



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Film Editing as Magical Story Writing: The Mechanics of Narrative Construction in Contemporary Film Editing

Joseph p joseph

Research Scholar, Vikrant University
School of Media and Communication, Gwalior

Dr. Devasish Verma

Professor & Research guide
School of Media and Communication, Vikrant University, Gwalior

Abstract:

Cinema is a medium of entertainment and knowledge. Editing helps to make the movie a seamless viewing experience. When the audience watches the film, it is not possible to see how its editing has been done, so editing is also called the invisible art of cinema. A deeper study of editing is necessary to understand more about film. This paper examines how the technique of non-linear editing (NLE) can deepen storytelling and how the editor can revolutionise film through non-linear editing – not just as a technical workflow, but instead as a magical act of storytelling with visuals. This article examines how non-linear editing can change the psychology of time and place characters and how it changes the way of storytelling itself. Taking in Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage, Christian Metz's film semiotics, and Dziga Vertov's concept of kino-eye, this article is a comprehensive study of the depth of storytelling through non-linear editing in modern cinema. This article also argues that editing allows for a better viewing experience by thinking along with an audience while analysing the effect of changing the way a story is told out of sequence. In short, editing is the only way to create a meaningful and emotional story. . This paper advances through a careful analysis of famous films such as Christopher Nolan's Memento (2000), Dunkirk (2017), Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction (1994), Alejandro González Iñárritu's 21 Grams (2003), and Anurag Kashyap's Gangs of Wasseypur (2012). . This study demonstrates that non-linear editing (NLE) is not just a technology, but also a primary tool for constructing cinematic meanings.

Keywords: Non-linear editing, film grammar, montage theory, narrative temporality, postmodern cinema, NLE software, story architecture, cinematic cognition, film semiotics, digital post-production

1. Introduction: The Editor as Magician

Cinema is generally known in the name of the director and the actor. Only for a very short time now has the cinematographer also been recognised as an important part of cinema in a similar manner. However, it is only a discussion within film workers that the editor is the final storyteller of the film. It is the editor who shapes the visuals, shot over days and months, into an emotionally engaging narrative experience. This is also the final task in film storytelling (Murch, 2001). It is the editor who decides the meaning of each shot. That is why Walter Murch says this: the important thing is not where to place the cut, but what each cut means. Through non-linear editing, the editor creates a special experience by blending sound and

light. It is also the editor who determines the duration of a visual and its place. Through this, the editor can completely alter the pace of storytelling. (Pearlman, 2016).

There is no doubt that among the technical aspects of cinema evolving in this era, the most important is non-linear editing itself. Non-linear editing software such as Avid Media Composer and Premiere Pro have brought revolutionary changes in film narrative techniques. Through non-linear editing, the editor can rearrange the original footage on the timeline without damaging it and access it at every cut. This makes the editing process much smoother. Non-linear editing has become, more than a technology, a special narrative mode in cinema. It is a method of showing events not in the same chronological order in which they occurred, but by changing and rearranging them. When timelines are altered, the natural connections between events also change. Because the viewer then has to use their own intelligence to understand this, it helps the film become a deeper experience. (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023).

To put the idea behind this study simply, it is a fact that editors in cinema are doing exactly what writers of great novels do. If we look at the books of Virginia Woolf or García Márquez, we can see that they do not tell the story straight, from beginning to end. Sometimes the story moves forward through the thoughts that arise in the characters' minds. Or suddenly it will go into a flashback, shifting time back and forth. In short, the writer uses words, paragraphs, and chapters to reveal their imagination. But our editor is like a magician: instead of words and paragraphs, he rearranges cuts and scenes and their timelines, influencing the thoughts, memories, and emotions of the audience, and thus creates a beautiful story (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023; Murch, 2001).

This article moves through seven key points, clearly explaining how editing theories influence nonlinear editing and tracing the growth of editing from the old analogue era of cutting and splicing reels to the present digital age (Dancyger, 2018). It also analyses some films that beautifully told stories and influenced audiences through nonlinear editing, and in the following sections discusses the emotions and thoughts that arise in the viewer's mind while watching such films, as well as the changes this method brings to film studies and the film industry. Finally, the article concludes by reflecting on new-generation perspectives in storytelling and the new possibilities in this field.

