded.

Post-production.

After the shot design and storyboard stages were completed, the production process continued to the animation stage, followed by post-production. In the *Death Waits* project, the post-production process was carried out through intensive discussions between Vellichor Pictures team members to detail the compositing and final editing steps. At this stage, various technical elements such as camera movement, frame ratio changes, minor color corrections, and composition refinements were adjusted to ensure that the final result of each shot remained consistent and faithful to the visual design established in the initial storyboard.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Creation Result



Fig. 5. Final look for scene 1 shot 4
(Personal documentation)

Scene 1 shot 4 serves as the film *Death Waits* first visual introduction to the protagonist, Bintari de Haag, who is presented in her elderly form (Figure 5). She is shown crossing the frame to open the door of her home, passing by a row of blurred photographs and faded

trophies that subtly hint at a long and distant past. The shot employs a long shot with framing that utilizes the silhouettes of plants and incense in the foreground. These foreground elements obscure irrelevant background details while simultaneously directing attention toward Bintari and the indistinct photos behind her. The camera is placed slightly below eye level, as though positioned atop an altar table, reinforcing the spatial and symbolic context of the scene.

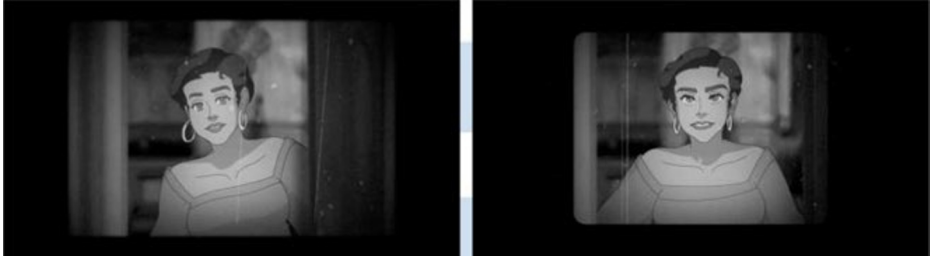


Fig. 6. Final look for scene 2 shot 1
(Personal documentation)

In scene 2, shot 1, the audience encounters Bintari for the first time in her youth, portrayed in black-and-white as a representation of her unclear and partially reconstructed memory (Figure 6). This shot is presented from Death's point of view—perceived by Bintari as a visit from Thian Kok—as she opens the door of her house. Initially, Bintari is framed within the doorway using a 16:9 aspect ratio. As the door swings open and her figure becomes clearer, the frame gradually narrows to 4:3, aligning the screen ratio with the physical proportions of the door frame. This shift creates a seamless connection between the diegetic architecture and the composition of the image, reinforcing the subjective and fragmented nature of her memory.



Fig. 7. Final look for scene 6 shot 4
(Personal documentation)

Scene 6 shot 4 marks the first transition from 4:3 to a 2.39:1 aspect ratio (Figure 7). In this scene, Bintari and Thian Kok walk home together, accompanied by a gradual widening of the frame that unveils the full exterior of their house. The expanded composition reveals a tricycle and an old swing in the yard—objects that function as visual fragments of Bintari's personal history. Presented in black and white to evoke the aesthetic of classic cinema, this long shot also operates as an establishing shot, introducing the environment and expanding the narrative space for the viewer.



Fig. 8. Final look for scene 9 shot 5
(Personal documentation)

By scene 9, shot 15, the once blurred and faded photographs are rendered with clarity and saturated color. These images depict Bintari's first, and final films written by Thian Kok, their wedding, their youth, and their two children. The shot employs a medium close-up combined with a gradual depth-of-field transition. The camera initially focuses on Bintari before slowly shifting its attention toward the now-sharp wall of photographs (Figure 8). A lateral pan to the right then reveals the full expanse of the memory wall, visually marking the restoration of her recollections.

4.2. Creation Analysis

Scene 1 shot 4 vs scene 9 shot 15



Fig. 9. Final look scene 1 shot 4 (left) & final look scene 9 shot 15 (right) (Personal Documentation)

These two shots visually articulate the contrast between Bintari's memory at the beginning and the end of the film (Figure 9). To affirm that both scenes occur within the diegetic present, the writer consistently presents the older version of Bintari in a 16:9 aspect ratio. At the start of the narrative, she appears as an elderly woman experiencing age-related memory decline, causing her past to feel fragmented and indistinct. This condition is expressed through a shot design that restricts the visual field using a frame-within-a-frame composition created by the silhouettes of altar objects. This technique not only guides the viewer's gaze toward the center of the image but also evokes a sense of vague, constricted perception—mirroring Bintari's impaired memory state. The approach references similar visual framing techniques seen in *Anastasia*(1997).

