

The Dexterity of Editing in Malayalam Films: A Case Study of 'Thallumaala'

Communication &
Journalism Research
Jan - Jun 2024 | 13 (1) pp 23-56
©The Author(s) 2024
Reprints and Permissions:
masscomhod@uoc. ac. in
ISSN: 2348 – 5663
DOI:10.5281/zenodo.12535011

Arya P G*

Research Scholar, School of Film Studies, Faculty of Media Studies, Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University

Vidya R

Assistant Professor, School of Film Studies, Faculty of Media Studies, Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University

Muhammadali N

Associate Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut

Abstract

This paper delves into the realm of contemporary Malayalam cinema, specifically focusing on the surge in experimental narrative techniques. Departing from traditional linear storytelling, filmmakers are embracing non-linear narratives to captivate audiences on various experience levels. 'Thallumaala,' a Malayalam film, serves as a prime example of this trend with its innovative editing techniques. Through an analysis of suturing techniques and suture rupture patterns within the editing process, this study aims to illuminate how 'Thallumaala' challenges conventional storytelling and editing norms, providing a deep understanding of film language and the intricate nature of editing techniques. Employing a content analysis approach within a qualitative methodology, this research scrutinizes the editing techniques utilized in 'Thallumaala.' By drawing upon film theory and content analysis, this study seeks to uncover the utilization and patterns of suturing techniques, as well as suture rupture methods, in the film. This exploration not only enriches the comprehension of film as an art form but also provides valuable insights for industry professionals striving to push the boundaries of storytelling within cinema.

* Correspondence: aryapgopi1997@gmail.com

Keywords: *Suture Theory, Suture Rupture, Editing Techniques, Malayalam Film, Non-linear, Dexterity.*

Introduction

In today's cinematic landscape, films wield significant influence, fostering profound connections between viewers and their personal experiences, memories, and sense of identity. Occasionally, the themes and messages conveyed within a film can deeply impact individuals' perspectives and convictions (Kubrak, 2020). Suture theory, rooted in psychoanalysis and expanded into film theory, offers insight into how filmmakers employ various techniques to immerse audiences in the narrative, fostering continuity and coherence (Butte, 2008). According to 'suture theory', the spectator is positioned as a subject within the narrative. It operates on the premise that the spectator is not just passively watching the film but is actively engaged in the process. It explores how a film strategically integrates or "stitches" the viewer into the storyline, fostering a strong sense of identification (Miller, 1977).

By encouraging viewers to engage with the storyline and embrace the fictional world presented on screen, suturing mechanisms enhance the cinematic experience. It posits that films are not merely passive experiences but are active engagements that "stitch" the viewer into the narrative, making them a part of the unfolding story. Suturing is not just about joining shots to tell a story linearly; it's about the seamless integration of visual, auditory, and narrative elements to create a cohesive and immersive cinematic experience (Magrini, 2006). Recent years have witnessed a notable transformation in Malayalam cinema, with filmmakers venturing into new storytelling avenues. Non-linear narrative techniques, deviating from conventional chronological order, have emerged as a prominent aspect of this evolution. These narratives do not follow a straightforward chronological order but instead weave in and out of different time frames, creating a tapestry of events that challenge the viewer's perception and engagement with the story.

Films like 'Thallumaala' stand out for their bold experimentation with non-linear storytelling and innovative editing techniques. The non-linear narrative allows filmmakers to juxtapose different time periods, perspectives, and realities, creating a richer and more multifaceted exploration of the themes. Malayalam movies have experienced a significant shift in narrative techniques, including

the adoption of non-linear narratives, which has been more evident in recent years. This shift involves interweaving several stories into one, and revealing past events through flashbacks or different storylines. Films like "Traffic" directed by Rjesh Pillai in the year 2011 have been pioneers in this shift, integrating multiple stories to create a complex narrative (Mohan, 2020). Other films, such as 'Friday' and 'City of God' effectively use non-linear narrative techniques, starting the story from the middle and using flashbacks to unfold the plot.

Moreover, Malayalam cinema has seen filmmakers deviating from traditional three-act structures, experimenting with non-linear storytelling techniques. 'Manjummel Boys' by Chidambaram and 'Aavasavyuham' by Krishand represent this experimentation, creating narratives that do not follow a linear progression. Overall, the narrative techniques in Malayalam movies have evolved, incorporating non-linear storytelling methods to engage audiences and offer unique storytelling experiences.

Technological advancements in filmmaking and editing have also played a role in facilitating the shift towards non-linear narratives. Modern editing tools allow filmmakers to seamlessly weave together different timelines and perspectives, making it easier to create complex narratives that would have been difficult to achieve in the past. This has opened up new possibilities for storytelling, enabling filmmakers to experiment with their narrative structures in ways that engage the audience more deeply.

'Thallumaala' is a 2022 Malayalam-language action comedy film directed by Khalid Rahman and produced by Ashiq Usman. The screenplay was done by Muhsin Parari and Ashraf Hamza. The film stars Tovino Thomas and Kalyani Priyadarshan in the lead roles and is known for its vibrant and energetic presentation, focusing on action sequences and stylishly shot stunts. Film editor Nishad Yusuf's innovative techniques and attention to detail are evident throughout the film, making 'Thallumaala' a standout in Malayalam cinema for its craft and storytelling style.

In 'Thallumaala', follow the story of Wazim (played by Tovino Thomas), a youthful and spirited man known for his involvement in numerous fights, who undergoes a profound transformation after crossing paths with Beevi / Beepathu (played by Kallyani Priyadarshan), a beloved vlogger. Despite Wazim's continued struggles with impulsivity and aggression, his encounter with Beevi

and the allure of her social media stardom begin to mellow his rough edges. Yet, the same fists that built his reputation as a fighter, threaten the delicate joy he has found with Beevi, weaving a narrative of love, change, friendship and the consequences of one's past actions. As the name suggests, "Thallu" means fight, and "Maala" means chain. The movie revolves around the chain of fights that Wazim finds himself embroiled in. His encounter with SI Reji Mathew (played by Shine Tom Chacko) marks a pivotal turn in Wazim's life. As the movie progresses, it sequentially unfolds the events that follow this transformative encounter.

