

Non-Linear Narrative Structure and Time Loops as Reflective Representation of Time in The Film Sore: Istri Dari Masa Depan

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ABSTRACT

Films have a narrative structure designed to present the events that will be told. The film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* adopts a non-linear narrative structure and time loop in developing its narrative, which is analyzed through a narratological approach. This research focuses on recurring time patterns in the three-act structure and their role in depicting life choices and character development. The aim of this research is to explain the structure of meaning generated through narrative, visual approaches, and temporal relationships in audiovisual texts. This research emphasizes narrative structure and depiction of time. The techniques applied include qualitative text analysis using the fabula-syuzhet framework. Bordwell, Genette's categories of narrative time (sequence, duration, frequency), and Deleuze's concept of the image of time. The results of this study indicate that temporal repetition functions not only as a dramatic element but also as a reflection that contributes to the gradual development of characters. Temporal patterns function structurally and visually to highlight the dimensions of relationships between individuals. These findings reveal flexibility in the narrative structure of modern Indonesian films, particularly in the romantic drama genre.

Keywords: *non-linear narrative, time loop, narrative structure, time representation, Indonesian film*

INTRODUCTION

Narrative is not simply a tool for telling a story, but rather the primary foundation that determines how a film constructs meaning. Through narrative structure, a film regulates the rhythm of events, forms causal relationships, and constructs the audience's experience of time. The way a film organizes its plot directly influences how the audience understands conflict, character development, and the message it conveys. Bordwell asserts that narrative functions as a system that organizes story information to form certain patterns of interpretation in the minds of the audience (Bordwell, 1985, p. 49). Therefore, examining narrative structure is not simply analyzing the sequence of events, but also exploring the strategies of meaning production at work behind the cinematic experience. In this context, narrative analysis is a crucial step in understanding how films represent reality, time, and human relations through specific storytelling choices.

One of the most defining aspects of a film's narrative structure is the way time is represented and organized. Films do not always follow a linear chronology; instead, many contemporary works utilize non-linear strategies such as flashbacks, plot fragmentation, and time loops to represent the subjectivity of experience and the psychological complexity of characters. When the sequence of events is scrambled or repeated, time no longer functions simply as a chronological backdrop but as a dramatic device that shapes meaning and emotional intensity. In this context, the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* becomes relevant to study. This film develops a narrative based on time travel and a pattern of looping (time loop) within the framework of a romantic drama, thus presenting time as a space for reflection

on life choices, relationships, and future possibilities. The non-linear strategy used not only creates plot variation but also serves as a medium for emphasizing the existential dimension of the relationships between the characters.

The use of a time-travel-based non-linear structure in the romantic drama *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* demonstrates that time travel experiments are no longer limited to the science fiction or thriller genres, but have become an aesthetic and thematic strategy in mainstream cinema. Studies of the representation of time in Indonesian films still tend to position non-linearity as a variation of storytelling techniques, not fully as a mechanism for forming meaning related to character development and philosophical reflections on life choices. Time is presented in the form of repetition or temporal shifts, the narrative structure plays a direct role in shaping the character's consciousness as well as the audience's interpretive experience.

Based on this background, it is important to examine how the non-linear narrative structure in the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* is constructed and how the organization of time in this film represents the ideas of choice, determinism, and the possibility of change. This research not only aims to identify the plot patterns and time travel devices used, but also analyze how these strategies function in articulating the film's thematic meaning. Through a narratological approach, this study attempts to place the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* within the discourse of contemporary Indonesian cinema that is increasingly open to temporal exploration and the complexity of narrative structures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Film narratology studies consistently place narrative structure as the foundation for the formation of cinematic meaning. Bordwell asserts that the relationship between the fabula (the story constructed by the audience) and the syuzhet (the way events are arranged and presented) determines how the audience gathers story information and builds causal inferences (Bordwell, 1985, p. 53). Chatman, through his distinction between story and discourse, shows that the meaning of a film is determined by the storytelling strategy, not solely by the content of the story (Chatman, 1978, p. 19). From this perspective, the analysis of narrative structure does not stop at mapping the plot, but must examine how the arrangement of time, conflict, and distribution of information shape the audience's interpretive experience. This means that narrative structure is an epistemological tool that determines how the reality of the film is understood.

