

ANALYSIS OF VISUAL EFFECTS IN “EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE” (2022) : BUILDING A MULTIVERSE NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

To investigate the role of visual effects in facilitating a multiverse story within a movie, the article Analysis of Visual Effects in the Film 'Everything Everywhere All at Once' (2022) in Building the Audience's Imagination through Integration of Multiverse World Narrative is used. The purpose is to examine how visual effects help introduce narrative structure, develop characters, enrich theme and enhance overall audience participation. This will be achieved by using Shilo T. McClean's theory about integrating narratives with visuals; this approach will involve closely analyzing scenes where visual effects play crucial roles in filmmaking. The paper asserts that differentiating various universes and amplifying the film's narrative coherence and emotional impact are among key functions visual effects perform. In view of this, it was concluded that live-action elements must be smoothly integrated with special effects for complicated storytelling and better empathy between viewers and storylines. Further investigation highlights how digital storytelling has made it possible for contemporary films to use visual effects as transformative tools within cinematic works.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022) is a sci-fi film directed by Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan. The story centers on a strained Chinese-American laundromat owner, Evelyn Wang, that suddenly finds herself in the center of an interdimensional war. Highly acclaimed and innovative use of Visual Effects constructs a compelling multiverse narrative by extracting the most from the editor, Paul Rogers, to utilize Visual Effects to build such a convincing multiverse world.

Everything Everywhere All at Once is an excellent example of utilizing the most out of Visual Effects to build its multiverse world, the difference and interpretation of various universes makes it interesting to analyze. Despite the

amount of literature on Visual Effects, there seems to be a gap in detailed analysis of the use of Visual Effects in representing multiverse concepts in film. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how this film invites the utilization of Visual Effects in supporting and enhancing the structure of the multiverse narrative. This problem's solution requires the study to analyze the film, centering on important moments where Visual Effects play a dire role in the overall impact on the narrative structure.

Visual Effects is the process and techniques used to make imagery outside of the context of a live-action shot is a definition found in “Digital Storytelling: The Narrative Power of Visual Effects in Film” by Shilo T. McClean. To achieve the desired visual narrative,

manipulation of on-screen images and often integrating digitally created elements with live-action footage. This definition focuses on the ability to transform Visual Effects in modern filmmaking, emphasizing their use not only in building the narrative and thematic vision of a film but also in making out-of-the-world visuals. It has come a long way in cinema, what once was a difficult technology is now readily available to the masses. This advancement has enabled editors to achieve the same if not more, effects that could have cost more if it were done practically.

"Cinema as a Worldbuilding Machine in the Digital Era: Essay on Multiverse Films and TV Series" by Boillat intensively explores the concept of multiverse. According to Boillat, a multiverse entertains the chance of various developments and is a recurring theme in sci-fi plots that center on worldbuilding and evolution through transmedia storytelling. Boillat underlines that in multiverse movies, the narrative often involves successive passages from one parallel world to another, rather than conventional time travel. This structure allows for an unlimited amount of narrative extensions, contributing to the intricacy and abundance of the multiverse concept in cinematic storytelling.

Narrative Integration Theory, discussed in Shilo T. McClean's book "Digital Storytelling: The Narrative Power of Visual Effects in Film" explains that Visual Effects (Visual Effects) are not only for decoration or additional elements in a film, but they are important for the narrative of a film. The six key elements of the theory are as follows:

1. Enhancing Narrative Structure

The film's narrative structure should be enhanced and conveyed through the use of visual effects. Especially elements that are nearly impossible to achieve through traditional filmmaking techniques, including the creation of helpful visual elements that support transitions, settings, and intricate storylines.

2. Character Development

Visualization of inner psychological states, transformations, or abilities by visual effects plays a crucial role in developing a character.

Helping to engage the audience and making them more relatable by providing a deeper insight into their journeys.

3. Thematic Depth

The film's themes and messages should be reinforced by the integration of visual effects. For example, visual effects can be used symbolically to represent abstract concepts like alternate realities, time, or memory, thus adding layers of meaning to the film's narrative.

4. Immersive Worldbuilding

Visual effects are crucial in making an immersive and believable world, especially in genres like science fiction. Visual effects help transport the audience into the film's universe, enhancing overall engagement by constructing a detailed and cohesive environment.

5. Seamless Integration

Live action footage needs to be seamlessly integrated with visual effects to be narratively effective. Meaning that visual effects shouldn't draw attention to their artificiality and feel like a natural part of the film's world. The visual effects' goal is to be a believable aspect of the story for the audience to accept it.

