

A Comparative Analysis of the Narrative Functions of Cross-Cutting and Parallel Editing in Modern Film Markets

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Abstract. The widely spreading use of film editing which consists of Cross-Cutting and Parallel Editing has played an increasingly important role in filming industry. These core narrative means have been created with development of film narrative forms and are key techniques to advance plots and enhance expression of various emotions in a film. The study paid attention to the narrative functions of cross-cutting and parallel editing in modern films, analyzing how they can intensify narrative effects with alteration of time and space, strengthening emotional tension and presentation of multidimensional perspectives. The combination of case-analysis method and theories of narratology and editing was used in the study to explore specific application and effect of the two techniques in representative modern films. The study shows it is more appropriate to take advantage of crosscutting for narrative structures with multiple parallel story lines because it functions in enhancing emotional resonance and creating tense atmosphere by alternatively presenting multiple plots. Parallel editing, on the other hand, is dramatically helpful for non-linear narrative structure with appearance of multiple-layered temporal-and-spatial relationships enriching narrative dimensions of films. The main feature of crossing-cutting lies in stronger adaptation on multiple-linear narratives, improving story compactness and emotional impact, while providing a film with a more complex temporal structure and perspective is the major characteristic of parallel editing. Further exploration and research should concentrate on their development and innovation in the digital age and multicultural context, adventuring in deep application of these two editing techniques in different kinds of films.

Keywords: Cross-Cutting, Parallel Editing, Narrative of Modern Films, Multiple-Linear Narrative, Non-Linear Narrative.

1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that the essence of film is the art of time, and film editing can show audiences the most inspiring power of creation for time. There are two common-use among various editing skills, referring to Cross-Cutting and Parallel Editing, which represent two distinctive concepts of time and space and narrative philosophies. The former can be used to generate sense of tension and suspense by simultaneously presenting actions in various spaces while the latter can function in creating metaphor and association with the juxtaposition of discontinuous time. Not only technically

do film directors make their choice on them, but also the choice reflects their profound thinking on time, space and narrative logic.

In the global film market, the two editing techniques have followed different development paths and played their own roles in application fields. For example, cross-cutting has become an essential film-processing tool for advancing sense of rhythm and creating tension in Hollywood commercial blockbusters with the globalization of film industry. Parallel editing, however, can be frequently found in majority of art films and experimental movies in order to explore the complexity of non-linear narratives and multiple perspectives. Their diverse narrative functions and wide adaptability on a global scale reflects high demand on continuous evolution of the two techniques in different types of movies. For example, it is in a commercial movie that rhythm control for a story is crucial for its success. The technique of cross-cutting can be improved to act as a powerful tool while a film director can make use of parallel editing in order to identify characters and recall his or her memory in an art film. The process of differentiation and integration not only reflects evolution of global film aesthetics but also reveals complex interaction between editing techniques and cultural expression [1].

As compared and analyzed in the study, cross-cutting and parallel editing are able to undertake their different narrative functions. The specific cases in this study will also lead readers to discussion about how the two can shape perception towards time and space for audiences, and how they can fulfill creative transformation in global film ecosystem. Methodologically, the study will construct an analytical framework where the technical characteristics and the cultural significance can be explained and revealed with the combination of film narratology, cognitive theory and the studies for cultures.

2. Overview

Cross-cutting puts more emphasis on strengthening power of tension in a drama and cause-and-effect relations. To achieve the effect, a film director usually employs the tool as a narrative technique to present a character's actions in parallel at different locations or times in a story. Switching between a variety of scenes or plots in the same interval, the editing skill can effectively establish multiple temporal-and-spatial dimensions and enhance audience's sense of tension and anticipation for a story's advancement. It is the substantial function that can guide audience's attention to two or more plots which seems unrelated by constantly alternating shots in a film, and thereby result in a kind of hint or direct presentation of cause-and-effect relations.

Cross-cutting can achieve parallel occurrence of different scenes that can not be limited to presentation in a single timeline. This type of narrative structure can create a tension contrast both visually and emotionally for audiences. A good example is that in suspense or action films the technique of cross-cutting can show a sense that one character is encountering danger while another is conducting a behavior related to the event. Audiences will feel that they quickly switch and place themselves to different temporal and spatial positions in the film. As a result, they can perceive close connection of the two plots and the potential relationship between causes and consequences. Eventually, the cause-and-effect relationship will be naturally revealed, converging at the climax of a plot and creating a satisfactory dramatic tension.

