



The TikTok Experience and Everything Everywhere All At Once: A Brief Analysis of Film Form

Tik Tok Deneyimi ve Everything Everywhere All At Once: Film Biçiminin Kısa Bir Çözümlemesi

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ABSTRACT: The TikTok experience refers to a user's interaction with the platform while scrolling through various videos. The user can change what they are viewing instantly on one screen much like a TV viewer, the only difference being that whatever is being watched is in the form of short videos made specifically for the platform. These videos vary in style and form and are made to be viewed within the platform itself. All the content that a user watches within the mobile application, in the end, forms a longer, both theoretically and practically never-ending, video that is sometimes completely unrelated but more often similar through shared jokes, memes, and visual filters. This way of producing and viewing short-form videos as a whole is reminiscent of the way *Everything Everywhere All At Once* feels to the audience which is no surprise as many other forms of media and artworks are inspired by internet short-form video platforms such as TikTok. A formal analysis of such a film work is important and acts as a first step in order to study these types of videos in terms of their social and psychological impact.

Key Words: *TikTok, Film, Editing, Narrative, Style, Trope*

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Öz: TikTok deneyimi kullanıcının platformu kullanırken değişik video içerikleriyle etkileşimidir. Kullanıcı istediği anda bir TV izleyicisi gibi izlediği şeyi değiştirebilir, ancak buradaki en büyük fark izlenen şeyin platform için yapılmış kısa videolar şeklinde olmasıdır. Bu videolar tarz ve biçim bakımından değişkenlik gösterir ve platforma özel olarak uygulamada izlenmesi için tasarlanmıştır. Kullanıcının mobil uygulama içinde izlediği tüm içerik, en sonunda, bitmeyen uzun bir videonun veya bir filmin parçası olarak düşünülebilirler. Bazen bu videolar birbirlerinden tamamen farklı olsalar da çoğu zaman paylaşılan şakalar, capsler ve görsel filtreler bakımından benzerlik gösterirler. Bu şekilde kısa-biçimli video yapımı, çok şaşırtıcı olmayan bir şekilde, Everything Everywhere All At Once filmi hatırlatmaktadır, çünkü ne de olsa TikTok gibi birçok internet tabanlı kısa-biçim video platformları diğer ortam ve sanat eserleri için ilham kaynağı haline gelmiştir. Bu tür videoların bir film eserini ne şekillerde etkilediğini toplumsal ve psikolojik bakımdan ele almadan önce biçimsel bir çözümleme bu tür tartışmalarda önemli bir başlangıç adımıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: TikTok, Film, Kurgu, Anlatı, Tarz, Trope

INTRODUCTION

Communication based on artistic creation always somehow finds its way through emerging media. The emergence of new media are sometimes completely separated from the rest but often it usually is a combination or a joining of the already present media. Though there is a generational difference and the creation of works in new media one can claim without a doubt that all generations are in one way, or another engulfed in one or more popular media (Jenkins & Thorburn, p. 2-3, 2003). In the present day, the transition is focused on media scaling down through technological devices. These devices have become more portable with time and now we can carry in our pockets what we needed perhaps ten or more devices (Green & Harvey, 1999, as cited in Green, p. 282, 2002). This physical transformation also affected the way we are exposed to information, which has become smaller. The form and style of the information that is viewed by us have also changed with this transition, whether it be videos, text, images, or audio (Jenkins, 2006).

Minimization [not to be confused with *minimalization*] both in form and medium, is related to the tendency or the desire to *consume* every little bit of information more quickly in idle moments of our daily lives. Furthermore, this is linked to the deterioration of the attention span, although, it is difficult to determine which comes after which (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 18-9). Research published by Microsoft in 2015, indicates that the average human attention span has declined to eight seconds since the beginning of the 2000s, which is just a second short of a goldfish (Microsoft Canada, Consumer Insights, 2015). Though, of course, one should always take big claims with a pinch of salt as Policy Institute and Centre for Attention Studies at King's College London suggests that Microsoft's research is a myth, and that attention span depends on the task at hand and that one must consider the suitability of the task regarding the person's abilities and interests (Policy Institute and Centre for Attention Studies at King's College London, 2022). Nevertheless, the research also affirms and claims that people have a high tendency to pick up their phones approximately eighty times a day (Bajarin, 2016), with primal instinct. Among the newly founded short-form works, in harmony with the shortening of one's attention span, short-video is the most prominent and favored with TikTok being the leading platform, as statistics suggest over two billion cumulative downloads in April 2022 (Chapple, 2020).

We see the same trend not only in social media but films as well (Suvattanadilok, 2021). This influence could be thought of in many ways but we aim to slowly descend into the possibility through a particular film through particular aspects, namely narration, and editing. This analysis will give us a certain outlook on the impact of such platforms with a single example. Of course, to make a bold claim we would need more than one film but the influence of the short-form video platforms will be quite apparent as we go further with a formal analysis. For this, we would first need to define what we mean by short-form videos and the *TikTok experience*.

1. Short-form videos and the TikTok Experience

Short-form video is any video piece that is under ten minutes. However, it should be noted that video length differs based on the platform or mobile application in which it is presented in. The short-form video appears in various durations, forms, and styles, spread between several platforms and even within the platform itself also with varying intentions and audiences (Zhang, p.544, 2020). To further delve into the practice and purpose of the short-form video, the platforms or applications should also be considered.

