

**THE CINEMATIC MYSTICAL GAZE:
The films of Peter Weir**

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**Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

August 2003

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Abstract

Peter Weir is one of Australia's most critically acclaimed and commercially successful directors. Ever since Weir's feature film debut with *The Cars that Ate Paris* in 1974, his work has been explored for unifying themes. Scholars have analysed his films from many perspectives: the establishment of identification and identity especially through binary oppositions in the diegesis;¹ the creation of an oneiric atmosphere as a way of exploiting the spectator's dream experience;² a clash of value systems;³ the ambiguous nature of narrative structure and character motivations leading to the creation of a sense of wonder;⁴ the experience of the protagonist placed in a foreign culture wherein conflict arises from social clashes and personal misunderstandings;⁵ and at the particular ways his films adapt generic codes in service of a discernible ideological agenda.⁶ To the best of my knowledge there has been no study of the mystical element of Weir's work in relation to the construction of a cinematic mystical gaze or act of spectatorship.

Within a culture defined by its secularity and a national cinema marked by quirky comedies and social realism, almost all of Weir's films have been described as mystical, arcane or interested in metaphysics. Such an observation could warrant no further investigation if it is held that this critical commentary is but hyperbole in its attempt to grasp what constitutes a Peter Weir film. If, however, language constructs meaning, then the recurrence of references to Weir's mysticism needs to be taken seriously to see what effect this might have exerted on the nature and structure of the Weir text. I will argue that the major consequence of Weir's fascination with the mystical has been the construction of a mystical mode of spectatorship. Furthermore, because other directors and films have been described in similar ways this study opens up a discussion about whether these observations about

¹ Blonski A, Propositions on the Films of Peter Weir and his Place in Contemporary Australian Cinema, Unpublished minor thesis, Master of Arts (Preliminary), Melbourne, Australia: Monash University, February 1983, pp. 75-77.

² Haltof J M, Film and Dream: the Films of Peter Weir, Major thesis, Master of Arts, Adelaide, Australia: Flinders University, 1988, pp. 122ff.

³ McMullen W, A Rhetorical Analysis of Peter Weir's *Witness*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 1989, pp. 3ff.

⁴ Corum E, Tantalizing Ambiguity: the Cinema of Peter Weir, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kansas City, Missouri: University of Kansas, 1990, p. 170.

⁵ Haltof J M, Film and Dream: the Films of Peter Weir, 1988, pp. 4ff.

⁶ Rayner J, The Films of Peter Weir, London: Cassell, 1998, pp. 2-18.

the mystical qualities in the viewing experience hold importance for other filmmakers, and theories of the gaze in the cinema.

Declaration

This is to certify that

- (i) the thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated in the preface;
- (ii) due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used;
- (iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length exclusive of tables, maps, footnotes, filmography, bibliographies.

Signed

Richard Leonard

Preface

Combined with my own arguments and the development of my own method in outlining the mystical gaze, this thesis locates, reviews, analyses and utilises a variety of different forms of evidence: visual/textual evidence; empirical and technical evidence; the evidence of primary sources; and the evidence of secondary sources. In every case where the observations, judgements or arguments are not my own the authority for them is cited in the text or the footnotes. The research for this thesis and its writing has not been carried out in collaboration with anyone else. This research has not been submitted for the purpose of obtaining any other degree or award, and has not previously been published in any other journal or book. All quotes from the Bible are from the The New Revised Standard Version, B Metzger (ed.), Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, 1989. Some of the works I will quote in this thesis are gender exclusive. Rather than regularly refer to [sic], the reader can presume that in each case I am directly and accurately quoting the original text and am aware of its gender presumptions.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Associate Professor Barbara Creed for her outstanding supervision of this research project. Her interest in my work, extensive knowledge and attention to detail has enabled me to both complete the writing of the dissertation, and enjoy the process. I also acknowledge the Australian Province of the Society of Jesus whose support and encouragement has enabled me to undertake this degree. I am grateful to Aysen Mustafa and the staff at the library of the Australian Film Institute whose unfailing assistance and courtesy were important. I thank the Jesuits and University of Melbourne's Faculty of Arts through its TRIPS scheme. Scholarships from both groups enabled me to do the final writing of my thesis within UCLA's Theater, Film and Television School. Finally I acknowledge the generosity and forbearance of the Jesuit Communities at Park Drive, Melbourne, and Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles who sustained me during my PhD programme. While I take responsibility for the final text, I am very grateful to Christopher Willcock and Paul Fyfe who helped me with the proofreading.

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Introduction

In this thesis I will argue that in his films Peter Weir constructs and deploys what is most accurately described as a “mystical gaze” and that this gaze constitutes one of the most important but neglected forms of spectatorship in the cinema.

I will demonstrate that other authors on Weir’s work have failed to explore the nature of the cinematic mystical experience. I will argue that the mystical gaze leads the spectator to contemplate his or her place in a larger frame of reference where physical laws count for less and a relationship with a metaphysical and, often, a meta-ethical world, is taken seriously. Either in the short or long term this leads the spectator to a new consciousness of his or her surroundings, ideologies and moral imperatives. The mystical gaze transforms the spectator’s awareness, suggests that there are realities beyond his or her sight, and that the cinema is one way to contemplate and encounter this Otherness, especially in western countries where religious collectives now play a lesser role than they have historically in providing a context for a mystical encounter. I will purposely use a capitalised version of Otherness to name what mystics and spectators have described as their encounter with Otherness. I am not arguing that cinema spectatorship is the same as a mystical experience, just that participants report the occurrence as a meeting with Otherness. By an encounter with Otherness I mean that a film (intentionally or otherwise) has the power to lift the viewer out of his or her daily, mundane world to encounter the mystical world, its belief patterns, ethical systems or personal and social mythologies which transcend the everyday.

Chapter One will survey and critically engage with the literature from critical reviews and commentaries in the press, theses and academic publications to establish that every one of Weir’s films has been described, in varying degrees, as mystical, spiritual or attending to the metaphysical. I will not attempt to address all the publications about Weir in the last 29 years. I will address all the theses and academic works, but even then I will approach them, and other commentaries, seeking to establish that mysticism and Otherness have been key elements in critical appraisals of Peter Weir’s films, but that the significance of this in relation to the deployment of a mystical gaze has not been theorised or even fully appreciated. To this end it is necessary to address the reception of Weir’s films by the popular press for three reasons. This public commentary requires analysis, especially in charting the way his

mysticism was spoken of, applauded or dismissed from 1974 – 2002. Initially Peter Weir received little critical attention from the academic film community and most commentary on his films was in the press, where critics and journalists began to notice his mystical and metaphysical predilections. It also has a direct bearing on the nature of what academics would try to name as the essential elements of a Peter Weir film and how and why this mystical element was present. Second, a critical discussion of Weir's reception by the popular press recognises an important feature of Weir's devotion to the cinema as one of the most popular entertainment venues in western countries. Weir has always been interested in mass-market cinema and he has been, as I will outline, suspicious of the academy. Third, as I will highlight in Chapter Two, the cinema now rivals the previously popular venues of churches, temples or synagogues as the place where spectators deploy the mystical gaze. I will, however, distinguish between the relative importance of the three critical forms contained in this literature review – the press, theses and books - by the level of critical engagement with the central arguments contained therein.

Chapter Two will attend to the questions that immediately arise from such an observation about the cinema in general and Weir in particular. What is mysticism? Is there a history of describing the cinema in these terms, and why should it be given any significance? I will outline how the language of magic and mysticism has been generously applied to the cinema from its inception to the present day. I will demonstrate how the primitive mysticism of magic and the more elaborate mystical traditions of the passion plays and light shows shaped the expectations of the cinema's first viewers. Drawing on the theories of Baudry, Freud, Lacan and Metz, I will provide evidence for the claim that magic and mysticism have been pivotal ways of defining the cinema. I will then make the case that some of the most important hypotheses about the look or gaze of the cinema draw on the language and iconography of mysticism and magic, and have a hitherto unacknowledged relationship with these categories.

Chapter Three will focus on theorists who have been interested in the relationship between religion and the cinema. Exploring the work of Schrader, Hurley, Bird, May, Holloway, Jones, Martin, Ostwalt, Johnston, Marsh and Ortiz, Miles, Fraser, Plate and Jasper, I will chart how they have variously described the cinema as transcendental, mythological, hierophantic, metaphysical, mesmeric, awe-inspiring, spiritual, theological, iconographic, sacramental or liturgical. Some have

even invoked the metaphor of the temple to describe the cinema theatre. I will posit an argument as to why mysticism as a constitutive element of the spectator's gaze has not been named or theorised until now. I will also argue a case for why there has not been a richer interaction between film scholars and academics from religious studies or theology.

Chapter Four will define the shared codes within the act of spectatorship and mysticism and argue that the cinema offers a place or context within which an increasingly secular audience encounters Otherness. I will make the case that the spectator's memory and experience of light and dark, time and space, sight and sound, private and public, hierarchies and stars, sacred stories and ritual have strong roots in multi-faith and multi-cultural mystical consciousness. By highlighting the ways in which mystics report their encounters and the preconditions that trigger such an event, I will argue that the cinema replicates the preconditions for a secular version of an encounter with Otherness, and has borrowed the language of mysticism to describe the outcome. Just as many mystical settings do not always lead to a mystical experience, I will not be arguing that all film viewing leads to an encounter with Otherness. I will argue that the cinema is a space within which a filmic text, in the hands of a director with a conscious or unconscious interest in the exploration of the metaphysical, can lead a spectator to report an encounter with Otherness using language previously reserved for religious experience.

Initially in Chapter Five, I will outline my method for deconstructing the mystical gaze. Because I am arguing for a new theory in spectatorship, I will also be developing my own method. My argument is that codified in the act of cinematic spectatorship is a mystical consciousness within which the cinema apparatus⁷ provides the preconditions for people to exercise a mystical gaze. Like all other gazes I maintain that the mystical gaze does not exist in isolation from its object and is instituted or constructed within the cinema, and that meaning is constructed in the interaction between spectator and film.

I will demonstrate that the mystical gaze, in Peter Weir's work and further afield as well, is achieved through a careful construction of elements in the diegesis: in the mystical resonances in the text and especially in the intertexts; in the empathetic

⁷ Used here and throughout this thesis in the sense of the technical elements employed by directors: camera angles, framing of shots, lighting, sound design, music and editing, as well the positioning of the spectator to identify with the action upon the screen.

position of the spectator to take the hero's quest and make it his or her own; in the mobile and omniscient position the spectator assumes as he or she presides over the hero's search; and in the illumination the spectator achieves in relation to the narrative, as well as to the fluidity of boundaries between the seen and unseen, in this world and in the mystical domains. I will analyse key scenes in three of Peter Weir's films: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Gallipoli* and *Witness*. The selected scenes are ones which have been regularly commented on as being the most mystical. I will make the case that the mystical quality of these films goes beyond the creation of a distinctive atmosphere or an aesthetic construct, to demonstrate that Weir is one of many auteurs who knows how to exploit the mystical gaze of the spectator which is constructed as illuminatory, mobile, cross-cultural and secular.

Chapter One:

Literature Survey

Early Commentators

The first person to draw attention to the mystical elements of Peter Weir's work was Peter Weir. Commenting on his debut feature film in 1973, Weir said, "It's a story about the cars and the people who drive them, with lots of mystifying subtleties...if there's life on Mars looking down, who could blame them for thinking that the cars are the creatures who inhabited earth?"⁸ *The Cars that Ate Paris* demonstrated Weir's early interest in film noir: voyeurism and fetishism. *The Cars that Ate Paris* was received with acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival. Weir was delighted that international critics saw that, "It's allegorical. It can be seen as a straightforward adventure yarn, but it has underlying issues, such as the concept of the cars taking us over." He was especially pleased that the critics at Cannes recognised that *The Cars That Ate Paris*, "fitted into a mythological mould."⁹

The following year Weir was in pre-production for *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which was to be the film that established his international reputation and brought Australia to the attention of the international film community.¹⁰ I will return to this film in Chapter Five, for now it is important to note the connections Weir made between his early religious history, his fascination for the fate of a shipwreck and his attraction to Joan Lindsay's unsolved mystery involving two schoolgirls and a teacher from Appleyard College. "When I was a devout little boy...I was very anxious to get to Heaven, so I could ask God what really happened to the mystery ship, 'Mary Celeste'"¹¹ and Joan Lindsay's novel "possessed" him in a similar way.¹² Years later Ian Hunter observed that *Picnic at Hanging Rock*'s "otherworldliness" showed the spectator what was to be the constant in nearly all of Weir's films.¹³ Speaking more generally about his auteur interests Weir observed that the demarcation between reality and fantasy was not fixed. "My films are very much concerned with this - that

⁸ Hawley J, "\$125,000 for film about a town that lives by trapping cars", *The Australian*, 6th June 1973, p. 8.

⁹ Dean P, "Club put Weir in gear", *TV Week*, 23rd November 1974, p. 47.

¹⁰ McFarlane B, "Picnic at Hanging Rock", *The Oxford Companion to Australian Film*, B McFarlane, G Mayer, I Bertrand (eds.), Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 385.

¹¹ Armitage M, "For Weir the word is 'unsolved'", *The Adelaide Advertiser*, 1st August 1974, p. 34.

¹² Eisenhuth S, "Australian director Peter Weir... 'a new talent in world cinema' say the Cannes critics", *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 23rd June 1976, p. 5.

¹³ Hunter I, "Corsetway to heaven: looking back to Hanging Rock", *An Australian Film Reader*, A Moran, T O'Reagen (eds.), Sydney: Currency Press, 1985, p. 192.

what people think is fantasy is fact (and) that the facts are so often fantasies – it’s a matter of points of view.”¹⁴

Terry Jennings, writing about Weir’s 1977 film, *The Last Wave*, was the first person to publish material about the underlying experiences that formed the ground for Weir’s mystical interests. He posited that Weir became interested in “psychic forces...after an experience in a field of rubble in Tunisia”. He recorded Weir speaking of a mystical experience for the first time.

As I walked along, ‘I thought I’m going to find a Roman carving’. Then I thought, ‘that’s ridiculous’. As I was about to leave, I noticed a strange carving on the ground. I pulled it up, it resisted, and then came this beautiful child’s head...from that day in 1971 I’ve never been able to understand why I knew I was going to find something.¹⁵

Jennings showed how this influenced Weir to write *The Last Wave*, “Where a premonition is embarrassing or silly to some, Weir finds it significant that Aboriginals believe, ‘it’s a perfectly acceptable way of thinking.’”¹⁶ Weir would later discover that some people thought these experiences were not only embarrassing and silly, but the person who took them seriously enough to relate them must be unstable in some measure.

The mystical experience in Tunisia gave Weir an interest in various epistemologies and Weir did not just explore the positive allurement of the mysticism of the Dreamtime in *The Last Wave*. “Fear is necessary for a fully balanced spiritual life. We’ve eliminated it from our religions - taken hell out. We’ve stripped away all the spiritual mechanisms.” Weir saw the cinema as filling the void, and that his films “...fight to keep the magic, to keep the emotional aura around the film, because I think that’s what the stuff of dreams, that’s what the stuff of movie magic is.”¹⁷ *The Last Wave* facilitated a number of reactions. Tom Pankhurst argued that Peter Weir’s films had “a fixation with the unknown” that he enjoyed “exploring unexplained mysteries” and that he had “captivated French and European audiences with its mysticism and haunting beauty.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁵ Jennings T, “On the crest of the incredible”, *The Adelaide Advertiser*, 12th November 1977, p. 24.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 24.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 24.

¹⁸ Pankhurst T, “From *Picnic* to *The Last Wave*,” *Sun News Pictorial*, 30th November 1977, p. 62.

Philip Adams, the founding Chair of the Australian Film Institute, in reviewing Weir's work up to the end of 1977, declared that, "Peter Weir is...preoccupied with the arcane." *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, he argued, was where "a number of virgins are sacrificed to that mysterious monolith." *The Last Wave* focused on "rain falling from a clear blue sky heralds all sorts of preternatural precipitation, a metaphysical monsoon intent on puckering a white community who have, in some way, blasphemed against the Dreamtime." While he admitted that Weir was "preposterously talented", Adams initiated a style of commentary about Weir's work that registered surprise at his metaphysical interests. Weir had "a strange sensibility that puts him on the same wavelengths as the UFO and ouija board". Adams, with journalistic flair, was the first person to call Weir "Peter Weir".¹⁹

Not everyone thought Weir was weird, or even if he was, he was in a venerable tradition. French critics Bassan, Beltar, Poulle and Tournees argued that Weir's work was an excellent example of the cinema fantastique,²⁰ a clearinghouse genre in French film theory.²¹ With *The Cars That Ate Pairs*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*, Weir's work finds an easy home here. What drew this disparate genre together was its exploration of Otherness, that unseen and unknown mystical patterns were present and should be taken seriously. As Annette Blonski would later

¹⁹ Adams P, "The yabbies that ate Yarralumla", *The Age*, 21st December 1977, p. 8.

²⁰ Bassan R, "*Pique-Nique at Hanging Rock*", *Ecran*, 58, May 1977, pp. 51-52; Beltar H, "Rencontre avec Peter Weir autour de La dernière vague", *Image et Son*, 325, February 1978, pp. 30-31; Poulle F, "Retour au fantastique: la dernière vague", *Jeune Cinéma*, 145, September 1982, pp. 26-32; Tournees A, "Naissance d'un cinéma Australien", *Jeune Cinéma*, 109, March 1978, pp. 14-20.

²¹ This genre is related to Laplanche and Pontalis' appropriation of Freud's definition of fantasy within "A child is being beaten". Freud understood fantasies to be the experience through which major crises of identification and meaning are resolved. Laplanche and Pontalis defined these fantasies as the emergence of individuality, origin of sexuality, seduction, castration and the difference between the sexes. See J Laplanche and J Pontalis, "Fantasy and the origins of sexuality", *Formations of Fantasy*, V Burgin, J Donald, C Kaplin (eds.), London: Methuen, 1964, p. 19. In psychoanalytic schools all cinema is seen as participating in the restaging and resolution of these fantasies. The fantasy genre is an explicit exploration of one or more of these crises of which our conscious self may know very little. It can employ mythology and dreams as a point of access to the realms of our unconscious desires. The fantasy genre is "the mise-en-scène of desire. In this context film puts desire up on the screen. The film industry is the industry of desire. Hollywood is the dream factory. The film is not just film, it is also a nexus of text relations which function as fantasy structures announcing an unconscious desire." Hayward S, *Key concepts in cinema studies*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 94. Inherently unstable as a genre, the fantastique deals with a range of films that are dealt with separately in genre theory in other countries, including adventure, fairytales, the mythological quest, the supernatural, pornography, melodrama, films which explore the "death drive", science fiction and horror. These films, which are marked by their intertextuality, are grouped together in this category because of the narrative's regular presumption upon other worlds and realities and the atmosphere these films need to create within the mise-en-scène to be convincing and successful. See S Neale, *Genre*, London: BFI, 1980, p. 67; L Williams, "Film bodies: gender, genre, and excess", *Film Quarterly*, 44, 4, 1991, pp. 2-13; S Zizek, "Looking awry", *October*, 50, 1989, pp. 42ff.

observe, “French critics in *Ecran* and in *Image et Son* wholeheartedly endorsed this kind of reading, locating the fantastic in the supernatural and in the discourses surrounding sexual repression, the flight into another level of reality.”²²

Jillet

While Weir was celebrated in Europe, his Australian peers or their mentors did not share his style and predilections for the spiritual. Neil Jillet recognised that in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*, Weir was exploring a world of sensuality and death, filled with mystery and dread that challenged modern perceptions.²³ For the first time Weir responded that his films were applications of the theories of Carl Jung.

He [Jung] talks about archetypes, forces. He talks about what interests me, about the unconscious not the subconsciousness of Freud,²⁴ the unconscious being the greater part of a psychic make up... The conscious is the tip of the iceberg; the area we know is the least shown. The area we don't know, the area that makes us what we are, is so ancient, so extraordinary it suits a curious area like the cinema to interpret it. We are born into this world with a certain history, a mental make up. Just as we have a stump on the root of our spine where we had a tail, just as we walked on all fours, so the brain, the soul, contains elements about older selves - far more powerful in deciding what we do in our conscious life than we are aware. In those two films I was interested in touching some of those ancient roots.²⁵

²² Blonski A, *Propositions on the Films of Peter Weir and His Place in Contemporary Australian Cinema*, p. 32.

²³ Jillet N, “Images of Gallipoli: the day Peter Weir met the ANZAC ghosts”, *The Age*, 28th January 1978, p. 17.

²⁴ This is, of course, a mis-reading of Freud. “Freud and Jung’s views about the so-called unconscious differ, but not so much as many believe. Jung’s concept of the *archetype* borrows from ideas previously found in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, religion, and theology. While the term itself may be traced to St. Augustine (354-430 CE), Jung sees the archetype as part of a psychological substratum common to all mankind, the *collective unconscious*. Freud spoke of phylogenetic schemata and prototypes. He also identified the Oedipus complex, a primal father and likens the contents of the unconscious to ancient archaeological ruins. Late in his career he revised his libido theory to include the general impulses of Eros (life) and Thanatos (death). Both Freud and Jung are influenced by Kant’s philosophical idea of categories. Because fundamental unconscious contents are for Freud universal, his concept of the self is, in part, collective.” Clark M, “Carl Gustav Jung”, *Earthpages*, 1999, http://members.rogers.com/earthpages3/articles_jung.htm. Also see M Adams, *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, P Young-Eisendrath, T Dawson (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 101; R Lifton, E Olson (eds.), *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974, p. 90.

²⁵ Jillet N, “Images of Gallipoli: the day Peter Weir met the ANZAC ghosts”, p. 17.

More than Weir could have imagined at the time, this statement marks out his contribution to the cinema in the same way that Jung's appreciation of mysticism marked him out from Freud.²⁶ Commentators, however, either did not take Weir's claim seriously or they did not understand it. Maybe they thought this fascination was a passing flirtation, but Weir has remained vitally interested in how ancient ideas and the agrarian life fits into a technological world, how the power and creation of myths can assist modern living, and the reality of a world the spectator cannot see has a potency on the behaviour of the world he or she can see.²⁷

When Neil Jillet interviewed Weir he was in pre-production for *Gallipoli*. Weir recounts how in 1976, when he was on his way to do research on the ANZAC battle at the Somme in France, he was encouraged to visit Gallipoli. Another mystical experience there was so powerful it changed his mind and his life. For this study it is important enough to recount it in full.

It was a hot, sunny day and I threw off my clothes and swam at Anzac Cove, and then walked up Shrapnel Gully. There was nothing on my mind...and I began to feel I was being watched. There was no one around, so I shrugged the feeling off. But the further I went up the Gully, the more certain I was I was being watched or even being followed. I thought: "This is crazy, this is ridiculous" and then I spoke out loud. I said: "who's there?" I said it louder. I said: "Hello" or "Cooee", to bring the person out, whoever it was. Anyway, the feeling was claustrophobic. So I started saying things. I said: "My name is Peter Weir." I walked on a bit further and thought: "I'm going mad. It must be the sun." So I busied myself, taking a few photographs, drawing a map of the area for the locations back in Australia. Again I found myself saying "I'm Peter Weir. I'm 32 years old. I'm Australian". Then I said strongly, almost spontaneously, "I know who you are and I know

²⁶ See V Brome, *Jung: Man and Myth*, London: Paladin, 1978, p. 154. Also see, Jung C G, *The Collected Works of C G Jung*, Vol. 4, (2nd ed.), H Read, M Fordham & G Adler (eds.), R Hull (trans.), Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 118.

²⁷ There are also striking parallels between Weir and Jung's histories that warrant a brief summary. Weir and Jung grew up in conservative Christian households of upper middle-class means. Early on in life both became disenchanted with the traditional forms of Christianity they knew and moved away from its practices. Both of them, however, were fascinated by the mysterious power of evil and tried to create a personal theodicy. Both of them had an interest in archaeology and through it became interested in ancient mythology. Most importantly with Jung clearly influencing Weir in this regard, both believed we can gain access to a generally unknown world, which many others either do not believe exists or believe is unknowable. Both are therefore self-confessed "mystics", Weir admitting he is the "mystic of the everyday". See: D Shiach, *The Films Of Peter Weir*, passim; J Haltof, *Film and Dream: the Films of Peter Weir*, passim; Rayner J, *The Films of Peter Weir*, passim; V Brome, *Jung: Man and Myth*, pp. 51ff, 54ff, 120ff.

you're watching me." I said: "I don't know whether to do this film. I don't know whether it is right to do It.... You're strangers to me, fellow countrymen, but I've been thinking of making a film about you. I'll do the right thing by you. I won't let you down. I wouldn't harm what you did here, because I know what you did here. If you are with me, show me your secret things. Help me." The feeling went. A few minutes later I found a can opener, a knife and fork, a pair of shoes, some bullets and a bomb, even a bottle of Eno's fruit salts unbroken, which I brought home... So I just hurried away, and that night I burst into tears, in a little Turkish Inn. I just wept as I never had before, a sort of sad crying, just a kind of gland thing, a physical release with the sudden understanding that history was something that really happened, the those countrymen had really, actually, died, suddenly. So I swore a pact with the ghosts that I'd do the film.²⁸

It would be hard to find a more vivid description of a mystical encounter. As I shall outline in Chapter Three, one does not have to accept the veracity of Weir's subjective experience, to study it or to investigate its impact. It does, however, contain many of the links Weir and Jung share: uncovering ancient ideas and persons literally buried by time which in turn reveal latent ancient archetypes within the psyche; archaeological artefacts becoming links to them and a verification of the experience; and a hitherto unknown world which erupts into the conscious world. Weir's experiences also shares codes with others who report mystical encounters. In a later chapter I will describe these characteristics in detail, for now, however, an outline of the major points of intersection will suffice: an experience that emerges out of death and darkness; the power of it confirms the veracity of the experience and the reordering of decisions about what constitutes the physical and metaphysical world and determines other life choices; travelling to a particular place with an expectation of something happening there; the place being remote and historically important; remembering the experiences others have had there; on arrival stripping off either physically, as with Weir's nakedness, or metaphorically; a sense of presence there, of being watched over; the revelation of names; defusing the sense of threat; making a life choice as result of the experience; vows made to the presence; items found at the site were invested with meaning and stand as signs confirming the experience and triggering the memory of it; and tears later released an emotional response to the encounter. By contrast with other mystics the only thing missing from Weir's experience is that there is no reference to a higher being, a god or any religion, though

²⁸ Jillett N, "Images of Gallipoli: the day Peter Weir met the ANZAC ghosts", p. 17.

the presumption that there is life after death and that one can encounter the presence of the dead is a vital component of nearly every major belief system in the world. It is any wonder Jillet concludes his interview by stating that Weir had “a strong streak of the mystic or something roughly equivalent.”²⁹

Who knows what happened to Weir at Anzac Cove? Who knows what were the personal or social causes that led up to it? It may be of some interest, but limited consequence, to argue about the reality, nature or causes of these mystical phenomena for as I will show Daniel Madigan argues that mysticism is essentially an experience of oneself, of a community that accepts and understands these experiences, and of belief.³⁰ It remains a fact that this experience changed Weir’s professional life, and maybe his personal life as well. As a result of this experience he chose against making his World War I film about the Australian soldiers at the Somme, but instead opted for a story about the Gallipoli campaign.³¹ Weir tells Jillet that the Gallipoli experience was not the first mystical encounter he had had, Tunisia was and that it led to similar professional outcome. “ ‘I’m no psychic ... I believe in psychic forces on far more pragmatic level. I’ve come to realise through films that I can invoke on a set great power. I can ... draw something out of them (from the others involved in the production), something which together with my force will create something else.’ ”³²

Jillet was the first commentator to take Weir’s experiences seriously and he hazards some conclusions about their causes.

He [Weir] believes, non-specifically, in God. He respects Christianity because ‘it’s kept alive some of our Dreamtime for 2000 years.’ He is grateful to the aboriginal actors of *The Last Wave* for having made him feel that his ‘dreaming’ - or whatever his odd experiences and sensations are - should be considered ordinary. ‘They stopped me feeling unusual. Stopped me feeling Peter Weir.’ ... But he does worry that his autobiographical recital might seem like an attempt to build himself up as a high priest of the Cinema, an occult figure... He does not like to be called a filmmaker with vision. His films always start off as simple stories. The haunting quality, the Weir trademark - the vision - as others have called it, is something he can identify only in retrospect.³³

²⁹ Ibid. p. 17.

³⁰ Madigan D, “When experience leads to different beliefs”, *The Way Supplement*, 92, 1998, p. 73.

³¹ Jillet N, “Images of Gallipoli: the day Peter Weir met the ANZAC ghosts”, p. 17.

³² Ibid. p. 17.

³³ Ibid. p. 17.

Aboriginal Dreamtime fits perfectly within Weir's need for a mysticism which had its roots in ancient ideas and myths and yet affects the thoughts, aspirations and destinies of devotees today. Just as Jung developed the concept of the archetypal unconscious which was real for individuals and societies, so too Weir found variations of these ideas present in Aboriginal culture. Weir was reassured by this living mystical tradition which does not accept the Western split between time and space, spirit and matter, physical and the metaphysical.

Higgins, Arnold and Dowling

Later in 1978 more questions were being asked about the worldly experiences that inform Weir's Otherworldly sensibilities. Peter Higgins challenged Weir to examine why he would be described as "Australia's master of the ominous" and that his films have a "fascination with what lies hidden." Weir saw the roots of his Otherworldliness in his upbringing and a desire to be a contemporary evangeliser for the recovery of the spiritual. "With the decline of Christianity I feel the need to bring back some kind of spirituality, in the very widest sense of that word. The Protestant church of my childhood was stripped of all mystery and it left a gap. Adults are afraid of all the wrong things. Children are so much more responsive than we are and know what is truly frightening."³⁴ Having posed these questions, Higgins, at least in the written form, did not explore these issues at greater depth, or the sense of spiritual dread that marks Weir's mysticism. Weir's comments, however, underlined a major trend in Western societies, that while adherence to a particular religious collective or denomination were in decline, the public's interest in spirituality had risen exponentially. "Religion conjures up words like organisation, institution, structure, and dogma. In contrast spirituality evokes phrases such as believing in God, walking the walk, surrendering, being consistent and actively searching."³⁵ Weir's work charts a shift from one to the next.

While *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was well received in the United Kingdom and Europe, it had less success in the United States of America. *The Last Wave* brought Weir more attention in the USA. Gary Arnold, one of that country's most respected

³⁴ Higgins J, "Australia's master of mystery and imagination", *The Times*, 10th August 1978, p. 5.

³⁵ R Wuthnow, *All In Sync: How Music and Art are Revitalizing American Religion*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p. 33.

critics, however, wrote that *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was “at once a more haunting and satisfying exercise in ominous mystification.” *The Last Wave*, he judged, was “a fascinating psychological thriller” with “apocalyptic undercurrents”. Arnold posited that the Australian landscape helps Weir create this atmosphere because of its recent relationships with ancient people, primitive civilisations and the more recent Western colonisation. Arnold was one of the first critics to identify that Weir was drawn to stories where the protagonists were placed in foreign worlds, even when they never leave the shores of Australia, suggesting that something more sinister was below the surface of the idyllic pictures. Weir agreed:

Everything is built on the real and the ordinary, but there’s chaos underneath. We try to protect ourselves from the mystery, but it’s all around, just waiting to reveal itself and terrorise us. The ironic thing about movies is that you can use this highly sophisticated technology to restore the sense of mystery that an industrialized, urban society tends to obscure. It’s a mechanical process with an uncanny power of emotional suggestion. It’s fascinating to try to orchestrate images in a way that would affect people emotionally.³⁶

One of Arnold’s colleagues, Tom Dowling, gave *Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s mysterious ending a more traditional reading and in the process highlighted his understanding of Weir’s mysticism.

Everything on the surface of the film is so delicate, natural and perfect that in the end the disappearance seems an act of Divine Providence. God staging an incident of disorder as naturally as he usually contrives incidents of order - and in both instances to please his own scheme of things rather than ours ... What distinguishes Weir’s films is the even handed spirit of serenity he brings to natural order and disorder alike.³⁷

Dowling mentioned that *The Last Wave* won the Grand Prize of the Golden Ibex at the Tehran International Film Festival where the judges commended it “for the bold originality of its depiction of cultural confrontation through which modern man is increasingly detached from his collective unconscious and the virtuosity of its visuals that are essential to evoking an alien super-reality.”³⁸ Years later, this film was to gain

³⁶ Arnold G, “Peter Weir catching *The Last Wave* from down under”, *The Washington Post*, 4th February 1979, p. H8. This important point about the way the apparatus of the cinema enables Weir to create a sense of mystery and wonder will be more fully discussed in the next chapter.

³⁷ Dowling T, “Peter Weir: his films are like mysteries that don’t have a solution”, *The Washington Star*, 9th February 1979, p. E10.

³⁸ Ibid. p. E10.

for Weir a towering comparison with a director famous for his cinematic mysticism. *The Last Wave* which “is even more evocative and mesmerising than *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, turns into a fable about a possible apocalypse. Its use of picture making to tell the story and its disarming examination of the nature of existence makes one think of the young Ingmar Bergman.”³⁹

Once *The Last Wave* was taken up as an art house film in the United States, more attention was paid to the earlier *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, even to the defence of its mysterious ending. “There is something else Weir wants to say - that in society, a sense of order is a very fragile thing. If people do not allow for the inexplicable, then they will collapse of shock when chance makes its inevitable appearance.”⁴⁰ It was, however, also in the USA that Weir’s mystical interests were criticised. David Ansen said of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* that as good as Weir’s “languid, sun-dappled images” might be, “there’s something hollow at the core, an unknown sense of importance, a reliance on mere word to suggest mystical depth.”⁴¹ Ansen did not expound on the elements that would make for hard-core cinematic mysticism.

McFarlane, Thomas and Ryan

By 1980 Peter Weir was firmly established as one of Australia’s most successful “new wave” national auteurs. Film academic Brian McFarlane was commissioned by the Australian Film Institute to write a long article reviewing his work. The need to wrestle with the metaphysical was apparent from the start.⁴² “In Weir’s case... he goes beyond the possibilities of human nature to contemplation of the irrational and of the supernatural.”⁴³ He argued that within *Picnic at Hanging Rock* “there is the question of the film’s metaphysical preoccupation which it wears on its exquisite sleeve, rather than locating them more centrally.”⁴⁴ In *The Last Wave* he observed that the film was about “the breakdown of man’s resources in areas where rationality cannot serve him.”⁴⁵ McFarlane concluded, “One of Weir’s strengths is his capacity for accepting mysteries but, if he does not try to explain

³⁹ Fuller R, “When nationality is secondary” *The Canberra Times*, 6th January 1992, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Schickel R, “Vanishing point”, *Time*, 113, 26th April 1979, p. 66.

⁴¹ Ansen D, “Rocky horror”, *Newsweek*, 93, 5th March 1979, p. 105.

⁴² McFarlane B, *The Films of Peter Weir*, AFI: Research & Information, 1980, p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 16.

them, or to rob them of their essential strangeness, he certainly does seem interested in illuminating them”. McFarlane was unable to categorise Weir’s work either in genre theory or in terms of the nationalistic cinema of the time. “Weir relies too much on mystic and cryptic frissons and on bold statements about beliefs and laws. As an auteur he is as recognizable as by his faults as by his strengths.”⁴⁶

Catherine Peake drew Weir out on the importance of the mystical experience he had at Gallipoli. Weir admitted that some people were sceptical about had happened to him. Weir said, “it precipitated an avalanche of letters from cranks and the odd smirking remark along the lines of, ‘There goes Peter Weir on one of his strange trips again.’ ” Weir decided not to speak about the experience again, because “those spiritual matters (are) regrettably taboo in this country... It’s not a university course... I’ve spoken to a couple of old ladies who felt it too. I went to the battlefield out of curiosity and it was there.” The “it” was the Anzac myth. Weir concluded, it is “a very sacred myth at that.”⁴⁷ The idea that *Gallipoli* would be a positive presentation of Australia’s national mythology was stated in 1977.⁴⁸ For Higgins this predisposition to the *Gallipoli* mythology was consistent with Weir’s work, for “it doesn’t seem such a strange direction for this intense, introspective film maker whose talented interests have already taken him to the edge of the incredible.”⁴⁹

Not all critics agreed that *Gallipoli* was a natural successor to Weir’s previous films such as *The Cars That Ate Paris*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Plumber* and *The Last Wave*.

On the surface, *Gallipoli* is a radical departure from the mystical and symbolic scenes of *The Last Wave* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, both of which explored the aboriginal Australian subconscious. Weir maintains, however, that *Gallipoli* is concerned with similar interests and he articulates clearer reasons for why this story ‘possesses’ him, ‘I was the last generation where the battle was taught as sacred, a celebration of a defeat. Today kids think of the whole episode as a joke.’⁵⁰

Weir was concerned with reinventing the mythology. To achieve this goal his mise-en-scène complimented his political objective.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 18.

⁴⁷ Peake C, “Peter Weir prepares to launch his \$2.5 million view of Gallipoli”, *The National Times*, 2nd August 1981, p. 10.

⁴⁸ Jennings T, “On the crest of the incredible”, *The Adelaide Advertiser*, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 24.

⁵⁰ Thomas K, “*Gallipoli*: A Dream Fulfilled”, *LA Times*, 23rd August 1981, p. 33.

Weir's films have always revealed a preoccupation with the supernatural and the mystical, and there are moments of Otherworldliness in *Gallipoli* - those vast stretches of desert, the shimmering beauty of the silent crossing of the Dardanelles at night, an idyllic undersea swim of some young soldiers shattered by a gunshot. How Weir loves his people in *Gallipoli*, and how deeply we have come to care for them ourselves.⁵¹

Thomas implicitly argued that Weir was driven by a mythology that possessed him to take a political stand, in this case to demonstrate the heroism of the soldiers of Gallipoli to another generation, to show the love and beauty of humanity even when it they were pushed beyond their limits. As demonstrably correct as Thomas' judgements were, he only half grasped the depth of Weir's intentions. The idea of being "possessed" is a word that of itself conjures up metaphysical preoccupations. It is only in recent years that it has come to be almost exclusively understood, in the popular imagination, in terms of demonic possession, but even in this context the Otherworldly dimensions behind it are apparent. Many mystics report their practises and desires in terms of being possessed by an idea, being, force, spirit or energy or of them possessing it. The obsession in being possessed, for good or ill, has traditionally been understood in terms of a breakdown in mental health or a spiritual quest, of one type or another. Thomas knew the quality of Weir's possession in *Gallipoli* enshrines the latter ideals where a national myth of heroic sacrifice is passed onto the next, often indifferent, generation. Thomas made this clear in that he saw Weir's film as a loving work. Most mystics, especially those who turn toward art as an expression of their encounter, report similar expressions. Furthermore, Thomas observed how the spectator comes to love the very people Weir loves, which also finds an echo of the leadership quality within mystical encounters as well. Weir wanted to restore the Gallipoli legend to the status of a "sacred" story. This led Thomas to use religiously-laden language in an attempt to capture the essence of Weir's work in *Gallipoli*. And while Thomas named a preoccupation with the supernatural and the mystical as the emerging traits which bind together Weir's filmography, he was unable to link these intentions beyond Weir and to see in them continuity between Weir and an ancient passion to experience the mystical.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 32.

By the end of 1981 Weir reacted to reviews of his films that he was inclined to the offbeat. "I suppose it depends on the way you see things. Maybe bizarre or strange, but I prefer words like enigmatic, curious or fascinating."⁵² Some critics found nothing enigmatic in *Gallipoli* and even less to fascinate them. Weir's success at recreating the Anzac mythology was at the expense of the English Generals. Understandably, British critics were offended by its portrayal of the British-led campaign and Britain's complicity in the slaughter.⁵³ Derek Malcolm led the charge, "Weir's *Gallipoli* is as much a celebration as a requiem and history makes that difficult to countenance in 1981. ...If you do not like fictional films where cliché is never far beneath the surface, then it might be better to keep away".⁵⁴ This film started a lively debate in Australia about historicity and film. Indeed it facilitated the founding of a conference dedicated to the portrayal of history in film. Weir and Williamson were criticised by some leading historians for not presenting a fuller picture of the historical events, but, instead, going for the version of events the Australian public had come to believe was true.⁵⁵

Maslin, Smith and Ventura

After the commercial and critical success of *Gallipoli* in the USA, Weir's 1978 telemovie, *The Plumber* gained a cinema release there in 1981. Janet Maslin, of The New York Times,⁵⁶ saw this film as further evidence of Weir's interests in meta-narratives. "Weir's point here, as it is in other films, is the line dividing civilised behavior from more primitive kinds is so thin as to be non-existent... 'It's what you can't see that counts in plumbing.'"⁵⁷ Maslin recognised that the "other side" was what united Weir's films and that in *The Plumber* his intentions were more explicit. Maslin knew that Weir's appreciation of the hidden, unknown, but real world that

⁵² McFarlane B and Ryan T, "Interview with Peter Weir", Cinema Papers, 34, September/October 1981, p. 325.

⁵³ Malcolm D, "More than a decade of living dangerously", The Australian, 17th March 1982, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 22.

⁵⁵ See B Gammage, "Working on *Gallipoli*", 1st Australian History and Film Conference Papers, A Hutton (ed.), North Ryde, NSW: Australian Film and Television School, 1982; D Kent, "Bean's ANZAC and the making of the ANZAC legend", War: Australia's creative response, A Rutherford, J Wieland (eds.), Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1997; R Lucas, "The gendered battlefield: sex and death in *Gallipoli*", Screening the Past, J Benson (ed.), Melbourne: The Sixth Australian History and Film Conference, 1993.

⁵⁶ Maslin mistakenly thinks *The Plumber* was made in 1968. See J Maslin, "Peter Weir's other side", The New York Times, as quoted in The Herald, 9th December 1981, p. 23.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 23.

surrounds it was both essential and powerful in our daily lives. It's like plumbing, the work occurs under the surface. Weir's plumber in this film externalises all the pipes normally hidden from view as he dismantles the bathroom of a small Sydney apartment. Weir's work here can easily be read as a commentary on the Jungian process of individuation whereby a person brings to consciousness the unconscious connections upon which she relies. Maslin identified that as in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* these forces were filled with attraction and dread. Weir's deconstruction of the working of the unconscious holds the same tension.

By 1982 Weir had completed *The Year of Living Dangerously*, his first film wholly shot outside Australia. Set in Jakarta during the overthrow of Sukarno in 1965, Weir shot the film in the more politically friendly Philippines. One commentator saw spirituality as the link between this film and its antecedents. Weir confirmed his judgement.

Weir cannot talk directly about the inspiration the Australian landscape gives him, although he admits it must influence his work on a psychic level. 'Aborigines have moral and spiritual riches which we lack. I felt the same when filming in the East'. He feels strongly about what he saw as a disintegration of values in the West. 'It is now up to the individual to construct his own moral and spiritual framework,' he said. 'The analytical silent thinking so prevalent in the West, is not enough on its own.'⁵⁸

The Year of Living Dangerously was the film that enabled Weir to give full reign to his mystical and metaphysical interests and to put them into dialogue with the riches of an Eastern mystical tradition, which was much admired by Carl Jung as well.⁵⁹

The result was, as Michael Ventura argued, "a thrilling breakthrough picture – for no other film that I can think of has looked on a political event as a spiritual crisis, nor spiritual growth as a political act, while letting the word 'spiritual' carry the full weight of paradox we feel within."⁶⁰ The dwarf photographer Billy Kwan⁶¹ was the character who bridged the cultures, mystical traditions and political necessities in the narrative, "... straight out of fairytales and myths: a dwarf, wise enough to have instinctive knowledge about whatever he sees, holy enough to find delight even in the

⁵⁸ Smith M, "Operatic link in Weir's latest film", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24th December 1982, Arts, p. 4.

⁵⁹ See V Brome, *Jung: Man and Myth*, pp. 184ff, 225ff.

⁶⁰ Ventura M, "Peter Weir's State Of Emergency", *LA Weekly*, 4th March 1983, p. 5.

⁶¹ Played by Linda Hunt who won an Oscar for the performance.

misery that tests his soul.” Billy became Guy Hamilton’s (Mel Gibson) eyes, “literally his guide into the underworld, where, as the old myths have it, one must dare to go before one becomes whole.”⁶² Ventura argued that as Billy initiated Guy into understanding the politics of Java through the Wayang kulit, the sacred shadow play, so Weir revealed his purpose as a director.

Rarely has a director so clearly stated his aesthetic: ‘The shadows are souls and the screen is heaven’, and ‘You must watch their shadows, not the puppets.’ In the West we want answers to everything, but in the Way-Yang no such final answers exist.’ Instead, it teaches us that ‘the forces of light and dark’ are forever in furious ‘balance.’...[Weir states], ‘I don’t care about the pictures, I care about the content’...Billy Kwan is a holy man. He seeks ‘the unmet friend.’ He believes that you must ‘add your light to the sum of light’. ‘The unseen is all around us’, he says, and then firmly suggests, to the likes of you and I, that ‘we must give love to whomever God has placed in our path.’ Billy actually lives these things and, as Jesus long ago proved, there is nothing more dangerous. Billy also makes mistakes, and there is absolutely nothing more dangerous than making mistakes on this level of being.⁶³

There are self-evident parallels here between the Wayang kulit, Plato’s cave, traditions of illumination and the cinema. All of these attend to a projected image in a darkened space, revealing a narrative about another world in another place which has a direct bearing on the here and now. All deal with mythology to varying degrees and require interpretation for a fuller understanding of the experience. What was less evident in Ventura’s commentary was how mystical traditions and experiences have been described in similar ways. In the forthcoming chapters I will outline these commentaries. Given Weir’s interests in Jungian psychology and Eastern spiritual traditions, he would not have been unmindful of these connections and purposely exploits them in his *mise-en-scène*.

Ventura was the first to notice how people disappear in Weir’s films. Not only in the physical way the girls disappear on *Hanging Rock*, or how David disappears into the *Dreamtime* stories or Sydney disappears under a tidal wave, but also how Archy disappears in battle and the reality of Frank’s war experience disappears in the

⁶² Ventura M, “Peter Weir’s State Of Emergency”, p. 5.

⁶³ Ibid. pp. 7, 15.

pages of Australian history.⁶⁴ “In *The Year of Living Dangerously*, a journalist, a cameraman and an intelligence officer, disappear into the Third World. It is like disappearing into all Peter Weir’s earlier movies at the same time.”⁶⁵ Ventura’s conclusions about Weir’s intentions in *The Year of Living Dangerously* were that he was a mystic of the aesthete. “Art is preparation. Such has been the thrust of mystic art for centuries, and of Brechtian art this century. Weir is a meeting of the two.”⁶⁶ And the metaphor of this unity was illumination, how Weir wanted his heroes to be enlightened so as to achieve a higher destiny. “This is what is meant by living dangerously. Until that state is approached we are merely living in grave danger.”⁶⁷

Blonski

At beginning of her academic career, film scholar Annette Blonski presented an honours thesis on Peter Weir in 1983. She responded to Australian critics who argued that Weir was a socially subversive filmmaker and finds little evidence in his narratives or style to confirm that Weir’s work was ideological, that it “unsettles the viewer through disruption of middle-class certainties.”⁶⁸ Blonski convincingly demonstrated that Weir’s films do nothing to disrupt Australian perceptions of women, aborigines, class or identity. She argued that Weir’s films present “woman as Other and woman as absent”, that Aborigines are portrayed as “immutably Other” and “primitive”. Far from unsettling middle class values, she argued that Weir’s films reinforce Australia’s white history and identity “...as uniquely gifted, imbued with powerful virtues in response to overcoming their fear of that land.”⁶⁹ Blonski argued that Weir’s work was consistent with Todorov’s categories of the fantastic and Weir was a master of the fantastique genre.⁷⁰ She argued that *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The*

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp. 35ff. Of special note is the link Ventura makes between Weir’s Calvinistic background and *Gallipoli*. “In *Gallipoli* a boy disappears into history - into, specifically Western history, which is experienced as the distant (military) command determining a mass event (a slaughter) in which there are victims but no participants, because to anticipate is to invoke choices and no one in this story acts as if there is any thing such as a choice. The boy, in other words, disappears into Calvinism, which is a slightly more precise word for the assumptions with which the West defines its mission and its history.”

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 39.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 40.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 40.

⁶⁸ B McFarlane quoted in Blonski A, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 76.

⁷⁰ Ibid. pp. 31ff. Blonski responds to the genre hypothesis of Weir’s film in the work of B McFarlane, T Ryan and S Rohdie. McFarlane argued that, “Weir’s films are aggressively confident, boldly addressing and manipulating the codes of a genre, combining a sharp perception of Australian mores

Last Wave and *The Plumber* showed that Weir was not bound by period dramas, but that he was more interested in exploring the boundaries of the fantasy genre. Even the historical drama, *Gallipoli* was heralded as “From a place you never heard of ... A story you will never forget.” “The appeal then is to a mixture of pleasure and pain, mystery and a promise of being transported into something real (a place you never heard of but which does exist) and in the realm of fantasy (a story which you won’t forget) which is nonetheless part of the real.”⁷¹ *The Year of Living Dangerously* was billed as a journey to an exotic country for a story of mythic proportions.⁷² Blonski’s larger argument was that Australian critics were primarily interested in establishing a generation of auteurs rather than appreciating Weir, in this instance, as an exemplar of the fantasy genre codes.⁷³

Weir is increasingly working with the codes and systems that are common to cinema throughout the world and his iconography is similar to that of that of the dominant cinema, the classic narrative tradition that developed in Hollywood; any iconography that might be uniquely Australian is thus buried within a system which transforms it so that is merely as a surface.⁷⁴

Although using the term iconography in a different context, Blonski’s application of it to Weir was more important than she may have realised.

Cole-Adams, Thompson and Colbert

Toward the end of 1983 Weir was trying to sell an adaptation of Paul Theroux’s *The Mosquito Coast*. It continued the theme of a journey to a mythic country with a suitably bleak ending, but this time the politics were ecological and the protagonist takes his family along for the ride. Peter Cole-Adams interviewed Weir about the screenplay and concluded, “While it is set in another continent, this is the

with sophisticated handling of Hollywood codes of the horror movie” (p. 30). Ryan and other commentators flirted with the idea of Weir as an exemplar of the fantasy genre, but Blonski argues that they are not clear enough about the elements of the genre to reconcile his work to it. “Ryan fundamentally confuses the horror and the fantastic genre” (p. 27). Most critics, like Rohdie, place Weir’s films in the historical drama genre of the Australian national cinematic revival (pp. 33, 45).

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 12.

⁷² Ibid. p. 15.

⁷³ Ibid. p. 6.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 74.

world of Joseph Conrad, the heart of darkness is close at hand. Weir, with his genius for creating atmosphere, seems the perfect man for the job.”⁷⁵

Connecting to other worlds featured strongly in a rare video interview Weir agreed to for the series Filmmakers On their Craft by the Australian Film, Television and Radio School.⁷⁶ Peter Thompson asked Weir to reflect on his role as an artist. Weir immediately referred to the documentary film he made in 1975, *Heart and Hand: Peter Rushford, Potter*. Rushford’s work was greatly influenced by the Japanese tradition of pottery. Weir quoted a Japanese master-potter as saying,

‘Every now and again the gods will invest the hands of a craftsman with art. It’s not his decision. He must just ignore it and not look at that. It’s kind of vanity and will cause him to do bad work.’ I thought this it was one of those fabulous instant things, and freed me from the tyranny of the artist/creator of the West. The artist as god, which really has arisen with the decline of religion in the West, which we’ve got, until today the media feeding it where we’ve got a screaming pitch, where the artist is as important, if not more important, than the work. This clearly I don’t want. So I’ve made up my idea of craft in the way a Japanese man or woman makes a pot and leaves the rest of it alone.’⁷⁷

In a revealing commentary on his role as a director, Weir rejected the constructs around auteur theory, implying that the cult of celebrity had filled a spiritual void. He had no trouble, however, accepting that “the gods” sometimes touch craftspeople and turn their craft into art. Weir contends that the Oriental artist was presented as having a lack of ego and waiting to be anointed. He contrasted this stance with the so-called ego-driven artist working in the spiritual desert in the West. This romantic vision of oriental artists is similar to the presentation of the belief systems of indigenous Australians he portrayed, and was heavily criticised for, in *The Last Wave*.

While he made his case for art and divine intervention, Weir argued against films being a substitute for religious activity. He particularly targeted the blockbuster films. “Movies are like a religion for some people... not for me... People saw *Raiders* or *ET* and wept, had a religious experience or something. Most odd...”⁷⁸ It is difficult to deduce whether Weir was taking issue with the spectator’s reported experience or

⁷⁵ Cole-Adams P, “Weir goes Hollywood”, *The Age*, 22nd September 1983, p. 11.

⁷⁶ Thompson P, “Peter Weir”, Filmmakers On Their Craft, Sydney: AFTRS and Los Angeles: First Light Video, 1983.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the stimulus that led to the report. This confusion is compounded later in the interview when he observed that what attracted him to a particular script was the way it “catches me, (because) what’s concerning me, as with many others, is the complete lack of a spiritual life in the West.” Weir goes on to lament the loss or “sense of not being complete” he felt in regard to the rise in the West of analytical thinking over the more intuitive human process. “I still feel the loss... we analyse art and remove the emotional response, the magic, the last remnant of childhood.” He hoped that his films helped to surface “a lot of unconscious things... (like)... the lack of a spiritual life” He wanted his work to “embrace paradox and ambiguity”, “mysteries with no solutions” and enable the spectator to be aware they are “part of a great whole”.

Weir found out in 1984 that the spiritual life and the heart of darkness was not an easy sell in Hollywood. While he was waiting to get financial backing for *The Mosquito Coast*, he looked at a number of projects that were on offer and were ready to proceed. One was a romantic thriller, *Witness*. Years later he observed that in *Witness* he was trying to escape the “mystical tag” often given to his work. The Amish, he said, were a “mystery to the Americans so I was taking them into uncharted waters.”⁷⁹ In Hollywood, Weir was offered a standard Hollywood genre film upon which he imprinted his stamp of Otherworldly interests, obsession, and a recrafting of the material so that it explored the more mystical aspects of the narrative.

To be honest I took the assignment because I decided it was a good idea not just to make films that obsessed me... *Witness* was halfway good, it seemed to me. What it needed was the right approach... So the first thing we did was build up the Amish aspect of the story. It was such a great chance to show a collision between the two worlds - a 20th Century man for whom violence was a fact of life, forced to take refuge and in a pacifist society, unchanged since the 18th-century.⁸⁰

Weir reworked *Witness* with screenwriters, Earl Wallace and William Kelley.⁸¹ For Weir the thriller genre piece only had interest if it could juxtapose the deceit of New York’s corrupt forces who were pursuing an honest cop inside the “strange but true world of the Amish people, God-fearing farmers who reject virtually

⁷⁹ Colbert M, “Weir: explorer of film horizons”, *The Courier Mail*, 21st August 1995, p. 10.

⁸⁰ Mann R, “Weir’s lens lingers on the intimacy of a glance”, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3rd February 1985, Datebook, p. 32.

⁸¹ Dell’Oso A-M, “Peter Weir finds a new direction in Pennsylvania”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20th April 1985, p. GW12.

the entire 20th century including telephones, cars, television - and the movies.”⁸² Weir was more at home with the nature mysticism of the Amish “finding much more to comment on about their social and religious relationships and their almost fierce love of the land and the need to force it by hard work to yield its fruits.”⁸³ Weir’s interests were most clearly displayed in the scene where in a day the entire Amish community built a barn for a newly married couple. Weir starkly drew out the individuality of the world John Book left and the communalism which marked the one he had entered, a world Salamon described as a “mystical reverie”⁸⁴ Paramount was happy with the fusion of Weir and the thriller genre styles⁸⁵, where the spectator was caught between looking at Jerusalem and Babylon.⁸⁶ David Denby of New York Magazine called *Witness* “a meditation on violence” and Anne Maree Dell’Oso saw that it continued in Weir’s style. “Those who have always enjoyed Peter Weir’s eerie style - to be mysterious without being mystifying - can be reassured that Hollywood and *Witness* did not lose him; his magic simply works through more solid objects, like mist seeping from under a closed door.”⁸⁷ *Witness* was Peter Weir’s most universally and critically acclaimed and commercially successful film to date. I will return to it in detail in Chapter Seven.

Weir’s success brought more scrutiny of his work and his motivations.

American Film (AF)⁸⁸ interviewed him:

AF: “Something spiritual and mystical always seems to be in your films. Is that intentional?”

PW: No, I would never start with that in mind. I start to tell a story. All the tools at one’s command, including mood, atmosphere, and design, are just there to serve the story and the idea within each scene. But given one individual making a number of films, there are bound to be parts of yourself, unconscious drives that come into the films. I find it very unnerving, but I do think that you begin to see something of yourself in your work and it can make you uncomfortable. And self-conscious...

AF: If you had to define what you’re trying to do in your work, what would you say?

⁸² McDonald D, “Fresh but flawed thriller”, The Canberra Times, 1st June 1985, p. 16.

⁸³ Ibid. p. 16.

⁸⁴ Salamon J, “An Australian in Amish country”, Wall Street Journal, 7th February 1985, p. 32.

⁸⁵ Bygrave M, “Hollywood smiles on our directors”, The Age, 6th April 1985, p. 8.

⁸⁶ Anderson D, “Weir’s genre piece with a difference”, The National Times, 10th May 1985, p. 30.

⁸⁷ Dell’Oso A-M, “Peter Weir finds a new direction in Pennsylvania”, p. GW2.

⁸⁸ The name of the interviewer for American Film is not given.

PW: I think a sense of wonder is really what I attempt to create.”⁸⁹

Here Weir described the two most important ingredients in cross-cultural mysticism: story or narrative; and a sense of wonder that there was something beyond ourselves in this world and that we can behold it, we can experience it.

Winer

By the end of 1986 *The Mosquito Coast*, the film Weir had been waiting to make, the one which had obsessed him, had become a box office and critical failure for it seemed to be a “film in which Weir forgot about his audience.”⁹⁰ Still, Weir’s mystical interests are on display in the narrative of the film: the fear of a nuclear apocalypse; salvation lying in the rejecting the consumerist West; the romance of the ecological movement and the journey to more simple living; the Armageddon created when dictatorship takes over.

