

# Cinematic Carcerality: Prison Metaphors in Film

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UNTIL NOW, CINEMATIC PRISON METAPHORS HAVE BEEN NEGLECTED by both metaphor and film studies. By focusing on these ignored types of metaphor, this article fills a crucial gap in the critical understanding of metaphor. The first part of this article develops a taxonomy of prison and film metaphors. The first taxonomy (of prison metaphors) is based on the categories developed by Monika Fludernik and discriminates between metaphors of imprisonment that use the prison as tenor (PRISON IS X) and proper prison metaphors that use the prison as vehicle (X IS PRISON). The second list (of film metaphors) relies on Charles Forceville's analyses of pictorial metaphors in advertisements and is intended as an alternative to already existing studies.

The following discussion of prison metaphors in film demonstrates the heuristic value of these taxonomies with regard to the recipient's quest for meaning. In other words, because the analyses of metaphors in this article are geared toward semantic significance, they serve as starting points for new interpretations of a number of films. More specifically, the use of certain prison metaphors centrally correlates with the ideological underpinnings<sup>1</sup> of the films that use them. For example, representations of the prison as a womb or a matrix of spiritual rebirth may be used to legitimize the prison, while portrayals of the prison in terms of hell or a tomb may serve to critique the prison. On the other hand, prison metaphors that describe a segment of the world outside prison in terms of imprisonment frequently correlate with social criticism and are used to shed a critical light on a certain aspect of society (e.g., class) by demonstrating how restrained people may be even outside the walls of the prison.

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## What is a Prison Metaphor?

Two types of prison metaphors exist. First, the prison may serve as the tenor of a metaphor which invites us to see the prison as something else (PRISON IS X). Second, the prison may serve as the vehicle of a metaphor that describes a domain in the outside world as a prison (X IS PRISON). Along the lines of so-called “animal metaphors” (X IS ANIMAL, like “you are a rat”), the term “prison metaphor” refers to images in which the prison serves as the vehicle (X IS PRISON), while the terms “images of carcerality” and “metaphors of imprisonment” denote metaphors in which the prison serves as the tenor (PRISON IS X).

Metaphors of imprisonment that describe the prison in terms of another domain of human experience usually play an important role with regard to the rendering of the prison experience and normally occur in narratives that are set in prison. For example, at one point, the narrator of Thomas E. Gaddis’s 1955 novel *Birdman of Alcatraz* refers to Robert F. Stroud’s cell at Leavenworth penitentiary in terms of the “recesses of his stone womb” (170). In this case, the metaphor stresses the fact that the inmate finds himself in a sheltered place that allows him to pursue his bird studies.

Prison metaphors that project the image of the prison onto domains outside a penal context can be found in all types of narratives because they focus more generally on all manner of restraint on human action. For instance, in John Fowles’s 1969 novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Charles Smithson experiences his engagement promises to Ernestina Freeman (and by extension Victorian mores) as a prison: “And Ernestina, his engagement vows? But to recall them was to be a prisoner waking from a dream that he was free and trying to stand, only to be jerked down by his chains back into the black reality of his cell” (296). Such prison metaphors highlight that, even in the “free” world, people may be confined or restrained.

## What is a Film Metaphor?

Earlier critics either argue that cinematic metaphors are not possible (Arnheim 265; Woolf 309) or they have rather exclusionist views on film metaphors. For example, many critics assume that juxtapositions are the only way of evoking metaphorical readings in film (Bluestone

24; Dart; Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* and *Film Form*). Noël Carroll has a rather exclusionist view on film metaphor as well. He calls metaphorical relationships that are established by means of superimpositions “*strict filmic metaphor* or *core filmic metaphor*” (“Note” 218, italics in the original), and ignores a wide variety of other cinematic means of suggesting metaphorical readings. Finally, Trevor Whittock’s comprehensive *Metaphor and Film* has its faults as well. Whittock uses far too many analytical categories that are confusing, and his examples are frequently not persuasive. For instance, most of Whittock’s alleged distortion metaphors (63–64) are not metaphors at all. Rather, his examples concern the deranged vision of protagonists but they do not allow us to see one entity in terms of another.