The word *video* comes from the Latin meaning *to see* (Charlton & Short, 2020), while the video in our case is an “electronic technology” (Banerjee, 2019, p. 81) used to record and project moving images as opposed to the chemical alternative of celluloid film stock. While in the beginning video technology was dependent on magnetic tapes, it has since become completely digital (Stump, 2014). Though video, considered a narrative medium, is often linked with narrative films with online communities and platforms it has become a highly flexible medium, one of these platforms is YouTube, which was an instant sensation when it was first introduced in February 2005 (“USATODAY.Com - Video Websites Pop up, Invite Postings,” n.d.). YouTube offered a large social space with noteworthy customization options that let users publish their videos publicly to anyone that had access to the internet. It enabled the user to communicate and socialize in a newly found social space driven by videos of all forms and styles as opposed to generalized social media platforms such as Facebook and MySpace. YouTube became the largest video platform on the internet, generating 10% of all the internet traffic (Cheng, Dale, & Liu, 2007, as cited in Rotman & Preece, p. 320, 2010) while being responsible for 72% of all video streaming online (Junee, 2009 as cited in Rotman & Preece, p. 320, 2010). On top of that, YouTube also offered a selection of limitless uploading and publishing service not only to professionals but also to casual users. A subscription feature that allowed users to follow creators for their content meant that the homepage would be customized according to users’ preferences which were dubbed the “YouTube algorithm” (Rotman et al., 2009; Rotman & Preece, 2010). The YouTube system, though itself has roots in other smaller websites, served as a base for all the subsequent video platforms.

One of the pioneer platforms that played with the short-form video style was Snapchat. Initially, in 2012, it was an instant messaging application; the idea was for instant messages to disappear as they were read by the recipient leaving nothing but a timestamp. A year after its release, in 2013, Snapchat introduced ten-second videos; it was implemented within the instant messaging feature and let users send disappearing short clips to each other. Soon after came what we now know as “stories” which enabled the user to share those short clips with everyone that they were “followed” by, which is the same as the subscription model of YouTube but more restrictive as the stories were *only* available if you followed that user, not public. These short clips on the homepage stayed there for twenty-four hours before they disappeared. With later upgrades including interactive filters, lenses, and various editing tools, Snapchat defined short videos as we know them today (Piwek & Joinson, 2016; Roesner et al., 2014). During Snapchat’s reign, Vine was founded as a social media application that let users post, at maximum, six-second videos that looped unless scrolled away. Vine’s highly restrictive style contributed to the fast-food short-form video form (Marone, 2017), even though it was forced to be shut down not able to keep up with the competition in 2017 (Herrman, 2020). Following the popularity of Vine, *Musica.ly* entered the scene in 2014. This platform was focused on short lip-sync videos that users, or musers as they referred to themselves, could make from the platform’s database limited to fifteen to sixty seconds with visual filters, emojis, and time-based video effects (Rettberg, p. 2, 2017). In 2017, three years in, a China-based technology company ByteDance Technology, Co. (Tran, 2017) bought Musical.ly and merged it with their own mobile application *Douyin* to create *TikTok* in August 2018 (Kaye et al., 2021; Lee, 2018).

TikTok defines itself as the leading destination for short-form mobile videos (TikTok, n.d.). The platform, now, includes every feature mentioned before and more. TikTok adapts the short-video concept and utilizes it as a narrative tool with “add-ons” that eliminate the need for external tools and applications for editing videos, music library, filters *et cetera* (TikTok, n.d.). TikTok has been leading the industry in short-form video with huge success, overcoming the competition (Chapple, 2020). Inevitably, almost every video-based platform has been imitating TikTok, since, adapting and altering short-form video features. Implementations of “Shorts” on YouTube (YouTube, 2020) and “Reels” on Instagram (Instagram, 2020), could be shown as a couple of examples of this, among many. We can see from inspirations as these, and claim, that there is something that we can only refer to as a “TikTok experience.” This experience is similar across platforms, sometimes platforms themselves have videos uploaded from TikTok by users, that consist of short-form video viewing through fundamental vertical scrolling.

This experience could be defined as not only the viewing of the short-form video but viewing at least more than one video in a certain way. In TikTok, a user is exposed to a variety of short-form videos in various styles often completely contrasting each other. A user can change the video on a whim just by swiping up. Most of these videos are made to capture the attention of the user from the first three seconds in the hopes of gaining

more followers or making money from advertising (Meng & Leung, 2021). Engagement with these videos through the platform exposes the user to a multitude of images and sounds in video form varying in the subject matter in a very short amount of time which also keeps the user attentive which also contributes to its addictive nature through dopamine (Lembke, 2021). The addictive aspect is supported by the fact that the platform gathers data to personalize the experience making it fit every user that engages fully with all its features, and it is always possible to find new videos to watch so one never runs out of content to *consume* (Anderson, 2020). The ever-changing nature of social media is pushed to its limits in TikTok, and combined with the chemical background of what is going on it is safe to say that this style of presentation of short-form video content is highly influential.

