Theoretical Aspects of Cinema and Its Impact on The Historicity of Narratives: Exploring Cinematic Movements and Interventions

Pinki Devi (History), Research Scholar, Glocal University, Saharanpur (Uttar Pradesh)
Dr. Rajkumar(History), Professor (Dept. of History), Glocal University, Saharanpur (Uttar Pradesh)

ABSTRACT

This comprehensive research paper delves into the intricate and evolving relationship between cinema, narratives, and history. It goes beyond surface analysis to explore how cinematic movements and interventions have not only reflected historical contexts but also actively shaped and redefined narratives. By examining the distinctive characteristics of various cinematic movements, including realism, expressionism, new wave, and postmodernism, alongside interventions such as propaganda and avant-garde techniques, this research illuminates the profound influence of cinema on historical interpretation and storytelling.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Avant-garde techniques

INTRODUCTION

Cinema, as a multidimensional art form, is an invaluable repository of narratives that interweave with the tapestry of history. This research aims to unravel the nuanced connections between cinema, narratives, and history, with a focus on how different cinematic movements and interventions have reshaped the understanding of the past. By tracing the evolution of cinematic techniques and their impact on historical narratives, this paper highlights cinema's role in shaping cultural memory and redefining historical representation. A story, in any form, is just a series of events connected in time and location by a web of causes and effects.A storyline in a Hollywood film is supposed to be a linear progression of events that the audience can easily follow. Hollywood's greatest strength is the ease with which its best screenwriters, directors, and other creators can construct narratives in which the connections between characters, plot points, and the passage of time and space are often taken for granted.

Author: Kristin Thompson (1999, p. 11)

No one should feel ashamed of themselves for enjoying the cinema. However, I am aware that their research is beyond the norm for an empirical psychologist. There's a common perception that movies are too complicated because they are. In this article, I analyze the structure of 150 popular films from the past 75 years. The questions I hope to address range from the structural to the psychological, beginning with the latter inquiry: What does the typical film look like? What effects could the format of the presentation have on us? Could the story's structure hold the answers to our questions and help us get more involved?

The plots of blockbuster films are stories. The field of research known as narratology examines the impact that stories and narrative structure have on our minds and hearts. The ordinary stories we tell one another are the units of remembered life because they are the reconstruction of our experience in story form. Moreover, stories are the focus of many of our arts, including theater, literature, and film; occasionally poetry, painting, dance, and music; and always in the majority of instances.

The study of story form has occupied numerous academic fields in the social sciences and humanities. Story grammars (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1975) and related ideas such as discourse (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978), scripts (Schank & Abelson, 1977), and schemata (Brewer, 1985) have been the focus of research in this area of psychology. The latter two are significant because, as we mature and learn more about the ways in which our social environment functions, we form expectations about how things ought to play out. In a confusing world, these are invaluable for making sense of everything.

Genre serves as the movie industry's prototypical schema form. According to Bordwell (1985, p. 36), "in a Western, we expect to see gunfights, barroom brawls, and thundering hooves even if they are neither realistically introduced nor causally necessary." In this piece, though, I want to do more than double back on genre tropes. To begin, I'll look into how Hollywood blockbusters typically organize their stories. Second, I will deduce how that narrational form should effect the audience by studying the extrinsic physical norms of movies.

Take note that I am not discussing how the story is interpreted, but rather how it is physically told. I will discuss how this storytelling structure has been "designed," albeit unconsciously, by filmmakers over many decades to captivate audiences. I will be importing and discussing ideas from the humanities to do this. My objective is similar to that of any beginning study in the cognitive sciences: I want to create a method for defining the structure of movies as stimuli and use the results to inform theory. Many different fields have used this method, including Kintsch and van Dijk's (1978) and Zwaan, Magliano, and Graesser's (1995) domain of discourse, and James Gibson's (1978) and his later career's (see Cutting, 1993) ecological approach to perception.

