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Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature

David Lodge

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Part Two

Metaphor and Metonymy

1 Jakobson's Theory

The idea of a binary opposition between metaphor and metonymy can be traced back to Russian Formalism. Erlich observes that Zirmunskij 'posited metaphor and metonymy as the chief earmarks of the Romantic and classic styles respectively' in an essay of 1928.[1] Roman Jakobson records that he 'ventured a few sketchy remarks on the metonymical turn in verbal art' in articles on realism (1927) and Pasternak (1935), and applied the idea to painting as early as 1919.[2] Alluding briefly in their *Theory of Literature* (1948) to 'the notion that metonymy and metaphor may be the characterizing structures of two poetic types—poetry of association by contiguity, of movement within a single world of discourse, and poetry of association by comparison, joining a plurality of worlds', Wellek and Warren refer the reader to Jakobson's essay on Pasternak, Karl Bühler's *Sprachtheorie* (1934) and Stephen J. Brown's *The World of Imagery* (1927).[3] The most systematic and comprehensive (though highly condensed) exposition of the idea, however, and the source most often cited in modern structuralist criticism, is Jakobson's essay 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', first published in *Fundamentals of Language* (1956) by Jakobson and Morris Halle. In his 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics' addressed to the 1958 Indiana Conference on Style in Language,[4] Jakobson referred to the same distinction but in a less even-handed way, reinforcing that bias of criticism towards the metaphoric at the expense of the metonymic mode which he had himself diagnosed in the earlier paper. The later one is, however, much better known to English and American critics than the earlier. Perhaps the title, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances' has not seemed very inviting to literary critics, and a quick glance at the contents of that essay might well discourage further investigation. The seminal distinction between the metaphoric and metonymic poles is compressed into half-a-dozen pages, and seems almost an afterthought appended to a

specialized study of language disorders. The theory of language upon which the distinction rests is expounded in a highly condensed fashion, with few concessions to lay readers. In the account of this essay which follows I have tried to make its content and implications (as I understand them) clear by expansions and illustrations which may seem obvious or redundant to readers already familiar with structuralist thinking about language and literature.

Jakobson begins by formulating one of the basic principles of structural linguistics deriving from Saussure: that language, like other systems of signs, has a twofold character. Its use involves two operations—selection and combination:

> Speech implies a selection of certain linguistic entities and their combination into linguistic units of a higher degree of complexity.[5]

This distinction between selection and combination corresponds to the binary oppositions between *langue* and *parole*, between *paradigm* (or *system*) and *syntagm*, between *code* and *message*, in structural linguistics and semiotics. It is perhaps most readily grasped in relation to concrete objects that function as signs, such as clothing, food and furniture. Roland Barthes gives useful illustrations of this kind in his *Elements of Semiology*. For example, to the garment *langue*/paradigm/system/code belongs the 'set of pieces, parts or details which cannot be worn at the same time on the same part of the body, and whose variation corresponds to a change in the meaning of the clothing', while the garment *parole*/syntagm/message is 'the juxtaposition in the same type of dress of different elements'.[6] Imagine a girl dressed in teeshirt, jeans and sandals: that is a message which tells you what kind of person she is, or what she is doing or what mood she is in, or all these things, depending on the context. She has selected these units of clothing and combined them into a garment unit 'of a higher degree of complexity'. She has selected the teeshirt from the set of clothes which cover the upper half of the body, jeans from the set of clothes which cover the lower half of the body and sandals from the set of footwear. The process of selection depends on her knowing what these sets are—on possessing a classification system of her wardrobe which groups teeshirt with, say, blouse and shirt as items which have the same function and only one of which she needs. The process of combination depends upon her knowing the rules by which garments are acceptably combined: that for instance sandals, not court shoes, go with jeans (though the rules of fashion are so volatile that one cannot be too dogmatic in these matters). The combination teeshirt-jeans-sandals is, in short, a kind of sentence.

Consider the sentence, 'Ships crossed the sea'. This has been constructed by selecting certain linguistic entities and combining them into a linguistic unit (syntagm) of a higher degree of complexity: selecting *ships* from the set (paradigm) of words with the same grammatical function (i.e. nouns) and belonging to the same semantic field (e.g. *craft, vessels, boats* etc.); selecting *crossed* from the set of verbs with the same general meaning (e.g. *went over, sailed across, traversed* etc.) and selecting *sea* from another set of nouns such as *ocean, water* etc. And having been selected, these verbal entities are then combined according to the rules of English grammar. To say 'The sea crossed the ships' would be nonsensical, equivalent to trying to wear jeans above the waist and a teeshirt below (both types of mistake commonly made by infants before they have mastered the basic rules of speech and dressing).