The following taxonomy of cinematic metaphor primarily draws on Charles Forceville’s insights into the functioning of pictorial metaphors in advertisements and serves as an alternative to the models mentioned above.

To begin with, cinematic *similes* of the form “x is like y” usually use pre-existing similarities to invite us to see a link between two entities. For instance, in Stanley Kubrick’s film *A Clockwork Orange*, the uniform Alex (Malcolm McDowell) wears in prison blends in with the prison officers’ uniforms and the suits worn by the government officials, thus suggesting that the prison officers and the government officials are “imprisoned” by their work as well. Also, a film may use similar colors in order to encourage us to link certain entities. For instance, by repeatedly using dreary green backgrounds, Robert Bresson’s film *L’Argent* invites us to look for similarities between the central protagonist’s home, the school, and the prison. All of these settings are dominated by drab routines and monotonous schedules. In these two examples, the similarities are visual ones, and hence the “nature” of the *mis en scène* is more important than cinematographic considerations.

Whereas filmic similes direct attention to pre-existing resemblances, *metaphors* proper imply that the essence of something is not what we normally take it to be, but something quite different (x *is* y). The figurative interpretation follows from an awareness of the incongruity between two entities. Besides, “*metaphors suggest a stronger fusion between primary subject [tenor] and secondary subject [vehicle] than similes*” (Forceville 142, italics in the original). There are seven different ways of producing metaphors in film.

First, film metaphors may emerge from the *juxtaposition of disparate elements* (i.e., elements without obvious similarity). For example, in

David Lynch's film *Lost Highway*, Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty) is infatuated with his lover Alice Wakefield (Patricia Arquette), his obsession bordering on self-destruction. At one point, she tells him that she will not be able to see him. Pete is full of despair, and the film cuts from a close-up of Pete's face to a shot of moths inside a ceiling light, where they die in their attempt to fly into a light bulb. This juxtaposition allows us to see Alice *as* the light and Pete *as* a moth in so far as he destroys himself in the attempt to reach, have, or possess her. Indeed, later on in the film, she significantly tells him, "You'll never have me."<sup>2</sup>

Juxtapositions can of course also occur within a single shot. For example, toward the end of Lynch's film *The Elephant Man*, the deformed Englishman John Merrick (John Hurt) is chased by a bullying crowd until he collapses near a urinal. The juxtaposition of the elephant man with the urinal clearly codes the sensitive outcast as an "abject" society wants to get rid of.<sup>3</sup>

Second, cinematic metaphors can be generated by the *interplay between the auditory and the visual level*. In other words, one of the two metaphorical domains (usually the vehicle) can be introduced by spoken or written words, music, or sound, while the tenor is represented on the screen. For example, in Anthony Asquith's film version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the famous conversation between Gwendolen (Joan Greenwood) and Cecily (Dorothy Tutin), which is dominated by verbosity and stylized mannerisms, is juxtaposed with sounds of twittering birds. This juxtaposition allows us to see the women *as* birds producing nice but meaningless sounds.<sup>4</sup>

Also, in Christine Edzard's film adaptation of *Little Dorrit*, shots of the dirty and gloomy city of London are repeatedly combined with the sound of clinking coins, which is reminiscent of clinking chains in prison, and the sound of buzzing flies. The first juxtaposition defines London as a materialist city dominated by money and, by extension, a prison, while the second interplay between the auditory and the visual level codes the city as a dying carcass or tomb that attract flies.

Third, metaphorical readings may emerge from *matching shots*, that is, shots that present two different entities in the same way (e.g., by using the same camera angles or movements or the same lines of dialogue). For example, in Alain Resnais's *Nuit et Brouillard* [*Night and Fog*], a tracking shot of fence posts matches a low-angle shot of marching legs of German Nazis. These two shots may suggest that the Nazis are as well ordered but as lifeless and devoid of feeling as the inanimate fence posts.

