
Research Article

Received: 17/05/2026; Accepted: 21/05/2026; Published: 21/05/2026

**Scientific Symbols in The Movie *Everything Everywhere All at Once*
(2022)**

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Abstract

This research analyzes the scientific symbols in the movie *Everything Everywhere All at Once* and their contribution to the development of the main character, Evelyn Wang. The study aims to identify the types of scientific symbols presented in the film and explain how these symbols function in shaping Evelyn's emotional and psychological transformation. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, focusing on the classification of signs into icons, indexes, and symbols through the elements of representamen, object, and interpretant. The data were collected from dialogues, screenshots, and visual scenes in the movie through observation and note-taking techniques. The findings show that the film contains various scientific symbols categorized into physical models, conceptual models, and procedural models based on Justi and Gilbert's theory. The symbols identified include the Verse-Jumping Headset, Googly Eyes, Multiverse Glitch, Everything Bagel, Memory Scanner, and Multiverse Timeline. Each symbol not only represents scientific concepts related to the multiverse but also reflects Evelyn's emotional journey, inner conflict, identity crisis, acceptance, and understanding of life. The study reveals that scientific symbols in the film function as narrative tools that deepen the philosophical and emotional meaning of the story. Furthermore, the research highlights how science fiction elements can be integrated with human experiences to create meaningful storytelling. Therefore, this study concludes that scientific symbols play an important role in enriching character development and helping audiences understand complex themes such as existence, family relationships, and the search for meaning in life.

Keywords: scientific symbols; physical model; conceptual model; procedural model; character development

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14710/ca.v10i2.32217>



1. Introduction

Symbol is a sign, image, word, or object that stands for a broader and more abstract concept or idea (Danesi, 2004). It functions as a medium of communication that conveys meaning indirectly, rather than through literal expression. According to Dillistone (2002), a symbol is a concrete word, object, action, event, pattern, or person that represents, describes, or conveys something deep and abstract. Symbols have emotive powers that stimulate action and play a universal role in human life.

The use of symbols in literature, in the world of science symbols are also known as scientific symbols. The classification of science according to Peirce (1931) is divided into three main divisions, namely branches, classes, and orders. In this structure, sciences of discovery occupy the topmost

position because they are the basis for other branches of science. For example, engineering depends on theoretical results from mathematics and physics, while medicine depends on chemistry, physiology, and biology. This classification shows that the sciences are interconnected, and from each of these branches of science come various scientific symbols that have an important function in conveying scientific concepts (Liszka, 1996).

In this context, scientific symbols can be understood as forms of symbolization used to represent scientific concepts, such as chemical element symbols, mathematical notations, or scientific models. Just like the use of symbols in literary works, scientific symbols also serve to convey complex information in a simpler and easier-to-understand form. When these scientific symbols are used in literature or film, their function is not only limited to scientific aspects, but can also enrich the meaning of the narrative (Kirby, 2003). These symbols can describe inner conflicts, character development, and existential crises experienced by the main character. In understanding how scientific symbols are used in the work, it is important to review the concept of symbol itself. According to Danesi (2017), symbols are part of the human meaning system that enables the conveyance of complex ideas through simple, recognizable forms. Scientific symbols are of several types, based on their function and field. common types of scientific symbols include mathematical, chemical, physical, and technological symbols.

Semiotics examines how signs function and creates meaning (Yuwono and Crishtomy 2004; Tinarbuko, 2008). This theory was mainly developed by Peirce and Saussure. Peirce (1931) classified signs into icons, indexes, and symbols, emphasizing that signs are essential in human thought, while Saussure (1983) introduced the concepts of signifier and signified, explaining that meaning is formed through social agreement and language. Later, Barthes (1977) expanded this theory by introducing denotation and connotation, showing that signs can contain both literal and cultural meanings. In addition, Van Zoest (1993) stated that semiotics studies the relationship between signs, their functions, and the process of meaning-making. Overall, semiotics helps people understand how signs operate in language, culture, media, and communication.

Scientific symbols are symbolic representations used to communicate important scientific concepts in a concise and standardized way across different disciplines. One form of scientific symbol is the scientific model, which refers to a simplified representation of complex real-world phenomena used to explain, predict, and understand aspects of nature and technology. According to Justi and Gilbert (2002) state that scientific models are tools that help people understand difficult scientific concepts through simplified representations such as diagrams, formulas, or simulations. They also classify scientific models into three main types: physical, conceptual, and procedural models, each serving different scientific purposes., while Carl Craver (2006) explains that models become explanatory when they describe mechanisms. In addition, Knuuttila et al. (2025), scientific models help represent complex phenomena.