Selection involves the perception of similarity (to group the items of the system into sets) and it implies the possibility of substitution (*blouse* instead of *teeshirt*, *boats* instead of *ships*). It is therefore the process by which metaphor is generated, for metaphor is substitution based on a certain kind of similarity. If I change the sentence, 'Ships crossed the sea' to 'Ships *ploughed* the sea', I have substituted *ploughed* for *crossed*, having perceived a similarity between the movement of a plough through the earth and of a ship through the sea. Note, however, that the awareness of *difference* between ships and ploughs is not suppressed: it is indeed essential to the metaphor. As Stephen Ullmann observes: 'It is an essential feature of a metaphor that there must be a certain distance between tenor and vehicle.* Their similarity must be accompanied by a feeling of disparity; they must belong to different spheres of thought.'[7]

Metonymy is a much less familiar term than metaphor, at least in Anglo-American criticism, though it is quite as common a rhetorical device in speech and writing. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines metonymy as 'a figure in which the name of an attribute or adjunct is substituted for that of the thing meant, e.g. *sceptre* for *authority*'. Richard A. Lanham gives a slightly different definition in his *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* 'Substitution of cause for effect or effect for cause, proper name for one of its qualities or vice versa: so the Wife of Bath is spoken of as half Venus and half Mars to denote her unique mixture of love and strife.' Metonymy is closely associated with synecdoche, defined by Lanham as 'the substitution of part for whole, genus for species or vice versa: "All hands on deck".'[8] The hackneyed lines, 'The hand that rocks the cradle/Is the hand that rules the world' include both tropes—the synecdoche 'hand' meaning 'person' (by inference, 'mother') and the metonymy 'cradle' meaning 'child'. In Jakobson's scheme, metonymy includes synecdoche.

Rhetoricians and critics from Aristotle to the present day have generally regarded metonymy and synecdoche as forms or subspecies

*Terms coined by I. A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* to distinguish the two elements in a metaphor or simile. In 'Ships ploughed the sea', 'Ships' movement' is the tenor and 'plough' the vehicle.

of metaphor, and it is easy to see why. Superficially they seem to be the same sort of thing—figurative transformations of literal statements. Metonymy and synecdoche seem to involve, like metaphor, the substitution of one term for another, and indeed the definitions quoted above use the word 'substitution'. Jakobson, however (and there is no more striking example of the advantages a structuralist approach may have over a commonsense empirical approach) argues that that metaphor and metonymy are *opposed*, because generated according to opposite principles.

Metaphor, as we have seen, belongs to the selection axis of language; metonymy and synecdoche belong to the combination axis of language. If we transform our model sentence into '*Keels* crossed the *deep*' we have used a synecdoche (*keels*) and a metonymy (*deep*) not on the basis of similarity but of contiguity. *Keel* may stand for *ship* not because it is similar to a ship but because it is part of a ship (it so happens that a keel is the same shape as a ship, but *sail*, which would be an alternative synecdoche, is not). *Deep* may stand for *sea* not because of any similarity between them but because depth is a property of the sea. It may be objected that these tropes are nevertheless formed by a process of substitution—*keels* for *ships*, *deep* for *sea*—and are not therefore fundamentally different from metaphor. To answer this objection we need to add an item to Jakobson's terminology. In his scheme selection is opposed to combination, and substitution is opposed to 'contexture'—the process by which 'any linguistic unit at one and the same time serves as a context for simpler units and/or finds its own context in a more complex linguistic unit.'[9] But 'contexture' is not an optional operation in quite the same way as 'substitution'—it is, rather, a law of language. I suggest that the term we need is *deletion*: deletion is to combination as substitution is to selection. Metonymies and synecdoches are *condensations* of contexture. The sentence, 'Keels crossed the deep' (a non-metaphorical but still figurative utterance) is a transformation of a notional sentence, *The keels of the ships crossed the deep sea* (itself a combination of simpler kernel sentences) by means of deletions. A rhetorical figure, rather than a précis, results because the items deleted are not those which seem logically the most dispensable. As the word *ship* includes the idea of keels, *keels* is logically redundant and would be the obvious candidate for omission in a more concise statement of the event, and the same applies to *deep*. Metonymy and synecdoche, in short, are produced by deleting one or more items from a natural combination, but not the items it would be most natural to omit: this illogicality is equivalent to the coexistence of similarity and dissimilarity in metaphor.