The filmmakers employed a variety of techniques to unravel the story. The editing process of 'Thallumaala' plays a crucial role in unravelling the narrative, serving as the backbone of film storytelling. This study delves into the utilization of suture rupture techniques within the editing process of 'Thallumaala', which has significantly advanced traditional storytelling and editing practices. Suture rupture refers to the moments when the seamless narrative illusion or suturing is broken or disrupted.

The importance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the evolving landscape of cinema, particularly within the Malayalam film industry. It sheds light on techniques and approaches contributing to the industry's success, offering insights that inform filmmakers and scholars globally. Moreover, the exploration of innovative editing practices enriches our understanding of film as an art form, offering a new perspective on the potential of cinema to engage, challenge, and transform the viewer. The study further examines the aesthetic qualities of the film 'Thallumaala' and how they parallel the characteristics of social media. Through this analysis, the study aims to uncover the ways in which 'Thallumaala' reflects the influence of social media on contemporary filmmaking, especially in its editing techniques. This comparison sheds light on the interconnectedness of digital culture and cinematic expression, revealing how social media's aesthetics and dynamics are increasingly mirrored in filmic narratives.

By delving into the specifics of how these techniques are employed in 'Thallumaala', the study not only enriches the understanding of the film but also contributes to the broader discourse on the evolution of narrative techniques and language in cinema. By focusing on how these techniques influence viewer engagement and narrative, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of cinema on the audience. It highlights the role of editing

as a critical tool in the filmmaker's battery, one that can be used to manipulate time, perception, and emotional response.

Methodology

This study adopts a content analysis approach within a qualitative methodology to scrutinize the editing techniques employed in the Malayalam film 'Thallumaala', recipient of the Best Editor Award at the Kerala State Film Awards-2022. This action-comedy film directed by Khalid Rahman and edited by Nishad Yusuf.

The film's storyline centres on a series of interconnected events, and a chain of quarrels that unfold in a non-linear narrative, where the story doesn't unfold in a chronological order. Instead, it revolves around a series of interconnected events, primarily fights, which lead to unexpected outcomes. The transitions between scenes were meticulously planned to be seamless and engaging, drawing inspiration from social media reels, particularly Instagram videos. This innovative approach to editing, featuring quick, quirky cuts, contributes to the film's dynamic and fast-paced nature. The sharp cuts, peppy transitions, and clever edits maintain the film's high energy and contribute to its unique viewing experience (Aswin, 2022).

The dictionary meaning of "Dexterity" refers to skill in performing tasks, often those requiring the use of hands (Woodford & Jackson, 2003). In the context of film editing, it implies a high level of skill, creativity, and precision. The use of the word "dexterity" highlights the editor's ability to navigate complex narrative structures, manipulate the flow of time, and evoke emotional responses from the audience through the judicious arrangement of shots and sequences.

Drawing upon insights from film theory and narrative analysis, the research seeks to uncover the utilization and patterns of suture breaking techniques in 'Thallumaala' and their influence on the audience's overall cinematic engagement. Considering 'Thallumaala' as a case study allows for an exploration of how such innovative techniques influence the broader landscape of Malayalam cinema. Analysing the innovative editing techniques and suture rupture methods set by 'Thallumaala's' editing and storytelling techniques could highlight its contribution to the dexterity and evolution of Malayalam films.

This study endeavours to answer the following research questions:

1. Do suture ruptures play a significant role in shaping the narrative style of the movie 'Thallumaala'?
2. How are post-production techniques used in the film 'Thallumaala' used to rupture the suturing?
3. Can any definite patterns be found in suture ruptures?

Through a meticulous examination of pivotal scenes and sequences, the research focuses on identifying instances of non-linear storytelling, suturing methods, and other editing techniques. Additionally, the researcher employs suture rupture methods such as graphics, cross cuts, Jump cuts, Flashbacks/Flash-forwards, transitions, overlapping images, fast intercuts, split screens, freezing frames, cut to black screens, overlapping videos, sound breaks, unusual camera movements, animations, and wipe transitions to analyse the suture rupture patterns, further enriching the understanding of the film's editing dynamics. Suturing techniques are designed to immerse the audience in the film's world, making the viewing experience seamless, on the other hands, suture ruptures intentionally disrupt the narrative, visual, or auditory flow to achieve specific effects (Tavares, 2024). The researcher intends to analyse the techniques that break the narrative flow, referring to these interruptions as instances of suture rupture.

The primary data collection involved a comprehensive frame-by-frame analysis of 'Thallumaala', with a specific focus on identifying instances of suture rupture. Each scene and shot was scrutinized to classify the type of rupture method utilized, its placement within the narrative, and its frequency. This granular approach ensured a thorough understanding of the editing techniques used and their contribution to the film's storytelling. A granular approach is about depth and precision, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter by focusing on the finer details. In the context of film analysis; it would extend to examining specific editing techniques, camera angles, sound design, lighting, and how these elements contribute to the overall narrative and emotional impact of the film. Each of these components would be analysed in detail to understand their purpose, effect, and how they interact with each other within the film's context.

Following data collection, the analysis phase involved categorizing the identified suture ruptures based on their method, timing, and frequency within

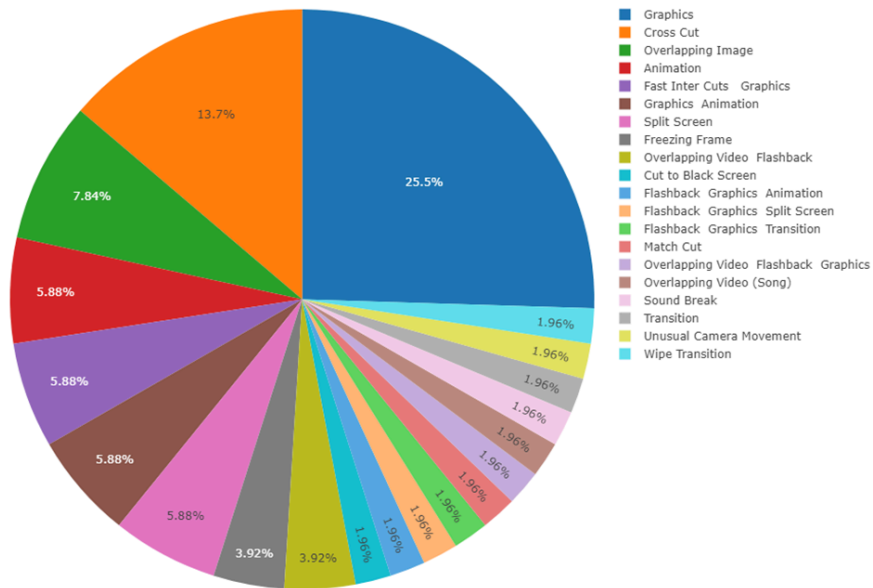
the film's timeline. This categorization facilitated a deeper examination of the patterns and purposes behind the use of suture breaks, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the editing style and its impact on the narrative flow of the movie. A critical aspect of the analysis was identifying the pattern of suture breaks across the movie. This step aimed to uncover any strategic placements or recurring themes in the use of suture rupture methods, providing insights into the film's innovative editing and its effect on the overall cinematic experience. The categorized data was then converted into a pie chart, offering a visual representation of the percentage and distribution of suture breaks utilized in 'Thallumaala'. This visualization enabled an immediate and clear interpretation of the editing technique's prevalence and its thematic significance within the movie.