CINEMATIC MOVEMENTS AND THEIR HISTORICITY

Realism:

Cinematic realism emerged as a significant movement in the early 20th century, driven by a desire to capture and convey reality on screen. This movement was a response to the advancements in film technology and storytelling techniques that allowed filmmakers to depict the world with greater accuracy and detail. Key figures such as Sergei Eisenstein and André Bazin played pivotal roles in shaping the concept of cinematic realism.

Sergei Eisenstein, a Soviet filmmaker and a pioneer of montage theory, believed in the power of film to construct historical narratives through juxtaposition and editing. His films, such as "Battleship Potemkin" (1925) and "Ivan the Terrible" (1944, 1958), employed montage techniques to convey emotional intensity and historical authenticity.

Eisenstein's approach to realism involved meticulous research and attention to historical accuracy. He aimed to reconstruct historical events not only for their factual accuracy but also for their emotional impact. By carefully selecting and arranging shots, he created a sense of immersion that transported viewers into the past, allowing them to experience historical moments firsthand. Eisenstein's films challenged conventional narratives by presenting alternative viewpoints and highlighting the complexities of historical events.

André Bazin, a French film critic and theorist, championed cinematic realism through his writings and co-founding of the influential film magazine "Cahiers du Cinéma." Bazin believed that the essence of cinema's power lay in its ability to capture reality in its purest form. He argued that the long take, deep focus cinematography, and minimal editing allowed the audience to engage with the film as if peering through a window into reality.

Bazin's concept of realism extended to preserving the temporal and spatial continuity of events, allowing the audience to perceive the unfolding of events as if they were happening in real time. He criticized excessive manipulation of reality through editing and special effects, as he believed they undermined the authenticity of the cinematic experience.

Fig.1 : Battleship Potemkin, 1925 Sergei Eisenstein silent film masterpiece Soviet Montage classic movie, Eduard Tisse, Aleksandr Antonov, Odessa Staircase steps

Cinematic realism offered a means to challenge official historical narratives and provide alternative perspectives. By presenting historical events from different angles, filmmakers could provoke critical thinking and foster a deeper understanding of the complexities of history. This approach not only entertained audiences but also encouraged them to question established truths and consider different interpretations of the past.

Expressionism:

Expressionism in cinema was a groundbreaking artistic movement that emerged primarily in Germany during the 1910s and 1920s. It was characterized by its distinctive visual style that aimed to depict emotions, psychological states, and subjective experiences in a highly stylized and often distorted manner. This movement had a significant impact on the portrayal of history in film, challenging traditional representations and offering a unique perspective on the past. Expressionist filmmakers, such as Fritz Lang and F.W. Murnau, utilized visual distortion techniques to create an otherworldly and emotionally charged atmosphere. These techniques included exaggerated sets, dramatic lighting, angular compositions, and unconventional camera angles. The goal was to convey the inner emotional turmoil of characters and to evoke a sense of unease or heightened emotion in the audience.

In the context of historical narratives, this visual distortion allowed filmmakers to emphasize the psychological and emotional aspects of historical events and characters rather than focusing solely on factual accuracy. By distorting the physical reality of historical settings, expressionist cinema could capture the internal struggles, fears, and desires of individuals caught in historical moments.

Expressionist cinema often relied on symbolism and metaphor to convey complex psychological and emotional states. Elements of the physical world were used to represent characters' inner turmoil or the broader societal context. This approach could be applied to historical events by using symbolic imagery to communicate the underlying emotions and tensions of a particular time period.

For instance, in F.W. Murnau's "Nosferatu" (1922), the vampire Count Orlok can be seen as a representation of the fears and anxieties of post-World War I Germany. By tapping into these emotional undercurrents, expressionist films created a deeper connection between the audience and the historical context, even if the visual representation of that context was distorted. Expressionist cinema's emphasis on emotional and psychological experiences allowed it to challenge conventional historical narratives. By transcending the literal depiction of historical events, these films encouraged viewers to engage with history on an emotional and visceral level. This approach often led to a more profound and personal connection to the past, as audiences could empathize with the characters' struggles and emotions.