Another such metaphor can be found in Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law*. Before Zack (Tom Waits) and Jack (John Lurie) become cellmates in the Orleans Parish Prison, we are presented with a dolly shot during the course of which the camera slowly and smoothly moves along the individual cells of the prison. And this shot is clearly reminiscent of the dolly shot at the beginning of the film, during the course of which the camera smoothly moves along coffin-like house fronts in New Orleans. Thus, having to live in dilapidated houses is presented as being similar to one's imprisonment in a cell. Society is represented as a prison because both involve lethargy and boredom.

Fourth, metaphors may emerge from *distortions*, that is, deviations from what is normally expected in film. Distortions can be achieved in a wide variety of different ways: the *mis en scène* may play a role but also the use of special lenses, camera speed, inserted cartoon sequences, etc. In any case, the image on the screen must represent an entity in such a way that our sense of what category it belongs to is affected. An example of a distortion metaphor can be found in *A Clockwork Orange* in the scene in which Alex kills an old lady (called the Cat Lady) with a sculpture of a penis. When the actual death blow is struck, we are confronted with an accelerating montage of details from the various erotic paintings in the room, linked together by the recurrent image of an open mouth representing the Cat Lady's scream. The representation of the brutal murder of the Cat Lady in terms of paintings (or art) allows us to see violence *as* a form of art, and this connection is also one of the central themes of the film.

Another example of a distortion metaphor can be found in Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove*. In this film, Kubrick repeatedly uses a fisheye lens<sup>5</sup> to depict an African-American bombardier (James Earl Jones), a member of a B-52 crew. Interestingly, the distorted images of his helmeted head make the bombardier look like the joystick in the cockpit so that we can see him *as* a component of nuclear-warfare technology.

Fifth, the *focusing on the same entity in two different scenes* may also evoke metaphorical readings. In other words, the unexpected depiction of entities that belong to a different domain might involve an intermingling of categories. For example, the depiction of details of prisons (such as bars, barbed wire, wire-netting fences, high and imposing towers or walls, uniforms, and pick-axes) in nonprison settings frequently allows us to see parts of the world as a prison. In the film *Little Dorrit*, Mrs. Clennam (Joan Greenwood) lives in a state of voluntary self-confinement and never leaves her house. Whenever the Clennam

house appears on the screen, it is always first seen through the bars of its wrought iron gate, and this detail of the *mis en scène* visually codes the house as a prison. Even though bars are metonyms of the prison, such images do not fully shade off into metonymy proper: in such tropes, the imported item comes from a domain (the prison) which is, at least at first glance, utterly alien to that of the tenor (society or the world).

By contrast, *metonymy* is a trope that involves condensation through deletion, and evokes new ideas through contiguity. Because the process of filming always entails selections and deletions (of parts of figures or the film set, etc.), film is inextricably tied to metonymies of a sort. Also, as Clifton (162–72) has shown, an object may be used to represent its owner or user, or a certain melody to represent a character, etc.

Sixth, as Trevor Whittock has shown (53), the *context* of a film may invite the audience to see one entity in terms of a different one. For example, in *Psycho*, Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) convinces Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) to return the money she has stolen from a client. Having made this decision, she goes to take a shower. Since we have been party to her temptation, guilt, struggle, resolve, and repentance, it is almost impossible not to feel that her washing herself is more than a physical deed, that it is also an act of spiritual cleansing.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, metaphorical readings can also emerge from the *superimposition of two distinct images*. For instance, in *Lost Highway*, Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) wakes up during the night, looks at his wife Renée (Patricia Arquette) and sees the face of an old man. More specifically, it is the face of the so-called “Mystery man” (Robert Blake) that is superimposed on Renée’s face. This superimposition allows us to see her *as* the Mystery Man with the consequence that the beautiful woman becomes threatening, scary, and ugly. And, indeed, the beautiful Renée is actually quite threatening for Fred. More specifically, Fred cannot have a “normal” relationship with her because, as we learn later on, she plays roles in porn films with Dick Laurent (Robert Loggia).