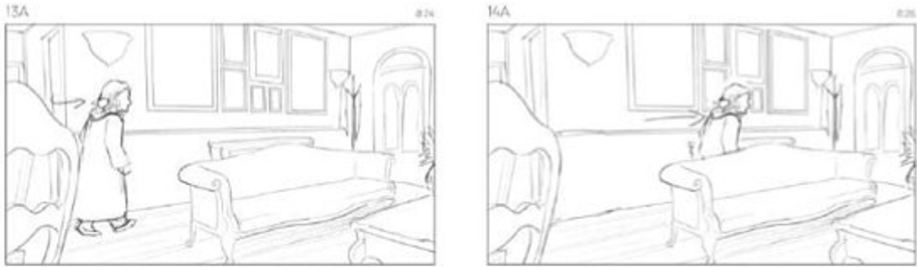


Fig. 10. Storyboard draft 2 after angle adjustments
(Personal Documentation)



Fig. 11. Storyboard draft 1 for framing design
(Personal Documentation)

The use of still shots, full shots, and depth-of-field control that centers on Bintari and her surroundings enables the audience to observe the environment with deliberate clarity (Figure 10; Figure 11). This environment becomes an extension of Bintari's internal condition, visually signaled by blurred paintings that embody her incomplete recollections. At the same time, the use of full shots produces a subtle emotional distance between the viewer and the character, reinforcing a sense of detachment that aligns with Bintari's estrangement from her own memories, as her facial expressions remain partially obscured.



Fig. 12. Storyboard scene 9 shot 15
(Personal Documentation)

In contrast, scene 9 shot 15 presents Bintari after she regained her memory (Figure 12). This moment draws inspiration from the psychological phenomenon of terminal lucidity—an unexpected return of mental clarity shortly before death. Here, Bintari speaks to

Death and states that she is no longer afraid of her life's end, signaling a sense of acceptance and fulfillment. The shot employs a medium close-up that brings her face into intimate proximity with the camera, allowing the audience to closely read her expression and dialogue. Initially, the composition follows the Rule of Thirds, placing Bintari on one side of the frame to make room for the narratively important background.

This shot employs a medium close-up composition that positions Bintari near the camera as the central focal point, enabling the audience to observe her facial expressions and dialogue with greater intimacy. The initial framing applies to the Rule of Thirds, placing Bintari on one side of the frame to open space for a background that holds narrative significance. The camera's focus then transitions smoothly through a rack focus shift—from Bintari in the foreground to the row of photographs displayed on the wall behind her. In contrast to earlier scenes framed by altar objects and shadows, this composition is unobstructed, offering the audience a clear and complete view of the vibrant photos and posters that represent the milestones and accomplishments of Bintari's life. This newfound visual clarity becomes a tangible symbol of memories that have been restored and reorganized.

The camera then slowly pans to the right, following the photographs in chronological progression. This movement not only signifies the passage of time but also mirrors the natural way individuals reflect upon their past, revisiting life events sequentially, as though leafing through memory itself. The stark contrast between the blurred, overlooked images seen earlier in the film and the sharp, fully legible photos in this scene forms the film's central visual metaphor. Through this comparison, the shot illustrates Bintari's journey from fragmented and inaccessible memory toward a state of coherence and acceptance, culminating in her recognition of a life lived fully and meaningfully.

Scene 2 shot 1

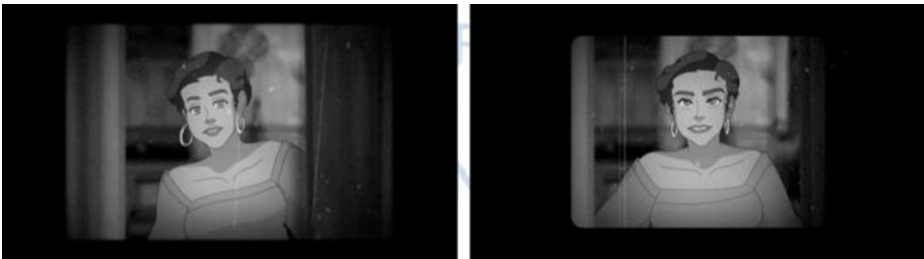


Fig. 13. Final look scene 2 shot 1
(Personal Documentation)

