CINEMA AS SECULAR CHURCH

CINEMA AS SECULAR CHURCH:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL TYPOLOGY AND

HERMENEUTICS

by

MARTY FAIRBAIRN, B.A., M.A.

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AUTHOR: Marty Fairbairn, B. A. (University of Guelph)

  M. A. (University of Guelph)

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ABSTRACT

The central claim of the present thesis is the idea that the film experience for us is the displaced expression of an interest which is fundamentally spiritual. After offering a phenomenological typology of the film experience, the thesis argues that the common denominator of these various types is the desire to touch the wholly other, a peculiarly postmodern variant of a much older desire, the desire to transcend oneself. Postmodern, secularized man is in fact deeply spiritual and the film experience can be shown to be an increasingly self-conscious, though still sublimated expression of this neeed to transcend the limits of the flesh.

What we get in the film experience is a religious smorgasbord, rather than any particular denominational perspective. The modern rise of science and technology as increasingly dependable sources of knowledge about the world, as well as various philosophical attacks which have been levelled at our ability to know the world and ourselves, have contributed to a growing sense of free-floating subjectivity. We no longer know exactly who we are. The vacuum left by the demise of religious authority cannot be filled by scientific/objective knowledge alone. We are in need of spiritual grounding as well, and through its contribution to constructed subjectivity, cinema is ideally suited to fill the void.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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List of Abbreviations

*ACA*1 George Dickie and R.J. Sclafani, eds. *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977).

*ACA*2 George Dickie, R.J. Sclafani and Ronald Roblin, eds. *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, 2nd. edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

Av Joe McCown, *Availability: Gabriel Marcel and the Phenomenology of Human Openness* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978).

BT Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967).

CI Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

EPT Steven W. Laycock and James G. Hart, eds. *Essays in Phenomenological Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

GGD Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

GS Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974).

IH Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, tr. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1970).

MPS Galen A. Johnson, "Desire and Invisibility in 'Eye and Mind': Some Remarks on Merleau-Ponty's Spirituality," in Patrick Burke and Jan van der Veken, eds., *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 85-96.

MR W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, tr. John B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960).

OWA Martin Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 17-87.

PF Ian Jarvie, *Philosophy of the Film: Epistemology, ontology, aesthetics* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).

PhAE   Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, tr. Edward S. Casey, Albert A. Anderson, Willis Domingo, and Leon Jacobson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). Originally published as *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), page references to French, English editions, respectively.

PhEx   Remy Kwant, *The Phenomenology of Expression* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978).

PhPer   Maurice Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962); originally published in French as *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1945), page references to French and English editions, respectively.

PhRel   Edward J. Jurji, *The Phenomenology of Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963).

PM   Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 2 vol's. Third Revised and enlarged edition (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1984).

PT   Martin Heidegger, *The Piety of Thinking*, tr. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

RB   Hans-Georg Gadamer *Relevance of the Beautiful*, tr. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

RC   Ivan Butler, *Religion in the Cinema* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1969).

S&S   Arthur Michael Ramsey, *Sacred and Secular: A Study in the Otherworldly and This-Worldly Aspects of Christianity* (London: Longman's, 1965).

TM   Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second revised edition, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 2nd. edition tr. W. Glen-Doepel (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975).

INTRODUCTION:

CINEMA AS SECULAR CHURCH

Many types of experience are possible at the cinema. In my Ph.D. thesis, I describe in the most nuanced way possible, that is to say phenomenologically, three different types of film experience.[1] The central claim that I develop and defend with this typology is the idea that *the cinematic experience is the displaced expression of an interest which is fundamentally spiritual in character, an interest which is seeking a new home in a secular society that regards this interest with disdain.* In order to see that this is the case, it is necessary to break down the film experience into types. Such a phenomenological description and hermeneutic analysis of the film experience suggests that the common denominator of these various expressions is in fact this spiritual interest.

The history of civilized humanity is in part the history of places of worship: we do not cast aside this history merely by technologizing human beings. I am convinced, along with Mircea Eliade, that "whatever modern, secularized man might think of himself, he still occupies a sacred dimension."[2] And while this dimension may not be immediately obvious in our society, this should not deter us from attempting to decipher it. Man cannot live without looking for being and meaning, and for us now, the cinema holds the promise of fulfilling that desire for spiritual grounding that remains a fundamental aspect of the structure of consciousness.

1

What accounts for a blossoming, ever-expanding film art is not mere entertainment: it is the coming to be of a new mode of truth. And that mode is through and through spiritual. Even seemingly all-stops-out entertainments such as *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991)[3] address a spiritual interest. We experience films like this one on several levels simultaneously, in this case as an action/adventure, a meditation on human identity, and as a self-conscious parody of the "soul-less" machine age. But the present thesis does not stand or fall on any one film interpretation, since it is not intended to be about film interpretation, but rather interpretation of film, as a phenomenon.

The best way to see that the film experience is a modern "sweat lodge," or secular church, is to break down the experience into phenomenological types. A hermeneutic analysis of these types leads us back toward this initial hypothesis, illuminating these types as various ways of dealing with a fundamental spiritual need. This need has not gone away,[4] but it has been subject to both cultural and historical variations in its mode of expression. And the mode of spiritual expression peculiar to our own century is the cinematic.

The film experience lends itself to phenomenological description because it is so immediate that it requires few preconceptions and prejudgements. It is an experience which for me embodies - perhaps even *requires* in order to be fully involved - what Herbert Spiegelberg has called (referring to phenomenology's prescription to return to "the things themselves") the "pristine innocence of first seeing".[5] The film experience seems ideally suited to this kind of seeing. It is an

experience whose character is conditioned by bodily being. And as such it is an experience requiring no special skill, except a little practice at not seeing the images as real. I agree with Merleau-Ponty when he says that "...the mingling of consciousness with the world, its involvement in a body, and its coexistence with others...is movie material *par excellence*."[6] Film experience is the experience of movement, of gesture and gaze, of the embodied human spirit resounding with music. It is, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, the subject for phenomenological description *par excellence*.

The boundaries between types of film experience are not rigidly demarcated, admitting of varying degrees of overlap, but it is nevertheless my hope that the reader will recognize him/herself in one or more of these types, or perhaps in all of them. Furthermore, they all have a common theme, namely, the desire to glimpse the life-world perspective[7] of the other. And this is fundamentally an interest in transcending ourselves. It is an interest in bridging the gap between us and the other - indeed, a way of achieving unlimited access to the other - which is made possible by cinema's "projection of the flesh," that flesh which under normal conditions permits, yet limits, our access to the other.

This interest in transcending ourselves is in part what Heidegger had in mind when he talked about Dasein being generally characterizable as "that being for whom being is a question."[8] Any answer to that question must transcend the ontic level to take account of the ontological, must concern itself with Being as such, rather than with entities. One mode of expression of this question deals with self-

identity. Since subjectivity is conditioned by intersubjectivity, self-understanding is always mediated by understanding the other. Cinema's foregrounding of subject construction means that our spiritual identity is its central project.

Self-identity is also one of Gabriel Marcel's "mysteries of being."[9] It is a problem which encroaches upon its own data, a "metaproblem."[10] And, as Marcel says, "it is in drama and through drama that metaphysical thought grasps and defines itself *in concreto*." For us now, it is in and through the cinematic that spiritual thought grasps and defines itself.

Of course, it would be easiest to deal only with that small fraction of films that take religious stories as their explicit subject-matter. But the challenge will be to show that both *structurally* (that is, as far as the "cinematographic apparatus" is concerned) and *semantically* (that is, as far as the thematic meaning content and the bodily meaning structures of the cinematic are concerned) the cinematic experience is through and through spiritual. The world of film is the double (*Doppelgänger*) of the world of our experience, a place where ancestral ghosts and guardian spirits dance across the screen, holding the promise of a transcendent spiritual dimension through which we can control the natural forces around, as well as within us, or at least come face to face with them.

It turns out that a nearly uncanny symmetry exists between phenomenology of film and phenomenology of religion. Indeed, the notions of "the sacred" and "the profane" have been at the centre of the cinematic experience since its beginnings. Both filmmakers and religious authorities were quick to recognize this new medi-

um's power to influence people spiritually, and not necessarily always for the good. The church's early attitude toward film is instructive with regard to film's spiritual importance for us: it ran from excitement with film's potential to promulgate the faith at one end - churches used to be the venue of choice for presenting films - to concern with this new medium's piety at the other end. And in the modern period, films of the acknowledged greats of cinema, from Hitchcock to Scorsese, seen through this spiritual lens, reveal a growing self-conscious awareness of cinema's spiritual essence. If you're a great filmmaker, you sense the fundamental nature of the cinematic, and take seriously its spiritual invitation. In the present thesis, we explore this largely unexamined link between film and religion[11] because it reveals the extent to which the film experience should be seen as essentially spiritual.

My more general purpose, or perhaps not-so-well-hidden agenda, is to send a wake-up call to the western, techno-secular self: Do not despair. Spirituality is all around you. You are not quite so cast adrift as you think. The questioning persists, only the venue is different. God is not dead - he's moved. And he left a for-warding address: the cinema.

The thesis is structured as follows. After a brief introduction, **Chapter One: Part I** provides an overview of the general intentions of the thesis - including a brief sketch of my overall plan. Then I outline some working definitions; for example, "spirituality," "transcendence," "metaphysical comfort," and "rupture." Also included will be such key terms as "modern" and "postmodern." **Chapter One: Part II** sets the stage of the thesis as far as the phenomenological method is concerned. It

describes and defends the use of particularly Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of bodily subjectivity as it applies to the film experience, emphasizing the fact that this experience depends in large measure upon bodily being for the creation of meaning.[12] **Part II** also lays out what I mean by a phenomenological "type," including the criteria separating types, their boundaries, and a general note on hermeneutic phenomenology, specifically how a hermeneutic analysis of these phenomenological types reveals their underlying spiritual significance. And in **Chapter One: Part III**, I argue that we are living in a period characterized by the increasing secularization of spiritual consciousness. This trend works itself out in a variety of ways, but my focus will be on the cinema as one important and not yet fully appreciated way of exercising our spiritual concerns. Important to understand in this context will be the fact that "secular" is opposed not to spiritual, but to "religious." While not subscribing to any particular religious doctrine, postmodern cinematic consciousness nevertheless views the world spiritually, that is, in terms of the sacred and the profane.

Chapter One sets the stage for **Chapters Two, Three, and Four,** which describe phenomenologically three types of film experience: "transcendence," "metaphysical comfort," and a third type, called simply "rupture." More will be said shortly about these types. Suffice it for now to say only that these types form the heart of the present thesis.

Chapter Five brings all these lines of analysis together under the general heading, "phenomenology of religion and cinematic consciousness."[13] It sets up a symmetry between phenomenology of the film experience - as described by the

typology - and phenomenology of religion. I shall use some of the central concepts of the latter, for example, the sacred and the profane, to give context to and underpin a spiritual hermeneutic of these three phenomenological types of film experience.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. These types are not to be confused with genres, though it will be interesting to see whether they will correspond in any useful way with genres. My purpose here will not be to contribute to this already thoroughly investigated area of knowledge - i.e., film genre studies - but rather to discover what, if anything, is to be gained in the way of a more fundamental understanding through a phenomenological classification of the film experience into types.

2. See Mircea Eliade, "The Sacred in the Secular World," in *Cultural Hermeneutics 1* (1973), 101.

3. I shall cite films by title, director and year of release.

4. As Edward J. Jurji has put the matter in his *The Phenomenology of Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963):

> Contemporary Western civilization is to a bewildering degree engaged in a radical transvaluation of the sacred. Supplanting the traditional sacred of religion are secular, lay, and humanist norms ...[t]he gods may disappear. But the temple arches remain. Longings that once erected the temples have not deserted the soul of man.[6]

It is the central claim of the present thesis that the "temple arches" have moved to the movie theatre. Hereafter, *PhRel* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

5. See Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 2 vol's. Third revised and enlarged edition (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1984), 677-717ff. Hereafter, *PM* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

6. This quote is taken from Merleau-Ponty's brief but instructive article, "Film and the New Psychology," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 59.

7. My use of the phrase, "life-world perspective" may strike the phenomenologically-tutored ear like a sounding brass. According to phenomenology, one's "perspective," or outlook on the world, is *part of* one's life-world, indeed, is part of what defines one's life-world, and hence using the two in a single phrase may sound redundant. However, I hope I may be permitted this slight repetitiveness in order to highlight the attitudinal aspect of one's life-world. After all, one's *stance toward* the world and *the life-world as a whole* are conceptually, even if not existentially, separable. We can for purposes of analysis discuss our life-world as a whole and its various aspects separately.

8. As Heidegger puts it, "Dasein is an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 236.

9. See, for example: Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Volume I: Reflection and Mystery*, tr. G.S. Fraser (Latham, MD: University Press of America, 1984). Reprint originally published in London by Harvill Press, 1950-51 (Gifford Lectures; 1949-1950), especially chapter III, "The Need for Transcendence," 39-56; and *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary*, tr. Katherine Farrer (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); and *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, tr. Manya Harari (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Co. Ltd., 1984), especially chapter one, "On the Ontological Mystery," 9-46.

10. For example, hope is a mystery when we hope against all hope that a person whom we love will recover from an incurable illness. Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 22-23.10.

11. This is true notwithstanding some recent scholarship which concerns itself with just this spiritual aspect of the cinematic, for example: Thomas M. Martin, *Images and the Imageless: A Study in Religious Consciousness and Film*, second ed. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991); Neil P. Hurley, *Theology Through Film* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); John R. May and Michael Bird (eds.), *Religion in Film* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1972); Yvette Biró, *Profane Mythology: The Savage Mind of the Cinema*, tr. Imre Goldstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

12. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of bodily being, particularly as it is found in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962); originally published in French as *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1945) - hereafter, *PhPer* (see "List of Abbreviations," page 2), with page references to French and English editions, respectively - helps us recognize that film's meaning structures mimic bodily ways of constructing meaning. For a sample of recent attempts to apply phenomenology to the film experience, see, for example: Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, who makes use of Merleau-Ponty's (later) phenomenology, as well as her "'Surge and Splendor': A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic," in *Representations* 29 (Winter 1990), and "The Visual and the Visible: Toward a Phenomenology of Film Experience," in *Stanford Humanities Review*; Dudley Andrew, "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory," in *Wide Angle* 2 (1978), 44-49; etc. A more comprehensive listing will be found in the bibliography, under the sub-heading "Phenomenology of Film."

13. In order to set up a symmetry between phenomenology of the film and phenomenology of religion, it will be necessary to look into analyses of the latter, such as: Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (New York: Oxford University Press, second edition,

1950); W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning Of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion* trans. John B. Carman (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960); Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979); etc. A more comprehensive list of sources on the phenomenology of religion will be found in the bibliography under the heading, "Phenomenology of Religion."

CHAPTER ONE:

SETTING THE STAGE

PART I - GENERAL BACKGROUND

> *As ironic modern worshipers we congregate at the cinematic temple. We pay our votive offerings at the box office. We buy our ritual corn. We hush in reverent anticipation as the lights go down and the celluloid magic begins...we are spiritually inspired by the moral of the story, all the while believing we are modern techno-secular people, devoid of religion. Yet the depth and intensity of our participation reveal a religious fervor that is not much different from that of religious zealots.* [1]

Section 1: Overall Plan

1.1 Background

Two twentieth-century developments, one technological, the other social/historical, have contributed to the emergence of cinema as a secular church. The first was the invention of the motion picture camera; the second was a trend toward secularization, a turning away from traditional modes of expression of spirituality, by which I mean "religiosity," as it is exercised in the context of the mainstream churches. [2] As a function of both the general lack of faith in religious institutions to deliver the goods on epistemological and metaphysical matters and the simultaneous rise of science and technology as dependable sources of increasingly specialized information about the world - as well as the fact that the penalty for non-belief is no longer death, at least in the west - the postmodern self has been placed in "spiritual search mode."

Spiritual search mode is that mode of consciousness which actively pursues, at some level, satisfaction of a desire for spiritual grounding in a secular society. This search mode is responsible for the spiritual interest looking in some pretty strange places in an effort to satisfy its hunger for solid ground.[3] And the cinema is ideally suited - in ways that will become clearer as we proceed - to satisfy this type of desire.

Film, the twentieth century's "mass art," has inspired much debate amongst aestheticians, film theorists, and cultural critics regarding its "structure,"[4] its "ontology,"[5] its "language,"[6] and its mode of presentation as "image."[7] But no one to date has provided either a phenomenological typology or a hermeneutic analysis of the film experience itself.[8] The purpose of such a typology is to divide the film experience into readily recognizable types, which helps us to see it with fresh eyes, possibly more coherently; and a hermeneutic analysis of these types unearths the reasons why cinema is so fascinating for us, reasons which lead back to our desire to spiritually define ourselves in a secular age. This analysis places cinema-going into a larger cultural context, enabling us to see it in new ways, enriching our experience of it. Like cinema itself, it shows us ourselves in a light we (perhaps) thought long ago extinguished.

1.2 Some Problems with Philosophy of the Film - Ian Jarvie's Realism

Notwithstanding a commitment on the part of most who write about film to argue for its status as an artform, there still seems to be little in the way of serious philosophical treatment of this "new" art, now 100 years old. Anthropology,

sociology, cultural studies, all seem to be focussed on quasi-political questions like gender and oppression, while the more philosophically inclined seem to concentrate their energies on matters having to do with the ontological status of the image, the real vs. the reel.[9]

Ian Jarvie, for example, is at pains to defend film as an artform, while at the same time spending much time insisting that we know that the filmic world is not real:

> The basic condition enabling us to think about the film, then, is that it is such as we are able to discern in its content something resembling a world; something, that is, like the world, but yet in some definite way not the world, merely like it. 'World' here could be expanded: it connotes order not chaos, contents not void, intelligible not meaningless. So we can redescribe what is presupposed by our discerning a world on film by saying that it permits us to impose order, to make intelligible, to individuate and to identify things. What we might call the project of constituting a world on film is merely a small part of the wider project with which we are constantly engaged, and that is imposing intelligibility, order, individuation and identity on the world in which we live. Precisely because film in some way replicates locally what we are constantly engaged in globally there is the possibility that we may learn from our constitution of the film world about our world-constituting activities in general.[PF, Preface, p.ivff]

This passage nicely flies Jarvie's Kantian colours. His main concern lies in finding out what objects inhabit the "real world"; that is, what is there about our world-constituting activities in the movie theatre that is instructive with regard to our world-constituting generally? His preference as a philosopher of science is epistemological; he gives "knowledge precedence over existence" (PF, 42). He lists Heidegger, and presumably other existential phenomenologists, as among those who

give existence precedence over knowledge. In answer to the question, "What do we know?", he responds:

> (a) not very much and (b) the cream of what we think we know is contained in science and mathematics. From this answer a relatively straightforward answer flows to the problem of what exists: (c) what exists are those entities disclosed or postulated by the current theories of mathematics and science.[*PF*, 43]

It's clear from this passage that those phenomena peculiar to the life-world of human beings, but difficult or impossible to quantify - such "subjective" phenomena as love, compassion, will, subjectivity, meaning, and spirituality - are to be relegated to the realm of the less-than-demonstrably true. While Jarvie holds that scientific discoveries are "transcendental" - in the sense that they make "contact with the world beyond our act of cognition just as beyond all known time and space" (*PF*, 45) - he seems not to place much credence in those human acts whereby we come in contact with other subjects, or with our own spirit.

He wants to ask questions of the film such as, "Is it real?," "Is it beautiful?," and "Is it true?" Clearly, what is needed here is the phenomenologist's emphasis on the "life-world." This would nicely extricate us from needless discussions by making film experience one among many life-world experiences with meaning content which we share with others, thereby putting it on a continuum with conversations, book-reading, museum browsing, etc. And it would make it possible to concentrate our energies on what film *means* to us, what it can tell us about our *shared* human world.

Jarvie asks, what is the nature and extent of the resemblance between our world, presumably the paradigm case of the real world, and the film world? Do real people behave like the characters in the film's world? Are the ideas expressed by the film's characters true ideas? How can we know that any film paraphrase which we posit really captures the "message" of this particular film, as well as whether the message itself is a true one? And is the film's "attitude" toward this message a correct one? (*PF*, 7)

Even though Jarvie is careful to point out that no one paraphrase or interpretation can capture the "real meaning" of a film - "I see no reason for insisting on a single correct interpretation of a film like *Casablanca*" (*PF*, 16) - he also contends that "*refutation is* the strongest form of criticism and hence *the most powerful engine of progress*," (*PF*, 16, emphasis mine)[10] and consequently that a process of refutation of competing interpretations can lead to truth: "what is interesting is relative to point of view, what is true does not vary" (*PF*, 18).

This will not do. While there is much to applaud in professor Jarvie's treatment of film (for example, his insistence that film is philosophically important, his contention that "In experiencing film people do philosophy without thinking about it, thereby accomplishing what some philosophical theories do not" [*PF*, 38]), his overemphasis on scientific realism - along with a parallel concern with emphasizing the phenomenological differences between "real" world experience and film experience - too narrowly restricts his investigations.

And the problems are compounded when he comes to describe the experience of the viewer:

> it is only the implicit contrast, however submerged the recognition of it, between the real world we inhabit and the film world we do not that makes the film world so enthralling and satisfying. Things work out so interestingly there, there is so much order and coherence, in contrast to the world as it actually is.[*PF*, 49]

This generalization collapses important distictions between types of film experience, indeed, this sounds to my ear like there is only *one type* of film experience.[11] But we know that many types of experience are possible at the cinema and in order to do them all justice, we need to get away from this real/reel "problem" and concentrate on the world of our experience at the cinema and what insights can be derived from that world, particularly about our spiritual situation. Do we really feel upon emerging from the fundamentally ambiguous worlds of David Lynch (for example, *Eraserhead*, 1978) or Peter Greenaway (for example, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover*, 1989) that "things work out so interestingly there," or that these worlds are characterized by "order and coherence"? Jarvie cannot have it both ways. If he contends that Lynch's and Greenaway's films are good examples of the kind of real/reel contrast that he thinks typical of cinematic experience, then he cannot also hold that films like *Medium Cool* (Haskell Wexler, 1969) - shot during the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago using actors mixing with politicians and rioting citizens - falls into the same category. Both kinds of films cannot be interesting because of the "implicit contrast" between them and the real world.

If, as Jarvie contends, a film embodies a thesis about the way the world is (*PF*, 26-33), then how could it derive its satisfying aspect from "the implicit contrast ... between the real world we inhabit and the film world we do not"? (*PF*, 49) Unless the film contained some truth about the way the world is, it would be of little interest to us.

There seems to be a fundamental tension in Jarvie's account between the "real" status accorded these satisfactions and the "unreal" status of the film world. If things "work out" so differently in the film world that all we have left in the way of a thesis about the world as it really is, is essentially a false one, which we then contrast with one we "know" to be true, where is the benefit of seeing the film? Truth as it occurs in the context of the film experience requires a more nuanced unpacking than this. It cannot be a simple matter of a film in effect saying to us, the world is *not* like "this," thus inviting us to consider how the world actually is.

Surely it is not the case, for example, that what *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980) has to say about boxing, about violence, and about human subjectivity in general, amounts to a false thesis, one whose real value lies in the character of its contrast with the real world of boxing or the real phenomenon of violence or the real nature of human subjectivity. It seems obvious that *Raging Bull* is more than this; certainly, it was more than this for Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro:[12]

> [Martin] Scorsese and [Robert] De Niro ... have taken apart this man,
> Jake La Motta, and reconstructed not the fighter of reality, but the
> figure of a man so unconscious of his own feelings and emotions that
> he can speak only through violence - a man Scorsese sees as almost
> another order of being. He cites St. Thomas Aquinas, who said that

perhaps animals serve God better than men because they have no
choice but to live their natures purely. Jake, for Scorsese, has that
primal quality. Yet Jake is conscious of the "bad things" he has done,
and sees his defeats as a kind of punishment. His rise to the cham-
pionship and his relationship with the women in his life seem marked
with a gratuitous brutality - for example, he destroys the face of the
good-looking fighter whom his wife Vicki has admired.

But near the end of the film, when Jake has been arrested for statutory rape, he sits

in his jail cell and contemplates the fact that he has destroyed everything that ever

meant anything to him. He beats his fists to shreds on the wall of his cell, and cries

out, "I am *not* an animal!" This is the moment when redemption begins, when Jake

finally begins to see himself as human, a being with a soul. When he finally gets

out of prison, he seeks salvation in an embrace with his brother.

Jake's lack of moral moorings leaves him spiritually cast adrift. He has no

subjective identity to call on in times of crisis. As Robert Kolker has observed,

Like so many of Scorsese's characters, La Motta is a subject without
subjectivity, without a firm comprehension of self or its location.
More than the characters of *Mean Streets* or even Travis Bickle in
Taxi Driver, La Motta exists without cultural, ideological, or even
class moorings.[13]

But the world of Jake La Motta is not "false." It is our world. It is a fundamental

necessity of our spiritual situation as beings seeking secure moral grounding and

self-identity that we have to confront our emotions and try to understand them,

rather than reacting with primal instinct to life's challenges. Our reactions are

precisely what constitute and subjectify us as human beings, locating us in a web of

moral and social situations.

This alone would be enough to call Jarvie's position into question, but we could actually reverse it. It seems clear that, in the case of dysfunctional families at least - arguably, families more common than fully functional ones - some of us organize our "real world" much like a standard Hollywood narrative, neurotically imposing rational beginnings, middles, and (especially "happy") endings that cohere and "make sense" on situations that don't conform to this model. Buried, unresolved issues are regarded as best left that way.

Cape Fear (Martin Scorsese, 1991) makes an interesting study in this regard. It is a film not accidentally full of its own interesting reversals. For example: Gregory Peck, who played Sam Bowden, an innocent victim of sadistic ex-convict Max Cady in the original version of *Cape Fear* (J. Lee Thompson, 1962), now appears as a defense attorney for Max Cady; Robert Mitchum, who played Max Cady originally, here plays a police detective; and, most significantly, Sam Bowden is now guilty himself of "selling out" Max Cady some 14 years earlier by illegally burying exculpatory evidence that might have cleared Cady of charges of rape and aggravated sexual battery. These reversals are not mere Hollywood in-jokes, although they function this way too. They are designed to subvert any morally unambiguous reading of the film. Consistent with his spiritual obsessions, Scorsese takes the thriller genre and makes something more out of it: a meditation on the nature of guilt and redemption.

Scorsese's vision of the film involved a quasi-Freudian visitation from the realm of unconscious sex-guilt:

> Cady was sort of the malignant spirit of guilt, in a way, of the family - the avenging angel. Punishment for everything you ever felt sexually. It is the basic moral battleground of Christian ethics.[14]

Cape Fear's Max Cady, then, is a harbinger not of doom, but of self-knowledge. Central to the "message" of films like *Cape Fear* is the notion that long-buried, unresolved issues, covered over with layers of "coherent, well-ordered," falsely-imposed narrative can, and sometimes do, resurface and challenge our comfortable pretense of security, health, and normality.

Cape Fear (1991) begins with a "reminiscence" by Danielle / Juliette Lewis, Bowden's sexually-awakening daughter, in which she says, "My reminiscence: I always thought that, for such a lovely river, the name was mystifying, 'Cape Fear,' when the only thing to fear on those enchanted summer nights was that the magic would end and real life would come crashing in." Perhaps in the case of Scorsese and similar directors, the real world is sometimes the cinematic - in the sense that it uncovers buried realities - and the so-called "real world," at least the one inhabited by dysfunctional families, is essentially a false one in the sense of being full of pretense and denial.

Truths on film resonate with truths in the rest of our life-world. Truths on film are like truths communicated by persons - they are multi-layered, multi-faceted entities which require subtle interpretations and delineations. And the kind of broad strokes that Jarvie uses fail to bring out the fine grains of the experience.

Let's have a closer look at some of the problems we run into when we understand film art this way. Jarvie is at some pains to argue that the ordinary

person is fully capable of "regularly discounting" the film world as real "when life as it is is confronted," but I am more interested in what this person *integrates into* his or her life as a lesson learned from this "unreal" world: What points of contact are established? What fundamental truth communicated? Jarvie's concern here is in keeping the "Guardians of Culture" at bay.[15] As he puts the worry:

> From soon after the time films were first publicly exhibited ... these guardians have worried that ordinary people will substitute the false reality of the films for the true reality of life in our world. At the very least people may take knowledge selectively from films, knowledge that conflicts with what are accepted as truths in the society at large. This was why the onscreen mores of film people were closely scrutinized and, when appropriate, censured by the Guardians.[*PF*, 60]

Quite rightly, Jarvie sees in all this a Platonic elitism, by which he means "the antidemocratic idea that insight into the true (and the good) is vouchsafed ... [by] only a few individuals and it is the place of the rest of us to hearken unto them" (*PF*, 60). This is the reason why he is so insistent that the "ordinary moviegoer" routinely has no trouble keeping in mind the differences between the real world and the film world.

But what does our ability to distinguish the film world from the real world have to do with our judgements vis à vis truth as we find it in film? There is a third choice - which I think professor Jarvie has missed - between "taking-for-real" and "discounting," and that is taking for (or not taking for) *representative*. There is a tension between his interest in the "resemblance" between the film world and our own real world and his notion that rational individuals "regularly discount" what

they see on the screen as unreal. In his haste to argue against the "Guardians of Culture," Jarvie effectively eviscerates the cinematic experience, stripping away most of its power and significance for us in an attempt to elevate the ordinary moviegoer to philosophical status: democratic, perhaps, but also inadequate to explain the power of cinema. Such a concentration on distinguishing the real from the unreal, and, more importantly, returning a reasonable level of rationality to the average movie-goer, in order specifically to argue against Platonic elitism, is admirable, but it: 1) eviscerates the power of cinema; and 2) too narrowly constricts the field of inquiry to two nested worlds, the real world and within it, the film world. It is also a concentration which draws too firm a boundary between the real world and the film world. Perhaps we occupy many worlds simultaneously, the sum of which might be called the *life-world*.

Jarvie says that as filmgoers we:

> tease ourselves constantly by imaginatively breaking out of and reentering the real world, thus alerting ourselves to the possibility that what we naively think of as the real world may itself be a nested illusion inside some wider real world. We know this because the enhancement of our imaginations by mechanical apparatus makes obvious the possibility of an infinitely nested and receding series of cameras filming cameras filming people.[*PF*, 65]

Once we divide the world up in this way - setting up the problem in terms of a false dichotomy between hypothetical realism on the one hand and the world as nothing but an illusion on the other - it becomes tempting to conclude that some form of realism must be true. But other possibilities are ignored in the process.

Jarvie uses film to "face and face down the metaphysical problem of appearance and reality" (*PF*, 69), but this use not only fails to do justice to the power of the experience - rendering non-sensical the many concerns in cinema's history with its persuasive capabilities - it also severely limits the types of experience which we can and do undergo at the cinema.

Jarvie thinks the real importance of the film experience lies in its "contemporary reenactment of Plato's cave" (*PF*, 69). And further that film "rebuts Plato's use of the cave to undermine the senses of the ordinary person as guides to knowledge" (*PF*, 69). Films under this view are used by the filmgoer as part of the process of coming to terms with and understanding the *real* world, knowing all the while that the unreal film world contrasts with the real world. And ordinary people are actually quite sophisticated with respect to the problem of appearance and reality, regularly "discounting" what they see as unreal, while at the same time somehow using it to come to terms with the real world. Jarvie seems to want his cake and eat it too. The harder we hold onto the stark contrast between the real and the reel, the harder it is to maintain that we can learn anything whatsoever from films, much less anything about the much-vaunted "real world."

When Jarvie comes to discuss phenomenology, the problem grows even greater. While he correctly reports that the *most intriguing phenomenon* for film phenomenologists is the experience of watching a film, he erroneously restricts the field of inquiry to this one phenomenon, *opposing* this interest to the phenomenologist's closely related interest in the experience of inhabiting the "Life-world":

> the phenomenon which is most intriguing to phenomenologists is the experience of watching a film, *as opposed to the experience of inhabiting the Lebenswelt*, or the experience of going to a theatre, the experience of listening to music, and so on. Less kindly put, one could make this point: unless the phenomenon of film can be discovered to have an essence different from the phenomenon of experience in general then phenomenology will be unable to discern a difference between the real world and the film world.[*PF*, 77, emphasis mine]

On the contrary, most phenomenologists would agree that going to see a film constitutes a particular mode of being in the world, or section of the life-world with its own assignable limits and meanings. This is not "opposed to the experience of inhabiting the *Lebenswelt*," but is rather *a part of* inhabiting the Lebenswelt, indeed an important part of it. Phenomenology is largely unconcerned with the extent to which it can discover through an examination of its "data" whether or not the phenomenon of film has a different essence from the phenomenon of experience in general, since it accepts as axiomatic the notion that all phenomena are part of the life-world of human beings and as such need to be explored with the same perspecuity. Only the phenomenologist who has abandoned his or her basic starting point will see film as confronting us "with the problem of appearance and reality" (*PF*, 78), because this basic starting point just is the "bracketing off" (or reduction, *epoché*) of questions having to do with the ontological status of the object(s) under consideration.

One of Jarvie's favourite writers on film is the early twentieth century, Harvard psychologist (hired by William James), Hugo Münsterberg. As Jarvie explains, Münsterberg thought that the "photoplay" acts:

as our memory and imagination act, for, in our minds, past, present and future are intertwined as are reality and imagination. The photoplay thus obeys the laws of the mind rather than those of the outer world. [The] principal point ... is that at the movies '*The objective world is molded by the interests of the mind*' (46).[*PF*, 111]

Münsterberg is quite right to have realized this. Indeed, it is a fundamental tenet of phenomenology that the world of perception is moulded by our interests. But why just "at the movies"? It is by now a truism of psychology that our "interests," broadly construed, have an effect on what we perceive. That the camera "chooses" what details are important suggests that we are engaged in a ghost-like inhabiting, or at least sharing, of someone else's consciousness.

What we get in the case of the film experience is not a perfect mechanically reproduced copy of the "real world," but rather the phenomenal world, or life-world, as experienced by a living human subject. As Merleau-Ponty points out, perceptual "interpretation" goes all the way down. What this means is that perception is never "objective," never a matter of "mirroring" the world in our minds. We always see and hear *in terms of our interests*, in terms of gradations of importance. The glass of poison on the table *seems to loom larger* than its "real size." The intensity of a conversation with a lover *seems to reduce everything else in the room to nothing.* These "subjective experiences" are concretized, or literalized, if you like, on the screen. The poisoned glass is shot so as to take up the whole screen. The room surrounding two lovers in rapt conversation actually disappears. We know that this kind of perceptual foregrounding / backgrounding is carried on by human subjects,

and as far as we know exclusively by human subjects. Hence, we have an uncanny sense that we are sharing subjectivities with some "other." And this is a mode of being that only our spiritual self is capable of.

The present thesis rescues the film experience from the metaphysical oblivion to which views such as Jarvie's relegate it, suggesting that we instead view films as a serious occasion for self-reflection that has much in common with some kinds of sacred experiences. Understood spiritually, the film experience comes to be seen as a postmodern version of ancient rituals of self-discovery such as the sweat-lodge.

Section 2: Working Definitions

2.1 Spirituality

Spirituality, as I am using the term in this thesis, is an existential mode characterized by an interest in understanding who we are in relation to the world and who we are in relation to each other. As Merold Westphal puts it, "the believer finds fulfillment ... in the integrity of finding his or her rightful place in the overall scheme of things".[16] Spirituality - if I may sound tautological for a moment - means an abiding interest in matters spiritual, that is, an interest in finding satisfactory answers to the fundamental questions of existence: What is the nature of the world? What is my place in it? What is the nature of the "other"? What is, or should be, my relationship with this other?

While it is easily demonstrated that some percentage of films have always taken, and continue to take, spiritual matters as their *explicit* concern - films ranging from *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodore Dreyer, 1928) to *The Last Tempta-*

tion of Christ (Martin Scorsese, 1988) - our position is much broader: film as phenomenon is structurally and semantically predisposed to take spiritual issues as its central concern. Film as phenomenon matters to us because it creates meaning through a kind of "shared subjectivity," and in so doing takes fundamental spiritual issues like human subjectivity as primary. This broad view of film as phenomenon leads us to question the distinction between "film art" and "mere entertainment." a suspect distinction at least since Alfred Hitchcock's popularization as film artist at the hands of the French critics of the nineteen-fifties.

But what do we mean by "spiritual" in this context? A renewed philosophical interest in spiritual matters is evident in the work Charles Taylor, for example, who writes that he wants to explore what he calls the "background picture of our spiritual nature" which he sees lying behind some modern moral and spiritual insights. Taylor thinks philosophy has ignored this dimension of our moral consciousness and beliefs, and even sometimes dismissed it as "confused and irrelevant." But moral intuitions are important because they involve our sense of what constitutes our own dignity, what makes our lives meaningful or fulfilled. These sorts of questions concern themselves with what makes life worth living. And the cinema regularly offers us a range of moral/spiritual life-world perspectives, or world-views, notwithstanding its apparently single-minded concentration on entertainment.

Taylor puts some meat on the bones when it comes to what "spiritual" means. He thinks that those questions or issues that deserve the "vague term spiritual" all

involve what he calls "strong evaluation." A good test for whether an evaluation is

"strong" is whether it can be the basis for attitudes of admiration or contempt.

Strong evaluations, then,[17]

> involve discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or
> lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations,
> or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards
> by which they can be judged.[18]

This kind of "strong evaluation" typifies the cinematic experience. Sometimes for

better and sometimes for worse, the movies hold up a moral mirror to our world.

But often these evaluations are subliminal, that is, we are not aware at the time that

we are being called upon to make this kind of evaluation. We are only dimly aware

of being either comfortable or uncomfortable with the projected life-world perspec-

tive. But these reactions are not so subliminal as to be unavailable to examination,

covered over by layers of Freudian, quasi-neurotic denial. If they were, we wouldn't

even be able to discuss the right-wing political appeal of such films as *Rambo: First

Blood, Part II* (George P. Cosmatos, 1985), or the right-wing, "family values

messages" (what Robin Wood calls "thumb-sucking reassurance") so much a part of

Steven Spielberg's projected life-world perspective, for example, in films such as,

quintessentially, *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982). Central to the

appeal of these so-called "entertainments" is the primal appeal of quick and easy

answers to spiritual questions of value.