The selection of 'Thallumaala' for this study is rooted in its prominence within contemporary Malayalam cinema and its potential to reshape narrative structures. By focusing on non-linear storytelling and editing techniques, the study addresses a notable gap in the literature regarding their specific application in Malayalam cinema.

Suturing in film extends beyond the realm of editing, influencing various components of filmmaking. These components include narrative structure, cinematography, sound design, and character development. Each plays a crucial role in engaging the viewer and ensuring the seamless flow of the film's story and emotional impact (Butte, 2008). But in this study, the researcher focuses particularly on the use of suture rupture in the process of film editing. By systematically analysing and visualizing the use of suture rupture methods, the research highlights the innovative approaches to storytelling in Malayalam cinema, showcasing the creative and technical prowess that characterizes the genre.

Observation and Results

When analysing the movie 'Thallumaala', a multitude of suture ruptures were meticulously identified: cross cuts, split screens, wipe transitions, overlapping images/videos, unusual camera movements, flashbacks, graphics/animations, sound breaks, transition to black screen and freezing frames. Each of these suture ruptures serves to disrupt the linear flow of the narrative and introduce variations in the editing style, contributing to the overall visual and thematic complexity of the film.



The analysis of suture rupture methods in ‘Thallumaala’ reveals a sophisticated use of editing techniques that contribute significantly to the film's narrative style and audience engagement. The breakdown of these methods into percentages highlights the predominance of certain techniques over others, offering insights into the film's visual storytelling approach.

Graphics, making up 25.5% of the suture rupture methods, play a pivotal role in ‘Thallumaala’. This high percentage indicates a strong reliance on visual elements beyond traditional cinematography to enhance the narrative. For instance, the use of graphical overlays can be seen in scenes where characters' emotions or thoughts are visually represented on screen, adding a layer of depth to the storytelling. Graphics might also be used in transition sequences, where visually striking elements help bridge scenes in a non-linear narrative, making the transitions smoother and more engaging for the audience.



Figure 1: Graphics used in a fight scene to enhance a character's reaction

Shortly after the title sequence, the film transitions into a scene that is visually rich and engaging, marked by the use of graphics. It begins with a graphical representation of someone conducting an online search for the "Ponnani wedding fight." Through this introduction, graphics not only sets the tone for the narrative that follows but also creatively engages the audience by blending digital culture with the film's storyline. Following this, the scene smoothly transitions to feature graphics associated with the "Manavalan Wasim" song, and then unfold to reveal graphics depicting someone recording the fight involving Manavalan Wasim. This particular use of graphics serves a dual purpose: it visually narrates the story's progression while also commenting on the modern phenomenon of capturing and sharing moments through digital means.

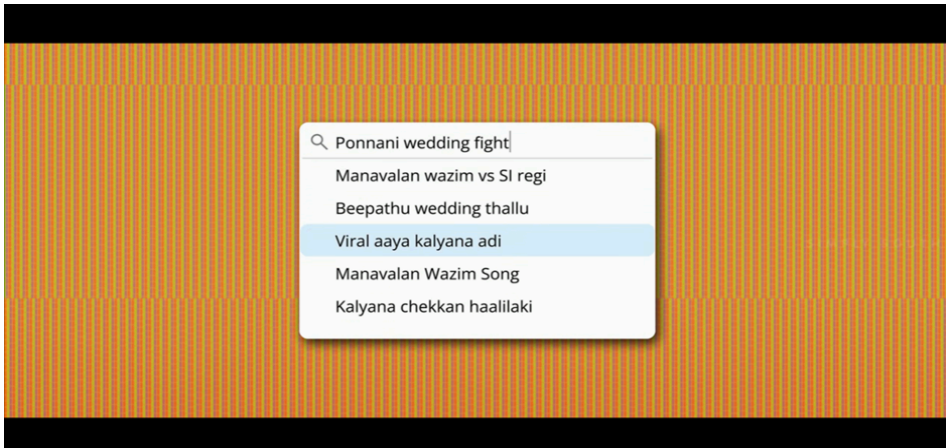


Figure 2: Ponnani Wedding Fight - Web Search

In this movie, a significant use of text graphics is employed to enhance the storytelling and visual experience. This creative choice involves integrating written words, stylized fonts, and dynamic text animations directly into the scenes. These text graphics serve multiple purposes: they can emphasize key moments, convey characters' thoughts and emotions or dialogue in a visually engaging manner, and provide contextual information or chapter details.



Figure 3: The use of text graphics to convey the character's confidence

Cross cuts, constituting 13.7% of the analysis, are employed to show simultaneous actions or events happening in different locations, enhancing the dynamism of the narrative. An example from 'Thallumaala' could involve cutting between two characters engaged in separate activities that, when viewed together, offer deeper insights into their relationship or the plot. This technique is effective in building tension or showcasing parallel developments in the storyline, engaging the viewer by keeping them guessing about the connection between these simultaneous events.

The film skillfully incorporates cross cuts to juxtapose scenes featuring Wasim with his friends against their opponents, Reji Mathew and his gang, unfolding simultaneously. This editing technique enriches the narrative by providing a multi-perspective view of the events, enhancing the storytelling's depth and complexity. Further, the uses of cross cuts are extensively employed to depict the escalating tension and eventual confrontation between Wasim and his friends and their adversaries. These cross cuts not only heighten the drama and intensity of the fight sequences but also serve to maintain a dynamic pace, keeping the audience engaged and invested in the outcome of these conflicts.

