

Exploring Relationships Between Film Editing Techniques, Style, Narrative, and Audience Experience

Jiahao Fan

College of Journalism and Communications, Heilongjiang University, Harbin, China
fan13757598099@outlook.com

Abstract. As a core element of cinematic expression, film editing has evolved from early technical operations to an essential artistic practice, closely intertwined with film styles, narrative needs, and audience aesthetics since the birth of cinema. Against this backdrop, this study focuses on exploring the relationships between film editing techniques, style, narrative, and audience experience. The research centers on three interrelated dimensions: the influence of film styles on the selection of editing techniques, the role of editing in shaping narrative structures, and the shaping of audience experience by the artistic functions of editing. Adopting an analytical approach, it examines the artistic logic of editing techniques through these three perspectives, with support from specific film cases. The findings reveal that distinct film styles, driven by their unique artistic pursuits, determine the underlying logic for selecting editing techniques. Additionally, editing directly affects the audience's emotional engagement and reception effects by regulating narrative rhythm and reconstructing time and space. This research clarifies the mediating role of editing among "style-narrative-audience," providing a theoretical reference for film creation and interpretation.

Keywords: Film editing, editing techniques, film style, narrative structure, audience experience

1. Introduction

Since the birth of cinema, editing has evolved from simple shot-splicing to the core of cinematic expression, an "invisible art" that shapes a work's texture. From the single-shot simplicity of *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* to modern non-linear narratives, editing techniques have always been tied to stylistic shifts, narrative demands, and audience aesthetics: early silent films heightened drama by adjusting shot duration and scale (e.g., Chaplin's comedies used quick cuts to emphasize physical humor), while sound films required alignment with audio and dialogue. However, existing research often isolates editing techniques, inadequately exploring their dynamic links with style, narrative, and audience experience—leaving the editing-mediated "style-narrative-audience" loop under-analyzed.

This study has both theoretical and practical value: theoretically, it clarifies editing's intrinsic links with cinema's core elements, enriching academic discourse; practically, it guides creators in editing strategies to enhance artistic communication.

The study combines literature analysis and case studies: literature review synthesizes theories like Eisenstein's "vertical montage," Murch's "Six Principles," and views of Wang Yapeng, Chen Xi to build a theoretical framework; case studies on *Bicycle Thieves*, *Battleship Potemkin*, *Furious 7* (among others) analyze editing application logic. This approach balances theoretical depth and practical relevance.

The study aims to reveal editing's mediating role in the "style-narrative-audience" loop: explaining how style directs editing choices, how editing shapes narratives via rhythm regulation and time-space reconstruction, and how these processes collectively affect audience experience. It ultimately provides theoretical references for creators to refine editing strategies and for audiences to grasp editing's artistic value, bridging the technology-art divide in filmmaking.

2.The selection and expression of editing techniques by film style

Different film styles have distinct artistic pursuits, which significantly influence the selection of editing techniques. This influence is reflected not only in the technical level of shot connection but also in the creators' different understandings of "reality," "emotion," and "form."

2.1.The application of "invisible editing" in realist style

Realist films aim to "reproduce reality" and mostly adopt continuity editing. By following principles such as the "180-degree rule" and "match cut," they weaken the traces of shot switching, making it easier for the audience to immerse themselves. The Italian neorealist film *Bicycle Thieves* is a typical example. In the segment where the male protagonist searches for his bicycle, a large number of long shots are used, combined with smooth transitions between shot scales—from the wide shot of the street environment to the medium shot of the character's actions, then to the close-up of his facial expressions. Each shot lasts more than 15 seconds, with almost no jump cuts or montages. Chen Xi analyzed that this editing method simulates the rhythm of human eye observation, allowing the audience to forget the existence of shots and feel as if they are experiencing the same predicament as the character, thereby enhancing the authenticity of social criticism [1].

The Chinese film *The Story of Qiu Ju* follows the same logic. In the segment where Qiu Ju repeatedly visits government offices, the continuous shots of "walking-asking-waiting" retain the integrity of time. At the same time, unnecessary actions such as the character tripping and adjusting her scarf are deliberately included. This editing concept of "letting reality speak for itself" weakens the creator's subjective expression, and shot connections depend more on the logic of life.