Reasonably satisfying answers to questions which call for a "strong evalu-

ation" are of central importance, it turns out, for the maintenance of health. Health

scientists and educators are beginning to explore the relationship between well-being

and spirituality. As Larry and Lauri Fahlberg remind us, spirituality has been

recognized as "pivotal" in the context of health education and promotion:

> An examination of the spirituality/consciousness relationship may be
> crucial for any profession that purports to address the health issues of
> the whole person ... If spirituality is part of human experience, then
> willingness to make forays into this dimension is fundamental to
> health.[19]

But right away we need to draw a distinction between spirituality and religiosity:

> Because a person may be spiritual but not identify with any religious
> group or organization, the terms "spiritual" and "religious" are not
> synonymous.[20]

Religion is characterized as that which concerns itself with the social activities of

groups, for example, church members or cult members. Spirituality, on the other

hand, has been defined by Banks as "... a unifying force within individuals; meaning

in life; a common bond between individuals; and individual perceptions or faith."

Religion can have a place for spirituality, but it does not have a monopoly on

spirituality.[21] As Fahlberg and Fahlberg remind us, "Maslow and Dewey [both]

held that spirituality is a manifestation of human existence and, therefore, prior to

and different from religiosity."[22] To unpack what this means, it is both possible to

have religious experience without spirituality - say, for example, attending church on

Sunday only to show off your new hat - and spiritual experience without religion -

as, for example, when we feel the beauty and majesty of a natural setting as if it had

been expressly created for us, but without any clear idea of God informing our feeling. Similarly, it is possible, though unlikely, to watch *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957) as a comedy - which I'm sure Woody Allen did - and watch *The Mask* (Charles Russell, 1994) as Jungian psychiatric commentary. The former ignores the spiritual possibilities available in Bergman's life-world perspective, while the latter derives spiritual/archetypal resonance from Jim Carrey's "Jerry Lewis" body-hysteria.

Spiritual questions historically have been addressed not only in the context of the study of philosophy, but more widely - and more commonly - in the context of the religious life of cultures. But a general weakening of the perceived viability of the traditional religious context to provide satisfying answers to these types of questions - the criteria of satisfaction having shifted toward that which can be demonstrated scientifically/objectively - has turned the religious into the mythological and the cinema into a secular church. In the beginning, cinema was met with a mixture of excitement and suspicion: excitement because here was a powerful new way to represent in images the guiding myths of culture, including Biblical ones; suspicion because representation, especially in a Christian context, can become an end in itself, an icon, and in so doing begin to replace that which it represents, namely, Spirit. A spiritual hermeneutic of film experience can explain why this was so, and still is so to some extent.

Evidence of a "secular spirituality" is everywhere in cinema. Consider the *Star Wars* trilogy, for example (*Star Wars*, George Lucas, 1977; *The Empire Strikes*

Back, Irvin Kershner, 1980; *Return of the Jedi*, Richard Marquand, 1983), wherein the forces of light do battle with the forces of darkness. Central to the success of the heroic "rebel alliance" is a faith in the ultimate victory of good over evil, as well as a belief in an unseen "force" for good which aligns itself with those who desire good for everyone. What is this "force" if not a secularized God? The rebel's, indeed, the *film's* "faith" in the ultimate victory of good presupposes that the world is divided up according to the ancient gnostic categories, light and dark, good and evil.

But why has the spiritual interest sublimated itself in the cinema? The suppression of spiritual or mystical ways of knowing has resulted in a culture which is hungry for those spiritual experiences that so richly textured its past. As Fahlberg and Fahlberg (1991) put it:

> Denying the spiritual and, worse yet, pathologizing it has contributed
> to the creation of a society of what has been referred to as "closet
> mystics."[23]

Our view of the spiritual nature of the cinematic has some affinities to Northrop Frye's view that classical mythology has become "fabulous." This happens when mythology begins to lose its sense of superior importance or authority. As Frye says, classical mythology became fabulous, that is, folk-tale like, a branch of secular literature, in Christian times, and Biblical mythology is quickly becoming fabulous now:

> The Bible is the supreme example of the way that myths can, under certain social pressures, stick together to make up a mythology. A second look at this mythology shows us that it actually became, for medieval and later centuries, a vast mythological universe, stretching in time from creation to apocalypse, and in metaphorical space from heaven to hell. A mythological universe is a vision of reality in terms of human concerns and hopes and anxieties.[24]

Classical mythology and Biblical mythology used to "found a world," as Heidegger might say,[25] but now both have become "fabulous" in the sense that they no longer guide the culture in which their stories are told. They have been reduced to "mere entertainment."

But is this really the case for cinema? Frye's distinction between the mythological and the fabulous is based upon what he perceives to be "a difference in authority and social function" (8). But once we collapse this difference, out with it goes the distinction. Hidden in the folds of this "entertainment" is the expression/fulfillment of the very spiritual desire that called these myths into existence in the first place, namely, the desire spiritually to ground ourselves in a secular society.

The central claim of the present thesis finds its analogue here: the Bible, containing the most important stories in the Christian canon, has in the hands of Hollywood become "fabulous." But this doesn't render these stories "mere entertainment," a "branch of secular literature," as Frye says. *Star Wars* - and modern cinema generally - has taken over from the Bible the role of moral teacher and spiritual inspirer.

Important to point out in this context is our view that the sharp dichotomy between the spiritual - as opposed to the religious - and the secular should be called

into question. Frye apparently accepts this distinction and uses it to map out the territory of literary stories descended from Biblical mythology. But inherent in Frye's view is just such a questioning of the above distinction. Where Frye sees only resonances, traces of these stories in modern literature, we see their presence everywhere in cinema as proof of a disingenuous secularity in modern Western culture.

Frye's question is, "[is it] possible to look at secular stories as a whole, and as forming a single integrated vision of the world, parallel to the Christian and biblical vision?"(15) He wants to "look at fiction as a total verbal order, with the outlines of an imaginative universe also in it." For Frye, "Romance is the structural core of all fiction: being directly descended from folktale, it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature to the sense of fiction, considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as a quest." Cinema seems ideally suited to engage us in just this kind of quest for a spiritual self-understanding. For example, we may understand the seemingly limitless appeal of Hollywood hokum such as *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939) as a function of its portrayal of Dorothy's spiritual quest for self-understanding.[26] What we learn from Frye is that cinema is not unique in its sublimated spirituality. But it is unique in its method of exploration, that is, in its method of "shared subjectivities."

A good deal of our opportunities to reflect on spiritual questions now happen in the context of cinematic experience. One of the functions of the traditional religious context is to provide a set of rather dogmatic answers to both moral

questions and questions of self-identity, but another function - and a more important

one for our purposes - is to provide an opportunity, away from the daily hustle and

bustle of our busy lives, to reflect on the more important questions which concern

us. This need to address questions of a spiritual nature is now "played with" at the

cinema. But play here is no mere frivolous adventure, or need not be.

"Play," for Hans-Georg Gadamer, is an important means of establishing both

meaning and self-identity for human beings.[27] He writes,

> Play has a special relation to what is serious. It is not only that the
> latter gives it its 'purpose': we play 'for the sake of recreation,' as
> Aristotle says.[*Politics*, VIII, 1337b39] More important, *play itself
> contains its own, even sacred, seriousness....* Huizinga has investigated
> the element of play in all cultures and most important has worked out
> the connection of children's and animal's play to "holy play." That
> led him to recognize the curious indecisiveness of the playing con-
> sciousness, which makes it absolutely impossible to decide between
> belief and non-belief ... we can say that *man* too plays. His playing
> too is a natural process. The meaning of his play too, precisely
> because - and insofar as - he is part of nature, is a pure self-presenta-
> tion.[*TM* (1989), 102]

This "pure self-presentation" is what we're up to in cinematic experience. It is a

mode of "play" with serious undertones that have to do with self-identity and belief.

These are the issues that drama of all kinds deals with, and that make it a sacred

game:

> But most important the being of the work of art is connected
> with the medial sense of play (Spiel]. Inasmuch as nature is without
> purpose and intention, just as it is without exertion, it is a constantly
> self-renewing play, and can therefore appear as a model for art. Thus
> Friedrich Schlegel writes, "*All the sacred games of art are only remote*

imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-creating work of art."[TM (1989), 102-105, emphasis mine]

Gadamer's description of the location of play is easily applied to the movie house. It is a specially marked out area, reserved for the movement of the game, which is analogous to the setting off of "sacred precincts." The "cinematographic apparatus" accomplishes this "setting off" by restricting movement, dimming the lighting, and limiting conversation. The rules of this cinematic "closed world" temporarily disconnect it with the "world of aims":

> Human play requires a playing field. Setting off the playing field -
> just like setting off sacred precincts, as Huizinga rightly points out -
> sets off the sphere of play as a closed world, one without transition
> and mediation to the world of aims.[*TM* (1989), 107]

All presentation occurring within this field is also potentially representation. Gadamer calls this the "characteristic feature" of art as play. When the closed world of "play" lets down one of its walls, presentation turns into re-presentation, for the sake of an audience. Religious rites and theatrical plays, as well as films, all have this feature. But there is a difference between child's play and religious or theatrical plays. The latter invite the participation of spectators; they point beyond themselves to the audience which participates by watching. Unlike the play of children,

> Their being is not exhausted by the fact that they present themselves,
> for at the same time they point beyond themselves to the audience
> which participates by watching...[play here] is "representing for
> someone." The directedness proper to all representation comes to the
> fore here and is constitutive of the being of art. [*TM* (1989), 108-09]

With regard to the role of the spectator as player, the audience constitutes and completes the play; they are the "fourth wall" of the theatre. This "closed world" is open to this extent. The play achieves its whole significance only with all the players participating, including the audience. The "play" in this sense comprises both spectators and actors:

> [in the spectator] the game is raised, as it were, to its ideality.... A complete change takes place when play as such becomes a play. It puts the spectator in the place of the player. He - and not the player - is the person for and in whom the play is played.[*TM* (1989), 109-10]

Furthermore, there is an analogy between "play" in Gadamer's sense and the religious rite. Performance is essential to both; it cannot be detached from either play or religious rite, as if it were not part of its essential being. And the encounter with the divine is the whole point of the religious rite:

> it is in the performance and only in it - as we see most clearly in the case of music - that we encounter the work itself, as the divine is encountered in the religious rite.[*TM* (1989), 116]

The play of light and shadow at the cinema is the play of good and evil in the lives of its spectators. It is the postmodern equivalent of the sweat lodge. Whether we're watching Dreyer, Buñuel, and Bergman, or Hitchcock, Spielberg, and Lucas; from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the face of death to the "force," the cinematic temple draws us epiphanously toward ourselves.

2.2 Type One: Spiritual Transcendence

Type One film experience consists in Spiritual Transcendence. This is the experience of glimpsing the life-world perspective of the wholly other. It is a getting beyond one's own point of view, whether comforting, disturbing, or hysterically funny. It is a view of the world which had remained hidden, or was only dimly perceived, until now.

But a modest level of Transcendence is also the condition of the possibility of all types of cinematic experience, since it establishes a relationship of trust between the viewer and the moviemaker,[28] a relationship characterized by a relatively high degree of openness,[29] though as we shall see our level of openness may still vary from halting and uncertain in the case of rupture, to unflinchingly, unreservedly open in the case of Transcendence, to just barely open enough to experience the film at a safe distance in the case of metaphysical comfort.

However, even in the case of metaphysical comfort, a relatively high level of openness is generated because the cinematic invitation is fundamentally spiritual in character; it is a spiritual invitation because it invites us to "share subjectivities" with an "other." Hence, presupposed in everything we have to say about filmic Transcendence, metaphysical comfort and Rupture is the idea that in any film experience whatsoever, a relatively high level of openness is invited and encouraged by the cinematic apparatus, so that these types should be regarded as lying on a continuum that is itself embedded at the high end of a continuum.

Transcendence, as a necessary condition of the film experience, constitutes the basic invitation of the cinematic apparatus. It involves the coming together of the viewer's openness with the filmmaker's vision of what the world is like. While transcending one's own point of view is a necessary condition for any type of film experience, it is not yet sufficient for "Transcendent" film experience proper. The latter is to be thought of as residing at one end of a continuum. In order to partici-pate in the experience of film, we have to allow it to take us somewhere. But our assent is usually halting and conditional. In the case of Transcendence, however, we surrender fully and allow the experience to touch us in fundamental ways, to challenge our sense of ourselves and/or our sense of the world. The crucial variable is the degree of openness that we bring to the film experience.

2.3 Type Two: Metaphysical Comfort

Metaphysical comfort also involves our view of ourselves and the world, as well as our relations with the other. But metaphysical comfort is the sense of reassurance that our view of ourselves and the world is essentially correct. The extent of our metaphysical comfort is a function of our level of confidence in our view of ourselves and our identities in relation to others and the world. Type Two film experience enhances, rather than challenges, this confidence.

The demand for metaphysical comfort is not unlike the demand for unity, simplicity, communicability, etc. that Jean-François Lyotard discussed in the context of his anlysis of 'realism':

> Realism, whose only definition is that it intends to avoid the question of reality implicated in that of art, always stands somewhere between academicism and kitsch. When power assumes the name of a party, realism...triumph[s] over the experimental avant-garde by slandering it and banning it - that is, provided the "correct" images, the "correct" narratives, the "correct" forms which the party requests, selects, and propagates can find a public to desire them as the appropriate remedy for the anxiety and depression that public experiences...[this is the party's] *demand for reality - that is, for unity, simplicity, communicability.*[30]

Similar demands, not from "the Party," but from the public psyche, characterize metaphysical comfort.

2.4 Type Three: Rupture

Rupture is the unsettling of either our view of ourselves, our view of the world, or both. The crucial difference between Rupture and Transcendence is the way in which the challenge is met. In the case of Transcendence, the challenge is met squarely and without reservation, a blissful and serene "surrender of the self" to whatever change is in store for it. This type of experience is conditioned by a high degree of openness. But in the case of Rupture, our level of openness is ambivalent. Hence, the challenge is met with reluctance and even severe resistance, a disruption of cherished beliefs that may or may not result in change, depending on the method of suture: if the "wound" is closed over with more of the same, a condition typical of limited openness, then no change occurs; if, on the other hand, the "wound" is explored with deep reflection, a condition characteristic of a high level of openness, permanent and lasting change may occur.

Rupture, then, is a sudden and severe break with expectations, but not just any expectations will do. In fact, most of our expectations with regard to film fall into the category of simple narrative expectations, for example, plot twists, closure, etc. I shall use the example of horror to explore what I mean by rupture. For now, suffice it to say that rupture offers some fundamental challenges to the way in which we see ourselves and/or the world.

Examples of films which challenge the notion of a narrative (or metanarrative) capable of delivering an objective point of view are *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950), and *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986). These films actively pursue multiple layers of meaning simultaneously. They can be read seriously or playfully, as whodunits, or as social satires, indeed, as scathing social commentaries or as entertaining melodramas. These competing elements undermine our ability to be comforted by these films, and contribute to a feeling of being challenged vis à vis our view of ourselves in relation to the world or the other.

2.5 Modern/Postmodern

What is a modern person, how may he or she be characterized, and what sets him or her apart from a "postmodern" person? A modern person can be generally characterized as one who still clings to Enlightenment notions like "The Truth": The Truth about the World, The Truth about Oneself, and The Truth about God. I agree with Richard Bernstein when he says that these terms have recently lost most of their utility through being used in "wildly different" ways within different cultural disciplines and even within the same discipline.[31] However, for my purposes it is

sufficient to describe a modern as someone who still believes that Truth is attainable, scientifically and/or philosophically, or more to the point in the current context, aesthetically, and a postmodern as someone who rejects this possibility entirely. For the postmodern, no single, grand narrative, or metanarrative, no hermeneutics of suspicion such as Freudian psychoanalysis, no super-rationalization of the human subject, no dialectics of the Spirit,[32] is capable of securing, once and for all, a world of unambiguous meaning for human subjects. The game is up.

While I agree that there is in the air a "mood," as Bernstein calls it,[33] of postmodernity, the reader will find my position closer to modernity, in the sense that I believe that *truths* are available in the context of the cinematic, just not *the* Truth. I agree with Merleau-Ponty when he says that truth is that which 'comes into being.' As Shaun Gallagher has rightly observed, Merleau-Ponty's hermeneutics is one "in which truth is not found, but *brought into being.* Yet the advent or realization of truth is never unambiguous; it is always incomplete and imperfect."[34]

The usefulness of the modern/postmodern distinction for my purposes resides in the way that it sets up modern subjectivity as problematic, in need of metaphysical or spiritual grounding. We are moderns living in a postmodern world. We are aware at some level of the (epistemological/metaphysical) barbarians crowding the gates, and this has set up a tension which we are seeking to relieve at the cinema. We are clinging to a piece of flotsam called objectivity,[35] to "the natural bond that modernism assumed to exist between *les mots et les choses*"[36] (words and things; language and the "real world"), and we are turning toward the

quintessentially postmodern for something solid: the cinematic image. As we drift further from shore, the need to solidify the self through narrative becomes greater and greater. This is "spiritual search mode."

Section 3: Genres and Types

There is a good deal of confusion surrounding the development of the theory of genres, quite apart from its use in film theory. Nevertheless, the relationship, if any, of genres to types, as I am using the concept here, warrants some comment, if only to forestall any possible confusion that might arise regarding the relationship between genre criticism and this typology. "Genre" is a term borrowed from literary theory,[37] used by film theorists to create categories which enable them to compare specific films, according to the particular kind, or form of the film. These categories divide films by shared characteristics, for example, western, film-noir, or horror film. But for my purposes, genre criticism has limited value, for types easily cross over the boundaries between genres:[38] any type of film experience is possible in any genre. There is no reason why comedy, for example, cannot be used to satisfy spiritual needs like metaphysical comfort or transcendence. We imagine, for example, satisfying a spiritual need for transcendence by watching Bugs Bunny: that knowing glance at the "camera" never fails to make us feel as if we share with Bugs a particular world-view, specifically as regards our impatience with stupidity, or our amazement at naïveté.[39] Bugs Bunny's life-world perspective was quite real for those animators who developed his character, as well as for those who followed his exploits.[40]

These preliminaries out of the way, we may now proceed in the remainder of Chapter One to set the stage in two ways. First, we shall look at phenomenological description, in Part II, and then we shall move on to discuss, in Part III, the historical movement known as "secularization." We may then proceed with the elaboration of a phenomenological typology of the film experience.

PART II - PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

Section 1: The Phenomenological Method

Before proceeding to describe phenomenologically three basic types of cinematic

experience, a few words about the phenomenological method itself are in order,

particularly with regard to what kind of phenomenology is to be carried out here. I

will be using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment for the most part.

However, shared by most phenomenologists is the central objective articulated by

Edmund Husserl, that is, to get back "to the things themselves."[41] What philosophy

must begin with are the phenomena themselves; all theory must take second place.

It is in this general spirit that our typology will be constructed.

Phenomenology is less a school than a method. As Heidegger puts it:

> The expression 'phenomenology' signifies primarily a *methodological*
> *conception*. This expression does not characterize the what of the objects of
> philosophical research as subject-matter, but rather the *how* of that research....
>   Thus the term 'phenomenology' expresses a maxim which can be
> formulated as 'To the things themselves!' It is opposed to all free-floating
> constructions and accidental findings; it is opposed to taking over any
> conceptions which only seem to have been demonstrated; it is opposed to
> those pseudo-questions which parade themselves as 'problems', often for
> generations at a time.[42]

Thus, for Heidegger, the scientific analysis of the phenomena always begins with

examining the way in which things show themselves.

This method involves the intuitive grasping, nuanced description, and analytic

examination of the phenomena, in this case those phenomena peculiar to the film

experience. Our first goal, then, will be to describe, rather than to attempt to

explain, cinematic phenomena as they appear, bracketing questions having to do with their "reality" or whatever significance they might enjoy with regard to the world of our everyday existence. Only after this initial descriptive step is complete will we be in a position to offer a hermeneutical analysis of the film experience as such.

Merleau-Ponty quotes Eugen Fink as probably having the "best formulation of the reduction ... when he spoke of 'wonder' in the face of the world"(*PhPer*, xiii). In this sense, the phenomenon of movie-going is a bracketing of discrete chunks of the life-world, framing them off from their wider context so as to contemplate their essence. This bracketing, or reduction, or putting out of play, of all natural rela- tionships with the world has the effect of bringing sharply into focus what is usually taken for granted, presupposed, and unnoticed. This is what Merleau-Ponty means when he says that the world *as lived*, rather than the so-called "objective" world, is movie material *par excellence*. And we become aware of this mingling of con- sciousness with the world through "slackening [those] intentional threads" that connect us with the world. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

> Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of
> consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of
> transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional
> threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our
> notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that
> world as strange and paradoxical.[*PhPer*, xiii]

While looking for the general essence of the experience, we nonetheless do not presume to identify any *disembodied* "essence of the film experience." In this sense, we will be pursuing Merleau-Pontean phenomenology, as opposed to Husser-

lian phenomenology, since Husserl believed that essences were ideal and ontologically distinct from the "real world," whereas Merleau-Ponty's position is that there are no disembodied essences. The search for essences - understood as the search for that element which lies in some ideal realm and constitutes the heart of the film experience - is in fact a nostalgic wish never to be realized. Unless we understand essence to be located in that embodied, existential element which most film experiences share, we shall needlessly restrict our search.

Furthermore, a hermeneutic analysis of the film experience as such reveals a profound, underlying need, the need spiritually to ground ourselves in a secular society. This constitutes the existential essence of the film experience. But the use of the term "essence" in this context is misleading. There are so many different modes of expression of spirituality that it becomes meaningless to talk of the essence of the spiritual experience. Any attempt to reduce the experience to a single essence is not only doomed to failure, but perhaps more importantly risks restricting the full breadth and richness of the experience to a small set of defining characteristics without which it would not be what it is. This view, far from enlivening and enriching the experience, tends to cut off and narrowly circumscribe it, resulting in endless and fruitless debate over what fits the profile and what doesn't. I would rather retain the texture and depth and richness than try to capture the experience in a nutshell.

Section 2: Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Lived-Body and the Film Experience

2.1 Bodily Preconditions of the Film Experience

Our level of engagement with the film world seems not to require any intellectual effort. This is not an act of linguistic interpretation - except when interpreting dialogue. Consequently, all semiotic analyses that use linguistic interpretation as their model, no matter how helpful they may be in identifying the signs that cinema makes use of, are insufficient to capture the full richness of the experience. Film's meaning structures depend largely on bodily ways of being in the world. We respond to the screen much as we respond to the other in "real life," that is, *viscerally*, to the bodily gestures and movements of the character's, as well as the camera's, point of view. This is how such an intense level of engagement is acheived. The camera serves the same function as an embodied eye. It takes up a point of view, one that we share. And this point of view is our first clue that the body-subject's presence to the world is what the film image recreates.

Subjectivity is so intimately bound up with the body[43] that the subjectivity embodied by the point of view of the camera works to make us occupy the emotional space of the camera. Examples of this effect are well-documented.[44] We feel trepidation and claustrophobia as the camera slowly dollies down a narrow hallway, as happens, for example, in *Diabolique* (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1955); hightened emotions if it fast-dollies forward to a character's face. For example, when the camera gets its first glimpse of John Wayne in *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), it is as if the subject embodied by the camera is "running up" to him. We may feel a close personal contact and even warmth toward a character in extreme close-up, for example, in Dreyer's use of close-up in his *The Passion*

of Joan of Arc (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928). We feel that two characters are emotionally

close to one another when the two appear in the same shot. An "over-the-shoulder" view

establishes this bond. Absence of this "over-the-shoulder" shot - particularly when objects

cut the space between the characters - is thought to signify the reverse, that is, lack of

closeness between the characters. For example, in *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976),

Robert De Niro and Cybill Shepherd are photographed from the side in a restaurant with

multiple objects dividing the screen space between them in order to emphasize the emo-

tional distance between them. Even respect for a person's power can be conveyed through

a low-angle shot of a character with whom we are supposed to be impressed in some way.

In *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), for example, Charles Foster Kane is photographed

from a low angle when we are supposed to be impressed by him. Its inverse, lack of awe

or respect, is revealed by the camera's position above the character. An interesting example

of this technique is the rooftop shot, which can signify anything from the character's being

spied upon to his being subject to the whims of fate, depending on the context. In *The 400*

Blows (François Truffaut, 1959), for example, we follow Jean Pierre Leaud's movements

from a rooftop after he commits a crime. A particularly witty example is Hitchcock's use

of a high angle shot in *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959) in order to exaggerate

the impending doom of American spy Eva Marie Saint at the hands of "enemy" spy James

Mason. Mason has just discovered that Saint is really a plant in his organization and plans

to heave her out of their escape plane once they have safely taken off. As Mason says to

Martin Landau, "These things are best handled from a great height," Hitchcock elevates his

camera position to shoot down on Mason and Landau, as if from the point of view both of

Saint, upstairs in the house at the time, as well as somewhat humourously looking forward to her demise, "from a great height."

While these effects are quite familiar to most film theorists, what both they and aestheticians have so far overlooked is the phenomenological fact that our bodily presence to the film world, which these effects recreate, marks the film experience as unique among aesthetic experiences. In no other art is bodily engagement so fundamental to producing aesthetic effects. This makes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis of the structures of bodily being in the world ideally suited to help us understand the film experience.

While it is true that theatre depends for its effects on the sheer bodily presence of its audience, this in no way means that meanings constructed on the basis of bodily ways of being are fundamental to its aesthetic effects, as is the case with cinema. In the theatre, notwithstanding some experimenting with special effects, the spectator is stationary. The play unfolds before us; we do not move around the world of the play, exploring it.

Even so, it is interesting to note the ways in which film art seems to be having an effect on theatre. Increasingly in today's theatre the sets are becoming as important as the play itself. Veteran set designer Tony Walton, for example, in constructing the sets for Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, used a central stage twice the size of that found in a conventional Broadway house, the largest ever built for the musical theatre. He surrounded the audience with sets depicting London streets. Set designer Heidi Landesman, who built the sets for *The Secret Garden* and *Big River*, and more recently designed the sets for *Smokey Joe's Café*, says the following about modern set design:

What you're really doing is ... you're able to create *inhabited dream worlds*, which is an enormously satisfying thing to be able to do.... You want to establish a world or a vocabulary or a metaphor, I think, at the top, and *pull your audience into that world* and inform them, "this is how we're going to operate; this is going to be the style." And then, presumably, once they've understood that, they'll let that go and get absorbed in the play.[45]

This is precisely what cinema has always done, that is, create "inhabited dream worlds."

Even though this is an effect not unlike that created by "Cinerama," which Hollywood

introduced in the 1950's as a response to television, Cinerama itself merely exaggerates a

fundamental effect of cinema, that is, bodily engagement and shared subjectivity.

Literature is probably closer to cinema than the theatre since it too allows for

unimpeded travel across time and space. But in literature, the written word is always the

connecting link with the fictive world. And this word requires interpretation. We conjure

up images to fit the story and characters, as opposed to being swept up bodily into the story

by conjured-up images.

Section 3: Types of Cinematic Experience

3.1 Criteria

The criterion which separates types is spiritual/existential intention. What do I mean by

"intention" in this context? This is no psychological state, a conscious - or even uncon-

scious - desire to do something. Intention here is not what we usually mean when we say

that we "intend" something. I am using the term "intention" in the phenomenological sense.

All phenomena are intentional in the sense that they are "*meant*, not simply acknowledged

in perception ... and phenomenology is the science or discipline of pheomena as 'meant'

entities - meanings ordered and, indeed, constituted by the appropriate acts of conscious-

ness."[46] We can unpack the meanings inherent in the intentional acts whereby we constitute film experience in general, and more to the point for our present purposes, different types of film experiences.

But in so doing, we must steer clear of any intellectualist notion of intentionality. Our bodies are not mere objects of consciousness, as they are for Descartes. They are our own bodies, bodies-in-action, expressions of modes of existence, living "attitudes" toward the world. Following Merleau-Ponty, we shall regard bodily motility as basic intentionality, "consciousness is in the first place [*originairement*] not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can'" (*PhPer*, 160, 137). As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "the relationship between subject and object is ... a *relationship of being* [un *rapport d'être*] in which, paradoxically, the subject *is* his body, his world, and his situation, by a sort of exchange."[47] If we want to examine cinematic experience, we must examine the filmgoer's bodily comportment toward the film, as well as his or her world and situation.[48] This approach takes us well beyond the walls of the theatre and into the filmgoer's world. Film art becomes that art which takes up the foundational and original form of intentionality, that is, the body's directedness toward the world, and uses it to make meaning. This is the paradox of cinematic experience: through its dependence on bodily modes of meaning, the cinematic *image* reminds us of our intimate bodily connection with the world and with others, yet it does so by enveloping us in an imagistic world.

A type, then, is a mode of being in the world, a stance toward or away from the world, wherein we operate with a particular intention, or orientation, notwithstanding our relative lack of self-consciousness regarding the type of mode in which we find ourselves.

It carries with it a particular attitude with respect to openness, availability.[49] In the case of Spiritual Transcendence, for example, a high degree of openness is characteristic; however, in the case of Metaphysical Comfort, a low degree of openness is typical. Between these two extremes resides Rupture - probably the most common of all existential intentionalities with respect to the film experience - a mode in which we are ambivalent regarding our level of openness to the other. Hence, a unique existential intention is operative in each case.

The boundaries between types are not rigid, but quite fluid and easily-crossed; overlapping rather than strict separation is the rule. For example, we could find ourselves suddenly shifting from metaphysical comfort to rupture (and probably back again) during a single sequence as a result of something (or someone) being made present to us which (or who) shakes the foundations of our life-world. But both metaphysical comfort and rupture have a common underlying intention, that is, spiritually to ground the self. Even though it is more common to shift about from type to type than it is to remain fixed in one type for the duration of a film, we can nevertheless characterize films according to their overarching mood, or atmosphere. This shifting about is even more common today, as a result of the postmodern blending of genres.

Cinema has become self-consciously aware of its spiritual essence. A feed-back loop is underway. Themes now seem more focused than ever on examining our place in the world, and our relationships with others, particularly the radical other, as is evident from the proliferation of science fiction identity-questioning motifs. We are no longer sure what we're going to get at the movies - and it seems this is precisely what we want: a

chance to question fundamental notions like self-identity and personhood. I have in mind

particularly *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), *Aliens* (James

Cameron, 1986), and *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987), all of which in different ways self-

consciously question the notion of self-identity. The interesting twist offered by the Alien

series is that the "alien" actually resides within, at least in its initial stages, making its threat

one of penetration of the body's inviolability by a disease-like organism, a motif that has

prompted some to link this science fiction/horror series to the beginnings of the AIDS crisis

in the 1980's.

3.2 Hermeneutic Phenomenology

This analysis is subject-centered, as opposed to "subjective," with all the latter's negative

connotations. That is, it will be concerned to describe the experience of human subjects,

largely leaving aside questions such as the ontological status of the filmic image. These

descriptions lead us into the realm of hermeneutics, since the construction of meaning is

always an activity carried out by an interpreting consciousness. A hermeneutic phenomen-

ology of the film experience reveals that the essence of the cinematic experience is spiri-

tual.

Indeed, hermeneutics itself has a theological significance much older than its modern

origins in Biblical interpretation. As Richard Palmer reminds us, the first basic direction of

the meaning of *hermeneuein* is "to express," "to assert," or "to say."[50] This is related to

the announcing function of Hermes, the Greek wing-footed messenger-god. But of

particular theological significance is the etymology of the word *herme*:

hermē is close to the Latin *sermo*, "to say," and to the Latin *verbum*, "word." This suggests that the minister, in bringing the Word, is "announcing" and "asserting" something; his function is not merely to explain but to proclaim. The minister, like Hermes, and like the priest at Delphi, brings fateful tidings from the divine. In his "saying" or proclamation, he is, like Hermes, a "go-between" from God to man. Even simply saying, asserting, or proclaiming is an important act of "interpretation."[51]

With this etymology in mind, we may say that the filmmaker projects, announces, says, or proclaims something about those items that he or she deems important by setting them off from their background and in so doing, acts as an interpreter of the life-world.

The self who seeks its ground is the narrated self, or self-interpreted.[52] Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology has as one of its central claims self-identity's reliance on the interpreting of cultural documents, like films, especially as this interpretation relates itself to symbols and myths. As Ricoeur puts it,

> the understanding of the self is always indirect and proceeds from the interpretation of signs given outside me in culture and history and from the appropriation of the meaning of these signs ... *[while] the interpretation of symbols is not the whole of hermeneutics, ... it is the condensation point and ... the place of greatest density.*[53]

Two points need to be stressed here: (1) the self is always arrived at indirectly through a process of interpretation, and (2) this process focuses on, or as Ricoeur says, "condenses around," the symbol. The self is known through mirroring ourselves to ourselves using symbol-laden cultural works such as films. Thus, cinematic experience makes an important contribution to constructed subjectivity and in so doing addresses the need to ground ourselves spiritually in a secular world. This contribution to postmodern subjectivity makes the movie house a secular temple.

Having set the stage as far as the type of phenomenology to be used is concerned, we may now set the stage historically by offering a very brief overview of the secularization of spiritual consciousness in the latter half of the twentieth century.

PART III - SECULARIZATION OF MODERN SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Section 1: Working Definition of "Secular"

The word "secular" means pertaining to the world, worldly; not sacred, but profane, or non-religious. It comes from the Latin *sæculāris*, from *sæculum*, meaning generation or age. In Christian Latin, it means the World, as especially opposed to the Church.

However, the first thing to notice about this concept is the lack of clear boundaries between it and the "spiritual." Secular, as I am using the term, means non-religious, but not necessarily non-spiritual, since the church is not the only means of expression of the spiritual life of a community. But we do not have in mind by the term what some have called "secularism." As Edward J. Jurji reminds us, secularism was one of the two main threats to religion in the early days of the twentieth century. As far back as 1928, Rufus M. Jones, the eminent Quaker thinker, warned that the real rival of Christianity was not Buddhism, Islam, or any other religion, but was instead what he called "secularism," which he defined as:

> *a way of life and an interpretation of life that include only the natural order*
> *of things and that do not find God, or a realm of spiritual reality, essential*
> *for life and thought.*[PhRel, 273, emphasis mine.]

For Rufus Jones, the causes of such secularism included Renaissance humanism, the rise of science, rationalism, as well as the historical criticism of the Bible and the Industrial Revolution, with its loss of contact with nature, its slums and depressed conditions as well as its intense economic competition and excessive materialism. But no matter what the causes, secularism was defined as a turning away from traditional religious interpretations of life.

The crucial thing to notice for our purposes is the phrase, "a realm of spiritual reality." This betrays a misunderstanding of what it means to be spiritual. The phrase indicates that two things which should be separated are being run together, the religious and the spiritual. One need not turn away from spirituality because one has turned away from religion. Perhaps in some periods of history, organized religion doesn't satisfy our spiritual longings.

Bernard Meland offers a definition of secularization:

> Simply stated, and in its barest terms, secularization is the movement away from traditionally accepted norms and sensibilities in the life interests and habits of a people - a departure from an historical order of life that presupposes religious sanctions.[54]

While it's clear that we have moved away from a way of life that presupposes religious sanctions, it's also clear that spirituality has not been cast out with the bathwater. *Religiosity* is a ritualistic mode of behaviour, including adherence to specific doctrines and beliefs, *through which we act out* our spiritual interests, while *spirituality* is that dimension of existence which seeks *in* these rituals answers to the kind of fundamental questions which we described earlier. Hence spirituality is prior to religiosity. If this distinction is not kept clearly in mind, we shall lose sight of what we are attempting to do. (See CHAPTER ONE, PART I, Section 2.1 for a discussion of this distinction.)

Section 2: Sacred and Profane

At this stage, it is worthwhile quoting at some length Emile Durkheim regarding the distinction between the sacred and the profane:

> All known religious beliefs ... presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal ... into two classes or opposed groups ... *profane* and *sacred* (*profane, sacré*) ... the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane ... the *beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with profane things*. But by sacred things one must not understand simply those personal beings which are called gods or spirits; a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word, *anything can be sacred. A rite can have this character; in fact, the rite does not exist which does not have it to a certain degree.* ...the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common.[55]

The realm of the sacred and the realm of the profane are indeed heterogeneous, but it is important for the present thesis that we bear in mind that this division resides within the context of a spiritual world-view. The "division of the world into two heterogeneous domains," (37) sacred and profane, is not *only* the distinctive trait of *religious thought*; it is also the distinctive trait of cinematic consciousness understood spiritually/existentially. Even more importantly, he says that the sacred can be anywhere. It may even be the case that the sacred is not consciously identified as such.

It is my contention that the rite known as cinema-going is a quasi-sacred rite which, not unlike religious thought, involves the representation of myths and legends which divide the world into light and dark, good and evil, sacred and profane. Hence, our "secularism" betrays an underlying spirituality, one which has embedded itself in the mythological world of the cinematic. This is what I mean by the secularization of modern spiritual consciousness.

These preliminaries out of the way, we may now proceed to the heart of the thesis, the phenomenological types of cinematic experience.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. This succinct encapsulation of the spirit of my thesis comes from Geoffrey Hill's recent book, *Illuminating Shadows: The Mythic Power of Film* (Boston: Shambala Publications, Inc., 1992), p.3.

2. For a general discussion of secularization, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christianity in a Secularized World* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); and Bernard Eugene Meland, *The Secularization of Modern Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966). I will have more to say about secularization as a prior cultural condition of "search mode" later on, in Chapter One, Part III: Secularization of Modern Spiritual Consciousness.

3. The modern frustration with the lack of fundamentals seems also responsible for a postmodern obsession with cults. Seen in this light, cults are just an extreme reaction to a free-floating, value-neutral culture that lacks spiritual foundations.

4. Here we find the structuralists and semioticians; for example: Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972); Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

5. See, for example: Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Enlarged edition, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), and André Bazin's influential realist treatment, *What Is Cinema?*, 2 volumes, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, 1971).

6. See, among many others: Stephen Heath and Patricia Mellencamp, eds. *Cinema and Language* (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1983); Inez Hedges, *Breaking the Frame: Film Language and the Experience of Limits* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*; R. Barton Palmer, ed., *The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches* (New York: AMS Press, 1989).

7. See, for example: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: The Athlone Press, 1986); and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minnesota: The Athlone Press, 1989); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1962); Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, tr. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972).

8. Although there has recently been a flurry of theoretical activity of a phenomenological type regarding the film experience - see, for example, Allan Casebier, *Film and Phenomenology: Toward a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* - none has addressed the existential question of the *types* of *possible* experience.