By alternating between the two groups, the film effectively builds suspense and anticipation, as the audience is led to wonder how these parallel narratives will converge. This method of storytelling, through cross cuts, allows for a richer, more layered narrative experience, showcasing the filmmaker's adeptness at using editing techniques to enhance the cinematic narrative.



Figure 4: The protagonist's migration to Dubai is indicated through animation

Animation, fast intercuts combined with graphics, graphics combined with animation, and split screens accounts for 5.88% of the suture rupture methods. Each of these techniques offers a unique way to enrich the storytelling. For example, the depiction of Wasim's migration to Dubai represents a significant plot point within the narrative, marking a pivotal shift in the storyline. The transition from his life in his hometown to his new life in Dubai is creatively portrayed through animation, starting from the farewell scene with his friends from the police station. This choice to utilize animation to showcase Wasim's Dubai experiences introduces a humorous and engaging element to the story, providing a distinct contrast to the film's earlier scenes.

The use of animation to depict this major life change is not only an innovative storytelling technique but also serves several narrative functions. Firstly, it visually distinguishes Wasim's life in Dubai from the preceding parts of the film, emphasizing the drastic change in his environment and experiences. The animated sequences allow for a more whimsical and exaggerated portrayal of Wasim's adventures and challenges in Dubai.



Figure 5: Animation used in chapter break

Moreover, this shift to animation during a crucial part of Wasim's journey adds a layer of creativity and freshness to the storytelling, engaging the audience's imagination and keeping them invested in the character's development. The decision to employ animation also reflects the film's willingness to experiment with different narrative styles and techniques, showcasing the filmmakers' versatility and commitment to storytelling. This approach not only enriches the narrative but also demonstrates the film's thematic exploration of change, adaptation, and the bittersweet nature of life events.

In the movie, the filmmakers have innovatively structured the narrative by systematically dividing it into 9 chapters, each introduced with its name creatively rendered in animation and graphics. These chapters are: Chapter 1: Adisthana Souhrudham, Chapter 2: Adi Vechu Munnottu, Chapter 3: Adiyil Anandakaalam, Chapter 4: Adi Jeevana Margangal, Chapter 5: Adiyanthiraavastha, Chapter 6: Adi Nirthal Prakhyaapanam, Chapter 7: Melodiyaal Meladi, Chapter 8: Adisthaana Souhrudham 2, Chapter 9: Adikkurippu. Dividing the movie into chapters with visually distinct introductions allows for a more structured and coherent narrative assembly. It provides clear breakpoints in the story, ensure narrative coherence, and thematic emphasize.



Figure 6: Fast intercutting with graphics used in a fight scene

The utilization of fast intercuts combined with graphics, particularly in fight scenes, represents a dynamic and innovative approach to film editing. This technique enhances the intensity and impact of the storyline. Fast intercuts, characterized by quick and sharp transitions between shots, serve to heighten the sense of urgency and chaos inherent in fight scenes. Graphics can visually depict sounds, such as the shouting and punching sounds in a stylized manner that emphasizes their intensity. Similarly, graphical representations of emotions, whether through expressive faces or symbolic imagery, offer visual shorthand for the characters internal states.

The integration of graphics combined with animation, particularly during scene breaks, serves as a unique narrative device within the film, especially in articulating major thematic shifts and character transformations. One of the most striking applications of this technique is in the depiction of Wasim's transformation, which is creatively presented in a manner reminiscent of a makeover game environment. This approach significantly contributes to the storytelling by providing a metaphorical representation of change and evolution within the film.



Figure 7: Depicting a character's makeover using the interface of a video gaming application

The use of split screens, particularly in fight scenes and telephone conversations, by dividing the screen into separate panels, each showcasing different visual information simultaneously. Filmmakers can convey multiple narrative threads or perspectives at once. The addition of movement within these split-screen dimensions further enriches the visual experience, adding dynamism and depth to the scenes.



Figure 8: Split screens used in a fight scene

In fight scenes, split screens allow the audience to witness the action from multiple angles and perspectives simultaneously. This approach can intensify the scene's impact by showing both the protagonist and the antagonist's actions and reactions in real-time, without cutting back and forth. The viewer gains a more comprehensive understanding of the fight's progression, capturing the full spectrum of movements, tactics, and emotions involved.

For telephone conversations, split screens serve to visually bridge the physical distance between the characters, presenting their facial expressions and reactions side by side. This technique effectively conveys the emotional nuances of the conversation, allowing the audience to experience both sides of the dialogue in a more connected and engaging way.



Figure 9: Split screens used in a telephone conversation

The incorporation of movement within split screens is a sophisticated technique that can elevate the storytelling. It prevents the split-screen format from feeling static or confining, instead making it a fluid element of the film's visual language. Each of these techniques contributes to the film's unique storytelling style, using visual innovation to break conventional narrative structures and engage the audience on multiple levels.

The use of freezing images and overlapping video with flashbacks accounts for 3.92% of the suture rupture methods. Freezing images can serve to highlight a specific moment, drawing the audience's attention to the significance of the scene or the emotional state of a character. When combined with overlapping video and flashbacks, this technique can create a poignant juxtaposition between past and present, seamlessly integrating memories into the current narrative flow. The technique of freezing images utilized to capture key moments of Wasim's wedding party, allowing the audience to linger on significant expressions or actions that define the character's emotions during this crucial event.



Figure 10: Overlapping Video



Figure 11: Continuation of overlapping video

The remaining 1.96% encompasses a wide array of editing techniques, each adding its layer of meaning to the film. The transition from Wazim's wedding night to the following morning is marked by a cut to a black screen. This simple yet effective technique signals a significant temporal shift, providing a clear

demarcation between the two scenes. It allows the audience a moment of pause, preparing them for the narrative's progression into the next phase of the story.

Wazim's quest to find Beevi, triggered by the memory of her bicycle, is depicted through a flashback enhanced with graphics and animation. This sequence is creatively set up within a gaming app environment, adding a layer of interactivity and visual appeal to the reminiscence.



Figure 12: Shot with video game interface

The use of flashback with graphics and split screen to depict a fast-paced outline of Wazim's past altercation with his friends showcases the filmmakers' ability to convey crucial backstory information efficiently. This technique allows for a simultaneous presentation of multiple perspectives or time frames, offering a comprehensive understanding of the events in a condensed format.