2.2.The role of "visible editing" in expressing emotions in expressionist style

Unlike realism, expressionist films break through realistic logic through editing, often using jump cuts and montages to strengthen subjective emotions. In 1949, Sergei Eisenstein proposed the theory of "vertical montage" in relation to *Battleship Potemkin* [2]. He combined shots from different times and space to generate new meanings. In the "Odessa Steps" segment of the film, close-ups of a baby carriage rolling down, medium shots of soldiers raising their guns, and close-ups of people screaming appear alternately. The shot duration gradually shortens, while the music rhythm accelerates, continuously superimposing the sense of oppression brought by violence. Even if the audience has not experienced a revolution, they can feel the power of anger and resistance through editing.

Modern psychological thrillers also well embody expressionist editing styles. In the film *Black Swan*, the segment of Nina's rehearsal uses many jump cuts. The same action is split into multiple fragmented shots: the rotating toes, the reflection in the mirror, and the coach's gaze. These shots have weak logical connections in switching but accurately convey the character's inner fragmentation and anxiety. This kind of editing allows the audience to better "feel the emotions." As director Darren Aronofsky said, "I want the audience to go crazy with Nina."

2.3. The adaptation of "functional editing" to narrative functions in genre film style

Editing techniques in genre films are more targeted, with distinct editing choices for different genres.

Action films often rely on quick editing to create tension. In the "skydiving with cars" segment of *Furious 7*, 38 shots are used in just 15 seconds, from the opening of the airplane door to the landing of the vehicle. Each shot focuses on different details, switching between the steering wheel turning, the actors' expressions, and the approaching ground. The editing rhythm echoes the car engine sound, environmental sounds, and music, giving the audience a "sense of immersive speed" [3].

Art-house films mostly use long shots and slow-paced editing to show characters' psychological activities. In *A City of Sadness*, the segment where Lin Wenqing and Kuanmei meet by the sea has a single shot lasting nearly 3 minutes. A long shot that slowly pushes from a distant view of waves hitting the shore to a medium shot of their conversation, combined with the characters' silence, the howling sea breeze, and distant bird calls, delicately expresses the characters' inner world, allowing the audience to better appreciate the fragility of love in turbulent times.

Experimental films often use non-linear editing to break narrative conventions and challenge the audience's cognition. In *Mulholland Drive*, shots of reality and dreams are randomly spliced: for example, a terrifying scene in a café suddenly cuts to an actress's audition scene. Character identities constantly change through editing. This "anti-logical" editing is not chaotic but simulates the "time-space folding" characteristic of dreams, requiring the audience to actively search for and piece together clues, thus engaging more deeply with the film and triggering deeper thinking.

3. The role of editing techniques in narrative structure and rhythm

Editing is the core of shaping narrative rhythm and structure. Its function is not just to "tell a story" but, more importantly, to "tell a good story." By adjusting shot duration, order, and scale, editing can produce different narrative effects from the same material.

3.1. Rhythm regulation in linear narrative

In traditional linear narrative, editing regulates rhythm through shot duration and shot scale transitions. Calm segments use long shots, while conflict scenes shorten shot intervals. The editing of Andy's escape segment in *The Shawshank Redemption* is typical. In the first half, to build a sense of oppression, long shots are mostly used, such as the close-up of Andy staring at the poster in his cell, lasting 8 seconds. When he starts acting, the editing rhythm suddenly accelerates: a close-up of rain washing over the poster (1 second), a close-up of hands chiseling the wall (0.5 seconds), a distant view of climbing the pipe (2 seconds), the barking of prison dogs (1 second) ... 38 shots are completed within 3 minutes, compressing hours of action into a compact narrative unit. The audience's heartbeat quickens with the frequency of shot switching, reaching the peak of dramatic tension [4].

In *Forrest Gump*, the editing of Forrest's long-distance running segment chooses a "slow rhythm" to convey a sense of growth. Forrest's run from Alabama to the West Coast is presented through 12 long shots, each averaging 10 seconds, showing the changes of seasons, the number of followers, and Forrest's appearance. The shot slowly pushes from a distant view to a medium shot, accompanied by soothing music, turning "running" from a simple action into a symbol of "life journey."

Thus, the editing logic of "letting rhythm serve the theme" is common in linearly narrative films.

3.2. Time-space reconstruction in non-linear narrative

Non-linear narrative relies on the time-space reconstruction ability of editing, creating suspense or deepening themes by disrupting shot order. *Memento* is a typical example. The film uses the plot of the protagonist's "short-term memory loss" as the editing logic: black-and-white shots of the forward narrative threads and color shots of the reverse narrative threads alternate, with the end of each reverse segment overlapping with the beginning of the next. This "reverse splicing" makes the audience "lose their time coordinates" like the protagonist. It is not until the final shot of the protagonist burning the photo that the audience suddenly realizes: the confusion in editing exactly echoes the theme of "unreliable memory" [5].