Fritz Lang’s film *Metropolis*, which deals with the inhumanity of factory work, contains another superimposition metaphor: at one point, we see a machine that explodes and kills a number of workers. At this point, a man-eating monster (“MOLOCH”) is superimposed on the machine—the machine is thus transformed into a devouring monster and we are invited to see the machine *as* a man-eating monster.

In contrast to Carroll (“Note” 220–21), who claims that visual metaphors are more prone to the reversibility of tenor and vehicle than verbal

metaphors, this article argues that film metaphors have clearly distinguishable tenors and vehicles. The stronger denotation, that is, the one more fully present in the narrative, serves as the metaphor's tenor, while the weaker or suggested one serves as the vehicle of the metaphor.

## Prison Metaphors in Film<sup>7</sup>

The film *The Shawshank Redemption* represents the prison as both a womb and a tomb. The movie is about the city banker Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) who is wrongfully convicted for murdering his wife and her lover and descends into the Shawshank State Prison, where he is exploited and raped. The metaphorical description of the prison begins with Andy's entering the Shawshank State Prison. The newcomer's entry ends in darkness and this image evokes the idea that the building "swallows" Andy.

On the auditory level, the voice-over narrator Red (Morgan Freeman) compares the new fish, who have to undress during the course of the induction process, to new-born babies ("They march you in naked as the day you were born, skin burning and half blind"), while later on, he argues that the prison takes the inmates' lives away ("They send you here for life and that's exactly what they take"). In this case, the metaphorical reading is evoked by the interplay between the auditory and the visual level. The tenor (the prison) is presented visually, while the vehicles (the womb and the tomb) are present verbally.

On the one hand, the inward movement into prison is presented as an entry into the maternal body, which implies infantilization and dependency but also the possibility of being reborn. On the other hand, the interplay suggests that because prisoners are withdrawn from life in the outside world and experience a social death in prison, one might see the inward movement into prison as an entry into a dark tomb. These connotations also centrally correlate with Andy's statement that in prison everything comes down to a simple choice: "Get busy living or get busy dying." This phrase is closely related to the presence or absence of hope, and serves as a reminder that if you do not keep moving in prison, you risk becoming "institutionalized," that is, part of the walls yourself.

Andy and his friend, the African-American Red, see the prison as a womb (or a matrix of spiritual rebirth), while the regime of the cruel Warden Norton (Bob Gunton) turns the prison into a tomb. More

specifically, the metaphors of imprisonment in the film draw a distinction between traditional or discipline-based prison regimes (like Norton's) and rehabilitative penal styles (like Andy's): "Andy strives to create a progressive apparatus within . . . [Norton's] semi-feudal system, one founded on the possibility of redemption and legitimized by reference to the arts" (Jarvis 198).

Already at the beginning of the film, Norton's regime is critiqued by means of a distortion metaphor that demonstrates that his system turns the inmates into insignificant ants. More specifically, before Andy enters the prison, we are presented with a bird's-eye view of the identical-looking prisoners in the exercise yard. The film thus accentuates the loss of the inmates' identity (and individuality) as well as their sense of insignificance in Norton's prison. Because the great distance between the scene and the camera turns the inmates into ants, this shot clearly comments on the prisoners' reification.

Furthermore, during the course of the film, Norton is repeatedly juxtaposed with dead or suffering prisoners. Norton exploits the prisoners as slave labor and allows the use of violence to support his corrupt regime. For example, Norton permits Captain Hadley (Clancy Brown) to beat the inmate "Fat Ass" (Frank Medrano) to death and to brutalize the rapist Bogs Diamond (Mark Rolston) so severely that he is disabled afterwards. Also, Norton uses the ex-banker Andy to run his various corrupt scams. When the innocent Andy wishes to get a new trial because the new inmate Tommy Williams (Gil Bellows) told him that Elmo Blatch (Bill Bolender) had actually committed the crime for which Andy is incarcerated, Norton sends Andy to the tomb-like "hole." Because Tommy declares that he would testify that Andy is innocent, Norton orders Hadley to kill Tommy, and we see Norton juxtaposed with Tommy's corpse, an image which codes him as a gravedigger.