Figure 13: Graphics of film ticket tearing

A particularly inventive use of flashback involves the depiction of past events at a theatre, where graphics of a film ticket and a tearing transition are employed. This method not only visually captivates but also symbolically represents the tearing away of layers to reveal hidden memories, enhancing the narrative depth.

Match cuts in 'Thallumaala' are utilized not just as a suture technique but in a more creative manner, where a scene freezes into a still photograph that subsequently crumples up and is washed away in a bathroom basin, transitioning to a different scene. The transition from a moving scene to a static photograph, followed by its crumpling and subsequent disposal in a basin, acts as a compelling visual metaphor. In the moment when the scene is still in motion, Wazim mentions that the story will be shared later, urging the audience to wait. Subsequently, the scene freezes and is washed away. This sequence could symbolize the postponement of the story, the concept of moving beyond past events, or the characters' intentions to momentarily set aside the occurrence. This technique enriches the narrative with symbolic elements, offering a more profound interpretation for the audience.



Figure 14: Freezing frame washed away in a bathroom basin

The intertwining of another storyline from the past, detailing how Wazim meets Beevi, is achieved through the overlapping of video, flashback, and graphics. This method enriches the storytelling by layering different narrative elements, providing a textured and multifaceted view of their relationship's origins. The use of overlapping videos in songs, where almost all shots are merged with another, creates a visually lush and dynamic musical experience.

The movie 'Thallumaala' incorporates memes as text and graphics, a creative choice that significantly enhances its narrative and visual storytelling. This approach reflects a deep understanding of contemporary digital culture and leverages the widespread popularity of social media platforms. The innovative use of visuals as stickers and the incorporation of certain shots styled as Instagram Live videos in 'Thallumaala' further exemplify the film's deep integration with contemporary digital culture and social media trends.



Figure 15: Memes are incorporated into the shot

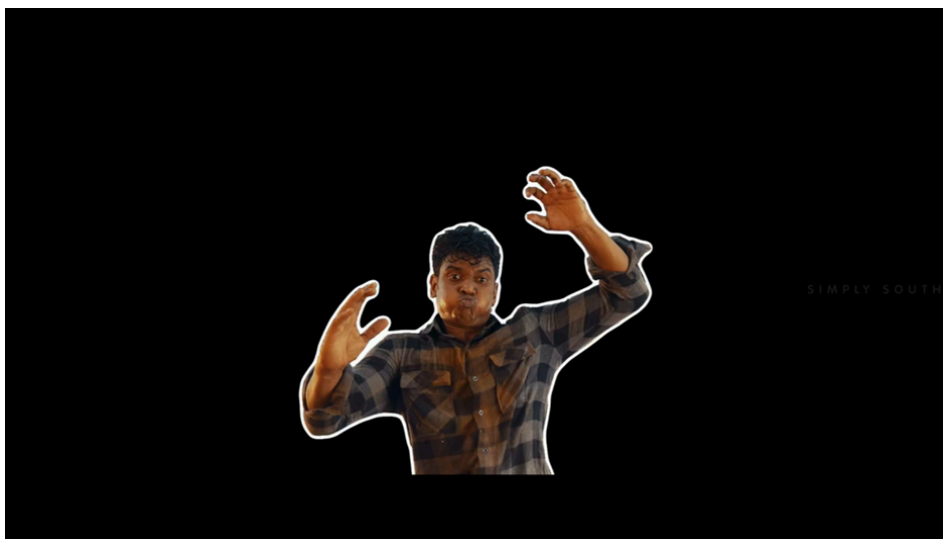


Figure 16: The shot being used as a sticker

The use of the Instagram Live interface indicates the life of influential vlogger Beepathu. By presenting certain shots as if they are being broadcast on Instagram Live, the film fosters a direct connection between its characters and the audience. This format allows viewers to feel as though they are part of the story, engaging directly with the characters. It breaks down the traditional barriers between the narrative and the viewer, fostering a more immersive experience.

This technique makes the narrative feel more contemporary and relatable, as viewers are accustomed to the live streaming format in their everyday social media interactions. It demonstrates the filmmakers' willingness to experiment with new forms of storytelling that resonate with a digitally savvy audience. This approach can make the film stand out, offering a unique viewing experience that leverages contemporary digital culture. The decision to set the dimensions of certain shots in 'Thallumaala' to resemble the aspect ratio of Instagram, rather than using the traditional full-screen format, is a deliberate and impactful artistic choice.

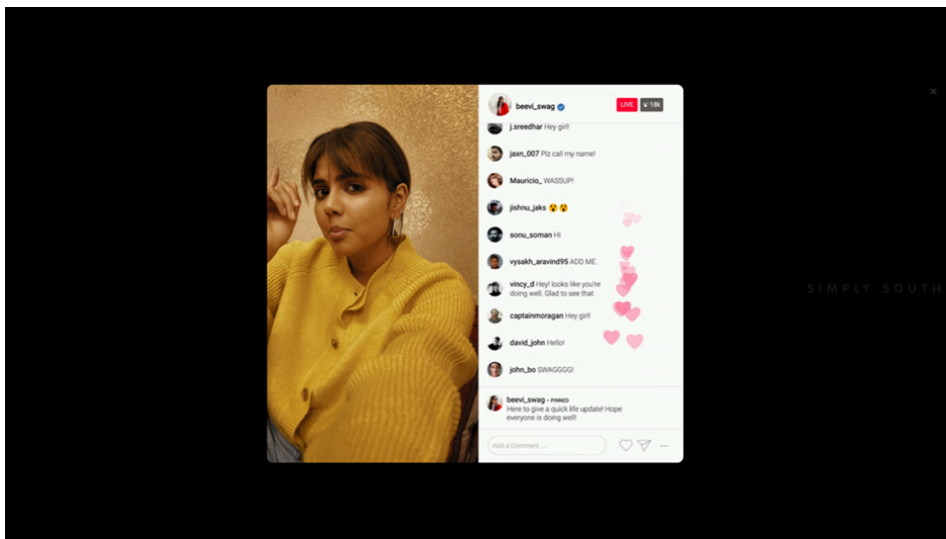


Figure 17: Use of Instagram live interface

Sound breaks are strategically used for transitioning between shots, enhancing the dramatic impact of scene changes. Additionally, the film employs fancy transitions that are rare in cinema, adding a unique stylistic flair to the visual

narrative. Rare camera movements in fight scenes and the use of wipe transitions for shot transformations further exemplify the filmmakers' commitment to innovative cinematography.