9. See, for example, Ian Jarvie, *Philosophy of the Film: Epistemology, ontology, aesthetics* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987). Hereafter, *PF* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

10. Jarvie's emphasis on refutation as the engine of progress seems influenced by his teacher, Sir Karl R. Popper, who sees scientific progress as a process not of theory verification but of lack of theory falsification:

> A theory which is not in fact refuted by testing those new and bold
> and improbable predictions to which it gives rise can be said to be
> corroborated by these severe tests.

Sir Karl R. Popper, "Truth, Rationality, and the Growth of Scientific Knowledge," in Alex Michalos (ed.), *Philosophical Problems of Science and Technology* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1974), 81.

11. As we shall see in Chapter Three, what Jarvie seems to regard as the heart of the film experience, I regard as merely *one possible type* of film experience, namely, the metaphysically comforting.

12. See Mary Pat Kelly, *Martin Scorsese: A Journey* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), 121.

13. See Robert Phillip Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 178.

14. Martin Scorsese, as quoted in Les Keyser, *Martin Scorsese* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 216.

15. This is a phrase he takes from Robert Sklar's book, *Movie-Made America* (New York: Random House, 1975), ch.8.

16. Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion*, 47. Hereafter, *GGD* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

17. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 523, n.2.

18. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 4.

19. See Larry L. Fahlberg and Lauri A. Fahlberg, "Exploring spirituality and consciousness with an expanded science: Beyond the ego with empiricism, phenomenology, and contemplation," in *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 1991; 5(4): 273-281.

20. Banks, R., "Health and the spiritual dimension: Relationships and implications for professional preparation," in *The Journal of School Health*, 1980; 50: 195-202, as quoted in Fahlberg and Fahlberg (1991), 274.

21. See Elkins, D., Hedstrom, L., Hughes, L., Leaf, J., Saunders, C., "Toward a humanistic-phenomenological spirituality," in *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1988; 28: 5-18, as referred to in Fahlberg and Fahlberg (1991), 274.

22. Elkins, D., et al, "Toward a Humanistic...," 274.

23. Fahlberg and Fahlberg, p.276

24. See Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 14.

25. See Martin Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), where he says:

> Towering up within itself, the work opens up a *world* and keeps it
> abidingly in force. To be a work means to set up a world...World is
> the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of
> birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being.
> Wherever those decisions of our history that relate to our very being
> are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are
> rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds.[*OWA*, 44-45]

Hereafter, OWA (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix). For us now, cinema founds a world.

26. In this regard, see Paul Nathanson's enlightening study, *Over The Rainbow: The Wizard of Oz as a Secular Myth of America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

27. See Hans-Georg Gadamer's discussion of 'play' in his *Truth and Method*, second revised edition, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroads, 1989). Also referred to will be the second German edition, tr. W. Glen-

Doepel (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975). Hereafter, *TM*, followed by year of translation and page numbers (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

28. I shall not be detained here by film-theoretical questions concerning the real 'author' (or 'auteur') of a film. Though this question has caused much ink to be spilt, it is not central to my concerns here because no matter who is responsible for the finished product, the types of experience possible at the cinema remain the same. Since my analysis centres on the viewing subject, the question of authorship is only relevant in determining what type of experience we're likely to have and how we approach the film experience in terms of expectations.

29. Gadamer, in the context of his discussion of the openness to tradition of his-torically effected consciousness, draws a parallel between this and human relations:

> It too has a real analogue in the I's experience of the Thou. In human relations the important thing is...to experience the Thou truly as a Thou - i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond.... Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so.[*TM*, 361]

30. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 75, emphasis mine.

31. See, for example: Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992), 1-13, 199-229, especially 200-201, and *Habermas and Modernity*, edited with an introduction by Bernstein (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985), 25, 41, 47, 50, and *Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 58, 59, 84, 90, wherein, incidentally, he uses the phrase "metaphysical comfort" to describe that feeling of standing on some sort of foundation, the kind of foundation which philosophers such as Richard Rorty are quite willing to live without. See also, regarding defining the modern/postmodern, Calvin O. Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), especially 13-49; and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), especially 3-65; and Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: ICA Documents* (London: ICA, 1989).

32. See in this context Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, xxiii-xxiv.

33. Bernstein, *New Constellation*, 200.

34. See Thomas W. Busch and Shaun Gallagher, eds., *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 4.

35. This is what I believe Lyotard has in mind when he writes of modern aesthetics being still tied to the (nostaligic) sublime, as it continues to offer to the viewer "matter for solace and pleasure...[the collective sharing of] the nostalgia for the unattainable," or "the nostalgia for presence felt by the human subject, on the obscure and futile will which inhabits him in spite of everything." See Jean-françois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 81, 79.

36. See Gary B. Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 183.

37. Perhaps the clearest contemporary example of genre theory appears in the work of Northrop Frye, as found, for example, in his *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); and *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); and *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1990). Frye has offered a typology of literary genres which links them to archetypal themes, some of which are mythologized versions of biblical or otherwise religious motifs.

38. These boundaries are now, with the advent of postmodern kitsch, blurred. The postmodern blending of genres which the public seems now to demand, known colloqially as *pastiche*, particularly evident in films of recent years, means that genre criticism as practiced by film theorists is in need of some rethinking, though this is not the place to undertake such a project. In this regard, see, for example, *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986), as well as the short-lived television series, *Twin Peaks* (David Lynch and Mark Frost, 1991-92), as well as the now-notoriously postmodern science fiction film-noir *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982).

39. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in the context of his discussion of the symbol in *Relevance of the Beautiful*, tr. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), hereafter, *RB* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix), says the following about these "shared articles of belief:"

> We define the symbol as that through which someone or something is
> known or recognized...[a] congregation [for example] understands its
> symbols and finds confirmation of itself in that recognition...shared
> articles of belief...whereas today the symbolic power of the work of
> art [awakens] a shared consciousness of something through its own
> expressive power. The experience that "this is you" can range from

the most terrifying intensity of tragic catastrophe to the lightest touch
of meaning, from the encounter with King Oedipus to a confrontation
with one of the silently brooding paintings of Mondrian: *in all these
cases, we become conscious of something shared.* The recognition
that the work of art procures for us is always an expansion of that
infinite process of making ourselves at home in the world which is the
human lot.[151]

An important source of these shared articles of belief for us postmoderns is the
cinematic experience.

40. Chuck Jones relates the following anecdote regarding the Warners animators'
self-conscious efforts at believable characterization:

> A young man came to work with us at Warner Brothers Cartoons as a
> writer shortly after WWII and promptly and proudly wrote home to
> his grandmother in Denver that he was writing sripts for Bugs Bunny.
> "I can't understand why you're writing scripts for Bugs
> Bunny," the old lady replied with some asperity. "He's funny enough
> just as he is."
> Believability. That's what we were striving for ... belief in the
> life of characters - by the writer, the artist, the director, the animator...
> What was implicit in what the old lady was saying was that our
> job was not to *invent* what Bugs Bunny did but to *report* his doings.

Bugs inhabits the same world we do and reacts to it in much the same way. See
Chuck Jones, *Chuck Amuck: The Life and Times of an Animated Cartoonist* (New
York: Avon Books, 1989), 13.

41. The German expression, "Zu den Sachen Selbst," was also used by Hegel. As
Spiegelberg says, it *doesn't* mean "turning to objective realities in the world outside,
rather than to subjective reflection." It means instead "the refusal to make philo-
sophical theories and the critique of such theories the primary concern... of philos-
ophy, as does much linguistic analysis and criticism" [*PM*, 109].

42. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 50 [H.27], emphasis mine.

43. For more on how subjectivity is closely related to embodiment, see Gabriel
Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary*. Marcel's influence is evident in
Paul Ricoeur's *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, tr. Erazim
Kohák (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966). And Merleau-Ponty's
most important works have embodiment as their central theme.

44. See, for example: Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema, The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*; Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema, Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso, 1982).

45. Transcribed from a recording of an interview with Heidi Landesman, which was broadcast on *CBS News Sunday Morning*, Sunday, December 4, 1994.

46. See Maurice Natanson, *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 13.

47. See Merleau-Ponty, "The Battle over Existentialism," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, 72. The original passage reads:

> Le rapport de sujet et de l'objet n'est plus ce *rapport de connaissance* dont parlait l'idéalisme classique et dans lequel l'objet apparaît toujours comme construit par le sujet, mais un *rapport d'être* selon lequel paradoxalement le sujet *est* son corps, son monde et sa situation, et, en quelque sorte, s'échange.[*Sens et Non-Sens*, 125].

48. As Merleau-Ponty points out in his "Film and the New Psychology," in *Sense and Non-Sense*,

> contemporary philosophy [existential phenomenology] consists not in stringing concepts together but in describing the mingling of consciousness with the world, its involvement in a body, and its coexistence with others;...this is movie material *par excellence*. [105, tr. 59].

49. For a helpful discussion of the concept of availability, see Joe McCown, *Availability: Gabriel Marcel and the Phenomenology of Human Openness* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978), especially with respect to the body, 25-39, and the other, the "Absolute Thou," 55-78. Hereafter, *Av* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

50. See Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern Unversity Press, 1969), 14-15.

51. Ibid.

52. See, in this regard, especially Ricoeur's *Fallible Man*, rev. tr. Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), *The Symbolism of Evil*, tr. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), and *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University

Press, 1974). See also Anthony Paul Kerby, *Narrative and the Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

53. This succinct statement of Ricoeur's position on the self is taken from his forward to Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971), xv-xvii (emphasis mine).

54. Bernard E. Meland, *The Secularization of Modern Cultures*, 43.

55. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, tr. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1915, 1968), 37-38.

CHAPTER TWO:

TYPE 1 - FILMIC TRANSCENDENCE

Films are not films to me. They are life. That's the idea ... especially a film that reaches a certain kind of truth. You learn from it. It's like reading [or trying to practice] ... a certain kind of philosophy. - Martin Scorsese[1]

My own invisibility is invested in the bodies of the others who see me. The self is divided from its Source, yet there persists a longing in the ragged and tattered folds of our bodies, lives and history. This is the longing for vision, for self-comprehension, and this longing is the desire for the Other. - Galen A. Johnson[2]

Section 1: A Working Definition of "Transcendence"

1.1 Transcendence

The word "transcendence" is derived from two Latin words, "trans," which means across, and "scandere," meaning to climb. So, transcendence means, literally, to climb across, to surpass, or go beyond. As *A Handbook of Theological Terms*[3] tells us, the term has generally been used in Christian theology in two different but closely related ways:

> (1) It has been used to designate any ideal or thing or being that "stands over against" the knowing subject. It conveys "otherness" ... *another self is transcendent in the sense of confronting one as an autonomous and independent centre of consciousness.* Or one may use the term, as Kant (1724-1804) did, to refer to those objects that lie beyond or surpass human modes of perception and cognition altogether and, thus, are unknowable.

> (2) The term has been used to signify that which "stands over against" all finite being as such, hence a term for God, the ground and source of all being. Transcendence then designates God's unique mode of

relationship to the world ... the diety is 'wholly other' and, therefore, unknowable by the unaided natural mind.

Clearly, both meanings are of use to us in the context of describing what is meant by filmic Transcendence. First, Transcendence closes the gap between self and other - a phenomenon which accounts for much of the appeal of the film experience - whether we are confronted with a "live" or only a quasi-subject. We are curious about what the world looks like from different perspectives. We are fascinated by the supposedly "unknowable," indeed this intrigues the curious mind most of all, like the hidden pond marked "NO FISHING". Whether it's the passionate and (sometimes explicitly) religious "ultimate concern"[4] of Ingmar Bergman's life-world pespective, or the surreal terrors of the flesh of David Cronenberg's world, we seek out a visual expression of a view from somewhere else.

Closely related to this first sense is the second, namely, that transcendence is a term for God, and that the ground and source of all being is "wholly other" and thus unknowable by the unaided human mind. Our fascination with the unknowable is very old indeed,[5] yet it lies at the very heart of our modern cinematic interest. The history of this fascination is the history of the search for God. And Filmic Transcendence is that type of film experience which teases us with the possibility of fulfilling this interest, and on rare occasions really does fulfill it. This spiritual dimension of the film experience is not immediately obvious, but we shall not allow this fact to deter us, as Mircea Eliade puts it, from attempting to decipher it.

1.2 Filmic Transcendence as Dissolution of the Self/Other Duality

How are we to understand transcendence as it is found in the experience of film?

Transcendence is characterized by a dissolution of the (apparent) distance between

self and other.[6] In the case of the cinematic experience, the "other" is the quasi-

subject[7] embodied by the film's mode of being in the world, a subject whose ghost

inhabits and gives expression to this world through its unique point of view, or life-

world perspective. I take the expression "quasi-subject" from Mikel Dufrenne:

> *the aesthetic object is a quasi subject [un quasi-sujet], that is, ... it is*
> *capable of expression.* In order to express, the aesthetic object must
> transcend itself toward a signification which is not the explicit signifi-
> cation attached to representations but a more fundamental signification
> that *projects a world [qui projette un monde].* In aesthetic experience,
> the unconditioned is the atmosphere of a world which is revealed by
> the expression through which the transcendence of the subject mani-
> fests itself. Moreover, we are justified in treating the aesthetic object
> as a quasi subject, because it is the work of a creator. A subject
> always appears in the aesthetic object, and that is why one is able to
> speak indifferently of a world of the creator or of a world of the work.
> *The aesthetic object contains the subjectivity of the subject who has*
> *created it and expresses himself in it, and whom in turn it manifests.-*
> [*PhAE*, 255-56, tr. 196.]

This last sentence reads in the French:

> L'objet esthétique recèle la subjectivité du sujet qui l'a créé, qui
> s'exprime en lui, et qu'à son tour il manifeste.

The French verb "receler," besides meaning "to contain," also carries the sense of

"concealing," which adds another dimension to this sentence's meaning. The work

of art has concealed within it the subjectivity of its "author."[8] But this also reminds

us of what Heidegger has to say about truth for the Greeks being *aletheia*, or unconcealedness, that is, the "clearing" through which the truth of being shines.(OWA, 36) Transcendence, then, is the uncanny experience of our spiritual co-habitation of the film's quasi-subjective world.[9]

This quasi-presence, or quasi-subjectivity of the work of film art, is what gives us the sometimes unsettling feeling that we "know" the "author" of this film somehow. Contrary to popular opinion, our level of comfort with the projected life-world perspective of a given film has little to do with the film's level of violence, or the extent of its nudity, etc. It has much more to do with the film's "attitude" toward its subject; *how* it looks, rather than *what* it looks at. It is our blending or sharing of subjectivities with the film's that can sometimes be quite alarming. If we are sensitive to the "terrors of the flesh," for example, then we get a clear sense that we probably don't want to know David Cronenberg personally (see, for example, *Dead Ringers* [1988]), but we might want to meet Sam Raimi, since Raimi's attitude toward horror is more playful, as for example in *Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn* (Sam Raimi, 1987). All this is, of course, an over-simplification of the complex issue of the authorship of films.

What do we mean by dissolution of the self-other duality? First, we have to define what we mean by dissolution of the self. Dissolution of the self breaks up its apparent formal unity. This dissolution is the necessary condition of the joining of self and other. The self is usually considered an isolated, autonomous individual, the subject of his or her own consciousness, from which it follows that intersubject-

ivity consists in the relation between two independent and mutually irreducible substances, self and other. Dissolution of the self-other duality is the breaking up of the supposed formal unity of the individual poles of the (apparent) duality of self and other.

This experience allows us to realize the indivisibility of self and other, since it consists in the utter dissolution of that self considered as something over and against, distinct and independent from the other. The unity of the self is "spread out," encompassing - and revealing itself as indistinguishable from - the other, much like the phenomenon of the spreading out of our body-image to envelop the physical boundaries of an automobile.

Section 2: A Phenomenological Description of Filmic Transcendence

When we are in the grip of Transcendent film experience, we are generally unaware of any real distinction between subject and object, between our life-world perspective and the point of view embodied by the film's quasi-subjectivity. We no longer live our being under the illusion of a subjectivity which is separate, uninvolved, distinct. We are made aware of the finiteness of our ego upon reflection only. Mikel Dufrenne's discussion of the "cosmological link between subject and object" in his *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (1973) is instructive in this regard. Mark Roberts and Dennis Gallagher sum up Dufrenne's point:

> a priori elements are likewise encountered by the ... experiencing
> subject, since he could not recognize the expressed world of the
> aesthetic object unless he had a virtual knowledge of its content in the
> particular, existential sense. But virtual knowledge also involves a

knowledge of the a priori in its cosmological embodiment, that is, as the inner link between the subject and the content of his inner experience. This reconciliation of subject and object within the aesthetic experience effects an even greater unity - the unity of Being. The a priori, as determination of both subject and object, testifies to an all-encompassing being that makes this affinity possible in the first place.[10]

Our being is made Being in the case of filmic transcendence; undifferentiated, whole, larger than the confines of our finite ego. During this involvement, the distinction between self and other evaporates. Mikel Dufrenne beautifully articulates this type of experience:

man and world are linked by the same flesh and blood. I can feel this profound familiarity whenever, instead of attempting to master appearances and thereby form a perception that subsequently lends itself to intellectual analysis, I remain fully sensible to the sensuous; whenever I am sufficiently present in it to let it resound in me and lose myself in it. For example, when I am all ears, I no longer have ears, for the sonorous completely inhabits me; I then live the primitive distinction between subject and object, just as I live it between self and other in the ecstatic moments of love.[11]

Filmic Transcendence, like other forms of aesthetic transcendence, is pre-reflective, like primordial perception itself, and as such reveals little distinction between subject and object.

Merleau-Ponty was aware of this it seems when he observed the following in regard to poetry:

ideas and facts are just the raw materials of art ... the essence of the art of poetry is not the didactic description of things or the explanation of ideas but the creation of a machine of language [*une machine de langage*] which almost without fail puts the reader in a certain poetic

state [*dans un certain état poétique*]. Movies, likewise, always have a
story and often an idea ..., but the function of the film is not to make
these facts or ideas known to us.[12]

It is true that while we are "into" a work of art such as a film in this way, we

experience a kind of distancing with regard to, for example, our seat in the theatre,

or perhaps the dim house lighting, but to pay attention to this strikes me as rather

like the passenger in a car who keeps looking out the rear window, more interested

in where he has been than where he is going. I am more interested in what is being

attended to than in what is being ignored. The question is, "What process is the

viewer going through at the moment of cinematic Transcendence?", not "What does

he or she have to ignore to get there?" In the case of Transcendence, we experience

a dissolution of the supposed self-other duality, and this dissolution is essentially

spiritual.

In Transcendent cinematic experience, there is a giving-in, a letting-go of

control, of the here-and-now, of our own world-view, of our place in the world.

There is a blending, a melding of our individual consciousness with some "other"

thought, idea, or reality constituting a wholly different point of view.

Thus, "aesthetic distance" is a partial description which restricts itself to the

individual ego, but this is an ego which has no individual existence at the moment

of transcendence. Indeed, the essence of cinematic Transcendence lies in this very

undifferentiatedness, a total engagement in and absorption into the work of art as

quasi-subject.

The paradigm case of this all-encompassing engagement in the other is the phenomenon of love, a quintessentially spiritual union. Particularly significant for our spiritual interpretation of this type of engagement is Marcel's notion that love, in turn, is the paradigm of communion with God. It is love which opens us to the other *as* other. Kenneth Gallagher comments:

> More and more Marcel approaches the position that any experience which opens us to another can be called love, until in the end we may not only say that communion is founded on love, but that communion *is* love.[13]

The experience of listening to music offers a useful analogy. "Getting into" a piece of music is often experienced as the utter breakdown of all the boundaries between me and the music, as it "takes me" wherever it wants.[14] The notion of aesthetic distance only labels the negative aspect of the experience, and talks precisely about the wrong thing; that is, the environment of the work, internal (instruments) and external (reproduction equipment), and not the work itself, and me co-existing with it.

Section 3: The Debate over "Disinterestedness" and "Distance": Shaftesbury, Addison, Alison, and Bullough

Now that we have described filmic transcendence, we need to situate our view within the context of the recent history of aesthetics. Jerome Stolnitz refers to the eighteenth century as the time of the great "Copernican Revolution in Aesthetics," the time when the focus shifts from the object experienced to the "attitude" of the percipient.[15] For Stolnitz the beginning of the modern period in aesthetics can be

traced directly to Joseph Addison. "By contrast to traditional theory (Plato, St.

Thomas), no object is admitted to or excluded from the realm of the aesthetic

because of its inherent nature ... [from now on] it is the attitude of the percipient

which is decisive ... [therefore] aesthetic experience 'at large' (Addison) includes

nature and the sciences, so far as they are objects of disinterested perception"

[*ACA*1, 624].

Archibald Alison (1790) theorized that imagination and emotion are the two

faculties of the aesthetic experience, and agreed that "attending to an object with no

interest other than that in perceiving itself" [*ACA*1, 616] was a prerequisite for

aesthetic experience:

> [the] ideal state of mind is to be "vacant and unemployed" ... what
> emerges ... is the peculiar, perhaps paradoxical two-sidedness of the
> aesthetic experience: the governing attitude is vigilance and control,
> attention to the object which scrupulously shuts out whatever might
> diminish or subvert it; yet the total experience is one of ease, fluidity,
> and delight ... "freedom." [*ACA*1, 617-618]

> To perceive disinterestedly is to make oneself a pure, unflawed mirror,
> prepared to receive without distortion "all impressions which the
> objects that are before us can produce"[Alison].[*ACA*1, 618]

But disinterestedness is a partial description of what is actually *a phenomenon of*

engagement, a phenomenon which was later to be more fully elaborated by

phenomenological accounts such as Mikel Dufrenne's. But this view has been

largely misunderstood (interpreted as, for example, a theory essentially about atten-

tion, about inner psychological states) and these misunderstandings continue down to

today.

That mode of consciousness called into being by the cinematic experience embodies a unique "intimate distance" which we need to distinguish from "aesthetic disinterestedness".[16] Drawing this distinction brings into sharp focus what I mean by Transcendence.[17] Aesthetic disinterestedness is a notion with a distinguished history, but it shares some interesting features with phenomenological analyses. Shaftesbury's account, for example, foreshadows modern phenomenological accounts in at least two ways: 1) both reject the mechanistic materialism that dominated (and still dominates to some extent) scientific thinking; and 2) both believe that "judgements" concerning the beautiful follow upon some form of immediate apprehension, or in phenomenological terms, prereflective intuition. As Monroe C. Beardsley reminds us, Shaftesbury's metaphysics was a reinvigorated Neoplatonism, influenced by the Cambridge Platonists, according to which:

> God is conceived as exercising a continually creating power in nature, which is then itself the greatest of all works of art.... Harmony is one of the central themes - the harmony of the natural world, as created by God, reflecting itself in the virtuous character, in which traits and impulses are balanced and integrated, and also in works of art. Thus beauty and goodness are identical ... and are grasped in the same way, by the same faculty. The theory of this "inward eye," to which Shaftesbury gave the name "moral sense," was his contribution to eighteenth century ethical theory, and at the same time to aesthetics.... *Its essential feature is that it grasps its object immediately, without reasoning, but its grasp involves a comparison of the object with an a priori concept of harmony. It is not sensuous, but intuitive.*

This is the sense in which Shaftesbury's account looks ahead to phenomenological accounts, namely, that he emphasizes intuition over cognition, but he still wants to

hold on to "a priori forms" which these intuitions are then "compared to," which phenomenological accounts do not.

Shaftesbury believed that the desire for the possession or the use of an object was inconsistent with, and actually inhibited, aesthetic sensibility. "When one loves God disinterestedly, one loves God simply for His own sake, because of the 'excellence of the object.'"[18] It must be remembered that Shaftesbury's interest was in man's social nature.[19] Hence he saw selfishness as an "ill and vicious affection" to be condemned if valued over the interest of the public. Thus self*less*ness is a necessary condition for both aesthetic contemplation and aesthetic creation, as well as for the "moral sense" which Shaftesbury regarded as central to ethics. In the true appreciation of the beautiful our minds transcend all desire for the possession, use, or mastery of the object of our contemplation.

A modern variation on Shaftesbury's aesthetics, Edward Bullough's theory of "psychical distance" (1912-ACA1, 758), seems not to have fully appreciated the basis of Shaftesbury's view. Bullough conceives of the "aesthetic attitude" as a "psychological inhibitory force which, when it occurs, blocks out impulses to action and 'practical' thoughts" (Editor's Introduction, *ACA*1, 756). The parallels to the traditional understanding of aesthetic disinterestedness are clear. However, Shaftesbury believed that the total self was involved in the creation or appreciation of a work of art. Hence, disinterestedness for him meant not merely inattention to the environment of the work of art - like the hard seats in the theatre - but *a letting go of the sense of self* which inhibits artistic appreciation. The depths of this notion of

"letting go of the sense of self" have not yet been fully plumbed. It is a notion which for us best describes filmic transcendence. And notions like Bullough's "aesthetic distance" merely desribe the negative aspect of what is essentially a phenomenon of engagement, not one of distance, a phenomenon which was described for us as early as the eighteenth century by Shaftesbury.

Disinterestedness may be a condition of the possibility of aesthetic experience, but it doesn't tell us anything about the character of those experiences that it permits. Furthermore, *the cinematic apparatus practically guarantees disinterestedness*, except if you happen to be in the market for a movie theatre. Once we enter into the ritual that is movie-going, our practical concerns are "put out of gear"[20] *for* us. We need not worry that we are going to be trying to figure out how to take advantage of what we're going to see. There is not much chance that we'll be in a position to anyway.

The "cinematographic apparatus" conditions how we see a film; the darkened theatre, the light source above and behind us, the screen in front, movement limited (at least by convention), and a general inattention toward those around us and the physical surroundings. Much has been written on the relationship between these conditions and the ideology of the cinema. These conditions - as has been pointed out by many theorists - parallel "Plato's cave."[21] But the importance of the basic cinematographic apparatus for our purposes lies in its invitation to blend bodily-subjectivity with the film's projected quasi-subjectivity. This blending of subject-

ivities seems not to fit the mould of quiet contemplation that we usually associate

with "disinterestedness" and "distance."

If not the "distanced," quiet, contemplative observer of "aesthetic disinter-

estedness," then what kind of spectator relation is created by the cinematographic

apparatus? It is a peculiar kind of spectator who, while watching the film quite

passively, nevertheless feels him or herself to be fully involved or engaged. This

kind of viewing is similar to that described by Gadamer, in the context of discussing

the kind of watching that yields theory, the notion of "participation in the show," in

his *Truth and Method*:

> Being present does not simply mean being there along with someone
> else that is there at the same time. To be present means to participate.
> If someone was present at something, he knows all about how it really
> was .... Thus watching something is a genuine mode of participating.
> Here we can recall the concept of sacral communion that lies behind
> the original Greek concept of theoria. Theoros means someone who
> takes part in a delegation to a festival. Such a person has no other
> distinction or function than to be there. Thus the theoros is a specta-
> tor in the proper sense of the word, since he participates in the solemn
> act through his presence at it and thus sacred law accords him a dis-
> tinction: for example, inviolability.... Theoria is a true participation,
> not something active but something passive (pathos), namely being
> totally involved in and carried away by what one sees.[*TM* (1989),
> 124-25]

It's clear from these comments that Gadamer views "presence" as all-involving,

though not active. This inactive, yet thoroughly engaged presence also characterizes

filmic Transcendence. We have forgotten just how involving watching something

really is. It is a genuine mode of participating, one which has its roots in sacred

communion, and one which demands our total engagement. It is also interesting to

note that the example he uses comes from a sacred Greek rite. This choice ties in nicely to our purposes here, since the sacred nature of film art is central to our concerns.

"Disinterested" for Stolnitz means "with no ulterior motive" whatsoever. This "selflessness" is an early version of what was to become an ontological blurring, under phenomenology, of the distinction between self and other. But at first, the focus was on the (apparent) psychological functions - like attention - which were presumed to be operating at the moment of the aesthetic experience. But to speak at all of not attending to one thing and attending to another presupposes that the ego is present as subject, performing various acts of cognition. However, at the moment of Transcendence the ego is not aware of its distinctness, but has "dissolved" its boundaries to embrace the point of view of the film's quasi-subjectivity.

Reflection on our filmgoing experiences tells us that when we are engaged in a film, we "distance" ourselves from our immediate surroundings (or our practical concerns, or ulterior motives), but this is only part of the story, and not the most interesting part. It turns out that what is going on is a dissolution or break-up of the (supposed) "unity" and "autonomy" of the self, a dissolution of the "boundaries" usually thought to exist between self and other - boundaries a good deal more fluid than we generally assume - a compenetration of our subjectivity with the film's quasi-subjectivity, a blending, melding of the self with the work. Stolnitz says that, "...the spectator 'surrenders' himself to the work of art."[22] I am suggesting that if you unpack this idea of "surrender," you find dissolution of the boundaries thought

to exist between self and other. An understanding of this notion of "surrender of the self" is central to an appreciation of our spiritual hermeneutic of the film experience.

Art critics have learned how to flip-flop between the two, being "in the play" (or whatever is under consideration), unaware of its individual components at one moment; and the next, making themselves abstractly aware of the various components of the life-world of the play. They do this, of course, to be able to analyze the contributions of the various individual parts to the whole.

As Dudley Andrew has said of Jean Mitry's aesthetics of film:

[film] joins a deep psychological reality and satisfies our desire to understand the world and each other in a powerful yet necessarily partial way. The aesthetics of film is based on this psychological truth and need ... in cinema human beings tell each other what reality means to them, yet they do so through reality itself, which surrounds their work like an ocean.[23]

I would add that this "reality" which "surrounds their work like an ocean" is not the reality of the objective world. It is a human reality: it is a life-world. Filmic Transcendence functions to temporarily dissipate the illusion of independent, autonomous selfhood.

While it is true that we are, during this experience, "distanced" from the particular, we are very much involved with the universal, at least in terms of human spirit. Aristotle said, "poetry makes the universal more visible than that faithful narration of facts and actual events which we call history can ever do." (*Poetics* 1451b5-7).[24] The aesthetic interest and the spiritual interest are simply different

expressions of the same felt need: the desire to know ourselves and our place in the world.

Plato saw the technē of mimesis as the mere imitation of an imitation. I see film art as an avenue through which may be discovered a fundamental characteristic of human reality, namely, the mutual dependence and "compenetration" of self and other, in a word, *intersubjectivity*. The discovery of this fundamental characteristic of reality is a spiritual one. As Thomas Martin tells us regarding the definition of religious consciousness:

> most uses of the term "religious" insist that it is an extraordinary sense of reality. They generally insist that what appears to be a world of multiplicities is in fact radically related. Some positions might argue that the multiplicities are in fact one. But at the very least religious consciousness must insist that there is a basic relatedness to what appears to the common sense to be a world of distinct and separate entities. This relatedness has its foundation in a common source, a greater whole that grounds, generates, nurtures, or sustains the individual existences, including human existence ... terms for the greater whole one finds in contemporary writings vary greatly: God, Existence, Being, Life Force, Ground of Being, and Presence.... [But common to all] is the sense of relatedness that the human has with the others of the world as all are rooted in a common greater whole.[25]

The desire for transcendence in the context of the film experience is really a desire for the experience of the dissolution of the (apparent) boundaries between self and other, and this desire is at bottom a spiritual one. The movies help us acheive this spiritual union.

Section 4: Filmic Transcendence

4.1 Filmic Transcendence and Spiritual Union

Filmic Transcendence has as its point of intersection with religious forms of

transcendence the experience of communion with the "other." As Emmanuel

Levinas has said, "it is through my relation to the Other, [that] I am in touch with

God."[26] This coming together of two subjectivities, two life-world perspectives, is

an experience with certain affinities to religious communion. An examination of the

concept of "ecstasy" is instructive in this regard. In a spiritual context, "ecstasy"

means, literally, "standing outside oneself," and is a term traditionally applied to that

extraordinary psychic or spiritual state which has often siezed prophets and mystics.

It is usually characterized by the suspension of normal physical functions, a phenom-

enon echoed by the cinematic experience. For Paul Tillich, ecstasy:

> points to a state of mind ... in which reason is beyond itself, that is,
> beyond its subject-object structure ... the mind is grasped by the mys-
> tery, namely, by the ground of being and meaning.... [Ecstasy] is the
> form in which that which concerns us unconditionally manifests itself
> within the whole of our psychological conditions.[27]

Important for our purposes is just this idea that in the cinematic experience, just as

in an experience of spiritual ecstasy, the subject-object dichotomy dissloves.

Edward J. Jurji describes this experience in a Christian context:

> To be ... bound up with Christ is to be lifted to a personal reality of
> living communion with God. To know the reality of such communion
> is to be born again and to live a new life. Those to whom such an
> experience is real are saved from separation and solitude. This is the
> atonement ... union longed for is attained through commitment to

Christ ... what distinguishes Christian faith is simply this: readiness in confidence and hope deliberately to lay hold upon Jesus' personality at the very core. There is a capacity here which all men share. It is man's capability to transcend his personal essence. It is a capability at the deepest level whereby man joins the essence of his being to that of another.[*PhRel*, 204]

This "joining" of our essence to that of another finds its pop-art analogue in cinematic Transcendence. Hence, aesthetic "dissolution of the self" is essentially spiritual, and finds its religious analogue in that "surrender of the self" characteristic of spiritual awakening, or God-love. As Jurji puts it:

The highest stage in God-love is consummate self-surrender, *prapatti* ...[h]ow to effect such a surrender is the burden of a passage in the [*Bhagavad*] *Gita* (18:66), where Krishna exhorts Arjuna:

> Renouncing all duties
> Take refuge in me alone.
> Grieve not, for I shall
> Relieve thee from all evil.

Explicitly enjoined is such self-surrender as the only means for the soul's release. Every other spiritual discipline, *sadhana*, be it external worship, formal piety, or study of scriptures and Yoga meditation, is but an avenue to the final act of surrender.[*PhRel*, 131.]

The movies, through their highlighting of bodily engagement in a world of other people, are well-suited to effect a putting out of gear of the persistent illusion of autonomous selfhood. Merleau-Ponty was on to this when he wrote:

> the movies are peculiarly suited to make manifest the union of mind and body, mind and world, and the expression of one in the other.[28]

It is this very "union," revealed by the dissolution of the self-other duality, which lies at the heart of transcendent film experience, and reveals most clearly "the mingling of consciousness with the world, its involvement in a body, and its coexistence with others ... this is movie material *par excellence*."[29]

4.2 Point-of-view and Spiritual Engagement

It is precisely cinema's ability to portray the inner thoughts of a character that accounts for its ability to engage us spiritually. Not merely events or facts are presented. In the case of the point-of-view shot, for example, as Panofsky has said, "movies have the power, entirely denied to the theatre, to convey psychological experiences by directly projecting their content onto the screen, substituting, as it were, the eye of the beholder for the consciousness of the character."[30] Panofsky cites *The Lost Weekend* (Billy Wilder, 1945) to illustrate the point. In this film, the hallucinations of delerium tremens appear on the screen as "stark realities instead of being described by mere words."[31] What is happening when films do this - indeed, what is happening when films engage us generally - is the calling forth of various bodily-situated modes of being in the world. Panofsky's implicit dualistic anthropology may be overcome by adopting the notion from phenomenology of the union of subject and object.

Over and above this first sense of being able to portray the inner life or life-world perspective of its characters, as experienced from a particular point of view, there is another sense in which the movies are able directly to establish a sense of being in the world, or inhabiting "presence." This is the sense of an unavoidable

perspectivity, or point of view, which always has to be taken up by the camera: Like human experience itself, the filmic experience is always one *of* something, *from* somewhere. It is this perspective which we inhabit via the dissolution of the boundaries between it and our own. This unavoidable perspectivity of the cinema is an analogue to our own unavoidable perspectivity. Masterworks of cinema embody a unique perspective that allows us properly to speak of a Hitchcock film, or a Bergman film precisely because these artists present a coherent, consistent mode of being in the world, a particular way of seeing which constitutes their perspective on the life-world, and with which we may participate through the experience of viewing their films.

Films of that quintessentially "entertaining" director, Alfred Hitchcock, for example, offer a good case in point. Basic to Hitchcock's life-world perspective is the idea that primordial forces sometimes break out into the most commonplace lives and alter their direction, as we see, for example, in *Shadow of a Doubt* (Hitchcock, 1943) and *Psycho* (1960) - as well as the related idea that the "wrong man" may be victimized by the whims of fate, as we see, for example, most explicitly, in *The Wrong Man* (Hitchcock, 1957) and *North by Northwest* (1959), surely a motif suggesting affinites to Christian theology. What allows us to become familiar with a director's life-world perspective is his or her control over their art. The consistency and coherence of their expression enhance the clarity of our participation in their life-world, just as the clarity of expression of someone we meet contributes to our knowing them.

4.3 Life-World on Film

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of temporality as subjectivity - which is analogous to Bergson's understanding of time as "duration" (duré) - offers us an interesting way of seeing how the movies establish the "point of view" we are describing. Movies only portray lived time. That is to say, they portray only the lived time of the story which is being told, whether from a particular perspective, or from many overlapping perspectives. The camera does not simply bear witness to a series of events which unfold before it, rather it acts as a corridor through which, given a willing suspension of disbelief, we are invited to travel to another world, the life-world of the story, as expressed from a particular point of view. It is in this sense of sharing a different world that the Transcendent film experience stands as an example of what Gadamer refers to as "an expression of the play-drive".[RB, 126]

Gadamer's phenomenological analysis of art maintains the central importincu of the viewer as reconstituting agent. A work of reproductive art "demands to be constructed by the viewer to whom it is presented ... it is something that only manifests itself when it is constituted in the viewer."(RB, 126) Gadamer uses the notion of "play" to understand the phenomenon of art as an expression of our desire to pretend, to point to something beyond ourselves, to create a rule-governed activity which we can share with one another, to intend toward something: "the kind of directedness to the matter at hand that is unique to man also finds expression in the characteristic of human play to include binding rules. Philosophers refer to this as the intentionality of consciousness."(RB, 124)

The created life-world of the cinema, then, and our own life-world, ordered by perception, can be thought of as mirror images of each other, reflecting our own strange unity with the world, a fact which might account for the disquieting effects of mirrors in cinema - both are two-dimensional reflections of ourselves.

