BREAKING THE SEQUENCE:

Exploring the impact of Non-Linear

Editing on Film Narratives

Callum Everitt

Master of Arts by Research

University of York

December 2023

ABSTRACT

This research explores the art of non-linear narratives and non-linear editing. It explores what makes a film non-linear and provides insights into the advantages and disadvantages of these particular techniques. Using key texts, sources and three case studies, it allows for greater understanding of these methods. In addition, it will lead the hand in the creation of three short films, each unique in the sense that they follow different narrative structures in how they are edited. The research conducted argues that Non-linear films may come down to personal preference for audiences. Also, the research indicates that there is no definitive 'best structure' for a narrative, which implies further research needs to be conducted into the audience's individual needs and wants.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling conventions within the evolving landscape of cinema is constantly evolving. Non-linear narratives are fundamentally emerging as transformative tools to challenging traditional approaches of telling stories to the audience. Hestand suggests that "non-linear storytelling has emerged as a compelling alternative, offering a unique and engaging experience for the audience. This narrative technique, which presents events out of their chronological order, challenges conventional storytelling norms and invites viewers into a more active role of piecing the story together" (Hestand, 2023, para.1). This brings upon lots of questions as to why filmmakers are departing from the linear trajectory of illustrating a narrative. One of these may fundamentally be down to audience engagement which is suggested by an extract from FasterCapital.com which articulates that "This can be used to create a sense of time passing, to create connections between characters or ideas, or to evoke a particular emotion" (FasterCapital, 2023,para.5).

This goes without saying that Non-linear editing plays a key factor in establishing a Non-linear narrative. Indeed, the Non-linear narrative may have been written that way on the script. Although it's the style of editing that shapes and moulds how the narrative is being displayed to the audience. "It's the process of editing and selecting shots,

sequences and scenes whilst using various editing techniques and making editing decisions in line with creative instructions and the director's vision" (Straub, 2023,para.3). It essentially demonstrates that both Non-linear narratives and editing complement one another to ascertain the film's purpose and goals. However, it's important to inaugurate that editing is just a creative tool in illustrating to audience the passage of time. Jones states that the "editing process greatly impacts the way we perceive a film. For example, jumping between two scenes during different times might highlight their significance with each other" (Jones, 2019,para.11).

However, there's this interesting conception of how we interpreted certain events. Due to our nature of understanding events in a linear fashion, maybe there's a 'grey area' where certain sequences can be decoded as occurring in the present. Although these sequences in fact transpired in the past or future. This concept is explored in the Literature Review.

From this introduction, it becomes evident that Non-linear Narrative represents the 'why' behind the story being told in a particular structure. The 'why' serves as the foundation of the film itself, providing essential insights into the motivations and underlying themes of the narrative. This foundational 'why' is crucial for effective worldbuilding and character depth, ensuring that the story resonates on a deeper level with the audience.

On the other hand, Non-linear Editing represents the 'how' of the storytelling process. It refers to the techniques and methods employed to construct the film in a way that fulfils

its intended purpose. By manipulating the sequence of events and establishing time within the narrative, Non-linear editing enhances the storytelling. This makes it more engaging and dynamic.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are a variety of different factors that can be explored with the use of non-linear narratives and editing. As there are conflicting ideas surrounding non-linear narratives and editing, it's hard to pinpoint an exact answer to these questions. This demonstrates that there's plenty of areas to explore for further research. Investigating the overall benefits of non-linear and how the audience gets more out of the story and its characters, compared to that of a linear structure.

With these key areas in mind, the study aims to examine two areas: firstly, understanding audience engagement of a non-linear film and which narrative structure they preferred, and secondly what the audience desires when watching a film (for its accessibility in linear or non-linear's complexity). With these in mind the study will try to answer the questions of: "How does non-linear storytelling influence emotional engagement compared to linear narratives" and "How does the use of non-linear editing effect audience's cognitive processing of events and sequences?".

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier, the overall objective of this study is to explore the impact of how non-linear editing affects the overall audience experience. With the creation of three different versions of the short film, each one follows different narrative structures. All three versions will then be shown to a group of participants, who will then fill out a questionnaire. Through this method, it's hoping to answer some of the ideas put forward earlier. With all three versions using the same footage, the placement of scenes and sequences differ from one another. This hopes to establish how non-linear editing and the placement of sequences within a timeline change perspectives, adds character depth, and provides a more organic experience for audiences.

As this study focuses largely on editing techniques, expensive filming equipment isn't needed to shoot the film. The film will be shot on an iPhone, rely heavily on available lighting and actor's performances. However, when shooting, the experimental side of the non-linear edits are kept in mind to allow a smooth transition from one scene to another. This means that some scenes will be shot slightly differently in terms of actor's performances. With this, it allows some headroom during the editing process.

During the editing phase the first version of the short film (Linear) followed the script's chronological sequences and was edited in accordance with this narrative structure. The second version of the film (Non-linear) starts off with the climax, midpoint of the story and then flashbacks to the events that led up to that climax. This indeed follows a very similar structure to that of the first version in terms of everything being chronological after the climax sequence is shown. Although it still classes as non-linear

it how it portrays the events. The third version of the film (Non-linear) introduces interweaving structure. Each scene is either a flashback or flashforward as it attempts to show an alternative viewpoint of the protagonist's life.

To hinder the chances of biased expectations from the participants, there will be a randomisation in terms of the order that the participants will see the different versions of the short film. For example: one participant may see versions 3,1,2 in that order, whilst another may see 2,3,1. With this, this ensures that the participant's reactions are solely based on the qualities of each of the versions of the short film, rather than predetermined expectations.