Inception uses "multi-layered dreams" editing to construct a nested narrative. The real-world airplane scene uses cold tones and long shots; the first-level dream's city chase uses quick editing and warm tones; the second-level dream's hotel zero-gravity scene uses rotating shots and jump cuts; the third-level dream's snow fortress uses slow-motion and cross-cutting. The distinct editing styles of different dreams allow the audience to clearly distinguish time-space levels. Even with a complex narrative, the audience can understand the time-space logic in the film through visual cues, expanding the possibilities of non-linear narrative through editing.

3.3. The symbiotic relationship between editing rhythm and emotion

In 2001, Walter Murch put "emotion" first in his "Six Principles of Editing." [6]. This indicates that editing rhythm should serve the progression of narrative emotions, not just show off techniques. The "ship sinking" segment in *Titanic* well embodies this. At first, when the ship tilts, the shot duration is maintained at around 5 seconds, showing the passengers' panic. When the hull breaks, the shot duration suddenly shortens to 1-2 seconds, presenting the screams of falling into water, the distance of lifeboats, and the struggle between Jack and Rose. When Jack sinks to the seabed, the shot suddenly extends to 10 seconds, giving a close-up of Rose staring at the sea surface. The "sudden stop" of rhythm allows the sad emotion to settle.

4. The influence of editing style on audience emotional experience and reception effect

Editing directly mobilizes audience emotions through rhythm changes and visual cues, and also affects the depth of audience understanding and the scope of reception. This interactive relationship is the core of film communication effects.

4.1. The physiological and psychological impact of editing on emotions

Studies have shown that editing techniques can trigger measurable physiological responses in the audience. In horror films, sudden jump cuts combined with sound effects can make the audience's galvanic skin response (an indicator of emotional fluctuations) rise by more than 30% within 0.5

seconds [7]. The long-shot editing of art-house films, by extending the audience's gaze time, reduces the heart rate by 5-10 beats per minute, fostering empathic psychology. In the earthquake segment of *Aftershock*, the previous second is a long shot of the mother cooking in the kitchen, full of a sense of calm; the next second suddenly cuts to a highly impactful image of houses collapsing. This "rhythmic assault" of both visuals and sound synchronizes the audience's physiological reactions with the characters' experiences, generating "immersive fear."

From a psychological perspective, editing guides the audience to complete the narrative logic through the "visual gestalt" mechanism. This "cognitive compensation" ability allows editing to not strictly follow chronological order. In the segment where Chris gets the job in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, the editing omits the process of "him walking out of the company," directly cutting from the office interior to a distant view of the street. However, the audience can understand the narrative through the character's expression and environmental changes, and this "blank space" instead enhances the emotional impact.

4.2. The relationship between editing style and audience acceptance threshold

Different editing styles affect the audience's acceptance range. The continuity editing of commercial genre films can lower the audience's understanding threshold. Although the battle scenes in *The Avengers* are complex, by following the editing rules of the "180-degree rule" and "action matching," even young audiences can understand the plot. In contrast, the non-linear editing of experimental films requires higher media literacy from the audience. For example, in *Last Year at Marienbad*, shots of the past and present are spliced without markers, requiring the audience to watch repeatedly to sort out character relationships. This "high-participation" editing makes the film exclusive to film festivals or niche film enthusiasts, but most audiences find it difficult to understand.

Monaco pointed out that the audience's acceptance of editing has shifted from "passive viewing" to "active decoding." [8]. In the era of social media, audiences are accustomed to the "fast-paced jump cuts" of short videos. This aesthetic change has forced innovation in film editing. *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* integrates comic storyboards, animation jump cuts, and live-action film continuity editing, satisfying young audiences' demand for "visual stimulation" while avoiding confusion through a clear narrative structure, achieving a good balance between art and commerce.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that film style determines the selection of editing techniques, and editing influences narrative through rhythm regulation and time-space reconstruction, as well as shapes the audience's emotional experience and reception effects. This conclusion reveals the mediating role of editing among "style-narrative-audience," providing a clear practical logic for film creation and helping audiences better understand the artistic value of editing. Future research can further explore the innovation of editing techniques driven by emerging technologies and the specific causes of differences in editing acceptance across cultural backgrounds, making the research more relevant to current film development.

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