One movie that contains scientific symbols is *Everything Everywhere all at once* (2022). *Everything everywhere all at once* is a sci-fi film directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert released in 2022. The film highlights the journey of Evelyn Wang, a Chinese- American woman whose life is filled with economic pressure, family conflicts, and a sense of confusion about her identity. However, Evelyn's life changes when she is drawn into the multiverse, where she experiences different versions of herself in other worlds. From here, the story develops into who we really are if we have so many possible versions of ourselves. The excellence of this movie is not only seen from its unique storyline and interesting visuals, but this movie successfully incorporates scientific elements as symbols in presenting emotions and main characters. One of the most iconic scientific symbols in the film is the black bagel, which initially symbolizes the emptiness and despair experienced by Joy.

However, as Evelyn's character develops, the meaning of the symbol changes to represent acceptance, understanding, and emotional bonds from those closest to her. Chandler (2007) mentions that the meaning of symbols is never absolute, it is shaped by the context and experience of the reader or viewer. It is also what makes this film highly appreciated internationally, its success is evident from

winning seven Oscar awards at the 2023 Academy Awards, including the Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress, Best Editing, Best Supporting Actor, Best Supporting Actress, and Best Original Screenplay categories. The combination of scientific approach, emotional value, and the use of symbols that evolve along with the development of the characters makes this film very relevant to analyze.

Several previous studies have discussed symbolism in films using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, especially in analyzing icons, indexes, and symbols found in visual media. Everything Everywhere All at Once was analyzed by Vania and Grahita (2024), who found that visual signs such as googly eyes and the Everything Bagel function as symbolic elements that strengthen the philosophical meaning of the story. Similarly, IT was studied by Joesoef and Adrallisman (2023), who identified various icons, indexes, and symbols representing fear and danger in the movie. Another related study by Pauzan (2018) on John Wick also applied Peirce's semiotic theory to reveal deeper meanings behind visual signs such as blood, cellphones, and church emblems. These studies show that semiotic analysis is effective in uncovering symbolic meanings in films through qualitative descriptive methods. In addition, Oktaviana and Nugroho (2025) examined elemental symbolism in Elemental and found that symbols of fire, water, earth, and air reflect human emotions and character relationships.

Although those previous studies share similarities with this research in using Peirce's semiotic approach, they mainly focus on identifying and classifying signs without exploring deeply how symbols influence character development. In contrast, this research focuses on scientific symbols and how symbols contribute to the transformation of the main character, Evelyn Wang. Furthermore, unlike previous studies, this research emphasizes themes of multiverse, identity, and existentialism, making the symbolic analysis more complex and narrative-oriented.

By doing this research, the author aims to explore how these scientific symbols form deeper meanings and contribute to the development of the characters in the story. Using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, this research explains how these symbols are not only representations of scientific concepts, but also key elements that deepen the emotional and philosophical themes in the narrative. Therefore, scientific symbols play a very important role in enriching the audience's experience, not only in understanding the scientific concepts raised, but also in exploring the universal themes to be conveyed. Overall, this research shows the importance of symbolic elements in enriching the audience's understanding of the movie and its broader meaning.

2. Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the role of scientific symbols in character development in Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022). A qualitative approach helps researchers understand meaning through interpretation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3). Similarly, Bogdan and Biklen (2007: 5) state that qualitative research is descriptive and focuses on human experiences through words, and symbols.

The data of this research is a movie with English subtitles. The main data source is the film Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022), which was written and directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert (the Daniels). The movie has a duration of approximately 139 minutes and was released on March 11, 2022, by A24 in the United States. It is available to watch on legal streaming platforms such as Prime Video and Apple TV. This research uses primary and secondary data from the movie and several source. The tool for this study is note-taking. According to Bailey (2008), note-taking is a method used in qualitative research to collect and organize data by writing down important information during observation or data collection. In this study, the researcher used tools such as pen and paper, notebooks, and handouts. To apply this tool, the researcher understands the material, identify the key elements, and write down or record relevant quotes, sentences, and phrases spoken by the main characters in selected scenes of the movie Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022). The researcher has watched the film for three times thoroughly to identify the scientific symbols and to analyze their role in the development of the main character, Evelyn Wang.

