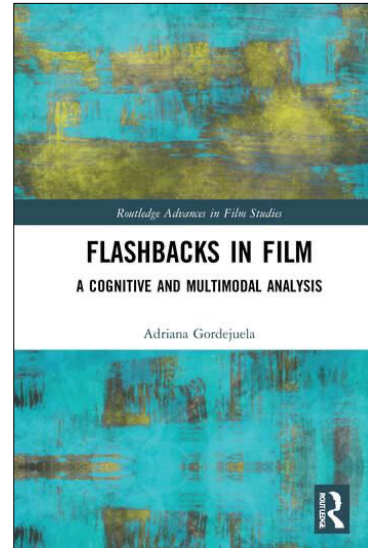


Adriana Gordejuela, **Flashbacks in Film: A Cognitive and Multimodal Analysis**, New York, NY: Routledge, 2021, 186 pp., \$160.00 (hardback), \$36.71 (eBook).

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Adriana Gordejuela's **Flashbacks in Film: A Cognitive and Multimodal Analysis** presents readers with intelligible considerations of how film flashbacks operate perceptually for audiences. Readers will find the textual examples herein to be both balanced in length with the author's theoretical contentions, as well as accessible in style and content. She primarily uses examples of mainstream narrative cinema to provide readers with a bevy of familiar films, while also offering measures of narrative consistency between case studies. In general, her book assesses the nature of cinematic flashbacks from a variety of cognitive perspectives to contend how flashbacks are digested and understood intuitively by viewers. While critical attention has been brought to this subject through noted scholarship, especially in Maureen Turim's (1989) *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History*, there are additional theoretical frameworks based on cognitive studies that provide fresh perspectives on the concept of flashbacks in film.



Gordejuela's book is divided into seven chapters, including an introduction and conclusion. Chapter 2 establishes a general academic perspective for the text, noting crucial scholars such as Barbara Dancygier, Gilles Fauconnier, and Mark Turner. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 each examine "specific mental operations involved in the viewer's comprehension of film flashbacks," via processes of blended joint attention, viewpoint compression, and time compression (p. 2). Chapter 6 uses each of the cognitive processes of the preceding chapters to apply the book's theoretical propositions to two narrative case studies.

The introduction details a cognitive approach to film theory, and this forms the basis for most of the critical discussions within this text. Gordejuela discusses how cognitive programs are useful in explaining narrative functions in film and adds that this cognitive approach to cinema studies has been called naturalistic because its critical scholars have mostly advocated that the natural cognitive capacities of viewers are central in the activity of viewership. Gordejuela's arguments on the nature of flashbacks through cognitive analyses primarily rely on conceptual integration theory, or blending theory, as discussed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). Gordejuela also highlights a shared cognitive capacity among viewers, where a cognitive understanding of flashbacks occurs subjectively. She evidences this more extensively through film analyses in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 examines the functionality of flashbacks as a common cinematic device in commercial films. Gordejuela acknowledges Turim (1989) as an essential scholar on film flashbacks—even more apparent given the nearly identical titles of both authors' monographs. She writes that while film theory has dealt with flashbacks from a variety of perspectives, her research aims to "offer an explanation of the cognitive

underpinnings of this rich filmic tool—that is, to seek an answer for the question of how viewers comprehend film flashbacks in and despite their various formal manifestations” (p. 21). Gordejuela’s theoretical framework in this portion of the text primarily concerns conceptual integration theory.

The third and lengthiest chapter explores the cognitive process of blended joint attention, which partly describes a perceptual behavior of perceiving the natural world. This idea provides a cognitive basis for what she calls a “blended joint attention triangle,” which postures how the camera and viewers reconcile narrative retrospection in flashbacks (p. 22). Some of the films used to outline this cognitive process include Tate Taylor’s (2011) *The Help*, and Robert Redford’s (1980) *Ordinary People*, with more textual examples from the classical Hollywood era. Gordejuela’s primary arguments concerning blended joint attention triangle concern how the past in a narrative story becomes a fixed point of attention. Both films provide textual examples of memory sequences, where temporal shifts between the diegetic present and narrative retrospection is perceptible through cutting, the camera’s attention to physical space, and character behavior.