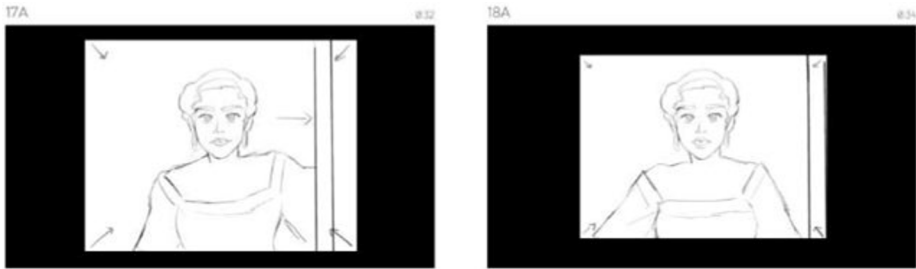


Fig. 14. Storyboard for scene 2 shot 1
(Personal Documentation)

In this shot, the change in screen ratio is also employed as a symbolic device that reinforces the visual narrative of Bintari's memories (Figure 13; Figure 14). The opening moment appears in a 16:9 aspect ratio, signaling objective reality before Bintari's face is fully revealed. Once the door opens completely and her face becomes clearly visible, the screen ratio transitions to 4:3; the standard format of early cinema from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

The 4:3 ratio serves two primary functions within this context. First, it marks a clear boundary between the real world and the subjective space of memory, signaling to the audience that they have entered Bintari's internal recollections. Second, its narrower composition visually represents the constraints of her memory: the limited frame echoes her fragmented, partially inaccessible past. Because the 4:3 ratio is now strongly associated with antiquated visual technology, its use also evokes nostalgia and enhances the impression that the scenes unfolding belong to Bintari's past, filtered through a memory that is incomplete and distorted. This scene initially employs a frame-within-a-frame composition, using the doorframe to encase Bintari's figure. This approach is especially visible at the beginning of the shot—still presented in a 16:9 ratio—where Bintari is depicted in a medium shot. The technique not only conveys a sense of confinement or visual restriction, subtly anticipating the upcoming shift to 4:3, but also provides the necessary spatial allowance for the new aspect ratio to crop the image without removing essential visual information. The transition is made seamless through the use of a static camera. Furthermore, the choice of a medium shot allows the audience to encounter the younger Bintari at a semi-personal distance, making it an effective visual and narrative introduction to the character.

Scene 6 shot 4



Fig. 15. Final look scene 6 shot 4
(Personal Documentation)



Fig. 16. Storyboard for scene 6 shot 4
(Personal Documentation)

This shot carries the same symbolic meaning as Scene 2 Shot 1, but in reverse. It begins in a 4:3 aspect ratio, continuing the visual language of the previous scenes (Figure 15; Figure 16). As the shot progresses, however, the frame gradually expands to 2.39:1; the modern widescreen ratio that has been standard since 1957. This transition is not merely a technical flourish; it visually embodies Bintari's attempt to recall an important detail in her life: her child's name.

As Bintari repeats the name under her breath, the screen widens in tandem, symbolizing the gradual expansion of her limited memory. Long-forgotten fragments begin to return to her consciousness, and the slow shift in aspect ratio serves as a visual metaphor for this process. The shot is composed of an extremely long shot, revealing Bintari's house in full. This choice, paired with a zoom-out movement, reinforces the sensation of memory opening up: the audience is invited to witness how Bintari slowly regains the ability to see the "whole picture" of a once-buried moment.

Besides introducing a new location following her encounter with Death in the form of Thian Kok, this shot reveals environmental details that support the theme of memory recovery. As the frame widens, a tricycle and an old swing gradually come into view: objects that subtly signal the presence of children in Bintari's past. Their slow emergence within the expanding frame strengthens the impression that Bintari is accessing memories tied to her family, especially her child.

The scene's composition adheres to the rule of thirds to organize these visual cues: the left column leads the audience's eye toward the tricycle, the center column focuses on Bintari and Thian Kok walking into the house, and the right column highlights the old swing. In this way, the aspect ratio shift becomes more than a stylistic choice. It now functions as a poetic device that deepens the emotional and narrative contours of Bintari's journey.

