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With the Past in Front of the Character: Evidence for Spatial-Temporal Metaphors in Cinema

Maarten Coëgnarts^a & Peter Kravanja^b

^a University of Antwerp

^b Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

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With the Past *in Front of* the Character: Evidence for Spatial-Temporal Metaphors in Cinema

Maarten Coëgnarts
University of Antwerp

Peter Kravanja
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Cognitive research on Ego-Reference-Point models of time in English traditionally shows that “*FUTURE IS IN FRONT OF EGO*” and “*PAST IS IN BACK OF EGO*.” Recently, however, this view has been challenged by other results, showing that there exists a major static model of time wherein “*FUTURE IS IN BACK OF EGO*” and “*PAST IS IN FRONT OF EGO*.” However, evidence for both conceptual systems comes predominantly from linguistic and gestural forms of expression. For instance, convincing empirical evidence coming from the manifestation mode of cinema is still lacking. This article attempts to fill this gap by bringing the discussion of temporal metaphors to the foreground of character subjectivity in film. Using concise case-studies taken from various films, this study provides evidence that a majority of flashback scenes seem to base their conceptions of time on a static Ego-Reference-Point model in which the past appears to be *in front* of the character’s eyes on screen.

INTRODUCTION

Studies on conceptual metaphor increasingly show that human thought is largely determined by an extensive system of bodily metaphors. These metaphors, which can be attributed to the overarching metaphor “*MIND IS BODY*,” allow us to map the inferential structure from concrete concepts (source domains) onto abstract concepts (target domains) (Boroditsky & Ramscar, 2002; Gibbs, 1994; Johnson, 1987, 2007; Lakoff, 1987b; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Sweetser, 1990). When considering the abstract concept of time, many scholars have pointed towards the importance of spatial and perceptual features in the conceptualization of temporal meaning (Clark, 1973; Gentner, 2001; Gentner, Imai, & Boroditsky, 2002; Evans, 2003; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999). For instance, cognitive linguistic results show that there exists a major static model of time wherein the space in front of the observer (or ego) and the space behind the observer are mapped onto the time (past or future).

Address correspondence to Maarten Coëgnarts, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Research Group Visual Studies and Media Culture, University of Antwerp, City Campus – Building M, St-Jacobstraat 2, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium. E-mail: maartencoegnarts@gmail.com

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Research on temporal metaphors is, however, restricted in one important way: the evidence for the metaphoric concepts of time is almost solely based on a corpus of studies that are focused on exclusively verbal manifestations of conceptual metaphors. Although recent work in cognitive studies clearly puts more emphasis on forms of communication that are not (exclusively) verbal (Coëgnarts & Kravanja, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Fahlenbrach, 2008; Forceville, 2002, 2009, 2011; Forceville & Jeulink, 2011, Kappelhoff & Müller, 2011; Ortiz, 2011, 2014; Winter, 2014), there still has been little evidence gathered with regard to the nonverbal manifestations of time metaphors. Finding comparative evidence other than linguistic, however, is essential because it helps to overcome one of the most important criticisms of cognitive linguistic studies on metaphor, namely, the danger of circular-reasoning (Forceville, 2009; Forceville & Jeulink, 2011; Gibbs & Perlman, 2006; Pecher & Van Dantzig, 2011). As Gibbs and Perlman (2006) state: “Analysts first examine linguistic expressions, enough so to infer the possible presence of underlying metaphorical mappings, and then test this possibility by referring back to language” (p. 215). Indeed, if research on the spatial construal of time is restricted to language, opponents might contend that there is no difference between the conceptual and the verbal level, which in turn would seriously undermine the fundamental role of time metaphors in cognition. Hence, if we presume that conceptual metaphor theory (henceforth, CMT) is correct in claiming that the “*TIME IS SPACE*” metaphor is central to human conceptualizing (i.e., that this metaphor is not a “mere” linguistic phenomenon, but a much deeper cognitive reality), then it is crucial to find surface manifestations that go beyond the realm of language.

This article, then, examines this assumption by bringing the discussion of spatiotemporal metaphors to the forefront of film studies, in particular, the study of character subjectivity in cinema. More specifically, this study will claim by means of a selected corpus of film scenes that cinema applies a major static Ego-Reference-Point (Ego-RP) model of time, very similar to the one reported in Aymara language, in which the past appears to be in front of the character or ego on screen. In elaborating our argument, we intend to realize three things. Firstly, we shall provide an overview of the literature on temporal metaphors (Metaphors of Time). Secondly, we shall consider the question of character perception (Embodying Character Perception in Cinema). Indeed, if the conceptualization of time in film depends on the perception of a character—i.e., past and present are conveyed by the perceived objects in front of the character and the objects collocated with the character, respectively—it follows that we first need to address the question as to how character perception can be construed by means exclusive to the cinematic medium (e.g., editing, camera movement, superimposition, etc.). Having developed a model for doing so, we will be able to recognize and investigate a number of significant film scenes in which the past coincides with the perceived object in front of the character (Putting the Past *in Front of* the Character’s Eyes: Mapping Character Perception Onto Time).

METAPHORS OF TIME

Since the early 1980s, research on conceptual metaphor has increasingly demonstrated that human conceptual systems are characterized by an extensive system of mappings according to which we map the inferential structure from a concrete source domain (e.g., space) into an abstract target domain (e.g., time). With respect to the abstract domain of time, Lakoff & Johnson

TABLE 1
The Time-Orientation Metaphor

<i>Source Domain: Space</i>	<i>Target Domain: Time</i>
The location of the observer	The present
The space in front of the observer	The future
The space behind the observer	The past

(1999) have argued that the most basic metaphor for time in English “has an observer at the present who is facing toward the future with the past behind the observer” (p. 140). They refer to this as the Time-Orientation metaphor. This metaphorical mapping includes many linguistic expressions (e.g., “*That’s all behind us now,*” “*We’re looking ahead to the future*”), and can be structured as in Table 1.

In these mappings the space in front of the perceiver is related to the future whereas the space behind the perceiver is related to the past. As Núñez & Sweetser (2006) have argued, this static model, however, does not take into account the cross-cultural variation in mapping patterns of time. As their research shows, Aymara speakers have a major static model of time wherein the back and the front of the ego are mapped onto the future and the past, respectively. As a possible explanation model for this discrepancy both authors refer to the strong emphasis Aymara language put on the “*KNOWLEDGE IS VISION*” metaphor (p. 438–439). Considered by many as one of the most common and basic metaphors across the world’s languages, this metaphor, which can be seen as a sub-version of the more generic metaphors “*UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING*” (Barcelona, 2002; Johnson, 2007; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Sweetser, 1990; Yu, 2003) or “*MENTAL FUNCTION IS PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE*” (Yu, 2004), allows us to understand the abstract target domain of understanding in terms of the concrete source domain of sight. Underlying this metaphor is the mapping according to which the object seen by the viewer is mapped onto the idea or concept that constitutes the knowledge (Johnson, 2007, p. 165). Consequently, because the past and the future are usually conceived as known and unknown, respectively, it follows that the past and future are placed in front of and behind the viewer, respectively.