2. Theoretical Framework: Editing, Montage, and the Grammar of Cinema

2.1 Eisenstein and the Theory of Montage

Cinema is not merely storytelling; it is an art form that makes the viewer's brain think – this was first argued by Sergei Eisenstein. He was a Russian filmmaker and also an engineer. He realized that just as building blocks are assembled to construct a building, in cinema, visuals are put together to tell a story. He studied cinema technically and argued that instead of simply placing two shots side by side, one could create another meaning by making the two shots collide with each other. Rooted in Hegelian philosophy, he called this discovery "montage." Eisenstein's montage theory laid an important theoretical foundation for many contemporary editing practices, including nonlinear narrative techniques (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023)

In his intellectual montage he explains that a single shot by itself cannot convey a complete meaning; when two different shots come together, they can produce beautiful interpretations and meanings. For example, in one shot we see the face of a hungry man, and in the next shot we see a newspaper filled with images of food. Shown separately, these have no special meaning. But if shot B is shown immediately after shot A, a new meaning appears there: a hungry man. In his films, Eisenstein created intellectual layers of meaning more through the arrangement of shots than through dialogue, and demonstrated that it is possible to make the audience think along with the film. (Eisenstein, 1949)

In old films, stories unfolded in chronological order (linear); that is, events that happened in the morning were shown first, followed by those that happened in the afternoon. However, Eisenstein's idea that each cut should ignite a spark in the viewer led him to completely transform this temporal order in cinema. As part of this, he began to arrange and weave together shots taken from different time periods. This enabled viewers not merely to watch the film, but to actively experience those images. In this way, Eisenstein transformed editing from being merely a technical process into a powerful cinematic language that directly communicates with the viewer. (Dancyger, 2018).

2.2 Metz and the Semiotics of Cinema

Cinema: A Visual Language and Christian Metz's Theory

Christian Metz observes that cinema is not just an art form, but also a powerful medium of communication. Just as we use language to create stories and poems, cinema tells stories by combining visual shots in a precise sequence. Therefore, Metz argued in his work "Film Language" that cinema too is a linguistic system. He also proposed clear grammatical rules for how images should be combined to narrate a story in film.

Cinematic grammar and the Grande Syntagmatique

Just as we combine words to form sentences when we speak, in cinema the editor weaves together shots to form "sequences." The concept of "Grande Syntagmatique" put forward by Metz is a grammatical rule about how to arrange shots in a film. This rule helps the viewer's mind easily understand which shot should appear when in a film, and how they are related to each other. For this reason, we can easily grasp the narrative contexts of films in any language in the world. (Metz, 1974; Bordwell & Thompson, 2023).

For example, if after showing a person walking toward the door, the next shot shows him sitting inside the room, our brain naturally thinks that he opened the door and went inside. We interpret the visuals in a film in the same way we interpret the things we do in our daily life.

Non-linear Editing and Emotional Levels

In some films, events happening at different times are shown simultaneously through editing. The way the editor communicates with the audience through his style in such cases can be called "non-linear editing." This gives a new language to storytelling and offers the audience distinct emotional experiences. If Eisenstein (Sergei Eisenstein) created emotional layers of meaning from the collision of shots (montage), Metz brought visuals into the framework of a language. Metz makes it clear that every "cut" in cinema is not just a technical transition, but a means of communication that helps to construct new meanings and convey them to the audience. (Metz, 1974; Bordwell & Thompson, 2023)

2.3 Vertov and the Kino-Eye

Dziga Vertov's idea of the Kino-Eye is, in simple terms, that the camera can see many things that the human eye cannot. When we watch an ordinary event, we only notice a part of it. But the camera can see that event from many angles and then present it in a new way through editing. That is why Vertov called the camera a machine eye. According to him, the camera is not just a device for recording scenes, but a medium that helps us understand reality more clearly. (Vertov, 1984; Bordwell & Thompson, 2023).

This idea is clearly seen in his film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). This film does not have a story, protagonist, or dialogue like ordinary films. Instead, ordinary life in a city is depicted in various ways. Karam has shot and edited many scenes of everyday life in a city in different ways. Split screen shows two scenes at the same time. Slow motion shows small things in detail. Fast motion shows big things in a short time and tries to give new meanings to everyday life using many editing methods such as reverse motion and montage. (Vertov (1984).

It was Vertov who made us understand the importance of editing more and more. According to Vertov, a film is not completed by taking pictures alone. What is more important is how those scenes are put together. When scenes taken at different times and places are put together, new meanings are formed. The same idea is seen in today's non-linear editing. The story and idea can be presented more strongly by not only showing the scenes in the order they happened, but by rearranging them as needed. Therefore, Vertov's concept of kine-i remains one of the most important in film studies and editing theories today. (Vertov, 1984)

2.4 Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

David Bordwell's 'classical Hollywood style' refers to the way in which a story is told clearly. In this way, the audience can easily understand the story. Each scene is naturally connected to the next. There is a clear continuity of time and place. So the audience does not get confused. This is narrative transparency. Although the non-linear editing (NLE) systems used today follow this basic method, Bordwell points out that new technologies have brought many changes to (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023).