As mentioned before there are too many videos to pick from to exemplify what is discussed. However, a few examples can be listed as: “Gummy Bears, Adele Concert,” a video where a gummy bear is placed as if it was on stage singing Adele’s “Someone Like You” (“Mik on TikTok,” n.d.); “Yee yee juice” Lil Nas X’s “Old Town Road” plays as a cat drinks “yee yee juice” [this is a meme that was derived from Lil Nas X (“Old Town Road | Know Your Meme,” n.d.)] and becomes a “cowboy” (“I Couldn’t Find a Tiny Hat #yeejeejuice #cowboy #foryou #foryoupage ... | TikTok,” n.d.); “Zach King’s Magic Broomstick,” in which a person riding a flying broomstick reveals using a longboard covered by a mirror. These videos are only a few that will pop up on a user’s timeline scrolling through TikTok. They are filled with memes, inside jokes that only “TikTokers” will get, and pop culture references to various works outside of the platform, and they are all part of what we can describe as a “TikTok economy” or perhaps a stock market where some days or weeks one or more jokes, memes or references are more popular than others resulting in more “views” and “likes” and these “assets” are introduced and forgotten throughout hours, days, weeks and months. Considering all of this, we will continue with a detailed analysis of the film *Everything Everywhere All At Once* which is only one of the films that were produced after the short-form video and TikTok “boom” that seems to point towards a stylistic shift inspired by such platforms and mobile applications in both form and style.

In conclusion, the TikTok experience is not watching one short-form video but a multitude of them within the app, making them a part of a longer, theoretically never-ending, video that is sometimes completely unrelated in every way but more often related to each other through in-jokes, memes, and visual filters. This helps all the videos connect and edit together by the user. This experience is similar to what it feels like to watch *Everything Everywhere All At Once* as no doubt many media and artworks are inspired by internet short-form video platforms.

2. Formal and Stylistic Analysis of Everything Everywhere All At Once

Everything Everywhere All At Once (2022), produced by the Russo Brothers, and written and directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, is regarded as a low-budget comedy film (Rubin, 2022) with science fiction elements (Zhou, 2022). This film is a great example of the so-called *TikTok experience* that we have mentioned above and once we get on with the basic structure of the form and style of the work the connection will be clearer. The first thing that we must take at hand is the very basic structure of the story itself and compare it to its plot all the while keeping our focus on the relationship between the intended way of presenting the events of the story with the style of editing that is utilized. The fact that we must focus on the narrative and editing form and style also requires references to other aspects of the film, however as mentioned before editing is what makes this film and others like it connect them to the *TikTok experience*.

As per the production company A24’s website the film is described as “a hilarious and big-hearted sci-fi action adventure about an exhausted Chinese American woman (Michelle Yeoh) who can’t seem to finish her taxes” (“Everything Everywhere All At Once,” 2022). Every story has a base that is as simple as that last sentence because in the traditional Hollywood story there is always a hero, who is troubled by something that they want to overcome and they reach triumph or despair through many trials and hurdles along the journey (Campbell, 2004). This way of storytelling is old as humanity and many traditional stories in film are still based on Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Aristotle, 1984). The idea of the traditional story stems from conflict. In the end, conflict is what makes a story interesting enough to spend millions of dollars to plan, photograph, and project on a big screen in front of hundreds of people in multiple locations. The conflict in *Everything Everywhere All At Once* (henceforth EEAAO) is at the surface an exhausted Chinese American woman trying to get her taxes in order for her family’s laundromat busi-

ness and underneath it is about her dealing with other people within and outside of her family in terms of culture, character, and passions. Evelyn is someone who has always struggled with her life choices and has come to a point where they all converge and remind her of the choices, she never made almost every day. At its base, the story is of a struggling migrant business owner who not only is troubled with society, government, and business but also with her immediate family. So, having established the core of the story we may continue with the plot.

2.1. Narrative Form

The plot of a film is the way the story is presented in a particular order and style (Egan, p. 455, 1978). While the scope of the story of the film is vast, the plot of the film is much more refined and specific. EEAAO has a seemingly complicated plotline because of the multiverse jumps. However, we may begin with a simplified plot segmentation, similar to the way Bordwell and Thompson do it (Bordwell, Thompson, & Smith, p. 101, 2016), and add detail as needed:

C. Credit title.

Prologue

1. Laundromat:

1. Joy tries to talk about Becky, but Evelyn deflects.
2. First appearance of Alpha-Waymond.
3. Joy, upset with Evelyn, leaves with Becky.

First Part

2. IRS Office

1. Alpha-Waymond appears again and informs Evelyn of the impending danger regarding the multiverse.
2. Evelyn watches as important life choices up to that point are presented to her in between the opened elevator doors.
3. Alpha-Waymond explains to Evelyn the evil that will doom the multiverse.
4. Tax officer, Deirdre, gives Evelyn until 6 p.m. to fix the discrepancies in her filings.
5. Evelyn punches Deirdre thinking that she is the evil thetaverse-Deirdre who is moving to attack her. She was, in fact, bringing her the trolley of files that she left behind.
6. Deirdre calls security.
7. Alpha-Waymond intervenes, fights the guards, and takes Evelyn away on his shoulders.