The construction of the questionnaire was to understand the participant's viewer engagement and evaluate the participant's perceptions of the narrative structures. Furthermore, it was important to add additional questions in the questionnaire to comprehend audience expectations and their overall commitment to watching all three versions of the film in one sitting. I believe exploring these areas, as well as the main focus of the study fundamentally demonstrates audience's attitudes and makes the data more tangible in terms of its credibility. In terms of data analysis, the data is being presented in a quantitative format to allow it to be visualised for studying. This gains an insight into participant's overall preferences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Defining 'Non-Linear'</u>

The actual definition of Non-linear in films is in many regards ambiguous. The exact meaning differs depending on sources and personal interpretation. This seems to be the case for the term 'Non-linear narratives'. However, 'Non-linear Editing' has a clear distinction as that is the act of how a film is constructed from a technical standpoint. Linear Editing is now fundamentally obsolete due to modern technologies allowing editors flexibility with the footage they've been given. Linear editing encompasses physical footage with film tapes and reels. Editors would have to manually cut footage and stick scenes together. Editors would do this in sequence order to speed up production (Woltmann,2023,para.5). Non-linear editing works by eliminating the destructive act of physically cutting film by using digital footage (Evans,2006, p.14), which allows editors to experiment more with the footage provided. With Non-linear editing it allows editors "to develop a workflow style which best suits you and how your creative mind works" (Vegas,2022,para.8).

Non-Linear narratives prove to be difficult to define as structures throughout films have changed throughout time. Many sources suggest that Non-linear storytelling is simply "a narrative technique in which story events are structured in nonchronological order" (Ferguson, 2023,para.6). One could argue that the use of flashbacks and flashforwards illustrates events within a story is indeed nonchronological. Many films use flashbacks within a linear structure, whilst many nonlinear films utilise linear sequences throughout (Blum,2001, p.125). Other sources express that the differences between linear and non-linear is simply down to two things: How each structure illustrates a character's arc and

demonstrating the passage of time itself within the world that the film is set in (Aju, 2022,para.11). The demonstration of how time itself is going forwards and backwards is to "increase the amount of tension interpreted by the audience, without having to expend additional efforts on the script" (Hill, 2019). It seems the biggest agreement amongst sources is that character depth is the one distinguishable factor that determines whether the structure is linear or nonlinear. Indeed, you can have character depth in a chronological story. Although with non-linear, it's how the events are presented that demonstrates how character's motivations, history and behaviours have changed at different points in time within the story's world (Sutherland,2023,para.10).

With the exploration of these sources, it provides some sort of clarity on the techniques used to make it a non-linear narrative. Although with the thorough understanding of non-linear editing, one could argue that simply rearranging scenes and sequences during the post-production can produce a non-linear narrative and provides more than the script provided. Undeniably many scripts are written with a non-linear structure in mind. However, it's important to highlight how seemingly experimenting with non-linear editing can produce something that follows the traits of what makes non-linear narratives more engaging for audiences. These are key elements to think about in regard to the research questions, as well as the overall creation of the three different versions of "Pull Over'.

Case Studies

For the creation of the three different versions of 'Pull Over' to be used for research purposes and to gain the most tangible results, it's important to explore and study film texts that are classed as 'Non-linear'. Additionally, it's also important to highlight the significance of the screenplay themselves to also touch upon how the non-linear format moulds during the pre-production stage.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (Gondry,2004) explores the nature of memory and love by using elements of science fiction and psychological drama to create non-linear film that's fragmented in terms of the placement of the scenes (Cole & Kipp, 2022,para.3). The film demonstrates how the human memory is unpredictable and disjointed (Teo,2013, para.15) due the structure of scenes being nonchronological. It applies non-linear narrative techniques to demonstrate the complexities of human relationships. This structure fundamentally demonstrates the manipulation of time, by challenging traditional linear storytelling.

Figure 1: "Screengrabs of the opening sequence", Gondry, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, 2004

The technique of fragmented chronology is evident in the opening scenes of the film (shown in *Figure 1)*. The first scene shows the main character Joel waking up with long hair and facial hair. After he gets up from his bed, it cuts to the next scene where we see him again. He is now on a train; however, he now features no facial hair and with short hair under his beanie hat. This clearly illustrates to the audience that this train scene is either set before or after the opening scene. This generates a sense of intrigue for the audience, whilst highlighting a possible highpoint in the character's life. As the narrative unfolds Clementine presents herself as a stranger, but as they start talking it's clear that these initial moments between them are in the midpoint of their relationship, not the beginning. With the dialogue it conveys to the audience that there's more to this relationship. This again generates that element of mystery for the audience. This idea of fragmented chronology is evidently here and with it being non-linear, it establishes how the characters have evolved to the audience.

Figure 2:" Screengrab of Joel revisiting a memory", Gondry, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, 2004

Studying the film reveals an intriguing theme of variation and repetition, where Joel and Clementine's relationship is revisited multiple times, showcasing how memories are subjective and open to interpretation. The feature of fragmented chronology being used comes with Clementine and Joel's relationship being revisited multiple times. This repetition comes with an element of déjà vu, which demonstrates how memories are subjective and down to interpretation. Although each repetition presents new variations in terms of dialogue and actions from the characters. Joel relives his moments of intimacy and conflict with Clementine (seen in *Figure 2*). This clearly highlights how their relationship is similar to that of a rollercoaster with its high points and low points at different points in time. With this narrative technique and it being non-linear in nature, it highlights how memories and events can be reinterpreted again and again. One could argue that this technique would be difficult to pull off in a linear narrative structure format. Implementing such complexity within a linear narrative structure would likely limit the depth of interpretation and hinder the portrayal of varied perspectives and experiences.