The commercial failure of *The Mosquito Coast* and the success of *Witness*, meant Weir’s body of work came under scholarly analysis. In a monograph in honour of Stanley Cavell’s contribution to the study of psychoanalysis and the cinema, psychoanalyst Robert Winer reviewed Weir’s filmography as a “developmental sequence of modes of participation and encounter that correspond to critical tasks from early adolescence to mature adulthood.”⁹¹ Winer neatly summarised this progression from “witnessing to bearing witness”, from being open to new experiences to enunciating wisdom acquired from life’s experience. Drawing on depth psychology, especially in reference to Erik Erikson’s developmental stages, Winer explored Weir’s work to argue that his films help the spectator restage critical stages of psychological growth: *Picnic at Hanging Rock* can be understood as a film about the early adolescence search for structures of meaning, including a break with past answers and a search for new and personal ones; *The Last Wave* as a late adolescent exploration of the “major arcana”, who am I? and what is the meaning of life?; *Gallipoli* was the transition into adulthood where a young person must interpret the

⁸⁹ “Dialogue on film: Peter Weir” *American Film*, 11, 5, March 1986, p. 13.

⁹⁰ Hawker P, “Deep water Weir”, *The Independent Monthly*, August 1989, p. 52.

⁹¹ Winer R., “Witnessing and bearing witness: the ontogeny of encounter in the films of Peter Weir”, *Images in Our Souls*, J Smith, W Kerrigan (eds.), Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 82.

group's demands with personal aspirations, forming a greater sense of adult bonding with the group; *The Year of Living Dangerously* attends to the early adulthood issue of "what must I be?" the movement to the contribution of an autonomous, and yet participative, individual; and in *Witness* the cycle was complete in mature adulthood where one should be open to alternative ways of living which enrich one's own personal history.⁹² In each of the films Winer tells the reader that Weir was showing the "uncanny in the everyday", "mystery within mystery", "the mystical" "mythology", "the integration of the linear and non linear", "symbolization", "the apocalyptic".⁹³ Winer recognised that Weir's films are as interested in Other worlds as much as they were interested in this world.

Winer's work was convincing when it offered a sympathetic analysis of the commentary Weir's films provide for developmental psychology. "...the apparitions he creates touch us because they materialize the spectral concerns that haunt us. The ghosts we witness bear witness to the mysteries that confound our lives."⁹⁴ It was less convincing when it ventured into seeing a parallel between Weir's films and his professional developmental processes. Winer argued that by *Witness* Weir had come to accept "collaboration in the shaping of the film and opening up of his established style."⁹⁵ One only had to look at the recurring names in the credits of Peter Weir's films before and after *Witness* to see the debt he owed to his talented colleagues.

Haltof

At Flinders University⁹⁶ in December, 1988 Jozef Haltof⁹⁷ submitted a thesis on "Film and Dream: the Films of Peter Weir". Haltof's approach to Weir was that his films

... do not appear to be his or the audience's dreams, but they were structured like dreams. The director does not translate the language of dreams into cinematic images; his interests lie in

⁹² Ibid. pp. 86-101.

⁹³ Winer R, "Witnessing and bearing witness: the ontogeny of encounter in the films of Peter Weir", pp. 86-87, 90-91, 99-100 and 105.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 107.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 106.

⁹⁶ Flinders University is in Adelaide, South Australia.

⁹⁷ When Polish-born Haltof presented his thesis he used his full name, Josef Marek Haltof. Later, when he published articles and a book on Weir, he only used his second name Marek.

creating an oneiric mood. But the narrative and visual levels of Weir's films allow him to blur the distinction between the real and oneiric worlds. It can intensify the viewer's experience by resembling his/her own dreams.⁹⁸

Haltorf analyses *Michael*, *The Cars That Ate Paris*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Last Wave*, *Gallipoli*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Witness* and *The Mosquito Coast* to prove that Peter Weir's deliberate and distinctive style was "to place the greatest of importance on creating a dream-like aspect in his films."⁹⁹ Any survey of the general literature written about these films showed that Haltorf was interested in constructing a theoretical paradigm around the popular dream-like commentary on Weir's work. Haltorf, in a confident demonstration of the principle "trust the tale not the teller,"¹⁰⁰ quoted Weir minimising his argument,

Of course we all have dreams as part of our psychic make-up. They are simply unmeasured abilities we have, forms of communication, or ancient influences that we have come through the very genes that make us just what we are. It is a subject with no boundaries. But I've explored consciously enough to decide it's best to leave it alone and concentrate on craft.¹⁰¹

It is not unheard of for a subject to resist or reject a theory about his or her work, particularly someone like Peter Weir who is suspicious of academic commentaries on his films.¹⁰² Haltorf, however, under the dominance of the "author is dead" methodology and married to his dream-like meta-structure had difficulty fitting some of Weir's films into his oneiric theory. He conceded:

... (films) from *Michael* to *The Plumber* are mainly concerned with dream; Weir is obsessed by the borderline area between the time of dream and awakening. The second group starting with *Gallipoli* through to *The Mosquito Coast*, share similar characteristics and claims - clash of cultures, atmosphere and such like - but is less mysterious, more conventional and more akin to the American genre tradition.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Haltorf J M, *Film and Dream: the Films of Peter Weir*, pp. 122f.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ This quotation is widely ascribed to D H Lawrence, though I can find no reference to it in his writings, or any reference to him in the writings of scholars who have used it before me.

¹⁰¹ Haltorf J M, *Film and Dream: the Films of Peter Weir*, p. 85.

¹⁰² Weir made this point strongly to his video interview with Peter Thompson in *Filmmakers On Their Craft*, 1983.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 10.

Peter Weir made twenty films before *The Plumber*. Seventeen of them were short films through which Weir learnt his craft. As strongly as he claims that the films of this period demonstrate Weir's dream interests, Haltof analysed only five of them: *Michael*, *The Plumber*, *The Cars That Ate Paris*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*. *Michael* was Weir's first professional short film; *The Plumber* was a 70-minute television feature; the last three films were full-length features. When Haltof turned to *Gallipoli*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Witness* and *The Mosquito Coast* his claims of dream explorations were less secure.

The change since *Gallipoli* seems to be connected, not with the shift in Peter Weir's interests but with the method of presenting his ideas...at the same time, they also contain Weir's familiar oneiric touches and themes: conflicts between incongruous cultures; protagonists trying to understand a different culture; characteristic visual images; and the haunting use of sound. These elements determine the uniqueness and worth of Peter Weir's cinema.¹⁰⁴

The problem for Haltof is that his argument was most strongly proven only in regard to Weir's earliest films which are not as well known or determinative of his style. Haltof's thesis ended up not making any special claim about Peter Weir's work at all.

The author considers that films are oneiric as a whole... Every film is more or less oneiric, not only those particular sequences mostly connected with the thematic illustrations of dreams, or the presentation of desire and/or eccentric situations. It should be emphasised that owing to some elements of the presentation of events onscreen, and the position of the film viewer while watching the film, cinema is oneiric in its nature... If films are like dreams the most interesting question is: which elements of the films used by the film director can intensify its dreamlike atmosphere?¹⁰⁵

From Haltof's argument all we could conclude, then, was that Weir's films were like all films inasmuch as they were dream-like, with his earlier work foregrounding this element more strongly than the more recent ones; and Weir's contribution to the cinema was the creation of a dream-like mood.

Even though Haltof was aware of the centrality of Carl Jung to Weir, he paid no attention to the role dreams play in Jungian psychology and the impact this had on this particular teller and his tales. Given that Haltof used words like myth, mystery,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 134.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. pp. 33f.

the supernatural, spirituality and mysticism on at least twenty four occasions in his thesis, he is alert to this feature in Weir's style. Unfortunately he uses these terms interchangeably and exclusively applies them to Weir's interest in dreams. Furthermore, Haltof never asked any questions about why Weir would have been interested in creating a dream world for the spectator, or from where his interest in the collapsing of boundaries between the conscious and unconscious came. Hence the limitations in this methodology are apparent. As Lars Iyer has recently asked,

...but what if the identity of the teller is given in the articulation of the tale? What if there would be not only no tale without a teller, but no teller without a tale? What if tale and teller were bound up in an interdependence that is far more complex than hitherto supposed? The "narrative turn" in the humanities is born of an insistence that there are modes of experience that cannot be captured by a theory that would transcend the historicity of experience.¹⁰⁶

This is not to canonise the author or make his or her intentions determinative of all readings, but as David Carr argues in his reaction against analytical commentary as representation, narrative composition in art is not retroactive. It exists at the time of, and in the context around, the composition of the work and alerts the viewer to some of the structures of experience which produced it. This in turn leads to even richer readings of texts.¹⁰⁷ The best compromise between Haltof's dream meta-narrative, which over invests one possible reading of Weir's work, and limits the importance of Weir's history, and making Weir's intentions the sole guide to reading his texts, is to take both the tale and the teller seriously, and both of them "with a healthy skepticism."¹⁰⁸

Dead Poets Society re-established Weir's bankability and his reputation for being able to make genre films on his own terms. In *Dead Poets Society* he revisited a school for the first time since *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, but this time brought an even more explicit metaphysical lens. Weir's mise-en-scène and directorial freedom when working with actors, especially a skilled improviser like Robin Williams, was

¹⁰⁶ Iyer L, "Blanchot, narration, and the event", *Postmodern Culture*, 12, 3, 2002, www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/current.issue/12.3iyer.html.

¹⁰⁷ Carr D, *Narrative and History*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 28ff.

¹⁰⁸ Garrett G, "Empty bed blues", *Blackbird: An Online Journal of Literature and Arts*, 1, 1, Spring 2000, www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v1n1/fiction/garrett_g/blues.htm.

strongly in evidence in *Dead Poets Society*.¹⁰⁹ Weir attended to the smallest detail to help the audience make unconscious association with other mystical or religious images. When the boys run through the fog-bound woods for their Society's nocturnal meetings, his mystical eye insisted that the hoods of their coats be peaked to suggest, "that they were like medieval monks making their way to a secret chapel. He wanted an ethereal, haunting quality."¹¹⁰ Indeed the play between night and day in *Dead Poets Society* is striking. The same play is found in his intertextual use of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer's Night Dream" where, deep in a forest, truths are spoken at night and by day lives were illuminated and changed.¹¹¹

The personal and social values of *Dead Poets Society* met with universal audience acceptance.

...It seemed that the timing was right, that people are looking for leadership and moral values again. With the decline of religion in daily life, someone that believes in something in this era of divorce and single parent families is important...I'm sure I'm a moralist in some way or other. But I certainly don't select a film on that basis, otherwise I would be a moral preacher, heaven forbid... I'm drawn to a good strong story in which moral choices are involved.¹¹²

The distinctions Weir made were important. He explicitly accepted that the cinema was an agent for moral formation in society. He implicitly connected this role in relation to the demise in participation of organised religion and the breakdown of family life. Weir seemed to be aware of the emergence of the "urban family"¹¹³ where friends can play a greater role in a young person's life than their blood family and the cinema is the temple at which many of them worship regularly. As I will argue in Chapter Two, these links are connected. By disavowing any claim to preaching, however, he assumes he is free of the charge. This is not true. Weir in *Dead Poets Society* and in all his films is a modern evangelist, a preacher of moral relativism and

¹⁰⁹ "I build up a sort of mood as I begin the scene, through the smallest detail, so that in most cases there's no need to discuss it, it's natural. If it doesn't happen that way, after they've done their first impression you must let the actor interpret the scene themselves, given the parameters we've set up." Evans P, "Weir(d) society", *City Life*, 2nd August 1989, p. 23.

¹¹⁰ Hawker P, "Deep water Weir", p. 52.

¹¹¹ Forbes C, "Poets who don't know it", *Sun News Pictorial*, 27th July 1989, p. 45.

¹¹² Weir quoted in Forbes C, "One more time before you go", *Sun News Pictorial*, 18th July 1989, p. 10.

¹¹³ For a full discussion on theories surrounding the development of the urban family see, W Burr, R Hill, F Nye, I Reiss, *Contemporary Theories About the Family*, New York: The Free Press, 1979; S Levitan, R Belous, *What's Happening to the American Family?*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981; G Mansnick, M J Bane, *The Nations Families 1960-1990*, Boston: Auburn House, 1980.

the cult of individualism. This is born out in the anxiety Weir felt in relation to the morality *Dead Poets Society* portrays. Neil's rejection of his oppressive father through suicide concerned Weir. "I was worried about a copycat situation, where there is a sort of nobility in death rather than having viable alternatives [so]...I hope the character appears to be weak rather than a heroic figure."¹¹⁴

Many critics argued Weir failed to make Neil look weak and that the rebellious Mr Keating provided Neil with no other model to the resolution of the conflict with his father than to follow his dreams and do as Keating does: rebel against legitimate authority.¹¹⁵ Weir responded to the charge of moral irresponsibility by arguing that rebellion against authority is, sometimes, a noble action. *Dead Poets Society*, he claimed, was a film of its time. "One audience I know who would appreciate the film are those kids sitting in that square because the school was China, the headmaster was the old brigade in the school that had to silence the truth as did the Chinese."¹¹⁶ As the preachers of various moralities took Weir to task for the portrayal of Keating and Neil, Weir moved away from the cinema's possible role in moral formation. "Can (the film) change lives? 'No, I don't really believe that's true. It could only be a spark that sets off something.'"¹¹⁷ *Dead Poets Society* as conversion therapy was precisely what some commentators were worried about and Weir's ethical interest in this film sheds even greater light on the nature of the elements of his mysticism. As I will show the link between mystical and ethics is as long-standing as it is complex and Weir's work demonstrated its complexities.

McMullen

In August of 1989 the third academic study of Peter Weir's work was presented. Wayne McMullen submitted to The Pennsylvania State University a dissertation entitled, A Rhetorical Analysis of Peter Weir's 'Witness'. It is a detailed and convincing work. Basing his work on Robert Ray and Thomas Benson's rhetorical critical methodology, McMullen argued that,

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 10.

¹¹⁵ For a full discussion on the ethical responses to *Dead Poets Society*, see S Brie, D Torevell, "Moral ambiguity and contradiction in *Dead Poets Society*", *Explorations in Theology and Film*, C Marsh, G Ortiz (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, pp. 167-180.

¹¹⁶ Evans P, "Weir(d) society", p. 23.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 23.

a commercial fiction film offers the rhetorical critic the opportunity to examine rhetorical form in a popular medium. Peter Weir's *Witness* is such a film. It communicates messages about values while suggesting an implied response of the viewer. The central focus of this study is to discover what is the rhetorical form of witness in the implied response of the viewer.¹¹⁸

McMullen set out to prove that Weir in *Witness* was advocating a strong counter values system to the dominant, urban American culture of the mid-1980s. McMullen contended that the romantic melodrama between John Book and the Amish woman, Rachel Lapp displaces the central focus of the film. To prove this point McMullen meticulously analysed each scene of the film to demonstrate how Weir presents the Amish community as a viable and radical alternative to the violent city. This was achieved by the spectator being invited to identify with the Amish and the juxtaposing of the idealistic, rural landscape over against the violent dark cityscape.¹¹⁹ McMullen was aware of the sharp distinctions Weir was drawing between "agrarian mythology...(and)... the tawdry, unhappy, and dangerous city living."¹²⁰ McMullen's work moved a long way from the original intention of analysing *Witness* as a commentary on counter-cultural values. He said that *Witness* essentially "offers nothing fundamentally new or significant; it is in fact a modernised western. This affirms what has become apparent: the old paradigms remain intact in the 1980s."¹²¹

In relation to mysticism in Peter Weir's work, McMullen made several cogent observations, especially how rhetorical commentary as applied to *Witness* links nature, spirituality and death. *Witness* opens with a funeral. The Amish visually arise out of the landscape of rural Pennsylvania to attend the funeral rites for Rachel's husband. As McMullen observed, "The experience for the viewer is destiny: one is born into this rigorous, spartan existence, and does not question or wonder about why one's husband died, or why one works many hours in the field."¹²² McMullen was aware that film set up the dangers of the urban life over against an idyllic portrayal of nature and agrarianism.¹²³ The scale balances in favour of the Amish for whom nature mysticism was directly linked to their strict religious observances and moral codes. "The rural dweller enjoys a closeness with God which the city person cannot know.

¹¹⁸ McMullen W, *A Rhetorical Analysis of Peter Weir's Witness*, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. pp. 31-32.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 279.

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 303.

¹²² Ibid. p. 31.

¹²³ Ibid. p. 25.

The soil gives life, and the farmer experiences this source first-hand. These routes are embedded in the religious psyche, thus giving the rural people as sense of divine mission and contact with supernatural life.”¹²⁴ As one expected in a film set within the religiously observant Amish community references to the ritual, prayer, the Bible, cultic law, the mysticism of hard work in caring for and tilling the soil and religious taboos saturate the narrative. I will return to how Weir constructs these in the narrative in Chapter Seven.

McMullen paid great attention to Kenneth Burke’s argument that, often, literary form and meaning were derived from openings and closings. “Should we not attach particular significance to the situations on which the work opens and closes... We should note the development from what through what to what”¹²⁵ *Witness* starts with a funeral, its major turning point was a murder and it ends in a farewell. Death comes to both communities but the style and manner of its sudden appearance and the responses to it further demarcate the different worlds.¹²⁶ The mysticism in this film was not only about nature and the rural life, it was about finding meaning in death and farewell in whatever context it occurred.

McMullen’s work highlights what is a key feature within Weir’s films: a response to death. What marks Weir’s work out from other auteurs who do the same and the broader discourse about death in Western society is that his films were essentially hopeful in the face of death. Death is never the final word on life in a Peter Weir film. As is self-evident, mysticism is predicated on the same insight, that there is something more we cannot see, but that it can be known or experienced. As we will see in Chapter Two, mysticism is a hopeful action and belief. McMullen’s analysis of *Witness* helps define a cinematic “mystic” as one who might explore the ultimate abjection in death for a society that is, generally, in denial about death and its effect in our life. It is also the basis on which Weir establishes a relationship with the spectator who is enabled to alleviate the fear of death as the final alienation and explore these issues from the safe distance of being a spectator in the cinema.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 26.

¹²⁵ McMullen W, *A Rhetorical Analysis of Peter Weir’s Witness*, p. 286.

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 18.

Hentzi

Gary Hentzi was among the first film academics to link Weir's spiritual interests with the post-modern project.¹²⁷ "For it is one of the most of un-noted characteristics of post modern culture that it recycles earlier cultural forms, serving them up afresh and in the process triggering a more complex response in the viewer than the material would at first glance seem to merit."¹²⁸ Hentzi argued that *The Last Wave* "manages to give form to one of its director's favourite themes: the persistence of primitive forces and the need to surface repressively rationalised modern existence." In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the audience were left "to reject the whole thing as suggestive nonsense or, if one shares the director's spiritual predilections, to accept it as necessarily reticent in the face of mysteries inaccessible to reason."¹²⁹

For the first time since 1981, Weir spoke publicly about his mystical interests in an interview with Hentzi. "There are just things I got very interested in ten years ago and began to investigating myself, and to think, read, and talk about. While I did so, I was least in touch with these things." Hentzi saw this "insistence on the individual experience is telling; for New Age thinking is a religion for a world without a collective dimension, a form of spiritualism that is preoccupied with the mysterious, transhistorical forces."¹³⁰ Hentzi nominated pacifism and a strong critique of modernity as Weir's major themes. He noted that there was the "restaging of a familiar kind of modernist engagement with the fragmentation and violence of the twentieth-century life, to which he has responded with an exploration of sexual and spiritual forces, as well as the profoundly related idea of community". This was most clearly seen in *Witness*, *Gallipoli* and *Dead Poets Society* where the individual(s) come up against physical, emotional, personal or institutional violence and embrace a new or better life through the community of a religious sect, mates in the trenches or the search for artistic expression in a cave.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Hentzi G, "Peter Weir and the cinema of new age humanism" *Film Quarterly*, 44, 2, Winter, 1990, p. 6.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 8.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 4.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 5

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 8.

Corum

The fourth academic study of Peter Weir's work was submitted at the University of Kansas in April of 1990. Everett Corum undertook studies on, Tantalizing Ambiguity: the Cinema of Peter Weir. His task was a straightforward one to study.

...the ambiguities in character motivations or in the presentation of time and place; these ambiguities tantalize by allowing the viewer to complete the picture for himself. Critics have said the films resonate with a rich intertextuality by frequently returning to themes and images that evoke elusive mysteries. Weir often resorts to creating tension by allowing brief glimpses beyond the facade of normal, everyday life that conceals inexplicable fear and dread lurking below.¹³²

Through the lens of narrative criticism, Corum analysed Weir's feature films up to and including *Dead Poets Society* to uncover the "central core" of Weir's authorial interests, "Weir is a consummate storyteller, and the success of his stories frequently come from the suddenly mysterious nuances which appear in an otherwise normal everyday milieu bordering on the dreary."¹³³ While Corum was alert to Weir's lack of attachment to the formal conventions of genre and knows that in his films the sound was as critical a factor as the pictures require,¹³⁴ his conclusion that the impetus for these traits emerged out of his storytelling was not compelling. There is nothing in good storytelling that demands of the relator that he or she move beyond convention. Indeed the opposite case is much stronger, that employing conventions in any genre of storytelling heightens both expectation and reassures the listener. The more disruptive a director is to the structures of any genre, the more assured he or she needs to be of the story, in the purpose of the telling and the ability of the hearer to interact with the

¹³² Corum E, Tantalizing Ambiguity: the Cinema of Peter Weir, p. (i).

¹³³ Ibid. p. 169.

¹³⁴ "Those critics who attempt to categorize Weir's films on the basis of the generic classification are often the most vociferous opponents of his work. The reason is clear, they usually have interpreted the specifically intended ambiguities as poor workmanship and have predetermined, on the basis of a title or a few early moments, what they think the film should become. Weir delights in frustrating those expectations by including elements of many genera within the same film, thus blurring the distinction between the usual formal structures. Those critics who are most moved by Weir's work, on the other hand, are those who approach each film with a completely open mind, a watchful eye, and ear that does not just hear but listens." Ibid. p. 169.

material and the style of its delivery. Weir is not interested in presenting the disruption of the unconscious world into the conscious realm for the sake of flouting the rules of genre or to stand out from other directors. Weir believes that Western civilisation has constructed a false psychological barrier between the physical and the metaphysical. His stories and his approach to telling them are interested in ordinary day-to-day events as the ground upon which he highlights how even here the mysterious breaks through.

As well as Weir's earlier work, Corum had the benefit of having *The Mosquito Coast* and *Dead Poets Society* to investigate. Given his interest in ambiguity, it was not surprising that his dissertation finds mystical, fantasy, mysterious or spiritual themes in each of the nine feature films he analysed. For example, Corum described *The Cars that Ate Paris* as a "suggestive, dark, comic fantasy."¹³⁵ *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was a film "powerfully charged with mysticism, a continuing the Weir trademark."¹³⁶ Corum saw that *The Last Wave*'s "conclusion ranks among the greatest great moments of cinemafantastique, because, the picture ends as it begins, in mystery, fear and visual power"¹³⁷ *The Plumber* was concerned with a shaman exerting power and domination through "the form of a ritualized exorcism".¹³⁸ Corum argued that *Gallipoli* was about two ordinary men's lives caught up in a life bigger than their own.¹³⁹ He concluded that *The Year of Living Dangerously* was completely concerned with metaphysical things, "every action may have a hidden motive, or it may simply be a red herring designed to throw the careless viewer off track. Likewise, every character's "shadow", or himself, is more important than his outward appearance."¹⁴⁰ *Witness* was an exploration of ethics and beliefs. "As the events are structured, a member of the audience can assume either possibility. Characters act in accordance to their personal beliefs, even when those beliefs come into conflict with the communal beliefs."¹⁴¹ Corum nominated that *The Mosquito Coast* was suffused with biblical imagery of a return to the Garden of Eden so as to enjoy the mysticism of nature.¹⁴² Curiously, when he turned to *Dead Poets Society*, however, he argued

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 24.

¹³⁶ Ibid. pp. 40, 42.

¹³⁷ "Chamberlain powerful in *The Last Wave*", *New York Post*, 19th December 1978, Review of Arts, Film and Television, quoted in E Corum, *Tantalizing Ambiguity: the Cinema of Peter Weir*, p. 51.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 81.

¹³⁹ Ibid. pp. 93f.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 113.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p. 129.

¹⁴² Ibid. pp. 136-142.

that this film had none of the “impenetrable mystery” of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* but did have “inspirational rituals”, biblical illusions to a crown of thorns, Judas and of living life so deeply as to transcend its mundanity.¹⁴³

Unlike the ambiguities Corum found in Weir’s films, his own conclusions were anything but ambiguous. Corum simply concluded that, “by providing a description of the content of Weir’s films, their basic narrative structures, and some of their images and thematic concerns, this study has opened the way for further analysis into his work.”¹⁴⁴ The problem with Corum’s analysis is that the theme of tantalizing ambiguity as the unifying motif in Weir’s work neither unites his filmography nor narrates an identifiable theme. Nowhere does Corum define what he means by “tantalising ambiguity”. This is not semantics. It is the “inner core” of his position. If by ambiguous Corum means that Weir’s films are obscure then he asserts this rather than proves it. Weir’s narratives are straightforward, the character motivations are usually clear, the narrative structure is conventional and his technique is stylised but not inventive. Weir’s approach is anything but obscure.

I imagine that Corum believes that Weir’s ambiguity is about having another intention in his films. Corum never asked, however, what motivated Weir to make films that were multi-layered and demanded readings which uncovered rich intertextuality. Corum seemed to have had all the information at his disposal to conclude that the “inner core” of Weir’s work is that he is “obsessed” by spiritual issues and attracted by narratives that explore metaphysical themes. In this regard Weir’s films are purposefully ambiguous, filled with concealed meanings as they reflect and explore a mystical world which is by definition of the same order, latent with unexplained possibilities and open endedness.

Shiach

In 1993 the first monograph on Weir was published. Don Shiach’s The Films of Peter Weir had some telling observations about Weir’s style and interests. Although he was well aware of different critical schools in film criticism and cinema studies, Shiach, like his subject, was mistrustful of them because he maintains that they demand of the spectator and the devotee a too narrow appreciation of the film

¹⁴³ Ibid. pp. 154, 155, 159, 163.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 170.

and its creators. “I believe that critics must come as a whole person to the viewing of films. Certainly critics must scrutinise film texts, but they should allow themselves to admit to whatever it is they felt when seeing the film in question.”¹⁴⁵ Shiach rejected a phenomenological stance, “critics cannot place themselves as ‘objects’ [sic] in the viewing state and hope to respond to cinema in any meaningful way. Such a critical stance leads to aridity, to rigid academization, to so-called scientific objectivity...”¹⁴⁶ Neo-Marxist and post-structuralist film critics were singled out for a special admonition.¹⁴⁷ Shiach states that he is primarily interested in spectator-interaction criticism. He pays serious attention to his emotional reactions to Weir’s films and uses a broad spectrum of critical schools to analyse them. He clearly favoured, however, auteur theory, historical criticism in terms of the production details of each film and its narrative, source criticism and he flirts with psychoanalysis in looking at the importance of Jung and dreams in Weir’s work.

By searching for what constituted a Weir film, Shiach detailed the production development of each film, looking especially at Weir’s role in the screenplay and casting. Though some of his conclusions do not stand up to careful analysis,¹⁴⁸ his most interesting observation about Weir’s signature concerns how the male protagonists undergo “a process of what could be called feminization.”¹⁴⁹ Shiach’s demonstrated this point by looking at Michael in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, David Burton in *The Last Wave*, Archy and Frank in *Gallipoli*, Guy Hamilton in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Neil in *Dead Poets Society*, Book in *Witness* and George in *Green Card*, and Max in *Fearless*. Shiach concludes that “...this director is interested in exploring the feminine aspect of masculinity, whereby men can give up the macho

¹⁴⁵ Shiach D, *The Films of Peter Weir*, London: Letts, 1993, p. 75.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 75.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 114.

¹⁴⁸ Shiach argues, for example, that the reason *The Mosquito Coast* does not work, or is not a Weir “signature” film, is that the screenplay was from a Hollywood studio film adapted from a novel someone else had written, which, in turn, Weir did not adapt for the screen and that he came to it as a studio director. “Weir was coming to the material at two steps removed from the initial creative act.” As I have noted above *The Mosquito Coast* was the film Weir wanted to make as early as 1984. He was “obsessed” by the Theroux novel, commissioned Paul Schrader’s adaptation of it. Many critics think that the reason *The Mosquito Coast* did not work well for Weir, or the public, was not, as Shiach claims, that he felt distant from the project or the narrative, but the very opposite: he was so absorbed by Theroux’s work, he could not be objective about it. See M Colbert, “Weir: explorer of film horizons”, p. 10.

¹⁴⁹ Shiach D, *The Films of Peter Weir*, pp. 134, 201.

attitudes and action and express their gentler more intuitive selves.”¹⁵⁰ Shiach’s commentary was telling here, but extraordinarily he did not make an explicit link with Jung’s anima/animus polarities. He stated that Jung’s study of dreams and the shadow side of the human psyche has had a major influence on Weir, but this element remained undeveloped in his own work.¹⁵¹ I will take up the exploration of the anima/animus in Weir’s male protagonists when I analyse John Book in *Witness*.

Shiach paid close attention to the role of music in Weir’s films. This is a telling insight because Weir plays music on the set during rehearsals and he has collaborated with composers Bruce Smeaton twice, Jean-Michel Jarre once and Maurice Jarre on five of his films. He was a director who was very careful about the sound design.¹⁵² Unfortunately, again, Shiach did not capitalise on his insight. The way Weir has married music and images in his films has been so strong that when people hear Gheorghe Zamfir’s “Pan’s Pipe”, they think of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Most people wrongly assume that this music was written for that film. The same misrecognition between a film and music occurs with Albinoni’s “Adagio in G Minor for Strings and Orchestra” which some people refer to as “*Gallipoli* music” and speak in similar terms about the orchestral hymn written for the barn-raising scene in *Witness*. Shiach described music as “another important aspect to Weir’s mise-en-scène.” As I will outline in Chapters Five, Six and Seven Weir argues for much more than this.

Helpfully, Shiach listed the major themes in Weir’s films as expressing a “dissatisfaction with the status quo”¹⁵³, “the need for the individual to take control of his or her life”,¹⁵⁴ “his ability to suggest the uncanny, the Other worldly, the unknown and the psychic,”¹⁵⁵ especially in the way he explores “dreams and visions, myths and archetypes”,¹⁵⁶ the influence “of the fantasy/horror genre traditions”.¹⁵⁷ Shiach claimed that Weir was “primarily a story-teller...(dealing) with the fundamental questions of human existence – what then must we do? What meaning can we give to

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 112. This is less true for *The Mosquito Coast*, but here it could be argued that Allie is machismo gone mad and Truman in *The Truman Show* has to assert his masculine side within a womb-like existence presided over by the creator/patriarch, Christof, to achieve integration and freedom.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 9.

¹⁵² Ibid. pp. 52, 127, 130, 143, 175.

¹⁵³ Ibid. pp. 8, 201.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. pp. 11, 201.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 11.

life? What kinds of moral choices face us?”¹⁵⁸ Shiach came to see elements as descriptive of a director interested in “visions of alternative realities. Visions that are flawed, dangerous, fanciful, liberating, transcendent, perhaps even with a touch of occasional phoniness to them.”¹⁵⁹ I will argue that this reality is not nearly as alternative as Shiach concludes. For Peter Weir, mystical reality, which Shiach could easily be describing above, was an important and central element of ordinary and everyday real existence.

Huck

Peter Huck observed that Weir’s 1993 film *Fearless* enabled him to return to “Weirdland” where his best work, “...wrestles with complex metaphysical themes, as he meditates on eternal questions like life, death and the nature of reality. His spiritual exploration is heightened by stunning visuals.” Huck was interested in how Weir constructs the shots that lead to such an atmosphere in his films. Weir told him that the close-up was what defines the cinema as art because it enables the spectator to see an actor’s eyes, writ large, and so gaze into their soul. “Gazing into the soul is Weir’s way of searching for the truth. During research for *Fearless*, he became interested in the mystical state where the body and the soul separate, enabling individuals to view life with almost clinical detachment.”¹⁶⁰ As telling as Huck’s conclusions were, his argument that Weir became interested in mysticism to make *Fearless* is clearly incorrect. As this chapter shows *Fearless* only continues Peter Weir’s life-long interest in metaphysics. This is not to say that *Fearless* is not Weir’s most explicitly spiritual film.¹⁶¹ Here again, and this time more directly, he linked the spiritual journey with facing up to death.

“I think, when we fly, it’s one of a few times in contemporary life where we actually think of death.” In *Fearless* Max re-evaluates his life after surviving a plane crash. “I wanted to film the crash from the point of view of the passengers,” explains Weir, who interviewed several real-life survivors from an 1989 flying disaster. “All them said, it was unreal. It was so real. It was like a dream. I had to make the crash unreal in order to reach its reality. Then it

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 11.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 199.

¹⁶⁰ Huck P, “Weir..d and wonderful”, *Mode*, April/May, 1994, p. 112.

¹⁶¹ “Call to Weir: ‘come in, oh spinner of tales’”, *The Hobart Mercury*, 2nd June 1994, p. 29; also see P Huck, “Weir..d and wonderful”, p. 112.

became, in a strange way, horrifyingly beautiful.”... In *Fearless* Weir explores the often mystical, even ecstatic, implications of near-death experiences.¹⁶²

Peter Huck concluded his brief evaluation of *Fearless* with a profound throwaway line that Weir’s latest film proves how right critics have been to dub him the “resident mystic of mainstream movies.”¹⁶³

By the mid-1990s Weir’s work was being analysed by scholars of other disciplines. David Tacey, a cultural critic and social psychologist suggested links between Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and real life events that bestowed on the film a prophetic insight or at least preparation for reality. “The raw, elemental, and archetypal nature of this tragic incident [Azaria Chamberlain] immediately gripped the nation: the innocent (sleeping) [sic] human being is destroyed by nature, by a wild dog; and, as in *Picnic*, the event takes place at a great and mysterious monument.”¹⁶⁴ Tacey read *Picnic at Hanging Rock* as a Jungian text in a way few film scholars had done.

Haltof

In 1996 Marek Haltof produced a monograph, *Peter Weir*. I have outlined the limitations of the oneiric meta-theory central to Haltof’s earlier work. In the preface to his book he admitted that this focus was “a relatively narrow topic: the relationship between dream and film in Weir’s cinema. By the time I finished my degree I was not satisfied.”¹⁶⁵ By the time he wrote this book Haltof had a further three films to consider (*Dead Poets Society*, *Green Card* and *Fearless*) and had come to see that the clash of cultures was the greater theme which signals Weir’s intentions.¹⁶⁶ It is striking to see how far Haltof revised his thesis. In *Peter Weir* he appropriately drew attention to the dream-like atmosphere in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Last Wave* and *Mosquito Coast*. The book, however, moves away from any oneiric qualities in *Gallipoli*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Green Card* and

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 112.

¹⁶³ Huck P, “Weir..d and wonderful”, p. 112.

¹⁶⁴ Tacey D, *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, Melbourne: Harper Collins, 1995, p. 69.

¹⁶⁵ Haltof M, *Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide*, New York: Twayne, 1996, p. xi. As a student Haltof used the name Josef Marek. In later writings, and when he published his book, he used only his second name, Marek.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. xi.

Fearless. In dealing with Weir's earliest films Haltorf argued for a more generic reading. *Michael*, *Homesdale*, *The Cars that Ate Paris* and *The Plumber* were read as antipodean horror films, examples of "Australian gothic" where "a nightmarish atmosphere was created."¹⁶⁷ *The Last Wave* was read as a later example of this genre.¹⁶⁸

Haltorf demonstrated how Weir's protagonists were usually isolated individuals in unfamiliar or foreign places. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* sexually repressed Victorian girls got lost in the bush.¹⁶⁹ In *The Last Wave* Weir explored depths in himself by entering into the watery, subterranean world of Sydney and the unknown predictions of the Dreamtime.¹⁷⁰ *Gallipoli* explored the way young soldiers enter new worlds by travelling from one desert to another.¹⁷¹ An Australian journalist discovered that *The Year of Living Dangerously* was about spiritual challenges as much as physical threats.¹⁷² *Witness* revealed how a protector of peace brings violence to an Amish farm.¹⁷³ A mad inventor decamped to *The Mosquito Coast* and subjected his family to a nightmare existence.¹⁷⁴ In *Dead Poets Society* an idealistic teacher challenged received orthodoxy with death-dealing results.¹⁷⁵ *Green Card* depicted a Tarzanesque Parisian who swung into New York to claim a work permit, permanent residency and Jane.¹⁷⁶ In *Fearless* a tragic survivor lived an unreal existence.¹⁷⁷

Surprisingly, while Haltorf defined how he was using auteur theory in relation to Weir,¹⁷⁸ and given that cultural theory was at the centre of his methodology, he never defined what he means by culture. It can be deduced that he was referring to the constructions of language that deals with power, values, meaning, nature, morality, law and knowledge.¹⁷⁹ Given the validity of this definition, the primary cultural

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 13, 20, 21.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 42, 44.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. pp. 23ff.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. pp. 38ff.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. pp. 50ff.

¹⁷² Ibid. pp. 67ff.

¹⁷³ Ibid. pp. 78ff.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. pp. 91ff.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. pp. 103ff.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. pp. 114ff.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 121ff.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p. xiii. "My own use of auteur methodology is concerned with the analysis of structures, themes, and cinematic devices employed by Weir in his works... For me, the director's work is a synthetic one that combines various contributions into a structural whole and determines the final form of the film."

¹⁷⁹ See P Edgar, P Sedgwick, *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory*, London: Routledge, 1999; C Jenks, *Culture*, London: Routledge, 1993; R Williams, *Culture*, London: Fontana, 1986.

clashes in Weir's films according to Haltof were, in order, sexual, preternatural, mythical, linguistic, religious, aesthetical, romantic and soteriological cultures.

Haltof's new framework was a much more malleable instrument than his thesis on dream theory was, but this raised a new problem. It would be hard to find a narrative tradition which was not constructed on polarities and dichotomies. Nearly every narrative form in the West portrays choices, divisions and contrasts. This is how tension is written into a story. So while it is helpful for Haltof to draw our attention to the particular contrasts that may be operative in Peter Weir's work, the suggestion that the presence of these constructs is the signature of what makes a film identifiably a Weir film ends up not saying very much at all. Like the film-as-dream theory, Haltof again reduced Weir's work to being like all other films and Weir like other directors. Haltof, clearly, knew that these polarities indicate something of Weir's intentions and interests. In both his thesis and in his book he repeatedly describes almost every film as, "mysterious",¹⁸⁰ "mythical",¹⁸¹ "supernatural".¹⁸² as interested in "archetypes",¹⁸³ "apocalyptic",¹⁸⁴ or "metaphysical".¹⁸⁵ The genre film, *Green Card* was even discredited as showing Weir's signature by the absence of any of these traits. "In spite of its thematic affinities with Weir's other films, *Green Card* lacks their sense of mystery... leaving no room for enigma."¹⁸⁶ In both his works on Weir, Haltof looks in the wrong place to decode the enigma. He thinks the inexplicable or deeper meaning in Weir's work was primarily a "structural opposition that is profoundly ethnographic: the clash between observer and observed, "us" versus "them"..."¹⁸⁷ These elements are present in his films, but Weir is more interested in "here" versus "there" and the location and people are secondary to this broader spiritual exploration.

Haltof knew that metaphysics played a key role in defining Weir's oeuvre, but he did not know how to deal with it. "Like Weir's earlier productions, *Fearless* does not belong to a single identifiable genre. It shares with previous works an overwhelming sense of mysticism, the common thread that bonds [sic] Weir's

¹⁸⁰ Haltof M, *Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide*, pp. 14, 18, 21, 25, 30, 34, 44, 47, 49, 101, 107, 120, 123.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. pp. 32, 35, 36, 47, 53, 54, 55, 57, 61, 62.

¹⁸² Ibid. pp. 26, 39, 41.

¹⁸³ Ibid. pp. 45, 46, 62.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 123.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. pp. 54, 127, 128.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 120.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 137.

films.”¹⁸⁸ Having asserted this principle he concluded his book by stating that Weir’s films “are structured around one fundamental conflict: the clash of cultures.”¹⁸⁹ I argue that Weir’s this-worldly narratives are told only to explore Otherworldly concerns. Weir is interested in “here” only inasmuch as it reveals something to us about “there”. In doing so, and as I will show, he builds on an ancient, well-developed and respected narrative mystical tradition and adapts it for the mainstream commercial cinema.

Malone, Brie and Torevell

Other commentators writing for a religious readership also paid particular attention to the theme of spirituality in Weir’s work, linking Weir’s mystical interests with the mythic and spiritual meanings of the Australian physical environment,¹⁹⁰ and drawing attention to a clash of archaic and established patterns of religious beliefs in *The Last Wave*.¹⁹¹ Theologian, Peter Malone argued for a Christian reading of *The Year of Living Dangerously*, where Weir’s mysticism was evidenced in social action and sacrifice. “Billy Kwan is given mystical overtones, the dwarf conscience-counsellor who understands the local law and the significance of the wayang, the shadow-puppet tales of Indonesia... Billy, in laying down his life for others and witnessing to abuses in Indonesia, is seen as a ‘redeemer-figure’.”¹⁹² Malone named an important narrative construct in Weir’s work. I will explore this in more depth when I analyse Weir’s presentation of sacrifice in *Gallipoli* and *Witness*.

In 1997 a collection of essays was published advocating a dialogue between film and theology. Within this volume Stephen Brie and David Torevell analysed *Dead Poets Society* from an ethical point of view.¹⁹³ Arguing against the preferred reading of this film that Mr Keating was a salvific figure to the repressed boys at the Welton Academy, Brie and Torevell focused on the primary outcome of Keating’s behaviour: the suicide of Neil. In an oppositional reading of this text they held that

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 128.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 129.

¹⁹⁰ Fisher G, “The presence – or the absence – of the Anglican Church”, *From Back Pews to Front Stalls: the Church in 100 Years of Australian Cinema*, P Malone (ed.), Sydney: Compass, 1996, p. 11.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p. 15.

¹⁹² Malone P, “Catholic – faithful, lapsed and hostile”, *From Back Pews to Front Stalls: the Church in 100 Years of Australian Cinema*, p. 21.

¹⁹³ Brie S, Torevell D, “Moral ambiguity and contradiction in *Dead Poets Society*”, pp. 196-180.

Keating's "ethereal idealism" and his social disruption at the school have tragic consequences for Neil and make no difference to the status quo at Welton. By the end of the film "the realities are that Keating has lost his teaching post... Neil is a teenage suicide statistic, and Evans Pritchard PhD will soon find his way back onto the curriculum."¹⁹⁴ At the beginning of their essay the authors recognised Weir's "interest in Jungian psychology with its references to dream and visions, all of which are in evidence within the narrative of *Dead Poets Society*."¹⁹⁵ Having done this they outlined a preferred and an oppositional reading of this text that exclusively interpreted all the characters in terms of nonconformist individualism.

It is hard to see how Jung's influence can be seen in either of the readings they give for the film. Jungian theories of the persona and the shadow give a high level of importance to the role of the Collective Unconscious. Individuals act within the human community through the physical as well as the metaphysical in which they are also unconsciously live in concert with archaic images and struggles. Jungian psychology holds that the healthy ego is aware of the complexities of these interactions acting out of them, in conformity with or against them.¹⁹⁶ From this perspective Keating initiated his students into discovery of the deeply Jungian cave where the Dead Poets Society, including Keating, has nurtured previous generations. Brie and Torevell failed to fully appreciate just how Jungian Weir's interests were in evidence in this film and how it informed his ethics. Keating is the prophetic archetype preparing the way for his disciple-students to restage the never-ending archetypal battle against systems of suppression at every level, including artistry. Neil's suicide is a casualty in his battle against the forces of personal, familial and social oppression. Brie and Torvell were mistaken in their judgement that by the film's end nothing had changed. Keating had changed, his students were not the same, the movement unleashed at Welton Academy will soon have its day, Neil's parents were tragically altered, and Neil was changed forever. Jung said his break with Freud came because Freud was "in flight from himself, from that other side of him that we might called the mystical."¹⁹⁷ Weir in following Jung cannot be charged with the same accusation and *Dead Poets Society* offers compelling evidence for this.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 178.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 169.

¹⁹⁶ Brome V, *Jung: Man and Myth*, London: Paladin, 1980, pp. 277ff.

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Wilson C, *Lord of the underworld: Jung and the Twentieth Century*, Wellingsborough, Northamptonshire: Aquarian, 1984. p. 50.

Fearless divided critics and was not a commercial success, yet Weir held true to his vision and the project:

CP:¹⁹⁸ “What was your response to the unjustly panned *Fearless*?

PW: I think I probably anticipated it because of the way I treated the film. The questions involved in the film enter into metaphysical areas, which are off-limits in the thinking of some critics. They don’t like being dealt with on the screen. I knew there would be people who would be prejudiced against this type of material. So I don’t count that, in any way, as a criticism of the film so much as a criticism of the way of thinking.”¹⁹⁹

Fraser

Not all people were resistant toward Weir’s metaphysical interests, at least not in relation to one of his earlier films. Toward the end of 1998 Peter Fraser went looking for the “the sacramental mode in film.”²⁰⁰ Fraser analysed a range of films including *Dairy of a Country Priest*, *Ordet*, *Black Robe*, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, *The Mission*, *Jesus of Montreal*, *On the Waterfront*, and *Chariots of Fire* to discover how the drama of liturgical ritual action was played out in these films. He did this by analysing them “according to the principles of mystical contemplation: composing the space, applying the intellect, understand, will, affection and so on...(because) These films uniquely synthesize the diverse practises of Christian devotional and liturgical traditions.”²⁰¹ In this company Fraser devoted a chapter to *Gallipoli*. Fraser stated that Weir’s interests as expressed in his films up to 1998 were “romanticism, mysticism and fraternity.”²⁰² In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* Fraser asserts that the paranormal was alluded to, but not defined. In *Witness* the agrarian and communal spirituality of the Amish was compared and contrasted with the dark spirituality of urban America. In *Gallipoli* a “brooding cosmic spirituality (is) in several scenes...but the spirituality most referenced is Christian. Archy and Frank “running the good race”²⁰³ at home and later into history,²⁰⁴ the bad father/good father paradigm where a son must be sacrificed for the sins of another son,²⁰⁵ the mixture of

¹⁹⁸ No author is given. CP is Cinema Papers.

¹⁹⁹ “Designing Vision”, *Cinema Papers*, 127, October 1998, p. 56.

²⁰⁰ Fraser P, *Images of the Passion: the Sacramental Mode in Film*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998.

²⁰¹ Ibid. p. 6.

²⁰² Ibid. p. 129.

²⁰³ See 1 Corinthians 9: 24.

²⁰⁴ Fraser P, *Images of the Passion: the Sacramental Mode in Film*, p. 133.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 138.

bullet fire and blood around the naked bodies of the soldiers swimming in the pristine waters off Gallipoli²⁰⁶, the physical and emotional innocence of Archy offering himself as willing victim²⁰⁷ and most especially Archy's final cruciform death pose²⁰⁸ which was frozen on the screen and then fades to black - these were all examples for Fraser of the explicit intertextuality between *Gallipoli* and the Christian story of Jesus' suffering and death. Fraser did not argue that Weir's intentions were evangelical, but that he borrows the pattern of the biblical narrative and its iconography to portray his innocent martyrs offered up on the altar of Imperial sacrifice. Fraser contended that *Gallipoli* was a "concrete development of his interest in trans-historical, spiritual agency in the world."²⁰⁹ And although he might use Christian motifs in the text, his work was for a post-Christian audience. *Gallipoli* "is the Passion story played out for a deaf and blind congregation, and to a silent, enigmatic and ultimately faceless god."²¹⁰ In Chapter Three, while analysing the work of scholars who are interested in the relationship between religion and film, I will return to Fraser's observations about Weir's films.

Danielsen, Weinraube and Colbert

Weir returned to Hollywood four years after *Fearless* to make another film that obsessed him, *The Truman Show*. Immediately critics saw the parallels with his earlier interests: quest motifs with mystery; symbolism; heroism; and conversion at the core.²¹¹ Weinraube observed that "unreal world" which was drawn in many of his earlier films constituted the entire and explicit premise of *The Truman Show*. Nearly all of his mystical concerns were revisited in this film as well: the spiritual journey within a clash of cultures; the danger; the inexplicable elements to life; the need to define what is worth living and dying for. In explaining to the film's star, Jim Carey, what he was after in *The Truman Show*, Weir recalled, "I played him a piece of music from Pink Floyd's, *Wish You Were Here* album, which I thought summed up the film effectively with the lyrics: 'So you think you can tell heaven from hell? Blue skies

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 135.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 133.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 136.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 130.

²¹⁰ Ibid. p. 139.

²¹¹ Danielsen S, "Back on the A list", *The Weekend Australian Review*, 19th September 1998, p. 6.

from pain? Can you tell a green field from a cold steel rail? So you think you can tell?”²¹²

Weir was aware that one of the elements in *The Truman Show* was directly challenging to his own colleagues in the cinema industry. “To some degree, the film subverts the movie form itself.” And, on one level, it was this sense of reality and unreality that television, particularly, promoted, that he was challenging.²¹³ Weir set out to criticise Western society which does not believe in the mystery of the everyday, the common place and so turns to television to invent it for them. Weir wanted people to have a sense of the Otherworldly, an acceptance of the inexplicable and a hunger for metaphysics. He argued in *The Truman Show* they have to break free of the false world of the media and invest in their own freedom and story. This political dimension to his mysticism had never been more obvious. He was now turning on his own industry. “...I got to the point, for a while, where I simply couldn’t watch other movies...Because of their lies. I’d see a couple talking in a room and it all seemed so fake to me. Where was the camera? Where are the lights? It was violating one’s faith, in a way.”²¹⁴ Again, without being conscious of it, as I will show in the next chapter, Weir nominates a crossover between mysticism and the cinema: both are predicated on a deception of the senses.

Weir argued that *The Truman Show*, however, offered not just a commentary on the media industry. It was also about “the whole Western world, I suppose, which today is so deeply informed and shaped by Hollywood and its aesthetic. Then again, you could take one more step, and say that the film is a metaphor for life itself. In my darker moments, I thought it was all about death and moving beyond light. Quitting this mortal coil.”²¹⁵ In this regard Truman fits into what Danielsen called Weir’s “cinema of metaphysics, in which action was merely the front for ideas, the deeper questions of identity and personal responsibility.”²¹⁶ He quoted Weir as saying,

The search for truth, coming to some kind of self-knowledge and deeper understanding of the world...is why I enjoy rites-of-passage stories, that whole explorer mentality. In this film, the image of Truman touching the sky was a gift for me, being the lover of Jung that I am. Because it was such a classically archetypal Jungian

²¹² Weinraube B, “Weir gets real”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22nd May 1998, p. 13.

²¹³ Colbert M, “Weird and wonderful”, p. 7.

²¹⁴ Danielsen S, “Back on the A list”, p. 7.

²¹⁵ Ibid. p. 4.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

image. And these things can't fail to have some kind of mesmeric effect on the viewer...Truman is manipulated, certainly, but not directed.²¹⁷

Not since *The Year of Living Dangerously* had Weir invoked so directly and publicly his Jungian interests and their bearing on his filmmaking. This invocation is also helpful in that Jung is often seen as the most mystical of psychoanalysts, refusing to rule out the role of mythology, ritual and pre-scientific events and experiences in the human psyche.²¹⁸

Weir was finally attracted to *The Truman Show* “because it is the most original escape story, a story of an escape from Paradise.”²¹⁹ Several elements in *The Truman Show* were explicit in their metaphysical preoccupations: “Ed Harris as the God-like television director, Christof.”²²⁰ Weir even thought about playing Christof in the film, “which would have been the cherry on the post-structuralist cake.”²²¹ Truman, “caught in another world”, not knowing about “the existence of powerful and unknown forces beyond his control.”²²² the “disturbance of reality or the merging of reality and unreality, like the audiences (the ones in the film and us) watching *The Truman Show* and this exploitation of a child.”²²³ But *The Truman Show* was a very modern morality play, portraying “a myriad millennial anxieties: about a growing taste for trivia and voyeurism, about the cruel and omnivorous appetite of the great God television for human sacrifice and, more generally, about the idea that there might be a not-altogether-benign power presiding over our lives.”²²⁴

Rayner

1998 saw a third monograph on Weir published: Jonathon Rayner's The Films of Peter Weir. Rayner applied the insights of auteur and genre theories to Weir's work. He drew on these methods not only because he believes they throw light on Weir's intention and themes, but also because they placed the spectator in a central

²¹⁷ Ibid. p. 6.

²¹⁸ For a full discussion of this point see, V Brome, Jung: Man and Myth, pp. 287ff.

²¹⁹ “Weir's Picnic”, The Herald Sun, 4th June 1998, p. 44.

²²⁰ Ibid. p. 44.

²²¹ Danielsen S, “Back on the A list”, p. 7.

²²² Skotnicki T, “The Truman factor”, The Herald Sun, 13th June 1998, p. 23.

²²³ “The director who ate Hollywood”, The Sun Herald, 13th September 1998, p. 5.

²²⁴ Johnston S, “My years of living dangerously”, The Sunday Herald Sun, 28th February 1999, p. 10.

position as the reader of the film text.²²⁵ The meeting point for genre criticism and auteurism, Rayner argued, was “textual study and thorough structural analysis.”²²⁶ Rayner outlined how Weir’s consistency over the decades in holding to his “signatures” had seen him transcend the assignation that he was an Australian auteur, a genre technician or a time-bound director. These signatures include, “a predisposition to mysticism, open-endedness and significantly detailed mise-en-scène.”²²⁷

Consistent with the structuralist project, Rayner traces other auteurial and cinematic influences on his subject. He outlines the impact westerns, horror and B-grade films from Hollywood and Britain, as well as the early Australian director Charles Chauvin had on the young Peter Weir.²²⁸ Rayner saw the influences of Goddard in *Michael* and *The Cars That Ate Paris*,²²⁹ Kubrick in *Homesdale*, Hitchcock in the thrillers *The Plumber*, *The Last Wave* and *Witness*,²³⁰ Kurosawa’s *Seven Samurai* was quoted in the muted ending of *Witness*,²³¹ Fellini, Bergman and Goddard in *The Last Wave*²³², the films *Notorious* and *Casablanca* in the political romance, *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Green Card*²³³, Coppola in *Apocalypse Now*, *The Lord of the Flies* and the Hollywood western in *The Mosquito Coast*, the western/crime genre in *Witness*,²³⁴ *Bildungsroman* in *Dead Poets Society*²³⁵, and *Catch 22* in *Fearless*²³⁶. By demonstrating these influences on the respective films, Rayner argued that Weir’s homage to his sources does not inhibit his originality within the genre or when dealing with a narrative. It was an exercise of intertextuality and quotation that made Weir’s work more interesting and stylish.²³⁷

For the purposes of this study Rayner was alert to the mystical dimensions in Weir’s sensibilities “...lack of narrative closure, allusive and pertinent design

²²⁵ Rayner J, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 5.

²²⁶ Ibid. p. 5. Although Rayner argues for a structuralist critique, the prominence he gives to the spectator and the way he marries auteur and genre theories leads me to conclude he is working out of a post-structuralist paradigm, which deconstructs exclusive claims by any one theoretical framework, attends to the significance of enunciation and the importance of spectator identification.

²²⁷ Ibid. p. 16.

²²⁸ Ibid. p. 7.

²²⁹ Ibid. pp. 26, 49.

²³⁰ Ibid. pp. 11, 83.

²³¹ Ibid. p. 147.

²³² Ibid. p. 95.

²³³ Ibid. p. 125.

²³⁴ Ibid. pp. 11, 148, 157.

²³⁵ Ibid. p. 12.

²³⁶ Ibid. p. 204.

²³⁷ Ibid. p. 12.

elements, characteristic lighting and framing, and a mystical and philosophical approach is discernible in Weir's most famous Australian films... and the same approach and stylistic qualities persist in Weir's American films."²³⁸ Curiously, Rayner argued that *Gallipoli* and *The Mosquito Coast* were exceptions to this pattern.²³⁹ In seeing a thematic and visual unity in the entire corpus of Weir's films, Rayner disagreed with Shiach who argued that these traits were much more identifiable in Weir's earlier Australian work.²⁴⁰ Like Shiach, Rayner uses a similar vocabulary to describe the films. Rayner draws attention to: the "mystical atmosphere" Weir created in *The Last Wave*²⁴¹; the way *The Year of Living Dangerously* exhibits many Weir hallmarks "an expert usage of soundtrack music; a fascination with mysticism; and myriad examples of alienated or isolated individuals set apart from societies or cultures."²⁴² *Gallipoli*, *The Year of Living Dangerously* and especially *Witness* pay homage to American genre cinema but use "mysticism and visual poetry."²⁴³ *The Last Wave* "articulates the efforts of the generation of the 1960s to regain spiritual transcendence of mundanity";²⁴⁴ Even in the romantic comedy *Green Card*, Rayner observed that "the camera technique which originates in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* as a signifier of emotional disturbance and confusion reappears as a recognition of spiritual growth, an upheaval with a positive outcome."²⁴⁵ In *Dead Poets Society*, the Whitman "Captain, O my Captain" reference is to the eulogy to Lincoln which applauds his and the nation's spiritual victories... *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Dead Poets Society* hinge on freedom from the establishment,²⁴⁶ while the "pictorial compositions of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the aboriginal mythology of *The Last Wave* and the religious imagery of *Fearless* point to the films' transcendence of narrative constraint..."²⁴⁷

The problems with Rayner's analysis rest with the application of his theoretical paradigm. A key element in post-structuralist criticism is the discourse around the text, where the spectator finds meaning between the conscious or

²³⁸ Ibid. p. 9.

²³⁹ Ibid. p. 14.

²⁴⁰ Shiach D, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 200.

²⁴¹ Rayner J, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 77.

²⁴² Ibid. p. 103.

²⁴³ Ibid. p. 77.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 97.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 172.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 181.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 200.

discernible intentions of the auteur, the text itself and the enunciation. These relationships bestow meaning on the text. This could be a particularly helpful way into Weir's films. Rayner, however, was wedded to auteur theory far more than he owned. He rejected Weir's distaste for being labelled an auteur, because "his selection of material defines and shapes the contribution of others, producing a personal signature and reviving a purer notion of auteurism."²⁴⁸ Weir cannot win. If he says he is not an auteur but a cinematic collaborator, Rayner finds this a greater reason to conclude he really is an auteur. He only briefly explored the enunciation of these texts and concludes that Weir's films resist being classified and do not lend themselves to being given definitive readings.²⁴⁹ A consistent preference for an open-ended narrative in itself suggests that a very strong statement about meaning and intention is being made. Under the weight of auteurism Rayner did not come to grips with Weir's work and so left everything up to the spectator's interpretation. Rayner mistakes Weir's mystical intentions as another device, a way of realising the text and establishing atmosphere. But as Weir had stated it is far more than that. As each film has been exhibited, Weir has owned his metaphysical concerns more. It has been a constructive, if not a priori, element in Weir's themes and style. Rayner could not fit *Gallipoli* and *The Mosquito Coast* into his auteur grid. Mysticism as a meta-narrative in all of Weir's work easily accommodated and illuminated both films. It also challenges Rayner's judgment that, while Weir had "definite and discernible intentions", he did not "necessarily have a specific message to transmit."²⁵⁰ As I will argue Weir had been busy about spreading the gospel of access to Otherness for decades.