In a way, expressionist cinema acknowledged that historical narratives are not merely about factual accounts but also about the human experiences that shape them. By distorting reality and emphasizing emotions, expressionist filmmakers could highlight the universal and timeless aspects of history while simultaneously offering a unique and unconventional viewpoint.

New Wave:

Cinematic New Wave movements, which emerged in various countries during the mid-20th century, marked a significant departure from traditional storytelling approaches. Filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard and Akira Kurosawa embraced a more subjective and introspective style that intertwined personal narratives with historical events. This approach blurred the lines between collective history and individual experiences, resulting in films that offered a unique and often unconventional perspective on the past.

1. Subjective Approach to Storytelling

One of the defining characteristics of New Wave cinema was its embrace of a more subjective approach to storytelling. Filmmakers were no longer confined to linear narratives or strict adherence to historical accuracy. Instead, they infused their films with personal viewpoints, emotions, and introspection. This allowed for a deeper exploration of characters' inner lives and their reactions to the historical events unfolding around them.

2. Interweaving Personal Journeys and Historical Events

Filmmakers of the New Wave often intertwined personal stories with broader historical events, creating a dynamic interplay between individual experiences and collective history. This approach humanized historical events by presenting them through the eyes of relatable characters. As a result, audiences could engage with history on a more intimate level, empathizing with the protagonists and understanding how historical circumstances impacted their lives.

3. Blurring Boundaries between Memory and History

The New Wave approach blurred the boundaries between collective memory and personal recollection. Films of this movement often featured protagonists who were shaped by historical contexts, yet their memories and perspectives on those contexts were highly subjective. This created a sense of authenticity and relatability, as the audience could see history not as an abstract concept but as something intimately connected to individual experiences.

4. Jean-Luc Godard: Subjectivity and Political Commentary

Jean-Luc Godard, a central figure in the French New Wave, used his films to merge personal narratives with political and historical commentary. Films like "Breathless" (1960) and "Weekend" (1967) showcased characters who were both products of their time and unique individuals with their own desires and struggles. Godard's fragmented storytelling and innovative editing techniques allowed viewers to engage with history through a lens of personal reflection and critical analysis.

5. Akira Kurosawa: Intertwining Human Drama and Historical Context

In Japan, Akira Kurosawa's films exemplified the fusion of personal narratives and historical events. Movies like "Rashomon" (1950) and "Seven Samurai" (1954) delved into the intricacies of human behavior within the backdrop of historical periods.

Fig. 2: Akira Kurosawa: Breaking Down The Master's Directing Technique

Kurosawa's characters were shaped by the historical circumstances surrounding them, but the focus remained on their personal journeys, creating a nuanced exploration of how individuals navigated through history.

Postmodernism:

The postmodern cinematic movement, which gained prominence in the latter half of the 20th century, brought a new and often subversive approach to storytelling. Filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino and Jean-Pierre Jeunet disrupted traditional narratives by introducing metafictional elements and nonlinear storytelling techniques. This movement not only shattered conventional storytelling structures but also encouraged audiences to critically engage with the notion of historical objectivity and the subjectivity of memory.

- *Metafiction and Playful Narratives*
- *Nonlinear Storytelling and Multiple Perspectives*

- *Questioning Historical Objectivity and Memory*

Postmodern filmmakers embraced metafiction, a technique that draws attention to the fact that a work of fiction is, indeed, fiction. This involves breaking the fourth wall, self-awareness, and sometimes even mixing the fictional world with the real world. In cinema, this could involve characters addressing the audience directly or characters being aware of their fictional nature. Filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino, in works such as "Pulp Fiction" (1994) and "Inglourious Basterds" (2009), and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, in films like "Amélie" (2001), utilized metafictional elements to disrupt the linearity of narratives and introduce a sense of playfulness and reflexivity. By acknowledging the artificiality of the narrative, these filmmakers encouraged audiences to question the boundaries between reality and fiction, including historical representations. Postmodern cinema frequently employed nonlinear storytelling, where events are presented out of chronological order. This fragmentation of narrative challenged the conventional linear progression found in historical storytelling. Instead, audiences were presented with puzzle-like narratives that required active engagement to piece together. Filmmakers used this approach to showcase multiple perspectives on the same events. By presenting events from different characters' viewpoints, the audience gained a more complex and nuanced understanding of historical events. This approach underlined the subjectivity inherent in historical narratives and invited viewers to question the idea of a single, objective truth.