3. Thetaverse IRS Office

1. 4655th Thetaverse Deirdre informs the people that Jobu Tupaki is arriving.
2. Jobu Tupaki, “an omniversal being with unimaginable power,” is revealed as an alternate universe Joy.
3. Alpha-Waymond explains the multiverse and “Verse-Jumping.”
4. Jobu Tupaki is building something that consumes “more than just light and matter.”
5. Thetaverse Deirdre and Alpha-Waymond get into a fight.
6. Evelyn learns kung-fu by verse-jumping and defeats Thetaverse Deirdre.
7. Alpha-Waymond explains how their daughter in the Alpha-universe was pushed by Alpha-Evelyn into becoming Jobu Tupaki, a being who can experience and manipulate all universes simultaneously, at will.
8. Jobu Tupaki appears just as Evelyn is getting arrested and shows off her abilities.
9. Evelyn pees herself to verse-jump but accidentally visits a universe where people have hotdogs for fingers.
10. Jobu Tupaki shows Evelyn the “everything bagel” she created that has “literally everything” on it.
11. Alpha-Gong Gong intervenes and pushes Jobu Tupaki with his electrical wheelchair.
12. Alpha-Gong Gong does not believe that this Evelyn is worthy and leaves.
13. Alpha-Waymond leaves promising to come back after Evelyn successfully gets as far as possible from Jobu.
14. Jobu Tupaki leaves Joy’s consciousness and Evelyn tries to explain everything to Waymond and Joy.
15. Alpha-Gong Gong returns and points a gun toward Joy, claiming that it is the only way to defeat Jobu but Evelyn refuses.
16. Evelyn tries to push herself as she did Joy in the Alpha universe and starts verse-jumping randomly in the hope that she can save her daughter.
17. The Jobu jumpers start looking for Evelyn in every universe possible.

18. Jobu kills Alpha-Waymond.
19. Evelyn's body gives and she faints.
20. Verse-jumping continues
21. Fake end credits.

Second Part

4. Various Universes

1. Jobu and Evelyn meet in different universes while keeping a conversation about all their personal problems with each other.
2. Verse-jumping montage sequence continues.
3. Jobu and Evelyn are in a universe where there is no life and their consciousnesses are within two rocks next to each other over a barren desert. They continue having their conversation and Evelyn says she is sorry.
4. Jobu reveals to Evelyn that the reason she created the bagel was an attempt to escape existence.
5. Waymond, in the original film universe, goes on a monologue about everything being his fault and implores for the fight to end.
6. Evelyn and Waymond emotionally reconcile.
7. Jobu orders Thetaverse-Deirdre to kill Evelyn but Evelyn gets away by mentioning their loving relationship in the hotdog universe.
8. Evelyn stops bullets from hitting her. She realizes that she is capable of anything and puts "googly eyes" on everyone.
9. In the rock universe, Evelyn moves around and reveals that her rock has "googly eyes" as well and moves towards Jobu's rock.
10. Jobu and Evelyn continue fighting in different universes.
11. Jobu/Joy finally says that she is happy about Evelyn's realization but she is tired, does not want to hurt anymore and that Evelyn is the reason why she hurts.
12. In the rock universe, Jobu/Joy jumps off the cliff.
13. Evelyn goes on a monologue about nothing making sense.
14. Evelyn and Joy make up and hug each other.

Part 3

5. IRS Office

1. The family is happy together and Becky is accepted.
2. They finally complete their tax audit.

The film opens with a slow-motion shot of a small circular mirror in a room that shows Evelyn, the mother, Waymond, the father, and Joy, the daughter singing karaoke. This image is shattered and cut into a medium-long shot of the dining room where various receipts and documents are laid with Evelyn in the middle of the frame. The opening is calm yet from the first minute gives us a sense of urgency of things to come and the stress that Evelyn is feeling. This feeling is supported by slow-motion shots and slow dolly-ins at certain emotionally vital points throughout the film. If we take out all the "verse-jumping" and focus on the life of the family without supernatural or sci-fi elements we are left with the following: a Chinese American family tries to pass a tax audit, all the while trying to work through their generational differences and relationship problems with each other. As we can see from the skeletal plot that the story itself is quite simple and if we put the plot within the scope of the classical three-act structure, we may realize that the end of the climax is with Evelyn's monologue just before they hug each other. The whole plot of the film is made up of the conflicts between each member of the, six conflicts in total: Evelyn-Joy, Evelyn-Waymond, Evelyn-Gong Gong, Joy-Waymond, Joy-Gong Gong, Waymond-Gong Gong. The conflict combination of the Wang family is the story but the plot is presented via tropes full of science-fiction twists, pastiches, pop-culture references, and memes. There is a certain edginess or wonkiness that is intended to project in the style of the film, however, it is imperative that we must move on to the formal characteristics before delving into what they entail.

As suggested by Kristin Thompson, a neoformalist approach is fitting to begin understanding how a film works without clinging to a grand theory that might skew the way we see a film (Thompson, 2020). This approach requires the viewer to consider the form of the film, and nothing else but the film, and its style. In other words,