On a pragmatic level, of course, metonymy may still be seen as a process of substitution: we strike out *ships* in our manuscript and insert *keels*, without consciously going through the process of expansion and deletion described above. This does not affect the fundamental structural opposition of metaphor and metonymy, which rests on the basic opposition between selection and combination.

> Selection (and correspondingly substitution) deals with entities conjoined in the code, but not in the given message, whereas in the case of combination the entities are conjoined in both or only in the actual message.[10]

Ploughed has been selected in preference to, or substituted for, other verbs of movement and penetration (like *crossed, cut through, scored*) which are conjoined in the code of English (by belonging to a class of verbs with approximately similar meanings) but not conjoined in the message (because only one of them is required). *Keels*, on the other hand, is conjoined with *ships* both in the code (as nouns, as items in nautical vocabulary) and in the notional message, *The keels of the ships etc.* The contiguity of *keels* and *ships* in many possible messages as well as in the code reflects their actual existential contiguity in the world, in what linguistics calls 'context', whereas there is no such contiguity between ploughs and ships.

2 Two Types of Aphasia

Impressive evidence for Jakobson's argument that metaphor and metonymy are polar opposites corresponding to the selection and combination axes of language comes from the study of aphasia (severe speech disability). Traditionally aphasia has been studied under the two aspects of sending and receiving the verbal message. Jakobson, however makes his methodological 'cut' in a different dimension, along the line between selection and combination (and again the advantage of a structuralist over an empirical approach to the problem is striking):

> We distinguish two basic types of aphasia—depending on whether the major deficiency lies in selection or substitution, with relative stability of combination and contexture; or conversely, in combination and contexture, with relative retention of normal selection and substitution.[1]

Aphasics who have difficulty with the selection axis of language—who suffer, in Jakobson's terms from 'selection deficiency' or 'similarity disorder'—are heavily dependent on context, i.e. on contiguity, to sustain discourse.

> The more his utterances are dependent on the context, the better he copes with his verbal task. He feels unable to utter a sentence which responds

neither to the cue of his interlocutor nor to the actual situation. The sentence 'it rains' cannot be produced unless the utterer sees that it is actually raining.[2]

Even more striking: a patient asked to repeat the word 'no', replied, 'No, I can't do it'. Context enabled him to use the word that he could not consciously 'select' from an abstract paradigm. In this kind of aphasic speech the grammatical subject of the sentence tends to be vague (represented by 'thing' or 'it'), elliptical or non-existent, while words naturally combined with each other by grammatical agreement or government, and words with an inherent reference to the context, like pronouns and adverbs, tend to survive. Objects are defined by reference to their specific contextual variants rather than by a comprehensive generic term (one patient would never say *knife*, only *pencil-sharpener*, *apple-parer*, *bread knife*, *knife-and-fork*). And, most interesting of all, aphasics of this type make 'metonymic' mistakes by transferring figures of combination and deletion to the axis of selection and substitution:

Fork is substituted for *knife*, *table* for *lamp*, *smoke* for *pipe*, *eat* for *toaster*. A typical case is reported by Head: 'When he failed to recall the name for "black" he described it as "What you do for the dead"; this he shortened to "dead".'

Such metonymies may be characterized as projections from the line of a habitual context into the line of substitution and selection: a sign (e.g. *fork*) which usually occurs together with another sign (e.g. *knife*) may be used instead of this sign.[3]

In the opposite type of aphasia—'contexture deficiency' or 'contiguity disorder'—it is the combination of linguistic units into a higher degree of complexity that causes difficulty, and the features of similarity disorder are reversed. Word order becomes chaotic, words with a purely grammatical (i.e. connective) function like prepositions, conjunctions and pronouns, disappear, but the subject tends to remain, and in extreme cases each sentence consists of a single subject-word. These aphasics tend to make 'metaphorical' mistakes:

'To say what a thing is, is to say what a thing is like', Jackson notes. . . . The patient confined to the substitution set (once contexture is deficient) deals with similarities, and his approximate identifications are of a metaphoric nature. . . . *Spyglass* for *microscope*, or *fire* for *gaslight* are typical examples of such quasi-metaphoric expressions, as Jackson christened them, since in contradistinction to rhetoric or poetic metaphors, they present no deliberate transfer of meaning.[4]

This evidence from the clinical study of aphasia is not merely fascinating in its own right and persuasive support for Jakobson's general theory of language; it is, I believe, of direct relevance to the study of modern literature and its notorious 'obscurity'. If much

modern literature is exceptionally difficult to understand, this can only be because of some dislocation or distortion of either the selection or the combination axes of language; and of some modern writing, e.g. the work of Gertrude Stein and Samuel Beckett, it is not an exaggeration to say that it aspires to the condition of aphasia. We shall investigate this further in due course; I proceed immediately to consider the final section of Jakobson's paper, 'The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles', in which he applies his distinction to all discourse, and indeed to all culture.

3 The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles

The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or their contiguity. The metaphorical way would be the more appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively. In aphasia one or other of these two processes is blocked. . . . In normal verbal behaviour both processes are continually operative, but careful observation will reveal that under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality, and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes over the other.[1]

Jakobson proceeds to classify a great variety of cultural phenomena according to this distinction. Thus, drama is basically metaphoric and film basically metonymic, but within the art of film the technique of montage is metaphoric, while the technique of close-up is synecdochic. In the Freudian interpretation of dreams, 'condensation and displacement' refer to metonymic aspects of the dreamwork, while 'identification and symbolism' are metaphoric.* In painting, cubism 'where the object is transformed into a set of synecdoches' is metonymic and surrealism metaphoric (presumably because it combines objects not contiguous in nature, and selects and substitutes

*These are the basic processes by which the latent content of the dream—the real anxieties or desires which motivate it—is translated into its manifest content, the dream itself. Condensation is the process by which the latent content of the dream is highly compressed, so that one item stands for many different dream thoughts, and displacement is the process by which dreams are often differently centred from the anxieties or guilts which trigger them off. Thus something trivial in a dream may have the significance of something important in actuality and the connection between the two can be traced along a line of contiguities by the technique of free association. Dream symbolism is the more familiar process by which, for instance, long pointed objects represent male sexuality and hollow round objects female sexuality.

visual/tactile values on the principle of similarity or contrast.* The two types of magic discriminated by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, homeopathic or imitative magic based on similarity and contagious magic based on contact, correspond to the metaphor/metonymy distinction. In literature, Russian lyrical songs are metaphoric, heroic epics metonymic. Prose, which is 'forwarded essentially by contiguity' tends towards the metonymic pole, while poetry, which in its metrical patterning and use of rhyme and other phonological devices emphasizes similarity, tends towards the metaphoric pole. Romantic and symbolist writing is metaphoric, and realist writing is metonymic: 'following the path of contiguous relationships, the realistic author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He is fond of synecdochic details. In the scene of Anna Karenina's suicide Tolstoy's artistic attention is focused on the heroine's handbag. . . .'[2]

'The dichotomy here discussed', says Jakobson, 'appears to be of primal significance and consequence for all verbal behaviour and for human behaviour in general'† and it may be asked whether anything that offers to explain so much can possibly be useful, even if true. I believe it can, for the reason that it is a binary system capable of being applied to data at different levels of generality, and because it is a theory of dominance of one quality over another, not of mutually exclusive qualities.‡ Thus the same distinction can serve to explain

*Cf. Max Ernst: 'One rainy day in 1919, finding myself in a village on the Rhine, I was struck with the obsession which held under my gaze the pages of an illustrated catalogue showing objects designed for anthropologic, microscopic, psychologic, mineralogic, and paleontologic demonstration. There I found brought together elements of figuration so remote that the sheer absurdity of that collection provoked a sudden intensification of the visionary faculties in me and brought forth an illusive succession of contradictory images, double, triple and multiple images, piling up on each other with the persistence and rapidity which are peculiar to love memories and visions of half-asleep.

'These visions called themselves new planes, because of their meeting in a new unknown (the plane of non-agreement).' *Beyond Painting* (New York, 1948), quoted in *The Modern Tradition* (New York, 1965) ed. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson Jr. p. 163.