The Truman Show is among the best examples of Weir marrying mysticism to ideology. Film academic Paul Kalina interviewed Weir and drew him to speak about the parallel between Christof, the director of the show and Zeus, the King of the Olympian Gods. Weir said,

Christof is Zeus, in the sense that he is trying to control the mortals. In my reading, as I recall, the one thing Zeus could not do was interfere with fate. He could do other God-like things, including controlling the weather, but he cannot, as Christof/Zeus does, begin to interfere with the decisions his creature has taken, which is to

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 15.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 210.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 12.

leave. So Christof/Zeus crosses the line at the end and is punished for it.²⁵¹

In this interview Weir demonstrated the way in he was aware of the subversive ideology in his mis-en-scène. Read against the grain of traditional theology, it was the god figure in *The Truman Show* who ends up expelled from the Eden, that is from the cult of celebrity, born of the success of his long-standing, top-rating show, for intervening too strongly in the affairs of his created world and exerting too much control over his creatures.

Johnston

Read in this light it is significant that film critic and theologian Robert Johnston in his book Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue argued that *The Truman Show*, from among all of Weir's films, exemplified "the interrelationship of Christian theology and Hollywood movies."²⁵² He readily acknowledged Weir's mystical concerns and argued that Weir's films could be read as texts about human liberation, stories that "challenge and renew the human spirit...interested in...life's central issues – death, nature, friendship, freedom, spirit..."²⁵³ He maintained that what marks Weir's work out from other contemporary filmmakers was the search for the spiritual, more precisely a focus on the lack of it.

...Weir returns to the same theme: there is in the West a missing spiritual component. *Witness*, *Dead Poets Society*, *The Mosquito Coast*, *Green Card*, *Fearless*, and *The Truman Show* all explore the life of the spirit (the shadow). There is something more than the surface realities of life...One can substitute Anzac, Amish, or Aborigine for Asian. The concrete political reality is important only as the occasion to delve beneath the surface to explore life itself.²⁵⁴

Truman's struggle between illusion and reality mirrors Weir's aims in other films and that with which he wants the spectator to grapple. Johnston nominated larger mythic stories interested in the shadow side of the human personality and society, the need for newcomers to have a mediator to be initiated into the Otherness beneath the

²⁵¹ Kalina P, "Designing visions", *Cinema Papers*, October 1998, p. 56.

²⁵² Johnston R, Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000, p. 175.

²⁵³ Ibid. pp. 176f.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 178.

surface, spiritual growth in the characters, the use of music, close-ups, soft-focus and slow motion shifts as the elements that create the metaphysical quality in his films.²⁵⁵ Once categorised in this way it was hard for Weir to escape Johnston's judgements for "even the absence of mystery suggests a sense of its presence."²⁵⁶ Johnston said it would be "dishonest to baptize" Weir or his films as Christian, even so, "their phenomenological approach to the mysterious and wonder-filled [sic] has much to teach Christians" and enables religious and non-religious people to experience what Rudolph Otto described as the "mysterium, tremendum, et fascinans."²⁵⁷ Johnston was the first scholar to explicitly conclude that Weir's films provide "occasions to experience what in traditional theological language is called common grace. He has given us reel spirituality."²⁵⁸

Bliss

Later in 2000 film academic Michael Bliss published a fourth monograph on Peter Weir, Dreams Within a Dream: the Films of Peter Weir.²⁵⁹ The title was revealing. Bliss set out to prove the now unoriginal idea that Weir was interested in the world of the unconscious, dreams and the uncanny. Not surprisingly he based his work, in large measure, on Freud's theory of the uncanny and Jung's theories about symbols, archetypes and the unconscious. Bliss made bold claims about these theories in regard to Weir. "For Weir reality resides in dreams, in myths, in states of heightened consciousness resulting from exposure to stress, strongly contrary impressions, or strange objects."²⁶⁰ Later he asserted, "The most significant link between Jung and Weir is in their conception of the implicit connection between the unconscious realms, dreams and religion."²⁶¹

Bliss categorised Weir's films from *The Cars that Ate Paris* to *Gallipoli* as his Australian period, and from *The Year of Living Dangerously* to *The Truman Show* as his American period.²⁶² In the former period Bliss argued that Weir was developing

²⁵⁵ Ibid. pp. 179-186.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 187.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 191.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 195.

²⁵⁹ Bliss M, Dreams within a Dream: the Films of Peter Weir, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 14.

²⁶¹ Ibid. p. 28.

²⁶² Ibid. p. 22.

an intellectual approach to filmmaking, which he equated with the conscious²⁶³ and with Carl Jung's influence on Weir.²⁶⁴ Bliss quoted a 1980 interview where Weir said that "...hell, I read very little of it (Jung) now, nor do I either agree with it or understand all of his theories...(so I have moved)...in another direction."²⁶⁵ Bliss maintained that this other direction was found in how Weir "gave up his fascination with the intellectual realm...(and moved) ...away from heavily symbolic renderings of abstract concepts ...in favor of emotions as the arbiter of knowledge and the prerequisite for self-realization..."²⁶⁶ In Bliss' categorisation Weir's American period films were a more explicit exploration of the world of the subconscious marked by the "emotional, the mystical, the romantic."²⁶⁷

Bliss analysed each of the twelve films and referred to all of them as a mix of metaphysics and psychology. *The Cars that Ate Paris* was a nightmarish allegory about the abnormal and the unexpected.²⁶⁸ "The primitive aspects of Paris become an analogue for a poorly realized desire for a return to Eden."²⁶⁹ *Picnic at Hanging Rock* portrayed "the natural tension between the material and spiritual realms"²⁷⁰ with "ethereal images ...of the incorporeal realm."²⁷¹ *The Last Wave* brought to the screen a magical, mysterious and apocalyptic²⁷² story in which the "natural elements act as reminders of a kind of cosmic justice against the attempts of white society to pave over forces of passion, desire, and a direct relationship with the subconscious."²⁷³ *The Plumber* was an archetypal metaphor on the relationship "between civilization and savagery".²⁷⁴ *Gallipoli* confronted the national iconography of Australia and demonstrated the end of the colonial dream in the country.²⁷⁵ Its images reveal the fine line between the idyllic and the horrific, as in the "swimming scene, which functions as a descent into what initially appears to a safe region of the

²⁶³ Ibid. p. 13.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 23.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 21. See M Dempsey, "Inexplicable feelings: an interview with Peter Weir", *Film Quarterly*, 33, 4, 1980, pp. 10-11.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 21.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 13.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 39.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 45.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 47.

²⁷¹ Ibid. p. 59.

²⁷² Ibid. p. 70.

²⁷³ Ibid. p. 69.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. pp. 73, 77.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 92.

unconscious.”²⁷⁶ *The Year of Living Dangerously* was a “drama whose symbolism, which involves shadows and vision metaphors, is inextricable from its story... (which acts as a journey into the) threats against one’s existence and identity.”²⁷⁷ *Witness* was about “the conflict between feeling and thinking... two kinds of sight, one literal (which corresponds to the secular realm), one figurative (corresponding to the religious realm).”²⁷⁸ *The Mosquito Coast* was a parable about the journey to the Garden of Eden,²⁷⁹ which becomes a living hell, a study of mania,²⁸⁰ where Father-rule must be destroyed.²⁸¹ “In a classic example of the consequences of stealing the gods’ fire, divine judgement is brought down upon Jeronimo and its Promethean ruler. Apocalypse is unleashed; Allie has become the destroyer of worlds.”²⁸² Like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Dead Poets Society* revealed Weir’s “obsession with mythic journeys, the same desire on the part of the students for sexual release from an atavistic, repressive educational institution.”²⁸³ In *Green Card*, the world of the unconscious, unrepressed feelings, nature and mystery were presented by the Frenchman George, the Afrika Café or Bronte’s greenhouse.²⁸⁴ In comparison to Weir’s other films Bliss gave *Green Card* a slighter treatment, but still concluded that, “what we see in the film is another version of the mystical. Wish-fulfilling movement into the fantastic Shakespearean green world... a world that offers respite from the demands of what has become a spiritually impoverished material existence.”²⁸⁵ *Fearless*, which was Bliss’ favourite film²⁸⁶ also considers it to be his most redemptive and metaphysical story,²⁸⁷ exploring “the relation between the secular and the religious as a spiritual metaphor for life and death.”²⁸⁸ *The Truman Show* was “a quest film: in his quest for himself Truman begins to question his world and his sense of self.”²⁸⁹ First he had to throw off Christof, the law-giving father,²⁹⁰ to make a bid for the ordinary world “on the other side of the door through which Truman walks: it’s the region in which (one

²⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 92.

²⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 94.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 111, 114.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 137.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 128.

²⁸¹ Ibid. pp. 136f.

²⁸² Ibid. p. 129.

²⁸³ Ibid. p. 140.

²⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 154.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 156.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 193.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 168.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 163.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 171.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 170.

hopes) fakery does not rule existence.... it's not planned, not perfect. It's a world of sorrow and joy, pleasure and pain.”²⁹¹

Bliss clearly identified the “otherworldliness”²⁹² of Weir’s films as central to the *mise-en-scène*. It is a rare scholar who reviews Weir’s work and does not see the dream-like quality of some of his early films, but to hold Weir to Miranda’s philosophising that, “What we see, and seem, is but a dream, a dream within a dream” is an overstated principle that cannot be reconciled with Weir’s later interests. For, as I argued in relation to Haltof’s work, while *The Cars that Ate Paris*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave* fit neatly into this oneiric schema, and while *Dead Poets Society*, *The Mosquito Coast*, and *Fearless* can be argued to include oneiric qualities and styles, *The Plumber*, *Gallipoli*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Witness*, *Green Card* and *The Truman Show* do not. In Bliss’ framework all of Weir’s films were either dreams or nightmares. The problem with such a categorisation is that it is too reductive, forcing all of Weir’s films to comply to the same schema.

The methodological problem lies in Bliss’s reading of Jung, and his application of it to Weir. The “profound dualisms”²⁹³ he found in Weir’s work we find in his own analysis. Bliss argued that, for Jung, the conscious was characterised by the intellect whereas emotion was the domain of the unconscious.²⁹⁴ He maintained that Jung’s explicit influence over Weir was before his American period, which he said starts with *The Year of Living Dangerously*. He also asserted, however, that *Gallipoli* was the film where Weir “turned away from the analytical, intellectual academic approach” and goes “flat-out for feeling.”²⁹⁵ In an academic sleight-of-hand Bliss argued that, “Weir has not abandoned Jung’s ideas so much as integrated them into his own thinking.”²⁹⁶ It is easy to see why Bliss was confused about Jung’s influence on Weir’s thinking. Weir had said conflicting things on the same subject over the years.²⁹⁷ By the time Bliss was writing his work, however, Weir had admitted that Jung’s writings, especially in Memories, Dreams, Reflections, continued

²⁹¹ Ibid. p. 180.

²⁹² This word, more than any other, is the one Bliss uses to describe Peter Weir’s films, see pp. 14, 19, 70, 168.

²⁹³ Ibid. p. 12.

²⁹⁴ Unfortunately, “subconscious” and “unconscious” seem to be synonyms for Bliss and are used interchangeably.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 22.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 21.

²⁹⁷ As I have shown Weir admits Jung’s importance to his work in 1978, moves away from this position in 1981, but strongly returns to it by 1998.

to have a pivotal influence on his filmmaking. It is hard to take Weir seriously in his 1980 claim that he had left Jung behind²⁹⁸ and then witness Jung's impact in *Gallipoli* from 1981 and *The Year of Living Dangerously* in 1983 with its highly symbolic use of the Wayang kulit as visual metaphor for the narrative.

Furthermore Bliss made a strong case for Freud's influence on Peter Weir. "Weir seems to have found a basis for many of his notions about the magical and mystical in the writings of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung."²⁹⁹ He went on to build an interesting case for the correlation between Freud's theory of the uncanny and "the other" in Weir's films.³⁰⁰ While I am not suggesting that Weir is not influenced by Freud or that several of Freud's theories cannot be successfully tested against Weir's films, Weir had never alluded to having read and therefore been directly influenced by Freud. In fact in an interview with Weir, which Bliss appended at the end of his book, Bliss put to Weir that he had been too hasty to "repudiate the influence in your work of your extensive reading in Freud and Jung." Weir replied, "...As for Freud and Jung, nobody working in a creative field can help but admire their pioneering work in mapping the unconscious, that mysterious landscape that plays such a major part in the creative life." Weir, however, went on to speak exclusively about Jung and the bearing his work has had on his own.³⁰¹ Bliss also suggested that the "most significant link between Jung and Weir is in their conception of the implicit connection among the unconscious realm, dreams and religion." Bliss followed this point up with Weir as well in the interview. Weir said he was interested in "discussions about religion" but his reply was in terms of "...mysteries, ambiguities, contradictions all around me ... thinking about who we are, what we believe in..."³⁰² which was a much more general sense of religion than Jung was interested in through his research into particular religious traditions and his experience of Roman Catholicism. The stronger claim is that Jung and Weir are equally at home in the exploration of the more general world of the "spiritual." In Bliss' hands Weir got caught in a Jung/Freud cross-fire.

Bliss' most convincing arguments concerned the different realities which Weir appreciated, that "all of Weir's stories are about an individual attempting to achieve some sort of reconciliation between conscious activity and unconscious yearnings,

²⁹⁸ As quoted in M Bliss, *Dreams Within a Dream: the Films of Peter Weir*, p. 21.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 23.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. pp. 23-26.

³⁰¹ Ibid. p. 184, 189.

³⁰² Ibid. p. 188.

reality and dreams – in essence, between the body, the spirit, the flesh and the world.”³⁰³ And while Bliss admired the way Weir goes about trying to present this spiritual quest on the screen it appears he didn’t share the veracity of Weir’s understanding in terms of mystical experience. Although the story of the ghosts at Anzac Cove as the impetus for the making of that film were widely reported at the time,³⁰⁴ Bliss seemed to know nothing about it or chose not to include it in his story of the influences on him as a filmmaker in general or in his analysis of *Gallipoli* in particular. Bliss did refer to Weir’s earlier mystical experience at Tunisia which led him to make *The Last Wave*. Bliss knew this event was important but his treatment of it was insignificant. Weir said it was a profound experience and a premonition,³⁰⁵ whereas Bliss called it “serendipity”³⁰⁶, an “anecdote”, “a tale”.³⁰⁷ The only other time Bliss used the word “tale”, which ordinarily refers to a fictitious narrative, was when he referred to the influence of “biblical tales” on Weir.³⁰⁸ This is instructive about Bliss’ analysis of Weir’s films. Though he named “the sense of wonder” as the “X factor”³⁰⁹ which gave Weir’s films their luminous power³¹⁰ and a grip on the audience, he never enquired beyond the screen to what experiences Weir might bring to these films and then trigger in the spectator. For Bliss the only influences that mattered were the intellectual ones. When Bliss asked Weir about how he responds to those who dismissed the centrality of mysticism in life Weir said, “...there’s often a kind of anger in response to this form of expression.”³¹¹ And later when speaking of how his films were an attempt to express the world of the unconscious, he said his films “relate to the way I’ve seen the world through my life; it’s how I express myself.”³¹² Ultimately Bliss’ grid of sharp distinctions between dream and wakefulness, unconscious and conscious, intellect and emotion, tales and truth, theatre and reality could not encompass Weir’s more fluid understanding of metaphysics which his films have respected and which had characterised his mystical gaze.

³⁰³ Ibid. p. 35.

³⁰⁴ Because he felt so misunderstood by journalists, Weir says he had to stop talking about it. See C Peake, “Peter Weir prepares to launch his \$2.5 million view of Gallipoli”, p. 10.

³⁰⁵ Weir even speaks about it in these terms to Bliss in the interview. See M Bliss, *Dreams Within a Dream: the Films of Peter Weir*, p. 192.

³⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 60.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 36.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 2.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 194.

³¹⁰ Surprisingly, except for the use of music on the set in *Dead Poets Society* and the music score in *Fearless*, Bliss never attends to the importance of the sound design in Weir’s films.

³¹¹ Ibid. p. 188.

³¹² Ibid. p. 189.

Caputo, Burton and Higgins

It is by coincidence that I can conclude this literature survey as I began it, with the words of Peter Weir. In 2002 Raffaele Caputo and Geoff Burton convinced Weir to write a chapter in their book on the Australian Film Industry. This is the first piece Weir had written about himself.³¹³ He admits in his article that he does not like reflecting on his career and it is unlike any other article in the collection. In Third Take: Australian Film-Makers Talk³¹⁴ Weir confirms the argument outlined in this chapter. He said that after *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*, he was uncomfortable with “what was perceived to be my style – mystical... So I consciously set out to avoid that style and look for subjects far away from that area.”³¹⁵ Weir was anxious about becoming a “prisoner of style”, but as we have seen his next films did nothing to stop the commentary on the mysticism in his films. What was at stake in Weir’s films, however, was not an issue of style. It was about a stance toward his craft as a director and what his work elicits from the spectator: the mystical gaze. Weir gives three personal stories as an insight into how he came to be a director. He relates how soon after he started directing feature films, in 1974, he had a vivid daydream wherein he felt confirmed in his career as a director.

(The dream)... was set in Asia and I was going to meet the Director’s Guru, the Director of Directors, sort of Directorial Buddha. He was so famous and so completely understanding of the craft he had actually never made a film. Which seems odd, but he didn’t need to and his disciples just knew that. There was a mountain to be climbed and there all sorts of disciples gathered and it was very doubtful whether I would get to meet him. In fact, very few were permitted to see him. So I climbed the mountain and then I waited and waited and finally I’m led to him. All other disciples backed away and I had to travel the final distance alone. He sat on the edge of a cliff with his back to me, and a beautiful valley down below. I sat behind him, as I’d been told to do, and I waited again. It seemed like a long time. Then without turning around, he said, “What is your question?” I knew I was allowed only one and I worked it out beforehand, but it came out awkwardly. I asked, “Master, what is a director?” I mean how must I be?” There was as

³¹³ An earlier article dealt with his debt to history in making *Gallipoli*. See P Weir, “I felt somehow I was touching history”, *Literature Film Quarterly*, 9, 4, 1981.

³¹⁴ Burton G, Caputo R, Third Take: Australian Film-Makers Talk, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 59.

silence and then with his back still to me he said, “You must care and not care, both at the same time.” That was it and made my way down the mountain, thinking all the while about what he said – what did it mean, to care and not care at the same time? I still think about that answer...which resulted in appearing more effortless.³¹⁶

The other stories Weir shared involve meeting a master Japanese potter who spoke about how “every now and again, the gods would touch the hand of the potter and that would be a work of art.” Weir said that directors were not gods but “maybe every now and then our hands are touched.”³¹⁷ Finally, Weir revealed how films or photographs drew him where the person in the frame projects “pure soul”. This was, for Weir, the moment of breakthrough of the unconscious into the conscious world. He related how he tried to achieve this in his own work through “collecting visual emblems...conventional research...(being) very receptive to place...(and) music.”³¹⁸ These things helped him induce “a meditative state that finally shows me the way to go.”³¹⁹ Once he had collected these visual motifs Weir found the story fell into place. “It’s at this point that film time begins to fracture real time – one leaves the real world behind and enters the world of film.”³²⁰

Taken as the most recent insight into Weir’s motivations and sensibilities these stories, confirm the nature of the fluidity Weir perceives between the physical and metaphysical. The daydream was a further testament to Weir’s actual mystical encounters which have shaped his own professional life choices. He now seems unafraid to speak about them publicly. As I will show, this quest story draws on many strands in mystical literature: the existence of a knowing Other who holds the key to illumination into meaning and existence; the metaphors of the solitary journey, the mountain climb, the precipice and the land of plenty before them; the centrality of gazing on the One who is sought while actually seeing the face; the oblique, peculiarly post-modern answer where the desire for self-certainty and for self-dissolution meet.

As a director Weir unapologetically recognises that some of his work enables the spectator to behold “pure soul”, the encounter with a sense of Otherness, or of their unconscious world. Not only does he indirectly acknowledge that some of his

³¹⁶ Ibid. p. 57.

³¹⁷ Ibid. p. 59.

³¹⁸ Ibid. p. 64.

³¹⁹ Ibid. p. 64.

³²⁰ Ibid. p. 64.

work has been ‘touched by the hands of the gods’ but that he has, in part, achieved what film is meant to achieve, to be a bridge between this world and the often unknown, but not unknowable, worlds beyond it. In his more mature years as a director, Peter Weir, seems more comfortable than ever with the “mystifying subtleties” he recognised in his own work at the outset.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have outlined how film critics, commentators, academics and Peter Weir himself have grappled with what constitutes “a Peter Weir film”. Many of them point out the presence of Other-worldliness in the narrative or style in most of these films. Unfortunately several writers have not developed their inquiries into this key area reducing it to a technical device which Weir creates through music, lighting, binary oppositions in the narrative, locations and the creation of atmosphere. Others have used words like metaphysical, magical, meditative, mythological, spiritual, mysterious, occult, oneiric, death, dread, ominous, supernatural, religious, dream-like, modern mystery, fantasy and primitive to describe nearly every one of Peter Weir’s films. As we shall see in Chapter Two, this lexicon is also used to describe mystical phenomena. Many authors, especially those who have written longer and more scholarly accounts of Weir’s work, have named the exploration of mysticism as one of his cinematic signatures. The consensus in the works cited, and most importantly from what Weir has said of his own work and motivations, is that there are four features to Weir’s cinematic mysticism: it involves an individual taking a journey to a mysterious unknown, timeless place; on this journey he or she uncovers knowledge about the way in which 20th century existence represses fundamental human values or virtues; in order to achieve integration the pilgrim must confront the guilt, anxiety and fear associated with this repression and the fragmentation of modern life in the West; finally he or she comes to experience or at least acknowledge another world or state in which conversion, dread and death are not seen as loss or annihilation but experienced as illuminating and transcending elements in ordinary, human existence.

Weir’s mysticism exists on both personal and mythical levels. On the personal level it is of great significance that Weir believes that his experience of a

stark form of Christian Protestantism, “stripped of all mystery...left a gap.”³²¹ He has often associated this lack in himself with fear,³²² mystery, heaven,³²³ hell,³²⁴ fantasy,³²⁵ and death.³²⁶ These associations suggest that Weir’s mysticism is concerned with self, identity, constructed nature and the permeability of the boundaries between self, nature and machine. These capture the spirit of post-modernity and post-structuralism where the self is a temporary fleeting entity carried by memory, with the mind as enfleshed in the body and emotions. This concept challenges traditional western constructs of the self as a mortal body containing an immortal soul. Trusting his own mystical experiences, Weir accepts a fluidity of the boundaries between the categories of traditional society: religious/mythical; real/unreal; temporal/spatial; knowledge/emotion. He accepts that acknowledging this fluidity is not the same as understanding it. This latter task is a life project. These mystical polarities and the quest of individuals to make sense of them are the most distinctive and unsettling elements in many of Peter Weir’s films.

On a mythical level the importance of Carl Jung to Peter Weir cannot be underestimated. Weir has spoken about Jung’s influence on several occasions. On the whole, commentators and scholars have not understood the importance of this self-analysis. Weir’s rejection of his traditional Christian faith meant that he looked for another frame of reference in which to interpret the nature of identity, transcendence, fragmentation and mortality. Jung’s influence is clearest in way in which Weir’s films chart the journey of an individual into his or her depths or unconscious. In search of their lost identities the protagonists discover the importance of mythology, nature, dreams, ancient ways of being and knowing. They become aware of belonging to, being in continuity with and contributing to a world of archetypes, the collective or familial unconscious, ethical discourses, mythical models, universal truths and of a relationship to nature. The source of Weir’s particular relationship to a location can be found in Jung’s thought. “I am deeply convinced of the still very mysterious relation between man and landscape.”³²⁷ David Tacey’s summary of Jung could also be a

³²¹ Higgins J, “Australia’s master of mystery and imagination”, p. 5.

³²² Ibid. p. 5.

³²³ Armitage M, “For Weir the word is ‘unsolved’ ”, p. 34.

³²⁴ Ibid. p. 24.

³²⁵ Ibid. p. 5.

³²⁶ Ibid. p. 4.

³²⁷ Jung C, C.G.Jung: Letters, Vol. 1, G Adler, (ed.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 338.

summary of Weir's cinematic enterprise: "Jung also felt that the condition of "participation mystique" with the environment still persisted beneath the surface of contemporary consciousness, and that its reality and effectiveness could still be felt today whenever our superficial education was stripped away or eroded by the unconscious."³²⁸ For both Jung and Weir the recovery of the self, identity and nature is predicated on the identification of the soul, the discovery of the centrality of mysticism as an essential element to nature and subjectivity. Unlike Marx and Freud who insisted that spiritual and religious traditions impeded personal and social development, Jung locates and understands "the contemporary vestiges and unconscious remnants of the sacred that persist even in our own secular or profane time."³²⁹ Weir has made this Jungian approach to the self and nature hallmarks of his own spirituality.

Weir sees the cinema as the best place to explore a symbolic mysticism.³³⁰ Although he has rejected being named a "preacher" he uses the mainstream cinema like a pulpit in the marketplace, "to reach as many folks as I can."³³¹ And what is Weir trying to say? That even though we live in dread of mystery, death and alienation, if we are prepared to confront our fears, enter the unconscious and believe in the transformative power of transcendence we will be illuminated by seeing the connectedness of our everyday life to Other-worldly existences. Weir's mysticism is about constructing a new language for Western epistemology.

It would be a mistake, however, to see Weir's project as fresh, novel or new. In the next chapter I will outline that on two levels Weir's mystical sensibilities are, appropriately for a Jungian disciple, rooted in ancient preoccupations and questions about identity, ultimate meaning, destiny and death and that his concerns, as they are played out in his films, demonstrate his ability to exploit a constitutive element of the cinematic experience, the "mystical gaze".

³²⁸ Tacey D, Edge of the Sacred: transformation in Australia, p. 156.

³²⁹ Ibid. p. 178.

³³⁰ "Symbol" is as often used and regularly as mystical in relation to Peter Weir, many other auteurs and the cinema itself. The word comes from two Greek words, sym-boli meaning together and bring. A symbol is a sign that brings together a variety of meanings or possibilities of interpretations. It is read or appropriated depending on the disposition of the one who beholds it. In this context it is useful to remember that the symbolic is the opposite of the diabolic, which historically referred to the fragmentation of meanings. See R Wuthnow, All In Sync: How Music and Art are Revitalizing American Religion, pp. 207-208.

³³¹ Evans P, "Weir(d) society", p. 23.

Chapter Two: The Mystical Gaze

The case needs to be made that within cinema spectatorship a mystical eye is a constitutive element in the viewer's gaze. Establishing the validity of this claim is necessary before I further explore how Peter Weir is one of the cinema's leading exponents of creating the circumstances in which the mystical gaze can be deployed to its greatest effect. In this chapter I will establish what I mean by the term "mystical" and what it includes and excludes. I will then record the history and development of the theoretical field of the gaze. I will look at the various and sometimes competing theories of looks and gazes which the academy now generally accepts, and the major structures within a gaze. I will posit an argument for why theorists of the gaze have not recognised the mystical gaze, and draw together the various threads in this argument by looking at the structures of the mystical gaze.

To speak of the mystical gaze, I must firstly establish what I mean by mysticism. I acknowledge at the outset of this discussion that there are those who dispute the reality of mystical experiences or conclude that these are manifestations or symptoms of a psychiatric pathology.³³² One neuropsychiatrist argues that mysticism is part aberrant perception and part belief pathology.³³³ Since the Enlightenment, Western cultures, especially, have challenged the veracity of mysticism and its attendant structures as trading on illusions. It is argued that medical science can explain most of the culturally defined phenomena described as mystical.³³⁴ For Freud religious feelings and any appeal to the mystical was evidence of neurosis, to an "early phase of ego-feeling" where the individual desires a father figure.³³⁵

³³² Steven Katz describes mysticism as nothing more than "mumbo-jumbo" in "Language, epistemology and mysticism", *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, S Katz (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, especially pp. 22ff. Carl Keller argues that the study of mysticism is a waste of time because "the student of mysticism cannot reach beyond his own personal experience." See "Mystical literature" in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, p. 96; Arthur Deikman argues, "a mystical experience is the production of an unusual state of consciousness. The state is brought about by a deautomatization of hierarchically ordered structures that ordinarily conserve the basic goals of the individual: biological survival as an organism and psychological survival as a personality." See, "Deautomatization and the mystic experience" in *Understanding Mysticism*, R Woods (ed.), Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980, p. 259.

³³³ "Individuals ... tend to be misled by untrustworthy sources of information, and/or tend to be prone to having their belief formation systems derailed and overridden by their motives (wish fulfilment being chief among them). Motives thus help to explain what maintains delusory beliefs once they have been generated by first factor sources." McKay R, "Hallucinating God: the cognitive neuropsychiatry of religious belief and experience", Unpublished conference paper quoted in C McGillion, "Religion versus science might be all in the mind", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29th April 2003, p. 16.

³³⁴ For a summary see, A Deikmann, "Deautomatization and the mystic experience", A Deikmann, "Bimodal consciousness and the mystic experience", K Wapnick, "Mysticism and schizophrenia", R Fisher, "A Cartography of ecstatic and meditative states", *Understanding mysticism*.

³³⁵ Jung C, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, R Hull (trans.), New York: Pantheon, 1963, p. 19.

The physical origin of religious ideas...is illusions, fulfilments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind ...the terrifying impression of helplessness in childhood aroused the need for protection which was provided by the father; and the recognition that this helplessness lasts throughout life made it necessary to cling to the existence of a father, but this time a more powerful one. Thus a benevolent rule of a divine Providence allays our fears of the dangers of life.³³⁶

Other scholars equate mystical experience as an encounter with consciousness.³³⁷

Their hypotheses vary: an encounter with “the subconscious continuation of our own hidden mind”³³⁸; a cosmic consciousness “acquired only by the best specimens of the race but also when they are at their best”³³⁹; an experience of undifferentiated unity³⁴⁰; a spontaneous action of the creative unconsciousness³⁴¹; as a peak experience in the cause of self-actualization³⁴²; and as “a regression in the service of the ego.”³⁴³ Using John White’s phrase, each of these observers thinks that there are various “classic trigger situations” during which a so-called mystical encounter can occur.

Hans Penner has argued that there is no such thing as pure consciousness, only social relationships and therefore mysticism should be treated only in the study of religion as a whole. “The mystical illusion is the result of an abstraction which distorts religious systems. As such it is a false category, unreal, regardless of whether or not it is taken as the real essence of religion or a particular feature of a religious system.”³⁴⁴ Penner leaves the door open for mysticism to exist as an experience, but only in the context of religion as a sociological phenomenon.³⁴⁵ Daniel Madigan goes further.

It is not so much a direct experience of God as an experience of believing... If religious experience appears to be a phenomenon common to all traditions, we cannot claim that it is because a single absolute or ultimate is clearly at work in them all. What gives these

³³⁶ Freud S, The future of an Illusion, J Strachey (trans. and ed.), New York: Norton, 1961, p. 30.

³³⁷ Egan H, What Are They Saying about Mysticism?, New York: Paulist, p. 24.

³³⁸ James W, The Varieties of Religious Experience, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1902] 1985, p. 386.

³³⁹ Bucke R, Cosmic Consciousness, New York: E P Dutton, 1969, p. 65.

³⁴⁰ Stace W, The Teachings of the Mystics, New York: Mentor, p. 20.

³⁴¹ Neumann E, “Mystical man”, Eranos Jahrbuch, 10, 1968, p. 377.

³⁴² Maslow A, Towards a Psychology of Being, Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1962, p. 12.

³⁴³ Price R and Savage C, “Mystical studies and the concept of regression”, The Highest State of Consciousness, J White (ed.), Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972, p. 115.

³⁴⁴ Penner H, “The mystical illusion”, Mysticism and Religious Traditions, S Katz (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 96.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 90f.

diverse experiences a tantalising commonality amid all their differences is the fact that they are all instances of human persons being drawn into communal vision or hypothesis about reality.³⁴⁶

There are, however, several other scholars, especially those without any confessional interest, who recognise mysticism as a multi-layered, multi-cultural, cross-generational event.³⁴⁷

Dismissing mysticism does not assist an understanding of what film critics and writers mean when they use terms like mystical, metaphysical, magical, meditative, mythological, spiritual, mysterious, occult, oneiric, religious, dream-like and supernatural to describe a strong, but, hitherto, unexplored theme in Peter Weir's mis-en-scène. These writers have used these terms interchangeably. Generally, they have been struggling to find a language to describe what they see and experience in Weir's work. Part of the problem in this analysis is these terms are regularly used with little apparent regard to the considerable amount of literature in a variety of disciplines that surrounds the experiences they describe.³⁴⁸ In this chapter I will argue that if the

³⁴⁶ Madigan D, "When experience leads to different beliefs", p. 73.

³⁴⁷ Just to name three scholars who began their investigations not believing in the veracity of mystical claims, but end up, not uncritically, accepting that the phenomenon was real: J Maréchal, Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics, Albany, New York: Magi Books, 1964; L Dupre, The Other Dimension, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972; J Maritain, The Degrees of Knowledge, New York: Charles Scribner, 1959. Even the sceptical psychiatrist, Arthur Deikmann, quoted above, concludes another study by saying, "Mystics have been guardians of a potentiality that has always been ours and that it is now time for us to reclaim." in "Bimodal consciousness and the mystic experience", Understanding Mysticism, p. 268.

³⁴⁸ Examples of literature where these terms are carefully defined and deployed can be found in: N Abercrombie, J Nicholas, B Sebastian, J Foster, "Superstition and religion: the god of gaps", Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, Vol. 3, D Martin, M Hill (eds.), London: SCM, 1970; D Anthony, T Robbins, "From symbolic realism to structuralism", Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 14, 1975, pp. 403-414; R Fenn, Liturgies and Trials: The Secularization of Religious Language, Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1982; M Furse, Mysticism: Window On a World, Nashville: Abingdon, 1977. Scholars from a variety of disciplines who describe mystical encounters include: W Garrett, "Maligned mysticism: the maledicted career of Troeltsch's third type", Sociological Analysis, 36, 3, 1975; A Greely, "Mysticism goes mainstream", American Health, January/February, 1987; F Happold, Mysticism, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970; R Hood, "Mysticism", The Sacred in a Secular Age, in P Hammond (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; R Jones, New Studies in Mystical Religion, New York: Macmillan, 1928; C Lemert, "Defining non-church religion", Review of Religious Research, 16, 3, 1975; C Lippy, P Williams (eds.), Encyclopaedia of the American Religious Experience, Vols. I-III, New York: Charles Scribner, 1988; G van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation: a Study in Phenomenology, New York: Harper, 1963; C Liebman, Deceptive Images: Toward a Redefinition of American Judaism, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1988; N Smart, The Phenomenon of Religion, New York: Herder and Herder, 1973; N Smart, Worldviews: Cross Cultural Exploration of Human Belief, New York: Charles Scribner, 1983; F Staal, Exploring Mysticism, Berkeley: University of California, 1975; M Spiro, "Religion: problems of definition and explanation", Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, M Banton (ed.), London: Tavistock, 1966; A Tippet, "The phenomenology of worship, conversion and brotherhood", Religious Experience: Its Nature and Function in the Human Psyche, W Clark (ed.), Springfield, Illinois: Thomas, 1973; M Truzzi, "Definition and dimension of the occult:

reality of the mystical gaze stands up to scrutiny it needs to be a cross-cultural phenomena, independent of confessional definitions.

Why use the word “mysticism” to describe this overlooked element in spectatorship? Mysticism has come to mean an action, separate from the activity of daily routine where an individual or a group experiences an apprehension, illumination or union which the members perceive to be something greater than themselves.³⁴⁹ The process and content of the experience can be mysterious for the participant, as repulsive as it can be alluring, but retains a compelling attraction.³⁵⁰ It has the power to be personally or socially transformative.³⁵¹ Religious collectives, doctrinal beliefs, ethical systems or a particular culture, while related to long-standing definitions of a mystical phenomenon in other disciplines, do not define mysticism. It is my argument that the apparatus of the cinema, the act of spectatorship and the content of films are coded to enable the spectator’s experience to what I have termed the mystical gaze. I will begin to establish this case by briefly charting the history and application of the concept of mysticism in Western thought.

towards a sociological perspective” On the Margins of the Visible, E Tiryakian (ed.), New York: Wiley, 1974; E Underhill, Mysticism, New York: E P Dutton, 1961; E Ozorak, “Social and cognitive influences on the development of religious beliefs and commitment in adolescence”, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 28, 4, 1989.

³⁴⁹ Mysticism is found in every major religious group where there is a tradition of apprehending a presence greater than that of the adherents through union or illumination. Krishna, Divine Mother, Heavenly Father, Lover, Allah, Wakan, the wholly other, Buddha, the Lord, Amida’s widow, the Dreamtime Spirits or Satan: there is already a long history and a wealth of literature about the process of entering into a greater presence. For an overview of the vast literature in this area see: M Eliade, The Sacred and Profane, New York: Harper, 1961; N Smart, The Phenomenon of Religion; N Smart, Worldviews: Cross Cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs; J Allen, C Lloyd, J Streng, Ways of Being Religious, Englewoods Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973; H Smith, Forgotten Truth: the Primordial Religion, New York: Harper and Row, 1976; W King, Introduction to Religion, New York: Harper & Row, 1968; N Soederbolm, The Living God: Basic Forms of Personal Religion, Boston: Beacon Press, 1962;

³⁵⁰ Based on Rudolph Otto’s famous definition of religious experience, “the mysterium, tremendum et fascinans”, see The Idea of the Holy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958, first published in 1923.

³⁵¹ While collectives have different ways of apprehension of the presence they seek, all of them share a personal and social expression. This is not confined to religious collectives. Scholars have observed how civic devotion, patriotism and nationalism as forms of a secular, civil religion operate within a similar dynamic. See P Hammond, “Religious pluralism and Durkheim’s integration thesis”, Changing Perspectives in the Scientific Study of Religion, A Eister (ed.), New York: Wiley 1974; P Hammond, “The sociology of American civil religion: A bibliographical essay”, Sociological Analysis, 37, 2, 1976, pp. 169-182; R Bellah, “Civil religion in America”, Daedalus, 96, 1967, pp. 1-21; L Pope, Millhands and Preachers, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1942; E Hermassi, “Politics and culture in the Middle East”, Social Compass, 25, 3-4, 1978, pp. 445-464; N.Ayubi, “The politics of militant Islamic movements in the Middle East”, Journal of International Affairs, 36, 1983, pp. 271-283; I Lustick, The Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988.

Etymologically, mysticism is related to the Greek word *muein* meaning, “close to the lips and eyes.”³⁵² It has roots in the life of the Greek temples where rituals were conducted to express purity and moral righteousness.³⁵³ It is, however, from the writings of the Roman philosopher Plotinus and his interpretations of Platonism that the systematisation and study of mysticism have developed. Plotinus was a mystic. “He is living proof of the fact that mysticism is not a religious phenomenon in the conventional sense that it must appear in the framework of some specific religious system, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam.”³⁵⁴

Common to both ancient and modern mystical traditions are three modes of apprehension: monism, theism and non-religious. Monism is the belief that the goal of mystical union is absorption into the Divine as an extension of the self.³⁵⁵ Theism acknowledges the distinction between the object of devotion and the subject. Mysticism in this tradition is the apprehension of the Divine while not being akin to it. The subject always remains a subject receiving mystical revelation.³⁵⁶ Non-religious mysticism recognises the reality of mystical experience, but does not accept that an ultimate being exists. It is not concerned with doctrinal revelation, metaphysics or

³⁵² Parrinder, G, Mysticism in the World's Religions, London: Sheldon Press, 1976, p. 8. One hundred years ago, William Ralph Inge wrote a book detailing twenty-six possible definitions of the word. See, Christian Mysticism, New York: Charles Scribner, 1899. For a full discussion of the many meanings of the term and its applications see W Stace, The Teachings of the Mystics, New York: Mentor, 1960, pp. 9-29. William Johnson argues that “the word comes from *mustes* (who) was the initiate who in an oath of secrecy swore to silence or, literally, to keep his mouth shut (*muien*) about the inner working of his new-found religion. In its original meaning, then mysticism is associated with the mystery and secrecy and the occult.” The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion, London: Collins, 1978, p. 16.

³⁵³ Parrinder G, Mysticism in the World's Religions, p. 8. Johnson names these Greco-Roman cults as “Eleusinian, Dionysian and Orphic mysteries”, The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion, p.16. For a full discussion of the development of Greek esoteric traditions within Christian mysticism see, G Stroumsa, Hidden Wisdom, Leiden: E J Brill, 1996; P Tillich, Systematic Theology 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 114. In regard to Eastern mysticism and the ethical life see A Danto, “Ethical theory and mystical experiences: a response to Professors Proudfoot and Wainwright”, The Journal for the Study of Religious Ethics, 4, Spring, 1976, p. 45.

³⁵⁴ Stace W, Mysticism and Philosophy, London: Macmillan, 1961, p. 111.

³⁵⁵ Happold F, Mysticism, p. 150. In the ancient world and in Christian theology, these first two categories have also been called “ascent” and “descent”. See G Stroumsa, Death, Ecstasy and Otherworldly Journeys, J Collins, M Fishbane (eds.), Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1995, pp. 139-154; I Culianu, Psychonia I: a Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and its Relevance, Leiden: E J Brill, 1983; J Kroll, Gott und Hölle: der Mythos von Descensuskampfe, Leipzig, Berlin: Teubner, 1932. Furthermore, another definition of the same distinction used in philosophy is “introvertive” and “extrovertive”. See W Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, pp. 85ff. Aldous Huxley calls the first two categories offered here “obtained” mysticism while our category of natural mysticism he names as “spontaneous”, See A Huxley, “Visionary Experiences”, The Doors of Perception, J White (ed.), New York: Harper and Row, 1954. Also see J Horne, The Moral Mystic, Waterloo, Ontario: Canadian Corporation for the Studies in Religion/Corporation Canadienne des Sciences Religieuses, 1983, pp. 34ff.

³⁵⁶ Parrinder G, Mysticism in the World's Religions, p. 93.

making ultimate truth claims on the basis of individual experience. It is often called nature mysticism.³⁵⁷

In the common era of Western culture, the Christian religion has become the most significant definer of what constitutes a mystical experience. In fact the use of this particular term to describe a human experience is peculiar to Christianity,³⁵⁸ though the phenomena it denotes are cross-cultural. In the fifth century the Syrian Christian monk, Pseudo-Dionysius uses the term *mystica* to describe the working of the subconscious.³⁵⁹ He was particularly interested in entering into the world of darkness so as to experience the Divine. “We pray that we come into this darkness which is beyond light, and, without seeing and without knowing, we see and know that which is above vision and knowledge; and thus praise, super-essentially, Him who is super-essential.”³⁶⁰ Pseudo Dionysius defines the school of *apophatic mysticism* as a conceptual darkness, where one empties the mind to encounter the Other. This tradition is richly developed in the anonymous medieval work, The Cloud of Unknowing. The author states that the task of unity with God is found in burying all images in a cloud of unknowing so that “the blind stirring of the heart” may bring the person to a knowledge of God.³⁶¹

Another, and equally significant, mystical tradition has been that of *kataphatic mysticism*, or the mysticism of light. In this school the encounter with the Other is such that a suffusion of light illuminates a person’s experience and his or her knowledge, even to the point of embracing oneness with the Divine.³⁶² Teresa of Avila, the Spanish mystic of the 16th century,³⁶³ exemplifies this approach. “The brilliance of this inner vision is like that of an infused light coming from a sun covered by something as transparent as a properly cut diamond.”³⁶⁴ Kataphatic mysticism concerns itself with beholding the Divine and, as a result, coming to

³⁵⁷ For a full discussion of these distinctions and their antecedents see J Horne, The Moral Mystic, pp. 34ff.

³⁵⁸ McBrien R, Catholicism, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1981, p. 1085.

³⁵⁹ Egan H, What Are They Saying About Mysticism?, p. 2.

³⁶⁰ Quoted in F Happold, Mysticism, p. 214.

³⁶¹ Johnson W, The Mysticism of The Cloud of Unknowing, St Meinrad, Indiana: Abbey Press, 1975, p. 18.

³⁶² Cox M, Mysticism: the Direct Experience of God, Northamptonshire: Aquarian Press, 1983, p. 32.

³⁶³ Lacan was fascinated by the sculpture of Teresa having a mystical experience, “The ecstasy of St Teresa” in the Teresianum Church, Rome Italy. See J Lacan, On Feminine Sexuality: the Limits of Love and Knowledge, B Fink (trans.), New York: W W Norton, 1998.

³⁶⁴ Teresa of Avila, “The interior castle”, The Collected Works of St Teresa of Avila, Vol. II, K Kavanaugh, O Rodriguez (eds. and trans.), Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1980, p. 412.

illumination about one's life, destiny and directions. Unlike apophatic mysticism, it attends to conceptualisations as primary ground for mystical experience.

The third school of mysticism is *nature mysticism*. This school attends to the unity one can experience with perceived reality. It does not make reference to a significant Other, nor does it concern itself with achieving unity with Divine Beings. Many people claim to have had a mystical encounter whilst apprehending nature, feeling an extraordinary unity with their surroundings.³⁶⁵ Poets and artists have been well known for expressing their experiences in this regard. Wordsworth is an example,

A presence of that disturbs me with joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the setting sun,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought
And rolls through all things³⁶⁶

Taoism is an organised example of nature mysticism. The word Tao means “the way”. The object of this way is to be one with the natural world, to achieve a universal reconciliation between spirit and matter. Simplicity and peace are paths on the way to achieve this experience and unity.³⁶⁷

William James observes that there are four elements to all mystical traditions: ineffability; noeticism; transience; passivity. Each tradition speaks about the indescribability of the experience. James calls this ineffability, a cognitive problem in trying, linguistically and adequately, to express feelings, concepts or descriptions that might enable another to understand the encounter. Secondly, James also claims that each mystical tradition has within it a noetic quality. The person comes to a particular kind of knowledge that is central either to the encounter or as a consequence of it. This even applies when the task of the mystical tradition is to lessen cognition because this is the knowledge gained from one encounter as a preparation for another encounter. Thirdly, James observes that transience is a hallmark of mystical

³⁶⁵ Parrinder G, *Mysticism in the World's Religions*, p. 21.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 25. W Wordsworth, “Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey”, (1798), *The Complete Poetical Works*, [1888], New York: Bartleby, 1999. For a commentary on Wordsworth's mysticism see, A Huxley, “Visionary Experiences”, pp. 36f.

³⁶⁷ Happold F, *Mysticism*, p. 150.

traditions.³⁶⁸ The experience or encounter cannot be sustained and is either a once-in-a-lifetime, or repeatable event, but the subject does not stay in the mystical state forever. Either way, it is meant to change the devotee's life and so the long-lasting benefits are the reordering of a life in a way that reflects the insight gained or more easily mediates another encounter. Finally, James notes that passivity is associated with mystical experiences. Either a Divine being reveals him/herself to the believer through darkness or light, or nature impinges on the consciousness of the beholder. In all mystical experiences the person feels as though he or she has been taken over by the external force.³⁶⁹

Karl Rahner argues that personal action is another common element to all mystical traditions³⁷⁰. The person who has the mystical experiences either turns away from the world as a result of trying to repeat or refine the experience, or enters into the world to live out the reality of the enlightenment attained, or understands his or herself as part of nature in a new way that leads to personal change or social action.³⁷¹ Harvey Egan has gone as far as to argue for a "mysticism of liberation", where one looks to "break open the socio-political, militantly-committed, prophetic dimensions of contemplation."³⁷² He maintains that a mysticism of the future must include a mysticism of suffering, victimhood and the scapegoat.³⁷³

³⁶⁸ It is important to note that "transience" is also a hallmark of modernity and of the cinematic experience.

³⁶⁹ James W, The Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 303ff. Also see: B Russell, Mysticism and Logic, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1917, p. 10; J Horne, The Moral Mystic, p. 113. William Johnson's experience of Christian/Buddhist dialogue and Zen meditation leads him to similar conclusions, The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion, pp. 43ff, 97ff, 179ff. This experience is similar to that described as the "viewing experience".

³⁷⁰ Rahner K, Spirit in the World, W Dych (trans.), New York: Herder and Herder, 1966, pp. 68ff. Rahner argues against those who claim mystical experience belongs to an elect few or those who mastered a certain spiritual path. "Mysticism... occurs within the framework of normal graces and within the experience of faith. To this extent, those who insist that mystical experience is not specifically different from the ordinary life of grace are certainly right." Encyclopaedia of Theology, London: Burns and Oates, 1975, p. 1010. Other writers who argue for the same social dimension to mysticism are: E Underhill, Mysticism and War, London: John M Watkins, 1915; E Underhill, Practical Mysticism, New York: E P Dutton, 1915; T Merton, Faith and Violence, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968; T Merton, The Seven Story Mountain, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948. Even J Horne emphasises this point in the title of his book, The Moral Mystic.

³⁷¹ Paul Tillich argued that the absence of morality and social concern in the writings of mystics led him to question the importance of their experience. Mystics appeared to him to be self-centred. See P Tillich, The Religious Situation, H Niebuhr (trans.), Chicago: New Chicago Press, 1957.

³⁷² Egan H, What Are They Saying About Mysticism?, p. 119.

³⁷³ Ibid. p. 119. French philosopher René Girard's recent theory on the centrality of the scapegoat in society is seen to have its roots in the mystical and theological presumptions of organised religion. See R Girard, The Scapegoat, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986; R Girard, J Oughourlian, G Lefort, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World: Books II & III, S Bann (trans.), Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987; R Girard, Selections, J Williams (ed.), New York:

Criticism of these observations is significant. Islamist Daniel Madigan has observed that the centrality of the appeal to the mystical experience in the West has arisen since the anti-clericalism of the 18th century. Friedrich Schliermacher, William James and Rudolph Otto gave to the personal mystical experience a central importance, for it was an “immediate consciousness of the Deity.”³⁷⁴ James thought mystical experience was untainted by ecclesial or social doctrines and so was the primary religious event.³⁷⁵ Madigan, however, recognises that while purity, righteousness, darkness, light, visage, ineffability, noeticism, transience, passivity and personal action can be seen as cross-cultural manifestations of mysticism, study of these elements alone ignores that mysticism is “mediated for us by a community and situated firmly within that community’s tradition of belief.”³⁷⁶ Madigan does not dismiss the reality of mystical experience or its social and religious importance but argues it is “firstly an experience of oneself...assenting to or achieving insight into and finally giving oneself over to the vision of reality proffered by a community that lives by that vision...”³⁷⁷ Furthermore, he argues that mystical experience is “not so much a direct experience of God as an experience of believing.”³⁷⁸ He concludes, “If religious experience appears to be a phenomenon common to all traditions, we cannot claim that it is because a single absolute or ultimate is clearly at work in them all. What gives these diverse experiences a tantalising commonality amid all their differences is the fact that they are all instances of human persons being drawn into communal vision or hypothesis about reality.”³⁷⁹

This survey of the concept of mysticism provides the framework for exploring what constitutes the elements of a cinematic mystical gaze. Whether scholars of the cinema or film writers have understood the implications of it or not, their invocation of the term mystical, and its associated language, is a telling commentary on what the

Crossroad, 1996; P Dumouchel (ed.), Violence and Truth: on the Work of René Girard, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988.

³⁷⁴ Schliermacher F, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, J Oman (trans. and ed.), New York: Harper & Row, 1958, p. 101.

³⁷⁵ James W, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 42.

³⁷⁶ Madigan D, “When experience leads to different beliefs”, p. 65. Also see S Katz, “Editor’s Introduction”, in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, p. 8.

³⁷⁷ Madigan D, “When experience leads to different beliefs”, p. 72. Katz makes the same point, “Our investigation suggests ...a wide variety of mystical experiences which are, at least in respect of some determinative aspects, culturally and ideologically grounded” See, “Language epistemology and mysticism”, in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, p. 66. R Zaehner has demonstrated the veracity of this claim in regard to Eastern mystical traditions. See R Zaehner, Mysticism Sacred and Profane, New York: Oxford University Press, 1957, pp. 194ff.

³⁷⁸ Madigan D, “When experience leads to different beliefs”, p. 73.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 73.

viewer takes to the act of film spectatorship and what some directors like Peter Weir make explicit in their films. To describe the cinema experience as mystical is a short-hand way of describing an ineffable encounter, where a sense of absorption, the break-down in subject/object relationship, a heightened awareness of and unity with the natural and created order, of forgetting oneself or being illuminated, has occurred. This transient experience, if regularly repeated, is powerful enough to change visual and emotional perspectives, to impart information, and to influence attitudes and behaviours. The experience of spectatorship is an encounter with oneself, one's culture and, at its core, of the belief in the suspension of disbelieving which it demands.

Akin to mysticism are other important religious, theological and anthropological terms like liturgy, mythology, ritual and church. Where possible I will keep the discussion centred on the mystical encounter for it is a more accessible and cross-cultural concept. There will be times, however, when I will draw upon these other terms, not for their confessional importance, but because they are examples of institutionalised mysticism and they have had a significant and hitherto unrecognised influence on the development of the cinema, its writers and directors and the expectation of its spectators. The language of cinematic mysticism opens up the Other-world in film that James Palmer and Michael Riley suggest is “apprehended not so much by sight as by vision”³⁸⁰ and that certain contemporary directors and films are not focussed on religion but on “faith, which is another mode of vision or knowing.”³⁸¹ It may be argued that, in the end, what is at stake here is a form of “secular mysticism”, an issue I will explore later.

The History and Development of the Theory of the Gaze and its Relationship to Mysticism.

Tom Gunning has shown that cinema's immediate antecedent was vaudeville's “magic theatre”, which in turn was to beget the emergence of fairgrounds in the early 20th century.³⁸² Before the development of its narrative character in 1907 – 1913, film was one of main attractions of popular and public entertainment festivals

³⁸⁰ Palmer J, Riley R, “Seeing, believing and ‘knowing’ in narrative film: *Don't Look Now* revisited”, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 23, 1, 1995, p. 14.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 16.

³⁸² Gunning T, “An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator”, *Art & Text*, 34, Spring, 1989, pp. 33f.

and shows.³⁸³ Gunning argues that these earliest films of arriving trains and stampeding elephants running straight toward the camera, assaulted the senses of their spectators and drew out of them astonished and terrified gazes³⁸⁴ as well “a pleasurable vacillation between belief and doubt.”³⁸⁵ He argues that these earliest manifestations of the film theatre had four characteristics: the images moved; the audience was safe no matter how terrified they were of what they were seeing; and the image addressed the spectators directly; they “explicitly acknowledge the spectator, seeming to reach outwards and confront.”³⁸⁶ Borrowing an image from a curious ally, Gunning concludes that this cinema of astonishment was what the fifth century St Augustine of Hippo called “the lust of the eyes.”³⁸⁷

Later in this chapter I will make an explicit connection between Gunning’s astonished gaze and the mystical gaze. For now I will develop the history of the cinema’s antecedents and see their connection to mysticism. Gunning traces the roots of the cinema back through the fairgrounds, the vaudeville theatres of the mid-19th century to the magic light shows in the centuries before. He does this to prove that the audience was not taken by surprise at the vividness of the first films they saw but that “the first spectator’s experience reveals not a childlike belief, but an undisguised awareness (and delight in) film’s illusionistic capabilities.”³⁸⁸ He is aware of the links between Spiritualism, the development of photography, the magic shows of the 19th century, the theatre of illusion and the earliest filmmakers.³⁸⁹

While serving, on the one hand, as evidence of a supernatural metaphysical existence, spirit photographers also present a uniquely modern conception of the spirit world as caught up in the endless play of image making and reproduction and the creation of simulacra... As revelatory images, evidence of an afterlife, such photographs led to byzantine conceptions of the spirit realm as engaged in the manufacture and reproduction of image doubles.³⁹⁰

³⁸³ Gunning T, “The cinema of attraction: early film, its spectator and the avant-garde”, Wide Angle, VIII, 3/4, 1986, pp. 65-67.

³⁸⁴ Gunning T, “An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator”, p. 33.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 34.

³⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 38.

³⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 38. See Augustine of Hippo, Confessions, chap. XXXV, sect.1.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 43.

³⁸⁹ Gunning T, “Phantom images and modern manifestations”, Fugitive Images, P Petro (ed.), Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 60ff. Also see A Hopkins (ed.), Magic: Stage Illusions, Special Effects and Trick Photography, New York: Dover, 1978.

³⁹⁰ Ibid. pp. 67-68.

Gunning's argument can be further supported by more history of how mysticism and theatre has been closely linked for centuries. In Europe the tradition that saw the development of these travelling shows of light and illusion were themselves born from the exotic Renaissance circuses, and before them the troubadours of the medieval period.³⁹¹ Until the 18th century these were often founded for the purpose of entertainment at religious festivals; magic was always connected to the supernatural.³⁹² Christian Passion plays are recorded as early as the fourth century. Moving within a geographical area and by the calendar of local saints and feast days, travelling troupes of musicians and players were common throughout Europe by the 11th century, one troupe permanently performing the Passion at the Coliseum by the 15th century. In 1402 the Confrérie de la Passion was given the Royal Warrant to the performances of the Passion in France. As their theatrical sophistication increased these troupes featured early light and illusion techniques in their retelling of the narratives about the work of Satan and, especially, in the staging of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.³⁹³ In its narrative development, the earliest cinema even maintained these religious associations by showing the very popular Life of Christ and lives of the saints by the reel.³⁹⁴ For all of St Augustine's grave concerns about representations of a lesser order,³⁹⁵ generations of Europeans fulfilled their lust for Otherworldly stories through this world's popular entertainment.

Tom Gunning's contention that the audience's "screams of terror and delight were well prepared for by both showmen and audience"³⁹⁶ is true, but even more so when a fuller history of the development of the style of this presentation and its content is taken into account. It can be argued that the earliest preparation of the audience's astonishment was their expectation of being presented with mysterious and

³⁹¹ For a full discussion on the history of magic in this period see, S During, Modern Enchantment: the Cultural Power of Secular Magic, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 7ff.

³⁹² Ibid. p. 14.

³⁹³ Scholes P, The Oxford Companion to Music, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 765.