The procedure data collection is done in several steps, as follows: a) watching the movie and read the film script three times to understand the story, b) collecting data such as dialogues, screenshots, and visual elements, c) writing down important things in the movie Everything Everywhere All at Once, d) classifying the scientific symbols and analyzed their meanings related to character development, and e) analyzing each symbol to explain how the symbol contributes to the main character development in the movie. The data, then, is analyzed using descriptive analysis technique by applying Pierce theory.

3. Results and Discussion

In this part of the research, the writer presented the results of research about semiotic analysis of the film Everything Everywhere All at Once. After repeatedly and carefully watching the film, the author identified several scientific signs that appear in important scenes. These signs include icons, indexes, and symbols, and are classified based on Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory.

3.1. Physical Models

Physical models are models that can be touched and used directly. They have a clear and solid shape. Based on the film Everything Everywhere All at Once, two symbols that fall into this category are the Verse-Jumping Headset and Googly Eyes.

This scene takes place inside an elevator and continues into the hallway of the IRS building. At that moment, Evelyn feels confused as Alpha Waymond secretly puts on and activates the verse-jumping headset. Alpha Waymond uses the device to help Evelyn connect with another version of herself from a different universe. The verse-jumping headset is used at that time because Evelyn is about to face a sudden attack, and she needs new abilities to survive. This device allows Evelyn to temporarily access the skills of her other selves. This moment marks the first time Evelyn uses the headset, and it becomes the starting point of her journey through the multiverse, where she begins to transform into someone who can face the chaos ahead. This is the device placed on Evelyn's head when she travels to another universe. It is considered a physical model because it has a real shape, can be touched, and can be used directly by Evelyn.

This symbol can be called an icon because it looks like real digital devices we know in the real world. It also works as an index because when it is used, it directly connects to the action of jumping between universes. Besides that, it is also a symbol because it represents the idea of advanced technology that helps people travel through the multiverse even though the multiverse itself is not visible, we can understand what the headset is meant to do from how it is used.

Data 1



Figure 1. Scene in minute 00:13:41

Evelyn : What are you- Alpha
Waymond : You may be in grave danger. There is no time to explain. Hold this.

The sign structure includes the representamen (the visible form of the headset), the object (the technology for multiverse jumping), and the interpretant (our understanding that the headset is an important tool in the verse-jumping system).

Data 2



Figure 2. Scene in minute 0:07:10

Evelyn : I told you to take down all of the google eyes before tonight!
No more google eyes!

This scene shows Evelyn's rejection of the toy eyes called Googly Eyes that Waymond always sticks everywhere. The googly eyes first appear at the laundromat and later show up in the IRS hallway during a major chaotic moment. At first, Evelyn sees them as childish and annoying. However, Waymond uses them to calm himself and express his outlook on life. The googly eyes are used as a peaceful way to face the chaos, and they become a symbol of kindness in the middle of a stressful situation.

Googly eyes are round toy eyes that Waymond often sticks on various objects. Googly eyes are classified as physical models because they are real, small, and can be physically touched. This symbol can be considered an icon because its shape looks similar to real eyes, even though in a cartoonish version. It can also function as a symbol, because it represents Waymond's positive perspective, empathy, and love. This object becomes a sign that simple things can carry deep meaning in facing the chaos of life.

The structure of the sign includes the representamen (the visual form of the googly eyes), the object (a positive and empathetic view of life), and the interpretant (the understanding that this item reflects Waymond's way of seeing the world).

3.2 Conceptual Models

Conceptual models are models that explain abstract ideas or concepts through visuals or specific symbols. These models cannot be touched or used directly, but they can be visualized. In the movie *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, the symbols that belong to this category are the multiverse glitch and the everything bagel.

Data 3



Figure 3. Scene minute 00:18:48

In this scene Evelyn is sitting at the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) office when she starts to experience a strange sensation. Suddenly, her face appears duplicated and distorted, signaling the beginning of her connection with parallel universe. The glitch is triggered by the verse-jumping instructions given by Alpha Waymond in the Elevator moment earlier.