Section 5: Transcendence and the "Other"

5.1 Transcending the Boundaries of the Self

But just what is it that we are transcending in this type of experience? J.N. Findlay, in the context of his phenomenological theology, speaks of our ability to perform the "strange miracle" of accessing the experiences of others:

> We are also able ... to perform the strange miracle of entering into other people's experiences; it seems plain that we are always in some measure performing this miracle, which is not based on any inference but rather serves as the permanent presuppostion of the latter.[32]

Important for our present purposes is the idea that this miracle lies on a continuum; at one end is access to the experiences of others, but at the other end lies the experience of the Holy. Filmic transcendence is a modern version of this miracle and hence lies on the same continuum. Findlay goes on:

> In all such exercises we are travelling beyond the sheer periphery of being and along a lifeline to the centre, along which, although in a reverse direction, the Holy Spirit may be thought to move. This means that, at the centre of being, there lies a state in which all lifelines converge and in which nothing can be remote from, or external to, anything else.[EPT, 36]

Filmic Transcendence teases us with this kind of spiritual contact with the other.

Shaftesbury's "loss of the sense of self"[33] now becomes important in our efforts to interpret spiritually Type 1 film experience. Certain forms of mystical experience have as a central feature an analogous loss of the sense of difference between self and other. Westphal cites some examples:

> For a Hindu to become one with Nirguna Brahman, beyond all name and form, or for a buddhist to attain Nirvana is not to encounter something numinous and stand in fascinated fear and trembling before the power.... It is rather to lose all sense of personal identity as the finite self is absorbed or extinguished in an undifferentiated All or Nothing. Bliss there is, but no "I am blissful," for the I in all its particularity as something other than anything else no longer functions. [34]

Although we shall later characterize another type of film experience - namely Rupture - as 'fearful trembling before the numinous', for our present purposes, this blissful loss of the sense of self perfectly describes filmic Transcendence.

Gadamer's notion of "being present" at a work of art is for us analogous to Transcendent film experience. It is a phenomenon of engagement, one which carries the spectator away with it, rather than one which is cooly, dispassionately meditated on, as if by a rational exercise of the scientist:

> Considered as a subjective accomplishment in human conduct, being present has the character of being outside oneself. In the *Phaedrus* Plato already described the blunder of those who take the viewpoint of rational reasonableness and tend to misinterpret the ecstatic condition of being outside oneself, seeing it as a mere negation of being composed within oneself and hence as a kind of madness. In fact, being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness to what one is watching.[*TM* (1989), 125-26]

This "positive possibility" is realized in filmic Transcendence. We are suddenly wholly with the film's quasi-subjectivity, its peculiar vantage point on the world.

In a clarifying footnote to the above paragraph in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer calls into question Eugen Fink's distinction, found in his *Vom Wesen des Enthusiasmus*, between "purely human rapture," on the one hand, and that "enthusiasm" whereby man is in God. For Gadamer, as for us, these two phenomena reside on a continuum, whereas for Fink, they are distinct:

> [Fink] contrasts "purely human rapture" with that enthusiasm by which man is in God ... [but] "purely human rapture" is also a being away from oneself and an involvement with something else of which man is "incapable," but which comes over him, and thus seems to me indistinguishable from enthusiasm.... [For Fink] there is a kind of rapture which it is in man's power to induce and ... by contrast enthusiasm is the experience of a superior power which simply overwhelms us: [but] these distinctions of control over oneself and of being overwhelmed are themselves conceived in terms of power and therefore do not do justice to the inter-penetration of being outside oneself and being involved in something, which is the case in every form of rapture and enthusiasm. The forms of "purely human rapture" described by Fink are themselves, if only they are not narcissistically and psychologically misinterpreted, modes of the "finite self-transcendence of finiteness"(cf. Eugen Fink, *Vom Wesen des Enthusiasmus*, esp. pp.22-25).[*TM* (1989), 126, n. 230]

Once we disslove the distinction between "good and bad madness," we may say that filmic Transcendence is not unlike "enthusiasm," which for Gadamer is a form of "purely human rapture," a mode of finite self-transcendence of finiteness, and is to be thought of as lying on the same continuum as that enthusiasm in which man is in God.

Gadamer is not only concerned to show the continuity of art with dance, but its continuity as well with other religious rites. He takes from Heidegger the idea that the work brings with it its own world, so that there is in our encounter with it a "fusion of horizons" (*TM*, [1975], 273). As Robert Bernasconi points out:

> In this way the work of art issues us a challenge ... makes a claim on us, thereby appealing to a concept with theological as well as Heideg- gerian overtones [*TM* (1975), 112].... [Gadamer] means by this that the experience of the work of art does not conform to the model of an adventure. Art is not to be understood as a magical, fantastic realm to which we can escape. We do not encounter the work of art without being transformed in the process.[35]

Several comments need to be made about this passage. First, with respect to the continuity of art with other cultural activities such as ritual dance and other religious rites, the film experience generally - and Transcendence in particular - are to be understood as residing on this cultural continuum. Transcendence makes a claim on us, as Gadamer would say, which is potentially transformative. But this is no mere episode, no mere escape to a magical, fantastic realm. The experience of episodes is closer to metaphysical comfort: "Episodes are a succession of details which have no inner coherence and for that very reason have no permanent significance" (*TM* [1989], 69). It's hard not to think of the *Rocky* series as a collection of mere episodes. What could possibly be the lasting significance of Sylvester Stallone's victory over his twentieth opponent in the boxing ring?

Second, if we combine Gadamer's insight that the experience of the work of art involves a "fusion of horizons" with Mikel Dufrenne's characterization of the

work as a "quasi-subject," what we get is the notion of an encounter with the "other" which is potentially, though clearly not necessarily, life-changing. The blending of identities and life-world perspectives carries with it the positive possibility of challenging our cherished views both of ourselves and of our relations with the world. Films of artists such as Martin Scorsese, for example, *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1975) and *Goodfellas* (1990), carry with them this positive possibility, as Scorsese himself recognizes (see quotation which opens this chapter). But since the basic film invitation is spiritual in character, it is possible to experience transcendence in some quite unexpected places.

5.2 Transcendence and "Mere Entertainment"

Of course, not all our encounters with potentially life-altering films, that is, works of film art, have a profound impact on us. This is because we may not *allow* the work to "make a claim" on us, just as we may not allow a person we have met to alter our views about ourselves or about the world, by the sheer impact of our coming into contact with their life-world perspective. The crucial difference lies in how we experience the work, rather than in any hard and fast distinction between works of film art and "mere entertainment." In what follows, we shall begin to unpack this difference.

Gadamer draws a distinction between two senses of experience, *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* (*TM* [1975], 62-63, 316-320). "Erlebnis" is a secondary formation from its older root, "erleben," which means in the first instance, "to be still alive when something happens,"[36] a word which expresses the difference between those

who remember where they were when they heard about the Kennedy assassination, for example, and those who have only read about it or seen movies about it. But it is more than this. As Gadamer points out, "What is experienced is always what one has experienced oneself," rather than what one has imagined, or inferred, or sur- mised (*TM* [1989], 61). Hence, the word also refers to the permanent content that remains after our initial experience ends. Gadamer takes these dual senses into account and in so doing allows us to understand why "[i]t is through biographical literature that the word Erlebnis takes root. The essence of biography, especially nineteenth-century biographies of artists and poets, is to understand the works from the life" (*TM*, [1989], 61). As Joel Weinsheimer puts it, "[t]he works are the lasting significance (*Erlebnis*) produced from the immediacy of experience (*Erlebnis*) that is the fundamental material of poetry."[37] Erlebnis means, then, both the immediacy with which something real is grasped, that "which precedes all interpretation, reworking, and communication, and merely offers a starting point for interpretation - material to be shaped - and its discovered yield, its lasting result" (*TM* [1989], 61).

With Schleiermacher, the word came to mean living feeling as opposed to "the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment," a development of its meaning which carried on into our own century and manifested itself in "life philosophy," a rejec- tion of the mechanization of life in contemporary mass society (*TM* [1989], 63). Gadamer's view is that the word Erlebnis was brought into general usage as a result of the "remoteness from and hunger for experience, caused by distress over the

complicated workings of civilization transformed by the Industrial Revolution" (*TM* [1989], 65).

Erfahrung, on the other hand, means scientific experience, experience that can be learned from others. But more important for Gadamer, as well as for our present purposes, is its dialectical sense, one that emphasizes the role of negative experiences in our learning processes. Once we have had such an experience, we find it impossible to go back to our previously held views. We have thus reversed our direction; consciousness has turned back on itself. We become aware of our experience, we acquire a new horizon, and in so doing become "experienced":

> a person who is called experienced has become so not only *through* experiences but is also open *to* new experiences ... [the] dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself.... [What] a man has to learn through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but insight into the limitations of humanity, into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man from the divine. It is ultimately a religious insight - the kind of insight that gave birth to Greek tragedy.[*TM* (1989), 355-57]

Tradition, for Gadamer, expresses itself like a Thou. A Thou is not an object, but rather something that relates itself to us. We should enter into dialogue with tradition in a quasi-I/Thou relation. The understanding of the Thou is a reflective form of self-relatedness. And openness is the basic condition for this type of experience.

Applying what Gadamer says in this context to film art, we may say that a film, like any work of art, introduces us to an unfamiliar world, an impressive technical achievement, but we should not base our assessment of its excellence on

this alone, because doing so would mean that we would have succumbed to what he calls the "aesthetic conception of art" as *Erlebnis*. As Bernasconi makes clear:

> if we do not take anything from that world, if we are unchanged when we leave it, then for Gadamer we will not have heard the claim art makes on us. We will have reduced it to a mere entertainment, an interlude. However, if we undergo an experience of art in the sense of Erfahrung, a word that Gadamer borrows from Hegel and Heidegger, then we will find that we have been transformed.[38]

When we are in contact with a work of film art, we may be oblivious to its call: "hearing the claim" that this work makes on us makes the difference between a genuine fusion of horizons, that is, transcendence, and "Metaphysical Comfort." Even works unlikely to challenge us in any way, works that generally massage us into a mind-numbing state of comfort - Steven Spielberg's films, such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1977, 1982) come to mind in this context - demand at least an entry-level shared subjectivity, that is, they demand what Gadamer would call a *hermeneutical experience*, one characterized by a quasi-I/Thou relation.

Although it is possible in principle to undergo a transcendent experience with these films - indeed, transcendence in the sense of the condition of the possibility of film experience in the first place, must be happening already - their non-threatening, non-challenging quasi-subjectivity makes their "claim" on us weak. It is not a big stretch to incorporate these works' life-world perspective into our own. Indeed, they probably already *are* our own. But everything depends on *how we experience* these works. As works of film art, our experience of them does not conform to the model

of an adventure, notwithstanding the fact that these films generally lend themselves to this model.

Hearing the claim that works of film art make on us is predicated on a Transcendent level of engagement that is itself conditional upon a high degree of openness. Our typology identifies and categorizes the existential possibilities for the filmgoing subject inherent in the types of works distinguished by Gadamer. The distinction that Gadamer draws between a work which "makes a claim on us" and one which "merely entertains" finds its existential analogue in two basic types of film experience, Transcendence and Metaphysical Comfort.

Recall, however, that for Aristotle, "entertainment" (*diagōgē*) was more important than mere amusement, since entertainment contributes to intelligence; it is for adults what play or amusement (*paidia*) is for children. Like amusement, it is relaxing, but it has greater value, just as the leisure activities of adults have a greater value than those of children. "Entertainment" was thought to provide rest and relaxation, but Aristotle asks whether we should only participate in music for amusement and relaxation, like people who get drunk or dance, or rather should we think that music makes us tend towards virtue, just as exercise makes our bodies fit, that is, does music contribute something to entertainment and intelligence? It turns out that the effect of music corresponds to that of "cathartic" or holy songs:

> one must introduce amusements at the moment proper for their use, as if applying them for the sake of medication. For such a motion of the soul is a recreation, and because of the pleasure [it gives] it is a [kind of] relaxation (*Politics* 1.1337b40ff.) [Aristotle, *Politics* VIII 5.1339-a15-24, as quoted in *Poetics*, 183][39]

Like songs, entertainment was thought to be good for the soul, even educative in the sense that we become habituated to enjoy that which is good for us, that is, the virtuous. Hence, entertainment cannot be so easily distinguished from "mere amusement," as they both can be seen to provide something valuable for us. Gadamer's "mere entertainment," or "interlude," is probably akin to Aristotle's "mere amusement." When it comes to film art, however, the difficulty of making a clear distinction between transcendence and "mere entertainment" renders judgements of value problematic.

When we say that "mere entertainment" is to be distinguished from Transcendence, we point to a rough distinction, rather than an absolute one. The reduction of a work of art to the level of "mere entertainment" is an interpretive act performed by a spectator who refuses to hear the claim that the work makes. He or she has succumbed to the aesthetic conception of art as *Erlebnis*, that is, experience as something that you *have* which is subject-centred, rather than *Erfahrung*, an experience that you *undergo* in which subjectivity is overcome and you are drawn into an "event." This latter kind of experience is an integrative process whereby the experience of the work expands our horizon by overturning an existing perspective, widening our limited views of life and culture, the result of which is what Gadamer calls non-dogmatic wisdom.(*TM* [1989], "Translator's Preface," xiii)

Section 6: Conditions of the Possibility of Filmic Transcendence

6.1 Gabriel Marcel's Notion of "Availability"

Filmic Transcendence is conditional upon a very high degree of openness.[40] How

are we to understand this relation? For us, it is not unlike that level of openness

with regard to the embodied "other" which Gabriel Marcel characterizes as "avail-

ability" (*disponibilité*). Examining this notion in Marcel should help us to see how

this type of film experience works.[41] Joe McCown has thoroughly analyzed this

notion in Marcel's writings, concluding that the idea clearly has a bodily significa-

tion. It is a direction we take, a way that we "face," a turning towards or away from

someone or something:

> It is essential to human life not only ... to orientate itself towards
> something other than itself, but also to be inwardly conjoined and
> adapted - rather as the joints of the skeleton are conjoined and adapted
> to the other bones - to that reality transcending the individual life
> which gives the individual life its point, and, in a certain sense, even
> its justification.[*Reflection ·and Mystery*, 163-64, as quoted in *AV*, 7]

Marcel's own explanation of "disponibilité" is as follows:

> The French terms I use are *disponibilité* and *indisponibilité*. Literally
> ... availability and unavailability, but it might sound more natural if
> one spoke of handiness and unhandiness ... having or not having, in a
> given contingency, one's resources to hand or at hand. [*Reflection and
> Mystery*, 163]

Other possible characterizations of the term include "openness to the other," "rea-

diness to respond," as well as "spiritual availability."[42] Marcel's metaphor for this

notion of availability is "opening a line of credit to" [*Av*, 9]. But we are not to

understand this as being limited to the realm of material. As Marcel explains:

> We must not be misled by the fact that to agree to extend credit is to
> place at the disposal [à la disposition] of another a certain sum, a
> certain quantity of something, with the expectation that it will be
> returned to us together with an additional sum, a certain profit. We
> must unburden the meaning of extending credit of this material
> weight. [*Creative Fidelity*, 134]

As McCown shows us, freed of its material weight, the idea of "opening a line of

credit" means "I put myself at the disposal of, or again I make a fundamental

engagement which bears not only on what I have, but on what I am." (*Mystery of*

Being, V.2: Time and Reality, p.78 [French]) When we give credit to another, for

example, when we open ourselves to a filmmaker's embodiment of his or her life-

world perspective:

> we are making a gift of ourselves ... opening credit to ... implies
> placing a confidence in .... [we are saying, in effect] "I am sure that
> you will not betray my expectation; that you will respond to it, that
> you will fulfill it."[*Av*, 10]

It is interesting to note in the context of Marcel's discussion of the "line of credit"

what Quentin Tarantino, director and screenwriter of *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and

Pulp Fiction (1994), and screenwriter of *True Romance* (1993) and *Natural Born*

Killers (Oliver Stone, 1994), says about trusting the filmmaker:

> I know when I go see a movie and I start getting confused, I'm
> emotionally disconnected, I check out emotionally. For some reason, I
> don't in *Le Doulos* ... the first time you see it, you have no idea that
> mystery is going to be solved as well as it is. That's the joy of it -

> I've had faith in this movie all this time and I had no idea my faith
> was going to be paid back so well ... ninety-nine percent of the reason
> that when a film starts confusing me I check out [emotionally] is
> because I know it's not intentional. I know whoever's at the helm
> doesn't have firm control of the material and it's a mistake that I'm
> confused. When you know you're in good hands, you can be con-
> fused and it's okay, because you know you're being confused for a
> reason. You know you'll be taken care of.

This is more evidence that a relation of trust, or what Marcel might call "availabil-

ity," exists between filmmaker and audience.

6.2 Filmic Transcendence as Availability to a Quasi-Subjectivity

The above sounds to my ear precisely what we routinely do in a tentative and halt-

ing manner in the cinema, and what we occasionally do in a much more robust

manner in the case of filmic Transcendence. Recall what Mikel Dufrenne has to say

about the "quasi-subjectivity" of the work of art:

> these landscapes, natural or human, express a certain vision of the
> world, composing an atmosphere to which a nonrepresentational art
> like music gives us direct access. In short, the world of the work is a
> finite but unlimited totality [*une totalité finie mais illimitée*], a totality
> which the work shows through both its form and its content, while
> soliciting reflection as well as feeling. This world is the work itself,
> considered not in its immediate and meaningless reality as a mute
> thing without a soul but as a thing which surpasses itself toward its
> meaning - that is, as a quasi subject.[*chose qui se dépasse vers son
> sens, quasi-sujet*][*PhAE*, 249, 190]

This applies *a fortiori* to the film experience, since we fuse our subjectivity with

the film's; subjectivity and quasi-subjectivity blend. Film's meaning structures

depend upon us taking its point of view. Availability is "the opening upon the

presence of another; not a way of access to certain goods he possesses ... [the

available person is] capable of being entirely with me; the unavailable person only

gives me a provisional loan on resources which lie at his disposal" (*Av*, 10). When

we open ourselves to the quasi-otherness of the film's quasi-subjectivity, we engage

in the positive possibility of changing our view of ourselves and/or our life-world

perspective. This is the time when filmic Transcendence can occur. But it is also

the time of greatest risk. And despite the cinematic invitation being spiritual in

nature, most of us find it difficult to hold this high level of openness for very long.

This for us is in part what accounts for the fact that most of the products of Holly-

wood are either uninspired, or sublimated spiritually.

6.3 The Self as City in Marcel

Marcel's metaphor for the self is a city. The conditions under which we become

conscious of ourselves are essentially social. We get a sense of who we are by

reflection from others, or from reflection on the cultural artifacts that express who

we are. As Marcel says:

> the city which I form with myself ... is not a monad .... [It] cannot
> establish itself as a distinct and isolated center, without working for its
> own destruction.... [On] the contrary, it draws the elements of its life
> from what is brought to it along canals, often very badly marked out,
> from friendly cities, of which it often scarcely knows the name or the
> situation.[43]

These "friendly cities" are not limited to other human beings, but extend to cultural

works like films, since, as we have seen above, these works exist as quasi-subjects,

capable of expression. And if we are available to their influence, we can participate fully in their world-view and come away changed. There is, for Marcel, a convergence of self-presence with the presence of the other. The self depends upon just this kind of influence. We can only be fully present to ourselves when we are fully present to the other. It is only when we are open to ourselves that we become capable of being open to others, or available (*disponibilité*) for them. As McCown tells us,

> Self-presence (*la présence du moi à lui même*) appears where the presence of the other is recognized [*Reflection and Mystery*, 205]. Love is the paradigm of the revelation of self-presence, with the presence of the other. And availability is the attitude which permits this revelation.

And as Marcel says,

> I can only communicate effectively with myself, when I communicate with the other, that is, when the other becomes thou (*toi*) for me. And this transformation comes about thanks to a movement of interior relaxation by which I put an end to a sort of contraction through which I shrivel (*crispe*) and at the same time distort (*déforme*) myself.[44]

This type of relaxation is possible through the voyeuristic nature of the cinematic. If we take the "other" of the cinematic seriously - that is, if we treat it as a quasi-subject, or a "thou" - we can Transcend our own life-world and blend with that of the cinematic. As Marcel says about letting the other "in" to my world:

> When somebody's presence does really make itself felt, it can refresh
> my inner being; it reveals me to myself, it makes me more fully
> myself than I should be if I were not exposed to its impact.[45]

Hence, to feel the presence of another is to allow that other to have an impact on us.

As Marcel says:

> the very act by which we incline ourselves towards a presence is
> essentially different from that through which we grasp at an object; in
> the case of a presence, the very possibility of grasping at, of seizing,
> is excluded in principle.[46]

Just as in the cinematic, grasping the object is excluded in principle, so it is with the

other: we cannot grasp the other like an object, we cannot use the other as if he or

she were an object, and in the case of the cinematic, we cannot use the film for

anything but a spectacle if we fail to let it work on us as an other.

Section 7: Summary of Type One Conclusions

What emerges from our considerations in this chapter is a notion of Transcendence

as residing on a continuum. At one end lies the condition of the possibility of any

film experience whatsoever - in order to participate fully in the experience, we have

to allow it to take us somewhere. And at the other end lies filmic Transcendence

par excellence - an experience which puts us in contact with the other in challenging

and potentially life-changing ways, not unlike the experience of meeting someone

who challenges our very sense of self.

We also saw that the condition for the possibility of this latter experience is

a high degree of openness. And we used Marcel's notion of "availability" to explain

what we had in mind by this condition. Film's invitation is spiritual in character, an invitation to transcend one's own world and to glimpse the world of the other. Jean-Louis Baudry was well aware of film's ability to transcend the limits of time and space:

> if the eye which moves is no longer fettered by a body, by the laws of matter and time, if there are no more assignable limits to its displacement - conditions fulfilled by the possibilities of shooting and of film - the world will be constituted not only by this eye but for it.... The mobility of the camera seems to fulfill the most favourable conditions for the manifestation of the "transcendental subject."[n.3: 'The cinema manifests in a hallucinatory manner the belief in the omnipotence of thought, described by Freud, which plays so important a role in neurotic defense mechanisms.'][47]

While Baudry sees the "transcendental subject" as problematic, I see it as conditioning the possibility of film experience and also making possible genuine transcendence. But, as we shall see in Chapter Three, openness is a phenomenon which admits of degrees, and when we do not bring to the experience a sufficient degree of openness - or when the film in question offers us no possibility for transcendence - then we merely comfort ourselves with just that part of the story which is reassuring to hear.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. From an *American Masters* program focusing on Scorsese entitled, "All this filming, is it *Healthy?*," produced by Pacific Street Films Project, Inc. in association with WNET/13, New York, 1990.

2. This fine expression of Merleau-Ponty's position on self-invisibility and spiritual longing is found in Galen A. Johnson's article, "Desire and Invisibility in 'Eye and Mind': Some Remarks on Merleau-Ponty's Spirituality," in *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective*, Patrick Burke and Jan vander Veken, eds. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 95.

3. Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Collier/-McMillan, 1964), 242-43.

4. The phrase, "ultimate concern" is taken from the work of Paul Tillich. See, for example, Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technological Society* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 159, where he offers the following definition,

> "being unconditionally concerned about the meaning of one's exist-
> ence." That's one definition of the fundamental concept of religion.
> Or, "taking something absolutely seriously" ... Or, "being grasped by
> an infinite interest and an infinite passion" ... Or, "the self-transcen-
> dence of life experience," a self-transcendence toward the ultimately
> sublime or ... one can also say *holy*, because that is what holy means
> ... [b]eing ultimately concerned is religion in this sense.

Tillich's notion of "ultimate concern," then, characterizes what I have defined as "spirituality," rather than religion. But this terminological difference need not detain us.

5. Even though transcendence has been a subject of philosophical debate since Plato, its most recent popular manifestation is the film experience, particularly the Transcendent type. Interest in transcendence has its modern roots in the Romantic period. The Romantic temperament or personality was thought to be dynamic, disordered, continuous, soft-focused, inner, sensitive, emotional, exotic, eager for novelty, for adventure, above all for *the vicarious adventure of fantasy*. William Blake has some of the marks of the Romantic, including *extreme transcendental yearning*, and Nietzsche has the Romantic's desire for *etwas mehr*, the "something more." We postmoderns, living in our climate-controlled atmospheres, with our automated everything, and our techno-scientific, materialistic view of the world, need once again to touch the extra-ordinary, the transcendent.

6. Part of this section has been previously published as "Phenomenology of Film: Dissolution of the Self-World Duality in the Aesthetic Moment," in Aref Ali Nayed and Fiore Guido (eds.) *Philosophy in Canada I: Proceedings of the Canadian Graduate Students' Conference in Philosophy*, McMaster University, 1988 (Toronto: Agathon Books, 1991), 172-180.

7. See Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, tr. Edward S. Casey, Albert A. Anderson, Willis Domingo, and Leon Jacobson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 255-56, 196. Originally published as *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967). Hereafter, *PhAE*, cited with pages references to French and English editions, respectively (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

8. Auteur film theory would no doubt identify this with the director's point of view, or stance toward his or her work, and hence toward the world. But the question of who's world we are discussing - whether it is the director's, the actors', the producer's, or, what is more likely, a composite of several interrelated worlds, or points of view, since film art is a collective enterprise - need not detain us, since it is a question which is tangential to our purposes here. Our focus is the subject/viewer; not the work's mode of production.

9. As Heidegger puts it, "The work as work sets up a world. The work holds open the Open of the world."[OWA, 45]

10. See Mikel Dufrenne, *In the Presence of the Sensuous: Essays in Aesthetics*, Mark S. Roberts and Dennis Gallagher, eds. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1987), Editor's Introduction, p. xvii.

11. Author's Preface to Mikel Dufrenne, *In the Presence of the Sensuous*, p. x.

12. Merleau-Ponty, "The Film and the New Psychology," *Sense and Non-Sense*, 57, 102-03 (French).

13. Kenneth T. Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), 78, as quoted in McCown, *AV*, 57.

14. Stanley Kubrick describes the effect he was after in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) as nonverbal, what we might call, following Merleau-Ponty, a preverbal, or prelinguistic, or prereflective experience:

> It's not a message that I ever intend to convey in words. *2001* is a nonverbal experience ... I tried to create a visual experience, one that bypasses verbalized pigeonholing and directly penetrates the subconscious with an emotional content ... I intended the film to be an intensely subjective experience that reaches the viewer at an inner

level of consciousness, just as music does ... even in the case of someone who is highly intelligent, certain ideas ... in *2001* would if presented as abstractions, fall rather lifelessly and be automatically assigned to pat intellectual categories; experienced in a moving visual and emotional context, however, they can resonate within the deepest fibers of one's being.

This highly suggestive statement of Kubrick's is taken from Jerome Agel, ed., *The Making of Kubrick's 2001* (New York: The New American Library, 1970), 328-330, reprint of an interview with Kubrick which appeared in *Playboy*, 1968.

15. For a discussion of the historical emergence of the notion of aesthetic disinterestedness, see Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origin of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no.2: 131-43. Also reprinted in George Dickie and R.J. Sclafani, eds. *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 607-625. Hereafter, *ACA*1 (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

16. See, for example: Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness'," in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* George Dickie and R.J. Sclafani, eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 607-625; and Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle", 320-333, Jerome Stolnitz, "The Aesthetic Attitude: from *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism*," 334-341, and George Dickie, "All Aesthetic Attitude Theories Fail: The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude," 342-355, all in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, 2nd. edition, ed. George Dickie, R.J. Sclafani and Ronald Roblin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989). Hereafter, *ACA*2 (see "List of Abbreviations," page 2).

17. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* ed. John Mackinnon Robertson (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1963).

18. See Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," in *ACA*1, 609.

19. As Monroe C. Beardsley reminds us, in his *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present* (New York: Macmillan, 1966):

> Just as he was led to face directly the question by what faculty beauty is apprehended, so Shaftesbury also took a closer look at the phenomenology of that apprehension, and in doing so he helped to formulate a notion that was to have a long and significant later history ["aesthetic attitude"]. He got into this problem by reflecting on psychological egoism, i.e., Are all human actions selfish [as Hobbes thought]? This is how he came to originate the notion of disinterested aesthetic

contemplation, which played such a large role subsequently in the history of aesthetics.

20. This language is taken from Bullough's discussion in his "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," in *ACA*1, 759.

21. For a discussion of what constitutes the basic cinematographic apparatus, see Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Movies and Methods, Volume 2*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 531-542, originally published in *Film Quarterly*, 28 no. 2 (Winter 1974/75); and "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," in Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, Fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 690-707. See also Stephen Heath, "The Cinematic Apparatus: Technology as Historical and Cultural Form," in Stephen Heath and Teresa de Lauretis (eds.), *The Cinematic Apparatus* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 1-13.

22. See Jerome Stolnitz, *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism: A Critical Introduction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 377-78.

23. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 210.

24. See Aristotle, *Poetics I*, tr. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 12.

25. See Thomas M. Martin, *Images and the Imageless: A Study in Religious Consciousness and Film*, second ed. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991), 27-29.

26. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, tr. Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 17.

27. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume I: Reason and Revelation, Being and God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 111-113.

28. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense*, 58.

29. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense*, 59.

30. Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, third edition, Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 236.

31. Panofsky, "Style and Medium...," 236.

32. J. N. Findlay, "Some Thoughts Regarding the Holy Spirit," in *Essays in Phenomenological Theology*, Steven W. Laycock and James G. Hart, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 46. Hereafter, *EPT* (see "List of Abbreviations," page 2).

33. Cf. Shaftesbury's views on "loss of the sense of self," discussed above in Section 3.2.

34. See *GGD*, 42-43.

35. Robert Bernasconi, "Translator's Introduction" to Gadamer, *RB*, xiii-xiv.

36. Gadamer offers an analysis of the word "Erlebnis" in his *TM* (1989), 60-70.

37. See Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 87.

38. Bernasconi, "Translator's Introduction" to Gadamer, *RB*, xiv, emphasis mine.

39. See *Poetics 1*, tr. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987), "Notes to Poetics I," 183.

40. Marcel's notion of "openness" is not unlike, though distinguishable from, Gadamer's notion of openness to the text. Openness for Gadamer means being ready to place one's prejudices at risk, "to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself"(*TM*, [1989], 355). Gadamer's notion of "openness" is not so much a setting aside of prejudices - in order that the text be allowed to speak - but rather a fore-grounding of them, so as to be able to keep in the forefront of one's thoughts the differences between what one brings to the text and what the text itself is saying. But more importantly for our purposes is the fact that Gadamer's notion of openness does *not* involve "the extinction of one's self" (*TM*, [1989], 269), whereas Transcendent film experience does. Hence, the usefulness of Marcel's notion of availability, over Gadamer's notion of "openness." Marcel's "availability" means the placing at risk of much more than the status of one's prejudices. It means being willing to risk one's very self-identity. It involves not only a willing suspension of belief in one's view of oneself, but a genuine questioning of the viability of that view.

41. I take Marcel's notion of "availability" from a variety of his texts, for example, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* and *The Mystery of Being: Volume I, Reflection and Mystery*, the first of two series of Gifford Lectures delivered by Marcel at the University of Aberdeen, 1949-1950; and from McCown, *Av*.

42. These alternative senses of the term come from Robert Rosthal, translator of Marcel's *Creative Fidelity*, who uses Katherine Farrer's (translator of Marcel's *Being and Having*) word, "disposability," but in a footnote suggests these other English expressions [*Av*, 8].

43. Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, tr. Emma Craufurd, 3rd. ed., Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 13-18, 32-33, and 61, as quoted in *Av*, 16.

44. Gabriel Marcel, *Du Refus à l'Invocation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940), 50. In English, *Creative Fidelity*, tr. Robert Rosthal (New York: Noonday Press of Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964), 34, as quoted in *Av*, 17.

45. Marcel, *Reflection and Mystery*, 205.

46. Marcel, *Reflection and Mystery: Volume I*, 207-08.

47. Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus," in Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 307.

CHAPTER THREE:

TYPE TWO - METAPHYSICAL COMFORT[1]

Man demands to be given a meaning, and if this should be incompatible with his real situation, he will deceive himself. - Karsten Harries[2]

Section 1: A Working Definition of "Metaphysical Comfort"

1.1 Displacement of Spiritual Interest

As we saw above, our interest in the cinematic experience is fundamentally spiritual in character; it is an interest in "transcending" ourselves, in dissolving the (apparent) distance between self and other. But in practice this interest is more often *displaced into a desire for mere metaphysical comfort*. Metaphysical comfort is a sense of reassurance that our life-world perspective, so important for securing our self-identity, is accurate. Central to the maintenance of a non-dissonant life-world perspective is the buttressing of certain metaphysical presuppositions, paramount among which is the notion of an objective criterion for truth. This particular presupposition is vitally important for our spiritual health because if there were no objective criterion for truth - a position more and more under attack, witness the preoccupation with popularly-understood "relativism" - then we would have no assurance that our views about the world and ourselves were accurate. Cinema, through its invitation to share subjectivities, is uniquely capable of supporting our increasingly fragmented subjectivity. In Type Two cinematic experience, then, we seek metaphysical comfort through a subliminal comparison of our life-world perspective with a cinematically-projected life-world perspective, while simultaneously desiring at a

more fundamental level genuine spiritual transcendence. This analysis also makes a contribution to ideologically-based film criticism by providing a theoretical model which allows us to understand the reasons why film experience provides - for better or for worse - a base-line by which to assess our life-world pespective; in short, *how* they "situate a subject."

In the postmodern age, we are left with a palpable desire or keenly-felt spiritual need for metaphysical comfort, in the wake of various lines of thought which have undermined the possibility of any objective criterion for truth. This desire is prior to the psychological experience of desiring any particular satisfaction, but rather serves as the ground for all satisfactions. This desire manifests itself as a mode of being in the world. This mode is a fundamental stance toward the world, or rather away from the world, a flight from authentic being, as Heidegger might say. The metaphysical comfort this desire aims at consists in a sense of objective belonging, or sureness of place in a real world, a sense which has progressively had the rug pulled out from under it as a result of the many critiques levelled at it recently. The resulting desire finds no relief in modern meaning structures because the security of these structures has been called into question. The felt need for metaphysical comfort this phenomenon creates then redirects itself, looking for a new home in the cinema, among shadowy apparitions and strange beasts, beloved aliens and transformed human beings.

1.2 Nietzsche's Notion of "Metaphysical Comfort"

Our use of the phrase "metaphysical comfort" is not the same as Nietzsche's; however, contrasting them will help us to define this type of film experience.[3] In the context of deciphering the origins of Greek tragedy, Nietzsche says the following about the "metaphysically comforting" effect of Dionysian tragedy - and specifically its precursor, the Greek chorus - on the Greek man of culture:

> the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling
> of unity leading back to the very heart of nature. The metaphysical
> comfort - with which ... every true tragedy leaves us - that life is at
> the bottom of things, despite all changes of appearances, indestructibly
> powerful and pleasurable - this comfort appears in incarnate clarity in
> the chorus of satyrs, a chorus of natural beings who live ineradicably,
> as it were, behind all civilization and remain eternally the same,
> despite the changes of generations and of the history of nations.[BT,
> 59]

Contrasted with this view, metaphysical comfort for our purposes involves no shattering revelation of the absurdity of existence, but involves instead the comforting reassurance that our cherished views about the world are not only shared by everyone else, but are also true. Whereas, for Nietzsche, the nausea caused by a glimpse into the fundamental unity of the world is mitigated by the sublime in art, for us this glimpse happens in the context of either "transcendence" or "rupture." This is especially so in the case of rupture, indeed, Nietzsche's notion of "nausea" describes one reaction to the sudden transcendence of the self brought about by a rupture in our life-world perspective. For both, one has:

> looked truly into the essence of things [and is now healed by the
> saving sorceress of art, who turns] ... these nauseous thoughts about
> the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can
> live: these are the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the horrible, and
> the *comic* as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity.[*BT*, 60]

This is what filmic transcendence accomplishes, not mere metaphysical comfort.
That "overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature" is
precisely what we can never experience if we rest secure with the delusion of
metaphysical comfort. This said, there are nevertheless some points of contact
between the two senses of "comfort."

First, both senses carry an illusory quality. For Nietzsche, the Greek chorus
is an ideal realm, a living wall that tragedy constructs around itself in order to close
itself off from the world of reality. (*BT*, 58) Nietzsche refers us to Schiller's notion
that the essence of all poetry is just its openly declared war on all naturalism in art.
The region of the Greek satyr chorus is an ideal domain, a "fictitious *natural state*"
in which are placed "fictitious *natural beings.*" (*BT*, 58) This world had the same
reality and credibility for the believing Hellene as the world of the Olympian gods.

But where the chorus served the vital function for the Hellene of providing
him with a religiously acknowledged reality under the sanction of myth and cult,
metaphysically comforting cinematic experiences serve only to reinforce much less
profound beliefs involving social norms and customs. This latter is no nullification
of the man of culture's beliefs in the state and society; instead, it is a comfort born
from the assurance that those beliefs are true, which for Nietzsche would be
anything but comforting. For the cinema-goer who desires metaphysical comfort,

there is no bold look "right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history," much less the cruelty of nature. (*BT*, 59) There is no overwhelming feeling of unity, and hence no nausea. No knowledge of the eternal core of things is gained; no insight into the horrible truth of existence has been revealed; and no one "now sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence." (*BT*, 60) Cinematic metaphysical comfort is merely that feeling which results from drinking in the "lie of culture that poses as if it were the only reality." (*BT*, 61)

The movie-goer who takes *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987), for example, as an action-adventure, a thrill-packed ride designed only to satisfy our conservative longing for "real justice" (read, for "justice," revenge, meted out with relish against vicious criminals; what in Stallone's hands would have become *Judge Dread* [1995]) desires metaphysical comfort in our sense from this experience. Whereas, those for whom this film is a brilliant parody of the action-adventure genre, which manages to say some pretty scathing things about our success-oriented, over-technologized culture, are probably operating in a diferent experiential mode.

Nietzsche's notion of metaphysical comfort does not consist in this kind of shallow reassurance, but rather in a deep, profound double movement whereby we become aware of the absurd truth of existence, yet take metaphysical comfort from genuine art, art that transfigures this horror into notions with which we may live, such as the sublime and the comic. For our metaphysically comforted movie-goer, though, film is no saving enchantress; it is instead a greedy trickster holding up a fun-house mirror.

1.3 Structure

We shall proceed in our analysis of metaphysical comfort in the following way. We shall begin by offering some historical background, tracing the modern origins of our current spiritual situation. First, we look at Martin Heidegger's analysis of "The Origin of the Work of Art," focusing on the idea of a "clearing" where the truth of Being shines. It is this clearing which we try to glimpse at the cinema. Cinema indeed founds a world, or better, contributes to the construction of subjectivity; it's just that the world it founds, and the subject it constructs, is (sometimes) problematic. Questioning the plausibility of truth being communicated in this way leads to a brief consideration of Paul Ricoeur's critique of Heidegger's faith in the possibility of accessing unmediated "truth." This powerful critique is symptomatic of a generalized frustration with our inability in this century to describe the conditions which would have to be met in order for us to have access to truth. We then offer a phenomenological description of metaphysical comfort, using Marcel's notions of "opacity" and "encumbrance." Next, we suggest that our desire for metaphysical comfort manifests itself as a desire to possess or control the other, through the seemingly limitless, voyeuristic domination offered by the paradoxical present-absence of the filmic image. After reminding ourselves of what Jean-Louis Baudry has to say about the "transcendental subject," we finally return to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the lived body in order to understand theoretically what we have just described phenomenologically, that is, how the cinematic experience brings about a level of participation that makes metaphysical comfort possible.