Figure 18: Unusual camera movement used in a fight scene

In a nutshell, by integrating cross cuts, the film seamlessly weaves together parallel storylines, creating a dynamic narrative structure that keeps the audience engaged and on their toes. Split screens are employed to present multiple perspectives simultaneously, enriching the narrative depth and allowing viewers to experience the story's multifaceted nature. Wipe transitions and overlapping images/videos add a layer of visual fluidity, connecting scenes and ideas in a way that is both aesthetically pleasing and thematically significant.

Moreover, the inclusion of unusual camera movements and flashbacks disrupts the chronological progression of events, inviting viewers to piece together the narrative puzzle themselves. This non-linear approach to storytelling not only enhances the mystery and intrigue but also encourages active engagement from the audience. The use of graphics and animations introduces an additional layer of fantasy narrative and thematic expression, often signalling shifts in tone, setting, or perspective, and adding a visually stimulating element that complements the film's storytelling.

Sound breaks and transitions to black screens are effectively used to create moments of tension, anticipation, and reflection, guiding the audience's emotional journey through the film. Freezing frames, in particular, emphasizing the film's thematic messages.

Major Findings

1. Frequency of Suture ruptures: The suture ruptures seem to occur frequently throughout the movie, indicating a dynamic editing style. The frequency and variety of these breaks suggest that they are intentionally used to disrupt the linear narrative flow and create a visual interest. These breaks are not incidental but are integral to the storytelling process, carefully chosen and placed to serve specific narrative and stylistic purposes.

2. Strategic Placement: Suture ruptures are strategically placed throughout the movie, occurring at different points such as scene breaks, transitions between flashbacks, and during action sequences. At the level of scene breaks, suture ruptures serve to punctuate the narrative, providing clear demarcations between different segments of the story. This not only aids in maintaining a consistent narrative structure but also allows for the introduction of new themes, settings, or characters. By strategically placing these breaks at scene transitions, the filmmakers effectively manage the pacing of the narrative, guiding the audience through the story's progression with precision and intent.

The transitions between flashbacks are another critical area where suture ruptures are employed with strategic intent. During action sequences, the use of suture ruptures adds dynamism and intensity to the visual storytelling. These breaks amplify the excitement and tension of the action, employing rapid cuts, unusual camera angles, and other dynamic editing techniques to immerse the audience in the cinematic experience. The strategic placement of suture ruptures throughout 'Thallumaala' is a clear indication of the filmmaker's dedication to crafting a film that is both narratively compelling and stylistically innovative.

1. Use of suture breaking techniques: This technique conveys multiple perspectives, themes, or timelines simultaneously, challenging the viewer's perception of the storyline. It invites deeper engagement by layering visuals and using unconventional filming techniques. Graphics and animation at scene break

signal shifts in theme, location, or narrative focus. It represents a sophisticated approach to storytelling.

2. **Definite Patterns:** The filmmakers segmented the film into 9 chapters, with recurring suture ruptures at the beginning of each chapter, often involving graphics and animations. This suggests thematic or narrative significance tied to these sections. It provides a unique opportunity to set the tone, mood, or thematic focus of the upcoming narrative segment. Additionally, suturing techniques, especially graphic elements and match cuts, are used at scene breaks. These techniques are not arbitrarily chosen; instead, they play a crucial role in maintaining the narrative's rhythm and coherence.

Through a sophisticated and strategic employment of various editing techniques, including cross cuts, split screens, graphic elements, and more, the filmmakers have crafted a narrative richly layered and visually dynamic. These breaks serve multiple purposes: they disrupt the conventional linear flow of storytelling, invite deeper audience engagement by challenging perceptions, and facilitate a seamless integration of multiple perspectives, themes, and timelines. The inclusion of shots with the social media platform interface in 'Thallumaala' significantly enriches the film's narrative and aesthetic appeal. It connects the film to contemporary digital practices and social media habits, offering a fresh and engaging way to tell stories that resonate with modern audiences.

This innovative approach to filmmaking challenges traditional cinematic conventions, engaging the audience in a deeply immersive and thought-provoking experience. Through its creative use of editing techniques, 'Thallumaala' stands as compelling evidence to the power of visual storytelling, leaving a lasting impact on its viewers and contributing to the evolution of cinematic art.

Discussion

The discussion surrounding the use of suture ruptures in the movie 'Thallumaala' reveals several key findings about the film's narrative style, editing techniques, language and overall cinematic impact.

Deviation from classical Hollywood editing and innovative narrative structure: Classical Hollywood editing used to maintain spatial and temporal continuity, guiding the viewer through the narrative without confusion or disruption. The

goal of Classical Hollywood editing and, by extension, suturing, is to render the technique invisible, allowing the story to unfold with apparent naturalness and ease. The use of suture ruptures deviates from the traditional continuity editing principles of classical Hollywood cinema, which typically prioritize seamless transitions and linear narrative flow. While those breaks depart from classical Hollywood editing norms, they can coexist with traditional editing techniques to create a hybrid style that balances tradition with innovation. Changes in these kinds of conventional narrative techniques not only end the boredom of viewers but also create visual interest. These breaks can be used to experiment with narrative structure, editing techniques, and visual styles, offering a fresh and innovative cinematic experience.

Artistic expression and narrative experimentation: The use of suture rupture reflects the filmmaker's artistic expression and creativity, shaping the overall aesthetic and thematic resonance of the film. Contemporary filmmakers often use suture ruptures as a means of artistic expression and narrative experimentation. Dexterity or the advanced and skillful editing techniques in Malayalam cinema, exemplified by 'Thallumaala', contribute to the art of storytelling, enhance the cinematic experience, and reflect the creative potential of the industry.

By playing with the conventions of cinema, directors and editors can explore new storytelling possibilities, engage with themes of reality and artifice, and offer unique cinematic experiences. This experimentation is part of the broader trend in contemporary art and media towards challenging traditional boundaries and exploring new forms of expression.

Enhanced audience engagement: Modern audiences are increasingly sophisticated and media-savvy, often seeking films that offer more than straightforward narratives and conventional techniques. Suture ruptures potentially engage passive audience members by disrupting the linear flow of the narrative and inviting active participation in deciphering the narrative structure. Viewers may find themselves more intellectually invested in the film's storyline due to the unexpected nature of these breaks. By momentarily pulling the audience out of the immersive experience, these breaks encourage active engagement with the film's content, inviting viewers to question, interpret, and analyse what they've seen.