we shall look at what the film shows us first which is the form, and how it is shown afterward which is the style. Since, style, as clarified by Noël Carroll is: "...generally thought of as the way in which something is done" (Carroll, p. 271, 2009). In light of this approach, then, what does EEAAO show us? The film begins mysteriously showing Waymond, Joy, and Evelyn inside a make-up mirror having fun doing karaoke and cuts to the ceiling of the dining room and flick-tilts down to the dinner table where the tax documents lay with no one in the frame. As the camera dollies in Evelyn walks into the frame and sits at the table right across from the camera. Both shots of the opening are filled with items that suggest a busy atmosphere and the rooms are dimly lit though it is daytime in the second shot. Here we are presented with the first problem of the narrative which is the tax audit that Evelyn must prepare for. Immediately when the camera moves even closer to Evelyn, we are presented with the second problem, which is Waymond's dire need to talk about their marriage. Evelyn tries to evade her husband, cooking rice at the same time and we jump from the dinner table to the nearby open kitchen with the alternation of motivated pans and cuts. These cuts are also constantly alternated between medium close-ups that frame one of the characters, or sometimes both, to wide shots that frame part of the living room, the dining room, and partially the kitchen showing various items scattered throughout the room carefully. This busy atmosphere seems as if it is planned. The room is untidy in an intended way. Right after the third-minute mark, Joy is introduced with her girlfriend ("Everything Everywhere All At Once," 2022, 00:03:21³). Evelyn walks into the scene from the room from a nearby room and we see a cut across the axis just as we see her opening the door (00:03:47). The jumping of the axis is no doubt intentional preparing us for the impending tension that will come out of the conversation they will have. We are, thus, presented with the third problem which is Joy's sexuality, her relationship with her mother, and all of this being hidden from the grandfather. The fourth major problem is when Evelyn sees a musical on the TV in the laundromat and reminisces about a life she never chose to pursue (00:08:33). This fourth problem is between Evelyn and herself and the framing of the shot-reverse-shot is fitting presents it as such; all three shots, Evelyn-TV-Evelyn, are single medium or medium close-ups as the camera slowly dollies in. Though the background is busy we see the sadness on her face. The problem of Joy's sexuality is this time handled with the grandfather when Joy tries to tell him that she is her girlfriend, but Evelyn intervenes and tells him that Becky is her "very good friend" (00:10:09). The last major scene of the prologue is when Joy leaves in her car, upset with Evelyn, as Evelyn stares at her (00:11:10). We are presented with all the character conflicts in the first eleven minutes.

The first part begins with the word "EVERYTHING" superimposed capitalized above Evelyn sitting at the table in the dining room while the grandfather eats noodles on the left side of the frame. We are presented with the overarching and last problem, which relates to all the characters with Evelyn in particular, in the first part when Evelyn, Waymond, and Gong Gong are in the elevator at the IRS building (00:13:21). Waymond transforms into Alpha-Waymond and urges her to do as he tells her regarding the well-being of the multiverse. From here on out the plot turns toward action tropes with sci-fi elements. This change marks the end of the first act and the beginning of the second act. The second act is the overamplified expression of Evelyn and Joy's relationship as mother and daughter as well as Waymond and Evelyn as husband and wife. Through, various pastiches, trope aversions-subversions, and deliveries we arrive at the climax. All films, or rather all dramatic stories, may be divided into three or five parts. The classic three-act structure was first analyzed by Aristotle in *Poetics* where he described a dramatic plot as: "A whole is something that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is an item that does not itself follow necessarily upon something else, but which has some second item following necessarily upon it" (Aristotle, 1450b27, 2013). In the three-act structure, there are two major plot points in a screenplay that push the story forward (Field, p. 86, 2005). The first one is roughly toward the end of the first act and the second plot point is right before the third act. However, the classical three-act structure is mostly the simplified version of Freytag's five-act structure which is based on Shakespeare's plays. So it is important to note that when modern Hollywood screenwriters talk about three acts they are speaking of Freytag's five acts with two of the acts used as "plot points" as we can see from Freytag's work *Die Technik des Dramas*: "It rises from the introduction with the entrance of the exciting forces to the *climax*, and falls from here to the *catastrophe*. Between these three parts lie (the parts of) the *rise* and *fall*. Each of these five parts may consist of a single scene or a succession of connected scenes, but the climax is usually composed of one chief scene" (Freytag, p. 114-5,

³ All timecode references will be to the same film; therefore, the title will be omitted henceforth.

1900). The first plot point determines the motivation of the protagonist, and we can say that this happens in the first elevator scene without a doubt. This scene pushes our protagonist to make a decision, perhaps a late coming “call to adventure” as Joseph Campbell would put it (Campbell, 2004). The second plot point is when Alpha-Gong Gong tries to shoot Joy/Jobu and Evelyn refuses which prompts her to verse-jump to the limit to become like Jobu herself. The climax is when Evelyn, Jobu, and her aides fight in the Thetaverse IRS building and ends when Evelyn and Jobu visit different universes together while having both a physical and a verbal fight that ends with them hugging it out after Evelyn’s monologue that declares everything nonsense (02:05:30). This monologue is the end of an action-packed climax, or rather the resolution of the climax, and it relies on Evelyn genuinely sharing her feelings to Joy.

From this summary of the plot structure of the film, we see that it is unbalanced more towards action and visuals that are made of alternate versions of the characters in other universes as well as their past choices. The director duo Daniels, as they refer to themselves, took a classical dramatic story archetype and presented it in a way that would only be fitting to express as something out of an ADHD mind. Just as we hit the first part we are slapped in the face with new information or a new interpretation of an established character trope with a new spin, only to reiterate it further. This is done with the use of memes, and references to other pop culture media, and the film is not concerned with whether the audience will get a certain reference. We now enter the realm of the *style*, and it is appropriate that we define it within the scope of this article. Noël Carroll defines formal style as: “...the concept of style can be applied to so many different kinds of things and at so many different levels of generality. One might use “style” to refer to whole periods of filmmaking, speaking, for example, of the German Expressionist style, or Hollywood studio style in the thirties. Or one might apply the concept of style to the work of a particular filmmaker’s oeuvre...” (Carroll, p. 385, 1998).

