

HITCHCOCK: At the beginning of the film [*The Birds*] we show Rod Taylor in the bird shop. He catches the canary that has escaped from its cage, and after putting it back, he says to Tippi Hedren, "I'm putting you back in your gilded cage, Melanie Daniels." I added that sentence during the shooting because I felt it added to her characterisation as a wealthy, shallow playgirl. And later on, when the gulls attack the village, Melanie Daniels takes refuge in a glass telephone booth and I show her as a bird in a cage. This time it isn't a gilded cage, but a cage of misery. . . . It's a reversal of the age-old conflict between men and birds. Here the human beings are in cages and the birds are on the outside. When I shoot something like that, I hardly think the public is likely to notice it.

TRUFFAUT: Even though the metaphor wasn't obvious – to me, at any rate – this is truly a remarkably powerful scene.¹

In the case of *Taxi Driver*, the theme was loneliness. Then you find a metaphor for the theme, one that expresses it. In *Taxi Driver*, that was the cabbie, the perfect expression of urban loneliness. . . . Metaphor is extremely important to a movie.

– Paul Schrader²

In these passages, a director, a scriptwriter, and a film critic identify what they see as metaphors in film. Is their use of what is normally regarded as a literary term appropriate, or is it, when carried over to the cinematic context, mere license? Is "cinematic metaphor" itself a metaphor only, or do metaphors really exist in films?

White-light fog is used in the underwater sequence of *The Graduate* in which Benjamin, donning flippers and goggles, flees to the bottom of the family swimming pool, presumably to escape the overbearing camaraderie of his parents and their circle of friends. As the camera assumes his point of view, the world becomes a gloomy blur, shimmering but indistinct, agitated by the motion of the water and toned in a bilious, washed-out green. While the metaphor of diving reflects Benjamin's introversion and retreat, the color quality of the image indicates the psychic cost of his escapism. He has ducked away from the plastic gewgaws of suburbia but only to set himself adrift in a turbid world of ghastly color and uncertain shapes.

– James F. Scott³

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Considerable hostility to the suggestion that metaphors exist in films has come from two quarters: from literary critics who consider that this extension of the concept of metaphor would empty it of all precision; and from film theoreticians who believe such applications arise from misunderstanding the true nature of the film medium. W. B. Stanford may be quoted as spokesman for the first view:

The frequent misuse of the term *metaphor* for *symbolism* demands a distinction. As S. J. Brown puts it, symbolism belongs to the sphere of *things* while metaphor belongs to the sphere of *words*. This does not mean that words cannot be things but that *metaphor* must not be used as a term for nonverbal transferences if it is to retain its meaning at all. What is one to make of this use in a cinema critique from *The Spectator* of October 4, 1935? – 'Here as a priest strikes a bell Mr. W_____ uses one of the loveliest *visual metaphors* I have ever seen on any screen. The sound of the bell startles a small bird from its branch and the camera follows the bird's flight and the notes of the bell across the island down from the mountain side, over forest and plain and sea, the vibration of the tiny wings, the fading sound' – this is symbolism, parallelism, analogy, anything but metaphor.⁴

The second view is summarized by Calvin Pryluck:⁵

A number of writers have criticized the whole idea of "film metaphor" on the partially valid basis that the photographic image in film is a literal representation of object and events. These objects and events, the argument goes, have intrinsic meanings which militate against the images being interpreted figuratively. On these grounds, Kracauer, for instance, suggested that the gods sequence in *October* would be seen as "an aimless assemblage of religious images rather than as an attack on religion."