The dimension of time is a crucial aspect in this framework. Genette, through the categories of order, duration, and frequency, provides analytical tools for reading the manipulation of chronology and repetition of events (Genette, 1980, p. 35). In contemporary cinema, temporal manipulation develops through non-linear strategies that Kiss and Willemsen (2017, p. 6) call part of the complex narration, a form of storytelling that challenges classical linearity and demands active cognitive participation from the audience. One form that is becoming increasingly prominent is the time structure. loop, where events repeat themselves but their meaning changes through the accumulation of the characters' consciousness (Brütsch, 2021, p. 47). Furthermore, Deleuze, through the concept of the time-image, opens up the possibility of reading time as a reflective experience that is not entirely subject to traditional causal logic (1989, p. 66). Thus, theoretically, there is a strong foundation for understanding non-linearity not merely as a technical variation, but as a representation of temporal consciousness and subjectivity.

However, in the context of Indonesian film research, the use of this theoretical framework has not been fully maximized. Andika and Kurniawan's (2022) study on "Falling in Love Like in the Movies" emphasizes the function of nonlinearity in building dramatic conflict, but has not systematically elaborated on the relationship between temporal structure and character transformation. Similarly, Sari et al.'s (2024) study on time The loop in the film *Kembang Api* positions time repetition as a strategy to increase curiosity, without deeply connecting it to the reflective or conceptual dimensions of time. A common limitation in these studies lies in the tendency to view non-linearity as a dramatic or aesthetic effect, rather than as an epistemological structure that shapes thematic meaning and character consciousness.

Study of time use The study of time loops in the Indonesian romantic drama genre is still relatively limited. Most research on time manipulation tends to focus on thrillers or mysteries, leaving the philosophical and existential implications of time loops in interpersonal relationships largely unexplored. In romantic dramas, time often serves as a medium for reflection on life choices, regrets, and the possibility of change dimensions that are particularly relevant when interpreted through an integration of classical narratological theory and the concept of the time-image.

Based on this gap, this research positions itself to offer a more systematic and theoretical reading of time-based non-linear narrative structures. loop in the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* . Different from previous studies that emphasize dramatic effects, this study analyzes how the structural organization of time shapes character transformation and represents the ideas of choice, determinism, and existential awareness. By integrating the frameworks of Bordwell , Genette , and Deleuze, this study seeks to expand the discourse of Indonesian film narratology from the descriptive realm to a more conceptual structural-reflective analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research uses a qualitative approach with a narrative textual analysis design (textual narrative analysis). Textual analysis in film studies aims to unravel the structure of meaning constructed through narrative organization, visual strategies, and temporal relations in audio-visual texts (Bordwell, 1985; Chatman, 1978). This approach was chosen because the focus of the research lies in the structure of storytelling and the representation of time, which requires a theory based interpretive reading, not quantitative measurement.

Epistemologically, this research is within the tradition of structural and post-structural narratology, which views film as a representational system that organizes the audience's experience through story arrangement (fabula) and presentation (syuzhet) (Bordwell, 1985). To deepen the temporal dimension, this research also integrates Genette's (1980) category of narrative time. order, duration, frequency and the time-image concept Deleuze (1989) uses time as a reflective experience that goes beyond linear causal logic.

Objects and Units of Analysis

The object of this research is the film "*Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan*" (The Wife from the Future) as a complete cinematic text. The unit of analysis is specifically and operationally defined as follows:

- 1) Dramatic structure (three-act segmentation and narrative turning points) (Field , 2005).
- 2) Syuzhet relations (Bordwell, 1985).
- 3) Temporal manipulation by category:
 - a. Order (anachrony : flashback , flashforward),
 - b. Duration (scene, summary, ellipsis),
 - c. Frequency (repetitive narration / time loop) (Genette, 1980).
- 4) Representation of time as a reflective experience (time-image) (Deleuze, 1989).
- 5) Character transformation in relation to temporal structure (Thompson, 2003).