³⁹⁴ Jesus Christ Moviestar, CCTV Documentary, 1990. In Australia the Salvation Army were the first to use the cinema for religious purposes with *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900) and *Heroes of the Cross* (1909). Some scholars claim that *Soldiers of the Cross* was the first feature film in the world. As important as Herbert Booth's presentation was in 1900, we know from written descriptions that it was a mixture of slides and short films. See P Laughren, "The beginnings of cinema in Australia", A Century of Australian Cinema, J Sabine (ed.), Sydney: Mandarin, 1999, pp. 16ff.

³⁹⁵ Gunning argues that Augustine would have seen the theatre as a means of being distracted from the higher call to behold Beauty towards sinfulness. See, "An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator", p. 37.

³⁹⁶ Gunning T, "An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator", p. 43.

mystical stories in these venues, as much as it was with the wonder of the apparatus delivering it in a new and extraordinary form.

Another support for this argument is in the application of the terms “carnivale” and “carnavalesque” to the cinema. Adapting the work of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, Patrick Fuery argues that the cinema offers an entry into another-world which can upset the social conventions of this one.³⁹⁷ Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivale was based on his study of the popular religious festivals in ancient Greece, Rome and of the Medieval period.³⁹⁸ These carnivals contained an array of imaginative displays which often dramatised the consequences of living a life dissenting from the precepts of the local deity. These presentations amplified a theological message and promoted the mysticism of the dominant religious group. Even today some of the grotesque images of the Venetian Carnivale and Halloween have an explicit connection to warding off evil and the “choosing of light”.

Julia Kristeva’s dialogical theory of the carnivalesque has been important in this school of thought. What she says of its characteristics: the representation of excess; dream-like sequences and settings; themes of social disruption; dark humour and the transformation of violence; a resistance to laws; the acceptance of disturbing images; use of liminal spaces and the distortion of time, is, as I demonstrate, said of mysticism and mystics as well.³⁹⁹ The European religious traditions of the travelling passion plays and the carnivale have been a largely unrecognised element in film theorists’ arguments as to why the gaze of the public so easily and quickly adapted to the cinema. Building on the foundations of these mystical festivals, the public already had a developed and heightened expectation of what the Other-world visual theatre could offer and the degree to which they could be sutured into the diegesis. The catharsis provided by the carnivale, which has at its root the religious catharsis facilitated by popular piety throughout Europe, was transferred seamlessly to the earliest cinema. “When film was invented at the turn of the century it was hailed as a spectacular and uniquely modern form of entertainment. It brought together the

³⁹⁷ Fuery P, *New Developments in Film Theory*, London: Macmillan, 2000, pp. 115-123.

³⁹⁸ Bakhtin M, *Rabelais and His World*, H Iswolsky (trans.), Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1968.

³⁹⁹ Kristeva J, *Desire in Language*, T Gora, A Jardine, L Roudice (trans.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, pp. 77ff. Also see P Fuery, *New Developments in Film Theory*, pp. 115ff.

mechanical and the mystical – magically on the screen before the astonished gaze of the modern subject.”⁴⁰⁰

Cinema, Magic and Primitive Mysticism

The fledging film industry’s first public exposure often came through shows by magicians. Georges Mèlies understood the power of the new medium and included it in his show.⁴⁰¹ Harry Houdini did the same.⁴⁰² Emile and Charles Pathé followed these examples and founded an enduring film empire.⁴⁰³ One of the common elements in these magic and film shows was their interest in the paranormal and spiritualism, which often included mediums who would speak with people beyond the grave. The public’s first exposure to film was in the context of a visual illusion and popular spirituality.⁴⁰⁴ By the end of World War I the dominance of the magic theatre had ended and the age of the cinema had been born.⁴⁰⁵ The public transferred their expectation and gaze from one to the next.

The earliest, continuous and most direct indicator to the mystical gaze in the cinema, however, came in the way the cinema was described as magical. Robert Herring writing in *Close-Up* in 1929, maintained that one of the hallmarks of all reality is magic. It “is the name for the thing that is larger than the thing itself, and this larger thing is what makes it real.” Given his definition, the cinema was “part of a larger magic which finds expression in all sorts of ways in our daily life”.⁴⁰⁶ Herring could substitute the word mystical for magic and the sense of his argument would not change. Herring was not on his own. Ten years earlier, surrealist Louis Aragon combined language of magic and religion to describe the cinema experience.

Someone mentioned magic. How better to explain this superhuman, despotic power such elements exercise even on those who recognised them, elements till now decried by people of taste, and which are the most powerful on souls least sensitive to the enchantment of film-going...only the cinema which directly addresses the people could impose these new sources of human

⁴⁰⁰ Creed B, “The cyberstar”, *The Film Cultures Reader*, G Turner (ed.), London: Routledge, 2002. p. 129.

⁴⁰¹ During S, *Modern Enchantment: the Cultural Power of Secular Magic*, pp. 169f.

⁴⁰² Ibid. pp. 173ff.

⁴⁰³ Ibid. pp. 170f.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. pp. 161-171.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 171.

⁴⁰⁶ Donald J, Friedberg A, Marcus L, *Close Up: Cinema and Modernism*, London: Cassell, 1998, p. 50.

splendour on a rebellious humanity searching for its soul... We must open our eyes in front of the screen, we must analyse the feeling that transports us, reason it out to discover that cause of that sublimation of ourselves.⁴⁰⁷

It is not surprising that one of the leading surrealists uses theologically charged and magical language in reference to the cinema. Many of the surrealists had such an exalted view of the cinema; they believed it would permanently change the world for good and be a source of conflict resolution. They lived to see their expectations disappointed, but their enthusiasm for the potency of the encounter is important. For Aragon, the experience of being a spectator and reflecting on what it engenders in us, how it enables a surrender of self and can lead to personal and social transformation.

In a similar vein Albert Valentin goes even further than Aragon, calling the cinema “black and white magic.” He makes an explicit link between film, magic and religion, with language bordering on the apocalyptic.

Two phosphorescent tails divided space at that time, though you observed the one that brought the end of the world with it without seeing the Other, which came out of the lens of the magic lantern, arrived before us full to bursting with a humanity that flows over us on every side.... It must be said that, if you thought about it a bit, you would not cross the threshold of the cinema without a feeling close to the one you get going into a church: a mixture of humility of sorts before the deception you are the object of, and admiration for the quality of the trap set you. In both cases someone is counting on a weakness of ours to trick us: in the temple on the feebleness of our understanding; in the darkened theatre on a defect in our retina that delights in visual puns and cannot succeed in isolating the succession of forms moving at speeds.⁴⁰⁸

It is hard to find a clearer example of a film theorist linking the act of spectatorship with a religious encounter. Demonstrating the tide of irreligious sentiment that gripped France during the late 1920s, Valentin even asserts that both the cinema and the church have an effect on us because we are too physically and mentally weak to unmask their deceptive powers. He alludes to the sense of presence created within the space where the theatrical and liturgical rites are played out. As I shall show later mystics have regularly described their experiences in terms of standing in awe before

⁴⁰⁷ Aragon L, “On Décor”, first published in L Delluc, *Le Film*, reproduced in *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema*, P Hammond (ed.), London: BFI, 1978, pp. 28f.

⁴⁰⁸ Valentin A, *L’Art Cinématographique IV*, Paris: Librairie Felix, Paris, 1927, published as “Introduction to black and white magic”, *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema*, P Hammond (ed.), p. 57.

the Other they have encountered, filled with admiration and humility, and feeling insignificant in such a presence. Furthermore the sense of bursting out and flowing over not only invokes the prophet Isaiah's ecstatic experience,⁴⁰⁹ but also alerts us to what Valentin observed in himself or others in both places. The temple claimed to conjure up the divine; the cinema delivered humanity writ large.

It is not by accident that the language of magic has been employed to describe the cinema and Valentin tells us why. Beginning with the "magic lantern", spectators thought the projection of moving images was miraculous.⁴¹⁰ To underline the link between cinema and magic, early filmmakers often used magicians in their scenarios and some movie houses employed them as live acts during the sessions.⁴¹¹ It is not surprising that phrases like "movie magic" and "the magic of the cinema" have grown up with the industry and continue to be used by scholars today⁴¹² and that Ingmar Bergman chose the term Magic Lantern as the title of his autobiography.⁴¹³ In a recent

⁴⁰⁹ See Isaiah 44: 4, 23.

⁴¹⁰ R Bassan, "Du côté des lanternes magiques", Image et Son, 373, June 1982, p. 2; T Barber, "Phantasmagorical wonders: the magic lantern ghost show in the nineteenth-century America", Film History, III, 2, 1989, pp. 73-86; E Barnouw, "The fantasies of Andrew Oehler", Quarterly Review of Film, IX, 1, 1984, pp. 40-44. Scholars on the "miraculous" properties of the magic lantern include: N Brederoo, "Veelbewogen beelden. De geschiedenis van de toverlantaarn", Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis, 3, 1, 2000, pp. 111-133; M Hommel, "De toverlantaarn", Skrien, 163, December-January, 1988-89, pp. 26-27; R Carson, The Magic Lantern, New York: Holt, 1952; R Kazis, "More than a moviehouse" Jump Cut, 24-25, March, 1981, pp. 10-12; Magic Lantern Society, The Lantern Magic: Iconography of the Magic Lantern, Nutley: Magic Lantern Society, 1993; National Film Board of Canada, Illuminating the Story of Projection: From the Magic Lantern to IMAX, Montréal: Organisée par la Cinémathèque, 1996; E Parker, The Lantern, New York: Salvation Army, 1901.

⁴¹¹ Barnouw, Erik "The magician and the movies", American Film, III, 7, May 1978, pp. 58-63. Also see E Barnouw, The Magician and the Cinema, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

⁴¹² J Arabov, "On the magic of cinema and the impact of screen images on the unconscious" Iskusstvo Kino 3, March 1996, pp. 50-51; C Beylie, C Schapira, "Entretien avec Georges Franju", Avant-Scène Cinéma, pp. 325-326, April 1984, pp. 3-11. Other scholars who speak about the "magic" of the cinema include: J Binet, "Le sacré dans le cinéma négro-africain", Positif, 235, October 1980, pp. 44-49; I Butler, Silent Magic: Rediscovering the Silent Film Era, London: Columbus, 1987; J Duncan, "Making Movie magic", Cinefex, 56, November 1993, pp. 97-98; J Gianvito, "Bergman's Magic lantern 'living is its own meaning' ", Literature/Film Quarterly, XVII, 2, April 1989, pp. 138-140; D Hahn, Animatic Magic, New York: Disney Press, 1996; D Hutchinson, Film Magic, New York: Prentice Hall, 1987; A Garbicz, Cinema: the Magic Vehicle, Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1975; D Galef, "A sense of magic: reality and illusion in Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*", Literature/Film Quarterly, XII, 2, April 1984, pp. 96-106; B Grant, K Barry, "Looking upward: H.G. Wells, science fiction and the cinema", Literature/Film Quarterly, XIV, 3, July 1986, pp. 154-163; M Mills, "Magic realism and Garcia Marquez's *Erendira*", Literature/Film Quarterly, XVII, 2, April 1989, pp. 113-122; R Moore, Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic, Durham, North Caroline: Duke University Press, 2000; V Ostria, "Showscan: le cinéma en kit", Cahiers du Cinéma, 423, September 1989, p. 9; B Ramirez, "Magic reels": a history of cinema in Latin America", Film Quarterly, XLV, 4, Summer 1992, pp. 50-52; J Robertson, The magic of film editing, Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania: TAB, 1984; D Sless, "Media magic", Media Information Australia, 48, May 1988, pp. 21-24; D Youngblood, The Magic Mirror: Moviemaking in Russia, 1908-1918, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

⁴¹³ Bergman I, The Magic Lantern: an Autobiography, J Tate (trans.), London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993.

and comprehensive study of magic, Simon During defines how the term magic is used in these contexts and what it signifies. It is “not the magic of witches or Siberian shamans...[or] the subject of the occult, [but]... ‘secular magic’ shows [that] have helped provide the terms and content of modern culture’s understanding of itself.”⁴¹⁴

André Breton, the leader of the French surrealists in the 1920s,⁴¹⁵ was another theorist whose description of the cinema’s “convulsive beauty” and its ability to enable spectators to enter into the “marvellous” offers a foundation for the mystical gaze. For Breton the goal of automatic writing and simulation was meant to intoxicate the lost soul and lead to personal revelation;⁴¹⁶ devotees arrived “in a strange place... accompanied by the direct sensation that something momentous, something essential depends upon them.”⁴¹⁷ Breton saw the cinema as the place in which simulation could occur because it best deconstructed time and space as in the pattern of our dreams.⁴¹⁸ He saw the cinema as the “the first great bridge between the day to this night.”⁴¹⁹ While such a description is easily understood in the Freudian psychoanalytical terms which Breton so admired, it also has an equal resonance with apophatic and kataphatic mysticism. In fact, Breton describes the experience of spectatorship as “magnetising”, where the “important thing is that one came out “charged” for a few days.”⁴²⁰ Several elements in the cinema gave Breton this charge: the mysterious power of the cinema to disorient; the lyrical stories told there; the narrative interaction with the spectator’s life and dreams; and even its ability to pacify the spectator.⁴²¹

In his later work Breton speaks more openly about the critical value in the reception of the experience and the way spectators are enticed back to behold the “convulsive beauty” of the screen, to possess the love within the stories shown there,

⁴¹⁴ During S, Modern Enchantment: the Cultural Power of Secular Magic, p. 1.

⁴¹⁵ Linda Williams notes that Breton effectively took charge of the first Surrealist movement in 1925 when he began editing La Revolution Surrealiste. See L Williams, Figures of Desire: a Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Films, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981, p. 11.

⁴¹⁶ Ray R, The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 8. Also see, W Benjamin, “One-way street”, One-Way Street and Other Writings, E Jephcott, K Shorter (trans.), London: New Left Books, 1979, p. 229.

⁴¹⁷ Breton A, Nadja, Richard Howard (trans.), New York: Grove Press, 1960, p. 20. Also see, Robert Ray, The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy, p. 82.

⁴¹⁸ See A Bréton, Manifestoes of Surrealism, R Seaver, H Lane (trans.), Amenhotep, Illinois: University of Michigan Press, 1969. Also see L Williams, Figures of desire: a theory and analysis of surrealist films, p. 13.

⁴¹⁹ Breton A, “As in a wood”, L’Age du Cinema, 4/5, August-November, 1951, reproduced in The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema, p. 44.

⁴²⁰ Ibid. p. 43.

⁴²¹ Ibid. p. 43.

and even the invitation to desire that which is forbidden.⁴²² Breton is not prepared to leave the fantastic as the sole domain of the Church. Indeed, he saw cinema spectatorship as a ritual akin to religious observance. By entering through a door that buffers the spectator from the world outside, they enter into a world marked by darkness, the company of strangers and, by joining with them in the pilgrimage of what is presented to eye, the hope of the group for this marvellous experience not to end.⁴²³ “It is at the movies that the only absolutely modern mystery is celebrated.”⁴²⁴

Breton’s recognition that the codes of the cinema, through their beauty, repetition, light and dark, unity and desire, could best induce simulation, is not far removed from the argument here that the cinema is the modern place where, for similar reasons, spectators can exercise a secularised mystical gaze. Where these positions diverge is in understanding the cause of the process as a way to explain and enjoy its effect. “The surrealists exposed what other filmmakers tried to hide: the underlying structure of the fetish and its role in the creation of desire.”⁴²⁵ This process of unmasking how the cinema seduced the spectators added even more enjoyment for Breton.⁴²⁶ In this analysis, however, mystical traditions side with non-surrealist filmmakers. Many mystics and mainstream filmmakers discourage their devotees from asking too many questions of the why and how of the encounter. They maintain that, either there is something unknowable about how it works, or that to know too much about the experience would rob it of some of its power.

Not that all writers and filmmakers agree with the use of the application of this language to the cinema and the unstated relationship it has with primitive mysticism.⁴²⁷ Ado Kyrou makes a distinction between the marvellous and the fantastic. It has to do with the attribution of sources. The fantastic recognises the possibility of religious or mystical explanations of transcendence whereas the

⁴²² See A Breton, *L’Amour fou*, M Caws (trans.), Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987.

⁴²³ Breton A, “As in a wood”, p. 43.

⁴²⁴ Breton A, quoted in J Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1971, p. 2.

⁴²⁵ Williams L, *Figures of Desire: a Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Films*, p. 218.

⁴²⁶ Joan Hawkins calls the way Breton and Vache enjoyed claiming personal control over their cinema spectatorship as the first example of “channel surfing.” See, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. 37ff.

⁴²⁷ Kenneth Anger is an example of a filmmaker who explicitly used film to explore the notion of magic, ritual and mysticism. His first three films, *Kenneth Anger Volume One* (1953), *Kenneth Anger Volume Two* (1954), *Kenneth Anger Volume Three* (1965) are parodies of Hollywood genre films. He regularly uses hypnosis as a narrative development in ritual erotic scenarios. See Olivier Joyard, “Kenneth Anger, le maître de cérémonie” *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 510, February 1997, pp. 52-55. *Kenneth Anger Volume Four* (1980) focuses on the connections between magic and evil. See C Rowe, “Illuminating Lucifer”, *Film Quarterly*, XXVII, 4, Summer 1974, pp. 24-33.

marvellous sees the source for the inexplicable as coming from the world of materiality and the domain of the unconscious. “Everything fantastic is not marvellous. The fantastic without the marvellous (in which case the fantastic becomes the enemy of the marvellous) does not belong here: I gladly leave it to the priests, Cocteau and the spectacular revues. I don’t confuse monstres with lanterns and I don’t get ecstatic about every vampire or every apparition...”⁴²⁸ Kyrrou accepts that the cinema engenders a sense of Otherness, but he has a distaste for any explanation that describes the cinema in terms of magic or mysticism. He wants to make a break with this legacy. For Kyrrou surrealist cinema provides a visual language that supersedes any metaphysical explanations or reference.

The glance of a woman who loves is the bridge leading to the forces on the other side and these forces are as worldly as the glance. Therein resides the magic which, instead of reducing man to the level of a kneeling domesticated animal, lifts him up, makes him aware of the power of revolt and puts him in touch with the treasures he refused to see surrounding him. So-called ‘supernatural’ phenomena are only unknown human forces or the magnificent symbols of terrestrial power. Any religious, esoteric (in the theological sense), mystical interpretation of these phenomena can only diminish their liberating significance. That famous ‘reason’ perturbed by the fantastic and immersed in surreality obtains the authentic sense of materialism, which is not limited to its manifest content.⁴²⁹

By resisting a rational or meta-rational explanation for the effect of the cinema on the spectator Kyrrou is in line with every mystical tradition in the world. For all the knowledge he and Valentin had about how the cinema drew the spectator in, Kyrrou just wanted to enjoy the experience and fend off any analysis of it that would diminish the pleasure. Mystics who often report that they wanted to stay in the place where they were having the encounter or hold onto the associated feelings sometimes resisted others’ investigations and explanations of their encounter. Also shared between Kyrrou and the mystical tradition is the altered perception of reality with which the individual is left. In so many cases Kyrrou’s observation that the reality of surreality was a more real way of perceiving the world is matched by the hyper-reality mystics report as well.

⁴²⁸ Kyrrou A, *Le Surréalisme au Cinéma*, Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1963, published in *The Shadow and its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema*, P Hammond (ed.), p. 102.

⁴²⁹ Ibid. p. 102.

Kyrou's advice to reject magical language as a descriptor of the cinema, however, has not been heeded and it remains as current in the thinking and language of spectators as ever. In recent years the link between magic and the cinema has grown due to the extraordinary development in animation, special effects and the digital manipulation of film images.⁴³⁰ At the same time that Kyrou was railing against using magic as a metaphor, Walt Disney was selling his magic mountain all over the world⁴³¹ and David L Hewitt was simulating space travel adventures in *The Time Travellers* (1964) and *The Wizard of Mars* (1964). In both films Hewitt broke technological ground in special effects⁴³² and his work heralded a new era of visual surprises for the spectator. These developments reached a climax in George Lucas' *Star Wars*. In 1975 Lucas founded a pioneering company to develop special effects for the cinema which he named Industrial Light and Magic.⁴³³

On one level, then, the cinema's relationship to magic in the popular imagination can be explained through filmmakers promoting their work as a continuance of the line of entertainers who traded on optical illusions and magic acts that the public were accustomed to see and enjoy. It was in the film promoter's interests to have the public not understand the science of film projection. More recently, special effects and digitisation keep this tradition alive by exploiting the spectator's "How did they do that?" response. The problem with this argument is that magic has traditionally been ascribed to something that cannot be explained by scientific methods. As I will show this is a pre-scientific phenomenon. Given this definition of magic the apparatus of the cinema has never been magical. It may be novel, new, fresh and exciting, but never inexplicable. If one were to accept Valentin's observation that the Church trades on "the feebleness of our understanding", then the same charge can be laid at the door of the cinema as well.

Valentin, however, was correct in saying that the cinema operates on a weakness of the retina.

⁴³⁰ See J Brosnan, *Movie Magic: the Story of Special Effects*, New York: St Martin, 1974.

⁴³¹ Walt Disney's political gender and social agenda have come under closer scrutiny in recent years. See critical essays in D Buckingham (ed.), "Discussing Disney: critical perspectives on children's media culture", *Media Culture & Society*, XIX, 2, Apr 1997, pp. 285-293.

⁴³² Skotak R, "David Hewitt: special effects magician", *Filmfax*, 60, April-May 1997, pp. 51-54, 66-67.

⁴³³ See S Gregory, "The illusion of a future", *Film Comment*, XXVIII, 2, March-April 1992, pp. 32-36, 38-41; D Jody, "On the shoulders of giants", *Cinefex*, 70, June 1997, p. 72-109; H Martin, "War stories", *Cinefex*, 65, March 1996, pp. 70-93; D Shay, "30 minutes with the godfather of digital cinema", *Cinefex*, 65, March 1996, pp. 58-67.

The photoreceptors do record the image much like film, but there are roughly 125 million photoreceptors in the eye, and only one million fibres in the optic nerve that carries information to the brain. Thus, there is no way that every image imprinted on the photoreceptors can be transferred directly, dot-by-dot, into the brain; some sort of simplification or coding is required. The nerve cell layers in the retina organize and code the visual image, so that in a very real sense we begin to think about visual images inside the eye.⁴³⁴

The cinema works because film projection is predicated on the flicker fusion frequency in our retina where the centre of an image is sharper and the periphery of the same image is slower and more obscured, depending on the frame around the image and the light outside and within the image.⁴³⁵ Through trial and error projectionists discovered that 24 or 25 film frames per second are the optimum speeds for the eye to perceive the field of vision, maintain focus on an image but that this speed is not slow enough for the retina to see that there is no image between each frame and that images in the movies are not moving at all.⁴³⁶ Amos Vogel notes that,

The many mysteries of film begin at this moment; the acceptance of a flat surface as three-dimensional, of a sudden action, scale, or set changes as ordinary, of a border delimiting this fraudulent universe as normal, of black-and-white as reality... Without the viewer's physiological and psychological complicity, there could be no cinema at all.⁴³⁷

While Vogel's observations are right about the compromises demanded of and given by the spectator at the cinema, he seems to 'blame' our retina for predisposing us to this exploitation in the first place. The physical illusions the cinema trades on, now more than ever, do not prevent Vogel from continuing the foreboding observations of Valentin by comparing film to a magical experience and the cinema to a place of worship.

⁴³⁴ Marmor M, "The eye and art", The Eye of the Artist, M Marmor, J Ravin (eds.), St Louis, Missouri: Mosby Year Book, 1997, p. 5. Also see D Hubel, Eye, Brain and Vision, New York: Scientific American Library, 1988.

⁴³⁵ O'Day J, "Vision and art", Art and Visual Perception, N Seymour (ed.), Melbourne: Mora, 2000, p. 2-3.

⁴³⁶ See S Kracauer, Theory of Film, New York: Oxford University Press, 1960; H Mauerhofer, "Psychology of film experience", The Penguin Film Review, London; Penguin, 1949; R Stevenson, J Debrix, The Cinema as Art, London: Penguin, 1965.

⁴³⁷ Vogel A, Film as Subversive Art, New York: Random House, 1974, p. 10.

Subversion in cinema starts then the theatre darkens and the screen lights up. For the cinema is a place of magic where psychological and environmental factors combine to create an openness to wonder and suggestion, an unlocking of the unconscious. It is a shrine at which modern rituals rooted in atavistic memories and subconscious desires are acted out in darkness and seclusion from the outer world.⁴³⁸

Vogel and Valentin are right and wrong. The magic of the cinema is not found in its apparatus. This claim was initially made to entice audiences into the cinema by reassuring them that they would only find a better version of the sleight-of-hand they knew. As the cinema developed, the claim of magic has become a hook for audiences to be enticed back to see its technical advances and developments. The language of cinematic magic has continued to be used because it has been commercially successful. On another level, however, this language points to the effect of the cinema on an audience and its relationship to what it sees on the screen. Hence, the language of magic is more correctly applied to the effect rather than the cause of persistence of vision. In this, the apparatus of the cinema is important, and ignorance of it predisposes the spectator to the magical effects of what they see and hear. bell hooks, writing seventy years after Robert Herring, agrees with him that it is cinema's relationship to reality that reveals its magical quality.

Movies make magic. They change things... They give the reimagined, reinvented version of the real. It may look like the familiar, but in actuality it is a different universe from the world of the real. That's what makes movies so compelling...Movies remain the perfect vehicle for the introduction of certain ritual rites of passage that come to stand for the quintessential experience of border crossing for everyone who wants to take a look at difference and the different without having to experientially engage 'the Other.'⁴³⁹

It is this focus on the effect of the participant, on the nature of cinema as ritual and its defining of reality that is most revealing of cinema magic and the mystical gaze.

There are a number of conventional conclusions I can draw from the fact that the concept and language of magic have been used to describe the cinema throughout its history: it is a convenient and common expression which, while used indiscriminately, has no greater significance; it was inherited from the vaudevillian

⁴³⁸ Ibid. p. 9

⁴³⁹ hooks b, Reel to Reel: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 1-2.

shows which the cinema superseded. It describes the lack of scientific understanding on the part of the audience, especially, in regard to the development of special effects, as Arthur C Clarke observes, “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”⁴⁴⁰ Another possibility is that without the commentators being aware of it, without scholars ever having studied the application of the term in relation to the cinema, the term “magic” indicates we are in the presence of a mystical gaze, that is, the gaze spectators bring to the viewing experience with an expectation that they will experience Otherness.

The term “mystical gaze”, as a general description of cinematic spectatorship is not misplaced in its application, nor without significance in its long-standing use, because magic is a first principle and foundation for mysticism. Even by his circuitous argument, Valentin recognised the existence of the mystical gaze when he claimed that entering a cinema was akin to entering a church, where both venues demand humility, admiration and feebleness of mind and body. The Church, to which Valentin must be referring to, in France in the 1920s, would be Roman Catholic where a daily diet of the Tridentine liturgy and a weekly sung Solemn Mass would have been celebrated. It is easy to see why he made the parallel: attending an especially dedicated building on a certain day and time; entering a dimly-lit vast space, with seating directed toward the front; silent, attentive passivity required on the part of the congregation and the action occurring at the front where a ritual drama is enacted; a “sanctuary” area swathed in light but inaccessible to everyone except those who live there; stories told of good and evil; suspending scientific rationalism to access the experience; being surrounded by sound; and, potentially, living life differently for having had the experience. As Simon During concludes, “...once the world is conceived of as lacking transcendence, and God is folded back into what there is, that is, into Nature then certain questions – about the limits of Nature, the relation between mind and matter, and more particularly, the finality of death – acquire a new and still potentially magical interest.”⁴⁴¹ It is only in recent years that scholars have been more guarded about making such links. It is one of the reasons magic has survived as a term to capture the act of spectatorship. The word “magical” offers a more secular, acceptable and free way to describe the gaze as mystical, but the two are inseparable as I will now demonstrate.

⁴⁴⁰ Clarke A, *Astounding Days: a Science Fictional Autobiography*, New York: Bantam, 1990, p. 196.

⁴⁴¹ During S, *Modern Enchantment: the Cultural Power of Secular Magic*, p. 261.

Magic, Mysticism and Gaze Theory

The relationship between magic and mysticism is as ancient as it is complex. James G Frazer, one of the founders of modern anthropology, argues in *The Magic Art*, one part of his 12 volume series, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, that magic was the forerunner of organised religion.⁴⁴² Magic tried to control the forces of nature and organise them for the desire of the subject. Where magic no longer effects a change in these forces and subjective desires are left unfulfilled, magic wanes in its power. Frazer observed that in the development of mystical traditions, an appeal to a higher being or power supersedes the claims of magic. Herring's description of cinematic magic in terms of the ordinary elements of life holds with Frazer's observations about the nature of magic and its powers. Magic draws a subject away from his or her everyday activity for a ritual that attempts to conjure up from natural forces a world in which the subject has the power to predict and control a desired outcome. Such a description of the power of magic can even be found in the Hebrew Scriptures.⁴⁴³

It was, however, Jean-Louis Baudry who applied similar insights to the cinema and proposed systematic theories of spectatorship. Baudry noted in an early article that the apparatus of the cinema deludes spectators into believing that they have control over the image projected on the screen which enables them to feel transcendent over the event they are watching and desiring to possess.⁴⁴⁴ "Cinema mimes a form of archaic satisfaction experienced by the subject by reproducing the scene of it."⁴⁴⁵ Baudry's argument that the cinematic gaze was akin to Plato's cave has a special resonance with what constitutes the relational looking in the mystical gaze. Baudry describes the common elements of both the cave and the cinema as

⁴⁴² Frazer J, *The New Golden Bough*, abridged, T Caster (ed.), New York: Macmillan, 1959. Frazer was not alone in making this observation nor exploring the relationship between magic and mysticism. Other scholars look at similar issues from different perspectives. See: E Tylor, *Religion in Primitive Culture*, New York: Harper, 1958; S Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, New York: Random House, 1946; L Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives and the Supernatural*, New York: E P Dutton, 1935, first published in 1931; E Evans-Prichard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965; A Jensen, *Myth and Cult Among Primitive People*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, first published 1951.

⁴⁴³ See Exodus 7 where Moses and Aaron call down spells on Pharaoh. Also see S During, *Modern Enchantment: the Cultural Power of Secular Magic*, pp. 3ff.

⁴⁴⁴ Baudry J-L, "Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus" *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, in P Rosen (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 286f.

⁴⁴⁵ Baudry J-L, "The apparatus: metaphysical approaches to ideology", *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, P Rosen (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 312.

being in a contrived, darkened place, shadowy images projected on a screen, the passivity of the spectator, the creation of a special environment filled with particularised sound, sight and atmosphere in which the spectator regresses to the point where they accept the images as reality. Baudry argued that the machinery of the cinema enabled the spectator to be inherently narcissistic. While they consider themselves open to the world on the screen, spectators are, in fact prisoners of the cave and of their own desires.⁴⁴⁶ Similar features are true of the mystical experience. Indeed Plato's cave had a direct influence on the development of mystical traditions in Christianity, where early monasteries absorbed Neo-Platonism and, literally, went underground to seek enlightenment.⁴⁴⁷

As I outlined earlier, mysticism and Plato's cave share an emphasis on strong auditory and visual stimuli⁴⁴⁸ and self absorption leading to a sense of fusion between the interior and exterior worlds.⁴⁴⁹ This leads the individual to accept that what is seen as real. This has political and social consequences. Devotees change their actions in accordance with what they have seen and experienced⁴⁵⁰ and encourage others to have the same experience or accept as universally true what they have beheld.⁴⁵¹ Indeed, in Christian mysticism much is made of the reflected light of God's presence that shines in darkened places. "We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with him on the mountain... You will do well to be attentive to this as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."⁴⁵² Even echoes of Plato's metaphor of the cave can be seen at work in the thought of Paul of Tarsus when he outlines how life is a mere reflection of hoped-for glory. "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been known."⁴⁵³ Plato's cave and Baudry's commentary on the cinematic gaze has much to contribute to the mystical gaze.

⁴⁴⁶ Baudry J-L, "The apparatus; metaphysical approaches to ideology", *passim*.

⁴⁴⁷ See M Miles, Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981; J Newman, Historical Sketches, London: Longmans, Green, 1906; S Rubenson, The Letters of St Antony, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995; H Waddell, The Desert Fathers, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1957.

⁴⁴⁸ Smart N, Dimensions of the Sacred, London: Harper Collins, 1996, pp. 153f; Streng F, Understanding Religious Life, Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1985, p. 98.

⁴⁴⁹ Smart N, Dimensions of the Sacred, pp. 51, 96; Streng F, Understanding Religious Life, pp. 84ff.

⁴⁵⁰ McGuire M, Religion: the Social Context, Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1992, pp. 29-31, 280f. Smart N, Dimensions of the Sacred, pp. 155, 211; Streng F, Understanding Religious Life, pp. 127f.

⁴⁵¹ Smart N, Dimensions of the Sacred, p. 100; Streng F, Understanding Religious Life, pp. 72f.

⁴⁵² 1 Peter 1: 19.

⁴⁵³ 1 Corinthians 13: 12. It is from this passage in 1961 that Ingmar Bergman took the title of his explicitly theological film, *Through a Glass Darkly*.

Interestingly, Baudry made a direct link between the ideology of the cinema and that of the Church and State. I will return to the religious significance of this shortly.

There are sympathetic parallels here between psychoanalytical ideas about a deluded subject⁴⁵⁴ and his or her desires for pleasure, and the way theorists have applied them to the cinema as a means of explaining the spectator's need to control desire.⁴⁵⁵ These parallels are the foundations for contemporary theories of the gaze. The surrealist filmmakers were among the first groups to adapt Sigmund Freud's theories of dreams and the unconscious to cinema spectatorship. André Breton extolled the cinema as a means to entering into the marvellous, a realm of love and freedom.⁴⁵⁶ "For the Surrealists, the cinema had the transcendent capacity to liberate what was conventionally repressed, to mingle the known and the unknown, the mundane and the oneiric, the quotidian and the marvellous."⁴⁵⁷ The Surrealists argued that cinema reproduced the pattern of dreaming and so unmasked the unconscious desires of the self.

More recent post-structuralist theories of the gaze have drawn upon Freudian psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious. In summary, they stress that the look of the spectator is a complex interplay between: the fulfilment of the desire for primal unity and the resistance toward it; the pleasure and displeasure of looking and of stolen gazes; the assertion of language and law (father-rule); and the development of sexuality.⁴⁵⁸ I will not summarise these well-known theories here, except to support

⁴⁵⁴ For example Jacques Lacan's theories, at least in part, came from his observation that people with schizophrenia described their experience in terms of a perennial and incoherent present. They had difficulties distinguishing themselves as relational subjects and processing the signifiers that surrounded them. Film scholars who have based their work on Lacanian principles observe that the spectator has a similar task because the cinema can break down the barriers between I, me and the other. See J Belton (ed.), Movies and Mass Culture, London: Athlone, 1996, p. 195.

⁴⁵⁵ Carbonnier A, Magny J, "La critique en question: entretien avec Judith Miller et Michel Silvestre", Cinéma, 72, 301, January 1984, pp. 22-25. Also see J Fletcher, "Versions of Masquerade", Screen, XXIX, 3, Summer 1988; C Harpole, "Report on the international film theory conference V: Cinema and Language Center for Twentieth Century Studies", Quarterly Review of Film Studies, IV, 4, Fall 1979, pp. 541-545; S Ijsseling, "Psychoanalyse & film: enige opmerkingen over Jacques Lacan", Skrien, 112, November 1981, pp. 24-29; C Metz, The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema, C Britton, A Williams, B Brewster, A Guzzetti (trans.), Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982; K Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan: a reconsideration of gaze, look and image", Camera Obscura, 19, January 1989, pp. 54-85; P Thomas, "Review essay on 'Everything you always wanted to know about Lacan (but were afraid to ask Hitchcock)'", Film Quarterly, XLVII, 1, Fall 1993, pp. 46-47; M Walsh, "Returns in the real: Lacan and the future of psychoanalysis in film studies", Post Script, XIV, 1-2, Winter-Spring 1994-95, pp. 22-32.

⁴⁵⁶ Breton A, What is surrealism? Selected writings, Franklin Rosemount (ed.), London: Pluto, 1978, chapter three.

⁴⁵⁷ Stam R, Film Theory, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, p. 56.

⁴⁵⁸ See S Freud, "Beyond the pleasure principle", "The infantile genital organisation", "On the sexual theories of children", The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,

the view that three aspects of Freud's theories have a particular importance for the mystical gaze: the sense of lack; the importance of dreams as an assertion of power over the symbolic order; and the function of stories.⁴⁵⁹

It is hardly surprising, then, that psychoanalytical theories have also had an impact on the study of mysticism. Julia Ching argues, for example, that Lacan's mirror symbol is a helpful theory in understanding the complexities of Confucian and Taoist mystical experiences. Ching concedes that she and Lacan have different starting points. "Jacques Lacan seeks consciously to demystify all experience, by seeking out underlying psychological conditions of human personality...I acknowledge and recognize a realm of experience, religious and mystical, which I consider to be not totally comprehensible to psycho-analysis."⁴⁶⁰ Ching argues, however, that the myth of primal narcissism, upon which Lacan's mirror stage is built, has resonances in many mystical traditions especially in the way water and the mirror reflect back to the mystic the mind, heart and soul.⁴⁶¹ "Here the image in the mirror no longer represent merely the external form of the person as seen by others, but a more interior principle. In both Eastern and Western religions, it frequently represents the soul – or its equivalent."⁴⁶² A common task in mystical traditions is to recover the primal innocence of the soul. "Their hearts are like mirrors in the mud, enclosing the light within the darkness. Dust and dirt once removed, the mirror will reflect the beautiful and the ugly."⁴⁶³ I have already outlined the view that the cinema screen acts as a primal mirror for the spectator. Julia Ching alerts us to the idea that one of the elements present when we look is the mystical gaze.

Though Ching finds connections between Lacan's mirror stage and mysticism, Christian Metz, another foundational theorist of the gaze, was never given to making

24 Vols., J Strachey (trans.), London: Hogarth, 1953-1966; B Creed, "Film and psychoanalysis", The Oxford Guide to Film Studies, J Hill, P Gibson (eds.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 77-90; E Grosz, Jacques Lacan: a Feminist Introduction, New York: Harper & Row, 1990, pp. 28ff; E Kaplan, Psychoanalysis and the Cinema, New York: Routledge, 1990.

⁴⁵⁹ See B Creed, "Film and psychoanalysis", pp. 79ff; T Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, London: Routledge, 1985, p. 99; R Stam, Film Theory, pp. 167ff; S Haywood, Key Concepts in Cinema Studies, pp. 96ff.

⁴⁶⁰ Ching J, "The mirror symbol revisited: Confucian and Taoist mysticism", Mysticism and Religious Traditions, p. 226.

⁴⁶¹ See J Lacan, The Four Fundamentals of Psycho-Analysis, A Sheridan (trans.), Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986, p. 83; J Lacan, The Psychoses, R Grigg, J-A Miller (eds.), London: Routledge, 1993, p. 13; J Lacan, Ecrits: a Selection, A Sheridan (trans.), New York: Norton, 1973, pp. 1f.

⁴⁶² Ibid. p. 226.

⁴⁶³ Yampolsky P (ed. and trans.), The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, New York: Doubleday, 1967, p. 132.

such a link. He does, however, use language laden with mystical references. In his work on the spectator's gaze he speaks of it, "as a condition of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject."⁴⁶⁴ The appeal to metaphysics to describe the gaze is underlined by the sense of power the spectator feels in relation to the screen. Mulvey argued that the dominant, heterosexual, erotic male gaze gives the spectator a sense of omnipotence⁴⁶⁵ what Metz calls, "an all-powerful position which is that of God himself, or more broadly of some ultimate signified". In similar terms to these the gaze can be understood to be mystical. In certain mystical traditions the process of regression is not viewed negatively but as a positive element in the experience.⁴⁶⁶ The change of consciousness which includes an altered state of perception is seen as an action whereby the subject becomes aware of its origin and destiny, of a presence, a reality it once knew and rediscovers. Mysticism is an act of the conscious self becoming aware of an act of perception of an external image or experience through which the subject recognises and identifies part of his or her own desire.⁴⁶⁷ The experience bestows on the subject a sense of power and, indeed a literal participation in omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. "It starts from a consciousness of the absolute superiority or supremacy of a power other than myself, and it is only as it falls back upon ontological terms to achieve its end...that the element of *tremendum*, originally apprehended as plenitude of power, becomes transmuted into plenitude of being."⁴⁶⁸

Metz rejected the idea that the cinema screen acted as a Lacanian mirror because it cannot reflect back an image of the spectator to her. For Metz the act of cinema spectatorship was more related to scopophilic voyeurism, where, just as our Oedipal desires saw us watch or imagine our parents having sex, so the cinema enables us to steal a private look into the intimate lives and situations of others, places

⁴⁶⁴ Metz C, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, p. 51.

⁴⁶⁵ Mulvey L, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema", *Screen*, 16, 3, 1975, p. 12.

⁴⁶⁶ See N Smart, "Interpretation and mystical experience", *Understanding Mysticism*, R Woods (ed.), Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980, pp. 83, 86; F Staal, "Superstructures", *Understanding Mysticism*, pp. 94, 100.

⁴⁶⁷ "When I am completely united to you, there will be no more sorrow or trials; entirely full of you, my life will be complete." Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, H Chadwick (trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, sect. 10. "All these sufferings are meant to increase the desire to enjoy the Spouse. And His Majesty, as one who knows our weakness, is enabling the soul through these afflictions and many others to have courage to take him as his Spouse." Teresa of Avila, "The interior castle", *The Collected Works of St Teresa of Avila*, Vol. 2, p. 338. "This soul of mine is in the heart of Brahman, and when I go from here I shall merge into it", *Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad* (3.14), quoted in G Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World's Religions*, p. 35. "The moon and the night-lily unite in love...I saw Krishna everywhere." *Gita*, quoted in Parrinder G, *Mysticism in the World's Religions*, p. 161.

⁴⁶⁸ Otto R, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.

we would not normally go, or into which we would not be welcomed. In doing so we identify with an imaginary image and take it for reality.⁴⁶⁹ Because of the consciousness of the spectator and the ability for he or her to identify with an imaginary world, the reality of the cinema was for Metz more akin to the phantasies of daydreams than those of the dreams of sleep.⁴⁷⁰ “This specific joy of receiving from the external world images that are usually internal...of seeing them inscribed in a physical location (the screen), of discovering in this way something almost realizable in them.”⁴⁷¹ Metz’s language here in describing the gaze of the cinema could easily be a description of mysticism. Metz is fully aware that Bazin and others were explicit in their appreciation of the cinema as a mystical event. Bazin went as far as calling silent films the “Old Testament of the cinema”⁴⁷² He summarizes Bazin and his fellow phenomenologists as arguing that “all conceptions of the cinema [are] a mystical revelation, as ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ unfolding by right, as the apparition of what is as an epiphany, derive from it.”⁴⁷³ Metz does not go this far, though he takes seriously Bazin’s point in relation to the type of ecstatic effect the cinema has on some spectators. “These cosmophanic conceptions (which are not always expressed in an extreme form) register rather well the ‘feeling’ of the deluded ego of the spectator, they often give us excellent descriptions and they have advanced our knowledge of the cinema.”⁴⁷⁴ Building on Metz’s work, Richard Allen has coined term “iconic imagination” to describe the interplay between spectator and the cinematic image as a “projective illusion [where] we step through the seeing-as corridor and appear to perceive directly a world instead of perceiving a photographic reproduction of something in the world.”⁴⁷⁵ Each spectator exercises his or her gaze in “in a spectator-centered way.”⁴⁷⁶

We can deduce, therefore, that there are four major intersections between foundational psychoanalytic theories in regard to how the cinema regulates the subject’s desires and the function of magic and mysticism: a sense of loss; a desire to regain innocence; a need to control the external world; and to possess powerful forces.

⁴⁶⁹ Metz C, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, p. 44.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid. pp. 97ff.

⁴⁷¹ Metz C, *Essais Semiotiques*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1977, p. 136.

⁴⁷² Bazin A, *What is cinema?*, Vol.2, H Gray (trans. and ed.), Berkeley California: University of California Press, 1967, p. 23.

⁴⁷³ Metz C, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, p. 50.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 50.

⁴⁷⁵ Allen R, “Cinema, psychoanalysis and the film spectator”, *Persistence of Vision*, 10, 1993, p. 8.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 28.

Lacanian psychoanalysts recognise that loss is the primal human experience and that we become aware that we are not what we seek. The cinema, implicitly, and magic, explicitly, promise the subject that he or she can be perfect or complete if he or she obtains what they have lost. Nearly every ancient religious belief system, for example, has mythologies that centre on the loss of innocence and the need to regain it.⁴⁷⁷

Accompanying this lack, is a loss of control over the natural and physical forces impacting upon the individual and the world, which are seen as a disruption of the harmony that once existed. Magic uses story, ritual, time, space, light, dark, smell, sound and people to conjure up the conditions in which a subject or a community might regain lost innocence and reassert control over the material world. Magic and the cinema act as gateways to a world of Otherness, Aragon's "searching for the soul", where access is regulated, outcomes predestined and enough pleasure is gained by the participant/spectator to want to keep repeating the experience.⁴⁷⁸ Cinema, magic and mysticism encode the desire to control, with a power to predict, the outcomes of the interaction between the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real.

Cinema shares with magic a process by which a participant seeks to live in harmony/identification with the object of the subject's desire and, often, attempt to possess it and make it his or her own. The major difference between psychoanalytical descriptions of the cinema and the activity of magical mysticism is the consciousness of delusion. While most people are unaware of how the cinema might play in their unconscious desires and how they are constructed as spectators by the apparatus, they are aware that they are watching a fictional world. Many people who participate in magic, deluded though they may be, do not accept they are deluded at all. Magic and the cinema, therefore, bestow on their respective participants a misrecognition of themselves as transcendent⁴⁷⁹ at the service of a political and ideological intention and use.⁴⁸⁰ One of the first scholars to draw attention to the ideological character of the cinematic gaze was Laura Mulvey.

⁴⁷⁷ The best known of these narratives in the western world is the account in the Book of Genesis. Adam and Eve are punished for their disobedience by being expelled from the Garden of Eden, the original paradise. The New Testament has Jesus styled as the "new Adam who restored lost innocence" and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, has been called the "new Eve".

⁴⁷⁸ For a fuller discussion on the experience of *jouissance*, see S Hayward, Key Concepts in Cinema Studies, p. 289.

⁴⁷⁹ Creed B, "Film and psychoanalysis", p. 80.

⁴⁸⁰ For the importance of Lacan's work for ideological readings of film see A Britton, "The ideology of 'Screen'", Movie, 26, Winter 1978-79, pp. 2-28; J McCanell, Figuring Lacan: Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious, London: Croom Helm, 1986.

Contemporary Theories of the Gaze and their Relationships to the Mystical

In the following discussion of cinematic spectatorship, I will explore the extent to which scholarly articles on the “gaze” have drawn upon the language and iconography associated with mysticism. The latter runs through theories of the gaze proposed by Mulvey, Doane, de Lauretis and Studlar.⁴⁸¹ Although drawing on important concepts associated with the tradition and representation of mysticism, none of these theorists draws attention to this important but neglected area. I will also discuss more recently developed theories of the gaze and demonstrate that although in a very different context writers such as Creed and Dyer draw upon areas of mysticism.

The Dominant Male Gaze

Laura Mulvey argued that the most important aspect of the gaze was that that it was split between the active, male gaze and the passive, female object. Mulvey argued that the cinema has traditionally presented women “as (passive) raw, material

⁴⁸¹ In this section I will not attempt an analysis of every theory of the gaze. There are other theories of the look or gaze which I will not analyse here but which raise interesting questions for the mystical gaze or have important points of intersection or challenges. Other theories of the look or gaze which raise interesting questions for the mystical gaze or have important points of intersection or challenges include Elizabeth Cowie’s mobile gaze where spectators address three central questions in the cinema: Who am I? Why do I desire? Why am I different? To find answers to these questions the spectator can identify with many characters and assume several positions within the film text. See E Cowie, “Fantasia”, *m/f*, 1984, p. 79. Also see, E Cowie *Representing the Woman: Film and Psychoanalysis*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984; Janet Wondra’s gathering gaze argues that we look at the screen to acquire data and obtain knowledge and understanding. See J Wondra, “A gaze unbecoming: schooling the child for femininity in *Days of Heaven*”, *Wide Angle*, XVI, 4, October 1995, pp. 4-22; Richard Allen’s autonomous gaze where he posits that the spectator lives out an illusion at the cinema that he or she has an autonomous response to the images presented or to the “cues that are planted in the text itself.” Extraordinarily, Allen likens the autonomy of the gaze to “the psychological foundations of the fetishistic belief that informs magic and religious ritual; it is this more general sense of fetishism that is significant for understanding our experience of the cinema... because... it allows two contradictory beliefs about the world to be maintained.” See R Allen, “Cinema, psychoanalysis and the film spectator”, p. 28. Queer theorists have reinstated questions of erotic pleasure for gay and lesbian viewers. From among the significant literature in this area, Laura Mark’s argument for the erotic look within queer theory has an important challenge to the presumptions of the mystical gaze when she outlines how some men look at men in film. “... it does not necessarily, indeed does not usually, consist of an explicitly homoerotic look.” If this is correct then it may share a code with the mystical gaze of men who usually behold and are socialised to desire an affective unity with a male deity. One aspect of both the mystical and erotic gazes is the centrality of “the fleeting nature of the moment, the feminisation of the image and the centrality of “ecstasy”. See L Marks, “Straight women, gay porn, and the scene of erotic looking”, *Jump Cut*, 40, March 1996, p. 128.

for the (active) gaze of man”.⁴⁸² Her critical insight was that the dominant gaze of the classic, narrative cinema is that was a sadistic, male gaze. Mulvey deconstructed the look of the cinema by exposing how it is essentially ideological, formed by the dominant social order which uses it to reflect, reveal and play with patriarchal assumptions. She also theorised that it enabled people to be voyeurs of pleasure and pain, forgetting about themselves and identifying with the male subject on the screen, internalising and making normative his desires for union with a woman who is presented as an object to be claimed, saved, punished or overvalued.

To maintain the social order Mulvey reminds the reader that “illusionistic narrative films” play with time and space, create a world within which “the invisible guest”, accepts the order of a created objective world where desire is regulated and social ideology enforced. The unseen three looks of the cinema, what the camera sees what the audience sees on the screen and what the characters see as they watch each other,⁴⁸³ prevent the audience from adopting a critical distance from the narrative and its political agenda and codifies social behaviour which reinforces the domination of the erotic, heterosexual, voyeuristic male gaze.

Given the earlier discussion on how the word “magic” indicates that a mystical frame of reference is being invoked, it is striking to see that in Mulvey’s landmark theory about the nature of the gaze in mainstream narrative film, she adopted magical language to describe film. “It is helpful to understand what the cinema has been, how its magic has worked in the past while attempting a theory and a practice which will challenge this cinema of the past.” Soon after in the same article she observed that “the magic of the Hollywood style at its best (and of all the cinema which fell within its sphere of influence) arose, not exclusively, but in one important aspect, from its skilled and satisfying manipulations of visual pleasure.” Still later she argued that the conventions of film that have consciously evolved, unwind “magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy.”⁴⁸⁴ Within the considerable commentary on Mulvey’s work there is not one scholar who questions or explores further the presumptions

⁴⁸² Mulvey L, “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema”, p. 17.

⁴⁸³ More recently Wheeler Winston Dixon has added that there is a reverse gaze in the cinema as well. “Rather than being viewers of an external phenomena, we are being acted upon by a mechanism possessing a gaze that stuns and transfixes us, like rabbits caught in the glare of a set of headlights, unable to move, to leave or to act unless given permission to do so.” See W Winston Dixon, “It looks back at you: notes on the ‘look back’ in cinema”, *Post Script*, 13, 1, Fall 1993, p. 86

⁴⁸⁴ Mulvey L, “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema”, pp. 6, 8, 9.

about the “magic” of film in her theory; it is just accepted as a self-explanatory given.⁴⁸⁵

The parallels, however, between the dominant, sadistic, male gaze and elements of magical mysticism are striking. Indeed, taking Mulvey’s central argument, one could argue that the reason the cinema’s gender codes exist in this form is because of the mystical and religious heritage from which all Western narrative is derived. If a god is imagined to be male, then male rule is assumed. If the task of mysticism is to encounter the presence of a higher being, predominantly imagined to be male, then the cinema, in the way it recreates the pattern of that encounter, accepts the patriarchal assumptions that come with it. To the degree that women in religious traditions are goddesses and virgins to be adored, like the Hindu goddesses and the Virgin Mary, or temptresses or whores to be punished and saved, as in nearly all major religious collectives,⁴⁸⁶ then cinematic narratives, in continuity

⁴⁸⁵ See B Brown, “‘Visual and other pleasures’ by Laura Mulvey”; C Penley, “The future of an illusion: film, feminism and psychoanalysis”; L Fischer, “Shot/countershot: film tradition and women’s cinema”, *Screen*, XXXII, 1, Spring 1991, pp. 109-113; W Bywater, “The visual pleasure of patriarchal cinema: Welles’ *Touch of Evil*”, *Film Criticism*, XIV, 3, Spring 1990, pp. 27-38. Other scholars who mention but do not explore further the presumptions about the “magic” of film in Mulvey’s theory include D Carson, L Dittmar, J Welsch, *Multiple Voices and Feminist Film Criticism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994; P Erens, *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990; R Harvey, “Sartre/cinema: spectator/art that is not one”, *Cinema Journal*, XXX, 3, Spring 1991, pp. 43-59; M Humm, *Feminism and Film*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999; L Jaymanne, *Kiss Me Deadly: Feminism and Cinema for the Moment*, Sydney: Power, 1995; E Kaplan, “Avant-garde feminist cinema: Mulvey and Woolen’s Riddles of the sphinx”, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, IV, 2, Spring, 1979, pp. 135-144; E Kaplan, (ed.), *Feminism and Film*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; E Kaplan, “Integrating Marxist and psychoanalytical approaches in feminist film criticism”, *Millennium*, 6, Spring 1980, pp. 8-17; P Maresh, L Mulvey, “Laura Mulveyová: feminismus a psychoanalýza. Vizuální rozkos a narativní film”, *Illuminace*, V, 3, 1993, pp. 39-52; A Quicke, “Of ‘Fetishism and curiosity’ by Laura Mulvey, a collection of feminist theoretical essays”, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, XXV, 2, Summer 1997, pp. 93-94; S Thornham, *Passionate Detachments: an Intro to Feminist Film Theory*, London: Arnold, 1997; G Zuilhof, “De gerijpte meesters van de avant-garde”, *Skrien*, 167, September 1989, pp. 58-61; H van der Kaap, G Zuilhof, “Laura Mulvey en Peter Wollen”, *Skrien*, 131, October-November, 1983, pp. 9-13.

⁴⁸⁶ In Judaism Eve is the one who told Adam to eat of the fruit, and so evil entered the world. In the Christian tradition the Virgin Mary is spoken of as the “new Eve”, whose obedience restored what Eve lost. Incorrectly, the Christian tradition has wrongly named Mary Magdalene as a woman in prostitution who was saved by Jesus from physical and spiritual death. In orthodox Hinduism women are presented as the corrupters of men through which evil came into the world. See R Baldick, B Radice, C Jones (eds.), *Hindu Myths*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975, p. 36. “I will tell you my son, how Brahma created wanton women and for what purpose, for there is nothing more evil than women... The Lord Grandfather, learning what was in the hearts of the Gods, created wanton women by a magic ritual in order to delude mankind...” See C Narasimhan (ed.), *The Mahabharata*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999, 13.40.3-10. In Buddhism the Yin/Yang explains the balance of life. The Yin is “the negative force in nature. It is seen in darkness, coolness, femaleness, dampness, the earth, moon and the shadows. The Yang (good) is the positive side in nature. It is in lightness, warmth, maleness, dryness and the sun.” See L Hopfe, *Religions of the World*, New York: Macmillan, 1991, p. 207. The Koran reinforces the subordination of women to men. “Men are the protectors (Qawamoon) of women, because God has given preference to some over others. And because men spend of their property on women. So good women are obedient, guarding even unnoticed that what Allah (God) has asked them

with most western narrative traditions, have inherited this perspective from the stories of religious collectives. The gaze of the cinema is male because the mystical gaze is male and its object is the Other whose presence is sought as a means of necessary salvation for, so-called, fallen humanity, most especially for feeble and defective women. The sadistic gaze of the classic narrative cinema is sadistic because the devotee is encouraged to see that the perfect Other is almost always male, especially in the western mystical traditions, and that women are corruptions of the reflected human form. Mulvey goes as far as to say that, as a result of the patriarchal and ideological order the cinema reinforces, the male spectator feels omnipotent, perfect, complete and powerful. She could be describing a mystic's god, the Other they desire and the one he or she wishes to control and possess, but never will.

Furthermore Mulvey uses other terms to describe the nature of the cinema which borrows heavily from mystical and religious paradigms. The idea of an "invisible guest" seeking unity with the object of his or her desire, while being aware, and yet not aware, of themselves as subjects, participate in a ritual where time and space are manipulated so that another world is created, could just as comfortably describe mysticism as it does the cinema. This could also apply to her descriptions of the nature of the cinema as: "patterns of fascination"; reflecting, revealing and playing with images and spectacle; establishing what is seen as pleasurable and beautiful; opening up a private world within which the spectator can look and glimpse a desirable order beyond; allowing a temporary loss of ego; and establishing a system of "stars" who embody the story and give it validity away from the screen. Moreover when Mulvey says that the cinema establishes an oppressive phallogocentric order within which the idea of woman is the lynchpin of the cinema and yet she is the bearer, not the maker, of meaning, she could be describing, for example, the particularities of Christian mysticism and mythology which holds that sin entered the world through the tempting of a man by a woman but was put right by the compliance of a virgin mother who bore the son of a father-god to save fallen humanity. There is nothing in the nature of magic, mysticism and the cinema to suggest that it is value-neutral. Indeed, as I shall explore in chapter four, all three are as value-laden as any social construction. The use of language which signifies the magical or spiritual

to guard. As for those from whom you fear rebellion in this (i.e. guarding their chastity in your absence), i) talk to them, ii) leave them alone in their beds, iii) strike them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them..." See A Ali (ed.), The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary, Elmhurst, New York: Tahrike Trasile Qur'an, 1987, 4:34.

“desire for union” is one key to the significance of the content and presumptions behind Mulvey’s arguments.