**Section 2: Our Spiritual Situation: Heidegger, Ricoeur, Derrida and
the Possibility of Truth**

2.1 Heidegger, the Work of Art, and the Clearing

A work of art for Heidegger opens a clearing in which the truth of being shines.

For the Greeks, he tells us, *aletheia* meant the "unconcealedness" of being, or truth.

This open place is always at the same time partially concealed:

> In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a
> clearing, a lighting ... [thanks] to this clearing, beings are unconcealed
> in certain changing degrees. And yet a being can be *concealed*, too,
> only within the sphere of what is lighted. Each being we encounter
> and which encounters us keeps to this curious opposition of presence
> in that it always withholds itself at the same time in a concealedness.
> The clearing in which beings stand is in itself at the same time con-
> cealment.[OWA, 53]

It is our fascination with this interplay - Heidegger calls it a war[4] - between reveal-

ing and concealing that helps us to understand how cinema can be metaphysically

comforting. The art of film is based in large measure on the tension between reveal-

ing and concealing - a tension which is characteristic of human understanding as

such[5] - and this tension carries a spiritual resonance.

We too, as subjects whose gaze is always restricted and circumscribed by our

bodily locatedness, see in terms of revealed/concealed. Our visual "frame" is

defined by our peripheral vision; our auditory "frame" by our bodily "attitude"

toward the sound source. This fundamental bodily intentionality, which serves as

the ground for all subsequent intentionalities, is mimicked in film art. But what

makes our participation in the show potentially metaphysically comforting is a high

level of consonance between what the camera "chooses" to look at - a good indication of the life-world perspective of the film's author (whoever that is) - and our way of being in the world, our own life-world perspective.

2.2 Paul Ricoeur on Language

Paul Ricoeur's critique of Heidegger's ontology revolves around the role of language in human understanding. Understanding, after Heidegger, becomes an aspect of Dasein's "project," and of its *openness to being.* "The question of truth is no longer the question of method; it is the question of the manifestation of being for a being whose existence consists in understanding being."[6] But self-understanding is always mediated by and finds its meaning through language.[7] In the light of this fact, Ricoeur tries a different route, namely, through semantics. For him, the being who is revealed to hermeneutics is the "being-interpreted." This is a being who "discovers, by the exegesis of his own life, that he is placed in being before he places and possesses himself." (*CI*, 11)

But then language itself as a signifying milieu must ultimately be referred to existence. As Ricoeur says,

> What animates the movement of surpassing the linguistic level is the desire for an ontology ... [i]t is in the self that we have an opportunity to discover an existent ... by understanding ourselves ... we appropriate to ourselves the meaning of our desire to be or of our effort to exist. Existence [is this] ... desire and effort.[*CI*, 21]

Ricoeur says that the purpose of all interpretation is to "conquer remoteness," to bridge the distance between text and interpreter. In this way, a text can be made

present. Every hermeneutics is thereby an effort at self-understanding through understanding the other. This task can also be accomplished via a confrontation with a quasi-other such as a film. But for Ricoeur, this is to be accomplished through reflection: "reflection is the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be by means of the works which testify to this effort and this desire."(*CI*, 18)

Films, like any cultural document, are an important source of self-understanding through appropriation. Indeed, this is especially the case for films, since, as we have argued above, their offer to share subjectivities with us is essentially a spiritual invitation. Even prior to language, the filmic image offers an intimate level of participation in the life-world perspective of an "other."

For Ricoeur, the remoteness set up by language is not easily bridged. Reflection must be doubly indirect. It must pass through not only the set of cultural documents, but also through false consciousness. In order for a "problematic of reflection" to surpass itself in a "problematic of existence," it must necessarily interpret. As Ricoeur says, it is in "deciphering the tricks of desire that the roots of desire may be unearthed." (*CI*, 18) We can only glimpse existence through this veil of interpretation. It is forever entangled in the movement of its own deciphering.

This is the movement which defines the hermeneutic circle. It results not in a "triumphant ontology," but in a second-order hermeneutics. While being remains just out of reach, its products indicate its omnipresence. But these products must be interpreted. Existence is always an interpreted existence.

Ricoeur discovers through his hermeneutics the "multiple modalities of the dependence of the self," that is, the dependence of self-identity on desire, spirit, and, most importantly for our purposes, the sacred:

> its dependence on desire glimpsed in the archaeology of the subject,
> its dependence on the spirit glimpsed in teleology, its dependence on
> the sacred glimpsed in its eschatology. It is by developing an archae-
> ology, a teleology, and an eschatology that reflection suppresses itself
> as reflection.[*CI*, 24]

In a real sense, we are brought into existence *as beings with meaning* by inter-pretation. "Existence bècomes a self - human and adult - only by appropriating this meaning, which first resides 'outside', in works, institutions, and cultural monuments in which the life of the spirit is objectified."(*CI*, 22)

Now, one of the most important sites where the "life of the spirit is objectified" is in the cinema. In an age hungry for spiritual grounding, catchy bits of movie dialogue become cultural symbols. For example: "Go ahead; make my day!," a phrase used by Ronald Reagan to bully the Senate and the House into passing his legislation (from the "Dirty Harry" series, various directors, including Clint Eastwood; *Dirty Harry* [Don Siegel, 1971], *Magnum Force* [Ted Post, 1973], *The Enforcer* [James Fargo, 1976], *Sudden Impact* [Eastwood, 1983], and *The Dead Pool* [Buddy Van Horn, 1988]); "I'll be back!," (from the "Terminator" series, beginning with *The Terminator* [James Cameron, 1984], and continuing with *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* [James Cameron, 1991], with, no doubt, more to come); "This could be the start of a beautiful friendship" (from *Casablanca* [Michael

Curtiz, 1941]); and "You talking to me?" (from *Taxi Driver* [Martin Scorsese, 1976]).

Another important critique which has severely undermined our already fragmented postmodern subjectivity is that offered by Jacques Derrida. Derrida offers perhaps a more fundamental critique of Heidegger's Daseinsanalysis, which he characterizes as a "metaphysics of presence." But for Derrida, the signified perpetually eludes the grasp of the signifier, absences itself by deferral. Indeed, the "signified" itself for Derrida is nothing but a trace of a trace, nothing but a signifier temporarily taking the place of a signified. Neither word and thing nor word and thought can ever become one; in fact, the whole notion of a thing to which a word refers is now gone. This makes the unifying of understanding with thing understood nothing more than a nostalgic wish.

Heidegger's question of being for Derrida relies on there being a Being susceptible to questioning. This is the "metaphysics of presence" which Derrida rejects. For him, all there are, are texts of one kind and another. This includes human subjects. Our desire for grounding, unambiguous meaning, or in my terms "metaphysical comfort," becomes a demand put directly to Being. But for Derrida there is no response but an echo.

Nietzsche seems to have seen this strange turn of events coming a hundred years ago when he said that we simply cannot decide whether existence is interpretable without slippage:

> [this holds notwithstanding] the most industrious and most scrupulous-
> ly conscientious analysis and self-examination of the intellect because
> in the course of this analysis the human intellect cannot avoid seeing
> itself in its own perspectives.... [We] cannot look around our own cor-
> ner.[8]

He called the desire to see from another's perspective a "hopeless curiosity," one

which wanted to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there might

be. Upon recognizing that the world may include infinite interpretations, we are

seized by a "great shudder" which inclines us toward deifying "again after the old

manner this monster of an unknown world." (*GS*, 336) It is this movement which

defines our fascination with metaphysical comfort; the need to reify/deify the

meaning of the world through the "grammar" of the cinematic.

As Nietzsche points out, we think that in possessing language we possess

knowledge of the world.[9] Today, we extend that thinking to include images. We

think that when we possess the *image*, we possess the thing of which it is an image.

The significance of language - or, in our own age, the image - for the evolution of

culture resides in the fact that man uses language to set up a world of his own, over

and against the other world:

> To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and
> names of things as in aeternae veritates (eternal truths) he has appro-
> priated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the
> animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of
> the world. The sculptor of language was not so modest as to believe
> that he was only giving things designations, he conceived rather that
> with words he was expressing supreme knowledge of things: language
> is, in fact, the first stage of the occupation with science [*Human, All
> Too Human*, 11].[10]

In the initial forming of language, according to Nietzsche, man does not really perceive things or events, but rather *impulses*. He doesn't communicate sensations, but instead merely copies of sensations. Language under this view doesn't desire to instruct, but merely to convey to others a subjective impulse as well as its acceptance: "The sensation, evoked through a nerve impulse, does not take in the thing itself: this sensation is presented externally through an image."[11]

Particularly intriguing for our present purposes is the following anthropological digression:

> First *images* - to explain how images arise in the spirit. Then *words*,
> applied to images. Finally *concepts*, possible only when there are
> words - the collecting together of many images in something
> nonvisible but audible (word).[12]

Images arise in the spirit, according to Nietzsche, and only then are words applied to them, and last concepts are only possible when there are words. But cinematic experience short-circuits language by directly presenting this "subjective impulse." It is prereflective, prelinguistic, because it uses images to convey a meaning and images are prior to words. It works on a level which is prior to language and hence is immediate, primordial, and affective, rather than conceptual, linguistic, and cognitive.

In this techno-secular age, metaphysical comfort at the cinema becomes an extension and affective intensification of the will to dominate by naming that Nietzsche identified over 100 years ago.

Section 3: A Phenomenological Description of Metaphysical Comfort

3.1 Marcel's Notion of "Opacity" and Metaphysical Comfort

Metaphysical comfort is the experience which results from drinking in those cultural

works which constitute most of the mainstream production of Hollywood. It is an

experience characterized by a feeling of comfort, or being "at home" in a world

created on film. No challenge to either our view of ourselves or our view of the

world surfaces in these film experiences. As we sit comfortably reassured that our

world is pretty much as we think it is, we effectively seal ourselves off from the

possibility of experiencing the wholly other. We are "opaque," as Marcel would

say. As McCown tells us:

> The image he [Marcel] uses is that of a material which blocks the
> passage of light ... the person who is opaque has ceased to let his
> presence pass into the world. He no longer lives in the world, nor
> remains open for its in-fluences (influx) upon his life ... an interior
> opacity is a sealing off of experience.[*Av*, 12]

A person only fully realizes himself in acts in which he tends to incarnate or

embody himself; in a work (*oeuvre*), in an action, or in an entire life. But it is

"essential to the development of personality that it not crystallize or congeal (*figer*)

around any particular expression of the self."(*Av*, 13) The appeal of the metaphys-

ically comforting film experience lies precisely in this kind of "safe" coagulation of

the life of the whole self around one particular manifestation of the self, or at least

around a small variety of these manifestations such as are routinely served up from

the Hollywood dream factory. This "crispation" of the self carries with it a loss of sensitivity as well as a general devaluation of life.(*Av*, 13)

Marcel uses the example of the fanatic to make the point. This is one way in which "crispation" can set in upon a human life. The fanatic is neither open to us nor to change in himself. He has "sealed himself off" from the world. He is fixed on an idea or obsession to the point of being compelled to defend it, which makes it difficult for us to be with him. For Marcel, fanaticism has the same paralyzing effect on the mind as does tetanus on the body. As McCown relates the story:

> The fanaticized consciousness remains numb and unsympathetic to "everything to which its own compass needle does not respond."... (Fanaticism is a pathological phenomenon.) The fanatic is satisfied to think what "one thinks," to say what "one says," and to believe what "everyone knows." His words are empty of meaning, mere notions other men have put into his head. Truth has become degraded, for him, into prejudice and opinion. He has closed off the channels which lead to experience.... "The life of the pretentious bigot does not open on heaven. The latter is confused with the 'country theatre' where everybody fights to get a front seat."[*Av*, 14]

The "fanaticized consciousness" sounds rather like the cinema-goer whose only wish is to buttress his or her life-world perspective. We mmediately think of *Rambo* movies in this context. Sylvester Stallone's appeal is to the prejudiced and opinionated. It is an appeal to the lowest common denominator, what "everyone thinks"; this is the metaphysically comforting. This experience is conditioned by a low level of openness. This is the level of emotional button-pushing. Oliver Stone's cinema offers another example in this regard. *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1992), for instance, "opens up" the discourse about the Kennedy assassination by offering a

standard Hollywood narrative from which emerges an unambiguous thesis gargantuan in its paranoia. Stone's fixation on the idea of a massive conspiracy doesn't so much open up the issue for examination as close off all possibility of disagreement: if you disagree, you're probably in on it!

3.2 Unavailability as "Encumbrance"

Unavailability is just the opposite of availability. If we are weighed down, or encumbered, by our selves, we become unable to be open to the other as other. As Marcel writes,

> To be unavailable is to be in some manner, not only occupied, but encumbered [*encombré*] by the self.[*Étre et Avoir*, 105-06] ... everything shows us that a being lives less, or if you wish, in a more indigent way, the more he is encumbered (encombré) with himself, entangled (empêtré) in himself.[*Réflexion et Mystère*, 178, as quoted in *Av*, 11]

This is one way in which a desire for transcendence can be misdirected into a desire for mere metaphysical comfort. If we are "weighed down" with, or too narrowly focussed on, the self, we are not open to new experiences which could potentially change us in fundamental ways. We become incapable of genuine presence. We become, as Marcel puts it, *opaque*. Like a material that blocks the passage of light, those who are "opaque" cut themselves off from the rest of the world. They do not really live in the world anymore. They do not allow the world "in" in the sense of remaining open to its in-fluences (influx). As McCown puts it:

an interior opacity is a sealing off of experience (huis clos: closed doors), so that experience becomes fixated on the stale, and tensed against the entrance of the new. Fixation is a hardening of the categories through which we view the world, and as such, a form of pride.[*Av*, 12]

The Hebrew Scriptures also knew that "hardening of the heart" was carried on by the will, and hence was a form of pride. This kind of shriveling, contracting, enclosing of the self is typical of metaphysical comfort. Its negation, availability, serves as a condition for filmic Transcendence. And its relation to "hardening of the heart" for our purposes is not accidental. A lack of openness to other subjectivities, or ways of apprehending the life-world, cuts short the possibility of filmic transcendence and constitutes a general refusal to allow the quasi-subjectivity embodied by the film's point of view to work on us. And this refusal is fundamentally spiritual in character.

Section 4: Metaphysical Comfort as Desire for Possession of the Wholly Other

4.1 Cinema and Desire for Metaphysical Comfort

I have briefly outlined above some of the more important senses in which Heidegger's "metaphysics of presence" has recently been called into question. Ricoeur - following his linguistic or hermeneutic turn (roughly coinciding with the publication of his *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* in 1965)[13] - has tried to show that the self is only made present by interpretation through language; Derrida has deconstructed the Heideggerian enterprise, showing that being - if there is such an animal, and this is a live question for the deconstructionist - always eludes

conceptual capture. In the light of these critiques, what shall we make of the obsessive desire for neat, tidy, unambiguous meanings offered by (most) film experience?

This phenomenon can best be understood in terms of desire - the logocentric desire, Derrida might call it - for metaphysical comfort. Of course, desire here also means domination, in the sense of control over one's environment. This desire for ownership, possession and control over one's environment finds its analogue in what Ernst Cassirer calls the "magical world view," a view also symptomatic of cinematic metaphysical comfort. Indeed, for Cassirer, the first energy by which man places himself as an independent being is that of desire. When he is no longer prepared to accept the world and the reality of things, he begins, through a magical world view, to build them up for himself. This is man's first and most primitive consciousness of his ability to give form to reality, under which there is no existing thing which must not ultimately submit to the omnipotence of thought[14] and the omnipotence of desire:

> Thus, in the magical world view the I exerts almost unlimited sway
> over reality: it takes all reality back into itself. But precisely this
> immediate identification of I and reality involves a peculiar dialectic
> in which the original relationship is reversed. The enhanced feeling of
> self which seems to express itself in the magical world view indicates
> actually that at this stage there is as yet no true self. Through the
> magical omnipotence of the will the I seeks to seize upon all things
> and bend them to its purpose; but precisely in this attempt it shows
> itself still totally dominated, totally "possessed," by things.[15]

Hence, for Cassirer as well as for us, this desperate yearning of the self is actually a sign of its inverse: the I must be in need of ground if it is claiming to possess the world through an image. Cinema seemingly fulfils this desire. It objectifies reality by possession, ownership, domination. The camera's gaze is intrusive, and frighteningly unavoidable. Alfred Hitchcock, for example, frequently played with this idea of the film medium as voyeuristic and surreptitiously possessive, most explicitly in *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954). The tension between the seen and the unseen is central to this kind of desire. And this tension is fundamentally spiritual.

This is also a desire for the possession or ownership and control of the other. As Marcel saw clearly, it is not hope, but rather desire which is the negative correlate of fear, since it tends toward possession. It is meant to assimilate by destroying or consuming. Hence, for Marcel, desire is:

> an anticipated appropriation with the consciousness of a need hitherto unsuspected and even nonexistent, which this appropriation ought to fill.[*Av*, 61]

The appetite of desire is "rapacious." The centre of desire is in the self, and the other is considered only to the extent that he or she can procure some enjoyment or service for me.(*Av*, 61) It is this kind of desire that fulfills itself in metaphysical comfort.

4.2 The Seen and the Unseen

The tension between the seen and the unseen has a biblical as well as a Merleau-Pontyan resonance.[16] "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."[2 Cor. 4:18] As Arthur Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, has said in the context of the Christian longing for God and heaven:

> some Christians, combining the imagery of another country with the sense of the present, unseen fellowship with God, have written of the other world not as away from or 'after' this world, but as existing behind it or within it, hidden by the veil of our present ignorance.

John Henry Newman draws out the theme:

> We are looking for the coming of the day of the Lord, when all the outward world, fair though it be, shall perish, when the heavens shall be burnt, and the earth melt away. We can bear the loss, for we know it will be but the removing of a veil. We know that to remove the world which is seen will be the manifestation of the world which is not seen. We know that what we see is like a screen hiding us from God and Christ, and his saints and angels. And we earnestly desire and pray for the dissolution of all that we see, from our own longing after that which we do not see.[Practical and Plain Sermons, Vol.4, 211.][17]

This passage reveals the extent to which this tension is spiritual as well as cognitive. Highly suggestive for our purposes is the language which Newman uses to describe the experience of searching for God. It has its roots in Plato's philosophy, certainly, but also finds a deep resonance with the film experience. The goal of this search is not just communion with God. It is *union* with God.[18]

A related kind of desire confronts us now, the Platonic, or Aristotelian wish that Reason rule. But this desire is not worked out in terms of the need to arrive at any kind of answer. It is played with. The cinematic fascination is with the play of light and shadow, truth and falsity, being and non-being, clearing and obstruction. Heidegger's "play" of revealing and concealing is in cinema made present. But usually we content ourselves with only that part of the story which is comforting to hear. In the cinema, we generally tell ourselves that order reigns in the world, that the world resolves itself neatly into beginnings, middles, and ends - in short, that the world makes sense. The light of the screen illuminates a clearing which reveals precisely what we want and expect to see.[19]

4.3 Baudry and the Cinematographic Apparatus

Some have fixed upon the value-laden nature of the satisfaction of this desire. Jean-Louis Baudry, for example, has written about the "ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus."[20] He sees cinema as ideologically suspect because it is capable of producing a "transcendental subject":

> if the eye which moves is no longer fettered by a body, by the laws of
> matter and time, if there are no more assignable limits to its displace-
> ment - conditions fulfilled by the possibilities of shooting and of
> film - the world will not only be constituted by this eye but for it.[21]

In this sense, the subject is able, with the help of the cinematic apparatus, to transcend his immediate surroundings. Indeed, the limitations of bodily existence disappear. One is no longer trapped within the confines of any particular point of

view. Baudry says that: "the cinema manifests in a hallucinatory way the belief in the omnipotence of thought, described by Freud, which plays so important a role in neurotic defense mechan-isms."[22] What I am describing, then, is a second-order defense mechanism, the desire to satisfy a yearning for metaphysical comfort, turned into the play of opposites, light and dark.

Section 5: Merleau-Ponty and the Cinematic Apparatus

5.1 The Film Experience and the Body

How is this metaphysical comfort purchased? First, our bodies assume a stance toward the screen which is participatory, one which dissolves the distance between us and the world of the film. The image is present to us in a bodily sense, while we are not present to it. Our response to characters on the screen does not require reflection on our part. Instead, we respond viscerally to the gestures, eye move-ments, and bodily positions of the characters as they are related to the camera, which serves as our bodily presence to the filmic world.

Second, our interpretations of these movements (I use the word "interpret-ation" here in a Merleau-Pontyan sense, one which draws no distinction between the body and the intellect)[23] are apparently in nearly universal agreement, even though the spin put on those movements by individuals may greatly vary. For example, a terrified face is almost universally so, even though the character of the terror may vary a great deal. The film's projected subjectivity is like our own subjectivity: it is recognizably human.

The fundamental interrelatedness of the five senses - so well-described by Merleau-Ponty - creates our sense of bodily presence to the world, or being in the world. And it is just this sense of bodily presence to the world that is mimicked by the cinema, creating a *projected shared subjectivity*. Our experience of film (when it works) constitutes a throwing out, casting out, or letting fall of subjectivity toward the quasi-subjectivity of the film. This involves a letting-go of our place in the world, an act of trust which might not be rewarded.

Film experience requires openness, a willingness to be manipulated, led away somewhere not of our own choosing. This is why we are not only aesthetically disapproving when a film takes us somewhere we don't want to go, but we are disappointed, even angry. This is because we have trusted the filmmaker in a way that we don't have to trust the playwright or the composer, neither of whom has the ability to bundle us up and take us on a little trip.

Even though a play creates a world for us to experience, it does not have the omniscience or the omnipresence of the film. Film's visual ability to be anywhere at any time, instantly, creates in us an expectation that we are about to have access to the truth. This visual point-of-view omniscience accounts for the power film enjoys as a propaganda tool. This is because sight, as St. Augustine reminds us, is primary among the senses as far as knowledge is concerned:

> sight is the principal sense by which knowledge is acquired, in the
> Scriptures it is called gratification of the eye.[I John 2:16] For
> although, correctly speaking, to see is the proper function of the eyes,
> we use the word of the other senses too, when we employ them to
> acquire knowledge. We do not say, "hear how it glows," "smell how

bright it is," "taste how it shines," or "feel how it glitters," because
these are all things which we say that we see. Yet we not only say
"See how it shines" when we are speaking of something which only
the eyes can perceive, but we also say "See how loud it is," See how
it smells," See how it tastes," and "See how hard it is." So, as I said,
sense experience in general is called the lust of the eyes because,
although the function of sight belongs primarily to the eyes, we apply
it to the other organs of sense as well, by analogy, when they are used
to discover any item of knowledge.[24]

Film's "gratification of the eye," or of the "lust of the eyes," reinforces our sense of

being shown something real, our sense of an "absent presence" with the film's

world, a sense which serves as the source for our level of metaphysical comfort.

The temptation to use the senses of the body for the satisfaction of its own inquisi-

tiveness Augustine calls a "futile curiosity," which masquerades under the name of

science and learning. Clearly, for Augustine, this thirst for knowldege through the

senses is a self-indulgence, slavery to which leads us to stray away from God. And

the "absent presence" of the film's projected subjectivity is a particularly strong

temptation which, unlike Augustine, we view as essentially spiritual.

A good indication that we are experiencing a paradoxical "present-absence"

with regard to the film's world is the fact that the rupture of our non-presence for

the film-world can be quite disconcerting. Some films use this rupturing as a device

for disturbing the viewer. Such films exhibit a rupture of the standard absentee

viewer, or omniscient voyeur, form, speaking instead directly with the viewer.

Stanley Kubrick is especially skilled in this technique. In *Full Metal Jacket* (1987),

for example, he creates a peculiar discomfort in the viewer by having characters in

several scenes address the camera directly. This discomfort ruptures our habitual

level of involvement with the film experience; it interferes with the way we usually massage ourselves into a comforting state. Safely snuggled in the dark, in the comfy chairs of the theater, we do not expect to be called upon to make a judgement, or be caught peeking in on somebody else's life.

The film experience, as Hitchcock knew perfectly well, is essentially voyeuristic; it is seeing (and hearing) without being seen (or heard). And we are thoroughly irritated when our narrative expectations are not met, for example, in the experimental cinema of Jean-Luc Godard, a director who has made an art of self-conscious filmmaking, or in the surrealist cinema of Luis Buñuel.

However, not all film is given over to this type of wish-fulfilment, despite the medium being generally characterizable in terms of the attempt to satisfy this profound desire. Theorists point to the work of some directors, notably Yasjiro Ozu, as examples of filmmakers who "displace the illusion of narrative presence and plenitude."[25] Another often-cited example is *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1955), which self-consciously breaks with the standard narrative form in order specifically to question the veracity of first-person story-telling. But these displacements occur within an already-existing frame which the viewer knows perfectly well is character- ized by conventional constraints. The objectification of the world remains.

Merleau-Ponty says at one point in his suggestive essay, "The Film and the New Psychology," that movies can be so gripping because they do not give us their character's thoughts, as novels do, but rather their conduct or behaviour:

They directly present to us that special way of being in the world, of dealing with things and other people, which we can see in the sign language of gesture and gaze and which clearly defines each person we know.[26]

A movie should not try to portray the "inner landscape of dizziness," for example, because we will get a much better sense of dizziness if we see it from the outside, if we contemplate an unbalanced body contorted on a rock or that unsteady step trying to adapt itself to some disturbance of space: "[For] the movies as for modern psychology dizziness, pleasure, grief, love, and hate are ways of behaving."[27]

While we agree that these states are not, strictly speaking, internal, but observable ways of being, it doesn't follow from this that the cinema cannot show us bodily ways of being in the world, *from the inside*. This is exactly what the cinema is peculiarly suited to do; indeed, its structure of shared subjectivities is what accounts for its ability to comfort us metaphysically. Bodily being is mimicked in the film experience, in such a way that we see and hear - and perhaps feel - what the world is like from a certain perspective, namely, the camera's.

5.2 Point-of-view and the Body's Being in the World

In the film experience, we always occupy a particular point of view; the camera is our "mind's eye." Our subjectivity *merges with* that of the camera (or of the camera's point of view); we become lost in the world of the film. Film-watching is the uncanny experience of seeing with somebody else's eyes, and of hearing with another's ears, a subtly intimate, yet distant, contact with the "other," which is no less intimate for being "mere representation." Film is dream-like, but it is much

more. The site of the dreamer, namely, at the center of the dream, needs to be explored more thoroughly. The film experience does more than make our thoughts visible and audible: the effect of this process is to create a *projected shared subjectivity*, which is capable of moving around in time and space, but which is entirely given over to the vagaries of the camera. We are sent on a journey in the case of cinematic art.

Ricoeur characterizes Nietzsche as saying that life itself is nothing but interpretation: philosophy then becomes the interpretation of interpretation. This would make philosophy of the film a third-order interpretation, that is, an interpretation of various interpretations of interpretation. If Baudry is right about the "transcendental subject" in the context of the film experience, this would mean that, at least in the case of metaphysical comfort, our necessary illusion of objective selfhood in a world of objects with unequivocal meanings is reinforced by the play of the filmic image.

Truth since the Greeks has been closely associated with vision. Hence, cinema's ability to construct reality visually gives it the aura of truth. But cinema also *re-constructs* vision. The identification of the eye with the lens of the camera means that the camera performs the function of the Body-Subject. In wholly unique ways, cinema reassures us of our supposed metaphysical underpinnings. Film's fascination for us must be understood in the light of the redirection of a spiritual interest in the latter half of the twentieth century. And although its subject (or atmosphere, or perhaps invitation) is metaphysical and ultimately spiritual, this does

not mean that the acting out of this interest need be grim. Quite the contrary, this interest is played with in the cinema. The cinematic gaze is the playful expression of a desire for metaphysical comfort, which is itself the displaced form of a more fundamental desire for spiritual transcendence.

Section 6: Summary of Conclusion from Chapter Three

We have seen in chapter three how certain comforting presuppositions concerning the self and the world are buttressed by metaphysically comforting cinematic experiences. We seek a subliminal comparison of our own life-world perspective with the film's, while simultaneously desiring at a more fundamental level genuine spiritual transcendence. This is the feeling of reassurance that takes place in us when we drink in those cultural products that pose as if they were the only reality. We looked briefly at several critiques that have undermined our sense of an objective self-identity, such as Ricoeur's and Derrida's. Nietzsche, the first "postmodern," as usual, was ahead of everyone in his doubts about the possibility of truth being communicated to us. And we saw that the will to dominate by naming that he talked about has become extended and intensified in the cinematic image, at least in the case of metaphysical comfort. We next offered a phenomenological description of this type of cinematic experience, focusing on Marcel's notion of "opacity," and we analyzed some ways in which we may become opaque to the experience of others, for example, "encumbrance." We concluded that the desire for metaphysical comfort manifested itself as a desire to own or control the other. And we drew upon Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the lived body in order to understand how

it is possible that metaphysical comfort can be so easily purchased. Lastly, we concluded that this profound level of participation witht the filmic image was made possible by a "projected shared subjectivity" which through its sharing of points of view enabled us to see the world from the camera's perspective.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. This chapter is a revised and expanded version of a paper accepted for publication in the *Journal of Value Inquiry*, **29**, Special Issue on Film, December, 1995.

2. See Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 156.

3. This phrase appears in Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), first published in 1872, especially sections 7, 8, 17, 18. Hereafter, *BT* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

4. Heidegger says the following about this conflict:

> Concealing denial is intended to denote that opposition in the nature
> of truth which subsists between clearing, or lighting and concealing.
> It is the opposition of the primal conflict. The nature of truth is, in
> itself, the primal conflict in which that open centre is won within
> which what is, stands, and from which it sets itself back into
> itself...[this makes the work of art] the fighting of the battle in which
> the unconcealedness of beings, as a whole, or truth, is won.[OWA, 54-
> 5).

5. It is interesting to note that this idea seems to make sense of the unending appeal of the mystery genre in film and, more broadly, why narrative - and especially narrative closure - is so central to the film experience.

6. See Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p.10. Hereafter, *CI* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

7. As Ricoeur puts it,

> The difficulty in passing from understanding as a mode of knowledge
> to understanding as a mode of being consists in the following: the
> understanding which is the result of the Analytic of Dasein is precise-
> ly the understanding through which and in which this being under-
> stands itself as being. Is it not once again *within language* itself that
> we must seek the indication that understanding is a mode of being?
> [*CI*, 10-11]

8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 336. Hereafter, *GS* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

9. I am indebted to Jeff Mitscherling for bringing these passages to my attention, from part of his work in progress, *The Author's Intention*, chapter four, sections A and B, entitled "Nietzsche's Rhetorical Model of Language and the Revision of Hermeneutic Ontology."

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), Appendix C, 190-191.

11. See "Description of Ancient Rhetoric," in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, eds. & trs. Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair, David J. Parent (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 21.

12. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, sec. 506, trs. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 275.

13. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970). See also, with regard to Ricoeur's hermeneutic turn, his "Foreword" to Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, xiii-xvii.

14. Cassirer gets the phrase "omnipotence of thought" from Sigmund Freud's essay, "Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thought," in *Totem and Taboo*, tr. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950), 75-99.

15. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol.2 Mythical Thought, tr. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 157-158.

16. The latter refers to Merleau-Ponty's last (unfinished) book, *The Visible and the Invisible*, tr. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

17. As quoted in Arthur Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, *Sacred and Secular: A Study in the Otherworldly and This-Worldly Aspects of Christianity* (London: Longman's, 1965), 30. Hereafter, *S&S* (see "List of Abbreviations," page 2).

18. As Jean-Paul Sartre points out in the context of his discussion of the fundamental project of the for-itself, the human being, namely, man's yearning to be God:

> It is as consciousness that it wishes to have the impermeability and infinite density of the in-itself. It is as the nihilation of the in-itself and a perpetual evasion of contingency and of facticity that it wishes to be its own foundation ... the ideal of a consciousness which would be the foundation of its own being-in-itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself. It is this ideal which can be called God. Thus the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God ...

> God, value and supreme end of transcendence, represents the perma-
> nent limit in terms of which man makes known to himself what he is.
> To be man means to reach toward being God. Or, if you prefer, man
> fundamentally is the desire to be God.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1956, 1966), 723-724.

19. This is what Jarvie sees. Recall Jarvie's view of the film experience: "Things work out so interestingly there, there is so much order and coherence, in contrast to the world as it actually is."[*PF*, 49] Jarvie's view of the film experience seems to limit itself to what I call "Metaphysical Comfort." For more on his restricted reading of the film experience, see Chapter One: Part I, Section 1.2.

20. "Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods, Volume II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 531-42.

21. Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Ideological Effects....," 531.

22. Baudry, "Ideological Effects...," 531. Cf Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol.2, Mythical Thought, 157-158, where he refers us to Freud's essay on the "omnipotence of thought." Human efficacy is at the very core of the "magical world view" for Cassirer. In desire, man builds up the world for himself. He no longer merely accepts the world as it is:

> The enhanced feeling of self which seems to express itself in the
> magical world view indicates actually that at this stage there is as yet
> no true self. Through the magical omnipotence of the will the I seeks
> to seize upon all things and bend them to its purpose.

23. Dufrenne says the following about the relative merits of aesthetics' emphasis on either cognition or the body:

> The artwork today prompts a number of scholarly discourses by critics
> and often by the creators themselves. Could it be that it requires
> intellect rather than feeling, and that it is more fully appreciated
> through speaking of it rather than feeling it? But we should not
> harden this opposition, for if the work becomes an object of knowl-
> edge, it is on condition that it be welocomed initially by the body, and
> perhaps in order to be more intensely savored by it.

Author's Preface to Dufrenne, *In the Presence of the Sensuous*, x.

24. See Saint Augustine, *Confessions* tr. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 241-242.

25. See, for example, Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu," *Screen* 17: 2 (Summer 1976), 52-54.

26. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 48-59.

27. Merleau-Ponty, "Film and the New Psychology," 104, 58.

CHAPTER FOUR:

TYPE THREE - RUPTURE

*I spent three years studying with the Jesuits. They used to terrify me
to death, and now I'm getting my own back by terrifying other people.*

- Sir Alfred Hitchcock[1]

Section 1: A Working Definition of "Rupture"

1.1 A Severe Break with Life-World Expectations

"Rupture" is that type of film experience which is characterized by a sudden and

severe break with our expectations, specifically those expectations having to do with

what the world is like and with what we are like as persons, a type of experience

that questions our very personal identity. Unlike Transcendence and Metaphysical

Comfort, rupture is neither a transcendent contact with the other (though the unex-

pected and challenging presence of the "wholly other" is the main cause of the

rupture), nor an affirmation of the spectator's views about him or herself or the

world. It is instead a break with the expected which - like Types 1 and 2 - admits

of varying degrees. At the lower end of this continuum lies the simple dramatic

convention of foiling the expectations of the spectator, which I shall call frustration

of **conventional narrative expectations**. This type of expectations frustration

includes: 1) relatively predictable plot twists that thwart our expectations in an

entertaining way - those peculiarly standard variations of plot found in any drama or

comedy; 2) unfamiliar surroundings that surprise us in an interesting way, for

example, as they are found in science fiction; and 3) unexpected characters whose

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behaviour catches us off-guard, while simultaneously fascinating us. All these variations occur with simple structural narrative considerations in mind.

At the other end of this spectrum lies a more formidable, severe kind of expectations frustration, a frustration of our views concerning personal identity or the way we see the world; in short, a frustration of our presuppositions concerning the life-world. These kinds of expectations reside on a deeper level and are different in kind from simple conventional expectations. They involve fundamental notions about personal identity, morality, and what our place in the world is or should be. I shall call them **life-world expectations.** Films that challenge our life-world expectations are never structurally simple, and almost never answer the questions they pose. They challenge us in ways we find distressing and/or stimulating.

Rupture is the unsettling, or perhaps unhinging, of either our view of ourselves, or our view of the world or both, a kind of deconstruction, or melting of the glue that holds our life-world together. Unlike Transcendence, this is no blissful and serene "surrender of the self" to whatever change is in store for it through its openness to the world of the other. This is an unexpected shattering of our life-world which challenges our view of ouselves and/or our world, a disruption of. cherished beliefs that may or may not result in change, depending on the method of suture.

A Rupture of this kind leaves behind a gaping hole in the intricate lattice-work of the self which calls for some kind of closing, or "suturing." The "decision" taken with respect to the method of suturing will depend on many factors, but the

important point for our purposes is that the "wound" is created in the first place by a rupture in the fabric of our life-world. Our response may be to simply ignore the tear, to not allow the full weight of the challenge to come to rest on us. This result has some features in common with Metaphysical Comfort, though we are left in the case of Rupture with an ambivalent sense of comfort, whereas in the case of Metaphysical Comfort, no such lingering doubts remain. If, on the other hand, we choose to explore the "wound" thoroughly with reflection, a condition characteristic of a high degree of openness, permanent and lasting change may occur. This result has some features in common with Transcendence, though some ambivalence remains with regard to how we end up integrating these new views into our view of ourselves, whereas in the case of Transcendence, no such discomfort remains.

This brings us to the first problem with regard to Rupture. Is Rupture a distinct type, or is it the shifting ground between Metaphysical Comfort and Transcendence? In other words, is Rupture simply Metaphysical Comfort gone wrong, an unexpected transcendent experience where we thought we were going to be reassured by the film's life-world perspective? It looks as though Rupture could just be an unforeseen shift from Metaphysical Comfort to Transcendence, but not the other way around. (It is not likely that the shift would go the other way, that is, from Transcendence to Metaphysical Comfort, because in the case of Transcendence, we are already opened up to the experience a great deal. Hence, any challenging material that comes our way would probably be met with curiosity, rather than panic.) We shall leave this question temporarily in abeyance while assuming that

Rupture is indeed a distinct type. This is arguable, of course, but for our present purposes we can make the assumption without serious impact on our analysis. It may turn out that we will be forced to jettison Rupture as an independent type, but we need not decide the matter until our description of it is complete.