Reservoir Dogs

Reservoir Dogs (Tarantino, 1992) explores the themes of Deception, Remorse and Morality by challenging the audience to piece together the timeline of events. The film features many flashbacks not only "to illustrate certain character's backstories but utilises them to provide a different perspective of a character in real-time" (Hestand, 2023,para.4). The film is mostly set in the warehouse after the bank heist, but it also shows glimpses of what happens before the heist. It doesn't show the audience what happens during the heist. The film presents events out of chronological order with interweaving sequences that offers different perspectives on certain events within the story.

Figure 3:" Screengrabs of Mr Orange being injured and Mr Orange practising being a criminal", Tarantino, Reservoir Dogs, 1992

The use of a flashback as mentioned previously, may not be considered 'non-linear'. Although it this case, the use of it is essential in establishing a character and their motives. Halfway through the film, Mr Orange reflects on his predicament (suffering with

a gunshot wound. It is revealed that Mr Orange is an undercover cop, and it triggers a

flashback (shown in *Figure 4*) which provides a glimpse into his police training and

acting like a robber. With this time jump back in time, in provides the audience with Mr

Orange's personal struggles (that being of duty as an undercover cop and also

maintaining the trust he gained from the criminal group). The flashback sequence offers

a momentous turning point at the end of the second act of the film. This fundamentally

allows audiences to get different perspectives of the character which wouldn't have

been possible in a linear structure. This gives the audience the opportunity to unravel

why the heist went bad, as they weren't shown what happened during the heist.

Figure 4:" Screengrabs of Mr. White, Mr. Blonde and Mr. Orange", Taratino, Reservoir Dogs,1992

Quentin Tarantino utilises interweaving narratives to present three different perspectives

on particular events and sequences within the narrative: Mr. White, Mr. Blonde and Mr.

Orange (shown in *Figure 5*). Viewing all these three unique perspectives, allows

audiences to fully understand the character's aims and goals, whilst also giving them

the information they need to piece together the full story. These interweaving narratives

are piece together by the end of the film. How these events are presented to the

audience through non-linear editing, such as flashbacks or parallel storylines, is what

determines the storytelling structure, focusing on thematic coherence or suspense rather than strict chronology.

Figure 5:" Screengrabs of Mr. Blonde speaking to Nice Guy Eddie, Mr. Blonde Interrogating and Mr. Orange shooting Mr. Blonde", Tarantino, Reservoir Dogs, 1992

A prime example of this is Mr. Blonde and how is backstory comminates with his death by Mr. Orange shooting him. Mr Blonde's perspective depicts his violent history (shown in *Figure 6*) by using flashbacks to reveal his previous acts of brutality. These prior acts of Mr Blonde's brutality are illustrated by revisiting moments from his past where he engages in violent behaviour, such as his torture of a police officer. These flashbacks provide insight into his character and contribute to the audience's understanding of his

violent tendencies and criminal background. The use of the non-linear structure heightens the unpredictability of his nature by showing how nice he is to Nice Guy Eddie before the heist and then cuts to the torture scene. This in turn intertwines with Mr. White's character who before the heist suspects there's a traitor in the group. With these two flashback scenes between these two characters (Mr. White and Mr. Blonde), it sets of the sequence of Mr. Orange's backstory when he shot Mr Blonde. This non-linear, entwining format adds an element of suspense as it lets the audience witness Mr. Blonde's true nature when the gang are threatened.

Through this style of non-linear storytelling, *Reservoir Dogs* provides a complex exploration of relationships, conflicts and backstories. The non-linear nature of this film immerses audiences by showing different perspectives from different characters. All of these perspectives pay off at the end and establishes why certain sequences occurred. This style enhances audience engagement, whilst allowing them to navigate character's attitudes and the reasoning behind their actions.

Arrival

Arrival (Villeneuve, 2016) explores themes of emotional resonance and of communication. The main protagonist in the film (Louise) at the start of the film is shown to be a mother who is heartbroken and just lost her child. The scenes are illustrated to initially as flashbacks. Although later on, we discover that these are indeed flashforwards, which in many ways subvert audience expectations. "Not once was it said that those were events from the past, but we the audience assumed that it was because of our linear thinking pattern" (Chaudhury, 2020,para.6). The film is classed as

non-linear due to these flashforwards in time. With these flashforwards and experiencing these at the same time as Louise, "it allows the audience to experience the same confusion and discovery as the protagonist" (Walters, 2023,para.2).

Figure 6:" Screengrabs of the opening sequence of Arrival", Villeneuve, Arrival, 2016

The opening sequence (*Figure 7*) of the film clearly establishes that the film doesn't follow a linear progression. The film shows scenes of Louise with her daughter using a montage sequence. However, each scene is illustrated in a non-linear format as each new cut shows Louise daughter at different stages of her life. The scene starts with Louise's daughter's death and then cuts back to her infancy. This sequence ends on the daughter's death again but shows Louise's reaction to this event. Interweaving different scenes through different periods of time not only demonstrates this idea of emotional resonance, but it implies to the audience that the story itself is about memories and how we perceive them. It's somewhat similar to that of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* on how fragmentations of memories can be interpreted. This in turn foreshadows how the film explores this concept of a non-linear structure and uses it reconnoitre how the human mind works.