Laura Mulvey mainly talks about the vision in the film. She examines what the camera shows and what the audience sees. A cut can direct the audience's attention to a particular part. It can also create an emotion. When the order of the story is changed and edited, this experience also changes. Therefore, editing is not just a technical task of adding scenes. It is also an important factor in influencing how the audience experiences the film (Mulvey, 1975)

Gunning, Gaudreault, and Jullier discuss the changes that digital editing has brought to cinema. In the days of film, editing involved cutting and splicing film. With the advent of digital technology, this changed. Scenes could be easily edited and altered. There was an opportunity to experiment. With this, editing became a more free and creative process. Its influence on the form of the film and the way it was told (Gunning, 2003; Gaudreault & Marion, 2015; Jullier, 2019)

When these theories are considered together, the growth of film editing can be clearly understood. Bordwell talks about the clarity of the story (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023) Mulvey explains the viewing experience of the audience (Mulvey 1975). Gunning, Gaudreault, and Jullier evaluate the changes brought about by digital technology (Gunning, 2003; Gaudreault & Marion, 2015; Jullier, 2019). All of these together have given rise to the form of film editing today. Therefore, editing is not just a job of adding scenes. It is an important creative activity that gives new meaning and form to the story.

3. Historical Evolution: From the Moviola to the Digital Timeline

3.1 The Analogue Era and Its Constraints

Today, a computer is enough to edit a movie. If you don't like a shot, you can change it or move it to another location. If you make a mistake, you can also restore it to its previous state. Therefore, editing is relatively easy today.

But in the early days, movies were shot on film reels. Therefore, editing was also done using the film reels. If you wanted to change a shot, you had to cut the film and then re-add the necessary parts. For this, special scissors and splicing tape or cement were used to glue the film together. (Dancyger, 2018).

The method used in editing at that time was linear editing. That is, editing should be done in the same order as the story. If you wanted to change a scene later, you had to undo and rearrange the parts that were added later. Therefore, each decision had to be made very carefully.

Later, editing machines like the Moviola and Steenbeck began to be used. In these, it was possible to cut and add each frame by running the film. However, the work was not easy. It took a lot of patience and time to manipulate the film reels and find the right part (Dancyger, 2018).

Despite these limitations, the editors of that time made great films. Editing in films like Citizen Kane is still studied today. In the days before computers, it was the experience and skill of the editors that made it possible to work so accurately. (Carringer, 1996)

Many things that are done with a mouse click today took hours back then. Therefore, editing in the past was not just a technical job. It required patience, attention, and training. Knowing the old film editing methods is very important to understand today's digital editing.

3.2 The Digital Revolution and the Non-Linear Timeline

In the 1990s, non-linear editing systems came into being, which brought revolutionary changes in film editing, changing the way film reels were cut and edited and started being edited using computers, making editing much easier.

Avid Media Composer, released in 1989, was the first NLE system widely used in the professional field. Later versions of Lightworks Final Cut Pro (1999) and Adobe Premiere DaVinci Resolve also made digital editing more convenient. Today, DaVinci Resolve is widely used for editing and color grading.

In these systems, footage is stored digitally on a hard drive. This allows you to quickly find any shot or frame, create multiple versions of the same scene, and compare them. You can easily change the order of scenes using drag-and-drop, and make changes to the timeline quickly. This allows you to extend, shorten, and rearrange scenes (Dancyger, 2018). This eliminates the need to cut or splice film reels, saving time and effort.

Digital editing also changed the way stories are told. It is easier to create multiple versions of the same sequence and try out new ideas, as the original footage can be edited without any damage, and the ability to restore the original if necessary. This gave editors more freedom and creative possibilities (Dancyger, 2018).

As a result of this change, directors and editors began to tell stories in new ways. They gained more confidence in presenting stories in different ways by arranging time. NLE also helped overcome the technical limitations of traditional editing. Films such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *Memento* (2000), *Amores Perros* (2000), and *21 Grams* (2003) are examples of this. The complex storytelling of these films, along with the skills of directors and editors, was greatly supported by digital non-linear editing technology.

3.3 NLE Software as Creative Infrastructure

It was mentioned earlier that film editing was a technique of cutting, pasting and stitching reels, but times have changed today. With the advent of software like Adobe Premiere or Avid, editing has become a great art beyond just a technical job.

The main thing to note here is that no editing software makes a film non-linear. That is, just because there is a software, the editor cannot make a great film. All these software only open up the possibilities for the editor to express his imagination and talent. It is not the editor's creation that shapes a great film.

Today's digital timeline is a different data structure from the film strip of the old days. The cut between two shots is not just a technical change, it is a logical relationship. This technology itself changes the way the editor thinks about how to convey the story to the audience.