Creation Analysis Table**Table 2.** Creation Analysis

Scene Number	Composition	Screen Ratio	Camera Technique
Scene 1 shot 4	Frame within a frame	16:9	Still Shot
Scene 2 shot 1	Frame within a frame	16:9 to 4:3	Still Shot
Scene 6 shot 4	Rule of Thirds	4:3 to 2.39:1	Zoom out
Scene 9 shot 15	Rule of Thirds	16:9	Rack Focus & Pan

Table 2 illustrates the evolution of Bintari's memory as expressed through image composition, aspect ratio of transitions, and camera techniques. Early in the sequence, the use of frame-within-a-frame composition and static shots (paired with a 16:9 ratio that later constricts to 4:3) visually conveys the fragmentary and constrained state of her recollections. As the narrative advances, the visual strategy shifts toward rule-of-thirds compositions, increasingly wider aspect ratios, and more dynamic techniques such as zooming out, rack focus, and panning. These developments signify the gradual sharpening and expansion of memories that were once indistinct and limited.

Ultimately, the camera's deliberate redirection of focus toward the memory photographs on the wall in Scene 9 Shot 15 marks the culmination of this process, signaling the restoration of Bintari's full recollection. Collectively, the table demonstrates how the film's visual progression parallels and poetically reinforces the gradual dissolution of memory distortion experienced by the protagonist.

Rather than functioning as isolated visual moments, the four analyzed shots collectively form a progressive visual system. The transition from constrained compositions and narrow aspect ratios toward open framing and dynamic camera techniques reflects a gradual shift from cognitive fragmentation to perceptual clarity. This progression demonstrates how shot design can be structured as a temporal and psychological continuum, rather than a series of discrete stylistic choices.

5. CONCLUSION

In designing the shot structure for the 2D animated film *Death Waits*, the writer applied visual narrative theory by integrating elements of mise-en-scène, composition, camera depth, camera position, aspect ratio, and shot type to construct imagery that reflects the instability of the protagonist Bintari's memories. This approach enables the audience to experience the fluidity and fragmentation of Bintari's recollections; while simultaneously following the gradual unveiling of her life story during the date night she spends with Death. Bintari's fragmented memory is initially represented through walls filled with photographs and film posters that appear indistinct and unfocused. In early scenes, the audience can only glimpse these visuals from afar, partially concealed by silhouettes of leaves and objects surrounding Thian Kok's altar. Such framing intentionally restricts the viewer's perspective, mirroring Bintari's own difficulty in accessing her past. This visual strategy is later contrasted with scene 9, shot 15, when Bintari's memory begins to return. Here, a shift in depth of field redirects the camera's focus from Bintari to the photo-covered wall behind her. A rightward camera pan sequentially reveals the timeline of her memories, with the images now rendered brightly and clearly, signifying the restoration of her full recollection.

Changes in aspect ratio within *Death Waits* further function as a narrative device to express Bintari's psychological and mnemonic state. The transition from a 16:9 ratio to 4:3 during the audience's first glimpse into her memory signals both a temporal shift and a constricted mental landscape. The narrower 4:3 frame evokes limitation and confinement, visually echoing the fragmented nature of her memory at that moment. Conversely, in scene 6, shot 4, as her memory stabilizes, the aspect ratio expands to 2.39:1. This widened frame symbolizes the broadening of Bintari's cognitive clarity and emotional understanding. In this way, aspect ratio shifts become a deliberate component of the film's visual language, subtly yet powerfully externalizing the character's internal transformation.

Based on the findings of this study, this research contributes to the field of animation and film studies by demonstrating that shot design can operate as a cognitive and perceptual instrument, rather than merely a compositional or aesthetic device. Through the deliberate integration of aspect ratio, framing, and camera techniques, filmmakers are able to construct a visual system that does not simply represent but actively simulates the subjective experience of psychological states. In the context of *Death Waits*, this system enables the visualization of memory distortion as a dynamic and evolving process, allowing the audience to perceive fragmentation, limitation, and eventual clarity in ways that are both experiential and narratively coherent.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that shot design plays a crucial role in structuring how psychological transformation is communicated over time. Rather than functioning as isolated stylistic choices, the progression of visual strategies—such as the shift from constrained framing and narrow aspect ratios to more expansive compositions and dynamic camera techniques—forms a cohesive visual continuum that mirrors the character's cognitive recovery. This indicates that cinematographic elements can be orchestrated systematically to guide audience perception, shaping not only what is seen, but how it is mentally processed and emotionally understood.

By positioning shot design within a cognitive and perceptual framework, this study extends existing discussions in cinematography and visual narrative, particularly in the context of animated films. It highlights the potential of animation as a medium capable of articulating complex psychological phenomena through controlled visual construction. Consequently, this research offers a conceptual and practical reference for future studies and creative practices that seek to explore the intersection between visual form, narrative structure, and human perception in audiovisual storytelling.

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