Figure 7:" Screengrabs of the flashforward sequence", Villeneuve, Arrival, 2016

Later on in the film, the utilisation of flashforwards becomes clear in establishing how present events creates the outcomes of future events. This is apparent in the scene where Louise starts to decode the Hetpapod language which starts her having 'visions' of the future. In *Figure 8* we see the character of Ian (Louise's partner) rushing her off to safety. It then cuts to a scene with her daughter which we've found out during the present sequence that she doesn't have. These short glimpses of Louise's future life provide the audience with insights of character growth without giving the audience the full context of how and why these events have occurred. This in many ways challenges the viewer into piecing together present and future sequences into establishing the character's actions. From the present sequence we learnt that Ian doesn't want a child but as it cuts to Louise with her daughter this brings upon many questions that the audience have. This level of engagement from the audience enriches the viewing experience by adding an extra layer of character development. The use of this style of editing fundamentally plays into the 'show not tell' motto by relying on visual storytelling to allow viewers to piece together the full story.

<u>Memento Screenplay</u>

This opening section of the *Memento* (Nolan, 2000) screenplay immediately sets up its

non-linear structure using reverse chronology and fragmented storytelling (seen in

Figure 9). By starting with a photograph that fades to white and actions that unfold in

reverse (like Leonard catching the gun and the blood reassembling), the film signals that

it will not follow a traditional timeline. This unusual start grabs the audience's attention

and makes them work to piece together the story, just like Leonard has to piece together

his fragmented memories. This storytelling approach not only creates suspense and

intrigue but also mirrors Leonard's disoriented mental state, highlighting the film's themes of memory, perception, and the unreliability of reality.

There are two main examples from this section of the script that demonstrates events are transpiring in a non-chronological format. The actions described, such as Leonard flapping the photo and placing it back into the camera, which then "sucks" the photo up, indicate that events are being shown in reverse. Typically, a photo is taken and then developed, but here, it's the opposite. Leonard catching the handgun which "leaps up into his grasp" and the detailed description of the blood reassembling onto Teddy's face further emphasis that we are witnessing the events in reverse.

500 Days of Summer Screenplay


```
EXT. PARK - DAY

For a few seconds we watch A MAN (20s) and a WOMAN (20s) on a
park bench. Their names are TOM and SUMMER. Neither one says
a word.

CLOSE ON her HAND, covering his. Notice the wedding ring. No
words are spoken. Tom looks at her the way every woman wants
to be looked at.

A DISTINGUISHED VOICE begins to speak to us.

                    NARRATOR
          This is a story of boy meets girl.

                                        CUT TO:


(1)


INT CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The boy is TOM HANSEN. He sits at a very long rectangular
conference table. The walls are lined with framed blow-up
sized greeting cards. Tom, dark hair and blue eyes, wears a t-
shirt under his sports coat and Adidas tennis shoes to
balance out the corporate dress code. He looks pretty bored.

                    NARRATOR
          The boy, Tom Hansen of Margate, New
          Jersey, grew up believing that he'd
          never truly be happy until the day
          he met his... "soulmate."

                                        CUT TO:


INT LIVING ROOM - 1989

PRE-TEEN TOM sits alone on his bed engrossed in a movie. His
walls are covered in posters of obscure bands. From the TV,
we hear: "Elaine! Elaine!"
```

Figure 9:" Screengrab of Page 1 of 500 Days of Summer", Webb, 500 Days of Summer, 2009

This opening sequence sets the non-linear structure by contrasting different points in Tom and Summer's relationship right from the first page. The narrative jumps between Day 488 and Day 1, indicating that the story will be told out of chronological order. The narrator's voice-over explicitly tells the audience that this will not be a typical love story, preparing them for an unconventional narrative structure. The screenplay immediately places a scene from near the end of the relationship (Day 488) next to the beginning (Day 1), highlighting the highs and lows of their time together. The utilisation of title cards to denote specific days helps the audience navigate the timeline and understand the context of each scene. This technique allows the story to explore themes and emotions more deeply by showing how different events and moments connect across time.

By using these elements from the very first page, "500 Days of Summer" effectively sets up its non-linear narrative, encouraging the audience to piece together the relationship's story in a way that mirrors the complexity and unpredictability of real-life relationships.

STUDY INFLUENCE

It has become clear through the study of texts that non-linear structures start with the film script. Indeed, as there will be three versions of 'Pull Over', it can be easily stated that the script for this film should be written in a linear format. This clearly allows flexibility during the editing process of all three versions. This without question links back to previous film texts such as *Arrival*. This will demonstrate how non-linear editing is a powerful tool in experimenting with different scenes and their placements within a timeline. By understanding audience expectations and character complexities from the text, it allows for a robust foundation to craft the three different versions of 'Pull Over'.

Drawing inspiration from the case studies has significantly informed the creation of these three different versions of the short film. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* with its use of scenes being out of chronological order is a clear inspiration of how to explore certain character arcs in a fragmented nonchronological manner. This technique can be used to explore the protagonist's state of mind through different periods of time within the film. With the study of *Reservoir Dogs* it has enhanced the understanding of character perspectives through non-linear storytelling. This can be a vital tool in the creation of the short films, as it can add an extra level of dynamic to the story and characters. This extra level is that of character's relationships and motivations. The use of non-linear editing can be showing how relationships between characters have changed throughout different periods of time. *Arrival* and how it uses the future to illustrate the consequences of actions in the present is another powerful tool that can be utilised in the creation of the short films. Showing the character in their lowest point to the audience first and then illustrating to them how they got there in the first place creates a more impactful experience. It adds a more sequential complexity for the audience as it intrigues them into understanding character development.

RESULTS

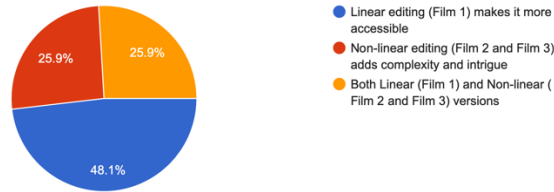How do you think the different editing structures effect the overall viewership?
27 responses

Figure 10:" Screenshot of results from the question – How do you think the different editing structures affect the overall viewership?"