This symbol appears as a visual distortion, shown through double shadows on Evelyn's face. It is classified as a conceptual model because it represents a disturbance in reality that happens when Evelyn's consciousness shifts between universes. This symbol can be considered as an icon because it looks like a common digital glitch seen on screens. It also functions as an index because it always appears when Evelyn is connected to another universe. Finally, it works as a symbol because it marks the instability of reality. The structure of this sign includes the representamen (the visual glitch and double shadow), the object (the shift of consciousness between universes), and the interpretant (Evelyn's awareness that her perception of reality is starting to break).

This scene of Everything Bagel takes place in one of the alternate universes after Evelyn has become more skilled at verse jumping. The Everything Bagel first appears when Jobu Tupaki explains that she has created a giant bagel filled with everything in the universe. Jobu shows the bagel as a symbol of her despair, because she feels that nothing in the world has any meaning. The Everything Bagel represents the emptiness and void she feels. In this moment, Jobu invites Evelyn to enter the bagel with her, hoping it will put an end to all the confusion in the multiverse

Data 4



Figure 4. Scene in minute 1:00:06

- Evelyn : What is it?
Jobu : A bagel. I got bored one day. So I put EVERYTHING on a bagel. All of my hopes and dreams. My old report cards. Every breed of dog. Every last personal ad on craigslist. Sesame. Poppy seed. Salt. And it collapsed in on itself. When you really put everything on a bagel, it becomes this. The truth.

The everything bagel is considered a conceptual model because it represents the idea of emptiness and chaos. The large black bagel with a hole in the middle is an icon because it looks like a black hole. It also serves as an index by signaling destruction across the multiverse, and it becomes a symbol as it represents emptiness and nothingness. Its structure includes the representamen (the black bagel), the object (the concept of emptiness and nothingness), and the interpretant (Evelyn's understanding that the bagel represents destruction).

3.3 Procedural Models

Procedural models are models that illustrate steps, processes, or systems involved in a scientific concept. The symbols that fall into this category are the Memory Scanner and the Multiverse Timeline.

Data 5

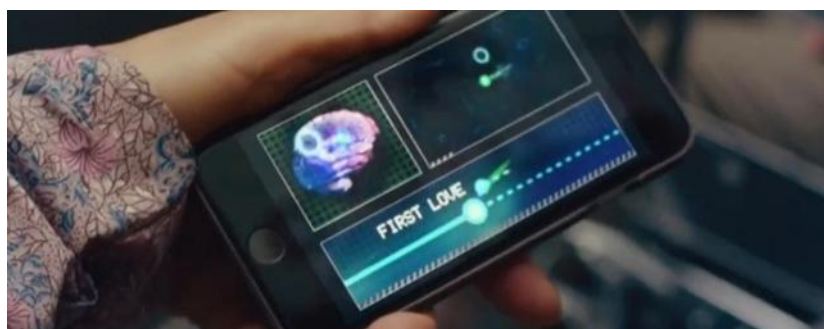


Figure 5. Scene in minute 00.32.28

This scene happens when Evelyn is inside the IRS building elevator with Alpha Waymond. At that time, Evelyn is still confused about all the strange things happening to her. In the middle of her confusion, Waymond puts a headset on her head, and a transparent screen appears. On the screen, fragments of Evelyn's past memories ones she had forgotten are shown. The memory scanner is a tool used to access Evelyn's memories from different universes. This tool becomes a symbol that represents the beginning of Evelyn's understanding of how she is connected to all her other versions.

The Memory Scanner in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is categorized as a procedural model because it shows a process or sequence of steps in the verse-jumping system. This device is shown as a transparent screen that displays Evelyn's memories. Its function is to search for emotional moments that can be used as triggers to help Evelyn jump into another universe.

This symbol can be seen as an icon because its form looks like a digital scanning device. It also acts as an index because it directly points to specific memories needed for the jump. Lastly, it functions as a symbol because it represents the idea that emotions and memories are essential parts of the verse-jumping process. The structure of the sign includes the representamen (the visual display of the scanning device), the object (the process of finding Evelyn's memories), and the interpretant (the understanding that memories play an important role in traveling between universes).