The reason, then, why English speakers still retain a different configuration, despite the fact that they also share the universal “*KNOWLEDGE IS VISION*” metaphor, is that both cultures, according to Núñez & Sweetser (2006), base their temporal conceptions on slightly different aspects of human experiential correlations between time and space (p. 438). That is, in contrast to the Aymara speakers, English speakers do not conceive the observer as a static one, but as a moving one (p. 439). This implies that what is known has already been seen and remains behind us, while what is unknown has yet to be seen and remains in front of us. As both authors argue, moving persons do not only share the division between “what I can see in front of me” and “what I cannot see behind me” but also the division between “places I haven’t yet been to—and thus haven’t seen and don’t know about” and “places I’ve been to already—and have thus seen and gained some knowledge about” (p. 439). Consequently, the metaphorical pair here is not “*KNOWN IS IN FRONT*” and “*UNKNOWN IS IN THE BACK,*” but rather “*KNOWN IS BEHIND*” and “*UNKNOWN IS AHEAD.*”

TABLE 2
The Moving-Time Metaphor (After Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 142)

<i>Source Domain: Space</i>	<i>Target Domain: Time</i>
The location of the observer	The present
The space in front of the observer	The future
The space behind the observer	The past
Objects	Times
The motion of objects past the observer	The “passage” of time

TABLE 3
The Moving-Ego Metaphor (After Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 146)

<i>Source Domain: Space</i>	<i>Target Domain: Time</i>
The location of the observer	The present
The space in front of the observer	The future
The space behind the observer	The past
Locations on observer’s path of motion	Times
The motion of the observer	The “passage” of time
The distance moved by the observer	The amount of time “passed”

It is exactly the notion of motion that led many scholars to distinguish further between two dominant metaphorical models for time in English that usually are integrated with the Time-Orientation metaphor. These are the Moving-Time metaphor and the Moving-Ego metaphor, respectively (Clark, 1973; Gentner, 2001; Gentner, Imai & Boroditsky, 2002; Evans, 2003; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999). Both models involve movement, “but in one the observer is stationary and time is moving, while in the other the observer is moving and time is stationary” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 141). Often this distinction is visualized using the image of a timeline. In the first metaphor a timeline is conceived of as a river or conveyor belt on which the perceived object in time is moving towards the perceiver (e.g., “Christmas is coming up”). In the second metaphor the perceiver’s point of view moves along the timeline towards the perceived object in time (past or future) (e.g., “We are coming up on Christmas”). Integrated with the Time-Orientation metaphor from above, the mappings of both metaphors can be summarized as in Tables 2 and 3.

Although most of the literature on time metaphors focuses on the distinction between the Moving-Time metaphor and the Moving-Ego metaphor, recent research seems to present a more multilayered system of time conceptualization. Núñez & Sweetser (2006), for instance, have pointed out that when time is conceived as dynamic, it is not always with respect to ego as a reference point. In “December follows November,” for example, times are construed as moving, and November is a moving reference point for the location of December (p. 406). In this conceptual metaphor the chronological order of times is understood in terms of a sequence of objects whereby an object A that is located in front of another object B is mapped onto a time A that occurs earlier than a time B (and vice versa) (p. 407). Unlike the Moving-Time metaphor and the Moving-Ego metaphor, the mapping does not entail a canonical observer in the source domain of space.

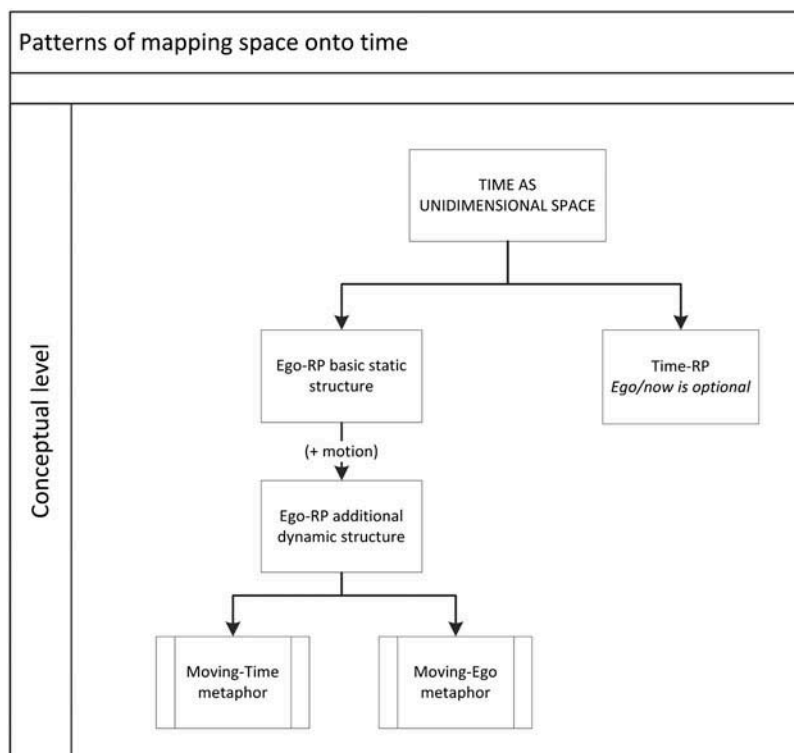


FIGURE 1 A classification of spatial metaphors of time (after Núñez & Sweetser, 2006).

For this reason, Núñez & Sweetser (2006) have adopted a system, inspired by the earlier writings of Moore (2000) and Núñez (1999), according to which time metaphors are not classified according to what moves (ego or time), but according to the relevant (static or dynamic) Reference Point (RP) (p. 406). Thus, rather than distinguishing between Moving-Time and Moving-Ego metaphors, they make the distinction between Ego-Reference-Point (Ego-RP) metaphors, where the ego's location always specifies the present, "now," (of which the Time-Orientation metaphor forms the basic static structure, and the Moving-Time and Moving-Ego metaphors are the sub-cases), and Time-Reference-Point (Time-RP) metaphors, where earlier events in time are "in front of" later events, and where there is no compulsory specification of "now."

To sum up, then, one can visualize the patterns of mapping space onto time as in Figure 1.

EMBODYING CHARACTER PERCEPTION IN CINEMA

Having addressed some of the most important patterns of mapping space onto time, we now turn to the field of film studies, in particular its connection to character subjectivity. More specifically, we will show in the next section of this article how a significant amount of films seem to base their temporal conceptions on the basic static structure of the Ego-RP mapping, in which the

past, through the mediating role of the “*KNOWLEDGE IS VISION*” metaphor, appears to be in front of the stationary and perceiving character or ego. To examine this mapping, however, we first and foremost need to define character perception. Indeed, if the perception forms the conditional basis for the communication of temporal meaning in film, it follows that we first need to know how character perception can be structured in film, as it is through the latter that the inherently semantic category of the past becomes tangible. For clarity, we divide this discussion in two parts. The first part considers cognitive linguistics and aims to provide the reader with a brief overview of the main literature concerning the metaphorical and metonymical modes of perception (Metaphors and Metonymies of Perception). The second part, then, involves film studies, in particular the topic of character subjectivity, and aims to show how both conceptual relationships of perception, as outlined in the first part, can be addressed cinematically in order to represent the characters’ perceptual activities (Spatial Construals of Character Perception in Film).