With the results (Appendix C) , some conclusions can be drawn on participant's preferences and attitudes towards the different versions of the short film. With the first question (*Figure 9*), it has become apparent a vast majority of people (13 out 27) only preferred the linear version of the short film with its accessibility. Although 7 people preferred all three versions of the film, whilst another 7 people preferred the non-linear editing of versions 2 and 3. This may indicate that audiences prefer both the accessibility of a linear structure, as well as the complexity of a non-linear one. This may demonstrate that a hybrid of both could work effectively.
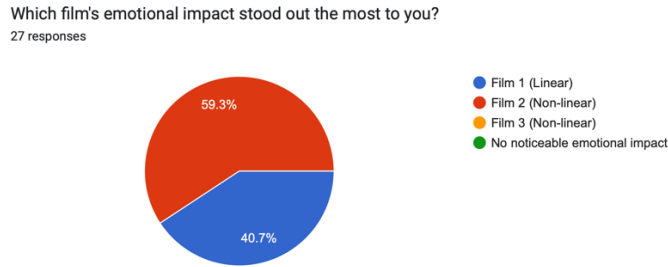
23

Which film's emotional impact stood out the most to you?
27 responses

Film 1 (Linear)
Film 2 (Non-linear)
Film 3 (Non-linear)
No noticeable emotional impact

59.3%

40.7%

Figure 11:" Screenshot of results from the question – Which film's emotional impact stood out the most to you?"

Figure 10 demonstrates that 16 participants found that film 2 had more of an emotional impact compared to the other two versions. It's important to mention that none of the participants preferred Film 3. This illustrates that possibly starting the film with the character's lowest point in their life and then showing the events leading up to the character's downfall creates a more emotional response from audiences.

Which film do you prefer overall?
27 responses

Film 1 (Linear)
Film 2 (Non-linear)
Film 3 (Non-linear)
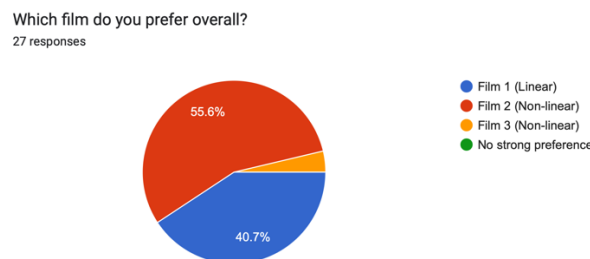No strong preference

55.6%

40.7%

Figure 12:" Screenshot of results from the question –Which film do you prefer overall?"

Figure 11 supports this point as well. From this 15 of the participants preferred Film 2 compared to the likes of the other versions. This may demonstrate that audiences prefer seeing the outcome of events before the cause as it creates more intrigue for the audience.

Which film's approach to character development did you find most intriguing?
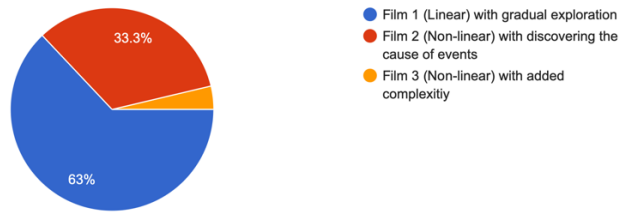27 responses

- Film 1 (Linear) with gradual exploration
- Film 2 (Non-linear) with discovering the cause of events
- Film 3 (Non-linear) with added complexitiy

33.3%

63%

Figure 13:" Screenshot of results from the question –Which film's approach to character development did you find most intriguing?"

However, with *Figure 12,* it someone contradicts the results of *Figure 11*. It illustrates that the participants favoured the character development in Film 1 with 17 votes. With Film 1's gradual exploration of the characters, this may indicate how the human mind favours gradual growth in a chronological fashion.

Do you think the initial expectations set before each film influenced your perception?
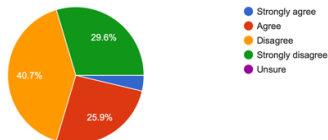27 responses

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure

29.6%

40.7%

25.9%

Do you think randomising the order of the films influenced your preferences?
27 responses

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure

25.9%

14.8%

33.3%

25.9%

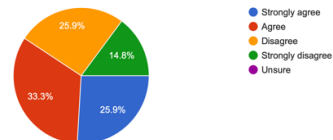*Figure 14: "Screenshot from one of the questions"*   *Figure 15: "Screenshot from one of the questions"*

Figure 13 and *Figure 14* with its questions focusing on how the study was conducted itself, provides an interesting insight into the participant's thoughts on the methodology behind the study. A vast majority (19 participants) strongly disagree/disagree with the question illustrated in *Figure 13*. This demonstrates that most of the participants went in without being influenced by initial expectations. This conveys that most of the data collected previously is genuine in terms of their reactions and thoughts on the short films. Although *Figure 14* demonstrates mixed feelings on that matter of randomisation.