Within a year of Mulvey’s article referred to above being published, Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory began a series of responses to her work⁴⁸⁷ and so gave rise to a vigorous study and debate about the nature and ideology of the gaze.⁴⁸⁸ The conclusions of the criticisms of Mulvey’s work are important for the nature of the gaze under discussion here because they have centred on how Mulvey ignored other forms of looking related to gender, race, class and queer desire.⁴⁸⁹ These became the foundations of theories of the multiple gazes of the cinema, what Lacan called the interaction between different sets of gazes and, indeed, different competing orders of gazes as well.⁴⁹⁰ The variety of ways of looking and the multiple looks we bring into the cinema undermines any argument that we can manipulate or control the gaze.⁴⁹¹ To further define the mystical gaze and its associated characteristics, I will briefly investigate other theories of the gaze and ways of looking in the cinema that have been defined since Mulvey.

The Gendered Gaze

Scholars concluded that Mulvey’s ground-breaking paradigm of male spectatorship was too narrow – although at the time Mulvey was the first to theorise the nature of the gaze. Christine Gledhill argued that despite Mulvey’s outstanding contribution to the development theories of the gaze her research had over-

⁴⁸⁷ See Camera Obscura: a Journal of Feminism and Film Theory, especially the first five editions in 1976/77.

⁴⁸⁸ For authors who use Mulvey’s work as an important foundation to their own see, M Doane, P Mellencamp, L William (eds.), Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, Fredrick, Maryland: The American Film Institute/University Publications of America, 1984; T de Lauretis, Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema on Women and the Media, London: The Women’s Press, 1984; E Kaplan, Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera, New York: Methuen, 1983; E Kaplan, Psychoanalysis and Cinema; E Kaplan, Motherhood Representation: the Mother in Popular Culture, New York and London: Routledge, 1992; T Modelski, The Women who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory, London and New York: Methuen, 1982; K Silverman, “Masochism and subjectivity”, Framework, 12, 1981; G Studlar, “Masochism the perverse pleasures of the cinema”, Movies and methods, J Nicholls (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

⁴⁸⁹ See, E Cowie, Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis; b hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation, Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1992; F Krutnick, In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre and Masculinity, New York and London: Routledge, 1991; C Geldhill, Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women’s Film, London: British Film Institute, 1987; M Smith, Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

⁴⁹⁰ Lacan J, The Four Fundamentals of Psycho-Analysis, pp. 105ff.

⁴⁹¹ Geldhill C, “Klute 1: A contemporary film noir and feminist criticism”, E Kaplan (ed.), Women in Film Noir, London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1980, pp. 14ff.

emphasised the film as a semiotic text, and not focussed enough on the context within which the film is produced and read.⁴⁹² David Rodowick insisted that Mulvey's male gaze was culturally inflexible and ahistorical.⁴⁹³ Elizabeth Cowie maintained that Mulvey only allowed for an exclusively "masculinist" reading of the film text while film in fact prompts multiple readings and cross-gender responses.⁴⁹⁴ Mulvey responded to some of her critics that her work was a necessary, polemical contribution to open up the exploration of the multifaceted nature of the gaze.⁴⁹⁵

What has emerged out of this debate is a movement away from theorising the male or female gaze, as such, to a gendered gaze. In doing so feminist writers, in particular, became increasingly critical of the patriarchal assumptions in Freudian psychoanalysis. Mary Anne Doane argued that what cinematic theory and Freud have in common is "the eviction of the female spectator from a discourse purportedly about her...one which, in fact, narrativizes her again and again."⁴⁹⁶ Doane theorised that what female spectators do at the cinema is what they often have to do elsewhere in the world: masquerade as a man to assert their own power and control. Because of "a certain over-presence of the image – she is the image",⁴⁹⁷ women have two options: "the masochism of over-identification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one's own object of desire, in assuming the image in a most radical way."⁴⁹⁸ For women to masquerade as a transvestite at the cinema empowers them to undermine the stereotype of "femininity" and female power presented there. Doane's interest in female spectatorship is not to preserve it or value it over other gazes, but to see it as part of the wider discussion of the role gender plays in the cinematic gaze, "...a theory of female spectatorship is indicative of the crucial necessity of understanding that position in order to dislocate it."⁴⁹⁹ Doane's become what you see approach⁵⁰⁰ shares codes with many mystical traditions. In the Christian tradition, exactly the

⁴⁹² Geldhill C, *Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, pp. 21ff.

⁴⁹³ Rodowick D, "The difficulty of difference", *Wide Angle*, 5, 1, 1982, pp. 4-15; also see his *The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference and Film Theory*, New York: Routledge, 1991.

⁴⁹⁴ Cowie E, "Fantasia", p. 79. Also see, *Representing the Woman: Film and Psychoanalysis*.

⁴⁹⁵ Mulvey L, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: Macmillan, 1989. In an often over-looked earlier essay, Mulvey was beginning her response. See, "On Duel in the sun", *Framework*, 15-17, Summer 1981, pp. 12-15.

⁴⁹⁶ Doane M, "Film and masquerade: theorising the female spectator", *Screen*, 23, 3-4, 1982, p. 77.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 79.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 87.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 87.

⁵⁰⁰ Augustine of Hippo wrote, "Receive what you believe; eat what you receive, and become what you eat" in regard to the Eucharist. See Augustine, *Sermo*, 272: PL 38, 1247.

same choice Doane nominates for the cinema confronts a female believer as well. She has to overcome the problems of distance and proximity by becoming what she imagines and visualises: identifying with a father-god and his son or becoming the contemporary embodiment of the mother of Jesus.

Building on the work of Doane, Teresa de Lauretis has so far given the most comprehensive arguments for the various elements in, and the importance of, the gendered gaze. For de Lauretis gender matters in spectatorship because the cinema helps construct and deconstruct society's gender assumptions, especially in its representations of sexuality and power.⁵⁰¹ Basing her work on Freud's observations in regard to how the girl child desires her mother and yet also resents her for not giving her a penis, de Lauretis argued that women and men bring different histories to the cinema and so have different investments in what they see there, and more importantly what they do not see on the screen. This absence is a critical factor in the gendered gaze because the actual experience of women is rarely attested to on the screen and so women move in and out of the diegesis. There is:

...the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation, which I propose characterises the subject of feminism, in a movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male centred frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out, or, more pointedly, makes representable...These two kinds of spaces are neither in oppositions to one another nor strung along in a chain of signification, but they co-exist concurrently and in contradiction.⁵⁰²

What is lacking in de Lauretis' important theorising of the gendered gaze, and even the differences between the way various women and men look, is the social and cultural resonances that inform it. To exclude religion from an analysis of the institutional discourses about "meanings, values, knowledge and practises,"⁵⁰³ when its liturgical and mystical traditions have exerted the most profound and significant influences on the European artistic and visual imagination for a millennia, leaves de Lauretis' theory on the role of gender in the gaze, at best, incomplete. The recognition of the role of the mystical gaze and its ideological and theological history goes some

⁵⁰¹ See T de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, London: Macmillan, 1989.

⁵⁰² Ibid. p. 26.

⁵⁰³ de Lauretis only names "pedagogy, medicine, demography and economics", disciplines which Judaism, Islam and Christianity developed into their present form in Western Society. See T de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, p. 12.

way to explain how the male gaze has become so entrenched in the cinema. It also explicates the legitimation of male over female spectatorship given that many women and men, in Judaism, Islam and Christianity for example, have been told to imagine and behold a father-god and to exclude a mother-God. The preferencing of a male over a female gaze has translated into cultural, political and social roles and structures for women that enshrine a phallogentric power relationship which socializes men seeing women and women seeing themselves, as secondary, ancillary and compliant.

The Masochistic Gaze

Doane was one of the first scholars to posit a masochistic gaze. She argued that because women saw themselves overexposed on the screen in a way that did not represent them and because they were forced to adopt a transgendered gaze so as to identify and desire the image of woman on the screen, they participated in a form of masochism.⁵⁰⁴ More than any other scholar Gaylan Studlar has developed a version of this theory of the gaze primarily in relation to the male viewer.⁵⁰⁵ Studlar is critical of the phallogentrism of Freud, Lacan, Mulvey and Rodowick, which attends to the sadistic, voyeuristic and fetishistic scopophilic nature of the male gaze.⁵⁰⁶ Basing her work on Gilles Deleuze's adaptation of Freudian psychoanalysis, Studlar focuses on the pre-Oedipal phase, critical to the healthy development of the child's ego, when the child has a unity with the mother and perceives the father is to be virtually absent. In this phase the child experiences the mother as a presence not as a lack. The child wants unity with the mother, but cannot possess her in the way it desires. Nonetheless, in its utter dependence, lack of power and submission to its mother it remembers the pleasure of the desire and the displeasure of separation.

Castration fear and the perception of sexual difference have no importance in forming the masochistic desire for complete symbiosis with the mother...The female in the masochistic aesthetic is more than the passive object of the male's desire for possession.

⁵⁰⁴ See M Doane, "The 'woman's film': possession and address", *Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film criticism*, pp. 79f.

⁵⁰⁵ The point of departure between Studlar and Doane is that Studlar is more interested in pleasure in masochism for men while Doane's research has focused more on the negative non-pleasurable masochism for women.

⁵⁰⁶ Studlar G, "Masochism the perverse pleasures of the cinema", pp. 611-613; also see G Studlar, "Masochism, masquerade, and the erotic metamorphoses of Marlene Dietrich", *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, J Ganies, C Herzog (eds.), New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 231-233.

She is also a figure of identification, the mother of plenitude whose gaze meets the infant's as it asserts her presence and her power.⁵⁰⁷

The cinema screen therefore, especially in its depiction of women, provides a re-enactment for spectators of the archaic memory of the larger-than-life mother they want to possess, but have to surrender. The pleasure of the desire is as important as the displeasure of separation, it defines what is on offer and cannot be possessed and so ensures repetition of the experience. "... unlike sadism, which depends on upon action and immediate gratification, masochism savours suspense and distance."⁵⁰⁸

There are three points of intersection between the masochistic and mystical gazes. The first comes in the language, and hence meaning which Studlar uses to describe this gaze. Like Mulvey, Studlar used magical language to capture the reality of what occurs in the cinema, "...the spectator must avoid the orgasmic release that would effectively destroy the boundaries of disavowal and disrupt the magical thinking that defines his/her oral, infantile, and narcissistic use of the cinematic object."⁵⁰⁹ Just as magic helps to define what the spectator thinks about the cinema, what occurs there is closely aligned to Baudry's appropriation of Plato's cave metaphor or to the experiences of kataphatic mystics. "Immobile and surrounded in darkness, the spectator becomes the passive receiving object who is also the subject. The spectator must comprehend the images, but the images cannot be controlled."⁵¹⁰ A sense of deluded divination is described in similar terms as well. "The spectator's narcissistic omnipotence is like the narcissistic, infantile omnipotence of the masochist, who ultimately cannot control the active partner."⁵¹¹ Studlar goes further, however, in the language she uses to describe the way in which the cinema enables the spectator, male or female, to restage an opposite-sex identification. While commenting on Wanda in *Venus in Furs* she writes how this film "illustrates the mystical, contemplative quality imposed on the erotic in masochism's supernatural world of spiritualized sexuality."⁵¹² It is clear from this extraordinary statement that Studlar is not just referring to the exercise of the masochistic gaze in relation to a particular film, but accepts that metaphysical considerations are at play in the regression to the pre-Oedipal phase the cinema allows in general.

⁵⁰⁷ Studlar G, "Masochism the perverse pleasures of the cinema", p. 612.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 612.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 613.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. p. 613.

⁵¹¹ Ibid. p. 613.

⁵¹² Studlar G, *In the Realm of Pleasure*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 21.

The second point of intersection between Studlar's theories and the mystical gaze is the goal of the regression. For Studlar the masochistic gaze is predicated "on the promise of seduction" which cannot be realised except in death. Her words could be those of a mystic trying to elucidate the focus of an encounter with a Hindu female deity, Mary, the mother of Jesus or indeed "Holy Mother Church", as much as it is for the disposition a spectator takes to the cinema. "Masochism obsessively recreates the movement between concealment and revelation, disappearance and appearance, seduction and rejection, in emulation of the ambivalent response to the mother who may either abandon or overwhelm the child."⁵¹³ Most religious people would view the term "masochistic fetish" as a dark concept foreign to their intentions. Understood in the Deleuzian sense of it being "a protest of the ideal against the real", organised mystical activities in religious ritual can easily be understood in terms of Studlar's masochistic fetish: a protective neutralisation of time and separation; an attempt to reconstruct the mother as inseparable plenitude;⁵¹⁴ a cycle of pleasure and displeasure in wanting what cannot be owned except in death where the image controls the viewing subject and even where a fluid gender association is possible. On this last point, for example, Christian men are seen as part of Mother Church which is in turn the Bride of Christ. Christian women can speak of their loving devotion to Mary, whom they call their Mother, while men aspire to be loving intimates of Jesus, and all Christians want "consummation" with God, who is neither male nor female. From both of these perspectives it can be argued that the masochistic fetishistic gaze owes a theoretical debt to the concept of mysticism.

The third point of intersection is the masochism of repetition. Many mystical encounters can be read through Studlar's lens of re-enacting the re-possession of the archaic mother. In the mystical gaze, however, the Other is usually seen, but cannot be held. Other times the mystic is unable or not permitted to see the Other. Most mystics report that, for all the pleasure of the encounter, even the alluring pleasure of dread, they are aware of being a creature who can never and will never be the creator. Hence, mystics, although aware of the transitory nature of the encounter, speak of "a lack", of being let down, and so work to repeat the experience and catch even a "stolen" glimpse of the object of their belief.

⁵¹³ Ibid. p. 21.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. p. 43.

The Abject Gaze

Adopting Freud's three primal phantasies of birth, seduction and castration even further, I would say that the castrating phantasy has rendered another important contribution to gaze theory. Reacting to Freud's image of woman as a passive, castrated Other, Barbara Creed employs Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject and the maternal to outline an abject and castrating gaze. In comparison to the discovery of the self in the exercise of the gaze, the spectator also has a desire for scopophilic pleasure in exploring the collapse of meaning where life is threatened and the self is annihilated.⁵¹⁵ Recalling how the mother who has nurtured the child must also, emotionally, castrate the child so he or she can enter into the symbolic order, Creed argues that patriarchy maintains an ambivalent attitude to the mother who is also capable of this castration. She outlines how the horror film is the genre where the monstrous, castrating feminine has been most clearly presented.

In the horror film this ambivalence has given rise to the representation of woman as monstrous because she gives birth and 'mothers'. In this sense, every encounter with horror, in the cinema, is an encounter with the maternal body constructed (I'm not arguing that woman is essentially abject) as non-symbolic by the signifying practices of patriarchal ideology. Women's objectification is crucial to the functioning of the patriarchal order.⁵¹⁶

The look of the abject castrating mother is given and returned in a variety of ways in the horror film where woman is pictured as archaic mother, possessed monster, monstrous womb, a vampire or witch. Horror films are especially obsessed by and fascinated with elements that indicate abjection: blood, pus, faeces, urine, a corpse, disease, vomit, anything that contaminates or defiles. These elements are pointers to the greatest of all abjection, death. "The horror film is obsessively concerned with death; death is so crucial that it constitutes a fourth primal phantasy which should rank in importance with the three other phantasies stipulated by Freud."⁵¹⁷

There are several clear intersections between the mystical gaze and the abject, castrating gaze. Firstly, Creed indicates that "whereas religion has traditionally dealt with the abject through various rites of purification, exorcism, reparation and healing

⁵¹⁵ Creed B, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 9.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. p. 161.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid. p. 154.

Kristeva argues that with the decline of religious observances the work of purification now rests solely with ‘that catharsis *par excellence* called art.’”⁵¹⁸ As increasingly true as Kristeva’s commentary might be, it has a familiar Western ring about it. Even then, one only has to reflect on the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, as one major example in recent history, to observe that art is not the sole catharsis for rites of purification and reparation in Western society. In developing cultures, mystical religion and art still mix to provide rites of passage and explanations of meaning. Even if art has now largely displaced mystical ritual in developed countries, the content and process of the catharsis it provides is still linked to Western mysticism. The writings of many mystics, especially in the katophatic tradition, describe the “dark night of the soul” or “the torment of hell” where they saw and encountered a terrible place defined by the abject. Indeed in a sense, because mysticism is an experience of believing, it stands as refutation to the final annihilation of death and confirms for the individual and the religious collective that a state-of-being being exists beyond them, in a place where now they can gain partial sensory access. Just as the horror genre enables the spectator to maintain a safe distance within which he or she can experience and restage the pleasure and displeasure of exploring the abject, so too the katophatic tradition occupies similar territory within the mystical tradition.

Secondly Creed’s argument for the abject, castrating mother is entirely predicated on a variety of mythological sources. For people who believed in the myths of the goddess of Melanesia, or the first Yanomano woman on earth who possessed a toothed vagina, or the goddess Medusa, an experience of their presence, to behold them, would have been a mystical encounter, filled with dread and horror. Mysticism is not exclusively about light and peace, but has been termed by Rudolph Otto, *the mysterium tremendum et fascinas*,⁵¹⁹ the mysterious encounter which is both frightening and fascinating at the same time. I will return to this point in a moment. In an earlier section I looked at Tom Gunning’s astonished gaze and its roots in the people’s expectations of mystical encounter in public ritual. He quotes, for example, Kracauer’s description of a Berlin cinema in the 1920s. Kracauer could have been describing a mystical temple, “the interior design...serves one sole purpose: to rivet the audience’s attention to the peripheral so they will not sink into the abyss...the

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. p. 14.

⁵¹⁹ See R Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 21ff.

total artwork effects assaults every one of the senses using every possible means.”⁵²⁰ Gunning’s observations of the pleasure and terror that the first cinema audiences experienced is a further shared code with the mystical gaze and the abject, castrating look.

Thirdly, just as the femme castratrice has a central position within Creed’s theory, so too maternity is a potent source and object for mystical traditions where a form of the castrating mother is a feature in several great religions of the world. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, for example is, in a Freudian sense, a “castrating” mother in that her life is used as an example of how Christian adherents should cultivate humility, docility and obedience. Mary keeps her subjects in their place in relation to the (male) Godhead. A more explicit example of Mary’s castrating power can be found in the links Roman Catholicism makes between the celibacy of its priests and devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. “Priests should always venerate and love the Blessed Virgin Mary, with a filial devotion and worship, as the Mother of the supreme and eternal Priest, as Queen of the Apostles, and protectress of their ministry.”⁵²¹ Celibacy is also considered a more enlightened way for Buddhist priests and nuns and a greater path to nirvana for Hindu priests as well. In other ways, too, the Western mystical tradition, along with Eastern mysticism as well, has been a product of, and a legitimation for, patriarchy’s subjection of women into being passive, receptive, auxiliary and subordinate.⁵²² In recent years patriarchal, institutional Christianity has even been compared to an abject monster, patriarchy

...we say that the temples of patriarchy have been disfigured and hidden our true mother and teacher and replaced her with a great mechanical idol, with flashing eyes and smoking nostrils, who spews out blasphemies and lies...our brother, Jesus, did not come to this earth to manufacture this idol, and he is not presented by this idol...The Roman Empire clothes itself in the mantle of the crucified and seats itself upon its imperial throne...We cry out: horror, blasphemy, deceitful deed.⁵²³

⁵²⁰ Kracauer S, as quoted in T Gunning, “An aesthetic of astonishment”, p. 41.

⁵²¹ Second Vatican Council, “Decree on the ministry of priests”, (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*), sect. 18, *Vatican Council II*, W Abbot (ed.), New York: Costello, 1975, p. 897.

⁵²² See E McLaughlin, R Ruether (eds.), *Religion and Sexism*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979, pp. 250ff.

⁵²³ Ruether R, *Sexism and God-talk*, Boston: Beacon, 1983, p. 69.

There is, then, a relationship between some of the imagery and the catharsis of katoptric mysticism and the abject, castrating look of the monstrous mother (or father) in the horror genre.

The Look Away

Creed's discussion of the fifth look in relation to the abject is especially significant for the mystical gaze. I have already outlined how Mulvey posited that the three looks of the cinema were the look of the camera, the look of audience toward the screen, and the looks between the characters on the screen. Paul Willemen later argued that there was a fourth look, where the spectator is overlooked while looking. Willemen theorised this gaze especially in relation to pornography where the spectator is embarrassed to be "caught" looking at images he or she would otherwise judge to be improper.⁵²⁴ As insightful as Willemen's theory is, it has a limited relationship with the mystical look where the gaze on the Other, whether in public or private, is encouraged and rewarded. To these looks Creed has added the fifth look, the look away. She argues that representation of the abject on the screen entices the viewer to want to look and then look away from the screen because the sight there is so terrible.

Here I am referring to those moments in the horror film when the spectator, unable to look away, to not-look, to look anywhere but at the screen – particularly when the monster is engaged in an act of killing. Strategies of identification are temporarily broken and pleasure in looking is transformed into pain as the spectator is punished for her/her voyeuristic desires.⁵²⁵

I noted in Chapter One how theologian and film critic Robert Johnson, in trying to name the Otherworldly elements he noted in Peter Weir's film, invoked Otto's description of the non-rational mystical encounter as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinas*. It is a telling insight. In a similar way to Creed's description of the way the abject in horror films is simultaneously compelling and repulsive, Otto noted that mystical encounters carried the same characteristic. He observed that mystics spoke about their finitude, that the encounter with the numinous led to the exploration of the place where personal meaning collapses and an individual's life counts for nothing or

⁵²⁴ Willemen P, "Letter to John", *Screen*, 21, 2, 1980, pp. 53ff.

⁵²⁵ Creed B, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, p. 28.

is extinguished. "... the finite self contrasted with it (the numinous) becomes conscious even in its nullity that 'I am naught, Thou art all.'"⁵²⁶ And even though the collapsing of these boundaries was before an object of their desires, mystics regularly described their encounters as a confrontation with the reality of death and evil as much as with life and goodness.

As this clear sight of the divine comes like a violent assault upon the soul to subdue it, the soul feels such an anguish in its weakness that all power and breath leave it together, while sense and spirit as though they stood burdened beneath a dark unmeasured load suffer such agony and are oppressed by such deadly fear that they should would choose death as a mitigation and refreshment...He (God) destroys, crushes and overwhelms (the soul) in such a deep darkness, that it feels as though melted and in its misery destroyed by a cruel death of the spirit...⁵²⁷

Other mystics were led to contemplate or glimpse the ultimate mystical abjection of never-ending death or hell. In turn they define these experiences as filling them with dread, loathing, guilt, pain or suffering. In such circumstances they did not want to see anymore, indeed they prayed they would be spared the scene or be permitted to look away.⁵²⁸

The Racial Gaze

Similar to the phallogocentric nature of the mysticism I outlined earlier, the racial look and the mystical gaze are closely associated, but have never been explicitly linked. In this section I will demonstrate that the history of the meaning of the mystical gaze is imbedded in gender and racial ideology. The concept of the racial look is concerned with deconstructing the normalising of whiteness and its association with issues of power and representation. It attends to the way race, every race, is subjectified, objectified or stereotyped in the diegesis. It addresses the colonial gaze and the narratives of ideology and class associated with an imperialist rhetoric that portrays non-whites as essentially "other".⁵²⁹ Ariel Dorfman argues, in a curious

⁵²⁶ Otto R, *The Idea of the Holy*, J Harvey (trans.), London: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 28.

⁵²⁷ John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, J Harvey (trans.), London: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 58; also quoted in R Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 106.

⁵²⁸ John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, passim, but especially chapters VIII, XII, XIII.

⁵²⁹ In this section I will limit myself to the relationship between colonial theory and mysticism, though I am aware of the importance of post-colonial theories which deconstruct the colonial gaze and of the increasing body of literature around the imperial and non-imperial gazes as well. Post-colonial theorists who deconstruct the colonial gaze, the imperial and non-imperial gazes as well include: E Cheyfitz,

mixture of metaphors, that the colonial gaze “feels no obligation to avoid the caricature, and rebaptises each country as if it were a can on the shelf...”⁵³⁰

Analysis of the cinematic gaze from a racial perspective initially concerned itself with the patterns of prejudice in the selection of material, plot and characterisations. It outlined the negative impact of these presentations on the groups being misrepresented and how they can internalise the behaviour being stereotyped as though it were normative. It demonstrated how stereotypes are used by dominant groups for social control. Steven Neale argued against stereotype analysis and image studies for various reasons: it was as reductive as some of the colonial ideology it was refuting; it accepted essentialism over plurality in individual racial communities; it preserved ahistoricism in racial groups where the “coloured” person is rarely seen to develop, change, grow or adapt; and it accepted an overemphasis on individualism rather than on the social context of the racially spectatorial community. Neale argued for a pluriform reading of race within ethnic communities and through psychoanalysis and post-structuralism identified the role that language plays in the disavowal, abjection and projection of the racist discourse of the dominant culture and the victimhood of the oppressed culture.⁵³¹

Of all theorists of the racial look, Richard Dyer is the one who has brought together many of its methodological strands into a coherent whole. He argued that because the imperialist gaze is essentially smug and intolerant, the racism it promotes can even be one that acknowledges difference. “There is a difference however between tolerance based on a complacent assumption that we’re all the same anyway and tolerance that acknowledges the stubborn core of differences between people...in multi-cultural contemporary Britain we need to foster the real tolerance of real

The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization From The Tempest to Tarzan, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; J Rosalind, Black British Theatre and Film as Postcolonial Discourse, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Santa Barbara: UCSB, (UCLA Library) 1993; F Jameson, The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992; L Koolish, “Fictive strategies and cinematic representations in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: postcolonial theory/postcolonial text”, African American Review, 29, 3, 1995; A McClintock, “The angel of progress: pitfalls of the term ‘post-colonialism’ ”, Social Text, 10, 31-32, 1992; A McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context, New York: Routledge, 1995; J Morrison, “On Barthes on cinemascope”, Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies, 3, 3, 1999, www.social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v3i3/barth.htm; T Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993; E Said, Culture and Imperialism, New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

⁵³⁰ Dorfman A, The Empire’s Old Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Babar and Other Innocent Heroes Do to Your Minds, New York: Pantheon, 1983, p. 24.

⁵³¹ Neale S, “The same old story: stereotypes and difference”, Screen, 32/33, 1979/80, pp. 41-47.

difference.”⁵³² Dyer argued against theorists of the racial gaze who have only concentrated on the look or presentation of a non-white person in the cinema. “The presence of black people...allows one to see whiteness as whiteness, and in this way relates to the existential psychology that is at its origins the interest in ‘otherness’ as an explanatory concept in the representation of ethnicity.”⁵³³ In his analysis Dyer exposes the way in which whiteness is aligned with order, rationality and rigidity, while blackness is aligned with disorder, irrationality and looseness.⁵³⁴ While whiteness is at the core of the dominant colonial ideology of Western cinema and is oppressive to non-whites, it is also a tyranny for white people who can never achieve the false, stereotypical presentation of their own racial community.⁵³⁵ Ella Shoat and Robert Stam who have moved the debate from a discussion of race, to race and ethnicity, take up Dyer’s more inclusive approach. They argue that contemporary film, as a global cultural structure, demands an analysis of race that is multiform and multicultural. They define this perspective as “ethnicities-in-relation”. Race is addressed in the enunciation of the text by taking less account of nation states and more to the newer interrelationships born of transnational borders in economic discourses.⁵³⁶

Any significant study of Western theories on race, at least between black and white people, has noted the role that organised religion has played in the evolution of racist attitudes and perspectives.⁵³⁷ In a Western context the Europeanization or whitening of the mystical experience has canonised a racist ideology in the same way the gender presumptions of a male deity make patriarchy normative. In Christianity, for example, even though the object of the adherent’s devotion is a “coloured” Palestinian man of the first century, within 800 years artistic representations of Jesus had transformed into a white figure. Dyer indicates an understanding of the issues when he notes that “people point to the Judaeo-Christian use of white and black to symbolise good and evil, as carried still in such expressions as “a black mark”, “black magic”, “to blacken the character.”⁵³⁸ Dyer, however, does explore the extent to

⁵³² Dyer R, The Matters of Images: Patterns on Representations, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 140.

⁵³³ Ibid. p. 145.

⁵³⁴ Ibid. p. 145.

⁵³⁵ Ibid. p. 161.

⁵³⁶ Shoat E, Stam R, Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media, New York: Routledge, 1994, *passim*.

⁵³⁷ For example see: P Fryer, Staying Power, London: Pluto, 1984; W Jordan, White Over Black, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.

⁵³⁸ Dyer R, The Matters of Images: Patterns on Representations, p. 142.

which theories of the colonial gaze have drawn upon the language of religion and mysticism.

Within mystical traditions in the West, racial lines have been clearly drawn in the images they have promoted and given to Western, white people to gaze upon. Given that colonialists would only ever have seen images that portrayed black as death - through the savage devil for example, and seen white as life through a Caucasian Christ, the identification of non-whites as the Other to be subdued and saved from themselves as ordained by their God who lived “in (white) light inaccessible”. In her adaptation of Dyer’s theories of whiteness to the Hollywood star, Jackie Stacey alerts us to how the film star Susan Haywood in promoting Lux Toilet Soap, which is called “divinely fragrant”, promotes an ideology of whiteness with “purity, cleanliness, beauty and civilised culture. Its opposite, though unspoken, is significant: blackness suggests impurity, dirtiness, ugliness and uncivilised behaviour.”⁵³⁹ What is curious is that Stacey leaves out “godliness” which has been popularly associated with cleanliness and would have further strengthened her case for the debasement of non-white people in being seen as evil.

Through iconography, statues, illuminated manuscripts, painting, art, stained glass, hymns and other literary works, the dominant mystical tradition of Europe misrepresented the ethnic origins of Jesus and made him in their own image and likeness. As a result, the racial look of the European colonialists and subsequently their colonies was white. The mystical gaze which is frequently associated with images, of blinding light and the halo effect, legitimated the racist look and colonial power of the Western industrialised world and was uncritically adopted by its cinema. A fuller explanation of the development of racial looking must take into account its roots and presumptions in mysticism. Furthermore, any future dialogue about the look of race and ethnicity in a multiform and multicultural world must attend to the continuing and unnamed, but powerful, theological assumptions in racist politics, and to the mystical gazes within the multiple faiths present in cultures with which the Western world wants to engage. This area has largely been neglected in cinematic theories of spectatorship and race.

⁵³⁹ Stacey J, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 5.

Conclusions

Nearly all gazes share codes of identification with the mystical gaze. What is surprising then is that until now the mystical gaze has been a central, but unnamed element in the act of spectatorship. In this chapter I have sought to establish that images which directly encode apophatic, kataphatic, nature or personal action mysticism can be found in the cinema. While historians of the cinema have looked to explain the development of the cinematic gaze or look in reference only to the technical antecedents of the cinema through the Carnivales and light shows, I have argued that an undeveloped and interesting line of research is the theoretical, indeed the theological, heritage that enabled spectators, at light shows in all their forms through the centuries, to expect wondrous, mystical things to happen before their eyes. While this relationship has not been explored in scholarship, its reality has been preserved in the language, and therefore the meaning, used to describe the event and the effect of the cinema. I have demonstrated how the word magic, the most primitive form of mysticism, and the mysterious connotations that go with it, continues to be an indicator that scholars, spectators and producers know that a relationship exists between mysticism and the cinema.

For the first time, I have shown how some theorists of the gaze have used terms like “magic”, “spiritual”, “supernatural”, “invisible guest”, “omniscient” and “omnipotent” to describe one or another facet in the act of the spectatorship. Other theorists have developed positive or critical theories of the construction of the spectator and his or her position in relation to the screen that share similar structures and codes with mystical traditions. Finally I demonstrated that the most interesting points of intersection between recent theories of the gaze or the look of the cinema and mysticism come in the effects both have on the subject: reinforcing ideological presumptions of gender and race; establishing patterns of social control through repetition and function; providing a forum for catharsis and the exploration of the abject to such a degree that sometimes the viewer has to look away; and becoming a space where in subjects can be both allured and repulsed at the same time.

Throughout this chapter I have contended that until now the cultural and social context of the development of the cinema and theories of the gaze has not taken into account the mystical heritage in which the cinema and the spectator is steeped. As I will now show this is hardly surprising given that a clear description of the mystical

gaze is missing from the scholarly work of the theorists of religion and the cinema, and that the projects they undertake in relation to the cinema are not conducive to a lively and forthright interaction with their secular colleagues.

Chapter Three:
The Unseen Gaze: Religion, Mysticism and Film

Cinema critics and other theorists avoid detailed investigations into the relationship between religion, mysticism and the act of spectatorship even when specific films deal directly with religious themes⁵⁴⁰ or when one could expect their area of study would encompass this relationship.⁵⁴¹ Joel Martin was not the first to draw attention to this phenomenon, but his work is the most comprehensive to date. Martin argues that, “Instead of encountering an ongoing and stimulating dialogue about religion and film, I encountered silence.”⁵⁴² Martin, however, only cites literature from the English-speaking world and even then, predominantly, from the United States of America. While it is striking that Martin can demonstrate the gap in the literature of such a publicly religious country, it does not follow that this claim holds true for all film critics and scholars everywhere. In the West it remains generally true with the notable exception of Germany⁵⁴³. In the former Eastern bloc, however, Martin’s claim cannot be sustained at all.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁰ Among leading film critics’ reviews of some explicitly religious films, these are the comments that come closest to analysing the theological, mystical or religious themes contained therein. *Diary of a country priest*: Pauline Kael, “tries to understand religious life”; Leonard Matlin, “life and death of an unhappy priest”. *The Seventh Seal*: Pauline Kael, “a morality play”; Leonard Matlin, “tries to solve the mysteries of life”. *The Passion of St Joan of Arc*: Pauline Kael, “passionate...suggests the stations of the cross”; Leonard Matlin, “Joan of Arc’s inquisition, trial and burning at the stake”. *Babette’s Feast*: Leonard Matlin, “focused on two sisters using religion as a substitute for living life”. *The Last Temptation of Christ*: “thought provoking and deeply felt”, Roger Ebert, “a devout film”; *Jesus of Montreal*: Leonard Matlin, “takes on religious hypocrisy, commercialism and other social ills”; Roger Ebert, “parallels the life of Christ”. See J Nash, S Ross (eds.), *The Motion Picture Guide*, Vols. 1-12, Chicago: Cinebooks, 1985. Also published on *Cinemania’97*, Microsoft CD ROM. Seattle, Washington, 1977.

⁵⁴¹ Burke K, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973; also see C McArthur, *Iconography and Iconology*, London: BFI, 1973; P Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, New York: Viking, 1972.

⁵⁴² Martin J, Ostwalt C, *Screening the Sacred*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1995, p. 2. Footnote one includes a list of monographs that mention religion in their treatment of films, but only in passing.

⁵⁴³ I will include here the recent discussions to prove the point. See H Dannowski, “Die Theologie nicht vor dem Film schützen!”, *EPD Film*, XVI, 11, November 1999, pp. 14-15; R Korthueuer-Schüring, W Roth, “Kirche - Film - Kultur. Gespräch mit dem neuen Filmbeauftragten Werner Schneider”, *EPD Film*, XVI, 9, September 1999, pp. 10-12. In German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) arrangements between Church and State are more integrated than other parts of the Western world. Germans pay a “religion tax” out of which clergy are paid, churches are maintained and agencies are supported. Centres for the making of films and for its study and criticism are sponsored by the major denominations and funded, at least in part, through the religious taxation system. The result is that the Churches in Germanic countries are a more significant force in their film communities. Accordingly journals have maintained a scrutiny on how the Churches are involved with the cinema and the interface between theology and film, not found in such volume in any other Western country. M Elwardt, H Dannowski, “Evangelische Filmarbeit”, *EPD Film*, XIV, 12, December 1997, pp. 8-9; H Dannowski, “Erlösung im Film. Praktisch-theologische Analysen und Interpretationen”, *EPD Film*, XIV, 10, October 1997, p. 16. I am grateful to Gerhard Siebenrock for his translations of these articles for me.

⁵⁴⁴ A review of the leading film journals in the former Eastern bloc over the last decade reveals a lively engagement with religious issues in the cinema. *Russia*: See S Bogdanovskij, “Ljubov’... soraduetsja istine”, *Iskusstvo Kino*, 7, July 1997, pp. 90-105; O Sedakova, “Krepka, kak smert’ ljubov”, *Iskusstvo*

Given these qualifications to Martin's observation, the reasons for the disengagement of religious considerations in cinematic study is no doubt, complex. Part of the answer, Martin argues, lies in the academy's acceptance of secularisation. Martin cites sociologist Bryan Wilson's observation that religion is ignored by most members of the academy because they, "take secularisation for granted. The overwhelming tendency...is to regard religion as a peripheral phenomenon in contemporary social organization, and one which, in their studies of the broad contours of social change, productivity, economic growth, or human psychology, they rarely find a need to consider."⁵⁴⁵ This argument, however, is not sufficient in itself to account for why virtually all theorists of the gaze would ignore religious issues and the possibility of a mystical gaze as a constitutive element in the look of the cinema.

At the base of secularisation is the religious disaffiliation of the Western world in the second half of the 20th Century through the acceptance of a variety of critical ideological and philosophical systems⁵⁴⁶ deconstructing the universalising truth claims of religion and the personal and social experiences to which they appeal for validity. Religious language is no longer trusted as a means to explain human experience and reactions against references to Otherness and appeals to objective desire are held in suspicion, if not derided.⁵⁴⁷

Kino, 6, June 1997, pp. 86-101. I am grateful to Pavel Gubina for his translations of these articles for me.

Poland: A Sobolewscy, "Indie i Zanussi" Kino, XXV, 4, 286, April 1991, pp. 36-37; A Sobolewscy, T Sobolewski, "Czy mozna dotknac sacrum?" Kino, XXIV, 9, 279, September 1990, pp. 6-10; M Klinger, "Sacrum niepokojace", Kino, XXIV, 9, 279, September 1990, pp. 4-6. I am grateful to Stanislaw Koprowski for his translations of these articles for me.

Hungary: P Schrader, "Transzcendentalis stilus a filmmuveszetben", Filmkultura XXVIII, 2, 1992, pp. 3-11; M Martonffy, "A bohoc evangeliuma", Filmkultura, XXVIII, 2, 1992, pp. 12-28; V Guryrey, "Csak egy kis csodet", Filmkultura, XXVIII, 2, 1992, p. 29; J Mate, "Eletmesek", Filmkultura, XXVIII, 2, 1992, p. 30. I am grateful to Ervin Cser for his translations of these articles for me.

⁵⁴⁵ Wilson B, "Reflections on a many sided controversy", Religion and Modernisation: Sociologists and Historians Debate Secularisation Thesis, S Bruce (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 3, quoted in J Martin, C Ostwalt, Screening the Sacred, p. 2.

⁵⁴⁶ For a discussion on how the influence of religion on society has been challenged and dismissed, see R Champagne, Jacques Derrida, New York: Twyane, 1995; J Derrida, "Violence et metaphysique", L'Ecriture et la Différence, Paris: Seuil, 1967; F Engels, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Selected Works in Two Volumes, Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1958; Gay P, A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis, New Haven: Yale, 1987; M Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, J Macquarie, E Robinson (trans.), New York: Harper & Row, 1962; K Jaspers, Philosophie, R Manheim (trans.), Berlin: Springer 1932; K Jaspers, Way to Wisdom, R Manheim (trans.), New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951; J-P Sartre, L'Étre et le Néant, Paris: Gallimard, 1955; P Singer, Rethinking Life & Death, Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 1994.

⁵⁴⁷ See: G Ward (ed.), The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997; G Gleeson, "Deconstructing the concept of God", Pacifica, 5, 1992, pp. 59-66; M Taylor, Erring: a Postmodern A/Theology, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984; J O'Leary, Questioning Back: The Overcoming of Metaphysics in the Christian Tradition, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985; J-L Marion, God without Being: Hors Texte, T Carlson (trans.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

These suspicions are voiced in the work of cinema theorists. Basing their study on Christian Metz's theory of the cinema as a return to primal desires, Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis have argued that all gazes are myriad variations on unrealised fantasies.⁵⁴⁸ This insight, however, does not render the search for the particular gazes within these unfulfilled fantasies obsolete. Therefore in summary form, Robert Stam can speak of a "gendered, sexualised, classed, raced, nationed, regioned" gaze,⁵⁴⁹ but he and his colleagues⁵⁵⁰ never venture into "religioned" spectatorship. As Martin observes, "Ironically, the power of religion was recognised by many of the thinkers whose theories have influenced contemporary film criticism. Several wrote on religion (Marx, Freud, Kristeva, Derrida)."⁵⁵¹ This gap in the literature could exist because of the sometimes hostile relationship between the film industry and religious communities over issues of censorship. Scholars, however, are not bound to accept a mystical group's ethical or moral codes to study, outline, debate and research the history, development, context and relationship between mysticism and their own area of study.

1991; K Hart, The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction Theology and Philosophy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; H Coward, T Foshay (eds.), Derrida and Negative Theology, Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1992; J Caputo, The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997; J Derrida, J Vattimo (eds.), Religion, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.

⁵⁴⁸ Burgoyne R, Flitterman-Lewis S, Stam R, New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 164f.

⁵⁴⁹ Stam R, Film Theory: an Introduction, p. 232

⁵⁵⁰ Scholars who have written on various aspects of spectatorship and the gaze and not mentioned a religious or mystical gaze include, J-L. Baudry, "From the world in a frame", Film Theory and Criticism, G Mast, M Cohen, J-L Baudry (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992; R Bellour, "Le Blocage symbolique", Communications, 23, 1975; E Cowie, "Fantasia"; B Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis; M Doane, "Film and masquerade: theorising the female spectator"; J Ellis, Visible Fictions, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982. Other scholars who have written on various aspects of spectatorship and the gaze and not mentioned a religious or mystical gaze include S Hayward, French National Cinema, London: Routledge, 1993; C Johnston, "Women's cinema as countercinema", J Nicholls (ed.), Movies and Methods, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976; E Kaplan, Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera; R Lapsley and M Westlake, Film Theory: an Introduction, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992; C Metz, "The imaginary signifier"; L Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema"; K Silverman, "Masochism and subjectivity"; J Stacey, Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship; G Studlar, "Masochism the perverse pleasures of the cinema"; L Williams, "When the woman looks", Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism. Still others have developed even further the nature of the gazes of the cinema: the "murderous gaze", see W Rothman, Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; a "Hollywood gaze", P Roffman, J Purdy, The Hollywood Social Problem Film, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981; a "disabled gaze", see M Norden, The Cinema of Isolation: a History of Physical Disability in the Movies, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1984; the "mediational gaze", the "reciprocal gaze" and the "screen as gazer", W Dixon, It looks at You: the Returned Gaze of the Cinema, New York: SUNY, 1995.

⁵⁵¹ Martin J, Ostwalt E, Screening the Sacred, p. 3

Frederick Streng in his seminal work on cross-cultural religious experience⁵⁵² lists five elements in mystical experience: personal apprehension of a holy presence; creation of a community through shared symbols; exploring and explaining the problematic in the human condition; accepting rituals, traditions and actions as a means to transformation; becoming aware of social bondage and obtaining strategies to overcome it. He goes on to identify five ways religious movements help an individual undergo these experiences: through establishing fulfilling human relationships; outlining social responsibilities; developing rational explanations; cultivating artistic creativity; and explaining our relationship to the physical world. I am not arguing here that the cinematic experience is the same as a religious experience, just that, stripped of language that appeals to a divine power or holy presence, Streng's functional description of religious experience demonstrates that there is a *prima facie* case for a methodological interaction between the two areas, as many of his categories could be applied to a spectator's experience of the cinema.

Other indicators also support the claim that a relationship between religious experience and the cinema can be demonstrated. Taking Australia as one example of a Western country, the growth of the appeal and influence of the cinema throughout the 20th century parallels a decline in organised religious affiliation and attendances. Since the Australian Bureau of Statistics began asking about religious affiliation in the census of 1984, each successive survey (1988, 1992 and 1996) demonstrates that public adherence to religion is declining. Furthermore it shows that a positive response to "no religion" is rising. At the same time Australian Bureau of Statistics results for cinema attendances have steadily risen. In 2000 there were 80 million attendances at the cinema in Australia.⁵⁵³ While no Australian Bureau of Statistics figures are available for Church attendances, the National Church Life Survey of 1996 concludes that there were 50 million Church attendances in 1995. The same research indicator demonstrates that this figure has been decreasing since 1960.⁵⁵⁴ The growth of the "dream factory" has been mirrored by the decline of the temples of eternity.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵² See F Streng, *Understanding Religious Life*, Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1985.

⁵⁵³ See www.abs.gov.au

⁵⁵⁴ The National Church Life Survey is a research office funded by the three major Christians denominations in Australia: Roman Catholicism, the Anglican Church of Australia and the Uniting Church of Australia. What gives credibility to their results is that they are not what these sponsoring organisations would like to discover. See, www.ncls.org.au; National Church Survey, *Build My Church*, Melbourne: NCLS, 1999, *passim*.

⁵⁵⁵ It could be argued that sport has similarly taken on a larger role in Australian society, yet a per capita comparison of attendance figures at football games, race meetings and cricket matches between

An unusual source of support for my claim that mysticism and the cinema are constitutively related comes from the teaching of the world's oldest, largest and most culturally diverse Christian church, Roman Catholicism. In 1967 Paul VI invoked the theme of light in John's Gospel as a parallel to the content and apparatus of the cinema, "...we are expressing confidence in your mysterious power of opening up the glorious regions of light that lie behind the mystery of human life."⁵⁵⁶ John Paul II went further while addressing members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles in 1987, "The link between your art of human expression and the exercise of religion is profound." Religion and the best work in the cinema unites human beings, fosters communication, seeks the truth and affirms human dignity and hope. He concludes, "I am convinced that to a great extent we share a common hope. ...As communicators of the human word, you are stewards and administrators of an immense spiritual power."⁵⁵⁷ Developing these ideas even more, John Paul II said in 2000 that the impact of the cinema as a constitutive part of the world's media, "can hardly be exaggerated...For many the experience of living is to a great extent an experience of the media." The Pope goes on to outline that any cinematic presentation, "which call(s) attention to authentic human needs, especially those of the weak, the vulnerable and the marginalised can be implicit proclamations of the Lord."⁵⁵⁸

While these documents separate the content of the cinema from the experience of spectatorship as a religious moment, this brief survey demonstrates, however, that the recent Popes accept what the academy fails to recognise, that a relationship exists between the cinema and religious experiences. For obvious reasons, I can find no evidence of any mainstream religious body saying cinematic attendance is akin to participation in their religious gatherings, but some religious groups recognise the

the years 1901 and 2001 show that sport attendance in Australia has been in steady decline. I fully concede that sport plays a central, indeed somewhat cultish, role for many Australians, and that television broadcasting of sporting fixtures has contributed to this decline in physical attendance at matches. It remains true, however, that, despite videos and DVDs, year-by-year people have been going out to the cinema in increasing numbers. See

www.olds.mh.com.au/news/specials/natl/federation/stats/recreation.html;

www.cricket.org/link_to_database/NATIONAL/AUS/ACB/OPERATIONS/ATTENDANCE.html;

www.aaflo.org/SportsLibrary/SportingTraditions/1984/st0101/st0101f.pdf;

www.aaflo.org/SportsLibrary/SportingTraditions/1995/st1102/st1102u.pdf.

⁵⁵⁶ Paul VI, "Allocution to Film Makers", Vatican City, 6th May 1967, *Acta Apostolica Sedis*, LIX: 83.

⁵⁵⁷ John Paul II, "Address to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles", 15th September 1987, *Acta Apostolica Sedis*, LXXIX: 781-787.

⁵⁵⁸ John Paul II, "Proclaiming Christ at the Dawn of the New Millennium", World Communications Day Message, Vatican City, 4th June 2000, *Acta Apostolica Sedis*, XCII: 234.

parallels and the intersections. It remains true, however, that for many spectators in the Western world the dream factory is the post-modern church. One of the reasons this transition has been so easy, so subtle, is that across the centuries spectators took with them the same thing. From the ancient temple ceremonies to the magic shows of travelling troupes, from the medieval passion plays to light and shadow shows and fairgrounds, from the Carnivales to the cinema, they took with them a mystical gaze. The relationship between mysticism and the cinematic gaze is as important a factor as gender, region, class, race and sexuality in the experience of spectatorship. I do not argue that it exists prior to, or is more evident than, other gazes accepted more readily by the academy, but if one admits that mysticism and religious elements have been constitutive elements in influencing desire and spectatorship in storytelling, theatre, dance, art and music up to now, it is harder to argue that they are not critical to spectator film theory than to accept that they are.⁵⁵⁹

Transcendental Style

Arguably the most important scholar to make an extensive study of the relationship between mysticism and the cinema is Paul Schrader in Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer. Located firmly in auteur theory, he argues that the style of some films “represent a way (a *tao*, in the broadest sense of the term) to approach the Transcendent.”⁵⁶⁰ Schrader makes large claims for his theory arguing that “transcendental style” is the most universal factor in film, is deliberately deployed through cinematic techniques and that it favours mystery and “eschews all conventional interpretations of reality: realism, naturalism, psychologism, romanticism, expressionism, impressionism, and finally, rationalism.”⁵⁶¹ Schrader contends that high art has always been concerned with the expression of the transcendent which enables the spectator to experience an encounter with Otherness.

⁵⁵⁹ Yet the sociologist of religion, Robert Wuthnow in his recent book on American religion and the arts never analyses the cinema’s contribution to either sphere. See, R Wuthnow, All In Sync: How Music and Art are Revitalising American Religion. Other scholars are calling for their academy to study the influence of the cinema arts on contemporary religion. See, G Pattison, Art, Modernity and Faith: Towards a Theology of Art, New York: St Martin’s Press, 1991; F Brown, Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989.

⁵⁶⁰ Schrader P, Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer, New York: Da Capo, 1988, first published in 1972, p. 3.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. p. 10.

Quoting Clive Bell, he notes, “Art and Religion are the two roads by which men escape from circumstance to ecstasy. Art and Religion are means to similar states of mind.”⁵⁶² The ecstasy Schrader has in mind is a mystical one. “Like transcendental religion, transcendental art merges with mysticism: ‘Absolute religion is mysticism; it is without shape and without sound. Absolute art can neither be seen or heard.’”⁵⁶³ Basing his study on Mircea Eliade’s phenomenological enquiries into archaic forms of religious manifestations, Schrader is the first to borrow Eliade’s term “hierophany” to argue that the cinema can effect in the spectator, through culturally defined ways, a universal encounter with the transcendent. Schrader is aware of the limitations of the language he has at his disposal to describe these phenomena and acknowledges its prehistory in superstition and magic, but maintains that he is outlining a category for film theorists within which to understand the work of some auteurs, as well as a method through which to approach them.⁵⁶⁴

Though Schrader can see elements of the transcendental style in Antonioni, Rossellini, Pasolini, Boetticher, Renoir, Mizoguchi, Buñuel, Warhol, Snow and Baillie, he sets out to show that Ozu and Bresson consistently employ it, and so are the leading exponents of it, while Dreyer’s *Ordet* is also an excellent example of the transcendental style. Schrader makes the case that there are three defining elements in the transcendental style. The first is a focus on the “everyday: a meticulous representation of the dull, banal commonplaces of everyday living...”⁵⁶⁵ This is more than realism; it is the observation of the details of the everyday in such a way that they take on a new meaning, are invested with significance and are “a prelude to the moment of redemption, when ordinary reality is transcended.”⁵⁶⁶ The second element is “disparity: an actual or potential disunity between man and his environment which culminates in a decisive action...”⁵⁶⁷ It is seen in the tension created by watching the actor on the screen become aware of the spiritual breaking through into the commonplace, “the extension of holy agony”⁵⁶⁸ and the burden of choices that accompanies this realisation. Then third element is “Stasis: a frozen view of life

⁵⁶² Ibid. p. 7, quoting Clive Bell, *Art*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1913, p. 68.

⁵⁶³ Ibid, p. 7, quoting G van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: the Holy in Art*, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1963, p. 273.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 5.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 39.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 42.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 42.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 43.

which does not resolve the disparity but transcends it.”⁵⁶⁹ This transforms rather than resolves the disparity. The spectator recognises that any change that has occurred has come through an altered perception. Life has not changed for the character or for the spectator, but new meaning has been discovered within the experience on the screen and in the cinema.

Ozu’s films, Schrader maintains, offer the best example of these steps where a recurring theme is expressed of nature being found within and of humanity being connected to the larger creation. Decisive action for Ozu is that a woman or man finds a place within a community or family. Bresson is Ozu’s Western counterpart, returning in his films to similar themes of humanity’s hostility to the local context and railing against human frailty. “The decisive action in Bresson’s films is limited to a lonely figure...the single redeemer: Moses, Christ, the priests, saints and mystics who each in his own way righted man with the world.”⁵⁷⁰ Carl Dreyer is not consistently transcendental in his style, according to Schrader, especially in the way he resolves the narrative and transforms his character’s perceptions in the final act of his films.⁵⁷¹ Dreyer’s *Ordet*, however “comes closet in technique and effect to the works of Ozu and Bresson.”⁵⁷²

Schrader concludes his study by arguing that because austerity and asceticism have been universal hallmarks of those who have ascribed their paths to transcendence, these characteristics mark out its cinematic style as well. From his studying of religious art Schrader maintains that “Sacred art has often favored primitive techniques: two-dimensionality, frontality, the abstract line, the archetypal character.”⁵⁷³ This primitive style is applied to the conveyance of the image by sparse means. Schrader finds this sparseness in Eric Satie, Homer and Thomas Aquinas, but more problematically he also contends that Mozart, Rembrandt and Dante are also exponents of this style.⁵⁷⁴ Even though some of these latter artists’ work is dark in mood and tone, it is hard to reconcile their musical, visual and literary complexity and flourish with the concept of sparseness. This discussion about the higher means of sparse representations has made Schrader critical of the cinema’s ability to transcend its own history in the way it keeps presenting abundant, secular images. “Motion

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 49.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 55.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid. p. 120.

⁵⁷² Ibid. p. 132.

⁵⁷³ Ibid. p. 152.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 154.

pictures were not born in religious practise, but are instead are the totally profane offspring of capitalism and technology.”⁵⁷⁵ The work of directors who forgo abundance for sparseness in their work find that the “spiritual cinema” returns abundance in a transformed and indeed ultimate way.⁵⁷⁶ “Transcendental style can take a viewer through the trials of experience to the expression of the Transcendent; it can return him to experience from a calm region untouched by the vagaries of emotion or personality. Transcendental style can bring us nearer to that silence, that invisible image, in which the parallel lines of religion and art meet and interpenetrate.”⁵⁷⁷

In many respects Schrader is describing what I have termed the mystical gaze. It is not surprising that Schrader does not use gaze theory to support his arguments, seeing that his work was first published in the early 1970’s, before theories of the gaze were more fully recognised and developed. There are, however, sympathetic meeting points between our studies: an acceptance that subjective personal transcendence is possible; a belief that while this encounter may be culturally defined and it might borrow religious language to describe it, it is not limited to religious content or constraints; an acknowledgement that these encounters are attested to across universal belief systems and cultural divides; a belief they share codes with multi-faith mystical traditions in the way they occur and are reported; an acceptance that the cinema can structure such an openness to Otherness; an acknowledgement this can be akin to how previous participants in, and spectators of, art have described the experience as an encounter with transcendence; an argument that the experience of transcendence is induced by some films more than others; and finally an argument that within these films, in which some people report an encounter with Otherness, there is an attention to the details of the everyday, a sense of the metaphysical breaking in upon the physical which can lead the character to a new consciousness of his or her surroundings.

There are many points, however, where the claims I make for the mystical gaze are very different from Schrader’s transcendental style. In the concluding paragraphs of his work, Schrader argues that “Spirituality in art must have room to

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 156.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. pp. 159ff.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 169.

move, to change with the times and the arts...it is always in flux.”⁵⁷⁸ This claim is incongruous with the argument he has just expounded and the method he has deployed to argue it. Schrader situates the transcendental style firmly within ideas and forms that have long been venerated in visual representation. The mystical gaze, however, is more adaptable to, and encompassing of, various epochs, not privileging one era’s work over the work of another. The main reason for the greater fluidity of the mystical gaze is because it is also in the possession of the spectator, not just the creation of the artist or his or her style. The cinema is but one recent development in the deployment of perception where a spectator can exercise the mystical gaze.

This adaptability also applies to the worthiness of the art form. By accepting only the work of Ozu, Bresson and Dreyer, by exception, into the pantheon of transcendental stylists, Schrader is intentionality interested in high art cinema. His implicit argument is that only high art, which is often very demanding of the spectator, takes time to create, education to fully appreciate, and discloses several layers of meaning, can be worthy of the transcendent. In this judgement Schrader has been too heavily influenced by the process and importance of iconography, and the katophatic mysticism which iconography encourages. As rich a source as icons and their evolution are for the exercise of the mystical gaze they also can be deployed in popular cinema, considered by some to be of lesser value, filled with the shape, sounds and excesses Schrader disdains. The history of mysticism demonstrates that while religious collectives have an official mystical tradition and representations, there is in every culture popular pieties, festivals, artefacts or art works which have been the meeting point between mass culture and the transcendent for centuries. Given the culturally shifting sands of what constitutes high art from one generation to the next, Schrader cannot dismiss the power of these popular mass devotions to deliver access to the transcendent which he wants to see in cinematic art. Apart from their reportage of such an encounter in these mass movements, there are those whose lives and deaths argue strongly for the efficacy of their experiences. Aware that certain types of art, and film art in this case, can be more helpful than others in assisting a spectator to an encounter with Otherness, and aware that as Daniel Madigan argues,⁵⁷⁹ mysticism is as much an encounter with one’s belief as with a

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 168.

⁵⁷⁹ Madigan D, “When experience leads to different beliefs”, pp. 73ff.

transcendent reality, the mystical gaze admits all genres of film as potential sites within which this gaze is exercised.

Schrader is alert to one of the problems in his method: language. He attempts to define and redefine what he means by transcendental style several times. By the end of the work, rather than coming to greater clarity about what a “transcendental style” means he ends up broadening out the terms to include characteristics he has previously not countenanced. “In each art and age the transcendent finds its proper level and style.”⁵⁸⁰ Part of the problem is that Schrader defines what he sees in certain types of cinema in terms of what certain European and Asian art-house auteurs do, how they manipulate the frame, the characterisations, the narrative structure, the sound, light and editing to achieve a certain look which parallels traditional religious imagery. The terms “mysticism” and “mystical” are frequently used by secular commentators to capture what Schrader wants to name as transcendental. Very few scholars use this latter term to nominate a similar reality because it connotes a more explicit position of belief in a being, in the transcendent. Mysticism and the associated Otherness it implies, however, can be appropriated and applied in a more secular way. Rather than something done to the spectator by the intending auteur, the mystical gaze is constructed in the interaction between the spectator and the film. The auteur’s work and, as I shall soon show, even the physical structure of the cinema, lend their skill and weight to the deployment of the mystical gaze. An auteur can heighten the experience. Schrader’s transcendental style is a sub-set of the mystical gaze which has roots in the ancient traditions of art and metaphysics discernible in diverse cultures and various artistic styles. It is a term more accessible for religious and secular critics alike, and so it is not restricted to its antecedents and is more universally appreciable.⁵⁸¹

Grammar of Myths

Schrader seems to be unaware of Neil Hurley’s work published two years before his own. This is surprising given that they are both interested in the Other-worldliness of the cinema. Although Hurley’s method and conclusions are vastly

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 168.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. p. 108.

different from Schrader's, he is the first scholar explicitly to link transcendence with film.