In contrast to Norton, the hard-working Andy constantly tries to educate the prisoners about the importance of hope. For example, he builds a new prison library, helps the young Tommy Williams to achieve educational qualifications, and manages to persuade Red of the necessity of hope. From this perspective, the prison becomes a womb.

Andy's escape from prison also clearly evokes the association with a birth or rebirth: the inmate has to crawl through a dark tunnel which leads to a tight sewage pipe. Clearly, the parallels between Andy inching his way head-first through this dark and tight tunnel and the birth of a child are made apparent by this visual trope. When Andy



emerges from the pipe in the middle of a rain shower, he strips off his shirt and extends his arms up from his half-naked body to the sky. The camera then pulls back to high-angle shot of Andy as the showery rain washes down on him. Later on, the voice-over argues that Andy “crawled through a river of shit and came out clean on the other side.” The context of Andy’s escape and the interplay between the visual and the auditory channel clearly invite us to see the escape *as* a spiritual rebirth and, by extension, the prison *as* a matrix of spiritual rebirth. Because we have witnessed the brutal and unjust treatment the innocent Andy had to endure in prison, it is obvious that the rain washing down on him is more than physical, and also involves a process of redemption and spiritual cleansing.

Furthermore, during the surprise inspection of Andy’s cell, we see the word “MOTHER” scratched into the wall above the Rita Hayworth poster which Andy uses to cover the tunnel shaft in his cell. This juxtaposition might suggest that Rita Hayworth is some kind of mother figure and, by extension that Andy’s escape (through the tunnel) correlates with some kind of birth or rebirth.

Interestingly, the film uses numerous metaphors of imprisonment to critique “traditional” prisons based on discipline but simultaneously legitimates rehabilitative incarceration. By representing the prison as a matrix of spiritual rebirth, the film demonstrates that certain forms of reformatory imprisonment are not too bad after all. Moreover, since apart from the innocent prisoner-hero Andy, all the other prisoners are depicted as “real” criminals, the film seeks to persuade its recipients of the necessity of well-run rehabilitative prisons. The movie does not invite us to sympathize with the mass of ordinary prisoners because these “deviant” individuals are criminals who have to be imprisoned.

Older prison films use different metaphors of imprisonment for the same purpose. For example, the film *Birdman of Alcatraz* represents the prison (negatively) as a cage for wild animals but also (positively) as a laboratory or academy. This film is about the prisoner Robert F. Stroud (Burt Lancaster), who becomes a leading ornithologist known as the “Birdman of Alcatraz.”

At one point in the film, Stroud is sent to “the hole” of the penitentiary at Leavenworth after a fight with a fellow inmate. The film then juxtaposes a close-up of a rat with a shot of Stroud lying on the floor. This juxtaposition of disparate elements illustrates how the guards view the inmates, namely as rats, beasts, or vermin. Later on,

when Stroud is sent to the “hole” again, we witness the following conversation with Warden Shoemaker (Karl Malden):

SHOEMAKER: “No remorse, ey? No pity. Just an animal.”

STROUD: “Ain’t that what these cages are for? Animals?”

In this case, the interplay between the auditory and the visual channel codes the prison as a cage for animals—the film constructs the prison as a zoo.

On the other hand, the film also shows that certain forms of imprisonment can have positive effects on the inmates. Later on in the film, we are confronted with shots that present the prisoner as a harmless bird and the prison as a laboratory or academy. During the course of the movie, Stroud becomes a leading ornithologist who uses the prison as a sheltered place that allows him to pursue his bird studies. First, the repeated juxtaposition of birds in cages and Stroud in his cell codes the inmate as an “innocent” jailbird. Second, the juxtaposition of Stroud’s prison cell and his equipment (his microscope, his pipette, etc.) invites us to see the prison as a laboratory, study room, or academy.