With this it's hard to conclude whether randomising the three versions influenced the responses to the questions.
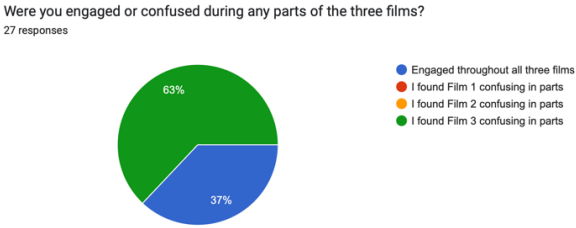

Were you engaged or confused during any parts of the three films?
27 responses

- Engaged throughout all three films
- I found Film 1 confusing in parts
- I found Film 2 confusing in parts
- I found Film 3 confusing in parts

63%
37%

Figure 16: "Screenshot from one of the questions"

Do you believe people were bored watching all three versions of the film in one sitting?
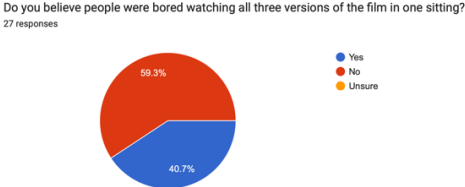27 responses

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

59.3%
40.7%

Figure 17: "Screenshot from one of the questions"

These last two questions highlight overall engagement of the three versions of the films. In *Figure 15*, it's clear that a vast majority of people found Film 3 to be confusing in parts. This may demonstrate the audiences found the overall fragmentation of the film's sequences confusing, possibly preferring a more linear approach in engaging with the protagonist's developments. With *Figure 16* we can clearly see that it's fairly close in terms of watching all three versions of the film in one sitting. 40.7% would say 'Yes' to the statement. Maybe this is more of a methodology issue and could suggest that it had a key factor in people responses to the other questions.

CONCLUSION

From the texts studied, and with the research conducted personally, it demonstrates that non-linear structures have somewhat of a grey area. This grey area is actually defining what a non-linear structure is and what audience's perception is of that. With the studying of texts and the case studies, it has come apparent that non-linear structures still follow many traits of a linear structure. One could argue that films can fill

into both categories. The utilisation of both can be advantageous to the film itself and help develop narratives and characters further.

Non-linear editing with the latest technologies has benefited filmmakers greatly. Even films with a chronological structure can benefit tremendously from Non-linear editing. The fact that filmmakers can experiment with the placement of scenes and sequences within a timeline can provide them with the freedom to add layers of dimension to a character for example. With this trial and error, it can allow filmmakers to explore how certain sequences can be altered to create a more enriched experience. From the creation of the three different versions of the short film, it evidently demonstrates how non-linear editing changes perceptions and complexity of the same narrative.

LIMITATIONS

The greatest limitation of this study is the overall number of participants for the questionnaire and having no knowledge on what sort of person chose which particular responses to the questions. More participants could've altered the conclusions made from them entirely. Likewise, the overall viewing experience could've changed in terms of where and how the participants viewed the three different versions of the short film. Watching them on a big screen may have also altered the results that were quantified. Additionally, the lack of knowing the participants personal interests may have been a key detail in understanding why some audiences prefer linear structures compared to that of non-linear for example.

Also, the fact that only three case studies were examined demonstrates that they are merely a microcosm of non-linear narratives in general. Every film functions differently from one another and it's solely down to personal preferences. Examining linear films and comparing them to non-linear films that have similar genres and themes may have been beneficial.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There are many further studies to be made that can give more vital viewpoints on non-linear in general. As mentioned earlier, the examination of traditional chronological narratives in different films may provide an important foundation to work from. There are many new films that come out each year. These narrative structures may illustrate how the use of non-linear editing as evolved narrative structures entirely, giving filmmakers more creative freedom to express how they want particular sequences to be shown.

Studying other mediums may also be advantageous in the study of non-linear narratives and editing. Other mediums such as television, video games and literature itself may provide insights into why the non-linear narrative structure is more common than ever before. Additionally, it may suggest why it's evolving also.

Word Count: 4997

BIBLOGRAPHY

Aju, C. (2022) Non-linear storytelling: Studying the art of Sharing stories, HackerNoon. Available at: https://hackernoon.com/non-linear-storytelling-studying-the-art-of-sharing-stories (Accessed: 20 October 2023).

Blum, R.A. (2001) in Television and screen writing: From concept to contract. New York: Focal Press, p. 125.

Chaudhury, P. (2020) Arrival: A non-linear perspective on Time, Medium. Available at: https://catplotlib.medium.com/arrival-a-non-linear-perspective-on-time-10e53c319cd3 (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

Cole, J. and Kipp, J. (2022) 'eternal sunshine of the spotless mind' 4K UHD Review, Slant Magazine. Available at: https://www.slantmagazine.com/dvd/eternal-sunshine-of-the-spotless-mind-4k-uhd-review-michel-gondry/ (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

Evans, R. (2006) in Practical DV filmmaking. Focal Press, pp. 14–15.

FasterCapital (2023) Breaking Down Rollscritique: The role of editing in Film analysis, FasterCapital. Available at: https://fastercapital.com/content/Breaking-Down-Rollscritique--The-Role-of-Editing-in-Film-Analysis.html#:~:text=5.-,Non%2DLinear%20Editing%20Techniques,engaging%20cinematic%20experience%20for%20audiences. (Accessed: 02 December 2023).

Ferguson, N. (2023) Non - linear storytelling: Definition, benefits, and tips, Celtx Blog. Available at: https://blog.celtx.com/non-linear-storytelling/ (Accessed: 27 October 2023).

Hestand, R. (2023) Quentin Tarantino and the art of non-linear storytelling, Medium. Available at: https://medium.com/@robhestand/quentin-tarantino-and-the-art-of-non-linear-storytelling-b03f02e97ed5 (Accessed: 28 September 2023).

Hestand, R. (2023) The craft of non-linear narratives in film: Analyzing 'memento', Medium. Available at: https://medium.com/@robhestand/the-craft-of-non-linear-narratives-in-film-analyzing-memento-3ab87f0fb04b (Accessed: 08 December 2023).