Chapter 4 examines the concept of viewpoint compression as a cognitive operation integral to the construction of flashbacks. Dancygier (2012) is used as a key perspective, given her research on cognitive linguistics and poetics. Edward Branigan’s (1984) *Point of View in the Cinema* is also used as a critical text to present the various ways in which films construct subjectivity. Gordejuela notes that there are three particular phenomena addressed, regarding viewpoints of characters in flashbacks. She writes that there is a compression of past and present viewpoints within a character during memory flashbacks, a decompression of character identity through two different viewpoints that are synthesized into a single viewpoint, and finally a viewpoint compression being evidenced in reenacted scenes, or replay flashbacks (p. 91). She analyzes various cognitive tools relating to spectatorial viewpoints throughout this section, such as point-of-view perspectives, focalization, and how a multiplicity of perspective viewpoints are blended and operate through a conceptual integration perspective. The author uses Michael Curtiz’s (1941) *Casablanca* as an example and examines how focusing on facial expressions of the leading character Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) generates a quality of viewpoint compression, by comparing Rick’s expressions in the diegetic present to those evident during the film’s flashback sequences.

The fifth chapter analyzes the cognitive operation of time compression. Dancygier (2012) serves as a substantial critical perspective in this section and argues that “flashbacks are not employed with the purpose of filling the gaps in the story timeline, ‘but to fill the gaps in relevant links between [characters] experiences and motives’ in the narrative” (p. 35). The story-blend thus emerges as a result of a series of connections taking place in the viewer’s mind between different elements in narrative spaces, and how temporal features emerge as a consequence of those multiple links and blends between space (p. 133). Gordejuela expresses that rather than viewing narrative retrospections as a one-dimensional track between past and future, “it is a complex blended network of experiential associations held together by the construal of motivational and causal chains” (p. 148). It is through the varied connections between different narrative spaces that are compressed in the mind of the viewer, that audiences can cognitively make sense of film flashbacks (p. 149).

The sixth chapter explores the cognitive processes of the previous three chapters (blended joint attention, viewpoint compression, time compression, and identity connections) in unison by analyzing two case studies: *The Bourne Identity* (Liman, 2002) and *Jane Eyre* (Fukunaga, 2011). These textual examples “serve

to test the proposed theoretical framework as a valid model to account for the cognitive intricacies of cinematic retrospections" (p. 150). This chapter gives a quick (if terse) summary of the preceding cognitive frameworks and could benefit from more examination of its case studies. A brief conclusion highlights that the primary objective of this study has been to analyze the intelligibility of flashbacks for film viewers, while also contending conceptual integration/blending theory as "a suitable framework for the analysis of the cognitive functioning of flashbacks" (p. 160). Furthermore, this framework offers an understanding of film flashbacks as a cognitive analog to how viewers make empirical sense of the world around them.

The case studies used in Gordejuela's monograph are mostly commercial, English-speaking films. And while it would be worthwhile to evidence more global cinema, the films examined are limited to appeal to a wider audience that is likely more familiar with Hollywood films. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that her proposed model does have limitations, since this theoretical framework attends to a classical narrative style and could benefit from further discussions involving avant-garde or experimental cinema. Moreover, she notes that her research could prompt further studies on film and cognition through other cinematic devices, like film transitions. Exemplifying transitions as a springboard for further thought, Gordejuela writes that her research on film flashbacks could be broadened and built upon, while also involving more interdisciplinary approaches.

In summary, *Flashbacks in Film* provides a worthwhile study of the cognitive function of flashbacks in film narratives and adds to the current academic discourse on techniques applicable to retrospective film narratives while further analyzing the utility of flashbacks in cinema. Gordejuela's text offers profitable considerations of retrospective film techniques, cognitive film theory, and expanded discussions on flashbacks as a narrative tool. Her book stands as a valuable addition to film scholarship for both academic audiences and general readers, and the pithy discussions herein are largely accessible to film enthusiasts looking to better appreciate film flashbacks as a mode of stimulating and engaging film narration.

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