Carroll further divides style into general style, personal style, and the style or form of the individual film (Carroll, pp. 385-6, 1998). He, then, refers to four “subclasses” of general style, which are universal, period, genre, and school or movement (p. 386, 1998). As we attempt to do in this paper: “...the examination of the style or form of the individual film is usually subordinated to frameworks that conceptualize the style or form of the individual film as exemplary of something else...” (p. 388, 1998). Now we must try and see if we can gather the formal functions and the style used to present them in *EEAAO*.

The style that Daniels have chosen to utilize in the film can be described as a combination of postmodernist, remix culture, hyperlink, maximalist, and pop culture reference cinema as mentioned in various newspapers and journals⁴. These reviews in the newspapers, though not always dependable from an academic standpoint are mostly correct regarding the way this film is stylized. Even though the concept of postmodernism is quite a slippery slope, especially about works of art on the brink of commercial and arthouse industries (Kretzschmar, 2018), there is something in the way the film is constructed that belongs to the world or general whereabouts of the cultures and subcultures that appeared through or as a result of the postmodernism debate. One of these is, as mentioned, the use of “hyperlinks,” a term coined by Alissa Quart referring to *Happy Endings* (2005):

Happy Endings could serve as proof for the currently fashionable theory that we shouldn’t worry that our web-based, video-game-loving culture is dumbing us down. Watching *Happy Endings*, you too can conclude, as some of our brightest young pundits have, that multitask entertainment actually makes us sharper. If this is true, the new genre *Happy Endings* belongs to—hyperlink cinema—could be the most iq-enhancing of all. (Alissa Quart, 2005)

In *EEAAO* we do not see a straightforward multi-plot approach, rather the single plot is presented within a slowly shattering multiverse with occasional to extreme verse-jumping. This creates plots within plots naturally with the demand of the subject matter. The alternate universes where characters are going through a completely different story and plotline, are mixed into the film timeline in flashbacks and flashforwards or sometimes as in-

⁴ See (“How Everything Everywhere All At Once Bridges the Gap Between Summer Blockbusters and Arthouse Cinema,” n.d.); (“Everything Everywhere All At Once Review: A Multiverse Epic | Digital Trends,” n.d.); (“‘Everything Everywhere All at Once’ Review: It’s Messy, and Glorious - The New York Times,” n.d.); (Zufelt, 2022)

serts and montage sequences. These inserts are not only out of context most of the time but refer to points in the plot either emotionally or physically. For example, the relationship between Evelyn and Deirdre in the hotdog-fingers universe is shown as an inside joke throughout the film as a result of Evelyn being forced to meaningfully tell Thetaverse-Deirdre that she loves her before these inserts (00:42:00). This style is reminiscent of how memes are formed, joked about, and become parodies of their own making naturally within the world of the internet which is quite similar to how a parody itself forms as described by Bakhtin CITATION. Additionally, the film can also be considered maximalist because of the amount of information and detail that is constantly thrown on the screen, almost every shot includes a reference to either diegetic or extra-diegetic information (Zufelt, 2022). These include, but are not limited to, The Matrix, Michelle Yeoh's career, meta ending of *Paprika* (2006), projectionist gag from *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), *Ratatouille* (2007), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Data's gadget belt in *The Goonies* (1985) played by the same actor who plays Waymond, Ke Huy Quan, *Rick and Morty* (2013) alternate universe goggles, slow motion scenes and costumes in In the *Mood for Love* (2001), the lyrics to "Absolutely (Story of a Girl)" by Nine Days, Elvis Presley and Tupac costumes worn by Jobu Tupaki, *Kill Bill* (2003) and other Hong Kong Kung Fu films, Super Mario Bros. games and films, yin and yang in bagels and googly eyes, co-director Daniel Scheinert in the dominatrix scene (Izay, 2022). As we can see from these examples, not only is the film full of pop culture references and self-references but it is also filled with popular tropes.

Trope comes from the Greek word *τρόπος* and literally means "a turn, direction, course, way, manner, fashion, habit" (Liddell et al., 1889) and the concept is used in film theory referring to a technique:

'Trope' is itself a trope; without explaining, it designates meaning as being augmented in certain ways. What is the tropical technique, then? Generally speaking, tropes can be defined as preset hypotheses that give rise to abductive inferences. It does not say much that 'parts of speech' enter into a tropical relation so that any part tropically changes the meaning of other parts. The synecdoche 'at the threshold of the century' does not change the meaning of 'threshold,' but does augment its meaning. (Ehrat, p. 441, 2005)