† And perhaps not only human behaviour. Recent experiments in America in teaching chimpanzees sign-language have made impressive progress. The chimps are able spontaneously to combine the signs they have learned to describe novel situations, and it is reported that one chimp, Washoe, referred to a duck as 'water-bird' and another, Lucy, referred to a melon as 'candy-drink'—metonymic and metaphoric expressions, respectively. 'The Signs of Washoe', *Horizon*, BBC 2, 4 November, 1974.

‡ I think Hayden White fails to appreciate this point about dominance when he describes the metaphor-metonymy distinction as 'dualistic' (*Metahistory*, p. 33n.) He himself follows a more traditional fourfold distinction between the 'master-tropes' of Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche and Irony, which he ingeniously combines with other fourfold classifications of Argument (Formism, Organicism, Mechanism, Contextualism) Emplotment (Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, Satire) and Ideology (Anarchism, Conservatism, Radicalism, Liberalism) to establish a typology of historiography. The symmetry of this apparatus is not without its disadvantages; in particular it entails a strong contrast between synecdoche (seen as essentially integrative, relating part to whole, and thus allied to metaphor) and metonymy (seen as essentially reductive, relating effect to cause, and allied to irony) which tends to blur the meaning of all four terms and thus limit their explanatory power.

both the difference between category A and category B and the difference between item X and item Y in category A. To make this point clear it is necessary to look more closely at some of Jakobson's pairings of opposites, and to follow up what are no more than cryptic hints in his paper. But first, for convenience of reference, the main points of the paper may be summarized in a schematic fashion by two lists:

METAPHOR	METONYMY
Paradigm	Syntagm
Similarity	Contiguity
Selection	Combination
Substitution	[Deletion] Contexture
Contiguity Disorder	Similarity Disorder
Contexture Deficiency	Selection Deficiency
Drama	Film
Montage	Close-up
Dream symbolism	Dream Condensation & Displacement
Surrealism	Cubism
Imitative Magic	Contagious Magic
Poetry	Prose
Lyric	Epic
Romanticism & Symbolism	Realism

4 Drama and Film

When Jakobson says that drama is essentially 'metaphoric' he is clearly thinking of the generic character of dramatic art as it has manifested itself throughout the history of culture. Arising out of religious ritual (in which a symbolic sacrifice was *substituted* for a real one) drama is correctly interpreted by its audience as being analogous to rather than directly imitative of reality, and has attained its highest achievements (in classical Greece, in Elizabethan England, in neoclassical France) by being poetic, using a language with a built-in emphasis on patterns of similarity and contrast (contrast being a kind of negative similarity). The 'unities' of classical tragedy are not means of producing a realistic

illusion, but of bringing into a single frame of reference a constellation of events (say, Oedipus's birth, his killing of an old man, solving of a riddle, marriage) that were not contiguous in space or time but combine on the level of similarity (the old man is the same as the father, the wife is the same as the mother, the son is the same as the husband) to form a message of tragic import. Elizabethan drama is more obviously narrative than Greek tragedy (that is, more linear or syntagmatic in its construction) but its most distinctive formal feature, the double plot, is a device of similarity and contrast. The two plots of *King Lear* and the complex pairing and contrasting and disguising of characters in that play is a classic example of such dramatic structure, which generally has the effect of retarding, or distracting attention from, the chronological sequence of events. In the storm scene of *Lear*, for instance—one of the peaks of Shakespeare's dramatic achievement—there is no linear progress: nothing happens, really, except that the characters juggle with similarities and contrasts: between the weather and human life, between appearances and realities. And it is not only in *Lear* that the chain of sequentiality and causality in Shakespearean tragedy proves under scrutiny to be curiously insubstantial. Stephen Booth has convincingly demonstrated how the opening of *Hamlet* plunges us immediately into a field of paradoxes and non-sequiturs which we struggle in vain to unite into a coherent pattern of cause and effect[1] (hence, perhaps, the ease with which Tom Stoppard grafted on to it his more explicitly absurdist and metaphorical *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*). It is demonstrable that the plot of *Othello* allows no time in which Desdemona could have committed adultery with Cassio—but that anomaly doesn't matter, and is indeed rarely noticed in the theatre: the play is built on contrasts—Othello's blackness with Desdemona's whiteness, his jealousy against her innocence, his naivety against Iago's cunning—not cause-and-effect. Othello's self-justifying soliloquy, 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul' (V, ii, 1) carries a bitter irony, for there is no cause: not only is Desdemona innocent, but Iago's malice has no real motive (that is why it is so effective).