Emphasizing themes and messages: Suture ruptures can be employed to emphasize a film's themes or messages, drawing attention to particular ideas or motifs by momentarily disrupting the narrative flow. This can make the themes more salient and encourage viewers to reflect on the film's deeper meanings. In contemporary cinema, where filmmakers often grapple with innovative narrative structure, suture breaks can enhance the thematic depth and resonance of the narrative.

Bridging cinema and social media aesthetics: The innovative use of suture ruptures techniques in 'Thallumaala', particularly the overlapping videos, graphics, and transitions, does suggest a stylistic approach that could be likened to Instagram Reels. Instagram Reels are known for their fast-paced, visually engaging content that combines quick cuts, vibrant graphics, and dynamic transitions to capture the viewer's attention within a short timeframe. 'Thallumaala' employs similar techniques to create a visually stimulating experience that resonates with the contemporary audience's consumption habits. The use of quick cuts and dynamic transitions in the movie mirrors the editing style popularized by social media platforms, making the narrative progression and storytelling visually compelling and modern. Just as Instagram Reels often rely on music to enhance the visual content, 'Thallumaala' utilizes overlapping videos in songs to create a rich, multi-layered audio-visual experience.

The stylistic resemblance to Instagram Reels also reflects 'Thallumaala's' engagement with contemporary culture and digital trends. By incorporating editing techniques and visual styles that echo popular social media content, the movie taps into the aesthetic sensibilities and viewing preferences of a generation accustomed to consuming stories through platforms like Instagram. This not only makes the film relevant and appealing to a younger audience but also comments on the pervasive influence of social media on storytelling and visual communication.

Suture breaks, as demonstrated in the editing style of 'Thallumaala', represent a significant departure from the linear, continuity-driven approach traditionally associated with classical Hollywood editing. These techniques, by interrupting the narrative flow in creative ways, offer filmmakers a myriad of opportunities to heighten visual interest, deepen audience engagement, and elevate artistic expression. The use of suture breaks, such as match cuts, freeze frames, and dynamic transitions, introduces a level of visual creativity and innovation that can make a film stand out. In 'Thallumaala', these techniques are not merely

decorative but serve to enrich the storytelling, making the visual experience more engaging. The blend of graphics, animations, and unconventional camera movements captivates the viewer's attention, ensuring that the visual narrative remains as compelling as the plot itself.

By employing suture breaks that challenge the conventional flow of scenes, 'Thallumaala' actively involves the audience in the narrative process. Techniques like sudden cuts to black screens, the integration of flashbacks with present action, and the overlay of videos and graphics, require viewers to piece together the storyline actively. This engagement fosters a deeper connection with the film, as audiences are not merely passive recipients of the story but participants in its unfolding. The interactive nature of the editing encourages viewers to pay closer attention, stimulating curiosity and anticipation.

The sophisticated editing style of 'Thallumaala', characterized by its diverse range of suture breaking techniques, invites critical analysis. Viewers are prompted to consider the significance of each editing choice and its impact on the narrative and thematic development. For instance, the use of a match cut those transitions from a still photograph to a different scene might symbolize the impermanence of memories or the interconnectedness of past and present. Such techniques encourage audiences to engage with the film on a deeper level, analyzing its visual language and the meanings conveyed through its innovative editing.

The film's departure from linear editing not only makes it visually arresting but also inspires it with a distinct style that contributes to its overall artistic merit. The blending of cinematic techniques with elements reminiscent of digital and social media platforms like Instagram Reels adds a contemporary flair to the film, making it a unique and enjoyable cinematic experience.

In summary, suture breaks can significantly impact the linear editing style of movies based on classical Hollywood editing principles, offering opportunities for enhanced visual interest, audience engagement, and artistic expression. They have the capacity to engage passive audiences, stimulating curiosity, encouraging critical analysis, and enriching aesthetic enjoyment. Overall, the data suggests that 'Thallumaala' employs a sophisticated and visually engaging editing style characterized by a diverse range of suture breaking techniques.

In 'Thallumaala', suture ruptures are not just stylistic choices but integral to the narrative structure and storytelling approach. By dividing the movie into nine chapters and employing suture rupture techniques, the filmmakers create a rhythm that allows for both immersion and reflection. This can be particularly effective in a film that deals with contemporary themes and digital culture, as it mirrors the fragmented, non-linear way we often experience stories and information in real life.

In this movie, various editing techniques are employed to achieve suture ruptures. These can include abrupt changes in editing style, such as sudden cuts or transitions that don't follow the conventional continuity editing rules. Other techniques might involve the use of graphic overlays, freeze frames, or shifts in aspect ratio—like the Instagram-like dimensions.

While each instance of suture rupture in 'Thallumaala' served a specific narrative, certain patterns emerged upon analysis. For example, the filmmakers might consistently employ these ruptures at chapter transitions to underscore the shift in narrative focus or tone. Another pattern is the use of suture ruptures to highlight moments of introspection or significant character development. Additionally, the film's engagement with digital culture and social media might be consistently marked by suture ruptures, using editing techniques that mimic digital interfaces or disrupt traditional cinematic presentation.

In conclusion, suture ruptures in 'Thallumaala' play a significant role in shaping the film's narrative style, employing editing techniques to disrupt the narrative flow and draw attention to the film's construction.

The importance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding and appreciation of the evolving landscape of cinema, particularly within the Malayalam film industry. Ultimately, the results generated from the analysis are relevant to society as they contribute to peoples understanding of visual media and storytelling techniques, which play a significant role in shaping cultural discourse, artistic expression, and collective imagination. By exploring and innovating within the realm of filmmaking, creators can continue to captivate audiences, provoke thought, and reflect the diverse experiences of society.

Conclusion

In contemporary cinema, suture ruptures are not only relevant but are also a vital tool for filmmakers seeking to engage audiences through innovative storytelling, thematic exploration, and artistic experimentation. These disruptions serve as a reflection of the evolving nature of film as an art form, audience expectations, and technological advancements. By incorporating suture ruptures, contemporary films can offer richer, more complex, and engaging cinematic experiences that resonate with modern viewers.