Hill, C. (2019) Why Quentin Tarantino uses non-linear storytelling and small talk dialogue, Medium. Available at: https://medium.com/@casscassbug/why-quentin-tarantino-uses-non-linear-storytelling-and-small-talk-dialogue-c59305f3a35b (Accessed: 19 October 2023).

Jones, S. (2019) What is film editing and why is it important?, Music Gateway. Available at: https://www.musicgateway.com/blog/film-industry/filmmaking/what-is-film-editing (Accessed: 15 October 2023).

Straub, J. (2023) Filmmaking 101: What is film editing?: Boords, boords.com. Available at: https://boords.com/blog/filmmaking-101-what-is-film-editing# (Accessed: 22 November 2023).

Sutherland, A. (2023) What is a nonlinear plot? - what you need to know, Ivoh. Available at: https://ivoh.org/what-is-a-nonlinear-plot/ (Accessed: 29 September 2023).

Teo, Y. (2013) Love, longing and Danger: Memory and forgetting in early twenty-first ..., LiverpoolUniversityPress.com. Available at:

https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/146458183.pdf (Accessed: 04 November 2023).

Vegas (2022) Why is non-linear video editing the standard today?, Why is Non-Linear Video Editing (NLE) The Standard Today? Available at:

https://www.vegascreativesoftware.com/us/video-editing/non-linear-editing-nle/ (Accessed: 01 November 2023).

Walters, J. (2023) Arrival timeline explained: Making sense of the movie's Twist, ScreenRant. Available at: https://screenrant.com/arrival-movie-timeline-explained/#:~:text=The%20timeline%20in%20Arrival%20is,and%20discovery%20as%20the%20protagonist. (Accessed: 09 November 2023).

Woltmann, S. (2023) Types of video editing (with examples) | backstage, Backstage. Available at: https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/types-of-video-editing-75728/ (Accessed: 20 October 2023).

Film Texts

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004) Directed by M. Gondry [Film]. New York:

Focus Features

Reservoir Dogs (1992) Directed by Q. Tarantino [Film]. Los Angeles: Miramax Films

Arrival (2016) Directed by D. Villeneuve [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures

Memento (2000) Directed by C. Nolan [Screenplay]. Los Angeles: NewMarket

500 Days of Summer (2009) Directed by M. Webb [Screenplay]. Lose Angeles: Fox

Pictures

Figures List

Figure 1: "Screengrabs from the opening scene", *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

(2004) Directed by M. Gondry [Online]. New York: Focus Features

Figure 2: "Screengrab of Joel revisiting a memory", *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless*

Mind (2004) Directed by M. Gondry [Online]. New York: Focus Features

Figure 3: "Screengrabs of Mr. Orange being injured and Mr. Orange practising being a

criminal", *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) Directed by Q. Tarantino [Online]. Los Angeles: Miramax

Films

Figure 4: "Screengrabs of Mr. White, Mr. Blonde and Mr. Orange", *Reservoir Dogs* (1992)

Directed by Q. Tarantino [Online]. Los Angeles: Miramax Films

Figure 5: Screengrabs of Mr.Blonde speaking to Nice Guy Eddie, Mr. Blone interrogating

and Mr. Orange shooting Mr. Blonde", *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) Directed by Q. Taratino

[Online]. Los Angeles: Miramax Films

Figure 6: "Screengrabs of the opening sequence in Arrival", *Arrival* (2016) Directed by D.

Villeneuve [Online]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures

Figure 7: "Screengrabs of the flashforward sequence, *Arrival* (2016) Directed by D.

Villeneuve [Online]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures

Figure 8: "Screengrab of the first page of *Memento*", *Memento* (2000) Directed by C.

Nolan [Screenplay]. Los Angeles: NewMarket

Figure 9: "Screengrab of the first page of *500 Days of Summer*", *500 Days of Summer*

(2009) Directed by M. Webb [Screenplay]. Lose Angeles: Fox Pictures

Figure 10-17: Screengrabs from Appendix C

Breaking the Sequence: Exploring the Impact of Non-Linear Editing on Film Narratives

UNIVERSITY *of York*

School of Arts and Creative Technologies

Participant Information Sheet –Anonymous Research

Project background

The University of York would like to invite you to take part in the following project: Breaking the Sequence: Exploring the impact of non-linear editing on film narratives. Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let us know if anything is unclear or you would like further information.

What is the purpose of the project?

This project is being undertaken by Callum Everitt (ce802@york.ac.uk), who is a master's student at the University of York.

The work is being conducted according to restrictions that have been subject to approval by the ACT Ethics committee. The Chair of the ACT Ethics committee can be contacted on ACT-ethics@york.ac.uk.

For this research project, we are interested your opinions on three different versions of a short film. These short films follow different narrative structures and are edited differently from one another. The goal is still explore the benefits of non-linear editing and narratives compared to that of linear.

Please note that to comply with the approved Ethics requirements of this work, we do not intend to discuss sensitive topics with you that could be potentially upsetting or distressing. If you have any concerns about the topics that may be covered in the research study, please raise these concerns with the researcher.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you wish, we will provide you with access to the edited film and/or the report that we submit after our marks have been confirmed. If you would like to receive access to these, you can indicate as such on the consent form.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because I would like to hear people's opinions no matter what their interests in film are. If you're just a casual viewer or a massive film fan, all opinions matter.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation is optional. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and will be asked to complete a participant consent form. If you change your mind at any point during the research activity, you will be able to withdraw your participation without having to provide a reason. To withdraw your participation you need to contact my email address (ce802@york.ac.uk).

Will I be identified in any outputs?