I think that motion pictures and theology work with transcendence...While seeking recreation, diversion, and understanding, movie watchers are often exercising transcendental faculties of insight, criticism, and wonder that come remarkably close to what religion has traditionally termed faith, prophecy, and reverence.⁵⁸²

Although Hurley is primarily interested in demonstrating the ways in which Christian theological themes of conscience, evil, sexuality, grace, freedom and sacrificial love are presented and treated in the cinema and how theology can be taught through film, he is keenly aware that the importance of the cinema rests in the images it presents for mass consumption. He argues that films will provide for future generations "the grammar of myths"⁵⁸³ in the way that religions have done so in the past. The cinema now dominates society's image-bank and connects it to what universal mystical traditions have been doing for centuries, disclosing themselves as "persuasive because all cultures, all major world religions, and all races have tenaciously held onto them (images) in one form or another throughout the ages."⁵⁸⁴ Given the inviting premises upon which Hurley launches his research it is disappointing to note that he does not conclude that film can be the ground for a mystical encounter, but simply a primer for later theological reflection on what believers see there.

Other scholars, who have ventured into the territory of religion and cinematic spectatorship, continue in Hurley's direction of seeing film at the service of theology. Many of them are explicit about these intentions and so their exploration of "sacredness", "religious experience", "mysticism" and "religion in the movies", or "religion at the movies" is enacted within a broader theological framework. The problem is that this strongly determines the questions these scholars ask and the assumptions they make about religion and the cinema.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Hurley N, Theology through film, New York: Harper & Row, 1970, p. x.

⁵⁸³ Ibid. p. 10.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 8.

⁵⁸⁵ P Malone (ed.), From Back Pews to Front Stalls: the Church in 100 years of Australian Cinema; L Kreitzer, The New Testament in Fiction and Film, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993; R Jewett, St Paul at the Movies, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993. Other scholars interested in "religion in the movies", or "religion at the movies" see: J Drane, Cultural Change and Biblical Faith, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000; A Bergesen and A Greely, God in the Movies, New Brunswick, New Jersey:

Film as Hierophany

One such work is Religion and Film where Michael Bird argues that the cinema holds mythic and ritualistic dimensions. Like Schrader, Bird bases his research on Mircea Eliade's phenomenological inquiries into archaic forms of religious manifestations. Bird also uses Eliade's term "hierophany", but claims much more for it in his theory. Bird argues for a theology of the cinema that accepts that spectatorship is linked to an ancient process of discerning "the act of the manifestation of the sacred."⁵⁸⁶ Art helps spectators become aware of their finitude and to encounter the transcendent, "present in its very absence, graspable in its ungraspability, appearing in its disappearing."⁵⁸⁷ Bird builds on Paul Tillich's theology of culture and Mikel Dufrenne's philosophical aesthetics to argue that art, and film art in particular, are as much an experience of the void in our lives as they are concerned with what can fill the void or make sense of it. Art is a powerful agent for transcendence because it not only stimulates thoughts, but draws from the spectator the depth of a feeling response, "to feel is, in a sense, to transcend," and so create a world in which meaning is bestowed.⁵⁸⁸ Film creates the illusion of reality in such a way that the spectator can see, as Kracauer observes, "life in all its fullness...a tendency toward endlessness...it proceeds from 'below' to 'above'."⁵⁸⁹ In dealing with life in the realistic way André Bazin and Amédée Ayfre have promoted, the cinema also points beyond itself to enable the spectator to discover a depth of being, which is " '...something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world.' At such points film becomes hierophany."⁵⁹⁰

Unfortunately Bird's singular contribution into the nature of the spectator's interaction with film goes nowhere. In the series of articles that follow in his book, no one builds on, refutes or discusses his insights. John May argues for "films [to] be

Transaction, 2000; J May, New Image of Religious Films, Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1997; R Johnston, Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue; B Stone, Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema, St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000; R Blake, AfterImage: the Indelible Catholic Imagination of Six American Filmmakers, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 2000.

⁵⁸⁶ May J, Bird M, Religion in Film, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982, p. 3, quoting Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 16, quoting Henri Argel, Poétique du Cinema, Paris: Editions du Signe, 1960, p. 59.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 5f.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 16, quoting S Kracauer, Theory of Film, pp. 233, 309.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 22, quoting M Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, p. 11.

viewed as visual story in order to discern religious potential.”⁵⁹¹ Rather than applying the insight Bird opens up, May and other contributors, among whom, most surprisingly, is Bird himself when he writes on Bergman, settle for an analysis of films, and more precisely film directors, that are “open to a religious or sectarian interpretation or to appropriation for the faith experience”.⁵⁹² As a result Altman, Bergman, Buñuel, Coppola, Fellini, Hitchcock, Kubrick, Russell, Truffaut and Wertmuller, among others, are analysed for how their work can be assimilated, almost exclusively, in terms of Christian theology. Leaving aside questions about whether a cinematic hierophany is possible in the hands of less worthy auteurs, Bird’s cogent arguments are left undeveloped. Maybe the implications of Eliade’s method had a bearing on this outcome. In his original work Eliade argued that the success of his method of finding unifying patterns and codes of religious symbols, myths and rites depended on how well the investigator can set aside his or her religious affiliations and assumptions and how well he or she can find a multi-faith, multi-ethnic language that transcends his or her own cultural bias.⁵⁹³ May and Bird’s study may have been intended to be non-sectarian, but their work concludes by seeing the cinema as a primer for a religious, Christian experience, rather than understanding the act of spectatorship as encoding the structures of the mystical gaze. Bird has never gone on to develop his hierophany theory and, as I will now argue, while other scholars may note it, they have not come to grips with it.

Biography, the Apocalypse and Iconography

Fifteen years after his first volume was published, John May edited New Image of Religious Film. May surveys literature interested in theology and film and concludes that religion in film has been seen to be encoded in a film’s morality and ethics, the religious influences on directors, the dialogue it promotes on religious issues or the “new humanism of liberation” some films promote. He returns, however, to his narrative method, albeit more broadly developed this time, to find “that any film, even those without explicit religious elements, can still be considered as

⁵⁹¹ Ibid. p. 43.

⁵⁹² Ibid. p. 43.

⁵⁹³ Eliade M, Patterns in Comparative Religions, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949. Also see M Eliade, The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969; F Streng, Understanding Religious Life, pp. 228f.

potentially religious.”⁵⁹⁴ Though May outlines Bird’s hierophany theory, he does not do anything more with it. Within this volume only Sylvain De Bleeckere comes close to the area Bird opened up when she addresses the religious dimensions of cinematic consciousness in a post-modern culture. De Bleeckere finds three dimensions: the biographical; the apocalyptical; and the iconophile.⁵⁹⁵ Not unsurprisingly it is in relation to this last category that he discusses the way we look in the cinema. In what is the weakest of his three arguments for a religious post-modern cinematic approach, he seems to be unaware of Schrader and Bird’s work in a similar area. De Bleeckere prefers to look at auteurs like Tarkowsky, Rivette and Erice who are consciously intertextual in the imagery they borrow from Christian iconography. The significance of the meaning of these quotations in their films is not clear to De Bleeckere and creates what he calls “the open gaze.” He asserts rather than demonstrates that these directors are able, at least, to assist “the postmodern spectator ...even in the twinkling of an eye, to surpass his all-too-human littleness and become a kindred spirit with the divine Spectator.”⁵⁹⁶ Her research instincts are moving in the right direction even if her case is far from clear.

Other contributors offer keen insights into how religion is present or encountered in the cinema. Joseph Marty argues that it is through memory, discovery and dialogue.⁵⁹⁷ Invoking Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, Marjeet Verbeek concludes that it can found in a film’s search for truth, ethical action and beauty.⁵⁹⁸ Ambros Eichenberger is aware of the task facing theologians interested in the cinema and advocates a method of analysing popular films which are fascinated by the spiritual but do not fit any previous category.

Myths, archetypes, even magic elements and ‘basic instincts’ need to be integrated into such a holistic interpretive approach that depends so much on intellectual discipline, in order to reach, of

⁵⁹⁴ May J, “The religious in films: from *King of Kings* to *The Fisher King*”, New Image of Religious Film, J May (ed.), Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1997, p. 34.

⁵⁹⁵ De Bleeckere S, “The religious dimensions of cinematic consciousness in postmodern culture”, New Image of Religious Film, J May (ed.), Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1997, p. 100.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 109.

⁵⁹⁷ Marty J, “Toward a theological interpretation and reading of a film: incarnation of the word of God – relation, image, word”, New Image of Religious Film, J May (ed.), Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1997, pp. 136, 146.

⁵⁹⁸ Verbeek M, “Too beautiful to be untrue: toward a theology of film aesthetics”, New Image of Religious Film, J May (ed.), Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1997, p. 173.

possible, deeper zones of the human soul, connecting and unifying its conscious, its rational and mystical urges.⁵⁹⁹

Even though May challenges the theological academy to “root [its] discussions of the religious implications of film in the formal elements of cinema itself,”⁶⁰⁰ such elements are notably lacking in their work. May and his colleagues fail to provide any methodology that could deal with the inherent secular mysticism of the cinema because their analysis is stronger in theology than film theory. For example, some film theorists, or those who have had a formative influence on cinema studies, are mentioned or dealt with only in passing like Metz, Bazin, Mulvey and Kracauer. Other theorists like Baudry, Burch, Lacan, Deleuze, Gunning and Kristeva are not mentioned at all. If the theological academy is going to have a fruitful dialogue with those outside it about how, where, and why mysticism can be found in the cinema, May’s challenge to scholars of religion to versed in the formal elements of the cinema must be met.

Identification, Technology and Mysticism

Ronald Holloway is another scholar interested in “how one is to interpret the religious dimensions of the cinema.”⁶⁰¹ Holloway argues that there are three intersections between religion and film: passive identification; a theology which develops from the technology of vision; and “mystical participation.”⁶⁰² He links this participation with the “the mystical bond of holiness between man and the soil.”⁶⁰³ While the industrial revolution has removed the direct link between the tilling of the earth and humanity, poets like Emerson, Ripley, Thoreau and Whitman, who believed themselves to be “mystics” or “transcendental idealists,”⁶⁰⁴ were the artistic bridge between acceptance of the industrialised age and finding in technology a new forum for reflecting on life. The first way in which the cinema enshrines mystical

⁵⁹⁹ Eichenberger A, “Approaches to film criticism”, New Image of Religious Film, J May (ed.), Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1997, p. 15.

⁶⁰⁰ May J, “Contemporary theories regarding the interpretation of religious film”, New Image of Religious Film, J May (ed.), Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1997, p. 34.

⁶⁰¹ Holloway R, Beyond the Image: Approaches to the Religious Dimension in the Cinema, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977, p. 7.

⁶⁰² Ibid. p. 11.

⁶⁰³ Ibid. p. 13.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid. pp. 57-58.

participation is that it provides a venue in which this reflection can occur.⁶⁰⁵ Holloway surveys film theorists and auteurs to establish what he terms a “theology of secularity.”⁶⁰⁶ Even though he admits mysticism is “a much abused term: it is better explained by what it did, than what it was”, Holloway uses this word more often than any other to describe the religious dimension in the cinema.

Analysing the antecedents of the cinema in 19th century melodramas and the magic lantern shows, he is alert to the language that came from these experiences into the cinema: magic, the supernatural and religious ecstasy.⁶⁰⁷ Demonstrating the early and explicit relationship between religious belief and the cinema, Holloway notes that in the first decade of the cinema, passion plays were the longest and most popular films of their day, challenged only by the lives of the saints, miracle stories and *Gulliver’s Travels*.⁶⁰⁸ Curiously, however, it was not in relation to a religious film that Holloway asserts “the words ‘sublime’ and ‘mystical union’ entered the film critic’s lexicon” in 1922. It was in regard to Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*.⁶⁰⁹ Holloway traces the history of his theory: Vachel Lindsay’s early work, The Art of the Moving Pictures, says that the cinema is mystical because it is reflective of real life; how “the ‘universal Deity’ form of mysticism” is the guiding force on D W Griffith’s work especially in *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*;⁶¹⁰ and that Dreyer, Buñuel, Fellini, Bergman, Pasolini, Bresson, Kubrick, Cassavetes, Loach, Herzog, Widerberg, Bertolucci, Godard and Makavejev are pre-eminent auteurs who, through their interest in intention, purpose, desire, will, choice, commitment and witness, have raised cinema to a high art where “the camera ceases recording life; (rather) it takes its pulse.”⁶¹¹ In false comparison Holloway argues while Cecil B DeMille is the “high priest” of the cinema,⁶¹² Charlie Chaplin is “the only film comedian in the twentieth century who understood the full scale of emotions, well enough to put prayer and faith in the middle of the gags.”⁶¹³ Analysing *The Kid* (1921), *The Pilgrim* (1922), *The Gold Rush* (1925) and especially *The Circus* (1928) Holloway maintains that there is an explicit exploration of the sacred in these films. Chaplin’s mysticism was not about

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid. pp. 12f.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 15.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 45.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. pp. 47ff.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 19.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 16f.

⁶¹¹ Ibid. p. 19, 22.

⁶¹² Ibid. p. 82.

⁶¹³ Ibid. p. 73.

confirming religious verities. In terms of the social mysticism outlined earlier, André Bazin can claim that it does not matter if Chaplin is religious or not, because within his films “the sacred is everywhere present in the life of society,” while “Charlie’s old films add up to the most formidable anticlerical indictment imaginable of provincial puritan society in the United States.”⁶¹⁴ In his final definition of what constitutes a theology of the cinema Holloway shares with Schrader that the cinema has the ability to open the spectator to an experience of transcendence. Holloway, however, argues for a more subjective transcendental encounter than Schrader does whereby openness to human problems, belief rather than certainty and empirical experience constitute the elements of the encounter.⁶¹⁵

The Celluloid Temple

Well before Holloway, scholars noted that the earliest cinemas were constructed on the lines of a church and movie palaces as cathedrals. In 1959 Daniel Lord, a Jesuit priest and the author of the Hollywood Production Code, noted that “two places claimed their [his family’s] pilgrimage: the parish church of a morning, the neighborhood theater of an evening. Many a fellow parishioner was inclined to genuflect on entering the local movie theater.”⁶¹⁶ Early movie palace architect John Eberson gained inspiration from religiously inspiring places. “We visualise and dream a magnificent amphitheater (like)...in a mystic Egyptian temple yard, all canopied by a soft moonlit sky.”⁶¹⁷ These religiously exotic aspects of architecture were quickly associated with the style of the building within which Satan would dwell and where a Black Mass would be offered in the sanctuary of the screen.⁶¹⁸ Mystical references do not just extend to the architecture or interior design, but also to the atmosphere within the cinema, in the reverential behaviour of spectators toward certain film, combining to create “the cathedral mood of the motion picture.”⁶¹⁹ Holloway asserts that “Churches were often used as movies theatres for high-paying

⁶¹⁴ André Bazin, quoted in R Holloway, Beyond the Image: Approaches to the Religious Dimension in the Cinema, p. 71.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. p. 24.

⁶¹⁶ Lord D, Played by ear, New York: Image, 1959, p. 12, quoted in J Holloway, Beyond the Image: Approaches to the Religious Dimension in the Cinema, p. 103.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. p. 78.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid. p. 79.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid. p. 53.

‘spectacles’, until Pope Pius X forbade this desecration in 1910.”⁶²⁰ Without naming it as such, Holloway is the first scholar to describe the transference of the mystical gaze from the site of the sacred theatre to the secular one. “The poor in effect had two cathedrals to harbor their cares, sorrows and dreams, but the movie palace also offered escape from the surrounding drabness.”⁶²¹ The spectators also had their saints and sinners in the cinema too. Greta Garbo, “a sensual distant goddess...(with) ethereal beauty” and Marilyn Monroe whose death “signalled the end of the Dream Cult, she herself being its sacrificial offering.”⁶²² Rather than continue the earliest traditions of seeing and making films as a complement to its evangelical work, the Christian Church, however, sensed a threat to its power of story telling and moral formation and sought to control the content and style of the cinema through censorship from 1930 to 1968.⁶²³

Metaphysics, Illusion and Eternity

In his conclusion, Holloway argues for a dialogue between the religion and the cinema and looks at how filmmakers like Dreyer and Bresson might help this process. “Bresson ...interprets the tragedies that prove God’s love; Dreyer, an agnostic, is moving toward tragedy in his quest to unveil the secrets of the soul. Bresson is an insider looking out; Dreyer an outside looking in.”⁶²⁴ In an extensive survey of other outstanding filmmakers in the East and West Holloway concedes that film scholars have difficulty with the terms “religious”, “mystical” and “sublime” to describe a director’s work, but he suggests that great filmmakers deserve these ascriptions because they share four characteristics with universal mystical traditions: a single indivisible unity between the physical and the metaphysical; that evil is illusory; that time is unreal; and reality eternal.⁶²⁵

Holloway’s work is pivotal in the study of the mystical gaze. He goes beyond Schrader’s study of Ozu, Bresson and Dreyer to include a broader set of examples. His linking of the language of mysticism to the narrative commentary of the American mystical poets highlights the unacknowledged and possibly unknown debt

⁶²⁰ Ibid. p. 26.

⁶²¹ Ibid. p. 26.

⁶²² Ibid. pp. 80-81.

⁶²³ Ibid. pp. 28f.

⁶²⁴ Ibid. p. 176.

⁶²⁵ Ibid. p. 139.

Schrader owes to these transcendental idealists as well. Like Gunning, however, Holloway also stops short in asking questions of the antecedents to the cinema, which, as I have seen, encompass medieval passion plays, religious festivals, and the driving away of evil in Carnivales. This may be a noticeable omission by an historian of the cinema, it is inexplicable in a theologian interested the relationship between the two. It weakens his argument that Whitman and Thoreau were the first to make links between nature, technology and the task of reflection. While these poets are some of the most lyrical on the relationship between the soul and technology, every generation, albeit in a limited way when compared to that of the 19th century, has integrated into the public theatre of its day, technological developments wherein the mystical gaze was called upon. Holloway's comprehensive survey of those who have contributed to the development of the mystical gaze in the East and West is outstanding. His reading of Chaplin, in particular, makes sense of how cinema as a place for reflection on belief rather than certainty, and openness to human problems can lead to a focus on what Karl Rahner describes as a "social mysticism" or what Harvey Egan describe as a "mysticism of liberation", where one looks to "break open the socio-political, militantly committed, prophetic dimensions of contemplation."⁶²⁶ In this reading, Chaplin becomes the patron saint of the social mystics in the cinema.

Holloway's most important argument, however, comes in the way he understands the place where the mystical gaze is exercised. He is the only scholar of religion and the cinema who takes the history of the architecture of cinema so seriously. He points to, but leaves undeveloped, an excellent thesis that the exotic architecture of early movie palaces, explicitly conjured up images of pagan temples where evil worship could be undertaken and sexuality was a public part of the cult. This is a further fascinating factor in explaining how the relationship between the cinema and the Christian Churches in nearly every Western country at the same time quickly deteriorated with the later group retreating to the barricades of censorship and hostility for thirty years.

What is disappointing about Holloway's work is that for all the good ground he covers and the historical and physical contexts in which he situates the spectator's mystical gaze, he retreats to a conclusion that still sees the cinema and religion as mutually exclusive, needing to be in dialogue with each other about time and space,

⁶²⁶ Egan H, What Are They Saying About Mysticism?, p. 119.

the physical and metaphysical, the nature of evil and eternity. In setting up this definition of mysticism he then, literally, sets out to prove that filmmakers are biblical theologians, whether they want to be or not. His arguments here are not compelling and are incongruent with the direction in which he has been previously leading his reader. The weight of his liberal Protestant theology limits him from making the logical conclusion to his research: that in the act of spectatorship, through socialisation and mythical references dating back thousands of years and now within secular cinematic cathedrals, the mystical gaze is instituted, deployed, delighted, satisfied and sometimes frustrated. Mystical theology does not need to be in dialogue about points of intersection, rather theologians and film theorists need to recognise the ancient process of what is encoded there already.

The Mesmeric Effect

Writing in 1968 as the Churches lost their grip on censorship boards throughout the West and there was a truce in the hostilities between Churches and the cinema, William Jones asks a vital question about spectatorship, “What if anything actually happened to that person during those hours in darkness before the screen?” Jones explores the cinema as a dream, as a projection of an individual’s hopes and fears and concludes that the cinema is an experience demanding the “channelisation of attention”, “suspension of belief”, “identification and empathy” and “a mental and emotional response to aural and visual stimuli”.⁶²⁷ He recognises that Christianity has moved away from its best traditions of visual communication as means of teaching. He argues that Jesus’ parables and the medieval morality plays are previous expressions of the aural and visual legacy in Christian history. While Jones wants the Church to reclaim this legacy in producing films he also wants a literate Christian audience that understands the mesmeric effect of films. Jones concludes that knowing the process of “participation” enables spectators to develop their critical abilities in regard to reconciling the truth of Christian faith, Church teaching and the content of films that are “of the world”.⁶²⁸ Unfortunately his idea of cinematic participation is

⁶²⁷ Jones W, *Sunday Night at the Movies*, Richmond Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968, pp. 60-67.

⁶²⁸ Ibid. p. 8. Michael Medved outlines an oppositional reading between religion and the cinema in the aptly named *Hollywood Vs. America*, New York: Harper, 1992. Rather than seeing any organic relationship between the two, Medved argues that the American cinema is conspiring to “poison” the

one-sided and relates only to what the audience takes from the screen. Jones has little appreciation of what the audience takes to the screen, what gazes may already be operative and what may be about to be constructed before a frame is projected before us. All gazes, including the mystical gaze, come into existence in the relationship between the spectator and film.

Awe-inspiring Otherness

Joel Martin and Conrad Ostwalt acknowledge that their work analyses “the sacred” and “religion” in the cinema exclusively in Christian terms.⁶²⁹ Martin and Ostwalt argue that the cinema is a manifestation of civil religion and they offer a tripartite process for exploring the relationship between religion and film: theological; mythological; ideological criticisms. In the theological method Martin and Ostwalt explore the ways in which cinemas have taken over from cathedrals the artistic presentations of stories that hold “classic religious concerns, sensibilities, and themes.”⁶³⁰ In line with the serious way literary criticism deals with theological themes, they challenge cinema scholars to analyse in the text and intertexts of films issues of redemption, expiation, grace and guilt.⁶³¹ In terms of the mystical gaze it is of particular interest to note Ostwalt’s observations that Hollywood has created an entire sub-genre that made its own the representation of the explicitly theological notions of eschatology and the Apocalypse.⁶³² Although they do not name it Martin and Ostwalt’s theological criticism highlights their awareness of the mystical gaze. They argue that theology in the cinema comes not only through the narrative, but also through the experience of viewing that “can mediate an awareness of Otherness, of the transcendent, and, hence, serve a religious purpose by providing access to the sacred.”⁶³³ In the mythological reading of the cinema Martin and Ostwalt base their method on Joseph Campbell’s analysis of mythology to argue that the cinema is the new locality for the contemporary mythologies of “values, beliefs, dreams, desires,

Christian values of American society, to attack religious belief, assault the family, glorify ugly language and behaviour and disrupt civil society.

⁶²⁹ Martin J, “Introduction: seeing the sacred on the screen”, *Screening the Sacred*, p. 12.

⁶³⁰ May J, Ostwalt C, “Theological criticism”, *Screening the Sacred*, p. 13.

⁶³¹ Ibid. p. 16.

⁶³² Ostwalt C, “Hollywood and Armageddon: apocalyptic themes in recent cinematic presentations”, *Screening the Sacred*, pp. 55-63.

⁶³³ May J, Ostwalt C, “Theological criticism”, *Screening the Sacred*, p. 16.

longings”⁶³⁴ With echoes of Rudolph Otto, Martin and Ostwalt name within their mythical reading elements of the mystical as well. “Myths narrate an encounter with the mysterious unknown, with terrifying or awe-inspiring or enchanting Otherness. They do by describing a sacred place and time, by portraying the quest of a hero, and by probing universal problems of human existence and belief.”⁶³⁵

The starting point for Martin and Ostwalt’s ideological reading of the cinema is Louis Althusser’s study of the systems of ideology. Martin and Ostwalt observe that while Althusser took religion seriously in his ideological criticism, film critics who have adopted his method, have not. Because spectators are now seeing theological and mythological stories on the screen, Martin and Ostwalt argue that it is naive to discount the significance of religion in ideological analysis in the cinema.⁶³⁶ “Greater sensitivity to religious themes, symbols, rites, narratives, and values will not undermine but, rather, enhance ideological criticism.”⁶³⁷ By investigating various films that can be found to be religious through one or more of these methods, Ostwalt concludes that the future of the dialogue between religion and the cinema is through a functional cultural criticism. This would accept that there is relationship between the ritual of film spectatorship and religious ritual, “to the extent that the event (attending the cinema) allows us to transcend mundane life for a prescribed period of time, we are part of a sacred space, a sacred time, and, transfixed by the experience the experience, we are confirmed by an alternative reality, a ‘not me’, an Otherness.”⁶³⁸ The analysis of the cinema that Ostwalt calls for is akin to the now commonplace observation that for some people, participation in sport is a like a sacred duty within their civic religion.⁶³⁹ What is more emphasised in the cinema over sport, however, is that the narrative helps a spectator make sense of the world and find meaning in their existence.⁶⁴⁰

Although Martin and Ostwalt are interested in developing a dialogue in the academy between film and religion, their arguments are mounted on the assumption that the cinema “fails to express many significant aspects of human religiosity. In

⁶³⁴ May J, Ostwalt C, “Mythological criticism”, *Screening the Sacred*, p. 68.

⁶³⁵ Ibid. p. 69.

⁶³⁶ May J, Ostwalt C, “Ideological criticism”, *Screening the Sacred*, p. 120.

⁶³⁷ Ibid. p. 123.

⁶³⁸ Ostwalt C, “Religion, film and cultural analysis”, *Screening the Sacred*, p. 155.

⁶³⁹ Ibid. p. 156.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 158.

some key ways, religion exceeds film.”⁶⁴¹ They may sincerely hold this belief, but who is arguing that the content of films should primarily express human religiosity or that the cinema is in competition with religion to explain and understand “...complex spiritual motivations and narratives...”?⁶⁴² Martin and Ostwalt’s criticism is unhelpful. They know films are “fascinating and popular visual texts” and that more recent generations, who no longer look to the Churches for an experience of the “diverse ways the sacred manifests itself and to the political and social effects of religious and mythological texts”⁶⁴³ turn to the cinema. It is difficult, however, to mount a criticism of the cinema on the basis of what it does not do given that very few people want to do these things. Most filmmakers are not explicitly interested in religious objectives. Although Martin and Ostwalt’s theological, mythological and ideological methods are not nearly as neat and compartmentalised as their presentation suggests, they are helpful tools for those who share with them a desire to find religion in the cinema. But what of the scholars who do not want to join in this investigation? As I have shown some of these critics and scholars are able to name a variety of films and directors as mystical or interested in metaphysics. They are alert to the codes of the cinema that can lead to Otherness, but because of their evangelical theological starting points, they seem suspicious of mystical language and so avoid it altogether, preferring other less secularised terms like “sacred” and “religious”. The language of the mystical gaze, however, is a way into a robust discussion with the academy about the theological, mythological and ideological components of this gaze. But it comes at a price. Theories surrounding the mystical gaze are as critical of the belief systems, the social ordering and claims for meaning that constitute theological, mythological and religiously ideological constructs as they are of the films under analysis. I wonder if Martin and Ostwalt would invite this style of dialogue? To be fair to them they concede that a critical synthesis between religion and the cinema has not emerged.⁶⁴⁴

Most other authors in this field follow a similar path to the scholars already cited. They read film for the religious themes and endorsements of their particular theological perspectives they can recognise. Within this general approach three authors have offered recent developments.

⁶⁴¹ Martin J, “Introduction: seeing the sacred on the screen”, *Screening the Sacred*, p. 4.

⁶⁴² Ibid. p. 4.

⁶⁴³ Ibid. p. 12.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 12.

Film and Spirituality

Robert Johnston in Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue quotes Henry David Thoreau, who recognises that various looks are operative at the cinema, “The question is not what you look at, but what you see.”⁶⁴⁵ Johnston is aware that film-as-art inherits art’s ability to both reveal knowledge of an ultimate Otherness and “to actually experience God as well.”⁶⁴⁶ He also recognises that it is not only an experience of the Other that spectators see acted out in the cinema anymore, but that through the camcorder people have heightened experiences of their own life by watching themselves on the small screen.⁶⁴⁷ Film becomes the primer and reference point for mediated existence. Johnston, against those who complain that film scholars have not taken religion seriously enough, develops a unique system for analysing how the Christian Churches deal with recognising the mystical power of the cinema. He adapts H Richard Niebuhr’s classic Christian cultural typology⁶⁴⁸ and identifies five positions the Churches adopt: “avoidance, caution, dialogue, appropriation, divine encounter.”⁶⁴⁹ The first two categories are self-evident. I only have to recall how often the scholars cited above use the word “dialogue” to appreciate the currency of the third stage. In the appropriation category Johnston is careful to draw a distinction between the intention of the director, cautioning believers “against baptizing film as unconsciously Christian”,⁶⁵⁰ and the process by which his or her work can be interpreted and applied to Christian theology, “it is better to say that film portrays something about life that is religion-like.”⁶⁵¹ In the final category of divine encounter, Johnston quotes various scholars on how film offers such an encounter with Otherness, leading to an acceptance of Schrader’s theory about film creating a space that enables an encounter with the transcendent. There is an internal contradiction in Johnston’s system here. If he accepts Schrader’s complete theory then very few films would qualify in this category. Most films would be avoided because they would be

⁶⁴⁵ Johnston R, Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue, p. 15.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 17.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 24.

⁶⁴⁸ 1) Christ against culture 2) Christ and culture in paradox 3) Christ the transformer of culture 4) Christ above culture, 5) Christ of culture. See H R Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, New York: Harper & Row, 1951.

⁶⁴⁹ Johnston R, Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue, p. 41.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 55.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid. p. 56.

incapable of proving a means for such an encounter. I can assume from the examples Johnston gives for the application of this final category⁶⁵² that he does not agree with Schrader's limited application of it to Ozu, Bresson and Dreyer's *Ordet*. Rather than challenging Schrader on the high art films he judges to be worthy of disclosing the divine, Johnston avoids the issue.

The title of Johnston's book is revealing. He is aware that the language of "spirituality" is a new bridge between theology and an increasingly secular Western world. This term no longer encompasses any particular denominational constraint or theological school and so provides ground for the dialogue Johnston's colleagues have been advocating. Johnston does not develop this term or what he means by it in any detail. It is striking that in a book on film and spirituality he only uses the word "spirituality" six times: in the introductory essay; in a quote from Martin Scorsese; and in regard to the films of Peter Weir, which I have reviewed in Chapter One. In his observations, Scorsese, a close associate of Paul Schrader, is referred to by Johnston to summarise the central argument of the thesis. In doing so Scorsese explains a critical element in his own work, Weir's work, and offers an insight into the mystical gaze. "I don't really see a conflict between the church and the movies, the sacred and the profane... I believe there's spirituality in films, even if it's not one which can supplant faith... It's as if movies answer an ancient quest for the common unconscious."⁶⁵³

Theology in Films

In 1997 Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz edited a volume entitled Explorations in Theology and Film. Like most of their colleagues they wished to "undertake creative Christian theology in conversation with film."⁶⁵⁴ They argue that until their volume, this conversation has been of limited value because it has been too general and the theological presumptions limited to a particular theological tradition. They outline how film analysis and religion will fruitfully dialogue when post-modern religion is

⁶⁵² Johnston writes passionately about a mystical experience he had while watching *Beckett* (1964) and his wife had while watching Peter Weir's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue, pp. 28f, 191f.

⁶⁵³ Ibid. p. 93.

⁶⁵⁴ Marsh C, Ortiz G, "Introduction", Explorations in Theology and Film, Explorations in Theology and Film, C Marsh, G Ortiz (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. p. 2.

“less systematic than any particular religion would like it to be.”⁶⁵⁵ Given this opening claim, Marsh bases his approach to film and religion strongly within a liberal Protestant theological methodology. Surveying and criticising a number of systematic theologians who have been interested in the dialogue between theology and culture, Marsh clearly gives preference to Paul Tillich’s theology of culture and correlation.⁶⁵⁶ Marsh criticises the way Tillich, almost exclusively, argues out of “highbrow” Western art, and uses it as a proof text for, or an illustration of, Christian theology.⁶⁵⁷ Marsh adapts Tillich’s approach to argue that what this dialogue needs is for the integrity of film to be recognised, that the analysis include Eastern and Third World cinema and that the importance of popular entertainment be acknowledged and used.⁶⁵⁸ What is astonishing about this volume is that Marsh’s contributors only take his advice on the final point.

David Browne summarises “the language of film” and “reading a film” and even psychoanalysis and the cinema but never mentions gaze theory or theories about spectatorship. While other authors analyse popular films such as *The Piano*, *Shane*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Raging Bull*, *Awakenings*, *The Terminator*, *Groundhog Day*, *Dead Poets Society*, *The Mission*, *The Name of the Rose* and *Priest*, among others, no one studies films that come from a non-Western culture. This is even true of Marsh in his analysis of *Shirley Valentine* and *Babette’s Feast*. Furthermore contributors are not interested in the post-modern project Marsh and Ortiz outline for them where “eclecticism, selectivity...(and)...the triumph of the individual”⁶⁵⁹ would influence their work. Every essay uses mainstream and traditional methods drawing on, for example, the Gospel of Mark, soteriology,⁶⁶⁰ christology, redemption and grace, liberation theology, philosophy of the body and the human person, Christian ethics, sacramental theology or eschatology to argue their respective cases. Again, Marsh does not take his own advice in the way he uses pneumatology to explore how *Shirley Valentine* prays out of her own experience or in the way he reads *Babette’s Feast* as a parable about the Eucharist. There is nothing ground-breaking about the relationship between theology and the post-modern here.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 3.

⁶⁵⁶ Marsh C, “Film and theologies of culture”, *Explorations in Theology and Film*, C Marsh, G Ortiz (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p. 30.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 31.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid. pp. 31f.

⁶⁵⁹ Marsh C, Ortiz G, “Introduction”, *Explorations in Theology and Film*, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁰ The theological study of how, why and in what way humanity is saved.

Indeed one sign of a lack of the post-modern sensibility in this volume is the small amount of attention paid to the spirituality of the cinema. Just as secular scholars are trying to articulate a non-confessional metaphysic in the cinema, professional theologians in this book avoid the very points of intersection and the language of a common ground. Even in their analysis of how theological arguments can be tested, Marsh and Ortiz only admit to interpretative, traditional and practical tests. Religious or mystical experience is omitted as a precondition or test for theology.⁶⁶¹ David Graham comes closest to dealing with the mystical gaze in his essay, “The uses of film in theology.” He admits that film and the media are “potent sources which provoke religious experiences and theological reflection.”⁶⁶² He names Eliade’s hierophany as one way of understanding how “the experience of God can be transmitted through anything.”⁶⁶³ Graham’s use of Eliade’s principle distorts it. Eliade’s anthropological research did not conclude that systems of belief held that an encounter with Otherness was possible through everything and everywhere - quite the opposite. He maintained that there were certain people, times, places and rituals that heightened and focused the encounter for an individual or group. Graham’s principle is so general as to be of no value in analysing the cinema, or any other specific location, as a place that could precondition or encode a mystical experience. The reason Graham argues this way is because he cannot move away from his theological construct. “It is important to say that this need (of having a religious experience through the media) should in no way be seen as undermining the unique place scripture has always had, certainly within the Christian faith, as the fundamental revelation of God.”⁶⁶⁴ Consequently, Graham does not analyse the cinema as a place to encounter Otherness, but moves to the safer theological ground of understanding film as a stimulus for the reflection on theological issues and a “source of religious ideas.”⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶¹ Marsh C, Ortiz G, “Theology beyond the modern and the postmodern: a future agenda for theology an film”, *Explorations in Theology and Film*, *Explorations in Theology and Film*, C Marsh, G Ortiz (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p. 249.

⁶⁶² Graham D, “The uses of film in theology”, *Explorations in Theology and Film*, C Marsh, G Ortiz (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, pp. 37, 41.

⁶⁶³ Ibid. p. 37.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 38.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 42.

Films as Icons

In Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies Margaret Miles offers a more robust discussion by drawing on explicit connections between the Greek Temple theatre traditions and the cinema. With similar dramatic content in the narratives, the annunciation and exploration of moral values and even the layout of complexes, Miles alerts us to the fact that the only thing missing between the two is the religious festival that surrounded the Greek theatrical presentations.⁶⁶⁶ While Miles is primarily interested in religion in film she contends that the most discernible way to see its traces in the contemporary cinema is in the system of values it explores and promotes.⁶⁶⁷ In this regard the multiplex has taken over from the local parish church. “The development of popular film coincided historically and geographically with the emancipation of public life from church control and patronage. ‘Congregations’ became ‘audiences’ as film created a new public sphere in which, under the guise of ‘entertainment’ values are formulated, circulated, resisted, and negotiated. The public sphere is an arena in which various overlapping minorities can converse, contest and negotiate, forming temporary coalitions.”⁶⁶⁸

Miles analyses the following: the portrayal of Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Jesus of Montreal*; religious commitment in *The Mission* and *Romero*; Islam and Judaism in *Not Without My Daughter*, *The Chosen* and *Chariots of Fire*; Christian fundamentalism in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Rapture*; and questions of race, gender and sexuality in *The Long Walk Home*, *Daughters of the Dust*, *Thelma and Louise*, *The Piano*, *Jungle Fever* and *Paris is Burning*. In each case she identifies the Christian images used in all of these films, the representation of religion within them and evaluates the values in the narrative.⁶⁶⁹ Miles argues that the reasons modern audiences assume a similar role to temple adherents or church congregations have to do with the need they have to form coherent and meaningful values. This is an important insight into the cognitive aspects to spectatorship. It fails however to grasp the experiential relationship between the mystical traditions that underpinned the Greek temples and the church congregations. Miles is aware of the power of the

⁶⁶⁶ M Miles, Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, pp. 8f.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 21.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 25.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 182.

cinema and suggests that some see this power is derived from the way films function as contemporary icons. She rejects this argument because unlike icons “it is possible to watch a film with little engagement of the imagination,”⁶⁷⁰ most films do not present or invite an explicitly religious desire, they do not function as presenting role models for adults⁶⁷¹ and they do not engage other senses, especially that of touch.⁶⁷² “Those who are alarmed enough about the effects of Hollywood films to urge some form of censorship do so because they assume that we relate to films as a devotee relates to an icon. This is an exaggeration of the power of films.”⁶⁷³ Apart from cutting across her arguments on the power of film in forming racial, gender and sexual values, this view also betrays a limited and Western view of mysticism. To see and touch icons is an element within apophatic mysticism. Icons are visual aids to mystical experience in a variety of cultures throughout the world. Miles’ presumption that adults do not look to film stars as role models, cannot be sustained in light the growing literature in regard to the cult of celebrity and the star system’s power to change behaviour in regard to social mores, buying patterns and fashion.⁶⁷⁴ This is hardly limited to children. Miles fails to grasp the element of personal encounter behind the individual’s relationship to icons and the individual’s experience of the cinema.

An iconographer does not paint a random subject for personal motivation, rather the task is undertaken as a means of trying to capture a vision he or she has seen, or one that has been revealed in the “mind’s eye.” The goal of traditional iconography is always in service of a liturgical assembly enabling the latter to know and experience the ultimately unknowable and ineffable Other. In this context, it is not by accident that the cinema borrows the language of iconography in its self-description.⁶⁷⁵ In the West, at least, filmmakers are still drawn to realise a vision they have, or to capture an element of their life experience and to realise this through the

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 188.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid. p. 190.

⁶⁷² Ibid. p. 189.

⁶⁷³ Ibid. p. 189.

⁶⁷⁴ See T Austin (ed.), Contemporary Hollywood Stardom, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004; L Brady, The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History, New York: Random House, 1987; P Biskind, Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Movies Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties, New York: Pantheon, 1983; R Decordova, Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America, Urbana Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1990; J Butler, Star Texts: Image and Performance Film and Television, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991; R Dyer, Stars, London: BFI, 1979; C Geldhill, Stardom: Industry of Desire, London: Routledge, 1991; P Marshall, Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

⁶⁷⁵ See C McArthur, Iconography and Iconology; and Stephen Neale on genre as filmic icons in Genre.

power of the multiplex temple to offer a multi-sensory experience. If it is true that some films are powerful enough to move a spectator to experience a range of emotions, form values, debate ethics, and affect patterns of consumption, then the depiction of film as a secular iconographical medium is a valid, but incomplete, description of the cinema. Most people would agree with Miles that films are “neither icons to be emulated, nor are they distillations of evil.”⁶⁷⁶ But this hardly exhausts our choices in relation to what constitutes the act of spectatorship. Film is certainly a cultural product, articulating the anxieties of a changing society⁶⁷⁷ and so it forms values and negotiates meanings for the group. As well the cinema shares with ancient temple practises and church ritual a systematic process of gaining access to Otherness. Margaret Miles argues that “Movies cannot replace religion in its traditional capacity to define and encourage love.” This is a curious observation, for of all the virtues, love is now strongly defined and encouraged in and through the cinema, most especially among young spectators.

Film as Sacrament

Unlike Miles, Peter Fraser is a theologian who believes that there is a hitherto unnamed film genre that does not just attend to the formation of values and ethics, but is structured around Christian liturgy. “The sacramental film can well be analysed according to the principles of mystical contemplation: composing the space, applying the intellect, understanding, willing affection and so on... These films uniquely synthesize the diverse practices of Christian devotional and liturgical traditions ...”⁶⁷⁸ To a degree Peter Fraser in Images of the Passion: the Sacramental Mode in Film has simply substituted Paul Schrader’s transcendental mode for a much more specific Christian reading of certain films. Fraser acknowledges his debt to Schrader whose categorisation “...on the surface, bears some similarity to this present study of the liturgical patterns in film.”⁶⁷⁹ Fraser argues that four elements delineate his work from Schrader’s and those of other theorists of religion and film: an acceptance of a much broader cross section of films as potentially sacramental; a broader selection of films that follow, no matter how idiosyncratically, the paradigmatic pattern of the Christ’s

⁶⁷⁶ Miles M, Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies, p. 193.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 193.

⁶⁷⁸ Fraser P, Images of the Passion: the Sacramental Mode in Film, p. 6.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 117.

life, death and resurrection; a concentration on the structure of a film for its Christian parallels even if this excludes other films which are overtly religious; and finally proposing the sacramental mode as a phenomenological tool rather than an evaluative one.⁶⁸⁰ On several other levels Fraser and Schrader's theories coalesce. Both work out of auteur theory. "In these films (those Fraser judges to be sacramental) one also expects and finds some strong Christian impulse behind the making of the film. With Dreyer, Bresson, Trakovskij or Borzage, the impulse is clearly the director's own Christian faith."⁶⁸¹ Both accept that the cinema is the place where a mystical encounter is possible and that such an intention is clear in the structure of the film. The 16th Century mystic Ignatius of Loyola "was content with art of our pure imagination through the means of contemplation of religious experience and Christian doctrine. Cinema projects the contemplation forward to the screen and then draws the individual to it."⁶⁸² Indeed Fraser's entire theory is that films operate like Christian sacraments, "they allow for the appropriation of spiritual presence sought by the devotional writers, but in a public experience."⁶⁸³ Fraser admits into this canon *Dairy of a Country Priest*, *Ordet*, *Andrej Rublev*, *Rome*, *Open City*, *Black Robe*, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, *The Mission*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *Jesus of Montreal*, *Hardcore*, *Gallipoli*, *On the Waterfront*, *You Only live Once* and *Chariots of Fire* because they "often follow a stable ideological base, and urge moral and spiritual enlightenment through the embrace of a form of divine presence, they operate ritualistically."⁶⁸⁴

Within a limited frame of reference, Fraser clearly knows that some films contain mystical elements. Whereas other scholars I have analysed so far have spoken about the act of spectatorship in more general terms of inducing a sense of awe, wonder, spirituality or a sense of the sacred, Fraser is the first scholar to explicitly connect the cinema to the mystical and liturgical traditions of Christianity. Fraser may want to argue that certain films can be read as sacraments, except that even on his own terms his paradigm is not clearly established. A diversion to theology is necessary to make the point and see the limitations of his reading.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 127.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid. p. 11.

⁶⁸² Ibid. p. 5.

⁶⁸³ Ibid. p. 5.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 8.

Fraser only defines what he means by the term “sacramental” deductively and therein lies the problem with his system of observation and classification. As a Lutheran theologian Fraser would be aware of a distinction between Sacraments and sacramentals. A general agreement about the nature of a Sacrament across Lutheranism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy and some branches of Anglicanism holds that it is a ritual whereby the invisible grace or love of Jesus Christ through his life, death and resurrection is made visible for believers, at a particular moment and time, so as to change for the better the lives of those who are disposed to receive them.⁶⁸⁵ Everything about Fraser’s language in regard to film as sacrament leads to the conclusion that he is arguing for some films as a Sacrament. He speaks of ritual, the passion, or death, of Jesus Christ, the reproduction of the structures of Christian liturgy, the sense of God’s presence that these films create and the inherent mysticism contained therein. The problem is that in terms of classical theology a film cannot be a Sacrament because Jesus Christ did not institute it.⁶⁸⁶ Without making it clear Fraser is talking about films as a “sacramental”, which may not be rituals, public events or a form of mystical encounter but those things that “prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it ... which flows from the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ.”⁶⁸⁷ Film could be one of these things because they include just about everything. “There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot be thus directed toward the sanctification of men and the praise of God.”⁶⁸⁸

By marrying his insight into the mystical nature of the cinema so closely to the ritual of the Christian tradition Fraser’s model has limited appeal to scholars outside those interested in sacramental theology. The limitations here are multiplied. What can Fraser’s model make of films from non-Christian or non-believing auteurs which engender similar mystical feelings in the Christian, non-Christian and atheistic spectator? Fraser, for example, appropriates to his own model Schrader’s transcendentalism and only two of his three examples: Bresson and Dreyer, but Ozu, Schrader’s third example who comes out of a Japanese Shinto context cannot be made to fit into the narrow cast of Fraser’s reductive sacramental theory and so has to be left aside. Fraser’s claims cannot be sustained when applied to national cinemas

⁶⁸⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Homebush: St Pauls, 1994, sections 1113–1134.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid. section 1114. Even though Lutherans may accept only Baptism and Eucharist as Sacraments, they do so because they accept that there is scriptural irrefutable evidence that Jesus instituted these rituals.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid. section 1670.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid. section 1670.

outside the context of Western Christianity and increasingly it is a difficult argument to apply to the films produced in the post-Christian West as well. Otherwise Fraser would have to apply to the global cinema in general what he implicitly does to some of the auteurs in his analysis. By placing such a strong stress on the auteur's intention to create a sacramental mentality through their films, Fraser states that only four of the fifteen directors he has studied count themselves as Christian believers.⁶⁸⁹ For the rest, Peter Weir included, Fraser implies that their latent, lapsed or even rejected Christianity enables them to project onto the cinematic screen contemplation on Jesus Christ's Passion. Other theologians have called this "anonymous Christianity"⁶⁹⁰ but this does not respect universal religious pluralism or the long-standing Christian doctrine of free will. Fraser's sacramental system gets buried in these issues whereas the recognition of the mystical gaze operating universally in the screen-spectator relationship claims the core of his insight without the doctrinaire approach of its application.

Cinema as Liturgy

In their edited volume Imag(in)ing Otherness Brent Plate and David Jasper set out to show how the cinema draws people together and addresses ethical concerns and global issues in a way the Church used to do for previous generations. Although their work is primarily interested in an ethical analysis of goodness, love, freedom and death through looking at who is Other and how Otherness is presented in the cinema, Jasper, in line with Peter Fraser, concludes the study by arguing that the cinema has become "a new form of liturgical activity"⁶⁹¹ where the ethical issues of the community are confronted and explored. The concept of experiencing Otherness, as in something outside the spectator, is everywhere in the text, but not directly named until the final paragraph. "Quite simply, the art of the cinema seriously continues that great

⁶⁸⁹ He nominates Dreyer, Bresson, Trakovskij and Borzage in this category. Curiously he seems to discount Scorsese because he "considered the priesthood early in life, but gave it up." See P Fraser, Images of the Passion: the Sacramental Mode in Film, p. 11. Whereas Scorsese has regularly spoken of the influence of his Catholic faith in his films. "I'm a lapsed Catholic. But I am a Roman Catholic – there's no way out of it." See R Blake, AfterImage: the Indelible Catholic Imagination of Six American Filmmakers, p. 25.

⁶⁹⁰ "...the views that there is still but one true religion and that insofar as other 'religions' embody authentic values and even saving grace, they do so as 'anonymously Christian' communities." McBrien R, Catholicism, p. 270.

⁶⁹¹ Jasper D, Plate S (eds.), Imagining Otherness: Filmic Visions of Living Together, Atlanta Georgia: Scholars Press, 1999, p. 215.

task of art in all ages which is at the same time profoundly religious, which is to draw us back to an imagining of Otherness and a relearning of the business of living with the Other and living in community.”⁶⁹² As I have argued mystical traditions have always linked an encounter of Otherness with an ethical system and moral imperatives that flow from the encounter and the ordering of society around that experience. Without naming it as such and preferring a liturgical and aesthetical paradigm in which to understand what is occurring at the multiplex, Jasper and Plate are drawing out the implications of the mystical gaze and the constitutive social dimension and worldview inherent in the encounter there.

Conclusions

The first problem with scholars who have ventured into the area of cinema and religion is that the vast majority of them exclusively work out of a Judeo-Christian framework. Accompanying much of this scholarship, particularly out of the United States, are assumptions about religion and social ideology that the cinema supports or subverts. While scholars can only work out of their own cultural milieu, a critical methodology that has applications to other faith traditions and spirituality in general may prove more useful to the an intercultural dialogue between theologians and cinema theorists. Second, while some scholars come close to describing the mystical gaze, they fail to explore this notion or its implications for theories of cinematic spectatorship. For example, “Works of art ...do not of themselves point toward the religious depth underlying particular religions and all of culture itself.”⁶⁹³ What could? Along with their colleagues, these scholars look at religion and the cinema as intersecting, for good or ill, rather than as coalescing. Their analysis of religion is usually “in the cinema”, or “of the cinema”. Their theological perspectives, and the absolute truth claims that go with them, inhibit them from exploring the act of cinema spectatorship, in itself, as a religious or spiritual moment. I imagine this inability is akin to the way any socially dominant group fails to understand the claims of those who outline the characteristics of the “gendered, sexualised, classed, raced, nationed (and) regioned” cinematic gazes. Third, scholars in this area focus, almost exclusively, on the content of film, rather than on the act of spectatorship. They only

⁶⁹² Ibid. p. 217.

⁶⁹³ May J, Bird M, Religion in Film, p. 4.

take into account the apparatus of the cinema and what the spectator brings into the cinema as a way of discerning what effect the filmmaker or the narrative is trying to have upon the viewer. They fail to understand that the gaze, which never exists in isolation from its object, is instituted or constructed within the cinema and that meaning is constructed in the interaction between spectator and film.

I surmise that one reason film scholars have stayed away from looking at the coalescence between the cinema and mysticism in these terms is because of their confessional nature of the work. When most of the scholars who have written in this area talk about religious experience their work, on the whole, reveals that it is a Western, Christian, often denominational, religious experience in which they are interested. While they are clear about this in their work, it limits the way in which this discussion can include other scholars who may be interested in the questions, but do not have such a keen interest in the outcomes.

The work of these scholars is my point of departure, because I argue they have overlooked the possibility that the act of cinema spectatorship is constitutively a mystical act. I know from other disciplines, especially, cultural anthropology, psychology and sociology that scholars do not have to accept the veracity of subjective experience and the tenets of any religious organisation to analyse the importance of mystical phenomena.⁶⁹⁴ I want to argue, therefore, that the critical

⁶⁹⁴ A brief study of the leading scholars interested in religion in these fields reveals that confessional belief is not necessary for, or evident in their work. See: E Barker (ed.), New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society, New York: Edwin Mellen, 1982; E Barker, "New religious movements in Britain: The context and membership", Social Compass, 30, 1, 1983; E Barker, The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing, Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1984; E Barker, "Kingdoms of heaven on earth: new religious movements and political orders", The Politics of Religion and Social Change, in A Shupe, J Hadden (eds.), New York: Paragon, 1988; J Beckford: Religious Organization: Current Sociology, The Hague: Mouton, 1975. Leading scholars interested in religion who limit the influence their confessional beliefs may on their research: J Beckford, The Trumpet of Prophecy: A Sociological Study of the Jehovah's Witnesses, New York: Halsted-Wiley, 1975; J Beckford, "Accounting for conversion", British Journal of Sociology 29, 2, 1975; R Bellah, "Religious evolution", American Sociological Review, 29, 3, 1964; R Bellah, "Civil religion in America", Daedalus, 96, 1967; R Bellah, "Christianity and symbolic realism", Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 9, 2, 1970; R Bellah, "New religious consciousness and the crisis of modernity", The New Religious Consciousness, C Glock, R Bellah (eds.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976; R Bellah, "Religion and legitimation in the American republic", Society, 15, 1978; R Bellah, "Legitimation processes in politics and religion", Current Sociology, 35, 2, 1987; P Berger, "Sectarianism and religious sociation", American Journal of Sociology, 64, 1958; P Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959; P Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967; E Durkheim, The Rules of the Sociological Method, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938; E Durkheim, Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, J Swain (trans.), New York: Free Press, (1915) 1965; M Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth, New York: Harper & Row, 1958; M Eliade, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, W Trask (trans.), New York: Pantheon Books, 1964; T Luckmann, The

synthesis Joel Martin seeks between religion and the cinema is achieved through investigating how the dynamics and outcomes of mysticism are coded and represented in the cinema. It is to such a study that I will now turn.

Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society, New York: Macmillan, 1967; T Luckmann, "Theories of religion and social change", Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion, 1, 1977; T Luckmann, "Shrinking transcendence, expanding religion?", Sociological Analysis, 50, 2, 1990; J Richardson, "From cult to sect: creative eclecticism in new religious movements", Pacific Sociological Review, 22, 2, 1979; J Richardson, "Studies of conversion: secularisation or re-enchantment", The Sacred in a Secular Age, P Hammond (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; J Richardson, "Cult brainwashing cases and freedom of religion", Journal of Church and State, 33, 1, 1991; M Weber, The Religion of China, H Gerth (trans.), New York: Free Press, (1920) 1951; M Weber, Ancient Judaism, H Gerth, D Martindale (trans.), New York: Free Press, (1921) 1952; M Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, T Parsons (trans.), New York: Charles Scribner, (1904) 1958; M Weber, The Religion of India, H Gerth, D Martindale (trans.), New York: Free Press, (1920) 1958; M Weber, The Sociology of Religion, E Fischhoff (trans.), Boston: Beacon Press, (1922) 1963; R Wuthnow, "Astrology and marginality", Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 15, 2, 1976; R Wuthnow, Experimentation in American Religion, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978; R Wuthnow, "Religious movements and the transition in world culture", Understanding the New Religions, J Needleman, G Baker (eds.), New York: Seabury Press, 1978; R Wuthnow, "World order and religious movements", Studies of the Modern World System, A Bergesen (ed.), New York: Academic Press, 1980; R Wuthnow, The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Chapter Four:
Defining the Codes within the Mystical Gaze

This thesis argues that the act of cinematic spectatorship draws upon codes also shared by the experience of mystical consciousness. In other words, the cinema apparatus provides the preconditions for the viewer to exercise and experience what I have termed the mystical gaze. To the best of my knowledge this argument has previously never been proposed or explored in detail. In order to argue for the existence of the mystical gaze I will first present a discussion of parallels between the mystical and cinematic experiences. I outline the following characteristics of mysticism aware that other mystical experiences could be presented as a counter-claim or refutation of these generalisations. My descriptions are not intended to be all-inclusive or exhaustive. The cross-cultural and multi-faith categories under which this analysis will proceed are the ones employed by most scholars investigating the anthropology, sociology or psychology of religion or aesthetical theology.⁶⁹⁵ That cinema studies use them as well is itself revealing of the parallels between the apparatus and diegetic structure of the cinema and the mystical experience. In looking at this intersection I will appeal to as many primary sources of mystical experience as possible in order to highlight the parallels between mystics attempting to explain what they experience and what occurs in the cinema which could be assimilated to a mystical experience. I will also explore other elements shared by both the mystical encounter in the broadest sense and the cinematic experience as it relates to both the individual and institutional characteristics of this most popular artistic form.

Light and Dark

Nearly every mystical tradition in human history has revolved around the physical and metaphysical play between light and dark. Reports from a variety of

⁶⁹⁵ Examples of such scholars are D Anthony, T Robbins, "From symbolic realism to structuralism", Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 14, 1975; H Egan, What Are They Saying About Mysticism?, New York: Paulist, 1982; W Garrett, "Malignant mysticism: the maledicted career of Troeltsch's third type", Sociological Analysis, 36, 3, 1975. Other anthropologists, sociologists, or psychologists of religion who use accepted cross-cultural and multi-faith categories include: G van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation: a Study in Phenomenology, New York: Harper, 1963; J Maréchal, Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics, Albany, New York: Magi Books, 1964; J Maritain, The Degrees of Knowledge, New York: Charles Scribner, 1959; N Smart, Worldviews: Cross Cultural Exploration of Human Belief, New York: Charles Scribner, 1983; F Staal, Exploring Mysticism, Berkeley: University of California, 1975; M Spiro, "Religion: problems of definition and explanation", Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, in M Banton (ed.), London: Tavistock, 1966; A Tippet, "The phenomenology of worship, conversion and brotherhood", Religious Experience: Its Nature and Function in the Human Psyche, W Clark (ed.), Springfield, Illinois: Thomas, 1973; M Truzzi, "Definition and dimension of the occult: towards a sociological perspective", On the Margins of the Visible, E Tiryakian (ed.), New York: Wiley, 1974.

cultures and eras demonstrate and recommend the importance of being in the dark, or in the light, as practical steps or as consequence of mystical phenomena.