Metaphors and Metonymies of Perception

When considering the commonality of the underlying conceptual systems across languages, visual metaphors or more general metaphors of perception are often hailed as one of the most universal conceptual metaphors. That is, a number of studies indicate that languages, despite their cultural differences, use the same kind of bodily information to structure the concept of perception (Sweetser, 1990; Yu, 2003, 2004; Yamanashi, 2010). In the literature this constitution or grounding often takes the form of two conceptual relationships, namely the conceptual metonymy “*PERCEPTUAL ORGAN STANDS FOR PERCEPTION*” and the conceptual metaphor “*PERCEPTION IS CONTACT BETWEEN PERCEIVER AND OBJECT PERCEIVED*”. Let us briefly consider each relationship in turn.

In the first conceptual mechanism, perception is elicited by conceptual mappings that occur *within the same* experiential domain. In particular, one entity in a schema (i.e., the perceptual organ) is taken as standing for the schema as a whole (i.e., perception). For instance, with respect to sight Yu (2004) notes that “eyes and brows are such important features of the human face that they together stand for the whole face or looks” (p. 665). Similarly, Hilpert (2006) refers to this metonymical extensions of eye as the “*INSTRUMENT FOR ACTIVITY*” metonymy “*EYE FOR WATCHING*” (p. 130), which, in turn, can be subsumed, according to Barcelona (2002), under the more general basic conceptual metonymy “*BODY PART FOR ITS TYPICAL FUNCTIONS AND FOR THE ATTRIBUTES CONNECTED WITH THEM*” (p. 265–266).

In the second conceptual mechanism, by contrast, perception is elicited by conceptual mappings across *different* experiential domains, that is, perception is understood metaphorically in terms of other conceptual domains. With regard to the latter, many scholars have emphasized the importance of human tactile experience as a significant source domain for the target domain of perception (Lakoff, 1995; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Sweetser, 1990; Yamanashi, 2010; Yu, 2003, 2004). Lakoff (1995), for example, has distinguished between two types of perception metaphors, both involving the physical domain of movement: “*PERCEIVING IS TOUCHING*” and “*PERCEPTION IS RECEPTION*” (p. 139; see also Yu, 2004, p. 676). In the first conceptual metaphor there is a mapping from the source domain of touching onto the target domain of

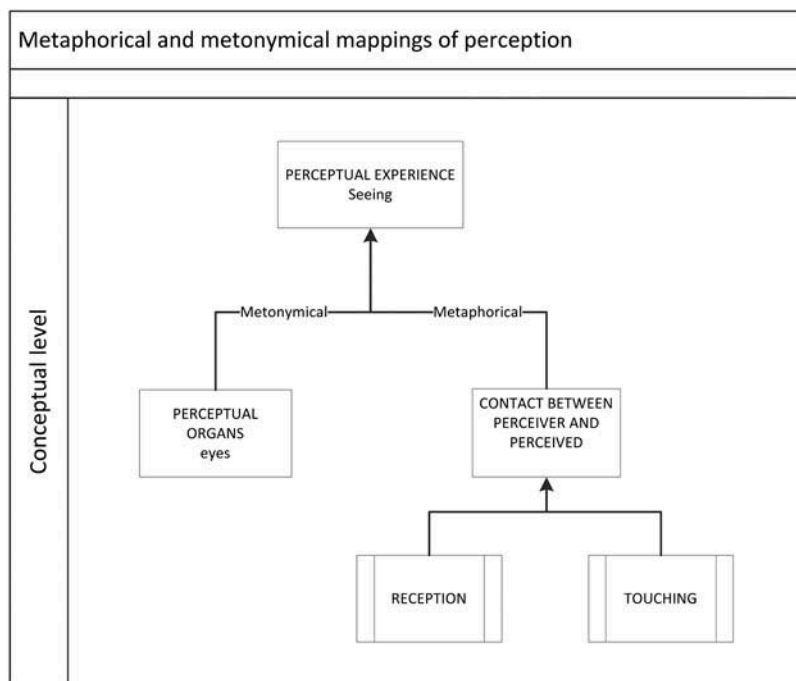


FIGURE 2 Metaphorical and metonymical mappings of perception.

perceiving. In this metaphor perception occurs “when the perceiver moves his organs of perception to the thing perceived and touches it” (p. 139). Examples include such expressions as “My eyes picked out every detail of the pattern” or “My gaze is out over the bay” (p. 133). As Lakoff (1995) points out, the words “gaze” and “eyes” are conceived metaphorically as visual limbs that can reach out and touch things. By contrast, in the second conceptual metaphor, there is a mapping from the source domain of reception onto the target domain of perceiving. In this metaphor perception occurs “when the thing perceived moves to the perceiver’s organs of perception” (p. 139). Examples include such expressions as “A comet came into my sight” or “The noise came through the walls” (p. 139). In both sentences, perception is construed in terms of perceptual sense impressions that reach the perceptual organs. Because both source domains (i.e., touch and reception) involve contact, both metaphors can be subsumed under a more general metaphor, which Lakoff (1995) labels the “*PERCEPTION IS CONTACT BETWEEN PERCEIVER AND PERCEIVED*” metaphor (p. 139).

In sum, then, one can summarize the underlying mappings of perception as in [Figure 2](#).

Spatial Construals of Character Perception in Film

Having sketched out the underlying metaphorical and metonymical structure of *human* perception, we now turn to the field of film studies by considering the filmic question of *character*

perception. Following Eder's (2010) heuristic core model of characters this concept can be related to the analysis of characters as "fictional beings" (p. 23), that is, perception is a *mental* feature that the character possesses. For this reason it can be further categorized under what Eder further labels the more general property domain of the *mind*, which overlaps but also distinguishes itself from other property domains of the fictional being such as *corporeality* (i.e., the external appearance and body language of characters) and *sociality* (i.e., the group membership of characters) (p. 24). These three domains are anthropological in the sense that they correspond to the three most general property domains of humans (p. 23).

It is within the property domain of the mind, then, that film scholars may draw on the theoretical tools of CMT to help structure the mental faculties of characters. For instance, given the cognitivist linguistic literature on perception, one might assume that the two conceptual relationships, as visualized in Figure 2, can also be extended to the cinematic construal of character perception.

Examining this assumption has been exactly the central aim of our recent work on cinematic subjectivity (Coëgnarts & Kravanja, 2014, 2015). Following the structure of Figure 2 our research was driven by the answerability of the following two questions:

1. How is the conceptual metonymy "*CHARACTER'S PERCEPTUAL ORGAN STANDS FOR PERCEPTION AS A WHOLE*" shaped by the devices and techniques of filmmaking?
2. How is the conceptual metaphor "*CHARACTER'S PERCEPTION IS CONTACT BETWEEN PERCEIVER (PR) AND THE OBJECT BEING PERCEIVED (OP)*" shaped by the devices and techniques of filmmaking?

The first metonymical relationship can be addressed in a relatively uncomplicated way by showing enough distinctive bodily features of the character so as to enable the viewer to recognize or infer the perceptual organs of the character (e.g., eyes, ears).¹ Thereby, we consider three characteristics of further importance: the spatial relationship between the camera and the character's perceptual organ (or the locus of the perceptual organ); the notion of intentionality (i.e., the character's perceptual organ in front of the camera has to be directed towards something, i.e., the perceived object); and the presence of accentuating attributes in the visual content of the filmic frame (e.g., a window, binoculars, etc.).