The representation of prison as a zoo primarily serves to critique the treatment of inmates in “traditional” or discipline-based institutions like Leavenworth. This image highlights processes of dehumanization and depersonalization in prison. On the other hand, the representation of the prisoner as a harmless bird and the description of the prison as a laboratory serve to contrast rehabilitative penal styles and discipline-based institutions. In other words, like *The Shawshank Redemption*, this film argues in favor of reformative incarceration, which, by giving the inmates an occupation (like bird-breeding), allows them to rehabilitate.

Let me turn to a discussion of cinematic metaphors that use the prison as the vehicle (X IS PRISON). For example, the film *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* represents the situation of workers in Nottingham in terms of imprisonment and this prison metaphor is central with regard to the potential “message” of the film. In the movie, Colin (Tom Courtenay), a member of the working class, is sent to HM Borstal Ruxton Towers for robbing a bakery. The film “explains” the crime as follows: Colin accuses his mother of not having waited to get a new partner until his father was cold in his grave. She then slaps him and throws him out of the house. As an afterthought,

she orders him not to return without some money. The film thus stresses that the mother's melodramatic announcement drives Colin to commit the crime.

The film uses various flashbacks to demonstrate that in most areas of human activity outside prison, Colin is treated like a prisoner. The movie establishes various (mostly visual) parallels between the borstal and the working-class area in Nottingham, thus visually imputing to class the qualities of a prison. For instance, once Colin's father has died in the film, we see the family entering their small house in Nottingham's working-class district. The tiny family house is surrounded by extremely high walls, which are reminiscent of the imposing walls and towers of the borstal we see at the beginning of the film. Second, when Colin and Mike (James Bolam) "borrow" a car, and convince Audrey (Topsy Jane) and Gladys (Julia Foster) to join them, they stop on a hillside overlooking the smoking factories of Nottingham. When Colin and Audrey kiss for the first time, we see barbed wire behind them—a detail of the *mis en scène* that visually comments on the confinements of industrial Nottingham, thus providing a link to the borstal, which is also framed by barbed wire. Third, when Colin and his mother visit the superior of Colin's father at the factory in order to collect the father's insurance money, a worker opens the huge gate of the factory for them. And this action is clearly reminiscent of the opening of the borstal's huge gate at the beginning of the film.

These details of the *mis en scène*—the high and imposing walls, the barbed wire and the gate—in the world outside prison allow us to see Nottingham (and by extension the situation of the working class) as a prison. These entities are metonyms of the borstal which are employed to assert some sort of identity between the situation of an inmate in borstal and the situation of a British worker: both borstals and factories are disciplinary spaces which "mold" individuals in certain ways to make them "conform."

Another similarity between members of the working class and borstal inmates is that both groups are depicted as being treated in a rude manner. Even though Colin buys a first-class train ticket in one of the film's flashbacks, the booking office clerk (Frank Finlay) is very unfriendly and says: "Come on lad, I haven't got all day." The clerk seems to dislike Colin because of his working-class accent. Furthermore, this statement is reminiscent of the prison officer urging Colin to move on by saying, "Come on lad, we haven't got all day," at the

beginning of the film. One might refer to these two shots in terms of matching shots because the spoken lines are virtually identical.

*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* uses matching shots and metonyms of the borstal to represent class as a prison. *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* is another film that alludes to the carceral coordinates of society. In this film, James Allen (Paul Muni), an unemployed ex-World War I soldier, steals a few dollars because he is hungry. He is caught by the police and sentenced to serve time on one of the chain gangs in the South of the United States. He manages to escape and gradually develops into a rich and hard-working citizen. Allen is reincarcerated and escapes again only to live in constant fear of being recaptured.

Once Allen has escaped, the film begins to parallel the prison with the outside world, and these parallels turn into a critique of a malfunctioning society. For example, the counter where Allen buys a train ticket is framed by a wire-netting fence—just as the chain gang camp is framed by barbed wire. Additionally, during his first job outside, Allen has to work hard by using a pickaxe, which is precisely what he does on the chain gang. The wire-netting fence and the pickaxe are metonyms of the prison which reappear in the outside world, thus inviting us to see society *as* a prison.