6. Emotional Engagement

Emotions from the audience can be evoked by the effective use of visual effects. From empathy for a character's plight, fear from realistic monsters, or awe from stunning landscapes.

Rather than existing solely for spectacle or aesthetic purposes. McClean emphasizes that for Visual Effects to be narratively effective, they must be cohesively blended with live-action elements, ensuring that they do not distract but rather immerse the audience further into the story.

McClean's theory is particularly relevant in the context of multiverse narratives, where Visual Effects are often used to distinguish between different realities. Her work provides a glance through which the contribution of Visual Effects to narrative relevancy and thematic tones can be critically assessed. For example, in "The Matrix" (1999), the iconic use of bullet-time effects and digital environments not only enhances action

sequences but also supports the film's exploration of reality and illusion. Likewise, "Inception" (2010) uses Visual Effects to depict multi-layered dream worlds, which are pivotal to its plot and thematic focus on the subconscious.

Previous research on this similar topic has been done by Ainur Afis Ramadhan (2018) on visual effects in building an actual reality and a virtual reality in the film "Ready Player One". This and Ramadhan's research is alike in the aspect that both discusses about visual effects in building a narrative world in a science fiction film. However, the differentiation between both studies is the subject visual effects builds, Ramadhan actual and virtual realities, this multiverses. Though there has been many studies about visual effects, very few talks about the methods used in his study, specifically in visual effects in building a narrative. Even less are researches about the impact of visual effects on building a multiverse narrative. Through this paper the author hopes to fill that gap.

This study aims to underline the innovative approaches to Visual Effects used in the film and their effectiveness in creating a cohesive and engaging multiverse in the film "Everything Everywhere All At Once" using Shilo T. McClean's Narrative Integration Theory. This writer also examines the usefulness of said techniques in conveying the concept of the multiverse. Lastly, this writer hopes to contribute to the discourse on the role of Visual Effects in modern cinema, specifically in the context of complex narrative structures such as a multiverse.

2. METHOD

This study was carried out using a descriptive qualitative approach, relying on observation to collect data. Following Miles and Hubberman, this study gathers information, through observation and study references. This method allows researchers to discover knowledge or theories that are relevant to the research subject at a particular time.

This study attempts to examine certain situations, in this case, several frames from certain scenes with the strongest multiverse elements are picked as examples that support the narrative Integration

Theory. The key elements of McClean's theory like enhancing narrative structure, character development, thematic depth, immersive worldbuilding, emotional engagement, and seamless integration, are used as the basis for understanding in building the audience's imagination in a multiverse world narrative. Using said theory, analysis results will be broken down in detail to provide a deeper understanding of how visual effects are used in the film Everything Everywhere All At Once.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Visual Effects in Everything Everywhere All At Once has a believable multiverse world. This can be observed by following the key elements of narrative integration theory. From the film's 88 scenes, 6 samples are curated to represent each key element in McClean's narrative integration theory.

4. Enhancing Narrative Structure

Everything Everywhere All At Once's narrative structure should be enhanced and conveyed through the use of visual effects. The film's multiverse elements are nearly impossible to achieve through traditional filmmaking techniques. Aspects of it such as transitions, settings, and intricate storylines are supported by the creation of helpful visual elements. Through Evelyn's eyes, we explore the film's narrative at the same time, dipping our toes into the concept of verse jumping which is the basis used throughout the whole film.



Fig 1. Evelyn Verse Jumping
(Source: Personal Documentation "Everything Everywhere All At Once" 2022)



Fig 2. Evelyn Verse Jumping
(Source: Personal Documentation “Everything Everywhere All At Once” 2022)



Fig 3. Evelyn Verse Jumping
(Source: Personal Documentation “Everything Everywhere All At Once” 2022)

Verse jumping is a concept that characters use to access abilities from alternate versions of themselves across different universes through bizarre actions. Evelyn, in a pinch, is about to get attacked and has to urgently verse jump, she does so at the last minute, sending her back through multiple universes rapidly. It is the first and only look in the film that shows the process of verse jumping.

Made with stock footage for the changing background and separate footage of the actress, Visual Effects can build a believable moment of how the multiverse works in this film. The Visual Effects in this scene are used to provide the audience with a digestible visualization of the complex transition and experience of falling through universes, which would be difficult to execute traditionally. Burst of changing environments, colors, and graphics, Evelyn’s plight of being thrown into a world of chaos and confusion after a dramatic revelation slaps her in the face. The narrative structure’s enhancement sets the scene of this film’s multiverse world, provoking curiosity and a basis of understanding

from the audience for the intricate storyline ahead.