No. Your participation in this research activity will be treated anonymously and you will not be identified in any outputs.

Privacy Notice

This section explains how personal data will be used by the University of York.
For this project, the University of York is the Data Controller. We are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. Our registration number is Z4855807.

What is our legal basis for processing your data?

Privacy law (the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018) requires us to have a legal reason to process your personal data. Our reason is we need it to perform a public task.[1]
This is because the University has a public function, which includes carrying out research projects.[2] We need to use personal data in order to carry out this research project.
Information about your health, ethnicity, sexual identity and other sensitive information is called "special category" data. We have to have an additional legal reason to use this data, because it is sensitive. Our reason is that it is needed for research purposes.[3] All research projects at the University follow our research ethics policies.

---

[1]This refers to UK GDPR Article 6 (1) (e): processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller

[2] Our charter and statutes states: 4.f. To provide instruction in such branches of learning as the University may think fit and to make provision for research and for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge in such manner as the University may determine.

[3]This refers to UK GDPR Article 9 (2) (j): processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes in accordance with Article 89(1) based on Union or Member State law which shall be proportionate to the aim pursued, respect the essence of the right to data protection and provide for suitable and specific measures to safeguard the fundamental rights and the interests of the data subject.

How do we use your data?

We will be using your responses and illustrating the data in the research phase of the project. The data will be used to analysis and draw up conclusion on. Your personal details won't be shown during this process.

Who do we share your data with?

As well as this, we use computer software or systems to hold and manage data. Other companies only provide the software, system or storage. They are not allowed to use your data for their own reasons.

We have agreements in place when we share data. These agreements meet legal requirements to ensure your data is protected.

How do we keep your data secure?

The University is serious about keeping your data secure and protecting your rights to privacy. We don't ask you for data we don't need, and only give access to people who need to know. We think about security when planning projects, to make sure they work well. Our IT security team checks regularly to make sure we're taking the right steps. For more details see our security webpages.

How do we transfer your data safely internationally?

If your data is stored or processed outside the UK, we follow legal requirements to make sure that the same level of privacy rules still apply.

How long will we keep your data?

The University has rules in place for how long research data can be kept when the research project is finished. Your information will be kept for 4 months and after this time an anonymised version will be kept. As this will be fully anonymous, it will not be possible to identify you in any way from this data.

What rights do you have in relation to your data?

You have rights over your data. This sheet explains how you can stop participating in the study, and what will happen to your data if you do. This information is in the section 'Do I have to take part?'.

If you want to get a copy of your data, or talk to us about any other rights, please contact us using the details below.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about how your data is being processed, please contact ce802@york.ac.uk

If you have further questions, the University's Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotection@york.ac.uk or by writing to: **Data Protection Officer, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD**.

Right to complain

If you are unhappy with how the University has handled your personal data, please contact our Data Protection Officer using the details above, so that we can try to put things right.

If you are unhappy with our response, you have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. You can also contact the Information Commissioner's Office by post to **Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF** or by phone on **0303 123 1113**.

Breaking the Sequence: Exploring the impact of Non-Linear Editing on film narratives

UNIVERSITY *of York*

School of Arts and Creative Technologies

Participant Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in this project. This research activity will be used to explore whether participant prefer traditional linear narratives or complex non-linear narratives. Trying to get an understanding of what people desire from a story and understand how different viewerships can affect the success of the film.

Please read the following statements carefully and tick the appropriate box:

	YES	NO
I have read the information sheet about this project		
I agree to take part in this project		
I consent to filling out a questionnaire to the best of my ability		
I consent that I'm willing to give up an hour of my time to watch all three different versions of the film		
I understand my right to withdraw and/or have my data destroyed from this project at any time		
I understand that my participation in this project will be treated anonymously		
I am over the age of 18		

Participant Name:

_____

Participant Signature:

_____

Date:

___/___/_____

Researcher Name:

_____

Researcher Signature:

_____

Date:

___/___/____

If you wish to be informed about the outcomes from this project, please provide your email address:

_____

APPENDIX C

PULL OVER (THREE VERSIONS)

1. How do you think the different editing structures affect the overall viewership?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Linear editing (Film 1) makes it more accessible
   ◯ Non-linear editing (Film 2 and Film 3) adds complexity and intrigue
   ◯ Both Linear (Film 1) and Non-linear (Film 2 and Film 3) versions

2. Which film's emotional impact stood out the most to you?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Film 1 (Linear)
   ◯ Film 2 (Non-linear)
   ◯ Film 3 (Non-linear)
   ◯ No noticeable emotional impact

3. Were you engaged or confused during any parts of the three films?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Engaged throughout all three films
   ◯ I found Film 1 confusing in parts
   ◯ I found Film 2 confusing in parts
   ◯ I found Film 3 confusing in parts

4. Which film's approach to character development did you find most intriguing?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Film 1 (Linear) with gradual exploration
   ◯ Film 2 (Non-linear) with discovering the cause of events
   ◯ Film 3 (Non-linear) with added complexitiy

5. Which film do you prefer overall?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Film 1 (Linear)
   ◯ Film 2 (Non-linear)
   ◯ Film 3 (Non-linear)
   ◯ No strong preference

6. Do you believe people were bored watching all three versions of the film in one sitting?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No
   ◯ Unsure

7. Do you think the initial expectations set before each film influenced your perception?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Strongly agree
   ◯ Agree
   ◯ Disagree
   ◯ Strongly disagree
   ◯ Unsure

8. Do you think randomising the order of the films influenced your preferences?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Strongly agree
   ◯ Agree
   ◯ Disagree
   ◯ Strongly disagree
   ◯ Unsure