Gabriel Marcel has distinguished a type of unavailability, called "susceptibility," which speaks of an ambivalence toward the other which is characteristic of Rupture. In Rupture, we are ambivalent regarding our level of openness to the other. The "susceptible" person, Marcel says, both needs external confirmation and at the same time needs to control the opinions of others. As McCown descibes it, susceptibility is an anguished unavailability, a contradictory experience in which the susceptible person experiences his vulnerability as an "open wound." This person is caught in the jaws of a basic contradiction:

> between a need to possess, to annex everything and an obscure con-
> sciousness of an abyss opening within the self ... the susceptible
> person needs to be confirmed, from outside himself, by another.... And
> he wants desperately to have (or to have power over) the opinions of
> others.... It is paradoxical that this most self-centred of persons needs
> the other: he waits upon the other, and upon him alone, for his final
> investiture.[AV, 14]

Marcel's "need to possess everything" is what I would call in the context of the film experience Metaphysical Comfort, while his description of an "obscure conscious-ness of an abyss opening within the self" applies nicely to Rupture. But I would like to recast Marcel's notion of susceptibility at the point of reaction. I would characterize susceptibility as sensitivity to but deep suspicion of the other. This

causes an ambivalent reaction which holds open the openness of the self, but not without some discomfort. The ruptured self could go either way: he could let down his guard and let the other have a profound effect on him, or he could yield to the temptation to seek release in Metaphysical Comfort. It all depends on how he reacts to the disruption.

For Marcel, then, susceptibility is an unavailability. But for us it is indicative of a shaking of the self to its foundations, a shaking which could result in a closing-off of the self, but need not.

1.2 Conventional Narrative vs. Life-World Expectations

The first thing to do before proceeding is to define some basic concepts. What do we mean by "expectations" in this context? First, neither of these types of expectations need be fully self-conscious, indeed for the average movie-goer, they seldom are - though life-world expectations are probably less accessible to consciousness than conventional narrative expectations, since the latter form the basis of the practice of criticism. We are more likely to talk about how the movie wasn't "satisfying," or didn't "hang together," or didn't "make sense" than we are to talk about our expectations being frustrated. Nevertheless, conventional narrative expectations comprise one of the things that is being addressed in this kind of discourse. But on a deeper level, if our desire for metaphysical comfort is frustrated, or our life-world expectations not met - that is, if we confront a radical Other which is both foreign and non-comforting, and we are just (ambivalently) open enough to allow this experience to have an impact on us - then the stability and integrity of our

life-world perspective is threatened or compromised in some way. This kind of frustrating of expectations resides on a deeper level than the simple structural foiling of expectations which is part and parcel of a narrative structure the nature of which we fully expect.

I shall call "conventional narrative" those expectations the frustration of which is purely at the service of telling a good story. Frustration of these is not rupturing, just entertaining. These include relatively predictable plot twists and satisfying closure.

Frustration of "life-world expectations," on the other hand, involves the shattering of our "moral universe" or self-identity in some unpredictable way. It is a challenging, severe break with expectations which results in a rupture of our views about ourselves or our world or both. A good example of a film bent on Rupture is *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (Peter Greenaway, 1990), a thoroughly unsatisfying film if what we are after is some sort of blissful transcendence or the assurance that the world makes sense. It has at best a problematic closure, an open-ended narrative that circles back on itself thematically but not narratively, and it steadfastly refuses to answer any of the questions it poses. It is a distressing, yet strangely stimulating film, full of challenging images and ideas.

Section 2: Horror and Life-World Expectations Frustration[2]

2.1 Horror as Rehearsal

The phenomenon of horror is linked with the desire to deal with buried impulses, desires, fears, phobias, etc. Not unlike the ritual painting of bison on cave walls in

order to rehearse the hunter's future emotional responses to the hunt, we terrify

ourselves in the cinema in order vicariously to experience situations which would be

unbearable if actually encountered. More specifically, this desire manifests itself as

an approach-avoidance emotional dynamic characterized by alternating desires both

to confront and to avoid that which scares us the most.

"Real life" is terrifying. We sometimes injure our bodies beyond repair; we

sometimes have to watch helplessly while loved ones suffer and die from disease;

we are sometimes emotionally scarred by the vagaries of our personal relationships

with each other; we can, in short, be hurt terribly in so many "normal" ways that we

experience a felt need to test our emotional strength. It is this need that accounts for

our interest in the horror genre.

But again for us there is something more going on here. The yen to test our

emotional strength which characterizes the unending appeal of the horror genre

points beyond itself, to a more fundamental phenomenon, an underlying "adduction"

toward the wholly other, the alien life, the abyss; it points to, in short, a desire to

touch the other.

Merleau-Ponty characterized sensation itself as intentional. There exists a

certain rhythmic harmony between us and the world of our experience such that we

are brought into conformity with the "mood," as it were, of that world. This rhythm

carries with it directedness by which we are either pulled toward the object or turned

away from it. Objects that seem to exhibit a "sacramental value" *(une valeur*

sacramentelle), that have "the power to cast a spell" (*un pouvoir d'envoûtement*) on us, we enter into a sympathetic relation with and make our own:

> Sensation is intentional because I find that in the sensible a certain
> rhythm of existence is put forward - abduction or adduction - and that
> ... I am brought into relation with an external being, whether it be in
> order to open myself to it or to shut myself off from it. If the qual-
> ities radiate around them a certain mode of existence, if they have the
> power to cast a spell and what we called just now a sacramental value,
> this is because the sentient subject does not posit them as objects, but
> enters into a sympathetic relation with them, makes them his own and
> finds in them his momentary law. [*PhPer*, 247, 213-214]

Hence the movement whereby we take a stance toward or away from an external being is a function of our body's mode of being in the world. And this movement is mythologized in the attraction/repulsion movement characteristic of the horror genre; it is a movement more basic to us as sentient beings than the exploitative status of this genre might suggest.

2.2 Heidegger, The Uncanny and Rupture

Type three film experience, or Rupture, is conditional upon experiencing a work of film art which has the potential to create in us an unsettling of our life-world, that is, a work which challenges in fundamental ways our view of ourselves or our world or both. Luis Buñuel comes immediately to mind as a director primarily engaged with this type of filmmaking. As Joan Mellen puts it, Buñuel "violates our comfortable view of reality":

> Buñuel, in fact, warned us of his artistic demeanor from the moment
> that impassive man, played by Buñuel himself, slit a woman's eyeball

with a razor in *Un Chien Andalou* [Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, 1928]. Since then he has indeed violated our comfortable view of reality through our very organ of perception, even as his camera's eye is violated by what it must reveal. The sliced eyeball, viscous fluid running, as a cloud indifferently bisects the moon, is followed by other unspeakable acts in *Un Chien Andalou*, a title bearing no relation to the images of the film. An automobile runs over a girl on an empty street while an indifferent crowd suddenly and mysteriously disappears.[3]

This kind of work calls our whole existence into question, not unlike the effect that

Heidegger spoke of with regard to the great work of art's capacity to allow us to

"poetically dwell":

> The great work of art is not something which is able to be placed conveniently and comfortably in our individual and social milieu. Rather, as the relating space in-between which brings things to world and world to things, it calls our whole existence into question.... Thoreau's "fact" states well the "thinging of the thing" achieved in poetic dwelling:
>
>> If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimetar, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career.[4]

When we poetically dwell, we see with fresh eyes, as opposed to being reassured of

our place in the world. We see a "fact" which "calls our whole existence into

question." Thoreau's description nicely captures the depth of the effect that a work

like this achieves.

Effects like this in film are many and varied, for example: the disquietingly

"true" tone of the dialogue in *Homicide* (David Mamet, 1991); the "birthday party"

for a dead Vietcong in *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987); the hand-held travelling shot where we "meet the fellas at the bar" from *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990); and the (in)famous point-of-view shot from an airborne eyeball in *Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn* (Sam Raimi, 1987). All in various ways and using a variety of techniques call our whole existence into question, making us susceptible to fundamental change.

2.3 Heidegger's Clearing and the Uncanny

That "being in the clearing" which exposes us to possibilities of being with the wholly other is quite often experienced as the uncanny. It has the call of the forgotten gods about it. Being in the clearing is not limited to the familiar being-with that characterizes our relationship with other mortals, but includes the possibility of being with other beings who may be "messengers" or "agents" of an integral "worlding of world." Just as "being alone" is really a deficient mode of "being with," so a preceding "presence," or prior being with, is the only possible explanation for our feeling that the gods are "missing" somehow. This "missingness of the gods" is what gives us the sense that we are living in needy times, times in which "the mystery hides its hiding." But this "being-with-the-gods" is a strange kind of being with because in needy times, this kind of being with conceals itself, only coming out into the open in the context of the "uncanny." Still, this coming to presence of the uncanny, even though it is not a mode of being with the gods itself, makes way for another possible mode of presence, that is, a realm of possible being

to which Dasein appeals as holding open the possibility of providing "a relation of world to things and things to world which is most appropriate":

> This other mode, which today is no longer and missing (which includes, for example, the divine of the Greeks, the prophetic word of Israel, and the sermons of Jesus), is not nothing; rather, it is our not-yet, because of the inexhaustible fullness and anticipatory power of its having been. What it might be, however, is hidden.... It is a realm of possible being which, though not in Dasein's grasp, is that to which Dasein appeals as providing, in some sense, possibilities for him, and which supports Dasein's hope ("golden dreams") of a relation of world to things and things to world which is most appropriate.[5]

This manifesting of the being-with-the-gods for us is the uncanny experience of cinematic Rupture. In these spiritually needy times, our "golden dreams" are cinematic. I read Heidegger here as pointing to the sacralization of the uncanny. And indeed, we find evidence of this movement in the making-holy of the image in the cinema. The forgotten realm of being-with-the-gods hides itself in the cinematic uncanny. Heidegger's comments on the following text by Hölderlin can easily be applied to the cinematic image and how it makes the possible real:

> In the condition between Being and Non-being the possible becomes real and the real ideal everywhere; and this, in the free imitation of art, is a terrible but divine dream.

Heidegger's comments:

> The essential mode of the poet's dream is the becoming real of the possible as the becoming ideal of the real. It is terrible because those to whom it shows itself are cast by it out of the carefree stay in the familiar real into the frightfulness of the uncanny unreal. But this terrible dream is divine because the possible which approaches the real is made holy upon its arrival through the coming of the holy itself. This extraordinary dreaming enables the possible to *be* more, and that

which is ordinarily regarded as being and real appears to have less reality.[6]

Lurking in this text, and Heidegger's comments on it, is the cinematic image, wherein the possible becomes real and the real ideal, the free imitation of art which inspires the terrible but divine dream. Indeed, this is particularly so in the case of cinematic rupture, because in it the uncanny is terrible; it casts us out of our "carefree stay in the familiar real into the frightfulness of the uncanny unreal." It is no accident, then, that horror deals with the terrible and quite often with the divine, most explicitly in films such as *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973). Nor is it accidental that, increasingly, the filmic preoccupation is with the strange, the unexpected, the uncanny. It is this preoccupation that characterizes both our fragmented, spiritually-needy, postmodern subjectivity and cinematic rupture.

2.4 Attraction/Repulsion - Horror and the Sacred

Westphal makes the point that this reaction of frightfulness coupled with attraction has been associated in religious writings with confronting the sacred. E. T. A. Hoffman, the "greatest of the romantic storytellers," he tells us, uses this double movement in his imaginative portrayal of "the marvellous," which is likely to make the everyday life of us ordinary mortals seem pale by comparison:

> He not only introduces his readers to "the faerie region of glorious wonders, where both rapture and honor may be evoked," but interrupts the painting of one such scene to assure the readers that if they had seen it all taking place in real life, "in horror, the hairs of your head might have stood on end."[7]

For Westphal, the sacred too is perceived as "simultaneously attractive and repellant."(*GGD*, 26) It evokes such contradictory emotions as joy and fear. As Westphal reminds us, "the same tension appears in Augustine's account of his intellectual discovery of God as truth":

> Eternal Truth, true Love, beloved Eternity - all this, my God, you are.... I gazed on you with eyes too weak to resist the dazzle of your splendour. Your light shone upon me in its brilliance, and I thrilled with love and dread alike.[8]

Attraction/repulsion seems a peculiarly apt description of our reaction to cinematic rupture, particularly the kind of rupture we typically experience with regard to the horror genre. Indeed, it's hard not to think at this stage about old movie advertising, as it shouted out to us, "you'll laugh; you'll scream!" Again, we could point to the postmodern blending of genres, known colloquially as "pastiche," to make the point that, increasingly, this double movement of attraction/repulsion characterizes what we seem to expect from film art. A good example of this genre-bending is the cinema of Stanley Kubrick, but more recently, the cinema of Quentin Tarantino. *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1991) and *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) both play with genre conventions, the former with the conventions of the crime caper film (for example, *The Asphalt Jungle* [John Huston, 1950]), the latter with those of the linear narrative.

Stanley Kubrick has commented on the lure of the horror genre:

> One of the things that horror stories can do is to show us the arche-types of the unconscious; we can see the dark side without having to

confront it directly. Also, ghost stories appeal to our craving for immortality. If you can be afraid of a ghost, then you have to believe that a ghost may exist. And if a ghost exists then oblivion might not be the end.[9]

Spiritual doubling has been a preoccupation of Kubrick's since *Paths of Glory* (Stanely Kubrick, 1957) and *Lolita* (Stanley Kubrick, 1962). As Thomas Allen Nelson puts it, Kubrick has a "surrealist fascination" with the archetypes of the unconscious, by which he suggests that "the Monster is normality's shadow":[10]

> [These Doublings] locate the primitive in the formal disguises of civilization and, paradoxically, the traces of civilized evolution in the savage's aggressive disorder.[11]

In Plotinus' famous essay on Beauty, he describes the emotions which accompany the apprehension of that which is at once good, beautiful, and true: joy, wonder, and happiness, but also distress and terror:

> And one that shall know this vision - with what passion of love shall he not be seized, with what pang of desire, what longing to be molten into one with This, what wondering delight! If he that has never seen this Being must hunger for It as for all his welfare, he that has known must love and reverence It as the very Beauty; he will be flooded with awe and gladness, stricken by a salutary terror; he loves with a veritable love, with sharp desire; all other loves than this he must despise, and disdain all that once seemed fair.[12]

The lure of the horror genre can thus be understood as a simultaneous attraction and repulsion, a double movement also characteristic of our experience of the sacred.

Even though Rupture is not limited to our experience of the horror genre, it is nonetheless most easily appreciated in the case of the attraction/repulsion typical

of this genre. Horror - perfectly capable of being metaphysically comforting, and indeed quite often used as a substitute in the absence of the divine - also has the potential to Rupture because it can be a confrontation with the uncanny, or wholly other.

Furthermore, our ambivalence toward the holy could account for the proliferation of the terrible in film:

> The fragility of being human comes to expression in a ... paradoxical way which exhibits ambivalence, namely in the representation of the holy as simultaneously attractive and repulsive. The gods are at once creative and destructive, the source of life and of death, beautiful and ugly, tender and terrifying, intimate and remote.[GGD, 33]

This "intimate remoteness" resonates with the Intimate Distance which is the essence of the film experience.

This movement of attraction/repulsion should be elaborated more fully in order to bring out the main characteristics of Rupture. Westphal fills in the required background for us:

> In the later history of Hindu devotional religion the attractiveness and repulsiveness of the divine receive independent development [in the forms of Krishna as a boy and the goddess Kali, respectively].
> Krishna [is the] youth whose sexual cq~ortings with the equally young and beautiful cowherdesses, Radha in particular, can only be described as a "carnival of joy." Krishna and his world are filled with freedom and spontaneity, beauty and grace, fragrance and harmony, wildness and play, warmth and intimacy. He is approachable, irresistable, hypnotizing, intoxicating, bewitching, and spellbinding. He embodies the bliss of ecstatic love [whereas] the sword is the symbol of Kali, who represents the hairraising, horrifying aspects of destructive forces ... bloodthirsty, ruthless, and fierce. [GGD, 34-35]

The leap from these descriptions to various types of film experience, but particularly Rupture, is not broad. Consider the following description of Kali, the Hindu goddess of destructive forces, listening for resonances with the emotional appeal of the modern horror genre:

> Of the terrible face and fearful aspect is Kali the awful. Four-armed, garlanded with skulls, with disheveled hair, she holds a freshly cut human head and a bloodied scimitar in her left hands.... Her neck adorned with a garland of severed human heads, her girdle a string of severed human hands, she is dark and naked. Terrible, fanglike teeth, full, prominent breasts, a smile on her lips glistening with blood, she is Kali whose laugh is terrifying ... she lives in the cremation ground, surrounded by screaming jackals. [*GGD*, 35][13]

And again later we get the following description of her by the nineteenth century Hindu saint Sri Ramakrishna:

> She has four arms. The lower left hand holds a severed human head and the upper grips a bloodstained sabre. One right hand offers boons to her children, the other allays their fear. The majesty of her posture can hardly be described. It combines the terror of destruction with the reassurance of motherly tenderness. For she is the Cosmic Power, the totality of the universe, a glorious harmony of the pairs of opposites. She deals out death, as she creates and preserves. [*GGD*, 35]

This combination of threat and reassurance is now worked out in the cinematic, particularly in the horror genre which is a good example of Rupture. But how shall we understand the appeal of this double movement phenomenologically?

Section 3: Phenomenology of Religion and Rupture

3.1 Rudolph Otto and the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*

Rudolph Otto has analyzed phenomenologically the idea of the divine in his *The Idea of the Holy*.[14] He suggests that we speak of the "holy" and the "numinous" to indicate an experience which evokes from us a consciousness of our "ontological deficiency," or "creaturehood." He specifies what these terms mean with his celebrated formula, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the awful and fascinating mystery. The holy is a mystery not because it is like a puzzle to be solved but because it is something out of the ordinary; it is "wholly other." Westphal describes it in the following way:

> Affectively, it strikes us with "blank wonder and astonishment."
> Conceptually, it finds expression in positive theologies as the super-
> natural or transcendent and in negative theologies as nothingness,
> silence or the void. Both of these are ways of trying to talk about
> what goes beyond the adequacy of human language, as if one were
> trying to describe a three-dimensional world in the language of two-
> dimensional creatures.[*GGD*, 38]

Otto's descriptions of the "mysterium tremendum" sound to this ear like a description of the possibilities of film:

> The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide,
> prevading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may
> pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing,
> as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away
> and the soul resumes its "profane," non-religious mood of everyday
> experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the
> soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements,
> to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and
> demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shudder-

ing. It has its crude and barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious.[*IH*, 12-13]

Applying this phenomenological analysis of the religious experience to the film experience, we may say that the soul resumes its "profane, non-religious mood of everyday existence" upon leaving the movie theatre. And indeed, there does seem to be a let-down, a profound falling-away of the mystery, if you will, that accompanies this leaving, like an authoritarian, ruler-weilding grade-school teacher reminding us that we should be concentrating on the "real world" instead of day-dreaming. Martin Scorsese has remarked on the jarring effect which accompanies this falling-away for him:

> Much of *Taxi Driver* [Martin Scorsese, 1975] arose from my feeling that movies are really a kind of dream-state, or like taking dope. And the shock of walking out of the theatre into broad daylight can be terrifying. I watch movies all the time and I am also very bad at waking up. The film was like that for me - that sense of being almost awake.[15]

The cinematic is the world of strange excitements, transport, even ecstasy; filled with wild, demonic forms ready to make us shudder in grisly horror, and yet ready also to turn suddenly into the beautiful, pure and glorious.

As Westphal reminds us, when we experience the "wholly other," we are drawn to its fascinating aspect, but at the same time repelled by the tremendous. This "push-pull" is also part and parcel of cinematic rupture, most clearly evidenced by the horror genre. In the presence of the holy, as tremendum, we experience fear,

terror, shuddering, dread, and horror. It is this aspect of the numinous that the Bible

expresses as the "wrath of God," that the Greeks refer to as the "jealousy of the

gods," and that Indian art portrays as "the grotesqueness of the gods." Otto speaks

of the holy as:

> "absolutely unapproachable" and "absolutely overpowering." This is
> right at the heart of the consciousness of creaturehood in which we
> apprehend ourselves as "not perfectly or essentially real."[*GGD*, 38]

In our forgetfulness, we seek the security of familiar feelings that resonate with our

spiritual history. And these feelings are reflected to us on the screen. We are both

fascinated and terrified by the ontological mystery that envelops us. Otto says the

following about the notion of creaturehood:

> Schleiermacher has the credit of isolating a very important element in
> such an experience [solemn worship]. This is the 'feeling of depend-
> ence.'.... I propose to call it 'creature-consciousness' or creature-
> feeling. It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed
> by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all
> creatures. [*IH*, 9-11]

The "feeling of dependence" in this religious context and the feeling of being swept

away by the world of the film reside on the same continuum. Although Otto

emphasizes the point that this is no ordinary "feeling of dependence," in the sense of

a feeling of personal insufficiency or impotence, or a consciousness of being deter-

mined by circumstances and environment beyond our control (witness his coining of

a new name for it, that is, "creature-consciousness"), it is still the case that in the

cinematic context as well as the religious context, the feeling of dependence is a

"primary and elementary datum in our psychical life."(*IH*, 9) In the cinematic, we are invited to dwell on this feeling without recourse to any actions which we might perform to vitiate it.

For Otto, this creature-feeling presupposes the presence of the numinous as "*object* objectively given," and must be posited as "a primary immediate datum of consciousness, and the 'feeling of dependence' is then a consequence, following very closely upon it, viz. a depreciation of the *subject* in his own eyes."(*IH*, 11, n.1) This position Otto opposes to Schleiermacher's, which is that "I can only come upon the very fact of God as the result of an inference, that is, by reasoning to a cause beyond myself to account for my 'feeling of dependence.'"[16] But this distinction on the basis of whether the feeling came first and this leads to awareness of God by inference (Schleiermacher) or God's 'shadow' has "immediate and primary reference to an object outside itself," should not detain us, for the difference makes no difference when it comes to cinematic consciousness. By way of response, we shall posit a numinous which makes its presence felt as an absence on the movie screen.

But the holy is not limited to the fearful. It is also overwhelmingly attractive, or *fascinating*. While it is certainly an object of horror and dread, it is also something that allures with a potent charm. We tremble before it, but at the same time feel compelled to turn toward it, perhaps even to make it our own. As Otto puts it, the one who experiences this mystery is entranced by it:

> The "mystery" is for him not merely something to be wondered at but
> something that entrances him; and beside that in it which bewilders
> and confounds, he feels a something that captivates and transports him

with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy
intoxication; it is the Dionysiac-element in the numen.[*IH*, 31]

Not only jealousy, fear and rage await us here, but so too love, mercy, grace,

comfort and bliss. Hence our deep desire and yearning for the wholly other. The

"awful and fascinating mystery" attracts us most powerfully. Affectively, says Otto,

it strikes us with "blank wonder and astonishment." This blank wonder at the

apprehension of the "wholly other" is played with in the cinematic.

Otto also analyzes what he calls the "tremendum":

> *Tremor* is in itself merely the perfectly familiar and 'natural' emotion
> of fear.... Specially noticeable is the 'ēmāh of Yahweh ('fear of God'),
> which Yahweh can pour forth, dispatching almost like a daemon, and
> which seizes upon a man with paralysing effect.... Here we have a
> terror fraught with an inward shuddering such as not even the most
> menacing and overpowering created thing can instill. It has something
> spectral in it. [*IH*, 14]

Of course, spectral means ghost-like, related to spectre, which means ghost, a thing

that is thought to be seen but has no material existence, much like the cinematic.[17]

It is also interesting to note, particularly for our present purposes, that the word

"spectre" has its origins in Latin, *spectrum*, meaning image, from the Latin, *specere*,

meaning "to look," and before that in the Greek, *specere*, meaning image or appar-

ition.[18] Cinematic representation is just such an apparition. Its ghostly qualities

from the very beginning led it to follow a quasi-religious path. This double move-

ment of attraction/repulsion characterizes both the phenomenology of religion as

Otto presents it, as well as the phenomenology of film here presented. Just like the

depth of transcendence, the cinematic is at once close (fascinans) and distant (tremendum). This is the real meaning of the phrase we have used to describe the film experience: intimate distance.

Section 4: Summary of Conclusions from Chapter Four

We have seen how Rupture is conditioned by an ambivalent degree of openness to the other. We have tried to draw a distinction between it and Filmic Transcendence, along lines of the method of "suturing" employed by the person so ruptured. We have also seen that Rupture, properly so called, is not the result of a simple frustration of expectations of a narrative kind, what I called "conventional narrative" expectations, but involves a shattering of our "moral universe" in some unpredictable way. We have seen as well how the Horror genre is a good example of the way in which cinema relies upon the gnostic duality of light and dark for its effects. And we saw how Heidegger's analysis of "poetic dwelling" helps us to understand the role played by the uncanny in our spiritually needy times. The primitive mode of being with the gods has hidden itself in the uncanny of the cinematic, especially in the case of the horror genre. Indeed, the kind of attraction/repulsion typical of the horror film's effect has affinities to similar responses to the divine, and this similarity is more than accidental. Rudolph Otto's analysis of the "idea of the holy" in terms of *mysterium tremendum et facinans* shows some interesting parallels to the cinematic, and this we saw through an examination of the lure of the horror genre. In our forgetfulness, we seek the security of familiar feelings that resonate with our spiritual history. And these feelings are reflected to us on the screen. The ghostly

light emanating from the screen carries with it the invitation to delve most deeply

into the spirit.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Gene D. Phillips, *Alfred Hitchcock* (Boston: Twayne filmmakers series, G. K. Hall and Co., 1984), 7.

2. There have been several recent studies on the phenomenon of horror in the film experience, notably: Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc., 1990); Joseph Grixti, *Terrors of Uncertainty: The Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989); James B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Gregory A. Waller (ed), *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

3. See Joan Mellen, "An Overview of Luis Buñuel's Career," in *The World of Luis Buñuel: Essays in Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 17.

4. See "Translator's Commentary" to Martin Heidegger, *The Piety of Thinking*, tr. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 137. Hereafter, *PT* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

5. "Translator's Commentary" to Heidegger, *PT*, 142.

6. "Translator's Commentary" to Heidegger, *PT*, 142.

7. From *The Best Tales of Hoffman*, ed. E.F. Bleiler (1967), as referred to in *GGD*, 256, n.4.

8. From Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 10, as quoted in *GGD*, 26-27.

9. As quoted in Thomas Allen Nelson, *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 197-198. Nelson takes the quotation from an article by Jack Kroll, "Stanley Kubrick's Horror Show," in *Newsweek*, 26 May 1980, 99.

10. Robin Wood, "Return of the Repressed," in *Film Comment* (July-August 1978): 25-32.

11. Nelson, *Kubrick*, 198-99.

12. From Ennead I, 6th Tractate, tr. Stephen MacKenna, in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (London: University of Chicago Press, 1964, 1976), 148.

13. From David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Kali and Krishna, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 1, 113.

14. Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, tr. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1970). Hereafter, *IH* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

15. See Martin Scorsese, *Scorsese on Scorsese*, ed. David Thompson and Ian Christie (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 54.

16. As Westphal explains, for Otto, the *mysterium, tremendum et fascinans* is not simply a reaction to our confrontation with a raw power, but carries with it a sense of "absolute worth as well, evoking a sense of ontological inadequacy which involves not only impotence but defilement and sinfulness as well" (*GGD*, 42).

17. Interestingly, one of the uses of this word, spectre, is in the context of describing the "spectre of the Brocken," a huge shadowy image of the observer projected on mists about mountain-tops, first observed on the Brocken in Germany. It is tempting to speculate that it is this meaning that Otto has in mind when he alludes to God's terrible image having a spectral quality. One imagines the 'soldierly figure' of Otto walking, as he loved to do, in the countryside around Marburg, being 'stung by the splendour of a sudden thought,' perhaps seeing his shadow writ large on the mists of the hillside. This tangent was partly inspired by John W. Harvey's "translator's preface" to Otto's *IH*, xii-xiii.

18. In modern languages, English has the words "awe" and awesome," which approximate the feeling that Otto is after. The phrase "he stood aghast" is also suggestive of the kind of reaction typical of the tremendum.

CHAPTER FIVE:

PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

AND CINEMATIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Religion and art are parallel lines which intersect only at infinity, and meet in God

— Gerardus van der Leeuw[1]

The life of humans is nothing but a way to God. I try to reach this goal without theological proofs, methods, supports; namely, to arrive at God without God

— Edmund Husserl[2]

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

We have seen - in Chapters Two, Three and Four above - that the film experience can be analyzed phenomenologically into three basic types and that these types may be understood in terms of their common existential/spiritual intention. It is now time to tie all these threads together under one heading, phenomenology of religion. The purpose of this chapter is to interpret these various types of film experience in spiritual terms, terms borrowed from the phenomenology of religion. Concepts such as "the wholly other," "the sacred," "the profane," and "the numinous" will be deployed in an effort to understand the film experience in a spiritual light.

There is no real opposition between art and religion. In antiquity, all forms of poetic and religious speech were indissolubly connected. Indeed, Gadamer notes the impossibility of "constructing an opposition between art and religion, or between poetic and religious speech":

In every expression of art, something is revealed, is known, is recog-
nized. There is always a disturbing quality to this recognition, an
amazement amounting almost to horror, that such things can befall
human beings and that human beings can acheive such things. [RB,
153]

Gadamer traces the process whereby poetic and religious speech began to take shape

as independent works:

in the development of rhapsodic performance that went beyond ritual;
in the choreographical staging of the choral lyric, which had certainly
emerged from the observance of everyday religious practice; in the
spectacle of tragedy, which was a special occasion in its own right for
which prizes were awarded even though it was embedded in the
context of religious life.[RB, 145]

In the Christian tradition, poetic and religious speech have become separate, become

two different kinds of speech, but "this does not mean that religious content ceases

to be communicated through poetry."(RB, 150) Furthermore, poetic speech still

shows signs of its origins in religious practices. Even the classical theory of art,

mimesis, or imitation, "obviously starts from play in the form of dancing, which is

the representation of the divine."(TM [1989], 113) Hence, we should not think of

"secular" symbolic speech as bearing some accidental analogous relation to religious

speech, but rather the other way around: the very existence of *non-religious* sym-

bolic speech is evidence that the concept of symbol has been extended beyond its

original religious context.

Art for the ancients was "a self-evident medium for the transmission of religious truth."(*RB*, 152) But art posed a serious problem for Christianity, notwithstanding the fact that eventually:

> Christianity did ... decide in favour of the image, and thus the visual
> and plastic arts. The decision was justified by the priority given to the
> written proclamation of the word, and thus the principle that art serve
> as an aid to faith came to the fore. The visual arts functioned as a
> *Biblia Pauperum*, as a kind of script for the illiterate.[*RB*, 152]

The Christian church had analogous problems with the cinematic image near the turn of the century.(see Section 2, below) But as we have seen cinema functions primarily as a kind of subliminal variant of the *Biblia Pauperum*, rehearsing and reflecting through its images its own peculiar brand of gnostic faith, the never-ending battle between the forces of good and the forces of darkness.

Moreover, as Gadamer points out, the experience of the beautiful in general has a religious resonance. It is "the invocation of a potentially whole and holy order of things."(*RB*, 32) As Gadamer points out with regard to art in general, so it is with film art. In our encounter with film art, too, it is not the particular that is important, but rather the "totality of the experienceable world, man's ontological place in it and above all his finitude before that which transcends him, that is brought to experience."(Ibid.) And cinema is uniquely capable of delivering on the promise of experiencing the totality of the experience-able.

Ultimately, our concentration on the spiritual character of the cinematic invitation will lead us to posit a new mode of consciousness that has emerged since

the advent of cinema, cinematic consciousness. But for now, we shall proceed in the following way. First, we offer an overview of those cultural forces which led us to our current spiritual situation. Specifically, we shall be concerned with the effects of the Enlightenment and the Romantic periods on our decentred, postmodern subjectivity. We then examine the early history of cinema, focusing on the problem of the piety of the image, a problem symptomatic of the church's early attitude of abivalence toward film. We then go back all the way to Gnosticism and Mani-chæism in order to argue that the desire to touch the "wholly other" is very old indeed. We then look at Remy Kwant's notion of a "horizon of darkness" in order to make the point that our interest in transcending our own point of view is primor-dial, that is, prior to all religious affirmations. And we examine the idea of the holy, noting the similarities between this notion and our phenomenological types of film experience.

But before we begin to outline the similarities between the phenomenology of religion and our phenomenological typology of the film experience, a little historical context will be helpful, both regarding the effects of the Enlightenment and the Romantic periods on our spiritually-decentred, postmodern subjectivity, and regard-ing the early ambivalence of church authorities toward cinema, an attitude that reveals a deep concern over the piety of the filmic image right from the beginning.

1.2 Historical Background

Postmodern man is in a sense pre-Enlightenment man, looking back prior to Descartes and Locke for some sort of spiritual rejuvenation amid a modernized,

technologized world of his own making. It would seem that as our control over the world grows greater and greater, disdain for our over-ordered existence grows right along with it. We are witnessing in our own age an unravelling of the intricately-woven threads of subjectivity, threads which first tightened during the Enlightenment.

This Enlightenment legacy is still with us centuries later. Most contemporary world-views which reject Christianity for some form of "secularist faith," such as positivism, materialism, rationalism, or humanism, have their origin in the Enlightenment, though complete theological and metaphysical scepticism was rare even at the time. The Enlightened person thought that the great evil of the church was its transcendental and supernatural base, which placed faith and revelation above reason.

But the Enlightnement was not without secularized versions of eternal ideas such as immortality. As Edward J. Jurji reminds us, this kind of "secularism" still claims an eternal character for two main things, the self and nature.(*PhRel*, 276) For the self, the Platonic claim was for the individual immortality of the soul, as opposed to personal resurrection as a creative act of God, which the early church preached. For nature, the Pre-Socratic claim was for the eternality of nature; Democritus and Epicurus, for example, had thought that matter was composed of indestructible atoms, perpetually mingling with one another in changing ways:

> Abreast with the march of science and broadening sphere of knowl-
> edge, this is a secularism of the deepest order. It is as old as Demo-
> critus and Epicurus. Their conjecture was that nothing existed save

atoms and the void. All else was illusory. The world process accord-
ingly comprised a perpetual mingling of small indestructible particles.
Hence its eternity. What eternity religion saw in God, the materialists
identified with matter.[Ibid.]

Kant described this eternalization of the world as the hallmark of man's desperate

yearning for an enduring principle in a changing world. This "desperate yearning"

hasn't abated; if anything, it has become even more desperate as a function of the

progressive decentring of the self. And cinema is perfectly suited, because of its

contribution to constructed subjectivity, to satisfy this yearning for some enduring

principle, though not always for the good, nor always for the stable.

The Romantics reacted against what they saw as the iron-clad rule of reason

enshrined by the Enlightenment. This reaction, which began in the late eighteenth

century, was not an out and out denial of reason, but rather a renewal of Reason, but

with a difference: along with it came the reawakening of notions such as transcen-

dence. The Romantic saw the Enlightened as guilty of holding a world view that

was mechanistic, atomistic, unfeeling and therefore unrealistic and inhuman.

Enlightenment "reason" was regarded by the Romantics as mere understanding

(*Verstand*), the kind of thinking a bookkeeper does; the higher, better Reason

(*Vernunft*) had a component of intuition, depth and transcendence, the kind of

thinking a real philosopher does. The Enlightenment thinker saw nature, for

example, as calm and uniform, while the Romantic saw it as wild, varied, unruly,

favouring the unique and the individual. Hence, reason was not abandoned, just

redefined.

The term "romantic" came to be associated early in the eighteenth century with "three moods or attitudes - love of nature, melancholy, and enthusiasm."[3] Those given to such attitudes were described by Shaftesbury as "plainly out of their wits." A thing is romantic when:

> it is strange, unexpected, intense, superlative, extreme, unique, etc. A thing is classical, on the other hand, when it is not unique, but representative of a class.... [Romanticism consists in] the addition of strangeness to beauty, the renascence of wonder. [Ibid.]

It's hard not to think of that (former) all-time box office champion, *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1980) in this context (box-office champion until *Jurassic Park*, not coincidentally, also Steven Spielberg, 1993). Indeed, Steven Spielberg's life-world perspective, as it is revealed in his films, is quintessentially romantic, in the sense that we have been using the term. It is a world filled with wonder, focusing on the strange, the unexpected, the extreme, the unique. If box-office receipts are any indicator, we seem to be more than ever in need of large, regular doses of the romantic. While it is true that Romanticism is not equal to spirituality, it is also true that part and parcel of the romantic attitude is an abiding concern with matters transcendental. "Enthusiasm" is central to the romantic attitude and, as we noted above, is a form of "purely human rapture," as Gadamer understands it, a mode of finite self-transcendence of finiteness, and is to be thought of as lying on the same continuum as that enthusiasm in which man is in God.

The Romantic attitude toward life is older than Christianity, dating back at least to Gnosticism, but more recent examples of this type of thinking can be found in early English literature:

> glimpses of the eerie moors and goblin-haunted meres of *Beowulf*, in the homeless and Fate-hunted melancholy of *The Wanderer*, in the homely poignancy of the old ballads and the bright chivalry of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.[Ibid.]

In later literature we see Romantic elements in the mazy enchantments and shining idealizations of *The Faërie Queen*, in the imaginative freedom and splendour of Elizabethan drama, and in the grandeur and pathos of *Paradise Lost*. Increasingly, mythical archetypes, eerie moors and homely poignancy are becoming the norm in the cinematic experience. And modern cinematic examples of romanticism are not limited to Steven Spielberg's films. What is the hero's quest in mind-numbingly popular, escapist films such as the *Die Hard* series (beginning with *Die Hard* [John McTiernan, 1988], and most recently, *Die Hard with a Vengeance* [John McTiernan, 1995]) if not the modernized Romantic exploits of the "Green Knight" for the nineties?

1.3 Our Modern Spiritual Situation

What effects has this history had on our postmodern spiritual situation? According to Paul Tillich, our spiritual situation cannot be understood without reference to three "powerful spiritual forces," mathematical natural science, technique and capitalist economy.[4] J. Mark Thomas comments:

In his books and essays that address these forces directly, and as an element of his systematic understanding in his other works, they appear again and again as constituting the "unconscious, self-evident faith" grounding the dynamics of Western society.[5]

For Tillich, the origins of the problem are to be found in our increasing ability to control the world. We use technical reason to create a world-wide mechanism of large-scale production and competitive economy that becomes a "second nature, a Frankenstein, above physical nature and subjecting [us] to itself." We are "swallowed up by [our] own creation." We become less and less able to control our "second nature," while becoming increasingly able to control and manipulate physical nature:

> Step by step the ·whole of human life [is] subordinated to the demands of the new worldwide economy. Men [become] units of working power ... the decisive feature of the period of victorious bourgeoisie is the loss of control by human reason over historical existence.[6]

The notion of a human "community" breaks down. Increasing transitoriness, value-neutrality, and social fragmentation all contribute to a growing sense of isolation and alienation.

