

Visual Effects Analysis in Building Messages Through Sequence in Anti-Hero Music Video

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ABSTRACT

Visual effects are image manipulation and the creation of illusions from shooting that lead the audience to see the illusion of reality in the scenes. Visual effects can dramatize scenes so that messages can be conveyed to the audience. Thus, visual effects that are created in the right context could enhance the overall story. "Anti-Hero" is a music video that tells a story about nightmares and disturbances in the mind that change situations in real life. As a director and songwriter, Taylor Swift used visual effects to dramatize the scene through narrative point, so that messages of song's lyric could be conveyed to the audience. This study was conducted to discuss the application of visual effects in building messages through the story stage in the music video "Anti-Hero". This research used qualitative method with purposive sampling approach. The theory used is the theory of visual effects proposed by Eran Dinur. The study was conducted by describing the sequence, song lyrics, and types of visual effects applied from director and songwriter's point of view. From the results of the study, it can be concluded that there is an application of visual effects in the form of morphing, cloning, and giant effects that occur throughout the music video. The application of morphing shows the unreal world and wounds experienced by Taylor at the beginning of the story. The clone effect shows the different nature or "anti-hero" of Taylor Swift. The giant effect shows a different nature in size, making Taylor isolated from those around her. Taylor Swift, as both director and songwriter, utilized visual effects to convey profound messages from the lyric of her song through the narrative of each scene. Swift's storytelling prowess extends beyond mere narrative planning, as she skillfully integrates various visual effects to enhance the impact of her lyrics. By employing diverse characters, both "good" and "bad Taylor", with distinct characteristics within her surreal world, Taylor elevates her storytelling to new heights. The seamless integration of visual effects throughout the sequences ensures that the song's lyrics are effectively conveyed, creating a cohesive and immersive experience for the audience.

Keywords: visual, effects, music, video, anti-hero

INTRODUCTION

Film is a series of visual images and audio displayed on a screen (Sanjaya, 2024). Film is also used as an entertainment medium that can attract the attention of the audience (Sanjaya, 2023a). Through a film, a message is conveyed so that it can educate people (Sanjaya, 2023c). Film has various supporting elements in it, namely narrative or story elements and cinematic elements (Sanjaya & Marian, 2023).

One of the areas that is impacted by the development of technology is computer graphics, where there is the application of visual effects that can be seen in various films or videos (Hatma et al., 2023). In the application of visual effects, there are fictional elements that are applied to the frame so that production that is very difficult to achieve becomes achievable. Visual effects or VFX is the process of manipulating images or creating illusions in footage that form illusions that help storytelling (Mustika et al., 2022).

Many aspiring filmmakers found themselves confused when asked to differentiate between visual and special effects in their applications. In his research, Arif (2014) explained that mechanical effects are effects that can be applied directly to the set location, such as explosions, muzzle flashes, and bullet hits, while visual effects are effects that can manipulate images in films that are produced through footage. Visual effects are carried out at the post-production stage in the filmmaking stage. In application, many visual effects are not created in the context. It means that visual effects applied have technical issues or lack of concept and thus is not integrated into the scene. Chris Roda (2022) called it visual effects rules that are not present in many stories. For example, visual effects such as a tornado that is applied with a black background that is not related to any story. With that said, visual effects have rules that could enhance the narrative when applied in the right context.



Figure 1. Visual Effects Out of Context
Source: Real Time Visual Effects For Technical Artist by Chris Roda