'Thallumaala' as an experimental film that masterfully utilizes suture breaks to craft a unique narrative experience. The strategic employment of various editing techniques disrupts traditional storytelling norms and also enhances the narrative's complexity and engages the audience in a visually stunning and intellectually stimulating manner. This study analyses that immersion isn't solely about seamless narrative integration but can also be fostered through deliberate narrative disruptions.

The concept of suture in film theory refers to the techniques filmmakers use to create a seamless narrative flow, making the audience forget they are watching a constructed reality and instead immerse them in the story. Suture ruptures, then, are moments that disrupt this flow, drawing attention to the film's construction, often for stylistic or thematic reasons. The film 'Thallumaala' distinguishes itself from other Malayalam movies through its plethora of visual storytelling techniques. In 'Thallumaala,' the strategic use of suture ruptures, especially within the framework of dividing the movie into nine chapters, plays a crucial role in shaping its narrative style and visual emphasis. It features an abundance of graphics and animations that serve as chapter introductions, employs flashbacks for narrative depth, and utilizes characters that mysteriously appear and disappear within scenes. The innovative use of split screens, along with scenes that freeze into still photographs before folding and dissolving in a bathroom sink to transition into new scenarios, adds to its unique style. Moreover, the film incorporates transitions using wipes, blends in memes, displays animated news bulletins, and even integrates a video game that represents its characters. Additionally, the presence of web searching interfaces adds a modern touch that makes 'Thallumaala' stand out distinctly in the landscape of Malayalam cinema. The use of suture rupture elements highlighted the changes in the visual storytelling culture of Malayalam cinema.

The editing process in 'Thallumaala' is not just about piecing together a series of events but is a deliberate effort to immerse the viewer in the narrative, making them an active participant in the unfolding drama. This is achieved through a variety of techniques, including jump cuts, flashbacks, and montage sequences, which serve to disorient and reorient the viewer, drawing them deeper into the narrative loop. This study highlights the film's success in leveraging editing as a powerful tool for storytelling, making 'Thallumaala' a compelling study in cinematic innovation and narrative sophistication.

The study helps to gain a deeper understanding of contemporary filmmaking practices and the ways in which filmmakers utilize editing techniques to enhance storytelling. This expands our knowledge of narrative experimentation in cinema and the various techniques employed to engage audiences. In terms of future prospects, the insights gained from analysing the data can inform filmmakers, editors, and scholars about emerging trends in editing techniques and narrative experimentation and evolution in cinematic language.

In the present national and international scenario, the need of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding and appreciation of the evolving landscape of cinema, particularly within the Malayalam film industry. As Malayalam cinema gains recognition on the global stage for its innovation and creativity, studies like this one shed light on the specific techniques and approaches that contribute to its success. Furthermore, in an era marked by rapid technological advancements and changing audience preferences, the exploration of innovative storytelling and editing practices holds relevance beyond national borders, contributing to broader discussions on the future of cinema in an increasingly interconnected world. Thus, this study serves as a valuable resource for both practitioners and researchers seeking to understand the dynamics of contemporary filmmaking and its implications for the broader cultural landscape.

Acknowledgement

The first author gratefully acknowledge the Directorate of Collegiate Education, Government of Kerala, for providing financial support to carry out the study.

References

- Andrew, J. D. (1976). *The major film theories*. Oxford University Press.
- Aswin. (2022, October 18). Gluing together a tale of brawls: How Instagram influenced Thallumaala's transitions. *The Hindu*. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/gluing-together-a-tale-of-brawls-how-instagram-influenced-thallumaalas-crazy-transitions/article65971366.ece>
- Bordwell, D., Staiger, J., & Thompson, K. (2003). *The classical Hollywood cinema*. Routledge.
- Bordwell, D., Thompson, K., & Smith, J. (2016). *Film art: An introduction*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Butte, G. (2008). Suture and the narration of subjectivity in film. *Poetics Today*, 29 (2), 277–308. <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-026>
- Dayan, D. (1974). The tutor-code of classical cinema. *Film Quarterly*, 28(1), 22–31. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1211439>
- Dmytryk, E. (1984). *On film editing: An introduction to the art of film construction*. Taylor & Francis.
- Fulford, A. (2008). Film and video editing may be the most important part of making movies. *Ezine Articles*. Retrieved November 15, 2022, from https://EzineArticles.com/expert/Adam_Fulford/96594
- Heath, S. (1981). *Questions of cinema*. Indiana University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16579-7>
- Jones, C. (2020). Exploring the evolution of editing: From classical Hollywood to the digital age. *Cineaste*, 45(2), 34-39.
- Kozloff, S. (1989). *Invisible storytellers*. University of California Press.

- Kubrak, T. (2020). Impact of films: Changes in young people's attitudes after watching a movie. *Behavioral Sciences*, 10(5), 86.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/bs10050086>
- Lacan, J., & Fink, B. (2006). *Ecrits*. W. W. Norton.
- Magrini. (2006). On the system of the "suture" in cinema. *Otherzine*, Issue 10.
http://othercinema.com/otherzine/archives/index.php?issueid=15&article_id=33
- Miller, J. A. (1977). Dossier suture: Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier). *Screen*, 18(4), 24–34. <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/18.4.24>
- Mohan, R. (2020). Exploring the unfemininity in new wave Malayalam movies. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Review*, 7(1).
<https://ijrar.org/papers/IJRAR2001321.pdf>
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>
- Murch, W. (2001). *In the blink of an eye: A perspective on film editing* (2nd ed.). Silman-James Press.
- Oudart, J. P. (1977). Cinema and suture. *Screen*, 18(4), 35–47.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/18.4.35>
- Patel, R. (2021, July 15). *The art of suture: How modern films are redefining classical editing techniques*. Screen Rant.
- Rahman, K. (Director). (2022). *Thallumaala* [Film]. Ashiq Usman Productions Plan B Motion Pictures.
- Reisz, K., & Millar, G. (1999). *The technique of film editing*. Focal Press.
- Tavares. (2021, November 24). What is suture film theory? BeverlyBoy Productions.
<https://beverlyboy.com/filmmaking/what-is-suture-film-theory/>

Watabe, K. (2020). Cinematic suture and panoramic stitch: Subject formation in immersive virtual reality. *Panorama Council*, 1, 59-65.

https://tsukuba.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/54295/files/IPCJ_1_59.pdf

Woodford, K., & Jackson, G. (2003). *Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary*. Cambridge University Press.