This was not always so. As Jurji reminds us, in the classical Chinese setting, for example, man considered himself to be one with the eternal Tao order. All irregularity was viewed as a "passing phase," a mere temporary disturbance in the ordinary rhythm of existence. For the Christian, too, there was an order of serenity and joy:

[a] state of dedication extends from creation through the Fall, unto
death, the resurrection, and the life everlasting. All holy living is
summed up in the Kingdom of God. This implies life on a plane of
meaningful and edifying faith.[*PhRel*, 269-70]

But today these spiritual modes of existence, whether classical Chinese, philosophical Greek, Biblical, or other, are either under fire or simply irrelevant. In our technologized, postmodern world, they seem naive, fanciful, and unrealistic. Science and technics have revolutionized the world. New economics and power politics have redefined society. And our relationship with the other, on which the security of our spiritual identity depends, has altered accordingly.

Psychology, the "science of the mind," has staked out for itself the territory of our spiritual self-understanding. And in so doing, it sets up its own special rivalry to faith. It attempts to reduce concepts that form the basis of the great living religions, such as soul, intelligence, and responsibility, to pat psychological categories. Life, under this type of view, becomes not something to be understood, but something to be "managed." Modern psychology attempts to know man and to operate on him. Having been tested and analyzed with the most refined methods available, our place in society becomes obvious, and our ability to function at top efficiency is optimized. As well, psychotherapy offers us "salvation" from uprootedness and anguish; eventually we even begin to feel as if we are masters of our fate. In this sterile, pseudo-scientific atmosphere, cinema approaches as a saving enchantress.

Jurji talks about the effects of this increasing humanism on nineteen-sixties man:

> Armed with these new resources, he will imagine himself strong
> enough to lay piety aside and to neglect the practice of prayer. What
> peace he needs, he thinks he can draw out of his own depths. Such a
> concentration on the human may be understood as an aspect of the
> universal longing for freedom....
>   Emphasis on freedom has not limited itself, however, to rejec-
> tion of the material impediments of freedom. It has rebelled against
> the divine. Hence the tragedy of a generation more sceptical than ever
> where the fidelities of living faith are concerned. Doubt, that probing,
> questioning uncertainty which acts as a cathartic, can also degenerate
> into a fearful symptom of loneliness, a bankruptcy brought about by
> rejection of hope and the forfeiture of meaning and joy.[*PhRel*, 270]

While we can agree that we have rebelled against the religious, we do not go so far as to claim that we have rebelled against the divine.[7] Our spiritual muscle has not atrophied. We exercise it in another context. We have not abandoned all hope, meaning and joy. Our apparent bankruptcy masks an underlying spirituality which we now work out cinematically.

The cinematic temple's fascination for us is just its spiritual invitation. Indeed, as W. Brede Kristensen reminds us, the Greek origins of the word *templum* indicate that the "ancient temple is always built or furnished so that it is the image of the actual cosmic dwelling place of God":

> The Greek word *temenos* (from *temnō*) is a piece which has been cut
> out or marked out. Its first meaning is that of a particular (demar-
> cated) section of the sky within which the god reveals himself in the
> flight of birds or in lightning flashes. This part corresponds to the
> whole sky, in which omens are seen. And then projected upon the
> earth, it means a corresponding section on earth, the so-called *templum*

minus, which first becomes *locus consecratus* by means of the *locum effari*. There the augurs observe the signs and perform other sacred acts. The actual *templum* is in the sky in which and through which God reveals Himself.[8]

The ultimate appeal of the cinematic is its implicit gnostic offer to touch the "wholly other," the "alien life," the "abyss," the "depth." And this other has historically been associated with God. The cinematic temple is a marked out, cut out piece of the earth which opens up our view to a piece of the sky: it casts us into complete darkness, the only illumination coming from its own projections. It is a section of the night sky in which omens are seen, birds take wing and lightning flashes. Seemingly projected upon the earth from some incorporeal realm, the cinematic light shines into a theatre that becomes a *templum minus*, a *locus consecratus*, where we observe the signs through which we learn about ourselves.

Section 2: The Sacred and the Cinematic

What evidence do we have that the relationship between cinema and spirituality is more than a vaguely analogous one? The early history of cinema is instructive in this regard. The question of the proper representation of religious icons is as old as religion but the advent of cinema brought this question up again with particular urgency early in our own century. Both filmmakers and religious authorities were quick to recognize film's rhetorical potential for representing religious stories. As Ivan Butler reminds us:

films concerned with religion or metaphysics, particularly if they are allegorical in form, offer more opportunities than most for ... fascinating and rewarding excavations.[9]

One of the founders of French cinema, Ferdinand Zecca, having already made *Prodigal Son* in 1901, directed what is probably the first version of *Samson and Delilah* in 1908. The first Biblical murder story appeared in 1905 with Méliès's *Justice and Vengeance Pursuing Crime*, probably inspired by the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel. American and Italian productions of Biblical stories were not far behind. 1909, 1910, and 1912 all saw productions like *Salome*, *Judgement of Solomon*, *Saul and David*, and an Italian film on Herodias (*Erodiade*). D. W. Griffith's first Biblical blockbuster, *Judith of Bethulia*, soon followed in 1913, and the pattern continues right up to *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Martin Scorsese, 1988) - the piety of which was under assault before it even opened - and *Jesus of Montréal* (Denys Arcand, 1989). Indeed, one of the very first representations of Christ on film is credited to two American theatrical producers, Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger, in Horwitz, Bohemia in 1897. The following year, a more elaborate production was released by R. G. Hollaman and A. G. Eaves, which was photographed on the roof of a New York building.[*RC*, 33]

But soon church authorities were concerned with the piety of this new mode of representation. Butler relates the following story:

> [about 1912] an organization known as the "Bonne Cinéma," set up in Paris by the Augustinian fathers for the promulgation of good film, was starting to use churches as a normal place for projecting them. Pope Pius X at first said that during Lent motion pictures should not

be shown in churches, then, in a decree at the end of 1912, instructed
that "even religious films were not to be projected in churches, in
order that the sacred character of the buildings should be safeguarde-
d."[*RC*, 36]

Here we have very early evidence that the attitude of the church toward film was

ambivalent at best, running from excitement with film's potential to promulgate the

faith at one end of the spectrum to concern with this new medium's piety at the

other end.

The problem was not limited to French filmmakers. Throughout the filming

of DeMille's *The King of Kings* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1927), for example, a Jesuit

priest from the Federal Council of Churches and another member of the clergy were

present to give advice. Even more telling, Caiaphas, rather than Judas, was made

responsible for Christ's death, in order to avoid offending Jewish sensibilities.

Extraordinary steps were taken, and well-publicised, to ensure a proper attitude of

reverence:

> H.B. Warner (Christ) was spoken to by no-one save the director when
> in costume, veiled and transported in a close car when necessary, and
> on location given his meals in solitude. Prayers were said at the scene
> of the curcifixion (which was filmed on Christmas Eve), Mass was
> celebrated every morning on location. The first day of shooting
> started with the uttering of prayers by representatives of Protestant,
> Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist and Moslem faiths.[*RC*, 39]

Even though most of this can be explained in terms of DeMille's penchant for

fanfare, it still shows the extent of concern - even if not his own - over representa-

tion and reverence. Despite all their efforts, *The King of Kings* met with consider-

able criticism for this kind of (pseudo-) reverence, as did the carefully contrived

cathedral atmosphere in the various cinemas, created by organ-playing, hymn-

singing, staged "religious" preludes, etc. It's clear from these examples that the

tension between the sacred and the profane has been at the centre of the cinematic

experience since its beginnings.

The following year, 1928, saw the release of Dreyer's masterpiece, *The*

Passion of Joan of Arc (Carl Theodore Dreyer, 1928). The film is shot almost

entirely in close-up, often huge, with none of the participants wearing any make-up.

The effect is to draw us into the expressions of the human face, in all its revealing

and concealing mobility, in a way never quite duplicated in the history of cinema.

Tragedy, suffering, pity, compassion, corruption, nobility, understanding and

stupidity strike starkly at our hearts through the expressions of the protagonists.

Butler relates the following personal anecdote:

> [Dreyer's *Joan*] induces, even today seen in prints inevitably scratched
> and imperfect, the strongest sense of involvement - of undergoing
> rather than watching a spiritual experience.... [When I] saw the film,
> the pianist stopped playing altogether at the moment when Joan is
> receiving her final communion. For several minutes there was com-
> plete silence - a silence much deeper than that of a noiseless sequence
> in a sound film, a silence absolutely unbroken by anyone present. The
> whole modern world of scientific expertise and cynicism receded
> before this forty-year-old cinematic representation of an ancient
> mystery.[*RC*, 118-119]

The power of cinema to deliver this kind of effect remains undiminished after 70

years. One thinks here of recent stories of similar reactions to *Schindler's List*

(Steven Spielberg, 1993). Following screenings of this shattering film experience, most audiences filed out of the theatre silently, reverently, as if from a wake.

In the modern period, films of the acknowledged greats of cinema, from Hitchcock to Scorsese, seen through this spiritual lens, reveal a growing self-conscious awareness of cinema's spiritual essence. If you're a great filmmaker, you sense the fundamental nature of the cinematic, that is, its spiritual invitation and take seriously your contribution to this movement. And for audiences, seeing films in this light makes us appreciate them in a new way.

Section 3: Early Religion and the Cinematic

3.1 Gnosticism and The Cinematic

At this point, we delve into the early history of religion in order to draw some parallels and note some resonances between early religious practices and our modern cinematic experience. To this end, we shall briefly examine both Gnosticism and Manichæism. The word "gnosis" (Gnosticism) and the Sanskrit word "bodhi" (Buddhism) have exactly the same meaning, "knowledge," particularly a knowledge that transcends that derived either empirically from the senses or rationally from an examination of the categories of thought. As Joseph Campbell makes clear, such ineffable knowledge transcends the images by which it is communicated:

> Our usual Christian way has been to take the mythical metaphors of the Credo literally, maintaining that there *is* a Father in a heaven that *does* exist; there *is* a Trinity, there *was* an Incarnation, there *will be* a Second Coming, and each of us *does* have an eternal soul to be saved.
>   The Gnostic-Buddhist schools, on the other hand, make use of their images and words, myths, rituals, and philosophies, as "conveni-

ent means or approaches" (Sanskrit, *upāya*, from the root *i*, [meaning]
"to go," plus *upa-*, "toward") ... by and through which their ineffable
gnosis or bodhi is suggested.[10]

The cinematic mode of consciousness is closer to the Gnostic-Buddhist traditions because it is not interested in the reality of heaven, the Trinity, etc., but rather in the images and words, myths and rituals, through which the ineffable is suggested. While exercising our spiritual muscle by contemplating what the world is like from other perspectives, we are not so much interested in whether Travis Bickle (*Taxi Driver*, Martin Scorsese, 1974) or Indiana Jones (from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Steven Spielberg, 1981 to *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Steven Spielberg, 1989) really exist; our concern is with the moral/spiritual extremes they represent.

The goal of gnostic striving is the release of the "inner man" (or soul) from the bonds of the world and his return to his "native realm" of light. Indeed, metaphors of light are most common when it comes to descriptions of this kind of knowing. The transcendent God cannot be discovered from this world: he is wholly other. Therefore, revelation is needed. The usual bringer of salvation in the form of gnosis is the messenger from the other world, the world of Light, who penetrates the barriers of the spheres, outwits the archons, awakens the spirit from its earthly slumber, and imparts to it the saving knowledge from without. This is the gnostic myth, knowledge of the soul's way out of the world through the sacraments and various magical preparations, armed with which the soul after death travels upward, reuniting ultimately with the divine substance.

Gnosticism emphasizes the transcendence of God. Ontologically, he is acosmic, and to this world and whatever belongs to it, he is the essentially other, the alien (as Marcion, an early gnostic, said), the "alien life" (as the Mandaeans thought), the "depth," or "abyss" (as the Valentinians had it), even "the not-being" (as Basilides said). Epistemologically, because of his transcendence and otherness of being, and because nature neither reveals nor even indicates him, he cannot be known from this world alone: he is ineffable, defies predication, and surpasses comprehension. In the Gnostic tradition, he has been positively described, though only metaphorically, as Light, Life, Spirit, Father, the Good, but not as Creator, Ruler, Judge (historically, gnosticism is one of the fountainheads of negative theology).

Hence, transcendence is a necessary condition for knowing God. Campbell offers us a good example of this transcendence requirement in his discussion of the late Greek-Egyptian body of pagan Gnostic teaching known as the Corpus Hermeticum. Put forth as a revelation of the syncretic god Hermes-Thot, the guide of souls, it shows that the problem of redemption is psychological. We must make ourselves equal to God, because like is known by like. Interestingly, screenwriter Wesley Strick, no doubt along with collaborators Robert De Niro and Martin Scorsese, have avenging angel Max Cady quote from Salesius in *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, 1991): "I am like God and God like me. I am as large as God; He is as small as I. He cannot above me, nor I beneath Him be." We must leap clear of all that is

corporeal, and make ourselves grow to a like expanse with that greatness which is beyond all measure, god:

> rise above all time, and become eternal; then you will apprehend God. Think that for you too nothing is impossible; deem that you too are immortal, and that you are able to grasp all things in your thought, to know every craft and every science; find your home in the haunts of every living creature; make yourself higher than all heights, and lower than all depths; ... think that you are everywhere at once, on land, at sea, in heaven; think that you are not yet begotten, that you are in the womb, that you are young, that you are old, that you have died, that you are in the world beyond the grave; grasp in your thought all this at once, all times and places, all substances and qualities and magnitudes together; then you can apprehend God.[11]

Recall what Jean-Louis Baudry says about the "transcendental subject" created by the film experience: "if the eye which moves is no longer fettered by a body, by the laws of matter and time ... the world will be constituted not only by this eye but for it."[12] That which the believer needs to do to apprehend God, from the point of view of the Corpus Hermeticum, reads for all the world like the transcendent-subjective possibilities opened up by the meduim of film. Many of the places described in this passage we have visited in the cinema. For us, too, nothing is impossible. We have seen "JUPITER AND BEYOND THE INFINITE" (*2001: A Space Odyssey*, Stanley Kubrick, 1969); we have visited the "haunts of every living creature," as well as those of some creatures who have never lived, from the belly of a whale (*Pinocchio*, Ben Sharpstein, Hamilton Luske, 1940) to the island of the cyclops (*The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, Nathan Juran, 1958); we have seen the future as well as the past, from *Voyage to the Moon* (Georges Méliès, 1902) to *The*

Age of Innocence (Martin Scorsese, 1993); we have glimpsed the world beyond the grave, from *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau, 1922) to *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper [Steven Spielberg], 1982) to *Ghost* (Jerry Zucker, 1990). All this we have done safe in our comfy chairs at the cinema.

Indeed, as the above passage from the Corpus Hermeticum also makes clear, to remain "attached" to the body is to remain in a state of evil, unable to grasp anything beautiful or good:

> if you shut up your soul in your body, and abase yourself, and say "I
> know nothing, I can do nothing; I am afraid of earth and sea, I cannot
> mount to heaven; I know not what I was, nor what I shall be"; then,
> what have you to do with God? Your thought can grasp nothing
> beautiful and good, if you cleave to the body, and are evil.[13]

The promise of corporeal transcendence, with which the cinematic experience teases us, finds its analogue in religious forms of transcendence such as the overcoming of our bodily relationship with the world.

There is a relationship between Gnosticism, Christianity, and Manichæism. These traditions overlap and borrow concepts and rites and rituals from one another. In the Acts of John, for example, an often-cited work of mixed Gnostic and orthodox strains, ascribed to the supposed author of the fourth Gospel - which was read aloud, in part, at the council of Nicaea, 325 A.D., and formally condemned - we find John saying the following in the context of his view of Christ's crucifixion:

> there are forces of the right and forces of the left, potencies, angelic
> powers and demons, efficacies, threats, upsurges of wrath, devils,
> Satan, and the lower root from which the nature of Becoming issued.

> And so it is this cross which spiritually bound the All together, and
> which marked off the realm of change and the lower realm, and which
> caused all things to rise up.[14]

Though formally condemned as a heretical strain of early Christianity, it's clear that

Gnosticism, and its cousins and offspring, had a lasting influence on Christian

mythical thinking. The division of man and the world in terms of the duality of

good and evil, angelic powers and forces, demons and wrath, devils and Satan, is

quintessentially cinematic.

3.2 Manichæism and Cinematic Consciousness

Manichæism flouished about the same time as early Gnosticism, roughly after the

start of the second century. It brought together Buddhist and Zoroastrian as well as

Christian elements and, like its close cousin Gnosticism, it believed in the radical

duality of the world, seeing human life as a struggle between the forces of Light and

Darkness, good and evil, God and matter. It is a consistent dualism which rejects

any possibility of tracing the origins of good and evil to one and the same source.

Evil stands as a completely independent principle against Good, and redemption

from the power of Evil is to be achieved by recognizing this dualism and following

the appropriate rules of life.

The opposition of God and matter is seen in the realm of nature as the

conflict of Light and Darkness, Truth and Error. The present world, and man in

particular, is a mixture of good and evil, the direct result of a breach of the original

limits by the powers of evil. For the Manichæans, the whole purpose of the

founding of the universe was to forever separate the two principles from one another, rendering evil harmless. The point of knowing the world is to become aware of this mixture of light and dark in all things and conduct yourself in such a way as to avoid any further contamination of the light and promote its release from its mixture with darkness. This is the reason that the death of the body is a redemption; true life requires the release of the soul from its imprisonment in the body and its return to its true abode, the light.[15]

Parallels between Manichæism and the world on film abound. Steven King's *The Stand* (Steven King, 1994) is paradigmatic in this regard. John Leonard has noted its fundamentally Gnostic ordering of the world.[16] King's appeal, he tells us, is so primal because it "taps into ancient narrative." God versus Beelzebub is what it's all about:

> As Fairy Tales hang together according to a recipe, so do epic quests for golden apples or Moby Dicks. And so does the mystic journey to enlightenment in every great religion from St. Arthur to St. John of the Cross, from William Blake to Sufis lapwings.... [For King's *The Stand*] the pilgrim's a soul; the weather's a trial; the migration symbolic, and there are ravens and hounds, voices and visions, ecstasies and apparitions, before we are transfigured. Steven King is the last of the Manichæns, the prophet of the final scrimage between gnostic light and the dark side demiurge.

And Steven King agrees with this spiritual reading:

> I think many find a spiritual resonance that they crave .... [It] tackles questions of good and evil from a fairly fundamentalist Christian point of view. It is a story that says that you have to give your will over to the will of God and that sometimes God requires a sacrifice to put things back on track. That's the way I was raised.[17]

Again, it would be easiest to deal only with that small fraction of cinema that takes religious stories as its explicit theme. As Stanley Kubrick once said, "I will say that the God concept is at the heart of *2001*."[18] But our position is that both *structurally* and *semantically* the cinematic experience is through and through spiritual. The world of film is the double of the real world, a place where ancestral ghosts and guardian spirits dance across the screen, holding the promise of a transcendent spiritual dimension through which we can come face to face with, and perhaps even control, the natural forces around and within us. Participation in this dance requires what Søren Kierkegaard called "acceptance of the Absurd."[19] And this relationship always begins with the individual's relation to God, just as the film's address is always personal, intimate, even though there is a crowd present.

Section 4: The Horizon of Darkness

4.1 Kwant's Phenomenology of Expression

Why is it that we keep returning to the religious sphere? What is it about our fundamental stance toward the world - what Merleau-Ponty would call the body-subject's being in the world - that urges us back to the realm of the spirit? Remy Kwant offers us an analysis of what he calls our "field of clarity." This field of clarity can collapse at any time. It leads a threatened life because it is essentially connected with the possibilities of our bodily existence, our possibilities of speaking and acting:

From time to time anyone experiences these threats. One who feels the first signs of a weakening of the heart is frightened because his whole existence is threatened. Our entire field of existence leads a threatened life. This is also the reason why people extend their good wishes to one another: such wishes would be meaningless if our field of existence consisted solely of unthreatened certainties.[20]

Our field of clarity is framed by a horizon of darkness with which we are all familiar, discovery of which requires no scientific, religious, or philosophical reflection. Primitive man was aware of this darkness, which surrounds our field of clarity like the frames of the motion-picture image. Our sensory awareness has bodily-defined limits and we know that these limits will remain even if we manage to extend our field of clarity.[Ibid.]

Both the religious view of life and the cinematic mode of consciousness occupy themselves with this mysterious dimension. Kwant points out that all religions are concerned with it:

Religion is a consciousness of origin, it is an affirmation concerned with the above-mentioned obscure dimension, and this affirmation has the character of an act of faith. An expression is religious when man expresses himself in terms of this dimension.[*PhEx*, 164]

But this definition of religious expression, or what I have been calling "spiritual" expression, is sufficiently broad to extend to cinema. Since it deals with human intangibles such as the meaning of existence, it is a fundamentally spiritual expression. For Kwant, the first "sphere" of religious expression occurs when "man comes to the realization that our field of existence is permeated with a dimension of

darkness." Man's religious affirmation can then "fill" this darkness with some story of Origins.

Cinematic consciousness opens up this same area of darkness, by direct reference through fantasy, but more fundamentally by indirect, structural reference through its contribution to constructed subjectivity. Its essential light/dark structure - the seen with its borders of darkness, the unseen - mimics this sphere of religious expression. However, it sometimes happens that this dimension is opened up without being filled with a religious affirmation. This happens quite often in the case of art:

> Many artists assume a negative attitude toward the religious affirm-
> ation, but this does not mean that they are not occupied with the same
> dimension in which the religious affirmation moves.... In many
> respects religion goes through a crisis today, yet more than ever
> people enter the dimension in which religion moves. The religious
> dimension fascinates man, even when he has become religionless.
> The recognition of darkness remains connected with the religious
> dimension, even when man has become religionless.[PhEx, 169,
> emphasis mine]

Film art is preoccupied with the religious dimension. Even though we have become religionless, we routinely enter the dimension in which religion moves, namely, the horizon of darkness. We are fascinated with what lies just beyond the borders of our peception, beyond the motion-picture frame, especially living in a period dominated by science, scepticism and cynicism. This realm of darkness remains connected with the religious dimension, even in our secular age.

The darkness is like a "cloud of unknowing" that intercedes between us and a transcendent realm, the realm of God. We yearn to touch this realm but we feel trapped in our corporeal world, unable to see beyond the cloud that envelops us. But this zone of darkness is sometimes penetrated by a beam of ghostly light. An anonymous fourteenth century English writer expresses the situation this way:

> This darkness and this cloud is betwixt thee and thy God, and telleth thee that thou mayest neither see him clearly by light of understanding, nor feel him in sweetness of love in thine affection, and therefore, hope thee to bide in this darkness as long as thou mayest, crying after him that thou lovest.... Then he will sometimes peradventure send a beam of ghostly light piercing this cloud of unknowing that is betwixt thee and him, and show thee some of his privity of the which man may not nor cannot speak.[21]

This "beam of ghostly light" now shines from a movie projector, a technological site that allows us to indulge our spiritual inclinations without the need of religiosity, which suits our postmodern view of spirituality.

4.2 The Idea of the Holy, Part 2

As we saw above in the context of our analysis of cinematic rupture, Rudolph Otto's phenomenological analysis of the "idea of the holy" shares some interesting resonances with our phenomenology of the film experience. For example, Otto names the "something extra" in the meaning of the "holy," above and beyond the meaning of goodness, the "numen":

> There is no religion in which it does not live as the real innermost core, and without it no religion would be worthy of the name.... I shall speak, then, of a unique "numinous" category of value and of a

definitely "numinous" state of mind, which is always found wherever
the category is applied. This mental state is perfectly sui generis and
irreducible to any other. [*IH*, 7]

The "numinous" is that which pertains to a numen; the divine, spiritual, revealing or

suggesting the presence of a god, that which inspires awe and reverence. This

"mental state" in which, full of awe and wonder, we experience the "something

more" that surrounds us finds its pop art analogue in the film experience.

In these spiritually needy times, to paraphrase a line from *Robocop* (w.

Edward Neumeier and Michael Miner, d. Paul Verhoeven, 1987), good spirituality is

where you find it. Historical traditions of the spirit have lost their authority, and

"man is constrained in sheer desperation to explore his inward spirit."(*PhRel*, 57)

This is certainly one reason why mystical ways of knowing are enjoying a resur-

gence, as most recently seen in the popularity of the telephone psychic readers who

advertise on television. The mystical way to god is essentially an orientation toward

the expansive and void:

> Enraptured with limitless infinitude, the mystic endeavors to divest
> himself of human obstructions. His notions are normally romantic,
> ethereal, negative, and allegorical. The metaphors of mysticism are
> frequently drawn from contemplation in desert solitude or other haunts
> of withdrawal and seclusion. Like a lark, the mystic must fly. He
> mounts up with wings, soars in infinite spaces, and sings to the
> fullness of divine love.[*PhRel*, 57]

Mystical experience is defined as "a direct contact of the human soul with transcen-

dental reality," a "conscious relation of man with the absolute."[22] These experi-

ences are usually characterized by a mood of passivity. Not unlike the cinemato-

graphic experience, mystical contact with God is acheived when the mind ceases to think and the powers of the self seem to cease to function. God possesses the soul far more than the soul possesses God.

But historically Christianity has been ambivalent about mysticism. The mystical writer of the fifth century known as pseudo-Dionysus introduced into Christian thought the doctrine of the *via negativa*:

> the idea that God is to be found in the void beyond thinking, beyond images, beyond understanding. [But this] is felt to be a kind of annihilationism foreign to the personal relationship of faith, love and knowledge in the New Testament.[*S&S*, 34]

Nevertheless, behind and before Christianity lies a long, rich tradition of mysticism. Indeed, the origins of the three great religious traditions of the Western world - Islam, and prior to it, Christianity, and prior to it, Judaism - can be traced to primitive cults central to all of which is the fact of idolatrous practices and heathen worship:

> on high places, through orgiastic cults, in sacrifices of blood and burnt offerings ... the adoration of trees and fountains, of stars and stones. If ... primitive religion stemmed from a simple and single pattern, the pattern in all probability would have had to be primitive totemism. The scenes were frequent where demons paraded in animal form; where references were made to serpents in beguiling shapes; where spirits satirically roamed fields and hills; and where cults of the dead and especially of ancestors at many a stage appeared. [*PhRel*, 185]

Judging by the opening sequence of Steven Spielberg's short-lived, weekly foray into television, *Amazing Stories* (Steven Spielberg, 1985-86), it appears that his own

attitude toward high-tech story-telling is, broadly-speaking, "anthropological." This sequence shows a gathering of primitives around a campfire, telling dramatic, exciting stories, perhaps about the day's hunting. Our position is similar. Modern cinema-going functions much like a primitive sacred rite, though restricting its sacrifices and orgies to representations.

But what is it that makes the cinematic image "sacred"? Is it not the case that sacred objects must be deemed so explicitly by those consciously intending a spiritual experience? Why isn't this merely superstition, rather than spirituality? Jurji reports on the findings of anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski, says Jurji, generalized on the basis of anthropological research:

> Dogma, ritual, and ethics he considered three inseparable facets of the same phenomenon - a deep conviction about the existence of a spiritual reality. In superstition, man attempts to control his reality. By it he is controlled in true religion. There is a "sacred story," he concluded, at the heart of culture and ethics.[23]

God is the ultimately controlling force which guides all human endeavours under this view. On the other hand, by superstition, man seeks to gain control over his own destiny. Cinematic spirituality plays these off against each other; superstition-control, religion-controlled. We surreptitiously control, or get the upper hand on, that which falls under our gaze, while simultaneously being controlled by those "choices" the camera makes.

According to Charles Courtney,[24] Henry Duméry, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris (Nanterre), has probably come the closest to producing a

systematic philosophy of religion. He offers us a philosophical approach to tran-

scendence. For Duméry, as Courtney tells us, the "Absolute" is not an object. It is

that principle or power by which all objects exist. Therefore, it cannot be intended

directly like an ordinary object. It must be reached indirectly, and more importantly

for our present purposes:

> since the Absolute is the ground for all that is, every object can in
> principle become a springboard for the religious intention. Such
> objects are called sacred. The immediate focus of religious transcend-
> ing is on sacred things, on those objects that are revelatory of God.-
> [*EPT*, 56]

Hence, sacred objects can be anywhere, can be anything. As Courtney says, objects

not usually thought of as sacred can become sacred by a process of "sacralization."

This sacralization is "the objectification of an inner disposition." (*EPT*, 56) Sacrali-

zation is "projecting onto a thing the intention of, or aspiration for, the Absolute." It

is this intention, rather than anything about the object towards which it is directed,

that accounts for an object being sacred. Without it, nothing would be sacred. As

Courtney explains, sacredness is not a natural quality of certain things for three

reasons:

> 1) any object can receive it, 2) not all objects of a certain kind are
> sacred, and 3) objects may lose their sacredness and also regain
> it.[*EPT*, 56]

Sacredness is something we do, not something that there is. We have sacred objects

"only when we have subjects aspiring to the transcendent." We make objects sacred,

or in our case images, when we treat them in a sacred way. Our contention is that

the cinematic image is now sacralized by us in this manner, made into a sacred

object.

This sacralization usually is projected onto unusual events or objects:

> the sacralizing projection often attaches to the extraordinary, the
> weird, the powerful. Whatever breaks the regular flow of phenomena
> suggests another realm, which it is important to control. And that is a
> characteristic of the genuinely transcendent.[*EPT*, 56]

Cinema breaks the regular flow of phenomena by bracketing it off from "normal"

experience for us to contemplate. It is often characterized by the weird, the extra-

ordinary, the powerful. This weird, powerful, uncanny recreation of a human life-

world, or life-world perspective, suggests another realm, a transcendent realm which

it is important for us to control. As Courtney puts it, "the religious person seeks

light, pure light, but can get at the light only by means of objects from which light

can be reflected."(*EPT*, 57) The cinematic image shines its own light on the world,

a light which illuminates the realm of the other's subjective point of view.

Our cinematic experience shares some basic features with spiritual experi-

ence. Psychologically, an encounter with a holy reality tends to "vivify personal-

ity."(*PhRel*, 15) This kind of experience renews the spirit, leaves us with an inward

glow of goodness, and converts us. It transforms anxiety and pain into "a joyful,

albiet dangerous adventure." Notwithstanding Jurji's insistence that the religious is

sui generis, its domain being the sacred, as we have seen, this domain is created by

us and can shift about according to what we deem spiritually important. Jurji says

that religion is "a unique phenomenon," but our position is precisely that religious acts and sacred objects need not be restricted to the domain of religion, indeed, they are dealt with widely in literature and, of course, film.

4.3 Heidegger: Poetic Dwelling, the Holy and Cinema

Why is it that we seek spiritual rejuvenation at the cinema, leaving aside the question of whether or not we actually get it? We saw above that sometimes, given a sufficiently high level of openness to the other - as well as a coherent and challenging life-world pespective coming from the screen - we are able to transcend our own life-world perspective but that at other times, usually as a result of a relatively low level of openness to the other - as well as a not very coherent, or perhaps unchallenging filmic life-world perspective - we're not. But what accounts for our interest in the transcendent in the first place?

Heidegger, in the context of thinking about thinking, has theorized that "mortals are ceaselessly turned toward the manifesting-hiding gathering which lights all that is present in its presencing":

> But still they turn from the clearing and turn only to that which is
> present.... They believe that this traffic with what is present of itself
> provides them with proper familiarity.... But they are unaware of that
> to which they are entrusted: unaware, forgetful of the presencing
> which as lighting first of all lets anything present come into view.[*PT*,
> "Translator's Commentary," 101]

For the postmodern, the ground of the world, or the sense of the divine, has lost its reality. As Heidegger reminds us - in his essay, "What are Poets For?" - this is a

result of a growing sense of the "missingness of the divine."[25] Because of this

missingness, no ground appears for the world:

> The ground is the soil in which to take root and stand. The age for
> which the ground fails to come hangs in the abyss [is completely
> without ground]. Assuming that a turn still remains open for this
> destitute time at all, it can come some day only if the world turns
> about fundamentally - and that now means unequivocally: if it turns
> away from the abyss. In the age of the world's night, the abyss of the
> world must be experienced and endured. But for this it is necessary
> that there be those who reach into the abyss.[26]

Our sense that there is no ground is really a sense of the missingness of God. But,

as Hart and Maraldo point out, in order to be at home in the clearing, we must

"make a detour and settle among what is uncanny and unaccustomed."(*PT*, "Trans-

lator's Commentary," 106) The cinematic offers us just such a "detour." It is the

home of the uncanny, the unaccustomed. If we treat it as a sacred space, we can

open a clearing for ourselves without God.

As Eliade says, when something sacred manifests itself, a *hierophany*, at the

same it hides itself, it becomes cryptic: "this is the true dialectic of the sacred. By

the very fact of showing itself it conceals itself."[27] Revealing/concealing - which

Heidegger links to the work of art's power to found a world - happens partly

because the hierophany is a manifestation of the sacred through the material of

reality:

> the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality
> that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part
> of our natural, "profane" world.[28]

Indeed, the cosmos itself can become a hierophany. But this manifestation or hierophany is always already a hiding. Hence, Heidegger invokes Otto's phrase, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, in order to call attention to this double movement of withdrawl and presencing. Hart and Maraldo comment:

> the experience of thinking, as the experience of the positive privative of an un-concealment, takes up its abode in the uncanny abyss. This, for Heidegger, secures a proximity to the holy ... [in the sense that the] ontic *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is given ontological moorings as that uncanny abyss which always withdraws from view but which also heals and makes whole. Because the experience of thinking dwells in that which is both uncanny and healing it is regarded as being preparatory for other "dimensions" of the holy, for example, the divine or the gods.[*PT*, "Translator's Commentary," 118-19]

The cinematic mode of consciousness, too, takes up its abode in the uncanny abyss, thus securing for itself a proximity to the holy. The film frame hides more than it reveals, withdraws most of its world from view, and in so doing, makes whole, or at least is able to make whole. In this sense, the cinematic is also preparatory for other dimensions of the holy, such as the gods or the divine, since their "reality" too lies just outside our own existential frame of perception.

But even more significant for our purposes is Heidegger's analysis of what he calls "authentic poetic dwelling." When we authentically, poetically dwell, anything can effect the opening of world and clearing in a way analogous to that in which the great poetic, or in our case filmic, artwork achieves this opening. Through a great work of art,

> the everyday for a particular people is held open. It determines what
> is familiar and wherein things come into their own. Thereby does it
> also prescribe what realm is uncanny and unfamiliar.[*PT*, "Translator's
> Commentary," 132]

Film art for us now holds open the everyday. It determines what is familiar, and it

prescribes what realm is uncanny and unfamiliar. It is the poetry of the age of the

image. Hence, truth establishes itself through the work of film art, too, an opening

or clearing, an unconcealedness. For Heidegger, this work may take many forms:

political ideas, philosophical questioning, heroic and sacrificial acts, or images of

them such as we get in works of film art.

Film poets have realized that cinema opens up a magical, uncanny realm for

many years. Jean Cocteau, for example, writes to Jacques Maritain that it is

impossible to try to "get out of ourselves" through literature.[29] One must get out,

he says, through love and Faith:

> only love and Faith enable us to get out of ourselves. To resort to
> dreams is not to leave home; it is searching the attic, [where] our
> childhood made contact with poetry.

As though magically looking forward all the way to Virtual Reality, Cocteau

imagines an era where the mind would abandon what he calls its "awkward

vehicles," would give up trying to convince by means of works of art. Genius

would then become sanctity. He envisions a "vast enterprise of small and large

hypnoses" that would "banish trafficking." Books, canvasses, oils, and ink would

disappear as cab horses have: "old cameras would no longer photograph our divine

tricks. I touch the future with heavenly fingers. Some day it will no longer be a question of deceiving birds, not even cubist birds, but of teaching birds to eat an unreal grape."[30] Thanks to virtual reality, that day seems to have arrived.

Significantly, for Cocteau, poetry's real vocation is thoroughly spiritual. Art, he says, like grace, is in the habit of symbolizing. There is an analogical relation between the world of poetry and the world of Sainthood. However, differences remain between the two. Poetry is the "highest natural resemblance to God's activity," where natural here is opposed to the essential supernaturalness of Christ's grace. But:

> This does not alter the fact that in another sense, just as first philos-
> ophy is called metaphysical, poetry can be said to be supernatural,
> insofar as it transcends ... [the order of] sense-perceivable nature and
> of all the laws of the material universe, and as its values are of a
> transcendental order.[31]

Our art, as Dante said, "is the grandchild of God." It derives directly from that art that made the world. Intelligence is essentially prolific; it seeks to produce an other, but cannot do so as God, so it at least wants to "beget a work, made in our image and where our heart would survive."[32]

Poetic inspiration is essentially divine on this view. It is a special inspiration which occurs in the natural order; it is above the deliberations of reason, and is thought to proceed from God present in us: "such is the inspiration of the poet. That is why he is indeed a man divine:"[33]

Words are for him no more than a medium of matter. With them he
creates an object that gives joy to the spirit, where shines some reflec-
tion of the great star-filled night of being. Thus he sees into things
and brings forth a sign, however minute it may be, of the spirituality
they contain.[34]

Cocteau offers us the following metaphysical ratio: "Poetry is to art what grace is to

moral life."[35] It transcends all technique, transcends art itself. One can be a poet

and yet produce nothing, just as a child baptized has sanctifying grace without yet

acting morally. "Poetry is an image of divine grace." It gives to us a foreshadow-

ing, an "obscure desire for the supernatural life." Baudelaire puts it this way: "It is

at once by poetry and through poetry, by and through music, that the soul catches a

glimpse of the splendours lying beyond the grave."[36] No one, says Cocteau, comes

so near the invisible world as the sage and the poet. Art and poetry are more

necessary than bread to the human race:

They fit it for the life of the spirit.... Art restores paradise in figure:
not in life, not in man, but in the work produced. There all is order
and beauty (Cocteau paraphrases Baudelaire); there, no more discord.
Spirit and senses are reconciled, sensual delight pours out in light,
bodily heat in intellect, the whole human reality conspires toward
heaven.
    Even with regard to sin art still imitates grace. He who does
not know the regions of evil does not understand much about the
world ... the artist, too, knows the recesses of the heart ... he visits low
places.[37]

But poetic dwelling for Heidegger is not just an attempt to relive old myths,

those exemplary stories of the ancients or the narrative rituals which were thought to

make the gods present. Neither is poetic dwelling an attempt to create new myths, if

that means to propose new sacred stories which presence the gods. Nevertheless, it

is a unique opening up of the meaning strata which enjoy efficacy in our everyday

dealings with the world, and myth as a sacred story is among these strata. This

unique opening up of meaning strata helps to prepare the way for the appearance of

the gods:

> poetic dwelling alone prepares the way for the manifestation of the
> holy, which itself makes space for the appearance of the gods.[*PT*,
> "Translator's Commentary," 133]

As Heidegger reminds us, "myth" means the telling word. For the Greeks, this

meant "to lay bare and make appear."[38] And this "laying bare" had a distinctly

spiritual resonance. *Mythos*, he tells us, is that which becomes present in the telling,

that which appears in its unconcealedness. This claim made by mythos is a claim

which is in advance of all others and which is most fundamental. It is the claim that

permits thought about that which appears, that which becomes present.