This technique is present in all literary and dramatic arts and film and television, especially in popular films with a cult following, they are used extensively. The internet is home to a website with such a focus that began from a similar cult following of the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and turned into what we know as the website "tv tropes" (TV Tropes, n.d.), a website where one can find the trope listings of any type of media from tv shows to games and, of course, films (*Behind The Wiki*, 2010). One may find the following examples of tropes within the EEAAO film that also relate to all the so-called "postmodern" *hyperlink* references that we have mentioned: *Abusive Parents* [Gong Gong is disappointed in Evelyn, Alpha-Evelyn pushed Joy into becoming evil, and Evelyn is emotionally distant], *Alternate Universe* [this is a general trope encompassing all things alternate universe or multiverse], *Ambiguous Ending* [it is not clear which universe we end up in], *The Anti-Nihilist* [Waymond's speech in the second act is an example of this trope where "nothing makes sense but we can still love" type of thinking as opposed to Jobu's *Straw Nihilist* view], *Arc Symbol* [the black circle indicating the "everything bagel," the googly eyes symbolizing yin-yang], *Chekhov's Gag* [the hotdog universe is an example, it seems like a passing joke but keeps coming back, similar to how Chekhov's Gun works with guns shown on screen], *Existential Horror* [similar to existential crisis to an extreme degree], *Genre Mashup* [self-explanatory with sci-fi, action, family drama, comedy all mixed together], *Shout-Out* [related to the idea of *hyperlink cinema*, instead of full blown homages the film gives a "shout out" so to say], *Subverted Trope* [this trope gives the audience a signal in a certain direction but ends up being something else, for example the fighter Alpha-Waymond is expected to save the day but instead he abandons the fight and original Waymond takes over with his loving ways], *You Are Not Alone* [this is the whole theme of the film and we can see it in almost every character arc] (TV Tropes, "Everything Everywhere All at Once"). These are just one of the few tropes that the film utilizes but tropes when noticed by the audience work like a meme or a pop culture reference where it satisfies the viewer in a way that keeps their attention in line. Compared to minimalist films EEAAO has a plethora of tropes and they all either relate to one another or work together to form a different trope or some are averted, subverted, or completely avoided. The complexity in the narrative form is enough to determine that this film is a maximalist work in the end. The fact that the tropes work as such also works towards how the stylistic choices are presented to us, especially through the use of editing.

2.2. Editing Style

Speaking of the film's editing will take us closer to why we have chosen to compare the experience of watching *TikTok* videos to a film such as this. The way the tropes are interwoven together and especially the use of *Genre Mashup* and tons of *Shout-Outs* we see lots of variety in terms of the style of the film. There is certainly a constant way that the actors are blocked, and the way scenes are lit and designed however with every wink or hyperlink to another work or a genre we see the cinematography and set design changing and editing helping with such changes.

Then, how could we analyze the style of editing in this film? *EEAAO* deliberately ignores or twists the classical editing conventions both at critical and non-critical transitional points in the film. This is made overtly clear right from the beginning as the first shot is cut into the second. The first shot shows us a room most likely at night, the camera dollies in on a make-up mirror that shows Waymond, Evelyn, and Joy doing karaoke as mentioned before. As the musical tension rises and we come closer to the mirror, a sudden cut takes us to daytime and shows the ceiling of the dining room immediately flicks down to show the dining room table as we hear a door closing. The camera continues its movement as we go through it to see Evelyn walking toward the table and sitting down. We realize from this movement that we were looking at a mirror on the opposite side of the living room that opens into the dining room area where the table is. This table could be one of the anchors in the Wang family apartment above their laundromat business that we come back to at the beginning of every part. The first part titled "EVERYTHING" begins right after a prologue as mentioned before at the 00:12:09 mark. The second part titled "EVERYWHERE" is at the 01:28:12 mark and begins the second act of the film. The third part titled "ALL AT ONCE" is at the 02:10:27 mark and marks the. It's always a similar shot with a few variations. For example, the first part shot is preceded by a high-angle shot that shows Evelyn from the back with her head out of focus and the receipts on the table in focus. In the next shot, we see Waymond's action from the previous shot where he picks up the cookies from the table. This shot is the reverse of the previous one and completely goes over the opposite side of the axis of action. Gong Gong is eating noodles on the left side of the frame now and Evelyn is framed right in the middle with a wide headspace facing toward the camera. Waymond talks to Evelyn but she ignores him. The second part shot begins with Evelyn's screams from the previous fast cuts showing different versions of her. The camera slowly dollies out from Evelyn hyperventilating with a receipt in her hand. Waymond asks her if she is okay, but she ignores him and says "I did it" referring to the fact that she verse-jumped to where she wanted to be. This time Waymond walks out of the frame from the left after the camera ends its movement and we see Evelyn sitting at the table facing the camera. The next shot is from the reverse, opposite of the axis of action showing Evelyn's hand as she tries to put the receipt that Deirdre drew a circle on. She cannot decide on which side she should put the receipt on. This results in two alternate timelines with the receipt on the left side of the screen and with the same receipt in another timeline on the right side of the screen. The screen is cut from the middle with a "broken glass" effect with a vibration that precedes it. This is most likely a reference to the *Rick and Morty* episode "A Rickle in Time" done only with a ray of light or a laser as opposed to the broken lens effect ("Rick and Morty:"). The next is again a wide shot showing the whole dining area with a high headspace, showing Evelyn with both empty hands on the table. The third part shot begins with Evelyn holding the same receipt that Deirdre circled in her hand. Joy is heard outside the frame as Evelyn puts the receipt right in the middle of the table in front of her. The next shot is from the opposite side of the axis of action and begins with a wide angle with the camera very slowly dolling reverse. Joy is on the right, Gong Gong is sitting on the left, Evelyn is in the middle of her usual spot looking at Joy, and Waymond is picking up receipts from the table in between Gong Gong and Evelyn. This shot which marks the beginning of the end of the film is the only one in that Evelyn acknowledges someone talking and looking at them, and this someone is Joy who was absent from the previous ones. As we can see from brief descriptions of these shots the cuts, shots, and framings have slight variations along with things slightly different in the mise-en-scène as well. These changes all signify the changes between the acts or parts themselves. One of the most obvious ones as mentioned is the fact that Evelyn does not acknowledge anyone around her in all of the shots except the last. This shows that there has been a change of character within the film. This change is not only shown through actors but through camera movement and editing as well.