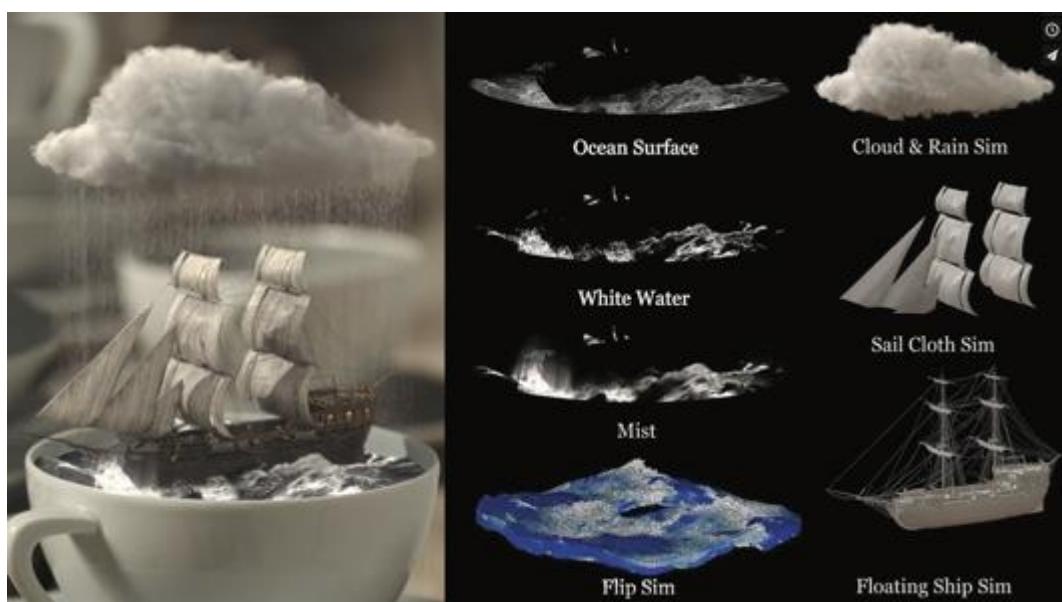


Figure 2. Visual Effects Integrated to Environment
Source: Real Time Visual Effects For Technical Artist by Chris Roda

Visual effects can provide a realistic effect that forms the perception of an artificial representation of various events that can give a real impression with technology (Sulistiyono, 2014). Visual effects also can dramatize and strengthen the meaning shown through scenes so that the message can be conveyed to the

audience (Nadya, 2024). In their research, Joli and Deni (2020) explained that visual effects can captivate the audience's attention by bringing them into an unreal world where the audience is taken to see the imagination that is realized.

One type of production in audio-visual media that has undergone development is music video production (Sanjaya, 2023b). A music video is a short film that is used as an accompaniment to a song or music (Eko Prasetyo et al., 2022). Music videos can also be used as a marketing tool for a song or album recorded by singers or bands (Rezqita Arum & Yuli A. Hambali, 2013). One of the platforms or broadcasting channels used in promoting music videos is YouTube, while the popular international industry standard chart is Billboard (Kristian Natalia & Nurus Sa'adah, 2021). Music videos emerged with the birth of music television called Music Television or MTV in 1981 in the United States (Mufarrih Muktaf, 2013). Through a video entitled "Video Killed The Radio Star" by The Baggles which aired on August 1, 1981, there was a shift in the phase of the music industry era to the music video era (Andi Saputra & Ariffudin Islam, 2021). Similar to films, music videos also function to convey messages and information to their audience (Wagas Wiratirta & Kusmareza Adim, 2023). Through the visual emphasis shown in the scenes, the message or meaning of the song lyrics can be conveyed, either directly or indirectly (Karunia, 2022). This emphasis can be done with various supporting aspects, one of which is the cinematic illusion in the form of visual effects shown in several scenes so that the audience is not only interested in the picture but also gets the message with the achievement of production that looks real.

Taylor Swift is a popular musician and songwriter known as a "country singer" since the age of 16. Early in her career, "Love Story" and "You Belong to Me" brought her to become a multiplatinum winner on the album "Fearless". Taylor Swift has won 16 Grammy Awards, and she is the first artist to win the "Album of The Year" category 4 times in a row. In 2022, Taylor Swift released the songs "Anti-Hero" on her last album "Midnights". "Anti-Hero" is a music video that talks about nightmares and stress conditions that change her real world (Angeline Reba, 2022). "Anti-Hero" has won various nominations and awards at various

prestigious music award events, such as the People's Choice Awards, MTV Video Music Awards, Billboard Music Awards, and others. In addition, "Anti-Hero" won the "Best Video" category at the MTV Europe Music Awards and Gold Derby Music Awards. "Anti-Hero" also won the "Best Visual Effects" and "Best Cinematography" categories at the MTV Video Music Awards (Marvela, 2023). "Anti-Hero" has the application of visual effects which include morphing, cloning, and giant effects. Other than that, "Anti-Hero" was directed by Taylor Swift that has great storytelling skill to engage audience through her lyric on her song. The application of these visual effects makes the message from lyric of "Anti-Hero" music video conveyed well through the series of stories to the audience. This study examines the role of visual effects in constructing messages within sequential narratives, as perceived by Taylor Swift, a songwriter and director (from a narrative perspective).

Visual Effects

Eran Dinur (2023) explains that visual effects are digital manipulations carried out on recordings made during the post-production stage (Dinur, 2023). There are several types of shots with the application of visual effects techniques, such as morphing, crowd tilting or cloning, and rotoscoping (Dinur, 2023).