5. Character Development

The Characters in this film consist of complex individuals who go through turmoils and challenges, causing them to develop as characters, their inner psychological states visualized to be understood by the audience. Everything Everywhere All At Once as a science fiction film, has characters with interdimensional transformations and abilities. Underlining the crucial role visual effects play in developing a character thus engaging the audience and making them more relatable by providing a deeper insight into their journeys. Jobu Tupaki as the most powerful being in the multiverse is the best example to analyze.



Fig 4. Jobu Tupaki Confronting Policeman
(Source: Personal Documentation “Everything Everywhere All At Once” 2022)



Fig 5. Jobu Tupaki Exploding Policeman’s Head Into Confetti
(Source: Personal Documentation “Everything Everywhere All At Once” 2022)

The introduction of Jobu Tupaki’s character establishes her as a powerful yet playful entity. Jobu gets into an altercation with the police when he implies he has authority over her, which meets her dismay as she has a past with Evelyn, her mom, telling her what to do her whole life. Her erratic response resulted in the death of said police officer exploding into confetti, establishing her contrasting character’s ability to manipulate reality as she pleases jestfully.

In this case, layers of shots are composited to make the subject disappear and turn into confetti. Communicating Jobu's abilities through visual effects, the audience believes Jobu has the power to manipulate reality across universes as an important feature of her character. The visual effect in her introduction also showcases her unpredictable and funny psychological state, her insecurity showing through her impulsive decision to choose confetti as a fun way to execute her rage.

6. Thematic Depth

The narration of this movie revolves around a multiverse, a complex concept containing deep themes and messages reinforced by the integration of visual effects. Visual effects are used symbolically to represent intricate concepts like alternate realities, time, or memory, thus adding depth of meaning to the film's narrative. The visualization of shattered glass is used throughout the whole film to represent deviations of universes. Best represented when Evelyn, who by halfway through the film has traveled to many alternate universes, has a scene where she merges all her alternate selves into one shattered glass.

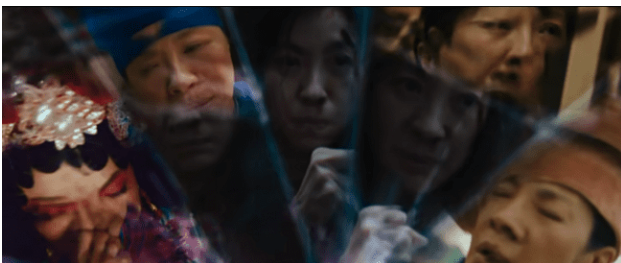


Fig 6. Evelyn's Universes Merging

(Source: Personal Documentation "Everything Everywhere All At Once" 2022)

Evelyn over-exerts herself from fending off Jobu's goons by jumping multiple back-to-back verses despite everything Evelyn finds herself having to fight Jobu in this state. Evelyn filled with exhaustion and turmoil finds herself overwhelmed by the sudden alternate versions suddenly muddling into her head causing her to pass out.

The broken glass visuals are used throughout the film to symbolize transitioning to another universe. In this case, the glass shatters into

multiple shards, implying that her alternate selves combining in her universe. Compositing multiple shots of one subject into one is often used in Visual Effects such as this scene where it is used as a means to show different versions of herself from multiple universes she went to combining into one.

7. Immersive Worldbuilding

Each universe has its immersive and believable worldbuilding built highly dependent on visual effects, especially in genres like science fiction such as this film. The audience is transported into the film's universe, enhancing overall engagement by constructing a detailed and cohesive environment. The universe with the most amount of visual effects is the Bagel Universe, its fully fictional aesthetic juxtaposes all the other organic humane-looking universes by far, immersing the audience in a whole new universe.



Fig 7. Jobu Introducing Evelyn to The Bagel Universe

(Source: Personal Documentation "Everything Everywhere All At Once" 2022)

Taking a rest from fighting, Jobu converses with Evelyn and introduces her to the Bagel Universe and her view of nihilism. Reflected by the world's holy and sterile architecture with one bagel in the center of it, sucking the multiverse slowly toward its demise. Evelyn catches a glimpse of her in other universes and gets influenced by Jobu's nihilism. Jobu is finally happy that someone understands her vision.

Evelyn and the audience are immersed in the visuals of a new heaven-like universe that is different from the other more human-like universes. The centerpiece of the bagel is made by visual effects and warping the background to convey the destruction consuming the multiverse, emphasizing to the audience the gravity of the situation.