The naturalistic 'fourth wall' plays which have dominated the commercial stage in our era must be seen as a 'metonymic' deviation from the metaphoric norm which the drama displays when viewed in deep historical perspective. In naturalistic drama every action is realistically motivated, dramatic time is almost indistinguishable from real time, ('deletions' from the chronological sequence being marked by act or scene divisions) and the characters are set in a contextual space bounded and filled with real (or *trompe l'oeil* imitations of) objects—doors, windows, curtains, sofas, rugs—all arranged in the same relations of contiguity with each other and with the actors as they would be in reality. Such naturalism is, arguably, unnatural in the theatre. In reaction against it, many modern playwrights have put an

extreme stress on the metaphoric dimension of drama. In Beckett's plays for instance, there is no progress through time, no logic of cause and effect, and the chintz and upholstery of drawing-rooms has given way to bare, stark acting spaces, with perhaps a chair, a row of dustbins and a high window from which nothing is visible (*End Game*). These plays offer themselves overtly as metaphors for the human condition, for on the literal level they are scarcely intelligible. Yet arguably *any* play, however naturalistic in style, is essentially metaphorical in that it is recognized as a *performance*: i.e. our pleasure in the play depends on our continuous and conscious awareness that we are spectators not of reality but of a conventionalized model of reality, constructed before us by actors who speak words not their own but provided by an invisible dramatist. The curtain call at which the actor who died in the last act takes his smiling bow is the conventional sign of this separation between the actors and their roles, between life and art.

The experience of watching a film is entirely different, notwithstanding the superficial similarity of modern theatre and cinema auditoria. There is, for example, no cinematic curtain call. Credits scarcely serve the same function: being written signs in an essentially non-literary medium their impact is comparatively weak, and often considerable ingenuity is used to make it even weaker, distracting our attention from the information the credits convey and integrating them into the film 'discourse' itself (by, for instance, delaying their introduction and/or by superimposing the words on scenic establishing shots or even action shots). Some films do attempt something like a curtain call at the end when they present a series of stills of the main actors with their real names superimposed, but these are invariably stills taken from the film itself, portraying the actor 'in character'—in other words the gap between performance and reality is not exposed.

Of course it is always possible for the film-maker to expose the artificiality of his production—Lindsay Anderson's *O Lucky Man*, for instance, ends with a celebration party on the set for actors and technicians, and Fellini likes to incorporate his cameras and other equipment into his pictures—but this is a highly deviant gesture in film. It is a commonplace that film creates an 'illusion of life' much more readily than drama. We are more likely to feel strong physical symptoms of pity, fear, etc. in the cinema than in the theatre, and this has little to do with aesthetic values. Whereas the play is created before us at every performance, the film is more like a record of something that happened, or is happening, only once. The camera and the microphone are voyeuristic instruments: they spy on, eavesdrop on experience and they can in effect follow the characters anywhere—out into the wilderness or into bed—without betraying their presence, so that nothing is easier for the film-maker than to create the illusion of reality. Of course film is still a system of signs, a conventional language

that has to be learned (films are more or less unintelligible to primitive people never exposed to them before).[2] The oblong frame around the image does not correspond to the field of human vision, and the repertoire of cinematic shots—long-shot, close-up, wide-angle, etc.—bears only a schematic resemblance to human optics. Nevertheless, once the language of film has been acquired it *seems* natural: hence the thudding hearts, the moist eyes, in the stalls. We tend to take the camera eye for granted, and to accept the 'truth' of what it shows us even though its perspective is never exactly the same as human vision.

This verisimilitude can be explained as a function of the metonymic character of the film medium. We move through time and space lineally and our sensory experience is a succession of contiguities. The basic units of the film, the shot and the scene, are composed along the same line of contiguity and combination, and the devices by which the one-damn-thing-after-another of experience is rendered more dramatic and meaningful are characteristically metonymic devices that operate along the same axis: the synecdochic close-up that represents the whole by the part, the slow-motion sequence that retards without rupturing the natural tempo of successiveness, the high or low angle shot that 'defamiliarizes', without departing from, the action it is focused on. Consciousness is not, of course, bound to the line of spatio-temporal contiguity, in the way that sensory experience is, but then film does not deal very much or very effectively with consciousness except insofar as it is manifested in behaviour and speech, or can be reflected in landscape through the pathetic fallacy, or suggested by music on the sound track.