Addressing the second, metaphorical relationship is of a more complex nature. As Table 4 shows, there are at least four major strategies to elicit this contact. Depending on the choice of cinematic technique, a filmmaker can impose a metaphorical relationship between the perceiving character (PR) and the object perceived (OP) either on the level of the individual shot or on the level of two shots. In addition, each level can be further divided into two sub-strategies. On the level of the single shot the linkage of PR with OP can be elicited homospatially via framing or

¹Note that it is not always necessary for the viewer to actually *see* the perceptual organ in order to identify the metonymical relationship. Top-down knowledge can help to aid in this identification. For instance, we know enough about the structure of human bodies to know that the eyes are attached to the head, so even if we only see, for example, the backside of a character's head in the foreground of the frame with the object of his gaze in the background, we are able to infer the perceptual organ, and by extension the metonymy "*EYES STAND FOR SEEING.*"

TABLE 4
 Categorization of the Cinematic Ways in Which the Contact Between PR and OP Can Be Elicited

	<i>Homospatality</i>	<i>Non-Homospatality</i>
Single shot	By showing PR and OP together in one shot (e.g., framing or mise-en-scène)	By moving from PR to OP (e.g., tracking, panning, tilting, zoom-function)
Two shots	By presenting PR and OP, each occupying a different shot, as co-present or homospatial entities in the same frame (e.g., superimposition, split screen)	By cutting from PR to OP (e.g., editing)

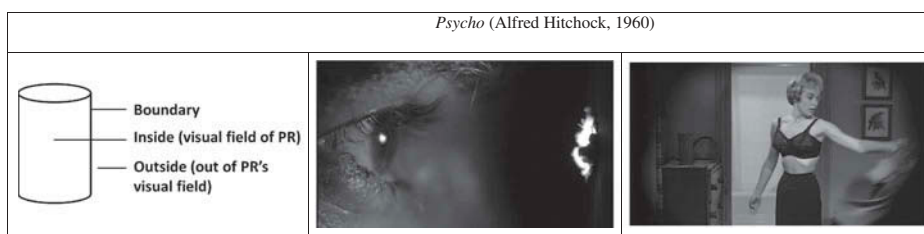


FIGURE 3 The “CONTAINER” schema as elicited by editing (non-homospatality, two shots).

non-homospatially via camera movement.² On the level of two shots, character’s perception can be imposed on the viewer homospatially via split screen or superimposition or non-homospatially via editing, the latter including the point of view (POV) structure.³

In each case, the spatial logic of a particular image schema is extended metaphorically to express the perceptual relationship between PR and OP. For instance, the POV shot reflects the underlying “CONTAINER” schema in that the inner content of the frame (i.e., the container) is mapped onto the perceptual content of the character’s perceptual experience, which in turn is relative to the outer representation of the observer (i.e., the objective shot of the observing character) (e.g., Figure 3).⁴ Similarly, camera movement expresses the underlying “SOURCE-PATH-GOAL” image schema in that the camera moves from a starting point (i.e., the perceiving character PR) via a pathway towards an ending point (i.e., the perceived object OP) (e.g., Figure 4). Several other image schemas (e.g., “LEFT-RIGHT,” “FRONT-BACK,” “UP-DOWN”) can also be found in framing (e.g., Figure 5a), split-screen (e.g., Figure 5b) and superimposition (e.g., Figure 5c).

²The term “homospatality” has been introduced by Noël Carroll (1994) to denote the co-presence of source and target domain in the same figure. In this article, we retain the term, but in a slightly different way, i.e., to indicate the co-presence of PR and OP in the same larger frame.

³For a detailed discussion of each category we refer to Coëgnarts & Kravanja (2014, 2015).

⁴All film stills in this contribution are treated as visual citations, in accordance with the established guideline for fair use of film stills from DVDs in scholarly writings.



FIGURE 4 The “SOURCE-PATH-GOAL” schema as elicited by a horizontal pan movement of the camera (non-homospatality, single shot).

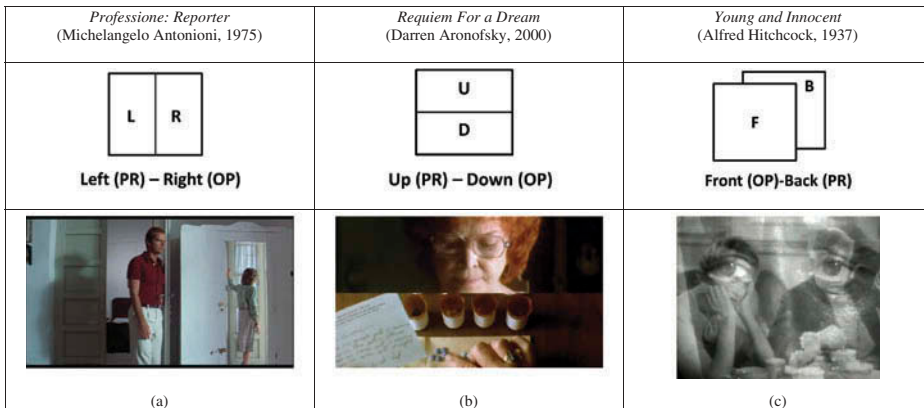


FIGURE 5 (a) The “LEFT-RIGHT” schema as elicited by framing (homospatality, single shot). (b) The “UP-DOWN” schema as elicited by split-screen (homospatality, two shots). (c) The “FRONT-BACK” schema as elicited by superimposition (homospatality, two shots).

PUTTING THE PAST *IN FRONT OF* THE CHARACTER’S EYES: MAPPING CHARACTER PERCEPTION ONTO TIME

Having discussed some of the ways in which character perception can be elicited in film, we are now able to move upwards to the domain of time. How can character perception, once metaphorically and cinematically articulated, in turn be used as a source domain for the conceptualization of time in cinema? Similarly, we claim that this question can be answered by recalling the role of the conceptual metaphor “*KNOWING IS SEEING*,” as outlined in *Metaphors of Time*. As shown by Núñez & Sweetser (2006), the situation in Aymara language describes a case in which the front of the ego is assigned to the past and the present. To explain this situation the authors refer to the correlation between known and in front. That is, a static (human) viewer holds a view of time according to which what is seen correlates with what is known and with what is in front of the viewer. Hence, because what is known correlates with the past, it follows that the past is put in

TABLE 5
The Metaphorical Correlation Between the “KNOWING IS SEEING” Metaphor and the Ego-RP Metaphor (Basic Static Structure) as Applied to Character Perception

<i>The “KNOWING IS SEEING” Metaphor as Mapped Onto the Ego-RP Basic Static Structure</i>		
<i>Source Domain: Seeing</i>	<i>Target/Source Domain: Knowing</i>	<i>Target Domain: Time</i>
<i>Objects</i>	<i>Concepts/Ideas</i>	<i>Times</i>
Objects seen by the stationary character (i.e., objects in front of the character)	The known	Past times
Objects that the stationary character cannot see (i.e., objects behind the character)	The unknown	Future times
Objects collocated with the stationary character	The known	Present times

front of the viewer. Likewise, then, we argue that the same mapping can be extended to character perception in cinema, that is, assuming that characters share the same mental features as human beings, we claim that what is seen by the stationary character is mapped onto what is known by the stationary character, and by metaphorical extension to the past. Table 5 shows the mapping of this metaphorical structure.