In addition to the function of parallel presentation, cross-cutting enables plots to be pushed forward more tightly and powerfully in terms of rhythm. A film director is able to effectively take control on audience's emotional fluctuation and focus of attention. For example, for the purpose of creating a kind of tension atmosphere in a classic action film, the tool will be often employed to simultaneously present a scene of one character being pursued while another attempting to solve the

crisis. the sense of acceleration and oppression of a plot can occur with the editing switched. The editing method enables audiences to simultaneously concentrate on the advancement of multiple plots in a limited time period, which can be beneficial for enhancement of complexity and depth of the story.

During process of cross-cutting, hints of cause and effect are often ingeniously laid out through language of camera, hints of actions, and connections between different characters. By switching between different plots, directors can gradually reveal connections between characters on a visual level or highlight links between certain key events. This not only promotes narrative development but also establishes a causal chain between events in audience's mind, thereby deepening tension of plot and emotional resonance.

In conclusion, in addition to an excellent tool for advancing rhythm and tension of a movie, the technique of cross-cutting provides audiences with fantastic experience of narrative by discovering cause-and-effect relationship and multiple perspectives. The function of cross-cutting, continuously switching between different plots and time and space, enables a film story to become more compact and full of suspense. And ultimately, the development of plots driven by complex cause-and-effect structures and character links can enhance power of drama and depth of a film.

Parallel editing places greater attention on expanding narrative capacity and emotional resonance. That means the important skill in film narrative usually juxtaposes non-constant time and space to acquire the increase on narrative contents and deeper emotional resonance with audiences. Unlike cross-cutting, parallel editing is not only an effective tool for enhancing rhythm and tension of a film, but also provides audiences with a richer narrative experience by revealing cause-and-effect relationships and multiple perspectives. It is worth noting that Zhao Shijia holds that boundary between the two should not be merely defined by differences in time or space, but should be combined with perspective of narratology, with whether they belong to same story system as core criterion [2]. There are several benefits brought by parallel editing, such as improving layers of narrative, providing broader space for emotional tension and ideological depth of a movie.

As mentioned above, parallel editing can be used to expand narrative capacity of a story with juxtaposition of non-linear time structure because it can simultaneously present multiple events that happen at different time for audiences, breaking limitation of traditional linear narrative mode where the single timeline refers to a kind of chronological order in which story plots will be advanced. To strengthen complexity and depth of narrative, what a director can do is to convey plots of several time points in one scene in this way. For example, the technique is beneficial to show audiences a kind of interweaving of character's memories, recollections and reality, which contributes to a more multidimensional and hierarchical narrative structure for plots of many art films. Thereby, audiences can have a good and comprehensive understanding of inner psychological minds of characters and multiple implications of a plot.

Furthermore, Juxtaposition and contrast are the important method the technique of parallel editing can employ to enhance emotional resonance of a film. To specify, a director can juxtapose characters or events in different situations to effectively construct emotional contrasts, and thereby evoke emotional resonance among audiences. For example, for a movie about family affection or a romantic film, the director can employ parallel editing to alternately describe the emotional experiences of two groups of characters, which can generate resonance with audience's emotions. The narrative mode of parallel editing has undergone various changes during its development. Among them, a structure centered on mutually exclusive plots is particularly suitable for films exploring a theme of fate. The film of *Sliding Door* is a typical example. Through two fates that cannot hold true simultaneously, it prompts audiences to reflect on life choices and outcomes

through comparison [3]. It is possible to evoke audience's sensitivity and resonance towards alternation of emotions with contrasting scenes of family reunions and separations, or comparing joy and pain of couples involved with love. Not only can the technique make it easier for audiences to empathize, but also can enhance emotional depth of a story with delicate depiction for emotions of characters.

Additionally, juxtaposition of plots, a common tool of parallel editing, can reveal links or conflicts between characters' destiny, endowing a film with more philosophical reflections. A director usually describe seemingly unrelated events or characters side by side to discover their hidden relations. For example, parallel editing is often used to contrast fates of characters with different social hierarchies and cultural backgrounds, which can present more complex social situations and value conflicts. There are mainly three benefits of the technique, including broadening narrative layers of a movie, providing audiences with more space for interpretation and increasing the ideological depth of a film.