Today, film schools often teach editing in terms of how to use software. Many people only learn how to import footage and how to apply transitions. But beyond that, it is important to understand that editing is a language. The grammar of the story, its rhythm, and its meaning are all part of this language.

Therefore, learning non-linear editing is not just learning software. Rather, it is a way to see time and story structure in a new way, and through it, create new meanings for the audience. Editing is the essence of cinema; it is not something that should be reduced to just a technique. The editor's role is huge in delivering the film beautifully to the audience, because they are the ones who give the story the right direction. (Murch, 2001).

4. Textual Analysis: Non-Linear Editing as Magical Storytelling

4.1 Christopher Nolan's Memento (2000): Memory, Identity, and Reverse Chronology

The film *Memento*, directed by Christopher Nolan, has brilliantly used the non-linear editing style. Its unusual editing style is what has gifted the audience a new experience. The editor of this film is Dody Dorn. It completely overturned the conventional notion of how a film's story reaches the audience. While ordinary films present events in the same order from beginning to end, in *Memento* the sequence of the story has been deliberately rearranged. Through this, the story is not just told; it becomes a mental state that the audience directly experiences. (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023)

The hero of this film, Leonard Shelby, has a memory disorder called Anterograde Amnesia. He is searching for the man who killed his wife. Since he cannot remember any past events, he identifies people by looking at tattoos and photographs.

The film is edited in this way so that the hero's memory loss can be truly felt by the audience as well. The color scenes move the story backward, and the black-and-white scenes move the story forward. With each scene, the coils of the story unwind. Instead of just watching passively, the audience is compelled to piece together the elements of the story themselves and discover the truth. Finally, when these two parts come together, the true picture of the story becomes clear.

This editing style is not just a technical experiment or a visual spectacle. It helps to present more powerfully the film's main themes: the reliability of memory, the construction of identity, and the relativity of truth. How trustworthy are memories? How does a person construct his own life story? The film leads the viewer toward such questions. Simply put, by bringing the viewer into the same confusion the protagonist experiences, the film proves that truth is something that keeps changing according to each person's perspective. (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023)

From a technical standpoint, maintaining such a complex visual structure precisely throughout the entire length of the film is a major achievement for the editor. Each scene is arranged in a way that does not break the logic of the story, while at the same time sustaining the viewer's curiosity. The moment when the two timelines merge in the final phase creates a powerful intellectual and emotional experience for the viewer. That is the result of the editor's meticulous planning alongside the director's vision.

In short, what Memento proves is that editing is not merely the technical process of cutting and joining scenes. Editing is a creative language that determines the form and meaning of the story and the viewer's experience. That is precisely why Memento is considered a milestone in the history of film editing. (Murch, 2001)

4.2 Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction (1994): Braided Chronologies and the Ethics of Editing

The greatest specialty of the film Pulp Fiction is that it presents the story in a different way instead of narrating it in a straight line. This is not a film that uses reverse chronology. Instead, it mixes several stories that happen at the same time and presents each segment to the audience at different points in time. Behind this distinctive storytelling lies the excellent collaboration between director Quentin Tarantino and editor Sally Menke. (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023)

The film begins right in the middle of the story. Later, the narrative sometimes travels backward and sometimes forward. Though this may create a bit of confusion for the viewer, as the film progresses, the connections between each event become clear, and accordingly the story becomes more enjoyable. This is the strength of the film's editing.

The main thing this film teaches us is that simply changing the order of the story does not necessarily confuse the audience; rather, if the editing is done properly, the story can become more curious and exciting. For example, at the beginning of the film, Vincent and Jules are talking about very ordinary things. What they say seems to have no direct connection with the story. But then, that scene suddenly turns into one of violence. Because calm and conflict keep alternating like this, the viewer's attention is never lost.

Instead of separating the past, present, and future in Pulp Fiction, the editing is done in such a way that all of them exist simultaneously in the viewer's mind. That's why, with each new scene, the viewer begins to rethink events they have already seen. Even after the story ends, the film prompts us to reflect on its structure.

One of the most striking aspects of the film is that, even though the character Vincent Vega is shown dying in one part, he later appears alive again in another part. This is not an editing mistake, but the result of deliberately altering the chronological order of the story. Through this, the film shows that a character's importance does not end with their death, and that when the way the story is told changes, that character can be given life again. (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023).

Therefore, the editing in Pulp Fiction is not just a technical device. It is a storytelling method that keeps the viewer's curiosity alive until the end and allows them to experience the story in a new way. That is why, even today, Pulp Fiction is regarded as one of the finest examples of film editing.

4.3 Christopher Nolan's Dunkirk (2017): Temporal Braiding and the Experience of War

The film Dunkirk (2017), directed by Christopher Nolan, is one of the most complex and technically accomplished examples of non-linear editing. In this film, the past and present are not shown separately using flashbacks or flash-forwards as is usually seen. Instead, the film creates a unified cinematic experience by synchronizing three temporal timelines of different durations simultaneously.