In what follows, we will illustrate this metaphorical mapping by showing how some of the strategies of character perception, as sketched out in Table 4, can be retained and extended to structure flashbacks in film. Within the theoretical conceptualization of time in film, the flashback can be defined as a “representation of the past that intervenes within the present flow of film narrative” (Turim, 2013, p. 2). In linking this narrative device with character subjectivity, then, we argue that there are two basic ways of addressing the past via the perception of a character: either the character sees the past directly, or he sees the past indirectly through the visual structure known as *symmetric object alignment*. In the former case the character (A) sees an object (B), which immediately refers metaphorically to the past. We shall call this basic relation the AB structure. By contrast, in the latter case, the past is seen through the mediating role of an object in the present. Rather than perceiving the past at once, the character (A) sees an object in the present (B), which, in turn, is aligned symmetrically with another object in the past (C). Given the presence of a third component, we shall label this the ABC structure.

Perceiving the Past Directly in Film (AB Structure)

When considering the strategies that filmmakers use to render the past directly via the perception of a character, editing probably comes up as the most widely used stylistic convention. In the genres of melodrama and film noir, for example, the viewer can discern countless flashbacks in which the static Ego-RP model of time is elicited by cutting from the stationary character in the act of looking (the present; A) to the object of his perception (the known/the past; B). In this section we would like to analyze two alternative ways of initiating the past through the perception of a character, namely, superimposition and camera movement. Given that perception is the

crucial factor in the conceptualization of time in film, we will similarly structure our analysis on the basis of the following two questions:

1. How is the concept of perception elicited metonymically? That is, how is the conceptual metonymy “*PERCEPTUAL ORGAN STANDS FOR PERCEPTION*” achieved in the flashback?
2. How is the perceiving character (A) aligned with the perceived object (B) in the present (relation AB)? That is, how is the conceptual metaphor “*PERCEPTION IS CONTACT BETWEEN PERCEIVER AND OBJECT PERCEIVED*” achieved in the flashback?

Superimposition: Saboteur (Alfred Hitchcock, 1942). We would like to start by considering an example in which the front of the character is mapped onto the past by way of superimposition. In the beginning of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Saboteur* (1942) there is a scene in which Barry (Robert Cummings), the lead character, remembers an event that was shown earlier on in the film. After being accused of having sabotaged an airplane factory, he escapes by obtaining a lift with a truck driver. At one moment during the ride, the truck driver states that it would be his pleasure to drop him off at one of “those big ranches.” This verbal cue in turn triggers the film to cut to a frontal medium shot of Barry. As he stares in front of him (see Figure 6a), the camera suddenly moves closer towards a close-up of his face, thus rendering the metonymy “*EYE FOR WATCHING.*” His face (i.e., the locus of his memories) is visually isolated from his surroundings and the truck driver next to him. This isolation is also expressed aurally as the present sound of driving disappears and is substituted by the earlier sound of footsteps. Simultaneously this sound of the past is visually complemented as a second image (B), which recalls an earlier shot in the film, is laid over the first image of Barry’s face (A) (see Figure 6b). This image of the past involves a subjective POV shot of Barry’s vision as he picks up a letter that was dropped by the real saboteur and that was addressed to “Deep Springs Ranch.” Superimposition thus presents itself as a homospatial solution to the idea of representing Barry’s inner memory

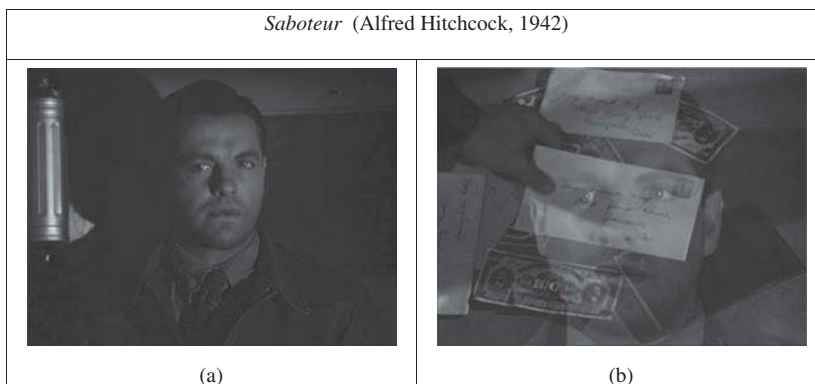


FIGURE 6 (a) Location of the perceiver → present (A). (b) Superimposition of (inner) OP over PR → superimposition of past (B) over the present (A).

(i.e., his knowledge about the past). Both perceiver (present) and perceived object (past) are represented in the larger frame. Notice that the second image (B), which represents the perceived object of the perceiver (A), in itself contains a relationship between a perceiver (the past version of Barry, metonymically triggered by the presence of his hand) and a perceived object (the letter). In other words, Barry (PR₁) perceives himself (OP₁, PR₂) in the act of perceiving something else (OP₂). However, while the homospatial PR-OP relationship between A and B (see Figure 6b) is created over two shots, the homospatial PR-OP relationship within B is instigated in one single shot.

Camera Movement: Professione: Reporter (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975). For our second example we would like to consider the famous flashback scene from Michelangelo Antonioni's *Professione: Reporter* (aka *The Passenger*; 1975). In this film camera movement, rather than the homospatial strategy of superimposition, posits itself as a cinematic way to solve the problem of cueing a flashback. The scene involves the moment when John Locke (Jack Nicholson) switches his identity with a dead man, named Robertson (Charles Mulvehill). The camera shows John seated at a table with his back towards the camera. As he turns his head to the left (see Figure 7a) and the conceptual metonymy "EYE FOR WATCHING" is rendered, the direction of his eyesight further triggers a horizontal camera movement to the left. The camera moves from the image of the perceiver in the present (the source or starting point) via a pathway towards the perceived object in the past (the goal or ending point), i.e., the opening of the window of his hotel room through which his past meeting with Robertson unfolds itself (see Figure 7b). Thus, the conceptual metaphor "PERCEPTION IS CONTACT BETWEEN PERCEIVER AND OBJECT PERCEIVED," here instigated by the strategy of camera movement, is mapped onto the character's mental function of remembering the past. Although John stays stationary, his perceptual field (and that of the viewer as well) is brought literally closer to the perceived object (i.e., the past). In accordance with the Aymaran variation of the Ego-RP basic static structure of time, the past is put in front of the character's eyes.⁵



FIGURE 7 (a) Location of the perceiver (source or starting point) → present (A). (b) Object "perceived" mentally (goal or ending point) → past (B).

⁵This analysis differs from our previous study (Coëgnarts & Kravanja, 2012c) in which the flashback scene from *The Passenger* was studied as an example of the Moving-Time metaphor on the grounds that the character is stationary.