One of the central themes of postmodern cinema is the questioning of historical objectivity. By deconstructing traditional narratives and presenting fractured, subjective accounts, filmmakers highlighted the fallibility of historical interpretations. Quentin Tarantino's "Inglourious Basterds," for example, offered an alternate history where characters successfully conspired to assassinate Adolf Hitler during World War II, challenging the accepted historical trajectory. Additionally, postmodern cinema often explored the role of memory in shaping narratives. Memories are inherently subjective and prone to distortion. Films like "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" (2004) directed by Michel Gondry and "Memento" (2000) directed by Christopher Nolan delved into the fragility of memory and how it influences individual experiences and historical understanding.

CINEMATIC INTERVENTIONS AND HISTORICAL MANIPULATION

Cinema's power as a persuasive medium has led to its co-option for political and ideological purposes. Governments and regimes have recognized its potential to shape public opinion and manipulate historical truths through the creation of propaganda films. The most notorious examples are Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, both of which utilized cinema to further their agendas.

Propaganda Films:

Propaganda films are created with the intention of promoting a specific message or ideology. In the context of historical manipulation, these films often distort facts, omit inconvenient truths, and create fictional narratives to serve the regime's interests. In Nazi Germany, for example, the infamous filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl produced the documentary "Triumph of the Will" (1935), which portrayed the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg as a grand and unified spectacle, masking the underlying realities of the regime's oppressive policies.

Fig. 3: Triumph of the Wall (Propaganda Films)

Similarly, the Soviet Union produced films like "Battleship Potemkin" (1925), directed by Sergei Eisenstein, which dramatized historical events for political impact, such as the Odessa Steps sequence that depicted a fictionalized massacre. These propaganda films blurred the lines between fact and fiction, shaping public perception of historical events and personalities. They showcased the malleability of history through visual storytelling by manipulating emotions and invoking a sense of loyalty to the respective regimes.

Avant-Garde Techniques:

In contrast to propaganda, avant-garde cinema took a more experimental approach to storytelling and representation. Filmmakers like Maya Deren and Chris Marker challenged traditional linear narratives by embracing abstraction, symbolism, and non-narrative forms. This artistic intervention demonstrated that history is not a fixed, objective reality but rather a subjective interpretation influenced by various perspectives and experiences.

Maya Deren's surreal and symbolic films like "Meshes of the Afternoon" (1943) used dream-like sequences to explore psychological states, raising questions about how individuals perceive and remember historical events. Similarly, Chris Marker's "La Jetée" (1962), a science-fiction short film composed almost entirely of still images, delved into themes of memory, time, and the fragility of historical continuity.

Fig. 4: Avant-Garde Techniques- Maya Deren's surreal and symbolic films like "Meshes of the Afternoon" (1943)

Avant-garde cinema disrupted conventional historiography by highlighting the emotional and sensory dimensions of history. These filmmakers showcased the potential for cinema to evoke complex feelings, ideas, and sensations that go beyond factual representation, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of historical interpretation.

In conclusion, the intersection of cinema and history reveals a spectrum of interventions, ranging from propaganda manipulation to avant-garde experimentation. Both approaches underscore the malleability of historical narratives and the power of visual storytelling to shape perceptions, emotions, and understanding. It's essential to be aware of these dynamics and critically analyze cinematic representations of history to discern the truth from distortion.

IMPACT ON HISTORICITY OF NARRATIVES

The impact of cinematic movements and interventions on the historicity of narratives is indeed significant and multi-faceted. Historically, cinema began as a form of entertainment and documentation, with early films often depicting historical events or reenacting important moments. However, as the art of filmmaking evolved, so did its approach to representing history. Cinematic movements, such as Italian Neorealism, French New Wave, and various avant-garde movements, challenged traditional storytelling conventions and introduced new techniques that influenced how history was portrayed on screen. These movements often emphasized realism, personal perspectives, and unconventional narrative structures, allowing filmmakers to delve deeper into the complexities of historical events and characters.