Additionally, during the course of the film, we are presented with numerous bird's-eye views which make people appear insignificant. More specifically, the first shot of the World War I veterans, the first shots of the prisoners working in the quarries, and the first shot of citizens strolling through the streets of Chicago are all bird's-eye views that make the depicted people look alike. These shots all function as distortion metaphors in so far as they visually deprive people of their individuality. The fact that we are presented with cinematographically matching shots additionally suggests a link between the prison and society. More specifically, the prison and the outside world wipe out individualism in a rather similar fashion.

## Conclusion

Films are full of metaphors, and it is important to recognize them because they convey significant connotations. Metaphorical readings may emerge from the juxtaposition of disparate elements, the interplay

between the auditory and the visual level, the focusing on the same entity in two different scenes, matching shots, or distortions. Occasionally, superimpositions or the context of the film may play a role as well.

Movies may use “positive” metaphors of imprisonment (and represent the prison as a womb, a matrix of spiritual rebirth or an academy) or “negative” ones (and represent the prison as a tomb, or a cage for wild animals). And these metaphors of imprisonment centrally correlate with the general attitude toward prison that is expressed in such films. Interestingly, as bell hooks has shown, a “film may have incredibly revolutionary standpoints merged with conservative ones. This mingling of standpoints is often what makes it hard for audiences to critically ‘read’ the overall filmic narrative” (3).

The films analyzed in this article critique traditional- and discipline-based institutions by using “negative” metaphors of imprisonment. At the same time, they argue in favor of rehabilitative incarceration by using “positive” metaphors of imprisonment. Hence, they express some kind of liberal consensus. Most films reproduce the prison and its agenda and follow the idea of “wanting prisons as simply neither too hard nor too easy” (Tambling 128).

Prison metaphors, on the other hand, usually serve to critique certain limitations in the “free world” and thus carry significant ideological and critical weight. The films analyzed in this article represent society (or certain facets of it) in terms of imprisonment, and such metaphors centrally correlate with social criticism. Films frequently use metonyms of the prison (such as bars, barbed wire, looming towers, fences, etc.) to represent an element of society as a prison. The ideological underpinnings of films centrally correlate with the metaphors they use, and hence it is of vital importance to identify these metaphors. The taxonomies developed in this article might perhaps help achieve this task.

## Notes

1. Following Ann Kaplan’s definition, which is based on Louis Althusser, the term “ideology” does not refer to “beliefs people consciously hold but to the myths that a society lives by, as if these myths referred to some natural, unproblematic ‘reality’” (12–13).
2. Forceville would call such examples “metaphors with two pictorially present terms (MP2s)” (126–36). In such cases, the context helps us identify the vehicle and the tenor of the metaphor. For example, it does not make much sense to see Pete as the light.

3. Bordwell and Thompson mention a number of juxtapositions which involve nondiegetic inserts for comparison's sake (336). For example, at the beginning of Charles Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), we are presented with a cut from a (nondiegetic) flock of sheep to workers descending the stairs to an underground station. The cut allows us to see the workers as (passive and foolish) sheep.
4. Such film metaphors are reminiscent of Forceville's verbo-pictorial metaphors in advertisements (148–62) with regard to which the advertised product (the tenor) is represented pictorially and the other (the vehicle) verbally.
5. A fisheye lens is a camera lens that has a wider than normal angle of view (and usually a short focal length). It produces an image that is foreshortened in the center and increasingly distorted in the periphery.
6. Forceville calls such metaphors “metaphors with one pictorially present term (MP1s)” (109–26). In such cases, only one domain is present on the screen, and this is normally the tenor. The vehicle is normally pictorially absent but unambiguously suggested by the context.
7. The following section develops some material from my book, *Narrating the Prison* (Alber 2007). I would like to thank Cambria Press for permission to partly reuse this material.

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