Other writers Pryluck adduces as making similar objections are Rudolf Arnheim⁶ and George Bluestone.⁷

Such views are not to be dismissed lightly. They stress the twofold drawbacks to any endeavor to apply traditional notions to new areas of experience: The traditional terms may become overextended and useless; and their employment may lead to preconceptions that hinder the recognition of the new for what it is. But what other recourse have we but to explore the unknown with the aid of the known, in the process modifying what we thought we knew and discovering what we did not expect to find? (Indeed, some regard this as the fundamental process of metaphor itself.)⁸ The history of film, as much as the history of film theory, exemplifies this procedure. D. W. Griffith brought the conventions of melodrama to establish the narrative resources of the new medium, just as Eisenstein adapted the methods of Meyerhold and Kabuki theater to formulate image and montage.⁹ Kracauer in developing his realist position called upon the authority of the literary critic and cultural historian, Erich Auerbach; and Christian Metz drew upon the semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes.¹⁰ An ap-

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proach to film via the concept of metaphor, then, is not, ipso facto, to be condemned. Even if the twofold dangers mentioned cannot be totally avoided, commensurate gains might be achieved. It may be salutary to rethink the concept of metaphor within a wider context, and the use of it in the analysis of film may feed back into its application in the literary sphere. A notion thought to be so central to artistic creativity in language cannot be totally alien to artistic creativity elsewhere, and may even illuminate it. At any rate, this book will endeavor to widen the employment of metaphor by seeking to discover where and how metaphors may be legitimately attributed to films. It is hoped that this will provide insights into specific films, into the workings of "film language," and indeed into the very processes underlying metaphor generally.

Yet, the question might still be asked, why metaphor? Reasons have already been hinted at. As the opening quotations illustrate, people do frequently rely upon the term when discussing films. Often their usage is loose, and the approach has been challenged. Clarification is needed, and implications should be set out before the debate continues. Then, theories of metaphor are closely related to theories of imagination and to the processes and structures imagination employs. The study of metaphor leads off in one direction toward cognitive psychology with its interest in the mental processes underlying perception and mental categorization; in another direction toward rhetoric and strategies of communication.¹¹ These topics are, or should be, of cardinal interest to film theoreticians. Finally, the study of cinematic metaphor is a relatively neglected field by comparison with some others. This despite, or in part because of, those trends in film theory that have their source in modern linguistics. Although it would not be true to say that structural linguists have not propounded ideas that cast a new light on metaphor,¹² in general their treatment of the subject has been disappointing. Particularly notable has been the failure to deal with the specificity of metaphors – their uniqueness of content – and with the way metaphors, as it were, step outside accepted codes to express meanings for which the codes themselves do not allow.¹³ Film semiology has been, if anything, even less fitted to tackling these issues, as I hope to indicate later in this book.¹⁴ Cinematic metaphor, hence, still remains largely unexplored and unexplained, a challenge and a lure.

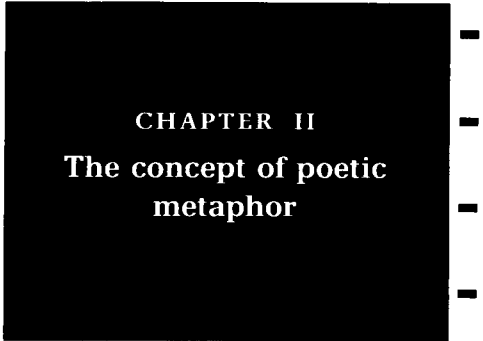
A few words need to be said about aspects of the approach adopted in this book in order to avoid any misunderstanding by the reader. First, an argument for metaphor in film needs to show that commentators *regularly* identify metaphors when attempting to explicate films. Consequently, in the sections of the book where specific cinematic metaphors are discussed, not only have I written on metaphors I my-

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self have noted but I have also liberally cited what other film critics have said. The apparent range and variety of metaphors detected in films indicate how rare it is to find a film critic who fails to note them.

Second, on the whole I have stuck to feature films and have virtually ignored documentaries or avant-garde or experimental films. My real interest lies in features, particularly those with some genuine claim to artistic merit. Still, I hope that much of what I say applies more widely than merely to narrative films. I have no doubt, for example, that a whole book could be devoted to the way documentaries utilize metaphorical images and employ arguments based on widely shared metaphors. But that is not the book I have chosen to write.

Third, this book is as much about metaphor itself as about the figurative possibilities of cinema. Film is a way of uncovering some fundamental properties of metaphor that a restricted focus on the verbal medium of literature runs the risk of neglecting.



Their language is vitally metaphoric: that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension.