Perceiving the Past Through Symmetrical Object Alignment (ABC Structure)

In the previous part we have seen how the object observed by the character immediately coincides with the past. In this part, we will show how the past can also be conceptualized indirectly through a visual pattern in which one thing seen by the character in the present is perceptually *aligned* with the same or other thing in the past. Often used in advertisement, Teng & Sun (2002) have referred to this kind of alignment of pictorial components depicting things at the object level as *symmetric image alignment*. Underlying this strategy is the following idea: “when pictorial components are approximately aligned with one another with respect to size, orientation, and distance, the alignment thus formed is apt for expressing an idea that connects these pictorial components” (Teng, 2009, p. 197). One sort of instance in which symmetric image alignment can be detected is called *pictorial grouping*. Featuring a number of cognitive factors akin to perceptual grouping (similarity of size, similarity of orientation, and equal spacing), this visual construction is intended “to produce the cognitive effect of inviting the viewers to see the depicted entities as belonging to the same category” (Teng & Sun, 2002, p. 300). If pictorial grouping is applied to two entities of different kinds, they call it *pictorial simile* (see also Forceville, 1996). In such a case, the effect on the viewer is that of cognitive dissonance in which the pattern of pictorial grouping prompts us to see the two entities as belonging to the same category, yet the entities are represented as things of different kinds. Similarly, Schilperoord, Maes, and Ferdinandusse (2009) have termed this kind of alignment of differing objects as the symmetric object alignment (SOA). They define it as a “design pattern that perceptually aligns different types of objects in an attempt to facilitate a metaphoric or associative conceptual link between them” (p. 155–156). Furthermore, they distinguish between two groups of formal criteria by which SOA can be created: *object-constitutive* factors like size, shape, and color, and *object-depictment* factors like perspective, orientation, and distance.

Further elaborating on this structure, Ortiz (2010), in turn, has emphasized that SOA can be correlated to Grady’s (1999) notion of primary metaphors. More specifically, she states that SOA is grounded on metaphors of which the source concepts have image content that is rooted in human perceptual experience. Referring to the perceptual mechanisms, as examined almost a century ago by the gestalt psychologists (e.g., Wertheimer, 1923), she argues that one-to-one alignment is based on the primary metaphors “*SIMILARITY IS ALIGNMENT*” and “*SIMILARITY IS PROXIMITY*.” The first metaphor manifests itself when we observe similar objects with the same orientation. Here, the direction of configuration is the main parameter for perceptual and cognitive classicization. The second metaphor evolves from the human tendency to perceive similarity in a scene where the objects are grouped together or are close to each other.

Consequently, given that objects are metaphorically mapped onto times, we shall label the metaphorical extension of the SOA construction to the conceptual domain of time, the symmetric time alignment (STA). From the perspective of the cinematic medium, then, the additional question is: how can SOA be achieved in film? In accordance with our cinematic model of character perception, we propose that this problem can be solved by referring to the same strategies that are

However, this account did not take into consideration the concept of perception, and the possibility that the perceiver’s eyesight can be expressed metaphorically by camera movement in which the camera brings the perceiver’s point of view in direct contact with the perceived object (i.e., the time). The same analysis also applies to some of the flashback scenes from *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996). For a discussion of this film from the perspective of primary metaphors, see also Ortiz (2014).

available in order to align the perceiving character with the perceived object. That is, two objects (i.e., two times) can be brought together cinematically by way of framing/mise-en-scène, camera movement, superimposition, or editing/juxtaposition.

In addition, the alignment of the objects (i.e., times), initiated by the perception of a character, can take three forms: it can be metaphorically based on (1) the perception of identical objects, on (2) the perception of differing objects that belong to the same conceptual group, or (3) on the perception of differing objects that belong to a different conceptual group. In the first case, the perceiving character perceives an object in the present that is aligned with the same object in the past ($B = C$). Hence, the crucial question is: how can temporal difference be provoked if both objects are identical? Especially with respect to film, we propose that this goal can be achieved by deviations in the figure-ground relationship (i.e., the relationship between the objects and the background). That is, difference in time can be provoked by either (a) changing the internal attribute structure of the identical figures (e.g., switching the pendulums of a clock, replacing the dates on a calendar), (b) by keeping the attribute structure unaffected and changing the grounds (e.g., dark/day vs. light/night, inside vs. outside), or (c) by a combination of both (a) and (b). In the second case, the character sees an object in the present aligned with a different object in the past that nevertheless belongs to the same category (e.g., two different hands of two different persons still belong to the same conceptual group of “hands”). In the third case, the character sees an object in the present aligned with a different object in the past that also belongs to a different conceptual category (e.g., rocket vs. arrow). Moreover, whereas the creation of similarity is obviously given in the first two forms, perceptual resemblance imposes much more of a creative challenge in the third form where the lack of similarity has to be compensated by perceptual correlations within the attribute structure (e.g., we perceive similarity because both the rocket and the arrow share the same shape).⁶

Having discussed some of the theoretical issues concerning image alignment, we are now able to analyze three examples in which the character (A) perceives an object in the present (B) that is aligned with another object in the past (C). In doing so, we will extend our two questions of the previous part with the following two additional questions:

3. How is the perceived object in the present (B) aligned with the perceived object in the past (C) (relation BC)?
4. Is the alignment between B and C based on identical objects or not? If so, how is the viewer invited to see the difference in time (i.e., by alteration of the figures of the objects, the grounds or both)?

⁶For this reason one might argue that the third case is closely related to Grady’s (1999) notion of resemblance metaphor. In contrast to the group of correlation-based metaphors that involves a set of correspondences between a concrete source domain and an abstract target domain (e.g., “*TIME IS SPACE*,” “*KNOWING IS SEEING*”), resemblance metaphors are grounded in a single resemblance between target and source. In the expression “*Achilles is a lion*,” for example, one feature, namely the inner characteristic quality of courage, is mapped from the lion onto Achilles. One kind of resemblance metaphor that has received much scholarly attention is the image metaphor (Deignan, 2007; Gibbs & Bogdonovich, 1999; Lakoff, 1987a; 1993; Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Here, the mapping of a single resemblance is based on a shared image structure, rather than a shared inner quality. For instance, in the much cited André Breton example of “*My wife . . . whose waist is an hourglass*,” one aspect of an hourglass, namely, its shape and more specifically its narrow center, is mapped onto the form of a woman. According to Lakoff and Turner (1989, p. 90) image structure is characterized by both part-whole structure (e.g., the relation between a roof and a house) and attribute structure (e.g., color, physical shape, intensity of light, etc.).