The story of the film is structured into three distinct narrative segments. The section titled 'The Mole' presents over the span of a week the experiences of British soldiers stranded on the Dunkirk shore. The section titled 'The Sea' depicts, within a one-day time frame, the voyage undertaken by ordinary citizens across the sea for rescue operations. Meanwhile, the section titled 'The Air' portrays, as events occurring within an hour, the mission of the fighter pilots. Although these three events have mutually different durations, they converge at the same time (Convergence Point) in the final phase of the film.

Editor Lee Smith's role is crucial in transforming this complex storytelling into a visual experience. Because events occurring at different times are presented by alternating between them, the viewer does not initially clearly recognize the time differences. It is only as the film progresses that one gradually realizes that the time frame of each narrative situation is different. Yet even without fully recognizing this temporal difference, the emotional pressure and suspense created through it are intensely felt by the viewer (Nolan, 2017).

The editing in Dunkirk is a notable example of the concept of "experiential simultaneity." The film actually presents events that take place over a week, a day, and an hour—different spans of time. However, with the help of editing, it creates in the viewer the experience that all these events are occurring at the same moment. Instead of following the real chronological order of time, the film prioritizes the intensity of the experience.

For this, Lee Smith carefully controls the emotional rhythm of each narrative strand. The editing shifts to another story at the very moment when the greatest suspense is created in one strand. These cuts are not arranged based on chronological time, but on emotional intensity. Therefore, even as each story progresses independently, their emotional energy is exchanged between them. As a result, three different time frames merge in the viewer's mind into a single dramatic experience.

Here, editing is not merely a technical process, but becomes a creative device that defines the very mode of cinematic storytelling. Instead of systematically explaining the temporal duration of different events, the editing works in such a way that the viewer directly experiences their psychological and emotional impact. That is why Dunkirk is evaluated not just as a war film that records time, but as a cinematic experiment that transforms time into an experience.

From the perspective of film theory, Dunkirk proves that non-linear editing is not just a tool for rearranging the story, but also a narrative technique that reconstructs time, experience, and emotion. That is why this film is regarded as one of the finest editing-based narrative forms in contemporary cinema. In Dunkirk, editing does not explain the story; instead, it creates a visual-emotional world in which the viewer directly experiences time, fear, hope, and survival.

4.4 Anurag Kashyap's Gangs of Wasseypur (2012): Non-Linear Epic and the Indian Context

Not only in Western cinema, but also in Indian cinema, non-linear editing has been used very effectively. A good example of this is Gangs of Wasseypur (2012), directed by Anurag Kashyap. Set against the backdrop of the coal mining regions of Jharkhand, this two-part film narrates the history of about sixty years spanning three generations. The editor of this film, Shweta Venkat Mathew, does not tell the story in a straight manner. Instead, the story is presented using an editing style that combines different time periods through flashbacks and time jumps, with movements forward and backward in events. Through this, the history of a family, their revenge, and their struggle for power reach the audience with greater intensity. (Kashyap, 2012)

Even though this film is influenced by The Godfather series and Martin Scorsese's crime films, Kashyap has also incorporated the distinctiveness of Indian storytelling into it. In particular, the nature of oral

storytelling and Indian literary traditions can be seen in the film's editing. Therefore, the non-linear structure of this film is, at the same time, of global standard and closely aligned with Indian culture.

This example proves that non-linear editing is not a characteristic of Western cinema alone. This method of editing helps in telling stories from any part of the world and any culture, and in presenting the flow of time, memories, history, and human experiences in a more natural and profound manner.

5. Cognitive and Psychological Dimensions of Non-Linear Narrative

5.1 The Active Viewer and Narrative Inference

Films that use non-linear editing demand more attention and thought from the viewer. Usually, in classical Hollywood films, the story is presented in the order of beginning, middle, and end. Therefore the viewer does not have much difficulty understanding the story.

However, in films that use non-linear editing, the story is not told in that order. The story progresses through flashbacks, flash-forwards, shifts in time, and by presenting the same event from different perspectives. Thus, the viewer has to figure out for themselves when each event happened and how they are connected. That is, one must not only watch the story, but also piece it together in the mind and reconstruct it.