– Percy Bysshe Shelley¹

Metaphor is usually defined as the presentation of one idea in terms of another, belonging to a different category, so that either our understanding of the first idea is transformed, or so that from the fusion of the two ideas a new one is created. This can be represented symbolically as

$$A + B = A(B) \quad \text{or} \quad A + B = Z$$

Ever since I. A. Richards proposed the nomenclature, it has become customary to refer to the original idea as the *tenor*, and the second idea imported to modify or transform it as the *vehicle*.²

The convocation of ideas, $A + B$, must involve some transformation; otherwise there is no metaphor. Instead there is only simple analogy, or simple juxtaposition.

Analogy is a process of reasoning from parallel cases, but with the two cases remaining separate and unchanged. A city planner might describe the traffic system in terms of the arterial network of the body; the analogy would only hold true where there are genuine parallels, and would become positively misleading should the planner confuse factors in the one category with factors in the other. Analogy is the basis of many metaphors – “similitude in dissimilitude.” In particular it is the basis of that form of metaphor called simile that explicitly calls attention to an analogy.³ “My love is *like* a red, red rose.” This is as that. In a common type of metaphor the words spelling out the comparison are simply omitted, and the analogy is implied only. But although such similes and metaphor have something in common with pure analogy, the way they work is different. In analogy the mind

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moves from the common factors to clinch a point or elaborate an argument. The common factors are preestablished – that is, they are generally accepted or are believed to be truly the case. Where this is not so the analogy falls down. But in simile-type metaphors the mind moves from the tenor to the vehicle and back, attempting to identify the similitude. What is there in common between the person someone loves and a red, red rose? The mind has to find meanings that will fit. The meanings so found in turn create a shift in our comprehension of the original terms.⁴

This point may be put in a different way. In analogy the connections between the subject and its parallel case are accepted literally; in metaphor the connections between tenor and vehicle are understood figuratively.

The distinction between *literal* and *figurative* is inextricably bound up with thinking about metaphor. *Literal* derives from being true to the letter. A literal transcript is one that accurately reproduces the words originally used. In time this fidelity of rendition was extended to two different sets of circumstances, an extension that, ironically, is itself metaphorical. “*Literal*” came to be applied to the recounting of events. A literal account of what happened is one that is faithful to the facts, not coloring or distorting them in any way. Second, it came to be applied to the use of language. Words used literally are words employed in accordance with the rules of grammar and to be understood in their usual or primary sense. The two applications of “*literal*” are, of course, interrelated, because our perception of events and our language are interrelated.

To identify a visual phenomenon as a red rose the beholder must be acquainted with the categories of redness and rose. Language gives names to most of the categories we possess. When children learn to speak, they are acquiring not only phonemes, syntax, and vocabulary but also the categories society has adopted to organize and classify and interconnect its experiences. Words in their ordinary or primary usage refer to these categories. When words are used literally the language seems most neutral, reliable, and transparent because the words accord to categories that are accepted and acceptable – ones that are handed on socially, binding the society together and making communication possible.⁵

Not all our actual experiences, however, are covered by the conceptual categories we thus acquire nor can they be represented through the literal usage of language.

Perhaps this can best be illustrated through the verbal behavior of children when they have as yet a restricted vocabulary and, consequently, a limited possession of conceptual categories. Daily they are confronted with experiences new to them for which they possess no

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names. What do they do when they wish to speak of these experiences? They coin metaphors. They carry over (*meta-phora*) a word they know, connected to a category they possess, to describe something for which they do not have the word or the category. Sometimes they even surprise us by coming up with a metaphor to say something for which no category has been established. So a small boy explains why it is impossible to say which part of a mongrel belongs to any particular breed by explaining that the dog has been homogenized. Such extensions of meaning, such transfers of a term out of the realm in which convention places it, are figurative uses of language. To delineate undetermined areas of experience – that is, those areas for which no set categories exist – we have to resort to metaphor.