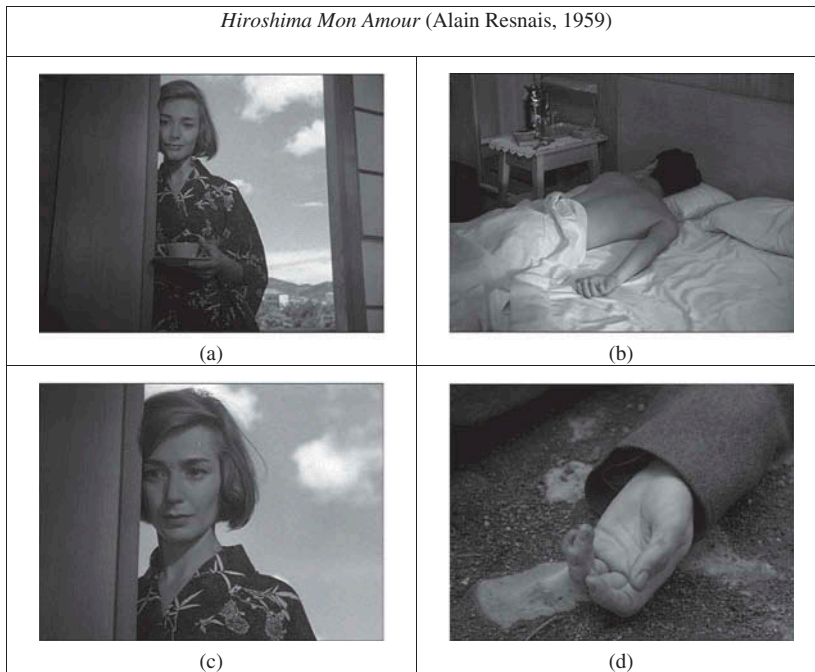


FIGURE 8 (a) Location of the perceiver → present (A). (b) Object perceived → present (B). (c) Location of the perceiver → present (A). (d) Object “perceived” mentally → past (C).

Editing: Hiroshima Mon Amour (Alain Resnais, 1959). For our first example we would like to consider a scene from the modernist psychological drama *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959). Written by Marguerite Duras, one of the leading figures of the French literary movement called *Nouveau Roman*, the film depicts a series of personal dialogues about the temporality of memory between a French actress (Emmanuelle Riva) and a Japanese architect (Eiji Okada). Characterized by a nonlinear and fragmented storyline, the film includes many brief flashbacks in which her traumatic past experiences during the Second World War are triggered by images in the present. One instance of such a flashback occurs right after she spent her last night with the Japanese man in Hiroshima. The film shows the woman in the morning as she is standing in the threshold of a door (see Figure 8a). Her tender gaze is directed towards something outside the left side of the frame. The conceptual metonymy “*EYE FOR WATCHING*” is rendered in the visual content of the frame. Next, the film cuts to a subjective POV shot, showing the object of her perception: the image of the body of her sleeping lover as he lies on the bed, his hand clearly visible in the middle of the frame (see Figure 8b). The strategy of editing is used to elicit the conceptual metaphor “*PERCEPTION IS CONTACT BETWEEN PERCEIVER AND OBJECT PERCEIVED.*” Then, the film cuts back to the actress (see Figure 8c). Notice that the shot size has altered. Instead of using a medium shot, the film now uses a medium close-up to render her face. Similar to the

function of the camera movement in *Saboteur*, then, the change of shot size visually anticipates the impending entering into her past memories. The camera cannot enter her head, but it can visually emphasize the inner mental process of remembering by reducing the distance between the camera and the object filmed. This coming subjective event is also highlighted at the level of acting, where her affectionate smile—due to the content of her visual field—now has turned into a more introspective facial expression. In the following shot the film shows the anticipated inner memory: a close-up of the dead hand of her first lover, a German soldier who was killed at the end of the Second World War in the French town of Nevers (see Figure 8d). Thus, the film makes use of symmetric image alignment to trigger her immersion into her youth trauma. More specifically, the temporal transition from present to past is elicited by a static Ego-RP model of time in which a stationary character (A) sees an object in the present (B) that is symmetrically aligned with a different object, albeit belonging to the same conceptual category (i.e., hands) in the past (C), whereas the connection between the two latter entities is formalized via editing. Note that if we were to remove the stationary character, as the canonical observer, from the source domain of the spatial structure (i.e., the relation ABC would be limited to the relation between B and C), the film would only depict a Time-RP model in which one image (i.e., one time) is pasted after another image (i.e., another time).

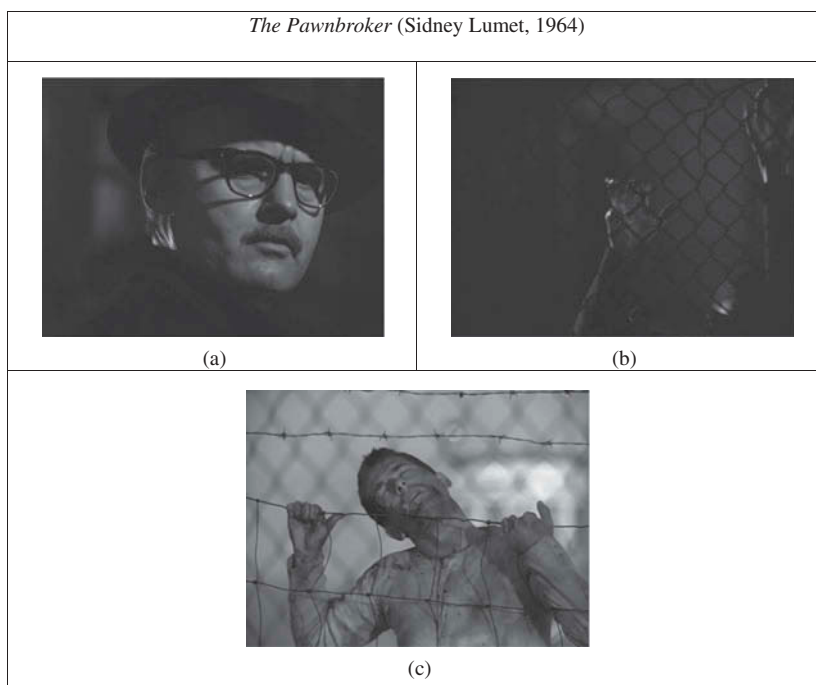


FIGURE 9 (a) Location of the perceiver → present (A). (b) Object perceived → present (B). (c) Object “perceived” mentally → past (C).

Editing: The Pawnbroker (Sidney Lumet, 1964). A quite similar analysis can be extended to Sidney Lumet's Holocaust drama *The Pawnbroker* (1964).⁷ Here, the static Ego-RP model of time is used metaphorically to link the past traumatic memories of a Jewish concentration camp survivor, named Sol Nazerman (Rod Steiger), to his present perceptual experience of the urban ghettos in the contemporary space of 1960s U.S. capitalism. At one moment in the film, the camera shows Sol as he walks down the street after having closed his pawnshop in East Harlem. While reaching his car his attention is drawn away to the chaotic sound of a barking dog. As he turns his eyes to the locus of the sound (see [Figure 9a](#)), the pawnbroker sees how a young black man is being beaten by several others. In an attempt to escape the harm, the young man runs to a fence of the playground and begins to climb it, only to be hunted and overcome by his attackers. As he grasps the fence, the camera focuses on the victim's hands (see [Figure 9b](#)). In a style very reminiscent of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, the film, then, reveals in a very short flashback one of Nazerman's past memories. While he was a prisoner in the concentration camp, he witnessed how one of his friends was being chased by a barking dog to the pleasure of some Nazi guards. As with the black man, he desperately tried to escape by making his way over a barbed wire fence. In symmetrical alignment with the image of the young black man's hands, then, the film shows the image of his hands (see [Figure 9c](#)). Again the static Ego-RP model of time is extended metaphorically to trigger a past event: a stationary character (A) sees an object in the present (B) that is symmetrically aligned with a different object in the past (C). Similarly, the connection between B and C is elicited by editing. Also notice the change in ground between night (B) and day (C) to denote the temporal difference of both shots.