In conclusion, parallel editing is frequently used to expand narrative capacity of a movie and discover complexity of emotions and diversity of a society by juxtaposition of non-linear time and contrast of emotions. More functions include enhancing artistic appealing power and social significance of a film through resonance of emotions and presentation of concepts, which can make it no longer merely a narration of time and space, but a kind of interweaving of emotions and thoughts, creating profound emotional experience and space of reflection for audiences. In practice, parallel editing and cross-cutting are often easily confused. The former can present multiple plot lines in parallel at different times or spaces without establishing causal relationship. The latter emphasizes multiple causal narrative threads within same period of time and converses them at the climax, thereby enhancing sense of tension and conflict [4].

It is more suitable to employ the method of cross-cutting for modern narratives, especially complex narrative structure with multiple parallel story lines. As film narrative gradually has been developing towards multiple-layered and interwoven story lines, cross-cutting has become a highly effective narrative tool.

A variety of characters and multiple events often develop in parallel in contemporary films, such as commercial blockbusters and complex feature films. The appropriate use of cross-cutting is good for highlighting interrelationships because the method can present these plots simultaneously. For example, it is very common for a director to depict interweaving of several events in crime, action or science fiction films. What the technique of cross-cutting can do is to allow audiences to perceive the sense of urgency and complexity caused by actions of different characters, which is beneficial for improvement on the sense of rhythm and enables audiences to understand key nodes with the story's development more clearly by comparing cause-and-effect relations in different plots.

The technique can also demonstrate the nature of leaps between time and space, ingeniously presenting character's fates and plot arrangements with more layers and multiple perspectives. That means not only can it visually create sense of tension, but also strengthen complexity and captivating effect of film narrative by synchronously showing multiple times and spaces or events.

Therefore, there is a kind of structural advantage of multiple-threaded story-telling for such a common narrative technique in modern films. It plays an important role of bridging multiple events both efficiently and expressively, which reflects modern film's pursuit for complex plots and profound themes.

3. Analysis of cases

Among the film narrative techniques, cross-cutting functions in alternately presenting events belonging to different times, spaces or plots, and creating a kind of rich and multiple-layered narrative structure. The employment of cross-cutting in modern movies has become necessary because it can connect a variety of the development of plots or characters, particularly, simultaneously advancing occurrence of multiple events in complex narrative structure with several parallel story lines. As a result, rhythm of a film can be enhanced, and it is easier for audiences to better understand emotional connections between characters and cause-and-effect relations between events.

The early use of cross-cutting took place in the film of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). It constructs a complex multiple-threaded parallel narrative structure through synchronous advancement and frequent switching of multiple story lines in different spaces, using rhythmic editing [5]. The technique, however, has acquired its continuous improvement in modern films with the advancement of filming skills and narrative forms, and gradually become a widely-used narrative tool. The appropriate application of cross-cutting whose core function lies in its power to present multiple plots in parallel to break limits of linear time and provide a director with more layers of narrative space can enhance emotional tension of a movie, and strengthen rhythm and sense of urgency of a story. The precise arrangements of editing weaves together destiny of characters and different plots, which can construct a kind of complex multiple-threaded narrative structure.

There is a high demand on the technique in various types of modern films and good applications are involved with complex drama films and suspense films. For example, the film of *Inception* has been considered a good example full of the technique of cross-cutting. In the movie, audiences can vividly experience the sense of interweaving for time when the protagonist travels through different levels of dreams. The technique enables audiences to understand such non-linear alternation about time and space, and clarify cause-and-effect relations in complex narrative structure. The director Nolan took advantage of cross-cutting in this way for many times to present complex plots, which can enhance the rhythm of the film, maintain emotional tension with simultaneous advancement of multiple plot lines in different spaces through frequent switching of editing, and forms a unique rhythm interweaving between fast-paced actions and slow-paced dialogues [6], especially, effectively show how the protagonist makes decisions at different levels of dreams and finally these decisions can make influences on the ending of the real world in the scenes where dreams and reality interweave.