If this account be true, evidence supporting it will be found in the history of a language. As societies change and people encounter new experiences, so we may expect to find them having recourse to language that is at first figurative but which, as the category is acknowledged and accepted, becomes literal. This, indeed, is what we find does happen. Much of the vocabulary of our language consists of words and phrases that are now dead metaphors, but which once were new mintings or wrenchings of preceding usage to describe the strange, the innovative, or the unnamed. *Skyscraper* must have once been a description expressing awe: Now it is just another noun. The perception has become categorized, the novelty has gone, and the thrill has faded.

We can now redefine the distinction between analogy and metaphor. Analogy entails literal comparison only: The categories remain undisturbed. Metaphor is figurative: Categories are compacted and broken down so that fresh meaning can be expressed. The effect of vehicle on tenor will either be to reconstruct the category of the tenor, or from the fusion of vehicle and tenor to create something for which no category yet exists.

This account leads to the suggestion that metaphors are born at a frontier of human consciousness – at a place where language with its inadequacies and our mental framework of classifications with its restrictions encounter unassimilated experiences. The difficulty of discussing what takes place on this frontier is compounded by the inescapable recognition that we cannot even discuss the nature and process of metaphor without recourse ourselves to overtly metaphorical language.

"It is proper," wrote Aristotle, "to derive metaphors . . . from objects which are closely related to the thing itself but which are not immediately obvious." That is, the tenor and the vehicle must belong to categories that are neither too close to one another nor too remote. The effort demanded to span the gap between tenor and vehicle has come

to be called the *tension* of a metaphor. A dead metaphor, because it has become an accepted category in its own right, is one where the tension has been lost or is residual only. Sometimes that latent tension can be revived, as in the case of such unfortunate mixed metaphors as "No stone was left unturned in plumbing the bottleneck to the depths." Dr. Johnson's well-known objection to some of the conceits of the metaphysical poets – that they "yoked heterogeneous objects together" – exemplifies an eighteenth-century resistance to metaphors with too much tension.

Discussions of the tension or incongruity in metaphors call attention to an aspect of metaphor that has often been vehemently distrusted. May not the connections linking tenor and vehicle be arbitrary? Or even worse, may not the figurative meanings generated by metaphor be illusory? Precisely because, the argument runs, metaphor challenges the received categories by means of which we realize our experience, may metaphor not be setting up false connections and weakening our grasp on the real world? Perhaps some such fear lurked behind Samuel Parker's action in 1670 when he advocated an act of Parliament forbidding the use of "fulsome and luscious" metaphors.⁶ (The obverse side of the argument is put by Wallace Stevens when he says, "Reality is a cliché from which we escape by metaphor.")⁷ That metaphors may be deceitful is a perfectly rational apprehension, for even staid metaphors can have the air of playing a game of "as if" with us. It is through, however, their fanciful play of analogies that we are freed from our set habits of thought. The mind can reconceive the subject, and contemplate fresh aspects of it. This is why writers on metaphor refer to the stereoscope of metaphor, or to its multidimensional depiction of a subject.⁸ Metaphor dissolves our fixed notions in order to produce fresh insights.

Thus the tension of a metaphor entails more than a gap between tenor and vehicle. It involves the effort to adjust our preset and customary ways of thinking to the startling new aspects brought to light by the metaphor. Through its tension a metaphor calls into question the ordered simplicities our received categories give us.⁹

Metaphor's wrenching of language and assault on categories means it can never be employed without an accompanying emotional charge. This probably explains why metaphor is so often considered to be an emotionally expressive trope.

Rhetorical devices, since classical times, have been divided into two main kinds: schemes and tropes. In *schemes* words may retain the same meaning they have in ordinary speech, but their order is organized in a more formal manner than is usual in common discourse. In *tropes*, words are employed in senses other than or additional to those they bear normally. Words in schemes may be literal; in tropes they

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are always to some degree figurative. Quintilian, for example, defines a trope as "the artistic alteration of a word or phrase from its proper meaning to another."¹⁰

It should be borne in mind though that often schemes and tropes are combined and that schemes themselves can become the basis for metaphors. Some writers have believed, erroneously, that metaphors rely on shifts of meaning in single words only. On the contrary, metaphorical implications are most often established through larger syntactical or rhetorical units – as the dramatic verse of Shakespeare amply illustrates.¹¹

There are several tropes that are so allied to metaphor that they are often classified as such. They include *synecdoche* and *metonymy*. The two figures are closely related because they both depend on contiguity, either in form or event. A literal name is substituted for another literal name with which it is customarily connected. The resultant meaning may be literal (as with "all hands to the pump"), but very often it is figurative. To say, "I suppose perfect teeth over there offered you a lift home," does more than identify a rival: It is a remark spiky with inuendos, creating a caricature.