One of the key transformations that cinema brought to the historicity of narratives is the idea that it is not just a passive medium for relaying historical facts, but an active

participant in shaping and reshaping historical understanding. Filmmakers began to realize that they could use cinematic tools to interpret, question, and reinterpret historical events, creating a dynamic dialogue between the past and the present. This recognition of cinema's role as an interpreter of history marked a shift from straightforward historical representation to a more nuanced and multi-dimensional exploration of the past. Moreover, filmmakers started to blend imaginative techniques with historical accuracy. While historical accuracy remains crucial for maintaining credibility, filmmakers began to recognize that some degree of creative interpretation is necessary to capture the essence of events, characters, and emotions. This blend allowed them to bridge the gap between historical facts and emotional engagement, making history more relatable and impactful for audiences.
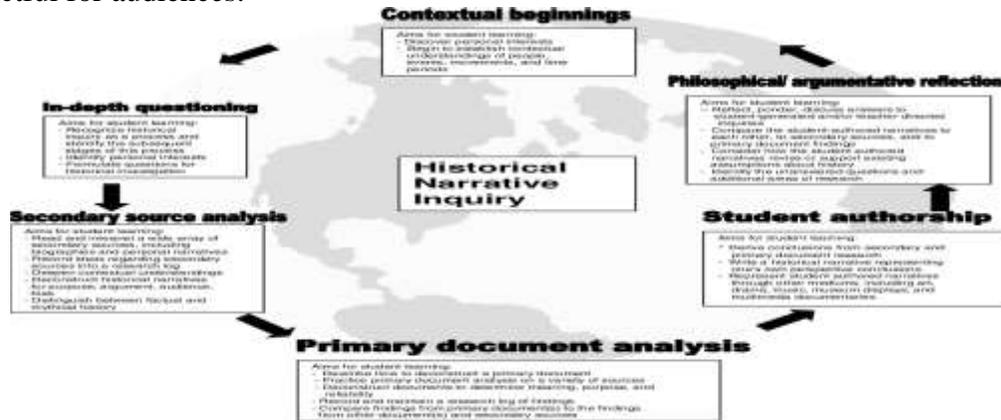

Fig. 5: Historical Narrative Inquiry

Personal perspectives also gained prominence in historical narratives through cinema. Filmmakers brought their own interpretations, biases, and viewpoints to the stories they told, highlighting that history is often subjective and open to diverse interpretations. This recognition of subjectivity encouraged audiences to think critically about the narratives presented on screen, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexity of historical events. Furthermore, cinema's ability to manipulate time and space through editing, visual effects, and sound design enabled filmmakers to reconstruct historical settings and events in ways that were previously impossible. This reconstruction offered audiences a more immersive experience, allowing them to witness history with a heightened sense of immediacy and emotional resonance. In essence, the impact of cinematic movements and interventions on the historicity of narratives is profound because it challenges the traditional notion of history as a fixed and objective account of the past. Cinema introduces a layer of subjectivity, creativity, and emotional engagement that encourages audiences to critically analyze historical events, question dominant narratives, and appreciate the dynamic and fluid nature of storytelling. As a result, cinema has not only expanded the possibilities of narrative construction but also enriched our understanding of history by presenting it as a living, evolving entity that continues to shape our present and future perspectives.

Reimagining Historical Events: Cinematic movements like historical epics or period dramas have the power to transport audiences to different eras, allowing them to visually experience historical events and settings. These films often combine meticulous attention to historical detail with a touch of creative interpretation, making the past come alive in ways that textbooks or written accounts cannot. For instance, movies like "Braveheart" or "Schindler's List" not only depict historical events but also offer emotional resonance and a sense of immediacy that can shape viewers' perceptions of those events.