According to film theorists David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, each viewer approaches the story with certain expectations based on prior experience when watching a film. This is called a schema. In ordinary films, these schemas help the story to be understood quickly. But non-linear films overturn this usual pattern. Therefore the viewer has to think in new ways and discover new connections. (Bordwell, 1985; Carroll, 1996)

The best example of this is *Memento* (2000). In this film, the story is presented in reverse chronology. The first scene we see is actually the final part of the story. Each subsequent scene shows events that happened before it. Therefore, whenever the viewer sees a new scene, they reassess the meaning of the scenes seen earlier and mentally reconstruct the true order of the story. (Nolan, 2000)

When watching such films, the viewer is not just a passive recipient of the story. They become an active participant who discovers the meaning of the story on their own and connects different events to each other. That is why non-linear editing is considered a powerful storytelling method that gives the viewer a more intellectual experience and enjoyment.

5.2 Emotional Engagement and Temporal Disruption

There is a doubt that many people raise about non-linear editing. The doubt is that, because the story is not told in the correct order, will the audience end up fully occupied with trying to understand the story and thus be unable to form an emotional bond with the characters?

But in reality, that is not what happens. Films like *Memento*, *Pulp Fiction*, *21 Grams* and so on are excellent examples of this. These films make the audience think in order to understand the story, while at the same time drawing them closer to the lives and emotions of the characters.

The main reason for this is a technique called Dramatic Irony. Sometimes the audience knows more information than the character, or the audience already knows what is going to happen to the character beforehand. Because of this, the audience watches every decision and action of the character with greater curiosity and emotion. (Bordwell & Thompson, 2023)

21 Grams – an example

The film *21 Grams* tells the life stories of three different characters. All of them become connected to each other through a car accident. However, this accident is not shown at the beginning of the film. Editing is

used to slice the events after the accident and the events before it into several parts and present them at different times. (Iñárritu, 2003)

Therefore, the viewer first sees the characters' grief and loss. Only later do they understand how that tragedy happened. That is, the cause is shown later and the effect is shown first.

This method does not diminish the viewer's emotions. On the contrary, since each new scene gives a new meaning to the events seen earlier, the empathy and emotional connection with the characters become even stronger.

5.3 Memory, Identity, and the Non-Linear Self

Non-linear editing is not just a technique for storytelling. It also shows how human memory, experiences, and personality are formed.

Scholars Ann Rigney, Alison Landsberg, and Mark Bould say that human personality is not something fixed. Each person shapes their personality by combining the experiences and memories that have occurred in their life. But these memories do not always exist in order. Some will be clear, some will be forgotten, some will be remembered later. So our understanding of our own life is often formed from fragmented memories. (Rigney, 2005; Landsberg, 2004; Bould, 2012).

Modern neuroscience says the same thing. The human brain does not store events exactly as they happen, like a camera. Every time we remember an event, the brain is reconstructing it again. Therefore, memories are not always complete and accurate. (Schacter, 1996).

This is why non-linear editing presents human thought and memory in a way that is closer to reality. In life, we do not remember events from beginning to end like in a film. A smell, a song, a picture, or a place can suddenly take us to a memory that is years old. Then we again return to the present moment. Non-linear films give the viewer this same experience.

Memento – an example

The film that most clearly illustrates this idea is Memento (2000).

The protagonist of this film, Leonard, is a man affected by a condition (Anterograde Amnesia) that prevents him from storing new memories. Therefore, every event feels new to him. The film's editing is designed with the goal that the viewer too should experience this mental state.

Instead of telling the story in a straight sequence, it is presented in reverse chronology. Because of this, the viewer, like the protagonist, has to try to understand each scene. In this way, the very structure of the film reflects the functioning of the protagonist's mind.

Here, the editor is not just a person who cuts and joins visual shots. They are also a narrative architect who allows the viewer to experience the character's psychology and the nature of memory. (Murch, 2001).

6. Pedagogical and Industrial Implications

6.1 Teaching Non-Linear Editing as a Creative Language

Non-linear editing should not be seen as just a technology. It is an important way of telling stories. In many film and media courses today, when editing is taught, more importance is given to how to use the software, how to arrange shots, how to maintain continuity, and how to cut according to the music. All these are things that need to be learned. However, that alone cannot create a good editor.

An editor is not just a technical expert. He is also a storyteller. The editor's skill lies in combining visuals in the right way to create emotion and meaning in the audience. Therefore, an editor must also have good knowledge of storytelling, the meaning of visuals, and the aesthetics of cinema. (Murch, 2001).

In a curriculum that teaches editing in this way, one should study the best examples of non-linear editing in world cinema. Topics such as montage theory and film semiotics should also be introduced. Along with this, practical training should be given in which students use the same video footage and edit it in many different ways to create different stories. In this way, they will directly understand how the same visuals can be given different meanings.

Moreover, students must understand that each film industry has its own editing style. For example, Malayalam cinema, Tamil cinema, and Hindi cinema each have different methods of editing. All these must be studied within their own cultural backgrounds and cinematic traditions, without comparing them to the Hollywood film model.