8. Seamless Integration

Making the audience believe in the possibility of fictional concepts requires live-action footage to be seamlessly integrated with visual effects. Added visual effects shouldn't draw attention to their artificiality and feel like a natural part of the film's world. Portals in the film do a great job of looking realistic. Unlike other portal scenes, this scene moves the portal thus also moving the setting behind it, executed smoothly the audience believes the portal looks through to the Bagel Universe.



Fig 8. A Glimpse of Bagel Universe
(Source: Personal Documentation "Everything Everywhere All At Once" 2022)

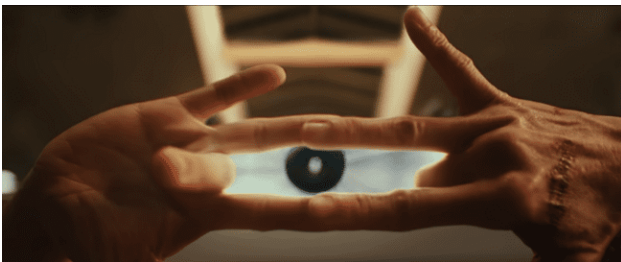


Fig 9. A Glimpse of Bagel Universe
(Source: Personal Documentation "Everything Everywhere All At Once" 2022)

In the last fight sequence, Evelyn converts back from Jobu's influence of Nihilism. In retaliation, Jobu tries to persuade Evelyn again by reminding her of the bagel, opening a portal to the Bagel Universe with both their hands. The visual of the portal organically fits into their hands with added light effects to signal the brightness from the other universe, providing softness. The cut and positioning of this universe align with the Bagel Universe seamlessly as the camera pans up so the audience doesn't think it is out of place.

9. Emotional Engagement

Visual effects when used effectively can evoke emotions from the audience, visualizing the gravity of situations, especially multiverse

ending ones. The climax of this film contains empathy for a character's plight, and fear of losing a loved one, keeping the audience on the edge of their seats. After long fights between the whole family, when it matters most they join together to save the multiverse and Jobu from getting sucked into the bagel ready to consume all.



Fig 10. Evelyn Stopping Jobu From Entering The Everything Bagel
(Source: Personal Documentation "Everything Everywhere All At Once" 2022)



Fig 11. Evelyn Stopping Jobu From Entering The Everything Bagel
(Source: Personal Documentation "Everything Everywhere All At Once" 2022)



Fig 12. Joy's Family Stopping Jobu From Entering The Everything Bagel
(Source: Personal Documentation "Everything Everywhere All At Once" 2022)

Through the portal made previously, the bagel materializes itself in the current universe. It starts to suck everything near it, and the threat to the multiverse starting to take its course. Jobu, failing to persuade Evelyn feels betrayed by their false connection and desperately jumps alone into the bagel. Evelyn holds her daughter back in

time, with their other family members in tow, Alpha Gong Gong and Waymond. What once was a strained family now clings onto each other in an emotional and intense plea to save Jobu and the multiverse.

Visuals of the bagel trying to physically suck everything and Jobu inside of itself in a chaotic nature adds to the intensity of the situation, papers flying about and faces distorted are added

10. CONCLUSIONS

This study has analyzed the pivotal role of visual effects in building the multiverse world of "Everything Everywhere All at Once" (2022). Utilizing Shilo T. McClean's Narrative Integration Theory, the research emphasizes how visual effects serve not only as visual additions but as integral components of the narrative and thematic structure. The analysis reveals that visual effects are important in differentiating various universes and amplifying the film's narrative coherence and emotional engagement.

The results indicate that the multiverse narrative of "Everything Everywhere All at Once" is facilitated by visual effects, which make abstract concepts understandable and visually distinct. According to McClean, this supports his contention that visual effects must be seamlessly integrated with live-action components to foster a more involving plot development, character creation, and thematic depth thus making it easy for viewers to understand complex narration of multiverse.

In the future studies can focus on how visual effects are used in other multiverse narratives comparing both techniques and outcomes from other films across other media. Moreover, the research could examine how visual effects have evolved in independent filmmaking, especially within productions where technological advancements have enabled high-quality visuals to be employed for digital storytelling. This study adds to general discussions on digital storytelling highlighting how visual effects can play a role in transforming contemporary cinema.

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digitally. Reality warps near the bagel as the family tries to prevent it from distorting even more of the multiverse. The realistic nature of the visuals makes it easy for the audience to put themselves in the shoes of each one of the characters' feelings in the moment, be it scared, confused, sad, or desperate that reality might cease to exist or they might be losing a loved one.

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