Morphing is divided into several types, namely gas or heat effects, and liquids. Heat effects include smoke, steam, fog, fire, and explosions, while liquid effects include effects that have a liquid form. Morphing are simulation effects that are depicted by the interaction of objects with water that are complex. Making morphing includes setting turbulence, waves, splashes, foam, sprays, and drops. These settings are arranged in such a way as to resemble the shape of water according to the type of liquid you want to create. Making large morphing, such as tsunamis or water waves, requires more equipment and time. The production of simpler morphing usually includes simple liquids or splashes of soda water, such as in beverage advertising videos (Dinur, 2023).



Figure 3. Application of Morphing in the Film "Terminator 2"
Source: <https://vfxblog.com/2017/08/23/the-tech-of-terminator-2-an-oral-history/>

In Figure 3, Ian Failes, a visual effects and animation journalist, explains that the application of morphing effects combined with models forms the T-1000 character in the film “Terminator 2” (Failes, 2017).



Figure 4. Morphing for Advertising Production by Imaginar
Source: <https://www.imaginar.co.uk/the-wonder-of-cgi-liquids-and-fluid-simulation/>

Figure 4 shows an example of the application of morphing in the form of an ice cream product in an advertising video. The morphing is applied to attract viewers. In the video, the effects of splashing, pouring, and dripping water on the product are visible (imaginair, 2022). Three types of visual effects techniques in populating humans are crowd tiling, sprites, and CG crowd simulation. Sprites is a technique that takes two shots. In the first shot (main plate), there is a shot with the character. Then, the background shot is taken separately (Dinur, 2023).



Figure 5. Extras Applied by Crowd Tilting to Enliven the Scenes in
"The Trial of the Chicago 7"

Source: The Filmmaker's Guide to Visual Effects: The Art and Techniques of VFX for
Directors, Producers, Editors and Cinematographers

In Figure 5, there is an additional group on the left side of the frame in the bottom image that is shown in "The Trial of the Chicago 7". The application of crowd tilting is done to help the storytelling so that the dramatization of the scene increases (Dinur, 2023).



Figure 6. Clone Effects in the Movie "Terminator 2"
Source: Screenshot from "Terminator 2"

In Figure 6, there is an application of clone effects to emphasize the abilities of the characters, thus helping the storytelling in "Terminator 2". The application of clone effects also attracts the audience to the scene because it emphasizes the dangerous situation experienced by the main character in the story (Dinur, 2023). There are applications of shooting that need to be considered in taking pictures, one of which is shooting by positioning the camera according to the needs of the desired visual effects. Rotoscoping is a technique used to detect the subject outline with a line (roto) marked with many points (roto points). The subject is drawn like a depiction of the subject using a pencil, but the points or lines can be animated according to the shape of the subject according to the movement and changes of the subject's shape. The function of rotoscoping is to separate the subject from the background so that the compositor can provide elements or depth to the scene. By providing rotoscoping, a scene can look more realistic because it has depth in the foreground, middle, and background (Dinur, 2023).



Figure 7. Application of Rotoscoping to A Characters
Source: The Filmmaker's Guide to Visual Effects: The Art and Techniques of VFX for
Directors, Producers, Editors and Cinematographers

The application of rotoscoping techniques in young children to separate the main subject from the background, so that a separation can be provided between the main subject and the background. With the application of rotoscoping, the elements placed in the scene can look real, as if they have foreground, middle, and background positions (Dinur, 2023).

In the book "The Filmmaker's Guide to Visual Effects", Eran Dinur (2023) explains that the movement of the camera's perspective can be placed without using movement to recreate the background using 2-dimensional elements, for example by taking pictures with photos that have lighting and perspective that are manipulated in creating new elements in the scene.

One of the visual effects techniques that can be applied using shooting settings is giant effects. Giant effects are applied by setting the position of the camera which is placed at the bottom, making the subject look huge in the picture.



Figure 8. Application of Giant Effect in the Music Video "Doin' Time" by Lana Del Rey
Source: YouTube Channel Lana Del Rey

In Figure 8, there is an application of the giant effect which is done by adjusting the angle of the camera and a combination of various caricatures's shooting.