Imageless vision is a looking into darkness in which nothing can be recognised. In the darkness, however, is a presence which the mystic seeks. It is a vision in the darkness, not a vision of the darkness. Paradoxically, a trans-sensual, trans-occult mystical light is the condition of possibility for vision into darkness. This mystical light provides the horizon in which all images are seen. In this mystical light, the entire world may perhaps become 'transparent' and reveal the presence of this 'embracing-Something'.⁶⁹⁶

This experience of transportation from light to darkness to greater light enables illumination to occur, either as a manifestation of an exterior force or an interior force rising to consciousness. This experience tends to reinforce the ego:

I have conquered and I know all,
I am enlightened quite by myself and have none as my teacher.
There is not one that is the same as I in the whole world where
there are many deities.
I am the one who is really worth,
I am the most supreme teacher.
I am the only one who is fully enlightened.
I am tranquillized.
I am now in Nirvana.⁶⁹⁷

Or it can highlight dependence on external power,

The earth was illuminated with God's splendour...Then I saw
a new heaven and a new earth...And there was no more night;
they need no light or lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be
their light, and they will reign forever and ever.⁶⁹⁸

The importance of light and dark in the cinema is such a given that most writers on the theory of film rarely mention it.⁶⁹⁹ The importance of key lighting, fill lighting and back lighting are all discussed, but this refers only to particular scenes within a film, the *mise-en-scène* or the style of a period, a national cinema or the style

⁶⁹⁶ Egan H, *What Are They Saying About Mysticism?*, p. 30.

⁶⁹⁷ *The Dhammapadam*, S Radhakrishnan (trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951, vv. 153-154.

⁶⁹⁸ Revelation 18: 1; 21: 1; 22: 5.

⁶⁹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer is one example. In *Theory of Film*, he discusses the general characteristics and basic concepts of film but never mentions the play between light and dark. See *Theory of Film*, pp. 27f. The same is true for H Mauerhofer, in "Psychology of film experience", *The Penguin Film Review*, London; Penguin, 1949, and R Stevenson and J R Debrin in *The Cinema as Art*, London: Penguin, 1965.

of an auteur.⁷⁰⁰ Until Patrick Fuery's recent work on the seductive gaze there was a gap in the literature on how the light and dark of the cinema is compulsively attractive. Fuery argues that the seduction with light and dark is "part of the very materiality of the cinema."⁷⁰¹ The cinema takes "vision, colour, sound, the body, space and time" and invests them with intensity that encodes resistance, power, knowledge and desire. Fuery theorises that

If the cinema light seduces, then there is also that other side of seduction – the darkness that surrounds us ...the unknown and the unknowable...both light and dark can seduce in the same way, at the same time, towards the same objective.⁷⁰²

He sees that the spectator is seduced into a complex relationship with the images on the screen through its power and knowledge, freedom and fantasy, obsession, subjectivity, and betrayal and revelation.⁷⁰³ Fuery notes that what is astonishing about the seduction of the cinema's light is that the spectator knows "its intentionality lies elsewhere."⁷⁰⁴

The mystical gaze suggests that there are three expectations at work in this seductive moment, which can be summarised in the mystical categories I outlined in chapter two: katophatic; monist; responsive. The katophatic expectation of the spectators is for the light to illuminate their physical surroundings (the screen and the theatre) and the images on the screen. They want to affirm the cinema will allow them to exercise their gaze upon the screen and that they have made the right choice to be here, now, beholding this image. If this katophatic expectation is not met, the spectators will not continue to sit in the darkness. Secondly, the monist expectation is that the light in the darkness will absorb the spectators and suture them into the filmic text, creating the illusion that the screen is an extension of the self. If this monist expectation is not met, spectators may describe the experience as "distant" because the composition of shots or the technique of the filmmaker has reminded them of their separation from the screen. Thirdly, while the spectators are physically passive as they sit in the dark they have expectations that the light will move their emotions and

⁷⁰⁰ See S Haywood, *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, p. 197; G Turner, *National Fiction: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986, pp. 67f; T Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, New York: Longman, 2001, pp. 62f.

⁷⁰¹ Fuery P, *New Developments in Film Theory*, p. 174.

⁷⁰² Ibid. p. 172.

⁷⁰³ Ibid. pp. 161-173.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 171.

trigger psychological responses to the film. This happens proximately as the diegesis unfolds and it also happens later when the narrative can effect in spectators a change of attitude, thought, feeling or a pattern of consumption. These responses can be positive, negative or neutral.

Time and Space

The creation of a particular space and the seeming suspension of time are elements commonly attributed to mystical phenomena. Temples, synagogues, cathedrals, churches, hermitages, cells and prayer rooms all indicate the ancient practice of creating a space within which one person, or a group, seeks mystical union. Within this space, however, there is usually a physical ordering of the furniture to face in a certain direction, apparatus that enables the space to function for its purpose, rules for good order and an agreed ritual or process within which adherents seek a common experience. Within this space, time is of secondary importance, even to the point where the Jewish and Christian mystical traditions speak of moving from *chronos* (worldly time) to *kairos* (God's time). "We urge you not accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, At the acceptable time (*chronos*) I have listened to you, and on the day of salvation I have helped you. See now is the acceptable time (*kairos*); see this is the day of salvation."⁷⁰⁵

Poet-mystic, Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of the first to deliberately bridge Eastern and Western mystical traditions. To capture the temporality of his mystical experiences he anticipated descriptions of slow-motion and hyper-reality:

There is a difference between one and another hour of life, in their authority and subsequent effect. There is a depth in those brief moments which constrain us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences...In ascending to this primary and aboriginal sentiment, we have come from our remote station on the circumference instantaneously to the centre of the world, where, as in the closet of God, we see the cause and anticipate the universe, which is but a slow effect.⁷⁰⁶

In the event of a mystical encounter the individual or the group commonly report that "time stood still" or "it was as though time was suspended" or "I went into another

⁷⁰⁵ 2 Corinthians 6: 2.

⁷⁰⁶ Emerson R, "The oversoul", The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903, p. 198.

world” - eternity, samadhi, nirvana. The action within the space is aimed to connect adherents of this world to an agreed reality in another world. It is meant to “bring heaven to earth”, to “conjure the spirits” or to “have the gods come down and visit us.”⁷⁰⁷ Such can be the intensity of the experience that the return to the usual space and time is reported to be a difficult, and for some, an impossible adjustment. Some adherents report “losing themselves” so much in the world encountered in the mystical experience, they want to live in it. “Contemplation is a death, an exodus from all earthly things, but at the same time it is also a new life in heaven. The contemplative, having reached the summit of the mountain of contemplation, no longer lives really in the world, but in his true homeland. Resembling the holy angels, he already enjoys their company.”⁷⁰⁸ Indeed the description of the suspension of time and space in these experiences, and at the cinema, can be so close that Louis Dupré’s summary of mysticism, could also be about the cinema.

Behind the gates of the restricted area the laws ruling ordinary consciousness seem to be suspended. Space and time recede or are transformed from outward perception into vistas of an inner realm with unknown rhythms and successions. From archaic depths the imagination (if it has not taken leave altogether) conjures well-structured visions to the dream consciousness only through fragments and to the waking consciousness not at all.⁷⁰⁹

The cinema theatre explicitly demands from spectators a suspension of the normal rules of time and space. Cinema buildings rarely incorporate into their structures those two structures that would enable us to be aware of time and space: clocks and windows. As spectators enter more deeply into the theatre, they can easily forget where they are in relation to their entrance. This is highlighted in modern cinemas by the illuminated exit sign, a necessary safety precaution for willingly disorientated spectators. This compromise is given so that the cinema can conjure up its own world of time and space within which spectators can enter a dream-like state where they lower their critical consciousness, but heighten their sensory perception,⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁷ For full discussion of these desires in a variety of mystical traditions see, B Borchert, Mysticism: its History and Challenge, York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1994.

⁷⁰⁸ Casio ed Evagio, S Marsili (trans. and ed.), Rome: Celli, 1936, p. 57.

⁷⁰⁹ Dupré L, “Mystical experience of the self”, Understanding Mysticism, p. 451.

⁷¹⁰ Kracauer S, Theory of Film, pp. 158f, 163.

especially that of sight and hearing.⁷¹¹ Kracauer outlines that within the duration of a film, the screen further distorts space and time, convincing the spectator that other physical laws apply in the theatre. Through the power of editing, film can: cover eras and locations throughout the world in a moment; follow through the cause and effect of an action to the exclusion of any other event; dwell on an object for longer than the eye would do so normally and so magnify perception of it and its importance; telescope myriad experiences rhythmically and homogeneously; recreate the natural world to fit the narrative of the film.⁷¹² This is done to maintain the individual spectator's focus on the screen and to gratify his or her desire for narcissism, voyeurism or fetishism.⁷¹³

The cinema has replicated the distortion of time and space in a similar way to mystical traditions. The ordering of the space, furniture, disorientation of the spectator, the absence of any signs of a world beyond the screen explicitly establishes that, for this period of time, there is no world beyond the screen and so they are “dead to the world” and alive to the screen. As a consequence of the temporal and spatial reordering of the world inside the cinema, spectators are transported into the hyper-real world of the diegesis where they are free to bring into play the mystical gaze.

Sight and Sound

All mystical traditions are dependent on what people report to have seen and heard. This is so strong in mysticism that people who have had such experiences are often referred to as “visionaries”. Their manifold experiences can vary from pleasurable to terrifying, from ones that include elements of this world to an experience of worlds or consciousness beyond this world.

Beholding this visage - resting, rapt, in the vision and possession of so lofty a loveliness, growing to its Likeness – what beauty can the soul lack? For this the Beauty supreme, the absolute and the primal, fashions its lovers to beauty and makes them worthy of love.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹¹ Some cinemas within theme parks are also equipped with platforms that move and with vents that supply smell. In this environment it is possible to observe that the darkness of the theatre also heightens the senses of touch and smell.

⁷¹² Kracauer S, pp. 64-68.

⁷¹³ Ibid. pp. 166f.

⁷¹⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 7, quoted in M Smith, “The nature and meaning of mysticism”, *Understanding Mysticism*, p. 25.

A mystic's experience of visual stimuli and auditory sensation encompasses an unusual heightening of sensory perception, often reported as "blinding to the eyes" or "the most wonderful sound I ever heard"⁷¹⁵. None of these descriptions, however, is as sympathetic to the philosophical meaning of Plato's cave or psychoanalysis' commentary on the cinema and the mystical gaze, as this commentary on the Sufi veils by a Rifai dervish.

Seventy thousand veils separate Allah, the One Reality, from the world of matter and sense. And every soul passes through these seventy thousand. The inner half of these veils are light; the outer half, are veils of darkness. For every one of the veils of light passed through, in this journey toward birth, the soul puts off a divine quality; and for every one of the dark veils, it puts on an earthly quality. Thus the child is born weeping, for the soul knows its separation from Allah, the One Reality. And when the child cries in its sleep, it is because the soul remembers something of what it has lost. Otherwise, the passage through the veils has brought with it forgetfulness. Man is now in his body, separated by these thick curtains from Allah, but the mystical way helps him escape from this prison...where we go into the fire of spiritual passion and we emerge refined.⁷¹⁶

The erotic love poetry of medieval mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg is typical of the heightened auditory perception of some mystical experiences.

A gentle voice I hear,
 Something of love sounds there;
 I have wooed her long and long,
 Yet not till now have I heard that song.
 It moveth me so,
 Towards her I must go.
 She is the soul who with pain is torn,
 And love, that is one with the pain.
 In the early dew of the morn,
 In the hidden depths, which are far below,
 The life of the soul is born.
 We have heard the whisper clear;
 The Prince is coming towards thee here,
 In the morning dew, in the bird's song.
 Ah, fair bride, tarry not long.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁵ See B Borchert, *Mysticism: its History and Challenge*, pp. 47f.

⁷¹⁶ W Gairdner (ed. and trans.), *The Way of a Mohammedan Mystic*, Leipzig: Gunther, 1912, p. 9.

⁷¹⁷ Tobin F, *Mechthild of Magdeburg: a Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes*, Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1995, p. 122.

An olfactory experience is often vividly reported, as in description of God's love for Israel in the Hebrew mystical love letter, *The Songs of Songs*, "My king was on his couch and, my nard gave forth its perfume. My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts, My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En-gedi."⁷¹⁸ Although there have been some experiments with "surround smell" in the cinema, it is yet to become a feature of cinematic exhibition, though it may not be far away.

What is critical to the cinema are the pictures, literally called "the vision" and the sound. While we know that sound and pictures work independently of each other, since *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 optical sound has been the preferred medium for the cinema experience. Even before this first "talkie", live music usually accompanied films. Today, sight and sound are so inextricably linked that if either fail or "go out of synch" at the cinema the spectator will not usually continue to watch the film.

Sight and sound are further evidence of the cinema's world of illusion. Images and their accompanying sounds are grossly magnified to enhance the reality they indicate. Both narrate the story, with the sound track often conveying as much information as the visuals. Both compose the place and time of the narrative and both can be deceptive, manipulated by the director to provide mixed messages and to disorient the audience.⁷¹⁹ The most important role of the sound track is to convey feelings, move the emotions, cover picture edits and establish or maintain atmosphere.⁷²⁰ This is especially true of the way music is cut to pictures. While music generally imparts the mood of a scene, it is often constructed to manipulate the spectator at climax points in the narrative, to provide an aural exclamation mark. "Music and images have a lot in common as media of communication; they are not understood in a direct, linear way by the audience, but irrationally, emotionally, individually."⁷²¹

The cinema encodes the mystical gaze because it enables the spectator to access an experience of Otherness and respond emotionally to the encounter. While sound surrounds the spectator, the movement of the sound, especially the dialogue, always emanates from the screen where he or she is sutured into the relationships on

⁷¹⁸ *Songs of Solomon* 1: 12-13.

⁷¹⁹ For a full discussion on film and sound see S Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, pp. 102-152; G Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, pp. 58-60.

⁷²⁰ Turner G, *Film as Social Practice*, p. 59.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.* p. 59.

offer there. Either the combination of sight and sound primes the spectator into experiencing emotions generated by what he or she is witnessing in the cinema or, the *mise-en-scène* triggers reflections which give rise to other memories. Pleasurable or unpleasurable feelings ensue. Unlike the constructed reality which induced them, these feelings are real and so, especially through repetition, the spectator comes to trust as normative the artifice of the cinema experience as a means to encounter themselves through latent memories and emotions.

Private and Public

It is a common misconception that mysticism is predominantly a private affair. Indeed most scholars of mysticism presume on “corporate mysticism” because it is the group that defines what constitutes a mystical experience.⁷²² Most traditions offer an interplay between the private encounter and a public demonstration of faith which proves the veracity of the revealed truth contained within the mystical experience. Indeed, the idea that mysticism is an activity of the private domain is a very recent development, born in the Enlightenment⁷²³ and is found, predominantly, in Western industrialised countries.⁷²⁴ The 20th century saw a range of public institutions like monarchies, governments and religious groups shift from making claims about meaning and purpose to being more service-orientated. This forced individuals to take greater control over their own lives and their destinies.⁷²⁵

Religion has traditionally been inextricably intertwined with the community; the boundaries of one were frequently coextensive with the boundaries of the other. Social and geographical mobility, together with the general acculturation of waves of immigrants, have changed the pattern of community...Local communities are increasingly voluntaristic, segmented, and irrelevant to institutions of the public sphere. The voluntary nature of community has the advantage of freeing individuals to choose a community of identification, but also reduces their power relative to institutions of the public sphere and their ability to provide stable sources of

⁷²² Woods R, *Understanding Mysticism*, p. 201.

⁷²³ Streng F, *Understanding Religious Life*, pp. 152f.

⁷²⁴ For a full discussion of the differences between Eastern and Western countries on this question, see H Won Moo and K Chung Kim, “Religious participation of Korean immigrants in the United States”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 29, 1, 1990, pp. 19-34.

⁷²⁵ See M McGuire, *Religion: the Social Context*, p. 58; T Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*, pp. 106-114.

identity for members. The process of privatisation is not inexorable, but its impact on family and community is already evident.⁷²⁶

Nearly every mystical tradition incorporates an interplay, and often a tension, between the experience of the individual and the ritual of the group. The Muslim Sufi mystic prays, “Oh my God, I invoke Thee in public as Lords are invoked, but in private as loved ones are invoked. Publicly I say, “Oh my God!” But privately I say, “Oh my beloved!”⁷²⁷ Both public and private structures are necessary for mysticism to develop. These public arrangements often referred to as cultural structures, which enable the more intimate private revelations and experiences to occur.

The cultural dimension of religious life is important because it structures religious experience along different communal, linguistic, and economic lines; more particularly, it organises the manner in which a particular person and community express the ultimate values. A powerful example of cultural forces is the common assumption among Western people that at the core of religion is sacred reality, which is radically different from profane existence. The assumption has contributed to the tension between religious claims of truth in the claims of science.⁷²⁸

The task of the public organisation dedicated to the encountering of Otherness is to inculcate in the group habitual responses. Public ritual promises adherents that through the ordering of a gathering, an individual may have access to personal revelation. “Religion is seen as a system of ideas and emotional responses used by a culture to create, define, and establish habitual ways of action through which the society interprets and validates itself.”⁷²⁹

The insights of anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber and Claude Lévi-Strauss are applicable to the cinema as the new temple for occult contemplation, as they are to the religious collectives who were the subject of their inquiries. Kroeber argued that a feature of social organisation in every culture was the vital function played by regulated patterns. He observed the important role religion played in domesticating and systemising the ecstatic, often mystical experiences, visions and revelations of charismatic individuals. Significant consequences were observed for the way in which local cultures absorbed and developed, resisted or rejected mystical religion and its

⁷²⁶ McGuire M, *Religion: the Social Context*, p. 59.

⁷²⁷ Quoted in *Understanding Mysticism*, R Woods (ed.), p. 182.

⁷²⁸ Streng F, *Understanding Religious Life*, p. 7.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 216.

claims for social ordering.⁷³⁰ Similarly, Lévi-Strauss took the habitual elements to all systems of meaning very seriously. He accepted, however, that religion, art, drama, literature and ritual had interrelated significance for a culture because it expressed the shared mysticism of the social group.⁷³¹ Echoes of this insight can be found in the writings of 20th century mystic, Thomas Merton. “The function of image, symbol, poetry, music, a chart, and of ritual is to open up the inner self to the contemplative, to incorporate the senses and the body in the totality of the self-orientation to God that is necessary for worship and meditation.”⁷³²

Lévi-Strauss recognised that mythology and ritual starts privately. As others learn and accept the inner logic of the stories and actions, they assist the group to confront cultural concerns and anxieties, provide meaning in crises, become socially active, and critical of public institutions.⁷³³

...certain objects, animals, plants, people, places, and events (whether real or imagined) have sacred status in a community, not because they are sublimations of repressed emotions (as Freud believed), not because they have social force for preserving group identity (as Durkheim claimed), and not because they have practical uses to control social groups (as Karl Marx asserted), but because they communicate meaning. The stories embody general ideas; they make comprehension of the world possible in terms of dramatic images.⁷³⁴

It varies from group to group how strongly the religious collectives expect this to be a feature of their communal gatherings. The shared experience of the gathering, however, is almost always predicated on the subjective experience of the individual and the dynamic of the gathering.

The parallels here with the cinema are self-evident. The cinema is a public sphere within which a private encounter can occur. Just as in the action of public mysticism not all contexts predispose the adherent to a mystical experience, so too the viewing context and diegesis needs to be right for the spectator to enter into a mystical experience and in so doing bring to bear a mystical gaze on events as they unfold. Furthermore, in a similar manner the predictability of what will facilitate such

⁷³⁰ Full a full description of these findings see: A Kroeber, *Anthropology*, New York: Harcourt, 1948; A Kroeber, *Nature of Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952.

⁷³¹ Lévi-Strauss C, *Structural Anthropology*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1967.

⁷³² Merton T, *Contemplative Prayer*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969, p. 85.

⁷³³ Lévi-Strauss C, *The Savage Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

⁷³⁴ Streng F, *Understanding Religious Life*, p. 218.

a mystical experience or the heightening of the mystical gaze can be highly subjective. As with other gazes, the mystical gaze structures language, community and economics to achieve an habitual and pleasing desire in the spectator, one he or she wants to repeat often. The cinema publicly tells the stories of the myths of a society and provides meaning for cultures where other meaning-bestowing institutions are in decline. Like mysticism, the encounter in the cinema is not confined to an emotional response, but it is predicated on the audience's reaction, which contains intellectual and social elements that demand a response, as well as social customs, moral codes and styles of living. As we have seen, these are in place to regulate desire. With processes akin to maturation rites in religious traditions, the cinema offers a kind of informal initiation process that is so strong that some people can recount the first time they went to the cinema, what film they saw and the emotions experienced.

The public/private elements to the cinematic gaze mean that what is said of a Buddhist mystic, therefore, could be said of the private spectator at the public cinema.

The mysticism of any particular mystic is really the whole pattern of his life. The wonderful 'peaks' of experience are a part of that pattern, but only a part, and their real value lies only in their relations to other parts, to his thought, his moral values, his conduct toward others, his character and personality... The mysticism of a Buddhist mystic is essentially informed by his Buddhism, that is by his Buddhist beliefs, his Buddhist habits of speech and action, his Buddhist communities.⁷³⁵

As I have shown in Chapter Two Breton, Kyrrou and the surrealists had a similarly high expectation for the ways the "peak" experience of the cinema could affect a spectators' whole life. They believed that the cinema could be an agent for universal peace and social cohesion.⁷³⁶ More recently, and rather more negatively, one only has to think of the way in which the images of the cinema affects buying patterns, fashions and body images to understand its power over other critical elements of spectators lives and the patterns of their behaviour.

Hierarchies and Stars

⁷³⁵ Katz S, "Mysticism in its contexts", Mysticism and Religious Traditions, S Katz (ed), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 85.

⁷³⁶ For the social expectations Aragon, Valentin, Breton and Kyrrou held for the cinema see The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema, passim.

In the process of institutionalising mystical experiences, most cultures develop structures of leadership that establish hierarchies of power. The similarities between institutional mysticism in religious collectives and the cinema are striking. Both claim access to powerful people who cannot be seen, but whose creative work is on display: God, Allah, Buddha, Krishna in religion; the writer, director, producer and cinematographer in the cinema. The worshipper or the spectator cannot easily gain access to the unseen power except through their sense perceptions, but they know that real power resides elsewhere from the proximate place – in Heaven or Hollywood. Even the name “Hollywood” is a modern form of the Old English word “Holyrood”, literary meaning “holy wood”, a reference to the holiness of the cross upon which Jesus Christ died.⁷³⁷ The audience and congregation vicariously participate in the work of these intermediary creators, principally by the stories they see and hear as well as appreciating the pattern, form and effect of the drama enacted for them. In both cases this drama is played out by the representatives of the unseen creative intelligence, actors or priests, and it is upon these men and women that local devotion is centred.

Many mystical groups have special classes of adherents who are models of behaviour or exponents of the core beliefs of the religious collective. Because of the way they live their lives, they are rewarded with devotion and invested with special status and are sometimes accorded special powers.⁷³⁸ They are often believed to have been subsumed into the object of the worship where they fully experience the mystical presence that was only partially available to them on earth.⁷³⁹

Max Weber was the first modern scholar to use the term “charismatic” to describe such people. The community invests them with this honour because they have a “certain quality of individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart

⁷³⁷ See, M Amalfitano, “Hollywood ups and downs”, *LA Weekly*, 18th December 1998, p. 28; www.hollywoodhistorymuseum.com/HistoryText. In 1886 Mrs H H Wilcox who named that part of Los Angeles “Hollywood” did so after meeting a fellow Methodist on a train who had called her summer residence by that name. Devout Methodists, the Wilcoxes were delighted with the name because they were grateful to God for their good fortune in finding the site. Significantly for my purposes here, the Holyrood stood above the “rood screen” at the altar rails at the foot of the sanctuary of Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican Cathedrals and was the demarcation line between the laity and priests. The priests went between the two worlds but the laity was forbidden entry into the sanctuary. The screen of the cinema plays a similar role in the multiplex cathedrals of suburbia.

⁷³⁸ For a full discussion of this topic, see B Borchert, *Mysticism: its History and Challenge*, pp. 12-18.

⁷³⁹ This is the meaning of “canonising” someone in the Roman Catholic tradition. Sanctity does not say the person was perfect, but that he or she lived such a heroic Christian life that the Church declares that he or she has now been welcomed into heaven and so his or her names are added to the list, or canon, of saints in heaven. See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sections 326, 828.

from ordinary men and treated as endowed with specifically exceptional powers or qualities (which) are not accessible to the ordinary person.”⁷⁴⁰ Buddha, Mohammad, Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Jesus and the heroes of primal religions are all considered charismatic individuals within their traditions. Within the religious collectives that follow the teaching of these charismatic leaders are followers who so emulate the behaviour, words and ethics of the leader they are venerated for being outstanding in their mystical performance. They are variously called saints, masters, Sufis, Brahmin, teachers or holy men and women. They embody the Otherness which the devotees seek and are an indication that such union is possible.⁷⁴¹

The leaders of the prescribed rituals, which assist adherents to mystical union, constitute the next level of the hierarchy. Their role is such that they can even lose their identity, especially for the duration of the ritual. This is shown by their place at rituals, dress codes, forms of address, not being encouraged to depart from the prescribed text and dedicated actions, but most especially, in having access to knowing and telling the stories of the group. “The masks used by officiants in some African religious ceremonies, the ceremonial robes used by Christian priests, the purification rites performed by priests of Hinduism or Shinto are necessary to separate the person of the priest in his everyday existence from his personification of sacred power during the ritual activity.”⁷⁴²

Steven Katz argues that the most important role of these leaders in mystical traditions is that of being models. This modelling across many cultures shares for the leaders thirteen characteristics: they demonstrate proper attitudes and the correct practices; they reassure adherents that the tenets of belief are correct; they reinforce the traditions of the group; they prove that union with the ultimate reality is possible; they challenge the group to do better; they provide continuity with previous traditions; they link one generation to another; they make present here and now the history of the group; they found, or refound, the collective; they define reality; they act out a perfected humanity; they a bridge between the here and beyond; they outline and live

⁷⁴⁰ Weber M, Theory of Social and Economic Organisation, New York: Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 358.

⁷⁴¹ See H Smith, The World's Religions, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991.

⁷⁴² Streng F, Understanding Religious Life, pp. 57f.

out ethical and moral behaviour.⁷⁴³ It would be hard to find a more comprehensive analysis of what the star system does in the cinema.

Cinema stars, who are scripted and often created by others, possess charismatic qualities in the way they act out the stories of the group. They are awarded special status and rewarded with box office, personal, social and sometimes political power. They achieve this by losing their own identity through language, dress, names and the characters they assume in retelling the mythical stories of the cinema. They live in the world of the screen, returning the gaze of the spectator as they communicate or connect to the life of the spectator, for whom they are performing. In this world stars are models: linking generations; carrying the past, present and future of the cinema in their actions; challenging, consoling and entertaining the spectator with the goodness or evil of the story. Devotion to these stars is given or taken away by the spectator depending on their behaviour on or off the screen, for they can disappoint in how they live up to, or how they live out, the expectations of the spectator. Away from the screen many stars are more socially radical than their screen personas suggest. Still, they hold the power to link the altered reality and consciousness of the spectator to the world upon and beyond the screen.⁷⁴⁴

It is not by accident that Garbo, Dietrich, Monroe and other women actors have been called “goddesses of the silver screen”, some male stars can be described as “gods”, Bette Midler can be styled as the “Divine Miss M” and when stars achieve a certain success through awards or critical acclaim, it can be said of them that they have entered the “pantheon of the gods.” The star system, where certain people live forever on the screen, is a modern variation on the ancient mystical practice of ancestor worship.⁷⁴⁵ Richard Dyer, Jeremy Butler and Christine Gledhill are three of the leading scholars of cinema and celebrity, and except in their use of the theologically charged terms “icon” and “iconography”, none of them has established

⁷⁴³ Katz S, “The conservative character of mysticism”, Mysticism and Religious Traditions, S Katz (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 43-47.

⁷⁴⁴ See T Austin (ed.), Contemporary Hollywood Stardom, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004; L Brady, The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History, New York: Random House, 1987; P Biskind, Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Movies Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties, New York: Pantheon, 1983; R Decordova, Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America, Urbana Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1990; J Butler, Star Texts: Image and Performance Film and Television, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991; R Dyer, Stars, London: BFI, 1979; C Geldhill, Stardom: Industry of Desire, London: Routledge, 1991; P Marshall, Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

⁷⁴⁵ For a description of the importance of ancestor worship and saints see, N Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred pp. 40-41, 65-66.

the clear connections between the star system and the canon of saints.⁷⁴⁶ Saints, for example, by virtue of their heroic actions, martyrdom or mystical experiences live in heaven with God. They are perpetually “in communion” with the divine, living “in full light” and working on behalf of believers on earth, interceding for them, that they might be able to emulate the heroic deeds which the saints accomplished and so achieve the same end and enter the divine realm.⁷⁴⁷ It is clear from this brief description that a secular theology of celebrity leaves a gap in the literature.

Sacred Story

It is impossible to over-state the role of language in the formation and maintenance of any group. The power of language is more apparent and extended when mysticism and religious collectives employ it.⁷⁴⁸ What is unique about the language of mysticism is that it attempts to express the inexpressible, and describe ultimate reality. In doing so nearly all mystics find the task too much.

Who can describe what He reveals to the loving souls in whom he resides? And who can put into words what He gives them to experience? And finally, who knows what He makes them desire? No one is able to do this, that is sure. It exceeds the capacity even of those involved; since, for that very reason, it is in a flood of images, comparisons, and symbols that they release something of what they have perceived.⁷⁴⁹

Even if mystics do not feel they can adequately convey their experience or revelations, they never the less try. In doing so they use direct, indirect, poetic and metaphorical language to tell their stories. These narratives constitute the basis of all mystical traditions. Some similar myths of creation, death and destiny have been retold in various cultures.⁷⁵⁰ Most of the world’s monotheistic religions are known as “People of the Book”: the Torah, the New Testament, the Koran, but the importance of mythology to all mystics, even in pre-literate tribes, is evident whether it comes through an oral or written tradition. “Mysticism represents, to a certain extent, a

⁷⁴⁶ See: J Butler, *Star Texts: Image and Performance Film and Television*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991; R Dyer, *Stars*, London: BFI, 1979; C Geldhill, *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, London: Routledge, 1991.

⁷⁴⁷ See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sections 946-959.

⁷⁴⁸ Streng F, *Understanding Religious Life*, p. 53.

⁷⁴⁹ John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, p. 85.

⁷⁵⁰ Streng F, *Understanding Religious Life*, Chapter 10.

revival of mythical lore”⁷⁵¹ and mystical experiences are regularly the central feature of the story, thereby reinforcing the reason for the group and its belief structure to exist. Mythology exists as the cognitive aspect to mysticism; it shapes what believers know about this world and any world beyond and is the foundation for the group’s activity in the world.⁷⁵² The mythic lore is often acted out in dramatic, musical and balletic representations. “The impulse to reach ultimate transformation by re-enacting religious truth and cosmic order through dance, drama, and music is as ancient as the visual arts for this purpose.”⁷⁵³

The power of the cinema is also found in its narratives and their representation – although of course the majority are not sacred in the conventional sense. Cinematic narratives, nonetheless, draw upon many of the elements associated with religious narrative: a struggle between good and evil; a difficult journey; betrayal and guilt; sacrifice and redemption. On a basic level there are mythologies that are common to mysticism and the cinema. One important example will demonstrate the point.

Whether filmmakers are conscious of it or not, the Greek myth of Oedipus, of the powerful father, the betrayed son and the mother as an object of desire and worship is retold regularly in the cinema.⁷⁵⁴ This and other ancient myths form the basis of many of the stories of humanity in a variety of cultures and they establish principles upon which cosmic and moral laws are explored.⁷⁵⁵ It is only in the 20th Century that Jung’s archetypes and even more so the humanist Ethical Culture movement nominated universal moral norms without any reference to divine revelation - mystical or otherwise.⁷⁵⁶ As cinema spectators are exposed to often-ancient mythologies, but now detheologised, the secular cinema in the West may now have become the main art form to offer a mystical component in the development of the humanist culture. There are now multiple research studies on the positive and negative effects on the community of the stories told at the cinema. There are strong conclusions drawn from the many positions taken within this impassioned debate how film, as part of the wider media community, has a direct influence on patterns of

⁷⁵¹ Scholem G, “General Characteristics of Jewish Mysticism”, Mysticism and Religious Traditions, S Katz (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 163.

⁷⁵² McGuire M, Religion: the Social Context, p. 16.

⁷⁵³ Streng F, Understanding Religious Life, p. 164.

⁷⁵⁴ One has only to look up “Oedipus” or “Oedipal” in any comprehensive film book or film search engine to see not only the contribution of Freudian psychoanalysis to the study of film, but to how many films are analysed through the Oedipal lens.

⁷⁵⁵ Streng F, Understanding Religious Life, p. 72.

⁷⁵⁶ See D Muzzey, Ethics as Religion, New York: Frederick Unger, 1967, pp. 155f.

thought, consumption and behaviour.⁷⁵⁷ In this regard the cinema shares with mysticism the role of exerting a significant impact on the actions of those who receive its myths.

In the 20th century Western culture was, in general, either dismissive of the importance of the mythology of religious groups as prescientific or blaming it for some of the conflicts in the world. At the same time there was an assumption that the cinema's sphere of influence was as escapist entertainment. It seems all three judgements are in error. The dismissal of mythology as beyond empiricism may be true, but that does not make mythology any less powerful. "Religious beliefs are not mere abstractions that are irrelevant to everyday life. People use their beliefs to make choices, interpret events, and plan actions. Myths are paradigms of human existence... They can be metaphors for concrete social structure and for real human events."⁷⁵⁸ These same observations increasingly apply to the power and affect of the myths about, and played out within, the cinema as well.

Rituals

Flowing from the mythological stories are rituals that develop and reinforce the group's perspective on the world and establish their boundaries in relation to the world. Though a mystic's ritual behaviour and symbolic frame of reference may greatly vary throughout the world, it exists in every mystical tradition.⁷⁵⁹ All mystics do something and all mystical traditions invest material things or places with special importance. One only has to recall some of the great rituals in the world's religions: Passover, Easter, Upanayana and tribal initiation rites to see their connection to mystical phenomena and how they act out the central mystical drama from which the

⁷⁵⁷ See Academy of Paediatrics, Testimony of the American Academy of Paediatrics on Media Violence, U.S. Senate Commerce Committee, before the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee, 13th September 2000; G Cumberbatch and D Howitt, A Measure of Uncertainty: The Effects of the Mass Media, London: Libbey, 1989; C Hovland, A Lumsdaine, F Sheffield, "The effect of presenting 'one side' versus 'both sides' in changing opinions on a controversial subject", The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, W Schramm, D Roberts (eds.), Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1971, pp. 467-484; S Kraus, D Davis, The Effects of Mass Communication on Political Behaviour, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976; E Rogers, A History of Communication Study, New York: Free Press, 1994.

⁷⁵⁸ McGuire M, Religion: the Social Context, p. 16.

⁷⁵⁹ See: N Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred, Chapter 2; T Penelhum, "Unity and diversity in interpretations of mysticism", Mysticism and Religious Traditions, S Katz (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 438f.

group takes its definition.⁷⁶⁰ “Ritual is an effective way of transforming space and time. Ritual places (such a mountain tops or shrines) can be transformed into the locus of power and awe. Time, too, can be changed, becoming a metaphor for sacred meanings and a catalyst for religious experience.”⁷⁶¹ In fact, Mircea Eliade argues that the function of mystical ritual is to abolish space and time, so that an experience of Otherness and union with the ultimate reality can occur.⁷⁶²

It is in regard to the suspension of time and space and the endowment of a particular place with awe and power that the strongest parallels to the ritual of the cinema can be drawn. The ritual of spectatorship begins before arrival at the cinema. The choice of film, venue, going alone or with others, travelling to be there in time for the commencement – these activities demand preparation and co-ordination of several personal rituals. On arrival spectators must pay to enter and then are ushered through several brightly lit foyers from which there are multiple theatre entrances. Doors and signs indicate where to go to experience the story that was chosen, but the spectators knows from the repetition of the ritual that what lies beyond each of these barriers - the interior spaces and the cinema apparatus - is almost identical. The door into the cinema often leads to stairs. As the spectator ascends them the screen is slowly revealed; or, he or she enters on one level and makes an entrance into the large space of the theatre, like an arena. Smaller cinema complexes increasingly work on another architectural premise and have the spectator descend into intimate cave-like rooms. After leaving the street and entering the cinema there are no windows anywhere in the complex so that the spectator is unaware of the movement of the sun outside. In the West at least, silence is demanded, the room is darkened, total concentration is focused on the illuminated screen.⁷⁶³ The film begins.

Still, after the viewing of a film people continue the cinema ritual in a variety of ways: they may be moved to tears, anger, disappointment, confusion (indeed they can be “mystified”), joy or activity; some leave immediately, others stay until the

⁷⁶⁰ Passover ritualises the last of the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea and the Exodus; Easter celebrates Jesus being raised from the dead; Upanayana are a series of puberty rituals where the Hindu Gods of Knowledge (Brhaspati), Power (Indra) and Brilliance (Agnis) are given a young man; tribal initiation rites are also conducted over days, where through sleep deprivation, the eating of designated herbs and imbibing special drink, the initiate undergoes a mystical experience. For a full discussion of these rituals see F Streng, *Understanding Religious Life*, pp. 49f.

⁷⁶¹ McGuire M, *Religion: the Social Context*, p. 17.

⁷⁶² Eliade M, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Chapter 5. Also see N Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, pp. 82f.

⁷⁶³ This is generally true in the developing world as well, especially in East Asia and Oceania, whereas a much conversational/interactive atmosphere is found in the cinemas of West Africa and India.

lights are up again and they are ushered out; some want to debrief the experience, others do not, or cannot, speak about it; some may say, then or later, that the film “changed my life”, others may never mention the film again and never recall having seen it. Whatever the response to the diegesis, the spectator cannot remain in the theatre. Viewers must leave the theatre and resume their lives, feeling somewhat disorientated for having had the experience. This is especially true if the spectator attends the darkened space of cinema during the day. Indeed, cinema architecture makes very little provision for spectators to stay after a film has ended. There is a pressure to leave the building. As I outlined earlier in this chapter, mystical experiences and rituals can be either pleasurable or displeasurable, depending upon the spectator’s personal situation, their expectations, their preparation and previous experiences. As with religious ritual, however, if this particular experience is displeasurable, then there will need to be enough pleasurable memories of other encounters for the spectator to return and repeat the ritual.

It is the aim of mystical ritual that most directly finds a parallel to the rituals of the cinema: suturing the spectator into the experience. All the rituals described above work to enable viewers to leave behind their everyday world and enter a vastly different space to their normal surroundings. Through ritual structures the spectator is offered the possibility of an encounter with some form of Otherness: feelings, thoughts, exposure to worlds beyond their own, desires, romance, sexuality, personal options, lifestyles, dramatic action, humour, dilemmas, horror, arousal, ethical choices, religions, gods and spiritualities not normally part of their everyday existence. On the screen the viewers see their fears, desires, hopes and lacks ritualised. Producers of films promise an experience that the viewer will “never forget”, “won’t believe”, “break your heart” or “move you to laughter and tears”, “scare you out of your skin”, “change your mind forever”, “have you singing all the way home”, “change your life forever” and convince you that “we are not alone.” Unlike mystical experiences the cinema is less particular about the content of the encounter with Otherness, not caring if the spectator laughs at a drama, for example. What mystical traditions and the cinema have in common is that they have learnt what rituals of oneness enable the devotee or spectator to an experience of Otherness that might see him or her return.

Conclusions

In these last three chapters I have charted new terrain for studies of the gaze. Even though in recent years scholars developed arguments for a number of gazes in the cinema, in concert with other disciplines, secularisation has meant that mystical and theological issues in film studies have been pushed to the periphery of the academy's inquiries. Outlining how one could expect to find the mystical gaze described in the work of religious scholars and theologians interested in film, I found that their work was too confessional in its frame of reference for them to make a contribution to mainstream cinema studies on the gaze. Other scholars like Metz, Baudry and Bazin, however, have come close to either describing the gaze as mystical or delineating its attributes. I have argued that there is coalescence between the act of cinema spectatorship and mysticism, and that the language of magic, the most primitive of mystical experiences, has been applied to the cinema throughout its history as a secular recognition, albeit unconsciously, of the ineffable, noetic, transient, outwardly passive and emotionally responsive qualities in spectatorship. Drawing on the social scientific study of religion this chapter has demonstrated that a scholar does not have to accept the veracity of the claim from a subjective mystical experience, or, in turn, the tenets of any religious organisation, to analyse the significance of the claims that have been made for most of recorded human history about mysticism. This chapter has argued that in terms of scholarship about mysticism, the mystical gaze is katoptric, monist and behaviourist.

Drawing on psychoanalytic theories on the gaze in regard to the primal lack the spectator brings to the mirror-screen, the desire for transcendence is worked out as a yearning for pleasure in recovering the lost innocence of the mystical union. The illusions of the cinema enable the spectator to maintain a sense of omnipotence and transcendence through exercising the mystical gaze. By analysing both the dynamics within reported mystical experiences and the codes of the cinema in terms of light and dark, time and space, sight and sound, private and public, hierarchies and saints and sacred story I have argued that the cinema preconditions, supports, repeats, provides meaning and affects behavioural change in a very similar way to recognised mystical traditions. Mysticism and the cinema offer an experience of Otherness. As can be evidenced in Australia, at least, it may not be by accident that the decrease in participation in religious traditions has been accompanied by an increase in cinematic

attendances. Although I have been arguing that the cinema is the contemporary mystical temple, I am not arguing that cinematic experience is exactly the same as the mystical experience,⁷⁶⁴ but there are striking parallels and significant differences as highlighted by the following table:⁷⁶⁵

Cinematic Experience	Mystical Experience
Suture	Absorption
Receiving	Open, receptive
Forgetful of self	Emptying the mind
Unity through apparatus	Unity with God/nature
Ineffable	Ineffable
Imparts knowledge	Noetic
Transient	Transient
I am part of this wider culture	Experience of mystical culture
I suspend disbelief	Experience of belief
Terror/astonishment	<i>Mysterium tremendum et fascinas</i>
Magical	Transcendental
Images move for the eyes	Images move in mind's eye
Audience is safe	Congregation is safe
Spectator is addressed	Believer is addressed
Spectator is acknowledged	Believer is acknowledged
Dream-like sequences	Dream-like sequences
Social disruption	Social action/disruption
Liminal spaces	Liminal spaces
Distortion of time	Distortion of time
Humility	Humility
Admiration	Admiration
Mirror	Soul
Illusion of omnipotence	A share in omnipotence
Scopophilic voyeurism	Pleasure/dread to behold
Loss of self	Loss of self
Possess powerful forces	Channel powerful forces
Constructed by apparatus	Created by belief structure
Masochistic	Masochistic
Gendered	Gendered
Screen as plenitude	Other as plenitude
Death confronting	Death preoccupied
Returned gaze	Perceived Being presides
Stars	Saints
Sight and sound	Sensory perception
Secular Story	Sacred story

⁷⁶⁴ The scope of this thesis prevents an analysis of the major differences between the cinema and mystical experience and more research needs to be done on this topic. I wish to note, however, that the major difference lies in the fact that devotees claim to encounter a Being, whereas, average spectators make no such claim of the encounters they have at the cinema.

⁷⁶⁵ This table is not to be read as one concerned with binary oppositions. It tables comparisons and contrasts.

Whatever the source of the mystical encounter, the cinema offers a “classic trigger situation” wherein people can in relation to some films exercise the mystical gaze. All the carefully planned and scientific illusions in the apparatus and mise-en-scène induce, support and enable the spectator to have an encounter with Otherness. At the very least the mystical gaze enables an encounter with oneself, the community, ideas, thoughts, feelings and a shared action of believing that the illusory world of the cinema is real. Given the argument in this chapter it is now clear that one of the least acknowledged gazes that a spectator possesses and brings to the cinema, arguably one of the most ancient, cross-cultural gazes in the collective unconscious, is the mystical gaze.

I will now discuss how Peter Weir structures the mystical gaze in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Gallipoli* and *Witness*.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁶ These three films have been chosen because *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was his first international debut. *Gallipoli* is the last film he made in Australia before going to work for Hollywood. *Witness* is, relatively, the most commercially successful film he has ever made. I have chosen not to analyse films like *The Last Wave*, *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Fearless* because the narrative so clearly suggests a mystical reading, as Chapter One demonstrated. By taking the three films chosen I want to argue that whether Weir works with a narrative adapted from a novel, writes the story himself or inherits a genre script from a studio, his mystical eye is brought to bear in the text.

Chapter Five:
Picnic at Hanging Rock

Methodology

Even though Peter Weir might protest, I established in the first chapter that a recurring observation about his films is that they are mystical. “After *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*, I felt uncomfortable with what was perceived as my style – mystical... So I consciously set out to avoid that style and look for subjects as far away from that area.”⁷⁶⁷ Despite his best efforts he seems to have failed in this mission. Accepting that language both constructs reality and bestows meaning on it, I took seriously the commentaries about mysticism in his films, but challenged the normal conclusion that Weir’s distinctiveness was primarily about lighting, sound and editing. By contrast with this reading of Weir, I argued that his work fits into a broader commentary about the cinema since its earliest days. By looking at the antecedents of the cinema, the use of words like magical and mystical and their roots in other disciplines, I have concluded that Peter Weir’s work shares in the codes of the cinema which highlights or foregrounds what I have called and described as the mystical gaze.⁷⁶⁸

If mysticism is a constitutive element of the gaze, in the same way that the gaze draws upon gender, sexuality, class, race, nationality and age, then it must be at least latently present every time a spectator views a film. What has been observed about Peter Weir’s films is that they make explicit this element of the gaze in the same way that other films and directors highlight other elements of the gaze.⁷⁶⁹ It is possible, then, for a spectator to view many other films and not be aware of their potential to evoke a mystical gaze, either because the spectator has limited

⁷⁶⁷ Weir P, “The directors voice 2”, *Third Take: Australian Film-makers Talk*, p. 59.

⁷⁶⁸ Tom Milne was an early commentator who linked *Picnic at Hanging Rock* to “that magical moment when nature somehow contrives to unloose the bonds of convention.” See “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, *Sight and Sound*, 45, 4, 1976, p. 257.

⁷⁶⁹ For example J Bertolini on the reciprocated look in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954), “*Rear Window* and the reciprocated glance”, *Hitchcock Annual*, 1994, pp. 55-75; Teresa De Lauretis on the gendered gaze in, among other films, Michael Apted’s *Gorillas in the Mist* (1989), “Guerrilla in the mist: women’s cinema in the 80s”, pp. 6-25; J Wondra’s gathering gaze in Terence Malick’s *Days of Heaven* (1978), “A gaze unbecoming: schooling the child for femininity in *Days of Heaven*”, *Wide Angle*, XVI, October 1995, pp. 4-22; Barbara Creed and the castrating gaze in Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979), “Horror and the monstrous-feminine: an imaginary abjection”, *Screen*, XXVII, 1, January-February 1986, pp. 44-70; Laura Mulvey has linked the sadistic gaze with several of Hitchcock’s films, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, pp. 22ff; G Studlar’s voyeuristic-sadistic gaze in Sternberg’s *The Devil is a Woman* (1935), *The Realm of Pleasure*, 1988. Paul Willemsen’s fourth look in Anthony Mann’s *Man of the West* (1958), *Looks and Fictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*, London: BFI, 1994.

appreciation of the various gazes they bring to the screen or because the film itself more strongly encodes another gaze. Even then, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters, the works of many and varied directors have been described as mystical.⁷⁷⁰ The techniques of these directors bind them together into a mystical style. It is entirely understandable that a variety of genres elicit the mystical gaze of spectators, and that some auteurs will do this more often than others. Because all styles are formed through technique, it is now necessary to deconstruct the technique of three of Peter Weir's films to uncover how the mystical gaze is constructed.

Peter Weir's work is a particularly interesting study for the mystical gaze for at least five reasons. First, since 1982 Weir has worked abroad from Australia and yet has taken his mystical interests with him as expressed in films like *Dead Poets Society*, *Witness*, *The Mosquito Coast*, *Fearless* and *The Truman Show*. Second, Weir's work is not wedded to any one genre. He has directed period drama, horror, political drama, supernatural thrillers, romantic comedy, social realism, a murder mystery and most recently a commentary on the media itself. Third, the highly secularised Australian context out of which he has emerged has been largely impervious to his sensibilities, so much so that it would have been easier for him to have abandoned his metaphysical interests and opt for the social realism which defines most dramatic Australian cinema. Fourth, Weir himself has stated that he did not set out to make mystical films and, indeed has set out to avoid making them, and yet as I outlined in Chapter One nearly all his films have been described as mystical. Finally, while he has not always written his own material for the screen, he has always adapted and reconstructed the text to suit his purposes. Peter Weir's body of work, therefore, places him in company with other auteurs whose work, despite its other nationalistic, gender, or textual considerations, enables spectators to experience a sense of cinematic Otherness, akin to reported mystical encounters from other contexts.

This chapter will establish the nature and structure of the mystical gaze. By applying the theories about the mystical gaze to three of Peter Weir's films, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Gallipoli* and *Witness*, I will outline the nature of subjectivity and desire, identity and meaning which the mystical gaze expresses. What I claim for the

⁷⁷⁰ To name but a few this list includes Antonioni, Rossellini, Pasolini, Buñuel, Warhol, Tarkowsky, Griffith, Fellini, Bergman, Kubrick, Cassavetes, Loach, Herzog, Bertolucci, Goddard, DeMille, Chaplin, Zimmerman, Hitchcock, Truffaut, Campion, Scorsese, Joffe, Annaud, Lee, Spielberg

mystical gaze is at once particular, in that what Weir brings to the task is a product of his own interests and history, and at the same time more generally applicable to other films and auteurs who demonstrate a similar interest or elicit a similar response from spectators. The argument in this chapter will be that the mystical gaze is essentially a mobile gaze, not defined or confined by race, gender, class or culture. I will show that films which elicit responses described in mystical terms, situate spectators in many, varied and even contradictory positions within the diegesis. Like all other gazes, the mystical gaze is not accidental. I will develop the following method of analysis for identifying the four structures of the mystical gaze:

- (i) *mystical intertextuality* - the mystical gaze is triggered by filmic texts and intertexts laden with mystical references and developed through the skilled use of symbols and metonymic significations or parallels.⁷⁷¹
- (ii) *a participatory, empathetic identification* - the spectator not only identifies with the action, but also empathises with the hero or heroine's search, which is primarily spiritual, or at least played out within a mystical and/or ethical context.
- (iii) *an omniscient look* – at a pivotal point the camera draws back and distances the spectator into a position within the diegesis where he or she omnisciently presides over the hero or heroine's mystical quest with full knowledge.
- (iv) *illumination* - through tropes of sexuality, death, intimacy and through the use of music, lighting and camera angles, the spectator accepts the existence of a fluidity of the boundaries between seen and unseen worlds and is positioned to ask personal questions about his or her own meaning and purpose in life.

I will argue that while these four structures constitute the mystical gaze, the exact nature of their representation varies according to the film, and not all structures are present or given equal weight in the mystical scenes I will analyse.

⁷⁷¹ The concept of metonymy will now become a critical factor in deconstructing the mysticism present in Peter Weir's films. In cinema studies I take metonymy to mean a repeated, visual reference which is regularly, deliberately and consciously chosen by the director to substitute a sign for the reality portrayed or for the meaning being conveyed. For example in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the clearest metonymy is the Rock itself. Weir uses it metonymically in that when the spectator sees the Rock, he or she always thinks of mystery and, in other contexts, sexuality. See S Hayward, *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, pp. 216ff; R Jakobson, "Concluding statement: linguistics and poetics", *Style in Language*, H Foster (ed.), Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960; J Monaco, *How to Read a Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History, and Theory of Film and Media*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981; R Rudicell, "Using Metonymy and Myth to Teach Film", *English Journal*, 81, 7, 1992, pp. 78-81; G Sonesson, *Pictorial Concepts: Inquiries into the Semiotic Heritage and its Relevance for the Analysis of the Visual World*, Lund: Aris/Lund University Press, 1989.

Picnic at Hanging Rock

Picnic at Hanging Rock was the film that alerted the world to Weir's particular interests. When, in 1973, executive producer Patricia Lovell read Joan Lindsay's 1967 novel she thought of Weir. She had seen his 1971 film, *Homesdale*. "It made a tremendous impact on me...it wasn't what was actually happening on the screen, it was... the undercurrents that really haunted me."⁷⁷² She believed Weir could realise the visual quality in the book and be comfortable with the mysteries of the story. When Lovell gave Weir the novel to read, he said,

I could not get it out of my mind. Strangely enough, my first thought was that I wished I'd written it. More than that, somehow, I felt as if I would have written it...it's just so compatible with my thinking. It was as if it had suddenly touched that part of my mind, and from that moment on I simply had to make the film.⁷⁷³

Lovell, Weir and screenwriter Cliff Green became "obsessed" with the project,⁷⁷⁴ "the way it expects you to put your own interpretation on what happened...the magic of the story."⁷⁷⁵ The screenplay arrived on the desk of Peter Weir who saw in its mystery an echo of the mystical experience he had in Tunisia in 1971 where he had a premonition that he would find something of significance and soon found a stone carving of a child's head. Here was his opportunity to put the inexplicable on the screen.

Even though the idea of people being lost or dying in the bush of Australia was not new terrain for Australian literature or film,⁷⁷⁶ *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was not an immediately obvious film for the Australian film industry to make. It took Lovell two years to convince investors of the merits of the project. There were 23

⁷⁷² Quoted in Green C, "Of ghosts unlocked: a dialogue", *Picnic at Hanging Rock: a Film*, Sydney: Cheshire, 1975, p. xv.

⁷⁷³ Ibid. p. xvi.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid. p. xvi.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid. p. xix.

⁷⁷⁶ Other films before 1975 which demonstrate the often unpredictable violence of a sinister Australian bush or outback desert include *Uncivilised* (1936), *The Phantom Stockman* (1953), *Jedda* (1955), *Walkabout* (1971), *Wake in fright* (1971) and *Lost in the bush* (1973). Films after *Picnic at Hanging Rock* which demonstrate the often unpredictable violence of a sinister Australian bush or outback desert include *Little Boy Lost* (1978), *The Last of the Knucklemen* (1979), *Turkey Shoot* (1982), *Buddies* (1983), *Hostage: The Christine Maresch Story* (1983), *Razorback* (1984), *The Settlement* (1984), *Fair Game* (1986), *Fortress* (1986), *Frenchman's Farm* (1987), *Going Sane* (1987), *Ground Zero* (1987), *Slate Wyn & Me* (1987), *Evil Angels* (1988), *Shame* (1988), *Incident at Raven's Gate* (1989), *The Salute of the Jugger* (1989), *Spirits of the Air* *Gremlins of the Clouds* (1989), *Sher Mountain Killings Mystery* (1990), *Backsliding* (1992), *Aberration* (1998), *Blackwater Trail* (1998), *Deadly* (1998), *Love Serenade* (1997).

locally produced films released in Australia in 1975.⁷⁷⁷ Against the inaccurate assertion that Australian films of this period were largely period dramas,⁷⁷⁸ 16 of those released that year had contemporary settings⁷⁷⁹, two were contemporary documentaries⁷⁸⁰ and five had historical settings: *The True Story of Eskimo Nell*, a sex romp set in the 1850s, *Sunday Too Far Away*, which concerned a shearer's strike and a failed romance in 1956, *Inn of the Damned*, a horror thriller set in 1896, *Ride a Wild Pony*, a Disney family film set in 1922 and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* set in 1900. Although this film is now considered to have become "a symbol of the Australian film revival"⁷⁸¹ and the masterpiece of the Australian film renaissance⁷⁸² this recognition was slow, hard-won and primarily came from overseas.⁷⁸³ This was especially true in 1975 because the Australian Film Institute (AFI) Awards were in disarray as the former invited jury was disbanded to make way for a peer voting system. Although released in 1975, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was too late to be eligible to compete in that year's awards.⁷⁸⁴ At the 1976 awards *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was beaten in every category in which it was nominated⁷⁸⁵ by Fred Schepisi's *The Devil's Playground*. Although Weir's film won nothing, it heralded a point of departure from the "ocker comedies" of the early Australian film revival. It pointed to a narrative fluidity never seen in the Australian cinema before and a visual and aural style that owed more to a

⁷⁷⁷ See A Pike, R Cooper, *Australian Film 1900 – 1977*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 284-296.

⁷⁷⁸ Statistics show that of the 190 feature films made from 1970 to 1982, only 28 were period films. The perception comes from the fact that some of these were the most critically and commercially successful: 1975: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Sunday Too Far Away*; 1976: *Caddie*, *The Devil's Playground*, *Eliza Fraser*; 1978: *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, *Newsfront*; 1979: *My Brilliant Career*; 1980: *Breaker Morant*; 1981: *Gallipoli*; 1982: *The Man from Snowy River*, *We of the Never Never*.

⁷⁷⁹ *The Firm Man*, *Promised Woman*, *Sidecar Racers*, *The Man from Hong King*, *The Great McCarthy*, *The Box*, *Pure S*, *The Golden Cage*, *How Willingly You Sing*, *Down the Wind*, *Plugg*, *Scooby Malone*, *The Removalists*, *Solo Flight*, *Nuts, Bolts and Bedroom Springs*, *The Lost Islands*.

⁷⁸⁰ *The Love Epidemic* and *Protected*.

⁷⁸¹ Haltof M, *Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide*, p. 23.

⁷⁸² Tibbets J, "Adaptation redux: Hanging Rock on video," *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 27, 2, 1999, p. 155.

⁷⁸³ See S Eisenhuth, "Australian director Peter Weir... 'a new talent in world cinema'" say the Cannes critics", pp. 4f. As well as being critically acclaimed at the Cannes Film Festival of 1976, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* won the 1977 BAFTA for Best Cinematography and was nominated for Best Sound Track and Best Costume Design. It was nominated in 1976 for the Best Cinematography at the British Society of Cinematographers. It won the 1977 Best Cinematography and was nominated for Best Writing at the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Film (USA).

⁷⁸⁴ The AFI awards of 1975 were a composite 1974/75 competition with only two films from the latter year, *The Great McCarthy* and *Sunday Too Far Away*, winning any awards at all. See B McFarlane, G Mayer, I Bertrand, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Film*, pp. 555f.