This determination of the unit of analysis allows research to move from the structural level to the conceptual level systematically.

Data Collection Technique

Primary data was obtained through close techniques viewing, namely repeated viewing of a film to identify structural patterns, scene repetitions, key dialogue, and temporal shifts. Close viewing is a standard procedure in film analysis because it allows the identification of structural and stylistic details that shape meaning (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019).

The data collection procedure is carried out through:

- 1) Initial viewing for general understanding of the storyline.
- 2) Second screening for dramatic structure segmentation.
- 3) Follow-up viewing for scene recording showing:
 - a. Time loop,
 - b. Chronological shift,
 - c. Character transformation.
- 4) Reconstruction of the chronology of the story (fabula) to compare with the order of presentation (syuzhet).

Secondary data was obtained from academic literature related to narratology, time theory in cinema, and previous research on non-linear narratives.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis is carried out through the following systematic stages:

1) Dramatic Structure Segmentation

The film is mapped into a three-act framework (setup–confrontation–resolution) to identify the basic structure and non-linear modifications (Field , 2005).

2) Fabula Reconstruction and Syuzhet Identification

The chronological sequence of the story (fabula) is reconstructed and compared with the film's presentation structure (syuzhet) to detect temporal anomalies (Bordwell, 1985).

3) Time Manipulation Analysis

The scenes were analyzed using Genette's (1980) categories:

- a. Order: identify chronological irregularities.
- b. Duration: analysis of time compression or expansion.
- c. Frequency: analysis of repetition patterns as time structures loop.

4) Conceptual Interpretation

The structural findings are then interpreted using the concept of time-image (Deleuze, 1989) to read time as a subjective and reflective experience.

5) Thematic Synthesis

The results of structural and conceptual analyses are synthesized to answer how non-linear structures shape the representation of life choices and character transformation.

Operational Analysis Scheme

Table 1. Operational linking theory with indicators and direction of findings

Theoretical Framework	Key Concepts	Analysis Indicators	Scenes Under Study	Direction of Findings
Bordwell (1985)	Fabula – Syuzhet	Difference between chronological order vs presentation	Identity disclosure & opening	Information distribution strategy
Field (2005)	Three-act structure	Inciting incident, plot point, climax	The emergence of the evening, conflict, resolution	Modification of classical structure
Genette (1980)	Order	Anachrony (flashback/ loop)	Repetition scene	Chronological irregularity
Genette (1980)	Frequency	Repetitive narration	Time repeating loop	Repetition as a dramatic structure
Deleuze (1989)	Time-image	Time as a reflective experience	Character awareness scene	Time as existential reflection
Thompson (2003)	Character development	Changes in character attitudes	The final iteration	Gradual transformation

Source: Author's work

This table shows that the analysis was carried out in a structured manner and based on clear indicators, not free interpretation.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the research is maintained through:

- 1) **Triangulation of theory**, by integrating structural (Bordwell, Genette) and philosophical (Deleuze) approaches.
- 2) **Analytical audit trail**, which is the documentation of the scene segmentation and categorization process.
- 3) Operational consistency of indicators, as formulated in the analysis scheme table.

With this procedure, this research is not only descriptive, but analytical-conceptual, thus fulfilling strict methodological standards in film studies.

DISCUSSION

Temporal Structure and Cinematic Strategy: From Narrative to the Visuality of Time

The temporal manipulation in *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* not only works at the level of narrative structure (syuzhet), but is also reinforced through cinematic devices. Narratively, the film utilizes time patterns. Loops are a form of temporal repetition. However, these repetitions are never visually or emotionally identical, and mise-en-scène and editing therefore act as mediators of the experience of time.