Sequence

Robert McKee explains that there is a story structure that has elements, such as scenes, sequences, plots, and other story elements. A sequence is a series of scenes formed in a theme to convey to the audience part of the story in the film (McKee, 2010). Bordwell and Thompson (2021) further elaborate that a sequence as a collection of scenes where actions are not interrupted in time. Each sequence possesses a unified phase of action that unfolds in a cohesive manner. Bordwell (2021) explains that there are actions, series of incidents, and conflicts that need

to be resolved as part of a narrative form. Furthermore, through a chain of events, a filmmaker could recognize how to engage viewers through dynamic activity. Also, Bordwell (2021) states that a narrative could cue the audience to draw to various aspects of story, such as characters, settings, situations, and other elements. Thus, a narrative point of story could be used to understand how visual effects could be applied, so that messages of a song's lyrics could be conveyed.

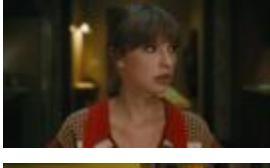
RESEARCH METHOD

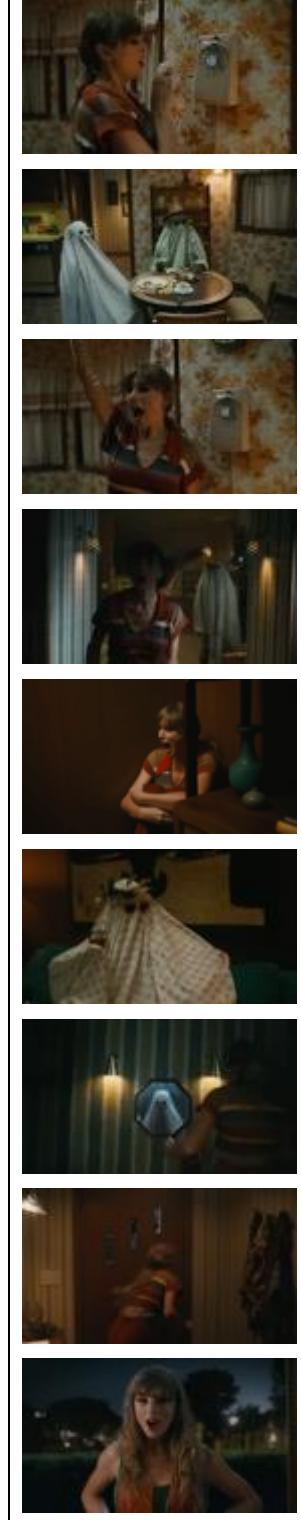
The research method used in this study is qualitative research. Bogdan and Taylor (2020) explained that qualitative methods are one of the research procedures carried out with descriptions or images of the objects being studied. The qualitative approach used is purposive sampling. The purposive sampling approach is carried out by taking samples from the objects being studied as study material from the objects being studied (Abdussamad, 2021). The object of research used is the "Anti-Hero" music video by Taylor Swift. This article discusses the application of visual effects, specifically morphing, clone, and giant effects, on narrative points in the "Anti-Hero" music video. Thus, this article focuses on sequences that have applications of visual effects based on the theory used, which is the visual effects theory explained by Eran Dinur. Criteria of visual effects that are discussed are morphing, clone, and giant effects. The description is carried out by describing the song lyrics, shots, and sequences that apply visual effects. Then, a more in-depth description is carried out on the function of the application of visual effects in building messages in the music video "Anti-Hero". Visual effects that are analysed are used to show how Taylor Swift applied them to convey messages from the song lyrics of the "Anti-Hero" music video.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Application of Visual Effects Based on Song Lyrics and Sequences in the Music Video "Anti-Hero"

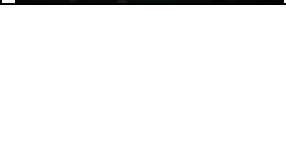
Some visual effects applications are described based on the sequence in the music video "Anti-Hero" as follows:

No.	Sequence	Song Lyrics	Shot	Visual Effects
1	Taylor is disturbed when she wants to cut her food with the liquid that comes out of her egg pieces. Then, Taylor tries to escape from the bed ghost who keeps chasing her. When she opens the door, Taylor meets her twin who has the opposite nature from her. Taylor and her twin spend time having fun, such as drinking, and destroying guitars. Next, good Taylor Swift takes	<i>I have this thing where I get older but just never wiser</i> <i>Midnights become my afternoons</i> <i>When my depression works the graveyard shift</i> <i>All of the people I've ghosted stand there in the room.</i> <i>I should not be left to my own devices</i> <i>They come with prices and vices</i> <i>I end up in crisis (tale as old as time)</i> <i>I wake up screaming from dreaming</i> <i>One day I'll watch as you're leaving</i> <i>Cause you got tired of my</i>	      	A morphing effect has been applied to a shot depicting hands cutting an egg. The liquid could be observed emanating from the egg. Clone effects applied to the final two shots of the first sequence, which depict double people drinking. Additionally, there is a shot that juxtaposes "good" and "bad" Taylors. The "good" Taylor Swift is playing the guitar, while