When taught in this way, students will be able to clearly understand that editing is not merely a technology that uses software, but one of the most important creative processes that shapes a film's story, emotions, and meaning.

6.2 The Editor in Contemporary Indian Cinema

In this context, the role of the editor in contemporary Indian cinema deserves special attention. Over the past twenty years, digital post-production systems have grown very rapidly in India. Non-linear editing (NLE) systems have begun to be widely used. Excellent editing studios have been established even outside major film hubs like Mumbai and Chennai. Moreover, with international-standard training and modern software becoming easily available, Indian editors have gained opportunities to work at a global level. (Dancyger, 2018).

However, despite so much progress, editors in Indian cinema still do not receive the recognition they deserve. In film promotions, editors are not highlighted as much as directors and actors. Their interviews in the media are very rare. Their contributions are often not adequately considered even in awards.

This neglect has some negative consequences. There is very little research on the work of Indian editors that students studying editing can use as models. They also lose the opportunity to learn from their own cinematic heritage.

For example, editors such as A. Sreekar Prasad have edited many notable films by leading directors like Mani Ratnam, S. S. Rajamouli, and Vetrimaaran. Their creative editing styles and contributions to cinema are not sufficiently discussed in Indian film studies.

Therefore, it is a major need of the present era to further study the creative contributions of Indian editors and to make them a part of academic study. Through this, students will be able to understand more clearly that editing is not merely a technical job, but a creative art that shapes the story and emotion of a film.

7. Non-Linear Editing and Postmodern Narrative Theory

7.1 Fragmentation, Multiplicity, and the Postmodern Text

There is a close relationship between non-linear film editing and postmodern literary theory. Scholars such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Linda Hutcheon, and Fredric Jameson have pointed to the collapse of chronology, multiple points of view, and the absence of linear storytelling as key features of postmodern literature (Lyotard, 1984). These features are also clearly visible in non-linear cinema.

According to Lyotard, in the postmodern age people no longer believe in a meta-narrative or a single truth that explains everything. So instead of telling a story from a single point of view, postmodern writings adopt the method of presenting events from multiple points of view.

Non-linear editing follows the same pattern. Instead of telling the events in a straight sequence from beginning to end, they are presented in different time periods, through the perspectives of several characters, and sometimes in different ways from each other. Therefore, the audience has to think for themselves and connect the events to understand the story.

In this sense, non-linear cinema is a classic example of postmodern thought. It does not attempt to present a single truth. Instead, it shows how the story unfolds and the audience must discover its meaning for themselves. Therefore, the audience is not merely a spectator of a film, but becomes a participant in the process of constructing the meaning of the story. (Hutcheon, 1988; Jameson, 1991).

7.2 The Editor as Postmodern Author

The editor has a very important place in postmodern narrative theory. Roland Barthes in his famous essay "The Death of the Author" (1967) states that the meaning of a work is not determined by the author alone, but by the reader who discovers the meaning based on his experiences and thoughts (Barthes, 1977). That is, he questions the old notion that the author is the sole owner of the meaning of a work.

This concept applies to movies as well. Usually it is about the director. However, in non-linear cinema this concept is more relevant to the editor. Because the editor is not just someone who conveys the meaning as intended by the director to the audience. Rather, the editor is the main person who shapes the final look and meaning of the film.

Often the scenes filmed are not necessarily in the exact storyline. It is the editor's skill to turn such footage into a meaningful story. The emotion and meaning of the film is shaped by decisions such as in which order to place scenes, what to leave out, where to provide flashbacks and where to use silence.

This is why the Non-Linear Editor is often referred to as a "magical storyteller". "Magic" here is not working miracles. It refers to the ability to combine ordinary sights and sounds to create a story that makes the audience think and feel.

That is, the story is not something that is already hidden in the visuals; The editor creates the story from those scenes. Technical knowledge alone is not enough for this. An editor also needs great imagination, storytelling excellence, cultural knowledge, deep understanding of cinema and artistic vision.

So, non-linear editing is not just a technical task. It is an artistic process. It is more accurate to say that an editor is a co-author who shapes the story, emotion and meaning of a film.

7.3 Digital Technology and the Future of Non-Linear Storytelling

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies are growing at a very fast pace today. Its influence can also be seen in non-linear editing. Systems like Adobe Sensei, Avid AI, and Gling AI can examine video footage, find the best takes, identify dialogue, and prepare an initial rough cut. (Manovich, 2019)

But AI is still unable to make decisions about how to tell a movie's story, which scenes should come where, and which sequences will have the most impact on the audience. Even today such decisions are based on human experience and imagination.

At the same time, many technical tasks that take more time are done by AI much faster. AI makes things like editing footage, syncing video and audio, and selecting good shots easy. This gives the editor time to focus more on the important tasks of shaping the story's structure and feel.