Data 6



Figure 6. Scene in minute 0:42:21

In that situation, Waymond explains the basic concept of the multiverse by showing a branching diagram on his verse-jumping device screen. The diagram shows that every choice can trigger the creation of an alternate universe with its own path. Evelyn's timeline is shown branching out from one point into many possibilities, indicating that there are many versions of Evelyn living different lives. This tool becomes a symbol that helps Evelyn understand that reality has endless branches, and it also marks the starting point of how she begins to see life differently.

The multiverse timeline is a diagram that illustrates how universes branch out from every decision made. This symbol is categorized as a procedural model because it shows the process by which alternate universes are formed based on the choices made by Evelyn. In the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, this symbol is visualized as a branching timeline to explain how Evelyn shifts between universes and creates new realities. This symbol can be classified as an icon because the diagram resembles a branching line typically used in graphs or mind maps. It also functions as a symbol because the audience understands that each branch represents different choices and alternative realities. The structure of the sign in this symbol includes the representamen (the visual of the branching lines or timeline), the object (the mechanism of multiverse creation), and the interpretant (the understanding that each universe is created from the choices made).

Everything Everywhere All at Once is not just seen in terms of the visual elements, but it plays an important role in supporting the emotional journey of the main character, Evelyn Wang. Each symbol reflects Evelyn's inner state and personal growth throughout the film. At first, Evelyn is a mother stuck in a monotonous life, overwhelmed by her daily routines. But as the story goes on, she becomes someone who understands her own existence within the reality of the multiverse, marked by the appearance of these symbols in key moments. These symbols are not isolated they are connected and help shape Evelyn's new awareness of herself, her family, and the universe around her. In other words, each scientific symbol has an impact on Evelyn's development in terms of her thoughts, emotions, and actions.

Evelyn's journey began when she was introduced to the Verse Jumping Headset by Alpha Waymond. This device allowed her to travel between universes and became the first doorway into the multiverse. At first, the verse-jumping headset left Evelyn feeling confused and scared, unable to understand what was happening. She still clung to her reality in the ordinary world, full of pressures tax problems, running the laundromat, a husband who seemed distant, and her strained relationship with her daughter. But her curiosity pushed her to follow the steps given to her, and she began to realize that

the reality she knew was only one of many possibilities she could access. This marked the starting point of Evelyn's transformation from disbelief and doubt to slowly opening herself to something new.

From here, Evelyn's steps in the multiverse continued. To help her see a bigger picture, Alpha Waymond introduced the Memory Scanner a screen that displayed Evelyn's memories from the past, including moments she had forgotten about her father, her husband, and her daughter. The memory scanner didn't just show her past memories, but also lives in other universes she could have lived like being an actress, a chef, a singer, and even a rock. Evelyn began to realize that she had been too focused on searching for the meaning of life from the outside, when in fact, meaning had always been around her. At this point, regret started to sink in she felt there were too many precious things she had ignored. The memory scanner became the first sign of her shift: from focusing on "what she didn't have" to appreciating what had always been there. And in that moment, Evelyn slowly began to learn.

However, the journey was not always smooth. After seeing so many possible lives through the memory scanner, her jumps from one universe to another started to get messy. In the middle of this confusion, she experienced a Multiverse Glitch a situation where the jumps became unstable and uncontrollable. This made her lose her sense of direction, start doubting who she really was, and lose her grip on reality. The multiverse glitch symbolized the deep inner conflict within Evelyn. She was overwhelmed by all versions of herself and didn't know which one to be. At this stage, Evelyn was on the verge of giving up. But from this chaos, she slowly began to understand that she didn't have to choose just one version of herself she could accept them all as part of who she is. The multiverse glitch became the turning point, shifting her from rejection and confusion toward acceptance of all possibilities.

In the middle of her despair, Alpha Waymond tried to bring her back by showing the Multiverse Timeline a branching diagram that showed how every small decision created a new reality. This wasn't just a scientific visual of the multiverse, but an emotional one too, helping Evelyn understand that her current life wasn't bad it was simply the result of all the choices she had made. At this point, Evelyn slowly began to make peace with her life as it was. She realized that her version living in a small apartment and running a laundromat was no less meaningful than her other, more "successful" versions in other universes. The multiverse timeline helped Evelyn understand that there's no right or wrong path in life it's all just the consequences of her own choices.