	<p>notes, while evil Taylor Swift writes "everyone will betray you" on the board.</p>	<p><i>scheming</i> <i>(For the last time)</i></p> <p><i>It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me</i> <i>At teatime, everybody agrees</i> <i>I'll stare directly at the sun but never in the mirror</i> <i>It must be exhausting</i> <i>always rooting for the anti-hero</i></p>		<p>the "bad" Taylor Swift is destroying it.</p>
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2	<p>Taylor joins a group of people at dinner, but one person shoots an arrow at her. Taylor looks at her shoulder oozing fluid, then pulls the tablecloth. Then, the people run away in fear. At the end of the scene, Taylor</p>	<p><i>Sometimes I feel like everybody is a sexy baby And I'm a monster on the hill Too big to hang out, slowly lurching toward your favourite city Pierced through the heart, but never killed Did you hear my covert narcissism I disguise as</i></p>	   	<p>Giant effect could be seen on shots that show "giant" Taylor walking into the room. Other than that, the giant effect shows small-size people and objects surrounding Taylor.</p>

	<p>eats and drinks alone.</p> <p><i>altruism</i> <i>Like some kind of congressman?</i> <i>(Tale as old as time)</i> <i>I wake up screaming from dreaming</i> <i>One day I'll watch as you're leaving</i> <i>And life will lose all its meaning (For the last time)</i></p>		<p>There is a morphing effect applied on a shot where liquid comes from the shoulder of Taylor.</p>
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3	<p>Taylor spends time with her evil twin, where Taylor is pushed while jumping on her bed. In addition, Taylor also drinks beer together, then vomits it. Taylor weighs herself, then looks at herself in the mirror.</p>	<p><i>It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me (I'm the problem, it's me)</i></p> <p><i>At teatime, everybody agrees</i></p> <p><i>I'll stare directly at the sun but never in the mirror</i></p> <p><i>It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero</i></p>	    	<p>Apply the Clone Effect to the entire shot with both "good" and "bad" Taylors.</p>
4	<p>In the final scene, Swift meets her doppelganger. Swift drinks together and waves to her giant doppelganger. They spend</p>	<p><i>It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me</i></p> <p><i>It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me</i></p> <p><i>It's me, hi, everybody agrees, everybody agrees</i></p> <p><i>It's me, hi (hi), I'm the problem, it's</i></p>	  	<p>Clone Effect is applied on shots that show doubles when they are sitting together. Also, there are three "Taylors" at the end of the sequence.</p>

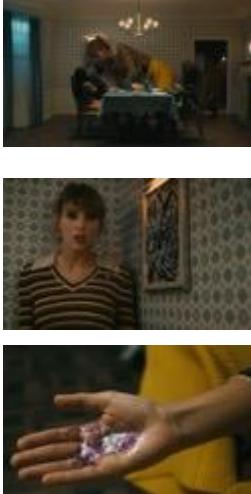
	time together on the roof of her house.	<i>me (I'm the problem, it's me) At tea (tea) time (time), everybody agrees (everybody agrees) I'll stare directly at the sun but never in the mirror It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero</i>		Giant effect could be seen when "giant" Taylor approaches double Taylor sitting on the roof.
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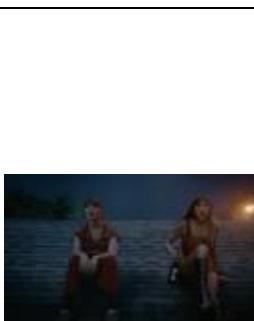
Table 1. Application of Visual Effects Based on Song Lyrics and Sequences in the music video "Anti-Hero"
 source: author's documentation

Visual Effect's Application in Building Meaning of "Anti-Hero" Music Video (From Singer and Director's Point of View)

From the result of the analysis, it can be concluded that the visual effects are applied in several sequences. Furthermore, this article also breakdown how visual effects that are applied in the "Anti-Hero" music video also enhance the narrative and bring emotion from Singer and Director's point of view (Taylor Swift). that concludes in the table below:

No.	Shot	Visual Effects In Bringing Emotions	Narrative Enhancements
1		<p>In this shot, morphing act as a narrative enhancement that depict the illusion that main character live in. With morphing, character got confused thus brings emotion of fear to audience.</p>	<p>The application of morphing on the shot when Taylor cuts the egg shows that she is in an unreal world at the beginning of the story. With the morphing, the audience can understand that the main character in the story is in an unreal world. As songwriter and director, Taylor Swift used morphing to bring the meaning of lyrics where someone could get depressed in the middle of a night all alone. Other than that, Taylor also depicts the condition where someone has a nightmare where everything odd could happen.</p>
		<p>Clone effects depict illusion of "good" (green) and "bad" (red) version of main character. Thus, it brings togetherness in the scene.</p>	<p>Clone effects are shown when Taylor is with her twin. The clone effects help show Taylor's "anti-hero" nature. It related to the lyrics where there is always the "other side" of people that create chaos with their surroundings.</p>

			
2	 	<p>In the beginning of the scene, Taylor joins as a "giant" version of herself. It brings her to a mess where people got annoyed by her presence. Taylor pulling napkin from the table. She expresses her sadness by looking at the wall. With that said, giant effects bring sadness and loneliness in the scene.</p> <p>After looking at her arm that has liquid, main character defence herself out of her surroundings. It brings fearfulness to the scene.</p>	<p>Giant effects help the audience understand Taylor's condition of being belittled by people around her. With the application of giant effects, the audience understands that differences in size can cause conflict in her life.</p> <p>Morphing shows the hurt that Taylor experiences when she is rejected from people around her. With the application of morphing, the audience understands that the conflict causes rejection that hurts Taylor.</p>

3		<p>In the scene, clone effects depict two versions of the main character. It depicts the different nature inside her. It brings oddity to the scene. One shows their bad side that could bring a person down. On the other hand, the "good" side could also act as a naive.</p>	<p>In the scene, the clone effect is applied to show the difference in nature and closeness inside herself. The difference in nature shows her true self in the scene. With the clone effects, the audience understands the difference in nature that exists within Taylor, which makes her blamed by people around her. It relates to the music video where there is good and bad nature within people.</p>
4		<p>Application of clone effects show togetherness by making a twin version of the main character that sit and enjoy together.</p> <p>Also, giant effects bring togetherness as she walks toward them.</p>	<p>Clone effects show Taylor's closeness to her twin. The scene shows Taylor who has a constantly changing nature.</p> <p>With clone effects, people could relate that there are different natures beneath us that could bring problems to surrounding.</p>

		<p>Giant and clone effects show Taylor's togetherness with her twin. The scene shows the different nature that Taylor has in dealing with the people around her. It also related to the lyrics that there are always nature that people don't like.</p>
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Table 2. Visual effects application in building meaning in "Anti-Hero" music video
source: author's documentation

"Anti-Hero" has the application of visual effects used to help build the story. This can be seen in 3 of 4 sequences that have several shots with the application of morphing, clone, and giant effects. Morphing is applied at the beginning of the story (sequences 1 and 2) to show the unreal world experienced by Taylor Swift. In addition, morphing also shows the wounds experienced by Taylor from the rejection of those around her. Thus, it could bring emotion of fear to the audience. Clone effects are applied from the beginning to the end of the story (sequences 1, 3, and 4) to show the "anti-hero" side of Taylor, while giant effects (sequences 2 and 4) are used to show Taylor's differences from those around her so that she is ostracized. Clone effects bring emotions of togetherness and oddity in scenes. In addition, giant effects also show different traits in Taylor's character at the end of the scene. Giant effects bring emotions of sadness and togetherness in scenes.

CONCLUSION

Visual effects are image manipulations employed to create unrealistic images, captivating the audience's perception of an illusionary reality. In her music video "Anti-Hero," Taylor Swift, as both director and songwriter, masterfully utilized morphing, cloning, and giant effects to convey profound messages through the narrative of each scene. Swift's storytelling prowess extends beyond mere narrative planning, as she skillfully integrates various visual effects to enhance the

impact of her lyrics. By employing diverse characters, both “good” and “bad Taylor”, with distinct characteristics within her surreal world, Taylor elevates her storytelling to new heights. The seamless integration of visual effects throughout the sequences ensures that the song’s lyrics are effectively conveyed, creating a cohesive and immersive experience for the audience.

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