In addition, the film of *12 Monkeys* gains its reputation for the application of cross-cutting with which the director presents the progress of events at multiple time points to reveal the complexity of time journey and the interweaving of fates. Audiences can perceive the protagonist's predicament and struggle in the transition of time and space as the director use the technique to frequently interweave the plots of the past, present and future. It also lays the groundwork for the film's twists and ending. As Cohen pointed out that the recurring key scene, especially the airport death scene, which returns multiple times in variant forms in the film, not only promotes the interweaving of multiple time lines but also strengthens audience's perception of the theme of fate [7].

The power of enhancing emotional tension of a film is another important benefit of cross-cutting. In the movie of *Mystic River*, the director made use of the technique to show the reactions of the characters towards the same event, which reveals their inner conflicts and complex emotions. The parallel way of advancing the plot helps audiences understand the characters' motives and psychological states more comprehensively and enhances the emotional depth of the film. As Yu

Tiantian emphasized, cross montage often achieves a superimposed effect of emotional conflict and plot suspense by simultaneously presenting narrative threads of both positive and negative poles and converging them at the climax [8].

4. Discussion

The common narrative techniques comprise cross-cutting and parallel editing, and they act as distinctive roles in narrative structure. Cross-cutting is often used to interweave different events or time and space by alternately presenting different plot lines or fates of characters, which can create intense emotional conflicts and narrative tension. Especially, cross-cutting is more appropriately employed in complex narrative structure with multiple parallel story lines because it can clearly present events that seem independent but actually closely related. For instance, in the film of *Inception*, the director succeeded in creating a tense atmosphere and guiding audiences to understand the complex connection between time and space with switching back and forth between dreams. The editing method enables the director to skillfully interweave multiple clues, ensuring the overall narrative framework as audiences keep following the plots.

In contrast, parallel editing focuses on highlighting contrast or connection between events with skill of synchronous presentation by which a director can compare reactions of characters in different scenes or situations to enhance layering of emotions. For example, in the baptism scene of the first part of *The Godfather*, the film alternates the scene of Michael presiding over the baptism ceremony and his subordinates carrying out the assassination. The two plot lines advance in parallel in time, but form a sharp contrast in content and atmosphere. The parallel editing intensifies the ironic tone of the theme [9]. However, the limitation of parallel editing lies in the fact that it is more suitable to describe linear and clear plots because of its feature of relatively simple narrative structure. The displaying way in parallel shows limited power of presenting for complex narratives.

5. Conclusion

It is indicated from the study that cross-cutting and parallel editing are made up of core techniques of modern film narrative, and play significant role in rhythm control, transmission of emotions and construction of time and space. On the one hand, enhancement on emotional resonance and sense of tension can be achieved with alternating display of different plot lines because the technique of cross-cutting can skillfully coordinate development of multiple plot lines especially in complex narrative structure with several parallel plot lines, which can enable audiences to be strongly engaged in a story emotionally and cognitively. On the other hand, parallel editing is widely used in depicting contrast of different events or characters with its feature of displaying multiple-layered and multidimensional time. Such dealing with the kind of non-linear narrative structure is suitable for greatly enriching narrative depth of a film.

The further study indicates that cross-cutting is a kind of crucial film-editing technique in terms of presentation for emotional impact and narrative compactness, and it has evolved to gain strong engagement in modern narratives, especially in complex multiple-threaded parallel narratives. To break through limitation of traditional linear narrative, the technique has made attempts to advance development of a story with constantly interweaving plot lines, bringing audiences an instant emotional reaction and stronger sense of immersion in a story. As compared, parallel editing has an intention of expanding layers of a film with overlap of time and non-linearity feature of structure, which aims at parallel presentation of different narrative dimensions.

The significance of the study is to provide valuable reference for future research in the field, mainly influencing exploration for adaptability and application of cross-cutting and parallel editing in multiple narrative structures. It is emphasized in the study that flexibility and adaptability of cross-cutting in modern films will offer more possibilities for emotional expression and structural innovation in a film, especially under the background of digitization and globalization. There will be deeper discussion in future study about how the technique will demonstrate its uniqueness across a variety of cultural context and different types of films, and how it can perfect its power of narrative function with integrating new techniques.

Additionally, there should be more focuses included in future study, such as synergy between editing techniques and other filming elements (cinematography, sound, script, etc.), and how a combination of these technical means can promote innovation and breakthroughs in modern film narrative.

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