This does not mean that film has no metaphoric devices, or that it may not be pushed in the direction of metaphorical structure. Jakobson categorizes montage as metaphoric, presumably because it juxtaposes images on the basis of their similarity (or contrast) rather than their contiguity in space-time. However, the fact that the techniques of cutting and splicing by which montage is achieved are also the techniques of all film editing, by which any film of the least degree of sophistication is composed, creates the possibility of confusion here. John Harrington, for example, in his *The Rhetoric of Film*, defines montage as

> a rhetorical arrangement of juxtaposed shots. The combination, or gestalt, produces an idea by combining the visual elements of two dissimilar images. A longing face, for instance, juxtaposed to a turkey dinner suggests hunger. Or the image of a fox following that of a man making a business deal would indicate slyness. Segments of film working together to create a single idea have no counterpart in nature; their juxtaposition occurs through the editor's imaginative yoke.[3]

The main drift of this definition confirms Jakobson's classification of montage as metaphorical, but the first of Harrington's examples is in

fact metonymic or synecdochic in Jakobson's sense: longing faces and turkey dinners *are* found together in nature (i.e. real contexts) and all that has been done in this hypothetical montage is to delete some of the links (*e.g.* a window) in a chain of contiguities that would link the face with the turkey. The fox and the businessman, on the other hand, are not contiguous in nature, but are connected in the montage through a suggested similarity of behaviour, as in the verbal metaphor 'a foxy businessman'. Context is all-important. If the montage of longing face and turkey dinner described by Harrington were in a film adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, we should interpret it metonymically; if it were interpolated in a documentary about starving animals, it would be metaphoric. Those favourite filmic metaphors for sexual intercourse in the pre-permissive cinema, skyrockets and waves pounding on the shore, could be disguised as metonymic background if the consummation were taking place on a beach on Independence Day, but would be perceived as overtly metaphorical if it were taking place on Christmas Eve in a city penthouse.

Eisenstein himself included in the concept of montage juxtapositions that are metonymic as well as metaphoric:

> The juxtaposition of two separate shots by splicing them together resembles not so much a simple sum of one shot plus another shot—as it does a *creation* . . . each montage piece exists no longer as something unrelated, but as a given *particular representation* of the general theme that in equal measure penetrates all the shot-pieces. The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that *general* quality in which each detail has participated and which binds together all the details into a whole, namely, into that generalized *image*, wherein the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme. . . . What exactly is this process? A given order of hands on the dial of a clock invokes a host of representations associated with the time that corresponds to the given order. Suppose, for example, the given figure be five. Our imagination is trained to respond to this figure by calling to mind pictures of all sorts of events that occur at that hour. Perhaps tea, the end of the day's work, the beginning of rush hour on the subway, perhaps shops closing, or the peculiar late afternoon light. . . . In any case we will automatically recall a series of pictures (representations) of what happens at five o'clock. The image of five o'clock is compounded of all these individual pictures.[4]

Translated into film such a montage of 'five o'clock' would be metonymic or synecdochic rather than metaphorical, representing the whole by parts, parts which are contiguous (because they belong to a larger complex of phenomena taking place at the same time) rather than similar. This is confirmed by Eisenstein's use of the word 'condensation' a few lines later: 'There occurs "condensation" within the process above described: the chain of intervening links falls away, and there is produced instantaneous connection between the figure and our perception of the time to which it corresponds.'[5]

Condensation, it will be recalled, belongs to the metonymic axis in Jakobson's scheme.