Her journey didn't end there Evelyn's biggest challenge actually came from someone closest to her own daughter, Joy. Who in another universe became Jobu Tupaki and created the darkest symbol called the Everything Bagel. This bagel became a representation of emptiness, void, nihilism, and the loss of life's meaning. At first, Evelyn was tempted to step into the Bagel, feeling that everything she had done in her life was pointless. However, when faced with this choice, she no longer saw Joy as a threat, but as someone who needed to be understood.

Evelyn's perspective shifted when she remembered Waymond and the small object she often saw him sticking around. Something she once considered annoying turned out to be the symbol of her turning point Googly Eyes. She now saw them as a symbol of love and acceptance, which made her a softer, more present, more accepting person, and no longer as stubborn as before. In the end, Evelyn did not emerge as a multiverse hero, but as a wife, a mother, and an individual who had become more open.

Through the scientific symbols shown throughout the film, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* doesn't just portray the multiverse as a fantasy in science fiction, but also uses it as a way to explore deeper themes like the meaning of life, the search for identity, and human relationships. In Evelyn's journey, science is not just presented as a technical tool to explain how she moves between universes—

it also works as a bridge that connects scientific concepts with deep emotions and complex inner experiences.

Symbols such as the Verse Jumping Headset, Googly Eyes, Multiverse Timeline, Multiverse Glitch, Everything Bagel, and Memory Scanner represent abstract ideas like emptiness, inner conflict, and acceptance, but are visualized in a way that feels real and easy for the audience to understand. This approach makes ideas that might seem too abstract or distant feel closer and more relatable, allowing the audience to not only understand the concept but also feel its emotional impact through the character's development.

The use of these scientific symbols also shows how science can play a significant role in character development. Each symbol Evelyn encounters is not only a tool that helps her navigate through the multiverse, but also a turning point that makes her reflect on her regrets, failures, and the choices she has made in life. In other words, these symbols serve a double purpose: as elements in the story world and as markers of Evelyn's psychological and emotional transformation.

In the end, the film shows that science can make something feel believable, even when it sounds impossible. What truly matters here is not the scientific accuracy, but how science and its symbols can help someone believe in themselves, in the people they love, and in life itself—just as Evelyn Wang experiences. This understanding emphasizes that in storytelling, science is not only used to explain phenomena, but also to connect big ideas with deeply personal human experiences, creating a story that is relevant, emotional, and meaningful.

This perspective also highlights how this research stands apart from previous studies in the same area. For example, Vania & Grahita (2024) highlight visual signs such as the Googly Eyes and Everything Bagel as symbolic elements, but do not directly relate them to the main character's development. Joesoef & Adrallisman (2023) and Pauzan (2018) focus more on classifying signs within the horror and action genres without exploring their influence on character transformation. Meanwhile, Oktaviana & Nugroho (2025) examine natural symbols in character formation, but not in the context of scientific symbols. By comparison, this study bridges that gap by combining the classification of scientific models (Justi & Gilbert) with Peirce's semiotic analysis to reveal how each scientific symbol not only functions within the story world but also drives Evelyn Wang's psychological and emotional transformation.

4. Conclusions

Based on the analysis in this research, the researcher concludes that the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* presents various scientific symbols that are not just visual elements, but also serve as meaningful tools that support the character development of the main character, Evelyn Wang. Symbols such as the Verse Jumping Headset, Memory Scanner, Googly Eyes, Everything Bagel, Multiverse Timeline, and Multiverse Glitch have been successfully classified into three types of scientific models: physical models, conceptual models, and procedural models.

Using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach, these symbols were analyzed through the elements of representamen, object, and interpretant, and categorized as icons, indexes, or symbols. The results show that each symbol represents different emotional phases that Evelyn experiences throughout her multiverse journey. These symbols appear during key moments in the film and reflect her inner conflict, regret, acceptance, and love. In other words, the scientific symbols in this film are not just visual signs, but act as bridges that help the audience understand Evelyn's emotional and personal growth on a deeper level.

Overall, the film successfully shows that science and scientific symbols can be powerful storytelling tools to express human values and the search for meaning in life. Because of that, Everything Everywhere All at Once is not only visually stunning and full of unique ideas, but also emotionally touching and thought-provoking for the audience

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who have supported and contributed to the completion of this study. The author also sincerely appreciates all those whose contributions, both directly and indirectly, have helped make the completion of this study possible.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author(s) Contribution

The corresponding author is the sole contributor to this manuscript, including the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and writing of the study.

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