In editing, a single shot is not enough of an indicator on its own, because what makes the meaning of the shot is also dependent on the shot that precedes and succeeds it as well. We can see how important it is regarding the story of the film when we look at these three similar parts. As suggested by neoformalists mentioned

before, unity and disunity in the form of a film are quite vital to the emergence of meaning that is presented to the audience. The first act division that we see, for example, is preceded by Joy crying while driving her car after her encounter with Evelyn, Gong Gong, and her girlfriend. The second part is preceded by Evelyn screaming in all the multiverse. The third part is preceded by Joy and Evelyn hugging. The shift in the emotional tone of the film is also a trope named *Cerebus Syndrome*. The first part is filled with more action and comic tropes as opposed to the more melancholic second part (tvtropes.org, “Everything Everywhere All at Once.”).

The disunity found around unified patterns is seen again in the cuts that ignore the 180-degree or the axis of action rule as mentioned before. The important thing here is to try and notice when these cuts happen. Of course, interpretations based on stylistic choices are not always straightforward, these choices may have been made depending on a certain visual aim or they may have been completely random or instinctual. Luckily, it is not important to us whether they had any preemptive goal, it only matters that they are there and apparent to the one who views the work. Since we are discussing how the final work itself appears to us rather than the reasons behind it as they are more often than not elusive sometimes even to the artist themselves. One of these cuts, as mentioned before, is when Evelyn walks down to the laundromat and opens the door to see Joy and Becky in front of the washing machines. The first is a medium close-up two-shot with Becky on the left and Joy on the right (00:03:27). The next shot is a medium shot of Evelyn with Joy and Becky out of focus in the foreground with the camera on the other side of the axis. In this shot, we see Joy on the left, Becky on the right, and Evelyn in the middle. It is not difficult to how such a cut and framing reflects the tension between them and Evelyn. Another axis jump is seen in the scene where Evelyn and Joy are cooking noodles upstairs and Evelyn says “he” instead of “she” (00:04:22). First, we see the noodles in a close-up tracking right motivated with Evelyn’s movement facing the camera. The next shot is a dolly in a medium shot from the opposite side of the kitchen, we see Joy on the right and Evelyn on the left facing away from the camera. Just as Joy says “Becky’s a she”, we see a cut to a medium close-up with Evelyn on the right and Joy on the left, panning as Evelyn moves behind Joy to the left. Considering the swiftness of the dialogue, the cuts, and the smooth camera movements that are motivated by Evelyn’s movements the only disparaging thing we see are framings and the order of the shots that disregard the axis of action. Not only are we feeling the tension in the scene with the actors’ movements, mimics, and facial expressions but with the way the cuts are placed.

On the other hand, we see that a static camera is also used and cuts between similar framings with Evelyn framed right in the center (01:33:59). The shots are cut slowly in the beginning exponentially getting faster and faster. This montage sequence begins with a shot of the “everything bagel” which is then cut into an extreme close-up of Evelyn’s eye. This transition is a classical graphic match cut that matches the shape of the bagel to the shape of Evelyn’s eyeball and finally, her face repeated in different settings. Counting from the “everything bagel” (01:33:55) to the extreme close-up eye shot, there are 31 shots, in ten seconds which means that the average shot length (ASL) of this particular scene is 0.31. Compared to the opening, which is 00:00:21. Here, we can see that, though the camera is static, the backgrounds and the cuts are quickly changing which is an example of the many variations in editing that we see in the film.

Considering the immense amount of shot combinations that are used in the film it would be quite difficult to include all of them here. However, we believe that with the examples above, given the nature of the film and the narrative form, the editing style draws inspiration from countless media with even more references big and small, it is not too far-fetched to close in on a connection between what we have described regarding the experience of using TikTok and the experience of watching such a film as *EEAAO*.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when we look at a film like *EEAAO* we can immediately recognize formal and stylistic aspects that are reminiscent of the short-form video boom in various social media platforms and applications with TikTok in particular. This is true because describing such a film as a “postmodern” or a “metamodern” film is not sufficient and misses a lot of what the film offers. On the one hand, this film is a maximalist and postmodernist dream utilizing many styles, changing and twisting tropes and conventions in various imaginative ways. On the other hand, we are left with asking ourselves what aim such a film serves. Of course, a work of art, and in this case a film is not *required* in any way to serve a certain aim or purpose whatsoever, but it is still a relevant question that

might help us declutter all the things we are shown to reveal something hidden within. However, we are yet to reach such a conclusion with the use of formal analysis. This might be because either such an approach is not fitting for this particular film, or a deeper analysis is needed to decode all that is shown to us within the work. This seems quite impossible in an article format, however, might be useful as wider research. What we can certainly conclude without a doubt is that TikTok and other short-form video platforms inspire new ways of making films that go beyond the, now classical, postmodern style. This is vital to study as, even though, our paper might not be showing the full picture enough there is, indeed, something to see in these films beyond all the quirky characters and funny memes that make the audience feel involved. All we could have done at this point was to present *what* and *how* things are shown in this film and not *why*, firstly because it is, as mentioned before, such an elusive concept to consider, and secondly because it would be better suited for a philosophical approach that is outside the scope of this paper.

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