Peculiar to modernity is the idea that:

> whatever is in its entirety is regarded as a being, that is, as something,
> only insofar as it is the result of the re-presenting and producing
> human being. World itself is treated as world-view or world-picture.
> The basic process of modernity is the conquest of the world as a view
> or picture - ie, a structure resulting from a representing-producing
> subjectivity. Within this framework the human being struggles for the
> position which best assures that the human being is the measure and
> rule for whatever is. The result is the confrontation of world-
> views.[*PT*, "Translator's Commentary," 150]

While Heidegger would probably see cinema as a collection of world-views, or subjectivities - and therefore of no help when it comes to poetic dwelling - we believe that cinematic consciousness can open a clearing in which the truth of being shines.

Section 5: Phenomenology of Religion and Phenomenology of Film

5.1 Sacred and Profane

Wiliam James gives us a vivid example of the transcendental experience of an anonymous clergyman:

> I remember the night ... when my soul opened out, as it were, into the Infinite, and there was a rushing together of the two worlds, the inner and the outer. It was deep calling unto deep.... I stood alone with Him who had made me.... I did not seek Him, but felt the perfect unison of my spirit with His. The ordinary sense of things around me faded.... The darkness held a presence that was all the more felt because it was not seen. I could not any more have doubted that He was there than that I was.[39]

Historically, Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion* (1799) represents the first major effort in the direction of a descriptive philosophy of religion. Subsequent forays into this area produced more phenomenologically-inspired analyses, such as Rudoplh Otto's *Idea of the Holy* (1923, 1950) and Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* (1955), accounts with which we have been largely concened here.

Schleiermacher's definition of religion was "a feeling of absolute dependence."[40] This feeling of dependence is hinted at in the case of the cinematic. We give ourselves over to the will of that quasi-subjectivity embodied by the camera's

life-world perspective. This profound sharing of subjectivities, of the inner and the outer, this unison of spirits, also forms the basis of enlightenment experiences such as the one decribed above by William James.

Again, one may object that the sacred and the profane are completely heterogeneous realms that share nothing in common. As Westphal puts it,

> for profane consciousness the self is *ens realissimum*, the most real being ... [it] *sees* itself to be what [religious consciousness] *sees* itself not to be.[*GGD*, 28]

But the relationship between sacred and profane is more complicated than this. Profane consciousness does *not* see itself as doubtful, or less real, or not definitely there before the sacred. Indeed, it sees itself as the very centre around which the world revolves. This locatedness of the self is for most of us the unshakeable ground for all our experiences. Religious experiences tend to throw us into doubt about the self. The experience of the presence of something more real than ourselves and the world of our immediate experiences makes us feel suddenly doubtful, less real and not definitely there.

Metaphysical reassurance of the self's definiteness, and especially the power of postmodern selfhood, is what we need and what cinema delivers to us. Profane consciousness has no such need for reassurance. It sees the self as the most real thing, the *ens realissimum*. If this was really the case for the postmodern, spiritually-decentred self, then we would have little need for the kind of metaphysical comfort that we argue typifies most film experience. It is our very profanity,

understood as a deficient mode of being-sacred, that calls out for the sacred, much

as Heidegger calls Being-alone a deficient mode of Being-with.[41]

But our interest in the sacred is quite ambivalent. Westphal deals at some

length with the notion of ambivalence toward the sacred. Both a drawing toward

and a shrinking from characterize the "believing soul's" response to the sacred:

> Just as the divine is experienced as a unity of opposites in terms of
> tender, creative, life-giving power and terrifying, destructive, death-
> dealing power, so it is perceived as a unity of delightful nearness and
> dreadful remoteness.[*GGD*, 36]

As Gerardus van der Leeuw says, "It allows us to become aware of infinite distance

and feel a never-suspected nearness."[42] This paradox of near and far finds its

philosophical analogue in the metaphysics of appearance and reality. The nearness

is a function of the "ontological excellence" of the sacred, while the farness

expresses our sense of our own ontological deficiency before the sacred. This same

intimate distance characterizes our response to the cinematic; its play of opposites,

light and dark, is its peculiar concern.

5.2 Merleau-Ponty: the Flesh, Depth and the Cinematic

Merleau-Ponty uses analogous terms, contact and distance, union and separation,

presence and absence to describe what he means by "depth." As Galen Johnson

reminds us, the philosophical lesson that Merleau-Ponty drew from Paul Klee and

modern painting is that the "thickness and voluminosity" of things does not derive in

any direct way from one-dimensional lines or from two-dimensional mirror surfaces.

Instead, depth is the "primitive experience" from which line and plane are abstracted. Depth is the "most existential dimension" (*PhPer*, 256, 296). It is a matter of "situation" that we will never get a sense of by setting a point in motion to generate a line, a second line, then a third. Depth is "Being rent in two." It is unlike breadth and height in that it is not a dimension in which things are juxtaposed:

> but depth is the power of things and parts of things to envelop each other [*PhPer*, 265, 306]. Two things are both present in a simultaneous temporal wave in which both are implied but are mutually exclusive. The foreground hides the background. The near covers the far. Without depth, everything would be out in the open. Nothing could be hidden. In a phrase borrowed from Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty says that without depth, things would be "all naked."(*VI*, 173, 131)[43]

Hence, for Merleau-Ponty, depth is a "global locality," from which the three dimensions, height, width, and depth, are abstracted. It is a "voluminosity" that we express in a single word when we say that something is "there."[44]

It is no accident that Flesh and logos are both icons of a Biblical theme: "And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us." As well, the sacramental language of transubstantiation is pervasive in Merleau-Ponty's essay, "Eye and Mind," as well as the creedal phrase, "maker of all things visible and invisible," which we find in the title of Merleau-Ponty's last work.[MPS, 90]

Writing about Bergson in *Signs*, Merleau-Ponty defines God as an element. God is "the element of joy or love in the sense that water and fire are elements"(*Signs*, 239, 190):

> Everything happens, according to Bergson, as if man encountered at the roots of his constituted being a generosity which is not a compromise with the adversity of the world and which is on his side against it.[45]

The near and the far, the background and the foreground, the revealed and the concealed, and the exposed and the hidden, as we have seen above, are all constitutive elements of cinematic consciousness. And they have a spiritual as well as a Merleau-Pontyan resonance. Against all realisms, cinematic consciousness for us immerses us in the folds of being because it shows us, not the objective, "real world" - as has so often been claimed by film theorists going back to André Bazin - but rather the life-world, the human world, as it lines itself up in relation to some consciousness. Our rather bold claim is that cinematic consciousness delivers the "Flesh" of the world. Cinematic consciousness is the new flesh. Like David Cronenberg's *Vidoedrome* (1983), we find ourselves drawn to the image as if by a sacred loadstone. Paradoxically, the two-dimensional cinematic image (at its best) reveals our unique commerce with the world by showing us at once the seeing and the seen, the world and our relations as an enlivened whole, our very being in the world.

Scorsese's vacant hallway and effervescent glass in *Taxi Driver* both express Travis's world as experienced by him. But not his "subjective" world, rather, they show us the world as lived, as it expresses itself toward us. The vacant hallway intends something, the bubbling glass expresses something, not by accidental reflection of a subjective mood, but the way all "objects" in the world express, by

the Flesh. Film art thus animates a style, a way of seeing the world. In cinema, the bright blue of the sky *is* agreement, comfort, and harmony, just as the dark clouds and thunder *are* disagreement and anger. In a way long forgotten, cinema reminds us that the flesh of the world, the seeing-seen, *means, expresses* itself as much as we express it; "things" express a style.

Our interest in the cinematic mode of consciousness, then, is "fundamentally narcissistic."[46] We want to see ourselves seeing. The desire thus fulfilled is the seeing subject's desire to see himself seeing, and "it is in another vision that he must be reflected, as in a mirror."[47]

Section 6: Summary of Conclusions from Chapter Five

This chapter has been designed to bring together the various lines of analysis of the first four chapters under one heading, phenomenology of religion. It's clear from a hermeneutic analysis of our three basic types of cinematic experience - filmic transcendence, metaphysical comfort, and rupture - that what we are up to in the case of cinematic experience is a movement whereby we may express some quasi-religious ideas while maintaining our secular status. The movie theatre has become for us a *templum minus*, the cite of a quasi-religious rite wherein we remind ourselves of the gnostic ordering of the world into light and dark. Cinematic consciousness opens up the same area of darkness traditionally opened up by religious thought, as it takes up its abode in the uncanny abyss. Its contribution to constructed subjectivity makes it an ideal candidate for situating the subject. But it

also opens up a human world as well as an objective one, rendering the latter in

communion with the former; in short, it articulates the flesh.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*, tr. David E. Green, Preface Mircea Eliade (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 333.

2. This expression of Husserl's goal comes from a letter to Sr. Adelgundis Jaiger-schmidt, OSB, "Gespraeche mit Edmund Husserl: 1931-1936," in *Stimmen*, 199 (1981), p.56, as quoted in *EPT*, 1-2. The rest of the passage reads as follows:

> I, as it were, must eliminate God from my scientific existence in order to pave the way to God for humans who do not have, as you do, the certainty of faith through the church. I know my procedure could be dangerous for me were I not a human deeply bound to God and a faithful Christian.

As Hart and Laycock point out, Husserl regarded phenomenological theology as "the end of philosophy, for the sake of which his own incessantly renegotiated 'beginnings' were enacted."[2] Now it is the cinematic experience that tries to "pave the way to God [without God] for humans who do not have ...the certainty of faith through the church."

3. See Alexander M. Witherspoon, ed. *The College Survey of English Literature* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, Inc., 1951), 677.

4. From Paul Tillich, *The Religious Situation*, tr. H. Richard Neibuhr (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 40-42, as quoted in "Editor's Introduction" to Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technical Society*, ed. J. Mark Thomas (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1988), xiii.

5. "Editor's Introduction" to Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation*, xiii.

6. Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation*, 6-7.

7. My concept of "religion," it will be remembered, is what Paul Tillich would call the "narrower concept of religion." He says that the "fundamental concept" of religion - that is, religion in the sense of "being unconditionally concerned about the meaning of one's existence - transcends both religion in the narrower sense and culture. Avoiding the difficulties inherent in drawing a distinction between religion, understood as that social group that represents our "ultimate concern," and religion understood as "a social group with symbols of thought and of action." See, for example, Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation*, 159-160.

8. See W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomeno-logy of Religion*, tr. John B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 369. Hereafter, *MR* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

9. See Ivan Butler, *Religion in the Cinema* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1969), 7-8. Hereafter, *RC* (see "list of Abbreviations," page ix).

10. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 158.

11. From the *Corpus Hermeticum*, tr. Scott, Book XI (ii), 20b-22b; pp.220-223, as quoted in Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Vol. 4: Occidental Mythology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), 367.

12. Baudry, "Ideological Effects...," 307.

13. Campbell, *Masks of God 4*, 367.

14. Campbell, *Masks of God 4*, 374.

15. The Manichæan myth begins with the two primal principles, Light and Darkness each dwelling in its own realm, both eternal but still independent. The Darkness perceives the Light and is envious, becomes greedy and hateful and seeks to attack the Light. The Father of Greatness calls fourth the Primal Man who arms himself with five powers and descends to do battle with the Darkness. But he is defeated and the five powers of Darkness devour a part of his light and thus bring the mixture into being. The captive prtion of light (the armour of the Primal Man) is the soul, which in this way becomes subject to the affections of Matter. The Primal Man appeals to the Father of Greatness, so he sends the Living Spirit to deliver him. The Archons, or Powers of Darkness, are overcome, although they can still act, and heaven and earth are made from their carcasses. From the purest part of the Light in the archons, the sun and moon are made. A new appeal to the Father of Greatness from the powers of Light results in a third Messenger being sent, whose appearance inspires the Darkness to create Adam and Eve in the image of his glorious form and to enclose in them the Light still at its disposal. The creation of Eve has a special significance in that she serves as the demons' instrument for the seduction of Adam. Procreation serves the ends of Darkness because each new soul captures and holds another bit of Light inside the Darkness, further dispersing it, prolonging the captivity of the Light. This is when Jesus comes on the scene, in order to reveal to Adam, who is still innocent but soon disobeys, is seduced by Eve, and so sets the chain of reproduction in motion. This indefinitely extends Jesus' mission on earth. In one age, the revelation comes to India through the Buddha, in another to Persia through Zoroaster, and in a third to the West through the historical Jesus.

16. John Leonard, *CBS News Sunday Morning* resident film/television critic and lecturer in Modern Culture at Columbia University, is probably one of the best critics working in the U.S. in any medium. This is a transcription of part of his review of *The Stand* (Steven King, 1994), *CBS News Sunday Morning*, May 8, 1994.

17. *TV Guide* (Toronto: Telemedia Communications, Inc., May 7, 1994), p. 27.

18. Agel, *The Making of Kubrick's 2001*, 330.

19. See *Papirer*, papers of Søren Kierkegaard, X^2 A 478.

20. See Remy Kwant, *The Phenomenology of Expression* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978 [originally published by Duquesne University Press, 1969]), 162. Hereafter, *PhEx* (see "List of Abbreviations," page ix).

21. *Cloud of Unknowing*, anonymous, England, 14th century, as quoted in Ramsey, *S&S*, 38.

22. See Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (London: Methuen, 1957), 97.

23. Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Foundations of Faith and Morals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), as referred to in *PhRel*, 67.

24. See Charles Courtney, "Henry Duméry's Phenomenology of Transcending," in *EPT*, 55-61.

25. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 91-92.

26. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 92, as quoted in *PT*, 106.

27. See *Fragments d'un journal*, tr. into French by Luc Badesco (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 506, as quoted in *PT*, 194, n.31.

28. See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, tr. William R. Trask (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1957, 1959, 1987), 11.

29. See Jean Cocteau and Jacques Maritain, *Art and Faith: Letters Between Jacques Maritain and Jean Cocteau*, tr. John Coleman (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1948), 56-57.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 88.

32. Ibid., 89.

33. Ibid., 89.

34. Ibid., 90.

35. Ibid.

36. As quoted in Cocteau, *Art and Faith*, 90-91.

37. Cocteau, *Art and Faith*, 94-95.

38. See Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, tr. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 10.

39. See Wiliam James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 67, as quoted in *GGD*, 27.

40. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, second German edition, tr. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinborough: T. T. Clark, 1960), para. 3, as quoted in *GGD*, 29.

41. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 157, H.120.

42. See Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*, tr. David E. Green (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 5, as referred to in *GGD*, 36.

43. See Galen A. Johnson, "Desire and Invisibility in 'Eye and Mind': Some Remarks on Merleau-Ponty's Spirituality," in Patrick Burke and Jan van der Veken, eds., *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 86. Hereafter, MPS (see "List of Abbreviations," page 2).

44. See Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," tr. Carleton Dallery in *Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 180, Fr. ed., 65, as quoted in MPS, 86.

45. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy*, tr. John Wild, James Edie, and John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 25-26, Fr. 33, as quoted in MPS, 90.

46. See Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, tr. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968); originally published in French as *Le Visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964). Hereafter, *VI*; page numbers refer to French and English editions, respectively.

47. See, in this regard, Gary Brent Madison, *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, tr. by the author (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981); originally published in French as *La phenomenologie de Merleau-Ponty: une recherche des limites de la conscience* (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1973), 181 [Fr. 195].

CONCLUSION:

CINEMATIC CONSCIOUSNESS AS

SUBLIMATED SPIRITUALITY

[The] human being needs a framework of values, a philosophy of life,
a religion or religion-surrogate to live by and understand by, in about
the same sense he needs sunlight, calcium, or love.

- Abraham Maslow[1]

We burn with desire to find a steadfast place and an ultimate fixed
basis whereon we may build a tower to reach the infinite. But our
whole foundation breaks up, and earth opens to the abysses.

- Blaise Pascal

Section 1: The Sacred and Cinematic Consciousness

Why has the sacred character of the film experience, what I have been calling the

cinematic mode of consciousness, not been emphasized up to now? The "film

experience" seems to have as many "essences" as there are film theorists. However,

film's identity problems are quite understandable. As a popular, "mass art," it is

required to be self-sufficient financially; in its capacity as entertainer it's expected to

provide a "good show" for your money. But financial success is not generally

regarded as coextensive with artistic merit. Indeed, some cling to the notion that art

which makes money can't really be artistically worthy somehow - a notion the

naïveté of which artists know all too well.

Film's reputation as an *art* is in conflict with its more general commitment to

entertain. The traditional arts do not stand or fall on their admission prices, although

more and more in the miserly nineties, opera houses and orchestras are under

pressure to show a profit. Filmmakers know that their access to expensive production facilities is directly tied to their box-office track record. And film is virtually alone (I leave aside other related entertainments which also depend on good reviews, such as theatre and music) in having to maintain its artistic integrity in an atmosphere thick with "critical acumen." How would our regard for painting, for example, be effected if it was routinely subjected to a hand-signal assessment - thumb's up or thumb's down - as is all too common in the case of the "film review"?

However, as Mircea Ediade points out, the fact that the sacred dimension is not immediately obvious in our society should not deter us from attempting to decipher it. There is a certain excited edginess, or perhaps ecstatic anticipation, we feel while waiting in line for a movie which goes beyond merely looking forward to an "entertainment." This delightful anxiety is our first clue that we are about to place ourselves at risk; a potentially dangerous chasm is opening before us holding the promise of spiritual growth. Will it be the terror of destruction or the reassurance of motherly tenderness?[2] As Hölderlin said, "Where danger is, the delivering power grows too."[3]

We seek a gnostic release of Spirit from Flesh, the former reduced to the latter by scientism, psychologism, and materialism. Cinematic consciousness revels in a gnostic-pagan playground. In the cinema, we give our consent, nod, will, over to something that is not really there, a numen, something that can only be known indirectly, via an image, an icon: the holy.

A parallel movement in the realm of the spirit to that peculiarly modern preoccupation with epistemology, the relation between knower and known, is the modern spirit's preoccupation with individual transcendence. This too involves the conditions that would have to be met in order to gain sure and certain knowledge of the relation of self to other, self to world. Film's "man-made dream for waking eyes"[4] now constitutes our most important avenue for spiritual transcendence, and hence, our most important human art.

We can see evidence of this preoccupation in the increasing popularity of science fiction. As Northrop Frye reminds us, in the twentieth century, romance got a new lease on life after the mid-fifties, with the success of J. R. R. Tolkien and the rise of science fiction:[5]

> In the Greek romances we find stories of mysterious birth, oracular prophecies about the future contortions of the plot, foster parents, adventures which involve capture by pirates, narrow escapes from death, recognition of the true identity of the hero and his eventual marriage with the heroine.... In Greek romance the characters are Levantine, the setting is the Mediterranean world, and the normal means of transportation is by shipwreck. In science fiction the characters may be earthlings, the setting the intergalactic spaces, and what gets wrecked in hostile territory a spaceship, but the tactics of the storyteller generally conform to much the same outlines.[6]

While we can agree with the general outlines of the analysis, we see something more going on in the case of cinema. Not only is it the case that most of cinema now conforms to the romance model, but it is also the case that cinema as such embodies a spiritual invitation, one perfectly consistent with Frye's emphasis on the

romantic structure of modern science fiction, given the fact that transcendence is central to the romantic attitude.

Cinematic experience gives us access to "the sacred worlds of others" by mirroring our bodily existence, by creating a situation in which we share subjectivities with an "other," a situation in which we transcend our own life-world perspective. The intersubjective world which we inhabit and tell stories about is not the objective world of the natural scientist, but rather the lyrical world of the poet - and it is this world which is revealed in the film experience. The film experience is one of movement, of gesture and gaze, of the embodied human spirit resounding with music.

Hence, postmodern man still occupies a sacred dimension. The sacred is an element in the structure of human consciousness, a part of the human mode of being in the world,[7] and as such it is prior to any particular cultural ritual or practice whose goal it is to *express* the sacred. As Eliade reminds us, modern man's claim to have largely rejected myth, and with it the sacred, reveals that he has misunderstood the basic nature of myth:

> The world of meaning of modern man plays the same function that
> myth played among the primitives. So long as modern man is inter-
> ested in discovering the meaning of life, that meaning can serve as
> model for human life, and thus is still in the same family as the
> archaic myth which presented the exemplary model for ritual repeti-
> tion. The sacred, therefore, remains an element in modern man's
> structure of consciousness.[8]

Postmodern man too requires a meaning, a ground, something upon which to base

his existence, a repeatable ritual providing exemplary models for his moral/social

behaviour, even if those models are often something less than exemplary. And if the

traditional forms fail to deliver this ground, or somehow fall into disuse, then the

structure of his consciousness will look for "ideas of being and meaning" elsewhere.

Interestingly, Eliade also allows for the possibility of:

> a new, religious expression which cannot yet be recognized as such,
> simply because it is something completely new, just because we speak
> of the new consciousness in purely humanistic terms, this does not
> mean that the new consciousness is not a continuation of what being
> is - meaning, a social being, and so on.[9]

This new religious expression is the cinematic, and along with it has been created a

new consciousness, cinematic consciousness. Thus, we extend this analysis to film

art. A hermeneutic analysis of the cinematic mode of consciousness reveals that the

film experience expresses the sacred dimension through its structure of shared

subjectivities.

We believe, with Eliade, that man still behaves as *homo religiosus*. He still

has some source of value and meaning, some images which nourish his unconscious,

an imaginary universe in which he can and does participate through cinematic

consciousness. Eliade says, "If the sacred means being, the real, and the meaningful

... then the sacred is a part of the structure of human consciousness."[10] And one of

the areas in which the sacred "surfaces" in our secular culture is art.

Our modest addition to this insightful analysis is to claim that for us now,

cinematic consciousness makes an important contribution to the sacred element of

human consciousness. Cinema invites us to get out of our selves, to see what other

perspectives there might be, and this is essentially a spiritual invitation to transcend

our own life-world perspective. It is a ghostly co-habitation of the life-world

perspective of an other. We are sure, as is Eliade, that for postmodern, secular man,

the sacred is "merely hidden, camouflaged, temporarily unrecognizable."[11] Sacred-

ness has undergone a Second Fall, this time to the unconscious level, outside of

man's manageable range. But this unconscious still remains an important and

creative resource:

> man cannot live without imagination, without dreams, without dis-
> covering the sacred worlds of other men through art and culture.[12]

The sacred quest for meaning for Eliade is always tied in with another world of

some sort, a world which holds the possibility of transformation. This transform-

ation implies access to an other, something or someone beyond our own realm.

What Eliade refers to as creative religious acts are precisely individual discoveries of

this other dimension. These discoveries, whether in the world of the artist, or in

society, or in the concern for social justice, all involve "a going out of self into a

world of a different time, an idealized time, a synchronic scheme that makes the past

and the future equally valuable with the present."[13] And this moving about in time

and space is quintessentially cinematic.

As we saw above, cinematic consciousness seeks to share subjectivities with the other, goes out of itself into a world of a different time, whether we're talking about period pieces or cinematic representations of duration - or human time - it is always an idealized time that makes the past and the future equally valuable with the present. Cinema is a postmodern, religiously creative act - what we have been calling "spiritual" - that "draws directly from the reservoir of the unconscious ... part of [the] timeless pattern of the workings of the collective human mind in discovering its roots."[14] The essence of cinematic consciousness is just its desire for the sacred, the transcendent, in other words, its sublimated spirituality.

Section 2: Modern Filmmaking as Remythologization

Many facets of the cinematic mode of consciousness remain to be explored, but one can, at least in a preliminary way, be identified, namely, *remythologization*. To understand what we mean by "remythologization," it is helpful to contrast it with theologian Rudolph Bultmann's notion of *de*-mythologization. Bultmann regarded the New testament as largely mythological. Its stories echo the gnostic/Manichæan ordering of the world into light and dark forces, demons and angels at war in the spirits of men. In this world, all unusual events are directly caused by supernatural powers. However, Bultmann saw elements of truth in the Christian myths, even though they were stated in outmoded form:

> Myth expresses certain fundamental intuitions about human existence
> and its relation to the powers that man experiences as the ground and
> limit of his life. In order to understand these intuitions, however, it is

necessary to separate them from their outmoded form, that is, it is necessary to demythologize.[15]

However, our view is that cinematic consciousness *remythologizes* the world along secularized spiritual lines, a religious smorgasbord, offering everything from Buddhistic surrender to Christian resurrection. Bultmann was right to see the thought forms of New Testament Christianity as remote and inaccessable to most sceptical moderns, but this doesn't mean that we cannot, nor indeed do not, see our world as a theatre of conflict between supernatural powers, the demonic side seeking to possess and destroy us, and our good side, represented by God (or at least some "force" for good) intervening to secure our salvation. This is precisely the appeal of the cinematic mode of consciousness, that is, as moral/spiritual mirror, ordering the world according to the ancient categories, light and dark.

Jean Douchet, for example, writes that Hitchcock's real inspiration was precisely this duel between Light and Shadow, in other words, Unity and Duality. He cites the opening sequence of *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) to make his point. First, we see an immense stretch of harshly-lit landscape around a very ordinary looking town, Phoenix, Arizona. Here, all must be immutable, a sense of eternity. But immediately, in opposition to this light comes the second shot, the inside of a hotel room, in nearly absolute blackness, until slowly a room is revealed, then a bed, and then two lovers embracing:

> In two shots, Hitchcock states his proposition: *Psycho* will speak to us of the eternal and the finite, being and nothingness, life and death - but seen in their naked truth.[16]

Even if we find Douchet's gnostic reading of the opening sequence of *Psycho* a bit much, there is still plenty of evidence that Hitchcock's primary concerns are broadly speaking spiritual. As William Rothman has pointed out, Hitchcock's most accomplished films, such as *Rear Window* (1954), *The Wrong Man* (1957), *Vertigo* (1958), and *North by Northwest* (1959), are "profound studies of the conditions of human identity, knowledge, and love, as well as sustained reflections, at the highest level of seriousness, on the conditions of the art of film."[17] These issues of human identity, knowledge and love are essentially spiritual in character.

Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, writing in the *Cahiers du cinéma*, also discerned in Hitchcock's films an element of spirituality, what they called "transference of guilt." A consistent theme emerged, they felt, such that the apparently innocent are also partly guilty, tainted as if by original sin. Raymond Durgnat summarizes:

> Curious affinities between heroes and villains appear, and the villains incarnate temptations to which, on some secret or subconscious level, the heroes have yielded, and for which they must be memorably punished, or from which they must be purified, by some sort of trial, concluding in a chastening awareness.[18]

Thus Hitchcock's character and plot structures are clearly inspired by quasi-religious themes.

Hitchcock himself did not rule out some degree of influence on his art resulting from his Catholic upbringing:

> I had a strict, religious upbringing.... I don't think I can be labelled a Catholic artist, but it may be that one's early upbringing influences a man's life and guides his instinct.... I am definitely not anti-religious; perhaps I am sometimes neglectful.[19]

This influence is perhaps most obvious in Hitchcock's use of consecrated settings in his films to raise the level of suspense and fear: the Westminster Cathedral Tower in *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), the seedy little East London chapel in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), the old California Mission in *Vertigo* (1958), the Swiss church in *Secret Agent* (1936), with the dead man's body depressing an organ note which echoes unceasingly and unnervingly through the building.[20]

Martin Scorsese's films, too, show clear evidence of a secularized spirituality. Paul Schrader, screenwriter for *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), comments on the film's climactic sequence:

> The screenplay has been moving at a reasonably realistic level until this prolonged slaughter. The slaughter itself is a gory extension of violence, more surreal than real. The slaughter is the moment Travis has been heading for all his life, and where this screenplay has been heading for over 85 pages. It is the release of all that cumulative pressure; it is a reality unto itself. It is the psychopath's second coming.[Schrader's draft script dated 29 April, 1975][21]

Travis's redemptive resurrection in blood, as Robert Ray points out,[22] repudiates the basic myth in American culture of "regeneration through violence:"

> *Taxi Driver* suggested ... that the myth of "regeneration through violence" that lay behind the Right cycle had become inapplicable in modern society. As a solution, it was madness.... In doing so, it followed the lead of D. H. Lawrence, whose description of the essen-

tial American soul perfectly fitted Travis: "hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer."[23]

Though Ray's emphasis is primarily political, we find in all this a concentration on our spiritual self-understanding that speaks to cinema's essence as gnostic mirror.

Scorsese himself has said the following about *Taxi Driver*:

> I saw *Taxi Driver* once in a theatre ... and everyone was yelling and
> screaming at the shootout. When I made it, I didn't intend to have the
> audience react with that feeling, 'Yes, do it! Let's go out and kill.'
> The idea was to create a violent catharsis, so that they'd find them-
> selves saying, 'Yes, kill'; and then afterwards realize, 'My God, no' -
> like some strange California therapy session.[24]

Scorsese's attempt, whether successful or not, is clearly to address the spirit of his times, its "Zeitgeist." The therapy is intended to repair suffering souls, to enlighten, and even perhaps to reconcile opposing forces.

As Father Francis Principe, priest at Old St. Patrick's during Scorsese's youth, said about Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*:

> The fact that the de Niro character does save the girl is lost [because
> overshadowed by the impact of the tremendous level of violence in
> the climax]. It was all Good Friday; all pain; all suffering. But the
> fact that the girl is saved, literally redeemed.... I remember being
> asked about the film by Marty and I said, 'Too much Good Friday;
> there should be more of Easter Sunday'.[25]

Consistently throughout Scorsese's filmmaking there has been an emphasis on matters spiritual. Defending his most explicit treatment of religion in film, *The Last*

Temptation of Christ (Martin Scorsese, 1988), at a September, 1988 press conference, Scorsese said the following:

> My feeling is that if you were to take yourself to the point where there are no churches, just you alone with God, that's the plane on which I wanted to make the film. To get down to what the message of Jesus really is. Not just a plastic model on a car dashboard, but someone who gave us the nost important message for us to survive as a species on earth. In *Mean Streets* [1973], the main character Charlie tries to live a Christian life; he goes to church, does confession, listens to all the philosophy within the edifice of the church. But outside in the street, life is ruled by the gun. So how does one live a good Christian life in a world of this kind? All these themes have been churning inside me for years, and have finally reached a special combination in *The Last Temptation of Christ*.[26]

Father Principe believes that Scorsese "has a strong sense of the reality of sin." For him, movies are important because "the whole history of cinema has affected the way we see the world." This accounts for why Scorsese is so involved in film preservation. However, our analysis of film as a secular form of spiritual search adds another dimension to, and enriches our understanding of, the reasons why film is able to play this role.

Section 3: Concluding Remarks

The so-called non-religious humanism of the modern world, which grew out of the Renaissance, reaffirmed the significance of nature and the ideals of humanism. As Baron Von Hügel observed, the Renaissance:

> no doubt exercised, in the long run, so potent a secularizing influence because men's minds had become too largely otherworldly - had lost sufficient interest in this wonderful world; and hence new, apparently

boundless outlooks and problems were taken largely in revolt and
escape from what looked like a prison-house - religion.[27]

If we substitute "oblivion" for "revolt and escape," we have here a description of the

attitude of modern secularism.

Now it is usually said that men's minds have become altogether too *this-worldly*. However, in the present theis, we have taken to task this largely unproven

presupposition of the modern disposition, namely, secularism. We are in reality not

so far removed from the mysterious, from the other-worldly, as we techno-secular

postmoderns usually suppose. A reaction is currently underway against the over-ordering, naturalizing, objectifying of the world. And part of that reaction consists

in using cinema as a secular church.

M. Darrol Bryant offers us an insightful analysis of cinema's role as popular

religion.[28] But like Ian Jarvie, he falls into the trap of collapsing different types of

film experiences into one, specifically, that one which I call "metaphysical comfort."

Cinema for Bryant is a place where we learn the central guiding myths of our

culture, or learn to critique them. We meet the culture's heroes, and are instructed

in the culture's characteristic habits. The problem is that Bryant sees films one-dimensionally: they address our technological society's "longing for a mechanical

transmutation of things, and the primordial longing of humanity to participate in the

lives of the gods":

> The act of going to the movies is a participation in a central ritual of
> this culture's spiritual life ... cinema is a form of popular "religion."
> As a popular form of the religious life, movies do what we have

always asked of popular religion, namely, they provide us with arche-
typal forms of humanity - heroic figures - and instruct us in the basic
values and myths of our society.

This much is true. But Bryant gets into problems when he assumes that film experience is uniform with respect to these lines: "The profoundly spiritual significance of film lies ... in our experience of film itself - an experience of order and harmony that stands in counterpoint to our experience of the everyday world."[29] Again, just as we saw with respect to Jarvie's analysis, this accounts for only one type of film experience, that which is metaphysically comforting.

What we have learned is that film experience is not uniform in this way. It is a complex interaction of subjectivities whose results vary with our degree of openness as well as the filmmaker's coherence of vision. Ours is a meta-structuralist account, relying not on the film's structure, nor even purely on the subjective structure of our experience, but rather on the two combined. It is an account that traces out the lines of shared subjectivity, a third thing created by the coming together of our subjective experience with the film's quasi-subjectivity. However, as we know, insight into essence in the final analysis is a matter of intuition. We can give many examples, but the conviction that all film experience involves some kind of spiritual address is a matter of judgement, not deductive or inductive proof.

The recovery of depth, as Merleau-Ponty realized, involves reinvigorating wonder, especially in a society that has been forced into the movie temple in order to satisfy its spiritual longings. Galen Johnson's explanation of Merleau-Ponty's

notion of invisibility applies too to the film experience as that to which we are drawn as if by an outline of our own bodily awareness:

> The lines of sight and representation traced out by the eyes in vision and the hand in drawing extend outward toward things. Now we seek to turn them around, to reverse the lines of sight and make them bounce back so we can see our own eyes and our own face. This is the painterly fascination with mirrors. The mirror is a technological object that outlines the metaphysical structure of the flesh.... In the mirror, I am both seeing and visible. This is why, Merleau-Ponty says, artists have so often liked to draw themselves in the act of painting, adding to what *they* saw of things what the *things* saw of them. This is the metamorphosis of seeing into seen that defines both the flesh and the painter's vocation.[MPS, 94]

Cinema too is a technological object that reverses the lines of sight, making visible the metaphysical structure of the flesh, in whose presence I am both seeing and visible.

We live in a culture whose priority is a kind of linear rationality, one that is apparently spiritually empty. But, as I hope this typology and hermeneutics of the film experience shows, our "secularity" betrays an underlying spirituality that expresses itself in a new mode of consciousness, cinematic consciousness, whose essence is its sublimated spirituality.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. See Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1962), 206, as quoted in Elkins, Hedstrom, et al, 7.

2. See Westphal (*GGD*) for a reference to Sri Ramakrishna's description of the Goddess Kali, the Divine Mother, the unity of opposite (referred to above, Chapter 4, Section 3.3). In the temple where he worships her she stands in basalt, spectacularly bedecked in gold and jewels, upon the prostrate body of Shiva in white marble:

> She has fours arms. The lower left hand holds a severed human head
> and the uper grips a bloodstained sabre. One right hand offers boons
> to her children; the other allays their fear. The majesty of her posture
> can hardly be described. It combines the terror of destruction with the
> reassurance of motherly tenderness. For she is the Cosmic power, the
> totality of the universe, a glorious harmony of the pairs of opposites.
> She deals out death, as she creates and preserves.

This combination of threat and reassurance is fundamental to cinematic consciousness.

3. See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hölderlin: Selected Verse*, tr. M. Hamburger (London: Anvil, 1986), as quoted in Kirk J. Schneider, "Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: An Existential View of Spirituality," in *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Spring 1993), 99.

4. See Plato, *The Sophist*, tr. Cornford, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 1014.

5. See Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 4.

6. Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 4-5.

7. See Mircea Eliade, "The Sacred in the Secular World," in *Cultural Hermeneutics* 1 (1973), 101.

8. Ibid., 102.

9. Ibid., 104.

10. Ibid., 101.

11. Ibid., 112.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 113.

15. Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms*, 67.

16. See Raymond Durgnat, *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock, or The Plain Man's Hitchcock* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1974), 23. Durgnat is commenting on Jean Douchet's article, "Hitch and his Public," in *Cahiers du cinéma* 113, November, 1960, reprinted in *Cahiers Du Cinéma, 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Holywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 150-161; and in Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague, eds., *A Hitchcock Reader* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1986), 7-15.

17. See William Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 248.

18. Durgnat, *The Strange Case...*, 23.

19. See Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ballantine/Random House, 1983), 13.

20. Butler, *Religion in Cinema*, 112.

21. See Les Keyser, *Martin Scorsese* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 80. Although this chapter on *Taxi Driver* is full of factual errors, it offers some interesting anecdotes as well as some considered commentary. The errors all seem to be references to the film, which suggests that Keyser was taking his information directly from Schrader's published script, rather than from the finished film.

22. See Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 358.

23. Ibid., 358-359.

24. See *Scorsese on Scorsese*, ed. David Thompson and Ian Christie (London: Farber and Farber, 1989), 63.

25. American Masters Program, "All This Filming, Is It Healthy?" Pacific Street Films Project, Inc., in association with WNET/13, New York, 1990.

26. See Martin Scorsese, *Scorsese on Scorsese*, xxv.

27. See Baron Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses*, Dent, 1921, Vol.1, p.96, as referred to in *S&S*, 16.

28. See M. Darrol Bryant, "Cinema, Religion, and Popular Culture," in John R. May and Michael Bird, eds., *Religion in Film*, 101-114.

29. Bryant, "Cinema, Religion, ...", 112.

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