Figure 1. Scene when Sore comes and introduces herself as Jonathan's wife
(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugqUrXXKWiM>)

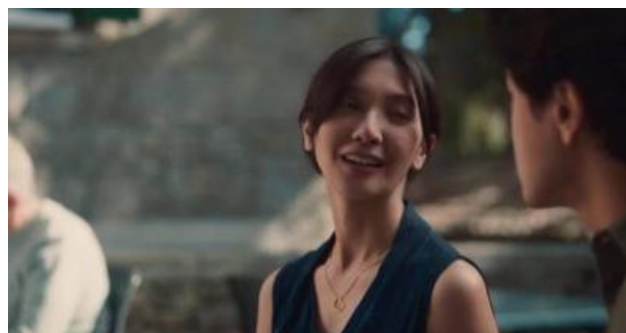


Figure 2. Scene of Jonathan being angry with Sore
(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugqUrXXKWiM>)

In figures 1 and 2, some scenes are repetitive. As in the conversation between Sore and Jonathan, the spatial composition and blocking of the actors undergo subtle variations. In early iterations, the framing tends to use medium shots with a relatively clear physical distance between the two characters, demonstrating relational tension. In subsequent iterations, the camera moves closer through close-ups, emphasizing the expressions and emotional intensity. This shift in framing creates the sensation that “the same time” is undergoing a transformation in meaning.

According to Bordwell (1985, p. 156), cinematic style functions as a system that directs the audience's inference process toward the narrative. In this context, editing and framing are not merely aesthetic elements, but structural devices that suggest internal character changes despite seemingly similar external situations. Variations in shot

duration within repetitive scenes also demonstrate durational manipulation (Genette, 1980): certain scenes are compressed in one iteration and slowed down in the next, producing shifts in dramatic rhythm.

Thus, time in this film is constructed not only through the storyline but also through the visual organization. Cinematic repetition constructs a temporal experience that feels both stagnant and progressive, chronologically stagnant and psychologically progressive.

Time-Image and Narrative Configuration of Time

Deleuze's framework (1989, p. 3), the structure of time The loop in this film can be read as a manifestation of time-image, where time is no longer subordinate to action but rather exists as a direct experience. Unlike movement-image, which moves through linear action-reaction relationships, this film presents pauses and repetitions that demonstrate the characters' awareness of temporal cycles.



Figure 3. Scene of Jonathan looking at the evening

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugqUrXXKWiM>)

In Figure 3, each time reset creates a contemplative moment; time seems to stop moving forward, but the character's consciousness continues to develop. This is the temporal paradox typical of time-images: physical movements are repeated, but mental movements are cumulative. The scene where Jonathan begins to show a doubtful expression in the same iteration marks a shift from automatic action to internal reflection.

This insight can be strengthened through Paul Ricoeur's (1984, p. 52) perspective on narrative. Time. Ricoeur asserts that narrative mediates between cosmological time (chronos) and phenomenological time (kairos). In this film, chronos appears to be suspended in a repetitive cycle, but kairos is a time of intensified experience and meaning. Each repetition becomes a kairotic moment that allows for reinterpretation of the past and the possibility of the future. Thus, time in the film is not only structural, but hermeneutic, becoming an arena for the formation of existential meaning.

Repetition, Determinism, and Agency

Time structure The film's loop can also be read as a negotiation between determinism and free will. Initially, the repetition creates a deterministic impression — events continually return to the same point. However, the variation in character responses suggests a sense of agency. This pattern is reminiscent of Thompson's (2003) thesis that character development in modern narratives is often built through meaningful repetition, not instantaneous change.

Visually, this agency is demonstrated through changes in Jonathan's gestures, intonation, and body position within the same scene. In the first iteration, he stands defensively; in the next, his body is more open and the camera more stable. This variation demonstrates that character change is represented not through plot twists, but through performative modifications within the same cycle.

Position in Indonesian Cinema

When compared to other Indonesian films that use a non-linear structure, such as *Jatuh Cinta Seperti di Film-Film* or *Kembang Api*, the fundamental difference lies in its temporal function. In *Kembang Api*, time loops tend to be used to build collective existential tension and curiosity (Sari et al., 2024). Repetitive structures function as mechanisms of suspense and mystery disclosure.