Eisenstein was not so much concerned with the difference between metaphoric and metonymic montage as with the difference between montage in general, and what he calls 'representation'—the photographing of an action from a single set-up by a simple accumulation of 'one shot plus another shot'—the cinematic equivalent of non-rhetorical, referential language in verbal discourse. Though celebrated for his daring use of the overtly metaphorical montage (e.g. soldiers being gunned down juxtaposed to cattle being slaughtered, Kerensky juxtaposed with a peacock) Eisenstein was comparatively sparing in his use of the device[6] (*Battleship Potemkin*, for instance, has no fully metaphorical montage though, as Roy Armes points out, the juxtaposition of shots of the three lions, one lying, one sitting and one roaring in the Odessa Steps sequence, creates the impression of a lion coming to life and 'conveyed the idea of protest—with an emotional meaning something like "Even the very stones cried out" '[7]) for the simple reason that if it becomes the main principle of composition in a film, narrative is more or less impossible to sustain. 'Underground' movies define themselves as deviant by deliberately resisting the natural metonymic tendency of the medium, either by a total commitment to montage, bombarding us with images between which there are only paradigmatic relations of similarity and contrast, or by parodying and frustrating the syntagm, setting the naturally linear and 'moving' medium against an unmoving object—the Empire State Building, for instance, or a man sleeping. Poetic drama, as I suggested earlier, is also in a paradoxical sense unmoving, nonprogressive, more concerned with paradigmatic similarities and contrasts than with syntagmatic sequence and cause-and-effect. The peculiar resistance of Shakespearian drama to successful translation into film, despite its superficial abundance of cinematic assets (exotic settings, duels, battles, pageantry etc.) is notorious; and one may confidently assert that the same difficulty would be still more acutely felt in any attempt to film Beckett's plays.* Even modern naturalistic drama (e.g. Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* or Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*) seems slightly ill-at-ease in the film medium, and

*It is noteworthy that Beckett's one screenplay, for a short film entitled *Film*, made in 1964 with Buster Keaton in the main role, is quite different in structure from his plays, though just as 'experimental' and aesthetically self-conscious. There is plenty of action and no dialogue. Event succeeds event in a logical time/space continuum. The camera follows a man along a street and up some stairs to a room; whenever the camera eye threatens to get a view of the man's face he displays anxiety and takes evasive action. In the room he banishes or covers all objects with eyes—animals, pictures, etc. But while he is dozing the camera eye stealthily moves round to view his face. The man wakes and registers horror at being observed. A cinematic 'cut' identifies the observer as the man himself 'but with a very different expression, impossible to describe, neither severity nor benignity, but rather acute *intentness*'. (Samuel Beckett, *Film* (1972) p. 47.)

most obviously so when it deserts the economical single setting for which it was originally designed, to take advantage of the freedom of location afforded by film. The two media seem to pull against each other. The realistic novel, on the other hand, converts very easily into film—and novelists were in fact presenting action cinematically long before the invention of the moving-picture camera. Consider this passage from George Eliot's first published work of fiction, 'The Sad Misfortunes of Amos Barton':

> Look at him as he winds through the little churchyard! The silver light that falls aslant on church and tomb, enables you to see his slim, black figure, made all the slimmer by tight pantaloons, as it flits past the pale gravestones. He walks with a quick step, and is now rapping with sharp decision at the vicarage door. It is opened without delay by the nurse, cook and housemaid, all at once—that is to say by the robust maid of all work, Nanny; and as Mr Barton hangs up his hat in the passage, you see that a narrow face of no particular complexion—even the smallpox that has attacked it seems to have been of a mongrel, indefinite kind—with features of no particular shape, and an eye of no particular expression, is surmounted by a slope of baldness gently rising from brow to crown. You judge him, rightly, to be about forty. . . .[8]

The passage continues in the same style: Barton opens the sitting-room door and, looking over his shoulder as it were, we see his wife Milly pacing up and down by the light of the fire, comforting the baby. Change George Eliot's 'you' to 'we' and the passage would read not unlike a film scenario. The action certainly breaks down very readily into a sequence of 'shots': *high-angle crane shot of Barton walking through churchyard; cut to door of vicarage opened by Nanny; close-up of Barton's face as he hangs up his hat* . . . and so on. In one respect the passage requires the cinema for its full realization: the charmless, yet human, ordinariness of Barton's physiognomy—the ordinariness which is unloveable yet which (George Eliot insists) we must learn to love—is a quality the cinema can convey very powerfully and immediately, whereas George Eliot can only indicate it verbally by means of negations. There is little doubt, I think, that George Eliot would have been deeply interested in the possibilities offered by the motion-picture camera of capturing the human significance of the commonplace: as it was, she had to appeal, as a visual analogy for her art, to the static pictures of the Dutch painters.[9]