Editing and Superimposition: Le Jour se lève (Marcel Carné, 1939). To conclude our analysis, we would like to consider a case in which the two aligned objects are not different, albeit from the same conceptual category, but identical. One such instance can be found in Marcel Carné's 1939 classic of poetic realism, *Le Jour se lève*. The film tells the story of a foundry worker named François (Jean Gabin) who has locked himself in his top-floor apartment after shooting and killing the man who has come in between him and the girl he has desperately fallen in love with. Renowned for its elaborate use of flashbacks, the film offers a series of scenes in which the main protagonist recalls the past events leading up to the murder by means of his perceptual experience of the present. One instance of such a scene unfolds at the beginning of the film. The film shows the metonymical image of François as he looks through the window of his room (see [Figure 10a](#)). His eyes are directed towards the people outside below (see [Figure 10b](#)), who have gathered to witness his armed standoff with the police. Similar to *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *The Pawnbroker*, the conceptual metaphor "PERCEPTION IS CONTACT BETWEEN PERCEIVER AND OBJECT PERCEIVED" is elicited by means of editing in which a subjective POV shot of the object perceived (B) is pasted right after an objective shot of the perceiver (A). The film then cuts back to François (see [Figure 10c](#)). As the image freezes, it gradually dissolves into another image (C): the present gradually disappears while the past gradually appears (see [Figure 10d](#)). For a moment the two images (i.e., the two times) blend in superimposition, provoking an effect very similar to the one shown earlier in *Saboteur* (see [Figure 6b](#)). Instead of the cut, superimposition

⁷For a good discussion of the film in the light of flashbacks, see also Turim (2001).

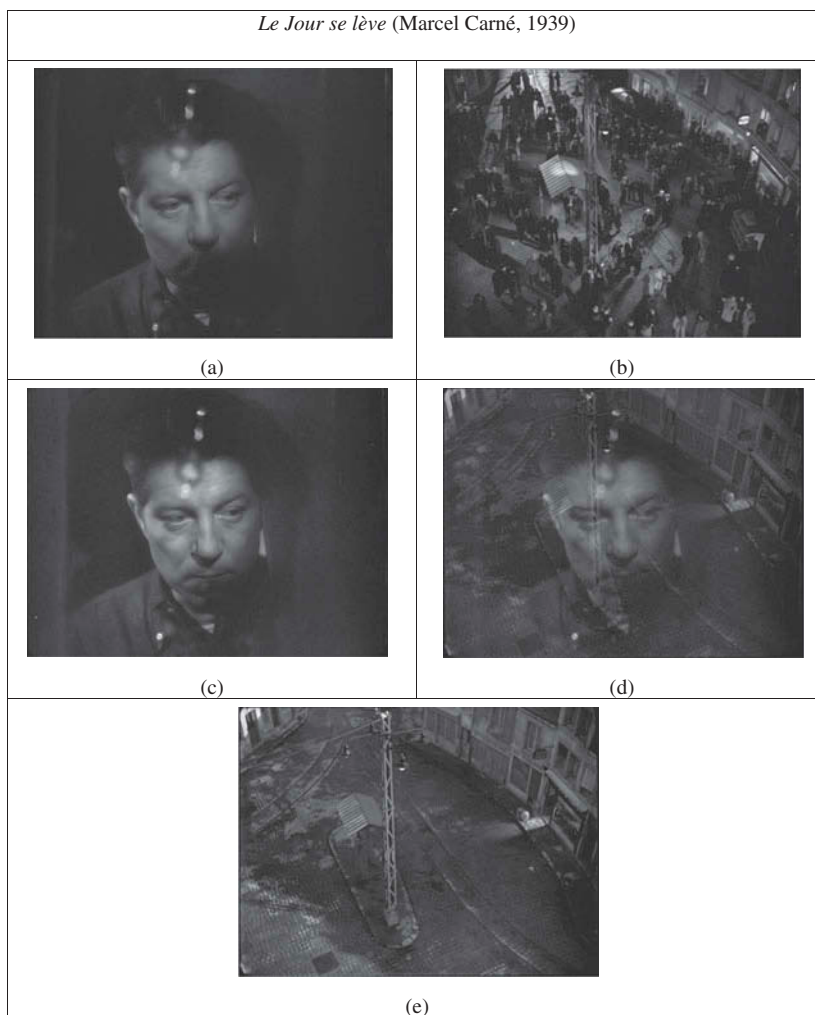


FIGURE 10 (a) Location of the perceiver → present (A). (b) Object perceived → present (B). (c) Location of the perceiver → present (A). (d) PR dissolves into OP → present (A) dissolves into past (C). (e) Object perceived “mentally” → the past (C).

is used to unite the perceiving character with the object perceived. The ground of the past image unfolding is identical to the one shown earlier (see Figure 10b), except that now the figures against the background have disappeared. While the crowd has moved out of frame, the camera still focuses on the same ground, i.e., in contrast with *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *The Pawnbroker*, the relationship between the two aligned images, although also elicited by editing, is motivated by the same spatial location. Moreover, the change in time is emphasized by the use of contrast within the identical grounds (e.g., full vs. empty, dark vs. light).

CONCLUSION

The point of this article has been to bring a filmic perspective to the discussion of time metaphors. Elaborating on cognitive research, in particular that of Núñez & Sweetser (2006), we have argued that film offers a static Ego-RP model of time, very similar to the one found in Aymara language wherein “*FUTURE IS IN BACK OF EGO*” and “*PAST IS IN FRONT OF EGO*.” More specifically, we have claimed that film appears to have a temporal system in which the inferential structure of character perception is mapped onto the conceptual domain of time. In analyzing this argument, we have first demonstrated how perception itself can be addressed cinematically by means of an embodied model that is grounded in two conceptual mechanisms, namely, the “*PERCEPTUAL ORGAN STANDS FOR PERCEPTION*” metonymy and the “*PERCEPTION IS CONTACT BETWEEN PERCEIVER AND OBJECT PERCEIVED*” metaphor. Furthermore, drawing on analyses of various examples, we have shown how the character perception of time in cinema can be divided into two groups: either the character perceives the past directly, or he perceives the past indirectly through the visual structure of symmetric object alignment.

What, then, are the broader theoretical implications of these findings? It seems to us that at least two important insights should be mentioned. Firstly, this research overcomes one of the main criticisms against CMT in that it offers filmic and nonlinguistic evidence for the conceptual basis of the Ego-Reference-Point model of time. As such our research further validates Lakoff and Johnson’s claim that metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and only derivatively a matter of form. Thereby we have suggested some conceptual tools that allow one to address some of the complex questions that unmistakably arise when the conceptual realities of temporal metaphors and image schemas are confronted with the stylistic particularities and technicalities of cinema. Secondly, our research shows that, despite their differences in expression form, language and film share the same temporal metaphors. Meaning-making in cinema goes beyond the level of words and sentences in that film uses; to quote Mark Johnson (2007), “the very same ordinary, everyday elements, and dimensions of meaning that operate at the heart of our more prototypical meaning-making in language” (p. 208).

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