In contrast, in *Sore*, repetition is not directed at external mysteries, but rather at relational transformation. If *Kembang Api* (Fireworks) positions time as a collective crisis, *Sore* positions it as an intimate crisis. Thus, the film broadens the spectrum of time's use. The loop in Indonesian cinema shifts from a dramatic function to a reflective one. From the perspective of complex narrative theory (Kiss & Willemsen, 2017, p. 79), this film does not fully fall into the puzzle film category because it does not construct extreme epistemological ambiguity. Instead, it utilizes a complex structure within an emotional framework that remains communicative. This position makes it a hybrid example of classical narrative and complex narrative.

Argumentative Integration

From the structural, cinematic, and philosophical analysis, it can be emphasized that the temporal manipulation in *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* works on three levels at once:

- 1) **Structural level** through three-act modification with repetition pattern.
- 2) **Cinematic level** through variations in framing, editing, and mise-en-scène in repetitive scenes.
- 3) **Philosophical level** through the representation of time as a reflective experience (Deleuze, 1989; Ricoeur, 1984).

The integration of these three levels demonstrates that nonlinearity in film functions not as a technical ornament, but as a structure of meaning. Time becomes both a dramatic device and a hermeneutic medium for understanding life choices and character transformations. The film "*Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan*" (Afternoon: Wife From the Future) makes a significant contribution in demonstrating how contemporary Indonesian cinema can process temporal manipulation conceptually, not merely aesthetically.



Figure 4. Cinematic Narrative Model of *Sore: The Wife of the Future*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study shows that the non-linear narrative structure in the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* does not function merely as a variation of storytelling techniques, but rather as a conceptual mechanism that shapes thematic meaning and character development. Through the integration of a three-act framework with a time-lapse pattern, loop, the film maintains classical dramatic coherence while expanding the audience's temporal experience through meaningful repetition.

Analysis based on the categories of order, duration, and frequency (Genette, 1980) shows that the repetition of events works as an accumulative structure that builds gradual character transformation. Variations in mise-en-scène, framing, and editing rhythms in repetitive scenes reinforce the construction of time as a psychological experience, not just a linear chronology. From the perspective of time-image (Deleuze, 1989) and narrative time configuration (Ricoeur, 1984), time in this film appears as a space of existential reflection that negotiates determinism and agency.

Thus, the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* demonstrates that temporal manipulation in contemporary Indonesian cinema can function as a reflective structure that articulates themes of life choices, interpersonal relationships, and self-awareness. This finding expands the discourse on Indonesian film narratology by demonstrating that time The loop in the romantic drama genre can be an epistemological device, not just a dramatic strategy.

Based on the research findings, there are several recommendations that can be put forward:

Theoretical Recommendations

Further research could expand the narratological approach by integrating cognitive perspectives (Herman, 2018) or narrative complexity theory (Mittell, 2020) to examine how audiences process time structures. mental and emotional loops . Interdisciplinary studies combining the philosophy of time, narrative psychology, and film studies also have the potential to enrich the analysis of temporal representation in Indonesian cinema.

Empirical Recommendations

Future research can conduct comparative studies with other Indonesian films that use non-linear structures or time manipulation in different genres, so that a typological mapping of time use can be obtained. loops in national cinema. The audience reception approach is also important to see how repetitive structures influence the viewing experience and interpretation of meaning.

Practical Recommendations

For filmmakers and audiovisual narrative designers, these findings demonstrate that temporal manipulation can be used strategically to build character depth and thematic reflection without sacrificing dramatic coherence. The integration of classical structures and non-linear strategies can be an effective narrative model in the development of contemporary Indonesian films.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express his gratitude to all parties who have supported the research and writing of this article. Special appreciation goes to his family for their moral and material support, as well as to his colleagues who provided critical input on the development of the theoretical framework and analysis in this research. He also thanks the institution where he works for the academic support that made this research possible.

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