In recent times metonymy especially has received close attention by writers on poetics. There has been disagreement as to how it stands in relation to metaphor. One view, proposed by Roman Jakobson, sees metonymy as representing a different principle of organization to metaphor¹² (a view I shall argue against later). A more traditional view (which I adhere to) is that metonymy is a type of metaphor. According to this account metaphors are of two main types: those bringing ideas together by reason of similarity or figurative analogy (e.g., simile), and those bringing ideas together by reason of contiguity (e.g., metonymy).

Now the notion of contiguity is applicable to two different sets of circumstances. First, it may be a property of objects themselves. Then the basis of the metaphor is a matter of how objects, or aspects of objects, are associated together because the linkages occur in real life. Second, contiguity may refer to the copresence of images or phrases in a poem. When such images are brought together and juxtaposed in a specific poetic context, then they can acquire figurative significance. In this case the contextual collocation rather than precontextual associations makes possible metaphoric meaning.

Where prior association rather than textual juxtaposition or similarity provides the vehicle that modifies the tenor, the tension between tenor and vehicle is normally less because the association is less unexpected. But some tension there will be, if only because the vehicle displaces or fragments the tenor. Such distortion always gives special semantic emphasis. Cumulatively this can be very powerful, and explains why metonymy lends itself to lists and catalogs in poetry: Full

metaphoric tension is built up by a variety of vehicles converging from different angles on the same tenor. Anglo-Saxon riddle poems, for example, function this way.

Metonymy tends to remain within a single world of discourse. Metaphor proper on the other hand joins together a plurality of worlds.¹³ Not only are terms from different categories brought together but, as we have observed, the similitudes linking them and the dissimilitudes separating them are juxtaposed. Thus even the simplest simile-type metaphor has a collocation of ideas based on disparity, as well as an association of ideas based on analogy.

This aspect of metaphor has been particularly explored by Philip Wheelwright in his seminal book, *Metaphor and Reality*.¹⁴ He proposes the terms *epiphor* to describe the synthesis brought about by similarity and *diaphor* for the synthesis arising from the juxtaposition of the disparate elements. He sees the two processes – that of epiphor and that of diaphor – “as intimately related aspects of poetic language and as mutually contributing to the power and significance of all good metaphor.”¹⁵ Wheelwright, however, concentrates on metaphor proper. I believe that diaphoric connection can play a metaphoric role in metonymy and synecdoche as well.

According to Wheelwright epiphor is the occasion for the contiguity that makes possible the diaphoric connection. Can contiguity be provided by other means? Yes, as we have suggested, by the poetic context itself. Images do not exist in isolation, but are part of a larger discourse. Just as tenor and vehicle become more than the sum of their parts, so a juxtaposition of epithets can fuse into a larger and unexpected meaning. Take, for example, a few lines from the seven ages of man speech in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*:

Then the whining schoolboy with his satchel
 And shining morning face, creeping like snail
 Unwillingly to school . . .

Ostensibly this simply describes that moment of a boy’s day when his face is scrubbed and he is packed off to school. But a profound cynicism – Jacques’s, not Shakespeare’s – is apparent beneath the humor. The contrast between the fresh and unbesmirched energy implied by “shining morning face” and the complaining and reluctant submission elsewhere indicated in the lines synthesizes into something more complex and disturbing: a sense that it is in the very nature of things that life should feel frustrated and confined, even by the care that seeks to nurture it: $A + B = Z$.

It could be argued that to call this an example of metaphor is to extend the meaning of the term unnecessarily widely. The point is well taken. But the dangers of not recognizing that here we have an exten-