Questioning Established Narratives: Cinema's reinterpretation of historical events can challenge dominant narratives and prompt audiences to reevaluate their understanding of

the past. By presenting alternative viewpoints or untold stories, filmmakers can shed light on marginalized perspectives or forgotten figures. For example, "Hidden Figures" highlighted the contributions of African-American women to the NASA space program, revealing a lesser-known aspect of history.

Humanizing Historical Figures: Cinematic interventions often focus on the personal lives and struggles of historical figures, rendering them more relatable and human. This humanization can lead to a deeper understanding of the motivations and complexities that drove historical figures' actions. Films like "Lincoln" or "Gandhi" provide nuanced portrayals of these iconic figures, emphasizing their vulnerabilities and moral dilemmas.

Exploring Sociopolitical Contexts: Cinematic movements can delve into the social, political, and cultural contexts surrounding historical events. By capturing the atmosphere, values, and tensions of a particular time, filmmakers can offer audiences insights into the factors that influenced historical decisions and outcomes. Movies like "Mississippi Burning" or "Munich" explore the societal dynamics that underpinned significant historical moments.

Cinema as Collective Memory: Films can serve as a collective memory repository, preserving and transmitting historical knowledge across generations. Iconic movies often become a shared cultural reference point, shaping how people remember and understand historical events. For example, the film "Saving Private Ryan" has contributed to shaping popular perceptions of World War II and the sacrifices made by soldiers.

Documentary and Verité Approaches: Beyond fictional narratives, documentaries and cinema verité styles offer a direct, unfiltered window into history. Documentaries can challenge conventional wisdom, uncover hidden truths, and provide audiences with a closer look at historical realities. Works like "Fahrenheit 9/11" or "Restrepo" offer alternative perspectives on contemporary events and conflicts.

Visualizing Historical Concepts: Abstract or complex historical concepts can be made more accessible through visual storytelling. For instance, films like "The Big Short" or "Inside Job" used cinematic techniques to explain intricate financial crises, making them comprehensible to wider audiences.

Relevance to Contemporary Issues: Cinema often draws parallels between historical events and current societal challenges, fostering discussions about continuity, change, and the cyclical nature of history. Movies like "The Post" or "Selma" explore historical struggles that resonate with contemporary issues, encouraging viewers to reflect on the lessons of the past in the present context.

CONCLUSION

Cinema's transformative power in shaping the historicity of narratives cannot be overstated. The symbiotic relationship between cinema and history continues to evolve, fostering a dynamic interplay between the artistic imagination and historical contexts. As cinematic techniques advance and societal perspectives shift, the exploration of historical narratives through cinema remains an enduring testament to the complex relationship between art, history, and human memory. By understanding the depth of this relationship, we gain a more profound appreciation for cinema's role in reshaping our understanding of the past.

REFERENCES

1. Bazin, A. (1967). "What Is Cinema?" University of California Press.
2. Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2008). "Film History: An Introduction." McGraw-Hill Education.
3. Gunning, T. (1994). "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde." Wide Angle, 8(3-4), 63-70.

4. Hayden, T. (1989). "The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities." MIT Press.
5. Jay, M. (1988). "Scopic Regimes of Modernity." In "Vision and Visuality" (pp. 3-23). Hal Foster (Ed.). Bay Press.
6. Kittler, F. (1999). "Gramophone, Film, Typewriter." Stanford University Press.
7. Mulvey, L. (1975). "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Screen, 16(3), 6-18.
8. Nichols, B. (1991). "Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary." Indiana University Press.
9. Prince, S. (1991). "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory." Film Quarterly, 46(2), 27-37.
10. Rascaroli, L. (2008). "The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film." Wallflower Press.
11. Rosenstone, R. A. (2006). "History on Film/Film on History." Pearson.
12. Sobchack, V. (1996). "The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience." Princeton University Press.
13. Stam, R. (2000). "Film Theory: An Introduction." Wiley-Blackwell.
14. Wollen, P. (1982). "The Two Avant-Gardes." October, 32, 45-62.
15. Comolli, J. L., & Narboni, J. (1969). "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism." Screen, 10(1), 27-53.
16. Rosen, P. (1981). "Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader." Columbia University Press.