AI has some advantages as well as limitations. AI can help even people who haven't learned much editing to prepare a preliminary edit. It will give more people a chance to get into video production and film.

But, AI always works by learning the models of previous successful movies, usually. Therefore, it is more likely to suggest familiar methods than new experiments. Because of this, different storytelling styles can sometimes be under-emphasized.

For example, the films Memento and Pulp Fiction are notable for their distinct non-linear storytelling. These kinds of bold creative decisions may not be easily suggested by an AI based solely on statistics.

So, while AI will become a great assistant for editors in the future, it will be the human editor who brings life to a film's story, creates emotions and introduces new ideas. AI can speed up tasks, but it is human creative thinking that gives soul and personality to a film.

8. Discussion: Synthesis and Implications

The main argument of this study is very clear. Non-linear editing is not just a technical process; It is an art form that tells a story. A good editor doesn't just add footage. They are transformed into a meaningful, emotional and engaging film. Hence, the editor can be described as a "magical storyteller". This concept has great significance in the fields of theory, education, film industry and culture.

Theoretical significance

Film editing should not only be seen as a technical subject but should be studied as an essential element of storytelling. Editing affects the time in a film, the order of the story, the experience of the characters, and the meaning the audience gets.

The ideas of cinema theorists such as Eisenstein, Siegfried Metz, Dziga Vertov and David Bordwell are still very important today. Additionally, cognitive film studies, postmodern theories, and digital cinema studies should also be part of editing studies. (Eisenstein, 1949; Metz, 1974; Vertov, 1984; Bordwell & Thompson, 2023).

Importance of education

A change is also needed in the way editing is taught. Students should also be trained in how to structure the story and not just focus on teaching the software.

Along with studying the great non-linear films of world cinema, the editing traditions of Indian cinema and South Asian cinema should also be taught. Films in languages like Malayalam, Tamil and Hindi need to be studied more from an editing point of view.

Importance in the film industry

In the film industry, the editor is often seen as a technical expert who executes the director's instructions. However, this view needs to change.

The editor's role in determining the final form of a film is very significant. Although the Oscar award for Best Editing has been given since 1934, editing does not receive as much importance in film criticism and discussions as the director, cinematographer, or actors do. This is an attitude that fails to properly value the editor's contribution.

Cultural importance

One of the biggest changes in cinema in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is non-linear editing. It has transformed not only the technical form of cinema, but also the way stories are told and the way audiences experience films.

Today many films do not tell their story in a straight sequence from beginning to end. Instead, they present the story using flashbacks, different timelines, and multiple points of view. Through this, the viewer not only watches the film, but also discovers the meaning of the story for themselves.

Therefore, non-linear editing is a force that has brought about a major change in our perspectives on time, memory, experience, and storytelling. The editor is one of the most important creative individuals who worked behind this change. Hence, in film studies and in the film industry, the editor deserves greater recognition and acceptability.

9. Conclusion

The main idea put forward by this study is that film editing, especially non-linear editing, is not merely a technical process but rather an art form of storytelling. Recorded visuals and sounds alone do not make a film. It is the editor who transforms them into a meaningful, emotionally rich story that engages the audience. That is why the editor is described as a “magical storyteller”.

In this study, non-linear editing is analysed on the basis of Soviet montage theory, film semiotics, cognitive film studies, and postmodern narrative theory. At the same time, by using notable films from world cinema and Indian cinema as examples, this study makes it clear that non-linear editing is not just a technical workflow, but that it has its own language, grammar, and aesthetics.

The power of a film does not depend solely on the number of shots or on great acting. How the visuals are arranged, where cuts are made, how time is presented, and how emotions are created in the audience are all decisions of the editor. Therefore, the editor is a creative artist who creates a meaningful story from scattered visuals.

In the future, more studies need to be conducted in this field. Research on how non-linear storytelling influences the thoughts and emotions of audiences should be further encouraged. Likewise, studies that compare the editing styles of films from different countries are also necessary. In particular, research on the editing traditions of Indian cinema and South Asian cinema still needs to be developed further.

Moreover, if film researchers, psychology researchers, narrative theory experts, and digital technology researchers work together, it will be possible to develop new knowledge and methodologies about non-linear editing.

To conclude, the non-linear editor is one of the most important creative artists of our time. It is the editor who gives life to cinema, makes us experience time in new ways, and transforms scattered visuals into a beautiful story. Therefore, it is time to acknowledge the editor not merely as a technical specialist, but as the co-creator of the film and the sculptor of the story. Understanding non-linear editing in depth is not just about understanding cinema; it is a study that helps us gain deeper insight into how stories are formed, how time is experienced, and how humans create meaning.

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