⁷⁸⁵ Best Picture, Best Direction, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography. See, "Helen has a double shot at best actress," *The Australian*, 25th June 1976, p. 24.

European art house tradition.⁷⁸⁶ “That so delicate and subtle a movie could be made in a land as apparently crass as Australia might surprise...It’s not going too far to suggest that in Peter Weir the cinema has a new poetic master.”⁷⁸⁷ Even by the end of the decade *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was “the largest grossing film in Australian history.”⁷⁸⁸ Even so, some critics found that “there’s something hollow at the core, an unearned sense of importance, a reliance on mere word to suggest mystical depths.”⁷⁸⁹ One went as far as to say, “The film is awful, and how critics have been able to praise it as an Australian artwork I simply can’t understand.”⁷⁹⁰

THE STRUCTURES OF THE MYSTICAL GAZE

Mystical Intertextuality

The opening black and white frame of the film gives the entire story:

On Saturday 14th February 1900 a party of schoolgirls picnicked at Hanging Rock near Mt Macedon in the state of Victoria. During the afternoon several members of the party disappeared without trace...

For a film all about mystery *Picnic at Hanging Rock* holds no surprises from this point on. The spectator believes, however, that he or she will either be given a satisfactory resolution or that they will be able to discover one. This device gives the film an air of factuality against which it has been read.⁷⁹¹ It also features the first structure within the mystical gaze. The spectator is told that this narrative is based on a mystery and is therefore mysterious. Multiple characters within the film say the same thing a further seven times.⁷⁹² From the first frame of the film, cited above, to

⁷⁸⁶ B McFarlane, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Film*, p. 385.

⁷⁸⁷ Greenfield P, “Everything happens at its appointed time: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, *Movietone News*, 62/63, 29th December 1979, pp. 8, 10. In an unsubscribed article *Variety* said the film was “Visually one of the most beautiful pix ever seen.” *Variety*, 5, November 1975, p. 38.

⁷⁸⁸ Wells J, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, *Films in Review*, 30, 5, May 1979, p. 313.

⁷⁸⁹ Ansen D, “Rocky Horror”, p. 34.

⁷⁹⁰ Hunter I, “Corsetway to heaven - looking back at ‘*Picnic at Hanging Rock*’”, p. 371. Also see R Combs, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 43, 512, September 1976, p. 197; T Milne, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, p. 257.

⁷⁹¹ “When I first saw the film in London, I assumed that the movie was based on some such real-life incident in Australian around the turn of the century. This assumption was shared by numerous other people I discussed the film with at the time. However, exhaustive enquiries by Australian reporters found no such evidence whatsoever of any such event.” Shiach D, *The Films of Peter Weir* p. 41. Shiach was not the only one. “The story, apparently, is based on a true story”, Craven J, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, *Film and Filming*, 23, 3, December 1976, p. 31.

⁷⁹² Miss McCraw tells the girls the evolution of the earth is “quite mysterious”. Miranda says the world is “a mysterious place.” When Mrs Appleyard asks what happened at the Rock, Mademoiselle says, “No one knows.” The police investigating the disappearances twice state that it’s a mystery. It is

the first dialogue of the film, where Miranda's voice-over misquotes Edgar Allan Poe's poem "A dream within a dream,"⁷⁹³ to the final voice-over of the film, "And to this day their disappearance remains a mystery," the spectator is warned about, encouraged and consoled by the seeming incomprehensibility of the story.

The allusion to Poe's poem bears greater analysis. Unlike the other seven occasions in the film where the spectator is told that mystery is afoot, this voice-over is an addition by Weir. It is not in Lindsay's novel or Green's screenplay. Weir could not have envisaged that this added voice-over was to become a hallmark which, as I outlined in Chapter One, critics and commentators have looked for in his work ever since. The opening of the film is a still, filtered, long-shot of Hanging Rock which slowly dissolves into a tilt up from indigenous scorched wildflowers to the imposing façade and manicured green lawns of Appleyard College. A recitation begins from an unseen narrator, soon to be identified as Miranda. Her poem is accompanied initially by the foreboding magnified sounds of the wind, then to silence, and then Gheorge Zamfir's "Flute de Pan" which is the film's piercing and haunting signature theme. This "Flute de Pan" heralds the birth of the film's action. Weir's use of the words, sound and images highlights the nature of the mystical gaze in terms of the fusion of different realities to which the film will attend. Poe's work is a lament to God about the transitory nature of one's life in the face of the enormity of death. Poe likens our lives to a small dream within a larger dream:

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
This much let me avow-
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand

reported that Irma cannot recall anything and so cannot solve the mystery. See C Green, *Picnic at Hanging Rock: a Film*, pp. 1, 40, 55, 71, 100, 105.

⁷⁹³ Poe's poem reads, "All that we see or seem, *is* a dream within a dream", (emphasis added) whereas Miranda says "What we see and what we seem are but a dream, A dream within a dream."

Grains of the golden sand –
 How few! Yet how they creep
 Through my fingers to the deep,
 While I weep – while I weep!
 O God! Can I grasp
 Them with a tighter clasp?
 O God! Can I not save
 One from the pitiless wave?
 Is all that we see or seem
 But a dream within a dream?⁷⁹⁴

For Poe the dream is metaphorical. Weir, however, signals through his Jungian interests that the world of dreams is as real as the world of consciousness, or at least it should be paid as much attention. These verses initiate the spectator into a dream story which is going to be told as if it were historical, in the same way that some dreams are experienced so vividly, that, initially, they are difficult to distinguish from reality. Within the diegesis the spectator is explicitly invited to enter into a similar state as in dreaming and surrender the higher critical faculties so that the more inexplicable and mysterious realms of the unconscious might emerge. The dream metonymically comes to signify the mystery and mysticism at the heart of the film.

In his important essay on Jungian analysis in cinema studies, Don Fredericksen argues that there are some films which explicitly belong to the “symbolic cinema.”⁷⁹⁵ Jung maintained that certain literary traditions “amplified” a symbolic reading of their work. “These kinds of psychic material mean next to nothing if simply broken down, but display a wealth of meaning if... meaning is reinforced and extended by all the conscious means at our disposal - by the so-called method of amplification. The images or symbols of the collective unconscious yield their distinctive values only when subjected to a synthetic mode of treatment.”⁷⁹⁶ Fredericksen argues that this amplification can be found in terms of the pattern of dreams and through “plotting of the dream’s archetypal imagery against parallels from mythology, comparative religion ethnology and so on.”⁷⁹⁷ He concludes that the purpose of some director’s interest in amplification is for subjective transcendence,⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁴ See, *Poe: a Critical Study*, E Davidson (ed.), Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1957, p. 230.

⁷⁹⁵ Fredericksen D, “Jung/sign/symbol/film, part one”, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 4, 2, 1979, p. 184.

⁷⁹⁶ Jung C, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, quoted in D Fredericksen, “Jung/sign/symbol/film, part one”, p. 188.

⁷⁹⁷ Fredericksen D, “Jung/sign/symbol/film, part one”, p. 188.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 182.

religious experience⁷⁹⁹, and to maintain a living tie between the conscious and the unconscious.⁸⁰⁰

It is beyond the intention and scope of this chapter to offer a detailed study of the symbolic amplifications within *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Weir, however, was at the height of his interest in Jungian psychology in 1975. He readily admits that Jung's Dreams, Memories and Reflections had a profound effect on him. This can be seen in their shared interests in the symbolism of alchemy, the *mysterium magnum*, archetypes, the descent into the unconscious, dreams, the masculine and feminine traits in every personality and the emergence of the shadow personality.⁸⁰¹ The exploration of these ideas is for both Weir and Jung primarily a spiritual journey. The invocation of a dream in the opening moments of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is a clear statement of his interests in this story in terms of dreaming, meaning and death and underlines its importance to Weir who has said, "You are in trouble if you don't know what dreams are anymore."⁸⁰²

The use of Edgar Allan Poe's poem is not the only vital intertextual structure operating metonymically within the narrative construction of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, but it sets the stage upon which the mystical gaze will be engaged. Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva have shown how intertextuality is critical to deconstruction.⁸⁰³ In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Weir relies heavily on several other texts to generate a symbolic and mystical reading of this film by the spectator. The most obvious is the dream within a dream. The parallels here to almost all mystical traditions are striking. Dreams in mysticism are usually the encounters wherein a divine revelation is given to a person who has special access to the numinous and is then anointed for a particular task, or they see visions which hold insight for the wider community.⁸⁰⁴ Both interpretations can be used in regard to Miranda.

In an early and important speech to Sara, who is stopped from attending the picnic, Miranda invokes Jesus' farewell discourse of love and leave-taking in John's

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 184.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 181.

⁸⁰¹ See C Jung, Dreams, Memories, Reflections, A Jaffe (ed.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953; C Jung, Seminar on Dream Analysis, W McGuire (ed.), Princeton: Princeton University Press; C Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, R Hull (trans.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953; C Jung, On Dreams, J Strachey (ed. and trans.), New York: Norton, 1952. Also see Michael Bliss, Dreams within a dream, pp. 27-30.

⁸⁰² Haltof M, Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide, p. 38.

⁸⁰³ See: R Barthes, S/Z, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974; J Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel", The Kristeva Reader, in T Moi (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

⁸⁰⁴ See N Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred, pp. 94, 151, 153, 189f.

Gospel when she ambiguously says, “You must learn to love someone else apart from me, Sara. I won’t be here very much longer.”⁸⁰⁵ Is Miranda leaving the school for holidays, or for good, or has she had a revelation that she will disappear from Sara’s life and the world today? Although it is Marion who asks permission for the party to go off to the base of the rock, from that moment on it is clear that Miranda is more than a knowing participant. Miranda is the leader of the party, being irresistibly drawn on, and providing explanations along the way. In a further invocation of John’s Gospel she reassures Mademoiselle as they leave for their exploration, “Don’t worry, Mam’selle. We shall only be gone a little while.”⁸⁰⁶ Weir’s camera which is especially interested in Miranda. Weir cuts 20 scenes together to construct this climbing sequence. Miranda is the leader of the quartet in 15 of these scenes. Miranda is the one who pre-eminently knows where they are going and why they have to reach the summit. At one stage Edith asks Miranda, “Where in the world are we going?” By the end of the film Miranda, Marion and Miss McCraw have disappeared, Edith is traumatised by the event and Irma has amnesia. Through complex intertextuality and the invocation of the dream state in the narrative, Weir invites the spectator to gaze upon Miranda as a dreamer, visionary and shaman.⁸⁰⁷ The forces of evil are what Ian Hunter concludes the film is about.

The worship of beauty and nature in this scheme of things has its roots in the love of suffering and death. This is the ghastly truth squeezed in the pretty guts of the film. The thrill we get from the mystery is the thrill we value in all that’s evil. Sexuality with necrophilia. Love with death. Innocence with corruption. Art and beauty with suffering. The hierarchies of goodness with divisions of class society. The truth about life with its transcendence.⁸⁰⁸

When Fredericksen applies Jungian analysis to several films, he outlines how amplified symbols in the cinema focus on rebirth, transformation, transcendence and

⁸⁰⁵ “I shall not be with you very much longer...where I am going you cannot come. I give you a new commandment: love another; as I have loved you.” John 13: 33-34.

⁸⁰⁶ “Do not be anxious...I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you, but in a short time the world will no longer see me.” John 14: 1, 18.

⁸⁰⁷ “A shaman is a religious specialist who has undergone an intense encounter with sacred forces, emerged with special powers, to effect good or evil on behalf of the rest of the group.” See, M McGuire, *Religion: the Social Context*, p. 18. Interestingly, one of the early promotional grabs for this film was as “a recollection of evil”, see J Craven, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, p. 31.

⁸⁰⁸ Hunter I, “Corsetway to Heaven: looking back to *Hanging Rock*”, p. 371.

wholeness.⁸⁰⁹ Fredericksen notes that directors draw on symbols which Jung thought had particular importance for dream analysis as they have a “long, variegated history as religious, mystic and alchemical symbols.”⁸¹⁰ These include birds, especially in ascending flight toward a “high and vast mountain...the climb itself and the movement from earth to air, the waters flowing down the mountain in which one pilgrim stands...”⁸¹¹ There are eleven scenes in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* which feature birds. There are only two scenes that include birds in flight toward or over a mountain: when Miranda descends from the dray and opens the gate to the picnic ground; and as Albert frantically searches on the rock for the girls, immediately before he discovers the near-dead Irma. In the first case, the sound of the parrots, accompanied by the “Flute du Pan”, unleash a metaphysical force which scares the horses. In the second shot, a similar flock of parrots at high altitude are accompanied by a combination of distorted wind and natural sounds set against Bruce Smeaton’s loud, urgent and foreboding synthesiser. These scenes strongly punctuate the unseen forces that carry Miranda to her vanishing point, and lead Albert to discover the only survivor of the party that attempted the final ascent. As important as these scenes are, Weir spends more time on another bird, the swan.⁸¹² It appears as a figurine in two of the three scenes in Miranda and Sara’s room. More importantly still, a swan gliding on the water appears in six scenes, two of which involve Michael’s dreams and daydreams. Through slow motion and dissolves, Miranda’s movements are paralleled to the grace and style of the swans. Although swans do not fly and so are water- or earth-bound, they have been symbols of grace and purity in many mythical legends and traditions.⁸¹³ Jonathan Rayner has suggested this reference is to the Greek myth of Leda.⁸¹⁴ The problem with this reading is that it is the male Zeus who becomes the Swan so he can seduce Leda.⁸¹⁵ In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the spectator does not identify Michael with the swan, but always with Miranda. It is more likely, therefore, that reference is to the French version of the German folk story, *Swan Lake*, made

⁸⁰⁹ Fredericksen D, “Jung/sign/symbol/film, part two”, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 5, 4, 1980, pp. 470f.

⁸¹⁰ Fredericksen D, “Jung/sign/symbol/film, part two”, p. 470.

⁸¹¹ Ibid. p. 470.

⁸¹² Scott Murray suggests that the allusion to the swan in the film can be read poetically. See S Murray, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, in *Cinema Papers*, 7, Nov/Dec, 1975, p. 265.

⁸¹³ For a cross cultural reading of similar traditions in regard to the swan, see: J Crumley, *Waters of the Wild Swan*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1992; A Pueblo, *Birds and Myth*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1979.

⁸¹⁴ Rayner J, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 30.

⁸¹⁵ See <http://www.loggia.com/myth/leda>.

popular by the ballet of the same name in 1877, is clearly in evidence here. In one of the three endings to this folk story, before Prince Siegfried can be reunited with Odette, Rothbart, Siegfried's spurned lover, turns her into a swan. Siegfried is left to grieve at the water's edge and to admire the swan's beauty and grace.⁸¹⁶

Given Fredericksen's argument above, Weir's use of birds in flight and the centrality of the swan points to archetypes common to all mystical traditions.⁸¹⁷

"Shamans in ecstatic trance claim to leave the body and to take flight like a bird, or to ride like a bird."⁸¹⁸ In Jungian terms this is done for two reasons: to transcend the space of the here and now, and so reach heaven; and to transcend time. Just before she begins her climb heavenward, when Mr Hussey and Miss McCraw's watches have stopped on twelve noon, Miranda is asked for the time. "Miranda, your pretty little diamond watch, can you tell us the time?" "I don't wear it anymore. I can't stand the ticking of it all day long just above my heart." Miranda's heart is already somewhere else where time stands still. Soon her body will arrive at the same destination.

As if to underline the timeless and non-spatial aspects of the narrative even further, Weir invokes another bird-like mythical creature, but one that comes from the next world to this: the angel. When Mademoiselle sees Miranda give a fateful wave, a scene that is repeated three times in the film, she declares, "Now I know...I know that Miranda is a Botticelli angel." Weir makes a mistake when he cuts to the close-up of the book upon which Mademoiselle has made this association, because she is not looking at a Botticelli angel at all.⁸¹⁹ She is looking at a detail of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus."⁸²⁰ Angels were a common subject for Botticelli with his "Coronation of the Virgin with the Saints" or "Madonna with the Angels" or "The Annunciation" but

⁸¹⁶ See: W Terry, *Ballet Guide*, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1976; www.websserver.rcds.rye.ny.us/id/Dance/dancepage.

⁸¹⁷ It is not by accident, for example, that Christian theology completes its life/death/resurrection motif through the sending of the Holy Spirit, often pictured as bird, usually a dove.

⁸¹⁸ Fredericksen D, "Jung/sign/symbol/film, part two", p. 472.

⁸¹⁹ On the set Producer Patricia Lovell pointed out to Weir that Venus was not an angel but a goddess, "but Peter wanted to keep the shot because he understood the term "angel" in a more broad category, and because that picture matched Anne's (Miranda) hair so perfectly." *Interview by the Author*, Sydney, Tuesday 24th September 2002.

⁸²⁰ Sandro Botticelli (1446-1510), *The Birth of Venus* c.1485-86, painted for the villa of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici at Castello, Tempera on canvas, 172.5 x 278.5 cm, now in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Scholars of this period liked Greek and Roman mythology. The story of Venus' birth "was the symbol of mystery through which the divine message of beauty came into the world. One can imagine that the painter set to work reverently to represent this myth in a worthy manner. The action of the picture is quickly understood. Venus has emerged from the sea on a shell which is driven to the shore by flying wind-gods amidst a shower of roses. As she is about to step on to the land, one of the Hours or Nymphs receives her with a purple cloak." See, www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/botticelli/venus.

these images would not have given Weir the same likeness to Miranda. The reference to a Botticelli angel is found in Green's screenplay, which has Mademoiselle exclaiming "Mon Dieu!" before stating her insight. For an unknown reason the actor Helen Morse does not say this line in the take Weir uses. It would have made sense to include it. The Christian tradition upon which Botticelli was painting holds that Angels are disembodied spirits, created by God, with free will. The name comes from the Greek word "angelos" which in turn comes from the Hebrew word "mal'ak" meaning messenger. Angels can be identified in the mystical literature of the Semitic cults, in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Babylonia. In the Bible good angels live in heaven with God and are either God's messengers⁸²¹ or guardians of people on earth.⁸²² It is as emissaries from heaven that angels were commonly described, and were later painted, as taking human form with translucent bird's wings attached. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* uses both these images of the angel. Apart from the direct reference to Miranda as an angel, her arm movements when she starts off on her climb up the rock, especially in slow motion, resemble the fluttering of wings. As a messenger Miranda declares that the line between this world and the next is less fixed than the spectator imagines.

The guardian angel is directly referred to in the painting on the wall of Sara and Miranda's bedroom. It is clearly in shot between Mademoiselle and Sara when she explains to her that Miranda, who has acted as a surrogate guardian angel for Sara up to St Valentine's Day, has gone forever. Toward the end of the film, when Mrs Appleyard goes to Sara's bedroom to tell her she must be sent away from the school, this framed print has been removed from the wall. It could just be an error in continuity or a visual queue that Miranda, Sara's guardian angel, has left her unprotected from Mrs Appleyard. A more oblique reference to the guardian angel comes when Doctor McKenzie explains to Sergeant Bumphrey that Irma's "...feet are unmarked. That's very strange, because she wasn't wearing shoes or stockings when she was found." Irma who was not able to complete the journey with Miranda and Marion, has nonetheless been in the presence of girls considered and painted as angels. At this point Green and Weir make reference to Psalm 91, "...he put his angels in charge to guard you wherever you go. They will support you in their hands

⁸²¹ See, for example: Psalm 8: 6; Psalm 48: 2, 5; Luke 2; Colossians 1: 16.

⁸²² See, for example: Matthew 6: 6; Genesis 16: 16; Matthew 18: 10; Acts of the Apostles 12: 7.

lest you dash your foot against a stone.”⁸²³ Dreams, birds and the Rock all operate metonymically within the text to signify its mysticism.

There are, however, other mystical references clearly drawn in the narrative. Against the now commonplace reading of this film as a commentary on repressed sexuality, with Victorian virgins mounting Hanging Rock, it is also possible to see Miranda’s ascent up the mountain as a quest for unity, illumination and instruction, a theme common to almost all mystical traditions. The mountaintop was often the place where the sacred presence could be encountered in the most vivid of ways. “Some mountains can be approached only with the greatest caution, if at all, for the gods live there...like Zeus and Rudra.”⁸²⁴ Self-evidently Hanging Rock looms large in this narrative, but what is often overlooked is Edith’s report that as she was coming down from the rock she saw a “a cloud... it was red.” And through it the spinster Miss McCraw passes as she ascends the Rock and vanishes. In nearly every religious collective in the world, cloud-cover on mountains was evocative of the presence of the ultimate reality who usually lived in the sky.⁸²⁵ Furthermore it cannot be by accident that Marion is a variation on the name Miriam who in the Book of Numbers is called to accompany Moses, and her brother Aaron, to witness “the Lord descend in a pillar of cloud.”⁸²⁶ Although William Shakespeare invented the name Miranda, which means “extraordinary” or “admirable” for his play *The Tempest* in 1611, it has its root in the Spanish verb “mirar”. This has a special importance for this study, for it means “to look at.”⁸²⁷ The physical journeys of both Shakespeare’s and Weir’s Mirandas involve spirits, nature, special knowledge and love through which both discover “a brave, new world”⁸²⁸ Miranda goes up the mountain and is consumed by the clouds.

An equally ancient and cross-cultural tradition is that celibate priests and virgin women are the only ones allowed into the holiest of holies, whether that is in a temple or outdoors.⁸²⁹ This has a special resonance in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* because the dramatic events occur on St Valentine’s Day. Understandably many

⁸²³ Psalm 91: 11-12.

⁸²⁴ Smart N, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, p. 154.

⁸²⁵ Ibid. p. 52.

⁸²⁶ See Numbers 12: 5f.

⁸²⁷ See www.medievalscotland.org/problem/names/miranda.

⁸²⁸ Roginski E, “Picnic at Hanging Rock”, *Film Quarterly*, 32, 4, 1979, p. 24.

⁸²⁹ Maguire M, *Religion: the Social Context*, pp. 121f.

commentators, along with Weir,⁸³⁰ simply take a modern reading of the intertextuality here, addressing themselves only to the romantic connotations of the day, based as it is on the ancient Roman festival of Lupercalia, dedicated to the goddess of the fever of love, Juno Februata.⁸³¹ As in other instances, Christianity took over the feast and gave it a new meaning.⁸³² Valentine was martyred at Rome in the third century for refusing to give up his faith in Jesus Christ. Whomever else he may have loved in this world, Valentine became a symbol of Otherworldly love and self-sacrifice. The story of Valentine provides another, neglected but consistent reading with the narrative of this film. Miranda leads the other girls in the celebration of Valentine's memory, especially in the cutting of heart-shaped cake at the base of Hanging Rock and she emulates the saint by being a sacrificial virgin to Otherworldly love. There is no record of how St Valentine died. The mythical and angelic Miranda, however, ventures up the mountain and is assumed into a spiritual state that could be described as heaven. Appropriately, then, when the girls of Appleyard College go to the local Church the next day, the postlude playing as they recess out of the church, "Rock of Ages." The final verse runs:

While I draw this fleeting breath
 When my eyelids close in death
 When I soar through tracts unknown
 See thee on thy judgement throne,
 Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in thee.

Laura Mulvey, in "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema", alerts us to the way the narrative codifies the spectator's gaze. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* Peter Weir was attracted to the mysticism in the narrative at the outset. So strong was his identification with the Otherworldly sensibilities in Lindsay's novel, he said he felt he could have written it. He informs the spectator several times that the story is a

⁸³⁰ "The tragedy had its beginnings on St Valentine's Day. Traditionally, it's the day of the pairing of the birds. And from the moment the day begins, the story is about the failure of birds to pair and connections to be made." Peter Weir, in J Dawson, "Picnic Under Capricorn", *Sight and Sound*, 45, 2, 1976, p. 83.

⁸³¹ "Young men would select partners for erotic games by drawing small papers with women's names on them—obviously the ancestors of modern-day Valentine cards." See, C Cavagna, "*Picnic at Hanging Rock*", www.aboutfilm.com/movies/p/picnichangingrock.

⁸³² Scholars are divided about the pagan feasts Christianity took over, but prominent ones discussed include: the Winter Solstice of Mithra as Christmas Day; the Summer Solstice as the Birth of John the Baptist; Samhain, the Celtic festival of the dead, as All Saints Day and All Souls Day. For a full discussion see, www.greenbelt.com/news/ic9903.htm and F Wieser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs: the Year of the Lord and Folklore*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958, p. 57.

mystery, but he also attends to extraordinary period details and elicits such natural and nuanced performances that the film is read more as an historical rather than a fictional drama. Weir heightens the mystical awareness of the spectator by using cross-cultural, long-standing and archetypal elements of mysticism: dreams as the point of access to the world of unconscious; symbols like birds, water, mountains and clouds. He deftly employs intertextuality through traditions in regard to the ascent to the numinous, farewell discourses, ascensions or assumptions, virgin-martyrs, angels and metaphors of God as a rock. Weir displays these symbols or narratives from other texts metonymically to enable the spectator to encounter a sense of transcendence, or the fluidity between the conscious and the unconscious, as they watch the film. In doing this he not only advocates a new cosmology through his characters on the screen, but he creates one in the cinema as well. In the next section I will look at how the apparatus at his disposal helps him achieve this outcome.

A Participatory, Empathetic Identification

As I have identified in preceding chapters, the gaze is an interplay between phantasy and subjectivity. Baudry's work on the ideology of the cinema is based on the illusion that that spectator is omniscient and omnipotent, both highly charged terms borrowed from theology. The apparatus at the disposal of the director both in the shoot, edit and in the exhibition enables him or her to situate the spectator's gaze for pleasure or displeasure.⁸³³ Mulvey rightly extends Baudry's insight to argue that the spectator's gaze is not only created by the apparatus, but that the spectator is also an active participant in the creation of meaning from the filmic text.⁸³⁴ I have already outlined the parallels between the environment of the cinema and the ways in which it borrows and mirrors that of a temple or cathedral. Focusing on what was at Weir's disposal in terms of framing, lighting, camera angles, sound and sequences, I will look at how the empathetic structures of the mystical gaze are visually and aurally constructed and explore for whom Weir creates as the "I" and the "thou" of this particular gaze.

There are two sequences within *Picnic at Hanging Rock* where Weir's mystical intentions are clearest in the way he uses the apparatus: the girls' and their

⁸³³ See J-L Baudry, "Ideological effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus", *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, P Rosen (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

⁸³⁴ Mulvey L, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema" pp. 8f.

teacher's venture up Hanging Rock; Michael's and Albert's search-and-find mission. There are, however, seven climbs in the film: Miranda and the girls; two each by Michael and Albert; and two that are reported, one each by Miss McCraw and Mrs Appleyard. Michael climbs because he seeks Miranda, Albert climbs because he seeks Michael and but it is never fully clear why Mrs Appleyard climbs at all. That leaves Miranda, Marion and Miss McCraw climbing because they want to. These climbing sequences are where Peter Weir has placed his particular creative emphasis. Together these sequences constitute a quarter of the film.

1. The Girl's Climb: "Come My Lovely Ones, Come."

This nineteen minute and forty-two second sequence involves 32 scenes and can be shown by the following table.⁸³⁵

16: 02-16:14	Miranda unlocks the gate to the picnic ground.
16:15-16:27	An ominous flock of birds flies overhead. Miranda is mesmerised by them.
16:28-16:45	The girls toast St Valentine and Miranda cuts the heart-shaped cake.
16:46-18:52	Mrs Appleyard chastises Sara. She pines for Bertie and Miranda.
18:53-20:39	Watches are found to have stopped at 12.00 midday.
20:40-20:49	Edith observes that, "Except for those people down there, we might be the only living creatures in the whole world."
20:50-21:40	The girls ask permission to go to the Rock.
21:41-21:54	In slow motion Miranda waves farewell to Mademoiselle.
21:55-22:19	Mademoiselle recognises Miranda as a "Botticelli angel".
22:20-23:04	The girls run to the creek.
23:05-24:11	Michael and Albert comment on the girls' beauty as they watch them cross over the water.
24:12-24:36	Miranda turns and looks at Michael.
24:37-25:03	Michael crosses the creek and follows the girls.
25:04-25:54	The quartet of girls begin the walk up the Rock.
25:55-26:06	Miranda admires the Rock, "Look, way up there in the sky."
26:07-27:34	The girls are surrounded by the Rock as they hold hands on the steeper climb.
27:35-27:54	Edith says, "Why can't we sit on this log and look at the ugly old Rock from here? It's nasty here. I never thought it would be so nasty or I wouldn't have come."

⁸³⁵ This term is used in relation to various shots in a sequence. "The shot is the single 'run' of the camera. This is the basic unit from which a film is constructed. The length (or duration) of a shot depends upon: a) its purpose i.e. establishing a place; b) to show action; c) to show reaction; d) the pace (or tempo) of the sequence in which it occurs. The sequence is a group of shots depicting one action, or, which seems to belong with or depend upon each other... the scene is a group of sequences, or, (for short scenes) a group of shots, which: a) depict an event in the story and b) occur in one place. A scene is generally a larger unit than a sequence (though sometimes a group of shots can be classified as either)." The New Zealand Ministry of Education, "The language of film and video", www.english.unitecuniversity.ac.nz/resources/resources/film, Wellington, 2002.

27:54-28:46	The girls walk through a narrow corridor inside the walls of the Rock exploring crevices and caves.
28:47-28:58	Miranda assumes leadership of the climb. "We can't go much further. We promised Mademoiselle we wouldn't be long away."
28:59-29:38	Irma says "If only we could stay out here all night."
29:40-30:32	Irma likens Sara to a deer that was "doomed to die", Edith falls asleep.
30:33-31:36	Twelve dissolving shots between Miranda in slow motion turning her head, pans of the Rock, Irma swirling her skirt against the bright afternoon sun, a slow-motion shot of Miranda removing her stockings and the three girls removing their shoes.
31:37-32:05	Edith wakes and discovers the shoeless Marion. Miranda and Irma began another upward climb as Edith calls out, "Where on earth are you going?" and scurries after them.
32:06- 33:11	Marion looks at the people at the base of the Rock and observes, "a surprising number of human beings go through life without purpose...Although it's probable that they are performing some function unknown to themselves." To which Miranda declares, "Everything begins and ends at exactly the right time and place."
33:12-33:33	The quartet reaches another shelf in the Rock and drops to the ground and falls asleep.
33:34-33:44	A lizard calmly walks between the girls.
33:45-34:21	Miss McCraw is drawn to the presence and power of the Rock.
34:22-34:28	The girls are watched while they are asleep.
34:29-35:20	The girls rise up for the final assault on the summit.
35:21-35:31	Edith says she feels awful, wants to know where the other three are going and repeatedly asks, "When are we going home?"
35:32-35:36	Edith calls for them not to "go up there. Come back!" and screams as they disappear from view.
35:37-35:41	From a high vantage, Edith is seen running down the Rock.

For the first half of this sequence the spectator is positioned to have an empathetic look focussed on Miranda. The story is initially told from her point of view. Her name is called out 12 times in the sequence. Already established in the narrative as more mature, insightful and knowing than the other girls, Miranda is not afraid at the ominous flock of birds that flies overhead when she opens the gate to the picnic ground (16:15). The very slight slow-motion wide-shot followed by a close up frame of Miranda waving farewell to Mademoiselle (21:41), underlines the angelic observations Mademoiselle is about to make about Miranda and reinforces the ethereal quality surrounding her. A similar frame is used when Michael watches Miranda cross the water and run off towards the Rock (23:05). He follows, but is never seen again in the sequence.

Although Miranda did not ask to undertake the climb and she does not initially lead the group, most of the point-of-view shots constructed by Weir belong to her. It is Miranda who calls the group to behold the Rock “Look, way up there in the sky” (25:55). Emphasising the religious aspects of these shots Roginski has outlined how Hanging Rock is like a temple, “complete with gargoyle figures embedded in its heights...(and) produces the effect of a temple housing a hundred ancient faces gazing at the picnickers below.”⁸³⁶ When they begin their ascent it is Miranda who opines, “We can’t go much further, we promised Mademoiselle we wouldn’t be long away” (28:47). Immediately she continues to lead the group up and on. It is Miranda who leads her companions into their afternoon sleep on the Rock, who awakens first and silently leads Irma and Marion away to the summit (34:29). Before they do the girls speak of destiny, the meaning of life, they toss their hair, swirl skirts and remove their stockings and shoes (30:33). The spectator’s desire is heightened for the girls through the fetishisation of their hair, legs and body form. In every respect the spectator is situated to desire Miranda, and even to desire to be her, to identify and empathise with her.

The Omniscient Look

Just over half way through this sequence Weir repositions the spectator. “What I attempted somewhere in the middle of the film is, was to gently shift emphasis off the mystery in the first half to develop the oppressive atmosphere...to bring out a tension and claustrophobia in the locations and the relationships.”⁸³⁷ In fact what Weir does is construct a new relationship between the spectator and the characters within the diegesis. As the girls’ climb, Weir draws the camera around 240-degrees. From this point on the spectator assumes a mobile gaze within the sequence, between an identification with Miranda and being the all-knowing presence who observes them from afar.

Weir constructs this omniscient look four times in this sequence. From 26:46-27:19, through a medium long shot to a high, sharp angle tilt down, the spectator watches the girls walk into the Rock. From 27:55-28:40, through a series of medium close ups to medium wide shots from within crevices and caves, and then to an extreme, high angle, pan left to right of screen the spectator becomes the watcher of

⁸³⁶ Roginski E, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, pp. 23f.

⁸³⁷ Weir in J Dawson, “*Picnic under Capricorn*”, p. 83.

the girls as they walk through a narrow corridor between the rocks, look inside the caves, find nothing as they peer in, and pass on. The spectator's invisible presence as voyeur within the diegesis is entirely legitimated as she/he is positioned above the girls and encouraged to observe from above – in a god's eyeshot. At 28:58-29:14, just before the summit and during their dreamy sleep, from a high angle long shot from the summit, the spectator is further constructed as the presiding presence, and sees a frilly lizard, the Australian version of the primordial snake, walk through the forms of the sleeping girls as though they were an expected and natural part of the terrain.⁸³⁸ As the girls wake the urgent sound of birds of prey begins. With new and urgent impetus the girls mount the summit of the Rock and consummate their and the spectator's desires.

Weir enhances the mystical quality in this sequences by using threatening bird calls, the sound of water, the crossing of water, names being called out, the urgent synthesiser with an ominous celestial chorus, sharp low-angle shots of the Rock, swirling winds and electronic thunder. When Edith observes that, "except for those people down there, we might be the only living creatures in the whole world", her observation ushers in the ethereal "Flute du Pan", which has already been established as the film's theme music. It continues as the girls ask permission to go to the Rock. It reemerges again at the creek. When the girls have crossed the stream and Michael has made the crossing, a more urgent piano accompanied by the synthesized celestial chorus underscores a long tilt down from the sun to the earth which finds the quartet of girls walking upward. As the girls climb, and the spectator is repositioned with an omnipotent look, the music reaches its first climax point with a synthesised thunder roll. In quick succession there are a series of extreme high angle framing shots, intercut with the girls' point of view. From then on the music becomes threatening and urgent. Distorted, elongated musical notes accompany the girl's explorations of the crevices and caves as the spectator invisibly observes them. At the climax of the scene the girls wake Edith, who expresses the spectator's question, "When are we going home?" In a small, slow motion pan from right to left the girls rise up and out of shot, Edith calls for them not to "go up there, come back", then screams as they disappear from view. As the spectator tracks Edith's descent from the Rock by an

⁸³⁸ Roginski invokes similar references to the Book of Genesis in describing Appleyard College as a "hot-house Eden". See E Roginski, "*Picnic at Hanging Rock*", p. 23.

aerial shot, the synthesised thunder roll and wind reach an aural climax on the sound track.

Throughout this entire sequence Weir carefully constructs the all-encompassing mystical gaze and asks the spectator to investigate with him the nature of the permeability between realities. There is nothing in Miranda's demeanour at the picnic ground, where she closely inspects a flower under a magnifying glass, that indicates that within minutes she is planning to take her friends away and vanish at the top of Hanging Rock. The spectator achieves omniscience by knowing what will happen to some of these characters before they know it themselves. Miranda becomes a disembodied spirit whose destiny influences the future of many others, indeed the entire world of Appleyard College. And like an angel of light Miranda does not have a will of her own for even when she contemplate going back, she pushes on, drawn by whatever it is the Rock holds for her. Against all visual cues, the Rock has a magnetism and force that is both irresistible and repulsive. Most effectively of all is the position that the spectator assumes as the unseen force or power that surrounds those drawn to the Rock. The girls vanish before our eyes in the cinema, in the empty space between the screen and the spectator. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the mystical gaze is identified with an all consuming force or power which annihilates the heroine in the mysterious worlds of intimacy, desire and death.

2. The Boys' Climb: Mount Your Horses and Be Gone

A Participatory, Empathetic Identification

Weir prepares and constructs the ascent of the boys as carefully as the girls but with contrasting emphases and results. Again Weir first encourages the spectator to empathise with the characters. As Michael prepares to climb there are three, medium close ups of a spider spinning its web and two birds, a cockatoo and a parrot. The final shot in this sequence is of a koala in the tree. Against the world of the Australian Bush Michael is about to get caught up in a web of intrigue out of which he will not find his own way out. The spectator is drawn into the urgency of Michael's search, hoping along with Michael that it will be successful. Against the mores of the day, Michael and Albert are much slower climbers than the girls. The girls who seemed so at home on the Rock are contrasted to Michael who has to mark out his way. The

spectator concludes that Miranda and Marion knew where they going and how to get there, or they were shown the path to take, whereas Michael and Albert are outsiders.

Michael's decision to stay on the Rock overnight leads the spectator, falsely as it turns out, to believe that the sinister happenings there will be revealed in the darkness of night. It confirms the change in the spectator from seeing Michael as a suspect in the girls' disappearance to Miranda's forlorn potential lover. This again elicits sympathy for Michael. When he falls asleep and dreams of the girls and the events around their disappearance the spectator thinks that Michael is gaining some insight as to their whereabouts. On waking he urgently tries the final ascent, which is much steeper than the one the girls undertook, and collapses. When Albert finds Michael lying against a rock, conscious but uncommunicative, the spectator is left to speculate if he is injured, exhausted or has seen something terrible. As Albert places Michael in the buggy, he extends his shaking fist to him. It contains a fragment of white linen cloth, similar to the cloth of the dresses worn by the girls on the day they disappeared. The spectator understands that Michael has found at least one piece of evidence that the girls did not just vanish. This becomes Albert's queue to continue the search.

The attention of the spectator now moves to Albert who scales the Rock with ease. He knows how to get back to where he found Michael. When he comes to the crevice bordered by long tufts of sun-bleached grass, the one down which Michael fell, the more physically strong and Australian-born Albert is able to pull himself up, and make the climb. In a cleft in the Rock Albert finds Irma and calls out for help. Weir provides another diversion for the spectator. There is a sense now that the film is about lost children in the Australian bush, and that by the end of the narrative, Marion and Miranda will found, dead or alive. Irma, however, has lost her memory of what happened on the Rock and is of no assistance in the recovery of the other girls. The spectator now empathises with anyone who encounters the disturbing sinister presence at the Rock. Michael was left exhausted and struck dumb, while Irma was left with amnesia. Albert never attempts to mount the summit and never falls asleep. On both climbs Albert finds what he is looking for: Michael and one of the girls. Only the more earthy and sexually aware Albert climbs the Rock with no apparent deficit because he does not directly encounter its force.

The Omniscient Look

In my analysis of the girl's climb I have pointed out that Weir repositions the spectator almost half way through the series of scenes. In the boy's climb Weir repositions the spectator at almost the same stage in the sequence. This twelve minute and fifty-two second sequence involves 28 scenes and can summarised on the following table.

54:03-54:53	At sun-up Michael and Albert mount their horses and ride to the Rock.
54:54-55:04	As Michael begins to climb, he sees a spider spinning its web, two birds, a cockatoo, a parrot and a somnolent koala.
55:05-55:09	He begins the climb.
55:10-55:19	Albert calling out "Coo-ee" to the lost girl.
55:20-56:07	Michael encounters steep terrain on the Rock which he finds impossible to mount.
56:08-56:25	Michael finds a cave opening high up on the side of the Rock. He calls out "Hello". There is no response.
56:26-56:53	Albert calls out to Michael, who places a white piece of paper as a marker on a tree, and descends to join Albert at the creek for afternoon tea.
56:54-57:39	Michael tells Albert he is going to stay on the Rock overnight.
57:40-58:23	At home Albert lies for Michael about his whereabouts.
58:24-58:38	At night Michael lies down on the Rock.
58:39-58:45	Albert awake in his bed at home.
58:46-59:43	At dawn Michael sees the marker and starts to search again, following the trail of white pieces of paper.
59:44-59:58	He is stopped by an aroused frilly lizard.
59:59-60:16	Michael passes similar caves to the ones we saw the girls look into.
60:17-60:41	Michael arrives at a shelf in the Rock and falls asleep.
60:42-61:29	Michael's dream.
61:30-62:03	Dazed and frightened Michael pushes on with his search for Miranda.
63:04-62:18	He pulls himself up through a crevice in the Rock which has long tufts of grass similar in colour to Miranda's hair. Almost at the summit, Michael struggles to climb up the last vertical wall of the Rock. He cries and struggles to get a hold onto the side of the Rock. He collapses saying, "She's here somewhere."

61:19-62:43	Albert arrives at Michael's base camp, next to the river.
62:44-63:09	Albert calls out "Coo-ee!"
63:10-63:20	Albert finds Michael's white paper markers.
63:21-63:41	He begins his quick ascent of the Rock's crevices.
63:42-64:03	Albert soon finds Michael. He races for help.
64:05-64:59	As Michael is placed in the buggy he gives Albert a fragment of white linen cloth.
65:00-65:19	Albert races up the side of the Rock.
65:20-65:37	Albert pulls himself up to make the climb.
65:38-65:45	Albert finds Irma alive under a cleft. He cries out for help.
65:46-66:55	He runs to the summit of the Rock waves his hat and calls for help.

Seven minutes and seven seconds into the sequence, the spectator is repositioned and encouraged to exercise an omnipotent look. Michael is stopped by an aroused frilly lizard (59:44), similar to the one which peacefully passed between the sleeping girls only days before. As he tentatively passes the lizard, the camera changes its position and angle. The spectator now observes him from an overhead shot. He passes similar caves to the ones the girls looked into. Again, the spectator is positioned from inside the cave looking out at him (59:59). From a high-angle, medium wide shot the spectator sees Michael arrive at a shelf on the Rock. Like the girls he is overcome with tiredness and falls asleep. During his fitful sleep a series of statements is heard on the sound track. They are part of Michael's dreaming (60:42):

It stopped at 12. Never stopped before. Everything begins and ends at exactly the right time. Waiting a million years, just for us. The rock, up there in the sky. Now I know. What do you know? Surprising how many humans are without purpose, though it is probable that they fulfil some function. Everything begins and ends at exactly the right time.

As this last statement is heard, the spectator sees Miranda taking her final steps toward the summit. This is superimposed on the slumbering Michael. His sleep abruptly ends with a superimposed shot of Edith screaming.

What is most striking about this sequence is that, except for Edith's scream, Michael, unlike the spectator, has never heard any of these comments before, they are not part of his personal memory. On the Rock, however, when he comes close to the place of Miranda's disappearance, Michael becomes a gnostic, imbued with special knowledge and visions. Although Michael has climbed upwards, this sequence has

parallels to Orpheus' descent to the underworld for Michael has penetrated the mythological inner space.⁸³⁹ Almost at the summit, Michael struggles to climb up the last vertical wall of the Rock. He cries and struggles to get a hold onto the side of the Rock. The camera pulls back through a cave at the top of the monolith. The spectator watches and hears Michael desperately say, "She's here somewhere." But she's not. Miranda is only alive in Michael's memory and dreams, which are now part of the archetypal, collective memory of the Rock. Weir has again recast the spectator as the force, energy or presence of the Rock: omnipresent and omnipotent.

The dream sequence at the end of Michael's climb enables Weir to further construct the mystical gaze by exploring the realm in which some people report a mystical experience: in their dreams, where knowledge is revealed through what is seen and heard. This is true for Michael and for the spectator. The fluidity Weir is exploring in the cosmology of the narrative is likened to the fluidity the spectator sometimes has in distinguishing the real from the unreal, in the world of dreams.

As in dreams Weir plays with time and space throughout *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. There is the stopping of watches and clocks, characters losing track of, or disregarding time, the play between day and night, frequent use of slow motion where our attention is forced on the details in the frame, and the use of dream scenes, out of which Miranda walks to her vanishing point and Michael risks his life in an attempt at the same thing.⁸⁴⁰ In terms of altered spaces the girls leave the school in their buggy in the mid-morning, travelling through the town and arriving at the Rock in time for morning tea. By contrast the boys rise at dawn to make their way to the Rock. They ride horses cross-country and, though the Rock is in view early in their journey, it takes them much longer to get there. Even on the Rock Weir alters the time. The girls left shortly after 2.00pm and were intending to be back by teatime, which should have been around 4.00pm. During this period they casually reach the summit. But the men seem to take much longer to make a similar climb. Even though Michael and Albert are physically stronger, the shots of the imposing summit against the noonday sun leads the spectator to understand that this climb is anything but a picnic for the boys. Furthermore, the boys enter the frame on the right and exist on the left. Miranda and the girls enter on the left and exist on the right. This creates the impression that the

⁸³⁹ Wright R, *Metaphors of Femininity and the Landscape in Australian Cinema: Five 'New Wave' Films*, Unpublished Masters Thesis, Monash University, Melbourne, 1992, p. 9.

⁸⁴⁰ Scott Murray describes the climbs of the Rock as the journey inside "a new time zone". See S Murray, "*Picnic at Hanging Rock*", p. 264.

climbers can be viewed on the Rock from any vantage point. The spectator achieves omnipresence and assumes several and often conflicting positions within the diegesis as Weir carefully deconstructs the time and space around the Rock.

Illumination

There are parallels here between Weir's construction of the diegesis in terms of Michael's climb and the latter part of the girls' climb: the sound of running water at the crossing of the creek; the "Flute du Pan" accompanying the assault on the Rock; strong bird and wind sounds return; a lizard appears: the need for sleep is felt: the sense of being watched is created as the climbers are observed from within caves and from overhead shots; Miranda's name is called out several times; and there are rolls of thunder. There are several marked contrasts as well that indicate to the spectator that the boys' ascent of the Rock will be unconsummated. There are never slow-motion pictures of Michael or Albert climbing Hanging Rock.

Similar to the first climbing sequence, when the spectator is repositioned with an omniscient look in the diegesis, the thunder roll starts, though it is less urgent and sinister than it was during the girls' climb. As Michael, and later Albert, climbs higher an exaggerated hum of cicadas, framed low angle shots of the Rock, wind sounds and the call of birds of prey being again.

There are three unsuccessful climbs of Hanging Rock: Michael's; Albert's; and Mrs Appleyard's. These three are irresistibly drawn to Hanging Rock as well, but they are not consumed by it. They do not or cannot possess the ways of the Rock that the virgins intuitively possess. The boys' presence is more threatening and, though it leads Michael into a similar slumber and to paranormal dreaming, he wakes to failure. The difference is that Miranda and Marion desire to be one with the Rock, or the force of nature surrounding it. The spectator understands that at the Rock time stands still, space is reordered and questions of destiny, meaning and identity have greater clarity. Everyone and everything has a time and place, a beginning and an end. By contrast, the men do not seek unity with the power of nature. They seek the ones they have lost and so are "doomed" to failure and death. Through the exchange of the looks of the camera, the gaze of the audience as a brooding presence and the looks between the characters the spectator sees in Miranda and Marion, virgins martyrs who have acquired the knowledge they need, know where to go, divest themselves of the constraints that hold them back and mount the summit, the totem of the force of

nature. They vanish. This is the moment of illumination for the spectator. These women are like the vestal virgins of old, the Virgin Mary in the Christian tradition or the martyrs and angels in several mystical collectives. They gain access to the presence of the deity, spirit or force through their purity. Everyone who vanishes on the Rock is a female virgin. Others are not acceptable. The spectator's desire, encoded by Weir through symbols of sexuality and death, sees that the Rock rejects men and non-virgins.

3. Old Virgins and Bitter Fruit

In a film about unseen worlds, powers and activities, it is entirely appropriate that two of the central, most inexplicable, elements in the story are not shown on the screen. Spectators, therefore, are not positioned in these sequences to exercise the mystical gaze, but it reinforces the mystical world into which they have entered and Peter Weir's presumptions about the gender of the omnipotent force he has represented.

During the girls' climb Weir returns the spectator back to the school party at the base of the Rock, to Miss McCraw. The spectator follows her point of view as she looks up toward to the Rock and then back down to her geometry book. It was Miss McCraw whose watch had stopped earlier. The second climb of the film is by Miss McCraw. It is one of two unseen ascents of the Rock and yet it further links tropes of mysticism, sexuality and androgyny.

By the time the girls return to school at night, all the spectator knows is that three girls and Miss McCraw are missing on the Rock. The spectator assumes that Miss McCraw is lost trying to find the girls. The next day the bedridden Irma states that when she was running down the Rock she passed Miss McCraw running in the opposite direction. Edith describes two other details in the scene; that the Rock was covered in a red cloud, and that the last she saw of the refined and meticulously groomed Miss McCraw she was skirtless. Miss McCraw vanishes as well.

Miss McCraw's disappearance breaks the young-beautiful-virgin-sacrifice paradigm. The spectator has to deal with the disappearance of an old, plain virgin as well. Irma's image of the red cloud covering the mountain paints a scene in which the Rock is gorging on the young girls, but it soon finds room to taste a more mature morsel as well. By the time Miss McCraw passes Irma she is already throwing off the strictures of Victoriana and assuming a more natural state.

The spectator has already been encouraged to identify Miranda as an angel, a disembodied spirit. It seems, however, that older virgins can be angels too. On the feast of Valentine, the virgin martyrs, Miranda, Marion and Miss McCraw vanish, either to die, be assumed into the heavens or be consumed by the Rock. This last point bears the greatest significance to the mystical gaze and its relationship to sexuality. Given that Weir bestows on the spectator the look of an unseen power or force working around a natural phenomenon, the force is unmistakably male, but the viewer gazes out from caves and crevices which are clearly female.⁸⁴¹ Apart from the phallic nature of the Rock described by Miss McCraw as “a recent eruption... silicious lava, forced up from deep down below. Soda trachytes extruded in a highly viscous state, building the steep-sided mametons...”, the look of the camera in all its views towards the girls as they explore the Rock encourages pleasurable desire. Unlike the boys and Mrs Appleyard, as I will soon show, the virgins are able to successfully negotiate their way to the summit. On the way up the spectator sees them looking in womb-like caves, up crevices, but they are unaware of being watched. The spectator is already watching the girls, conscious of their exploration and of the sexualised nature of their journey.

The last climb in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* comes in the final scene of the film. It deserves careful reading. The interior of the door to Mrs Appleyard’s office is framed in a medium wide shot. The clock is loudly ticking. Someone is pounding on the door. The distressed cry of a woman can be heard. It is coming from inside the room. The gardener Mr Whitehead, who just made the grisly discovery of Sara’s body in the greenhouse, opens the door and leans heavily upon it. When he enters the room the crying stops immediately. Was Mrs Appleyard upset? Was it her memory of Sara’s final, distressed cry? In a reverse angle shot Mrs Appleyard is seen to be imperiously sitting at her desk. Extraordinarily she is wearing the same hat as Miss McCraw wore to the picnic on St Valentine’s Day. Miss McCraw’s hat had a brown feather on the left hand side of the crown. Mrs Appleyard has a large black feather in

⁸⁴¹ Against the usual reading of the phallic nature of the rock Scott Murray argues that “the rock has a clearly feminine sexuality about it, with its womb-like cavities and crevices.” Murray implies that mother earth has consumed her daughters and that their exploration of the rock is akin to the exploration of their homosexual desires for each other. Michael cannot enter where the girls have gone because “after all it is an unconsummated and heterosexual love that draws him there. See S Murray, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock*”, p. 264.

The problem with Murray’s argument is that we could think that the homoerotic overtones in Mrs Appleyard’s grief at losing the enjoyment of Miss McCraw’s “masculine intellect” should have gained her admission to the womb of the Rock as well.

its place. She shows no sign of emotional distress. The room has been cleared of all her personal effects. Her packed bags and hatboxes surround the desk. Mrs Appleyard's gaze is fixed ahead of her. In a close up of the shocked Mr Whitehead he says twice, "Sara. "Sara." The ticking clock dominates the sound track. In a close up of Mrs Appleyard, she slowly turns her head toward Mr Whitehead and now fixes her gaze upon him. She says nothing. This shot is held for 33 seconds. The clock stops ticking after ten seconds. Five seconds later a voice-over narrates:

The body of Mrs Arthur Appleyard, principal of Appleyard College, was found at the base of Hanging Rock on Friday 27th March, 1900. Although the exact circumstances of her death are not known, it is believed she fell while attempting to climb the Rock.

The final music of the film, Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, begins as the voice-over continues.

The search for the missing school girls and their governess continued spasmodically for several years without success. And to this day their disappearance remains a mystery.

Over these words comes an extreme slow motion and long pan from right to left of the picnicking school girls, Miss McCraw reading, Edith eating, Miranda inspecting some flowers under a magnifying glass and Mademoiselle talking to some students. At the climax point in the music, Weir cuts to another slow motion shot of Miranda waving goodbye to Mademoiselle who returns the wave. Then, as Miranda turns her head as if to run off, the frame is frozen and is burnt out through the sunlight falling on Miranda's blonde hair.

The reported climbs of Miss Craw and Mrs Appleyard are significant because they enable Weir to raise even more questions about the mystery in the narrative. Because Weir has been so successful in creating an altered cosmology within the world of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the spectator accepts the reports of the disappearance of Miss McCraw without seeing her walk to her vanishing point, and Mrs Appleyard's death without seeing her body at the base of the Rock.⁸⁴² From the dinner scene the night before she commits suicide, Mrs Appleyard grieves for the lost Miss McCraw. This death triggers memories of her late husband. Mrs Appleyard

⁸⁴² This shot was filmed, but Weir decided not to include it in the final cut of the film, [Interview with Patricia Lovell](#).

seems to blame Greta McCraw for allowing “herself to be spirited away.” As grief-filled as she is, however, there is no hint in the framing of Mrs Appleyard and in the dressing of her office that she is about to go to the Rock or intends to commit suicide. She appears as publicly controlled as the image of Queen Victoria in the portrait immediately behind her desk, or the one in the girl’s schoolroom upstairs. Her journey to, and fall from, the Rock is as unexpected, unforeseen and unpredictable as the events that immediately follow the images in the very final sequence of the film. The spectator is reminded of the tragic spontaneity of Miranda’s group who simply started out to “to take a few measurements at the base of the Rock.” In turn, however, the Rock and the spectator, had the measure of the girls, Miss McCraw, the boys and Mrs Appleyard.

The result of Weir’s use of the apparatus in creating a mystical cinema is both pleasurable and displeasurable. The pleasure comes in the type of voyeurism *Picnic at Hanging Rock* promotes, where the spectator is cast, initially as the “I”, the receiving subject of the narrative, but is visually recreated into the “thou”, the unseen force, which is the cause of the story in the first place. Frustration is inherent in this position. The spectator is able to observe beautiful people, things and places as if enjoying his or her own handiwork, and consoled that wherever the three women are now they are liberated from the strictures of their previous lives. Our displeasure comes from concealment. The spectator wants to know even more; wants to see, hear and know where, why and how these women vanished. The spectator may be cast as the all-seeing force in the film, but we discover that we are not as all-seeing, all-present and all-knowing as we would like to be. For while we see more than anyone else in the narrative, our glimpses and insights remain partial.

Conclusions

Laura Mulvey has argued that the gaze of the cinema is essentially male and that women in mainstream narrative films are investigated, demystified, devalued and disavowed.⁸⁴³ It could be argued that at its core *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is a clear example of the phallogentric cinema. A central and long-lasting look established by Weir in this film is that of Miranda. Two different views of her stand out. There is the wave to Mademoiselle, which concludes the coda to the film, and her final steps up to

⁸⁴³ Mulvey L, “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema”, pp. 11-15.

the summit of the Rock. These images are repeated three times in the course of the film. The central action of the film occurs between them. These are the looks which gave the film its mystical tag as soon as it was released. Because of their repetition they are also the scenes most people recall from the film. They are manifestly phallogentric in that Miranda, the “Botticelli angel” is given to the spectator as an object of desire. Albert objectifies Miranda as “a bit of a looker ...with legs that go all the way up to her bum.” Michael falls under Miranda’s spell. He initially follows her across the creek and later risks his own life trying to find and possess her. Miranda, admired by Mademoiselle and followed by Marion and Irma, however, also loves Sara, so while the eroticisation of the gaze is predominantly male in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, it is not so exclusively. In addition it seems clear that the film constructs a gaze not theorised by Mulvey – a mystical gaze that crosses gender boundaries.

The spectator is told the story is mysterious, and given the entire narrative in the first frame of the film. Reminded of the close relationship the cinema has to the act of dreaming and with the associated regression to primordial states and desires, Weir enjoins us to confront issues of identity and destiny through exploring the world of the unconscious which the world of dreams opens up and represents.⁸⁴⁴ The narrative then uses text and intertexts to exploit signs and symbols of transformation, transcendence and wholeness that have special, and often universal, cross-cultural resonances: departures; farewells; birds; mountains; the crossing of water; wind; the divesting of clothing; angels; and the sacrificial love of martyrs who desire to live where the angels reside rather than compromise their desires here on earth. Weir takes these elements and uses the apparatus to construct an ethereal world wherein the quest motif found in the climbing of the Rock is invested with special significance and atmosphere. Distorted natural sounds, archaic pipes, contemporary music that express the urgency of the quest are married to shifting identification. After having sutured the spectator into the diegesis as the voyeurs watching the characters, the spectator is repositioned as if taking up the place of Nature herself. “Rather than frustrating audiences desires, *Picnic* [sic] remoulds them...(pushing) aside the veil between the material and spiritual and, having done so, communicates through its director’s

⁸⁴⁴ Dempsey M, “Inexplicable feelings: an interview with Peter Weir”, p. 9.

ambiguous, ethereal images a clear intuition of the incorporeal realm.”⁸⁴⁵ This enables the spectator to move from an experience of his or her subjectivity to an opportunity for an encounter with Otherness. The Other in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, is the omnivorous force of nature, constructed here as male and female, which receives and consumes the pure desire of those who seek out and love the “mysterium tremendum et fascinans” of natural beauty. The spectator, regardless of gender, is invited to identify with the gaze of the camera in the mystification of the Rock, filmed in high angle as a mysterious (phallic) presence, standing sentinel over its hidden caves. The moment when the girls disappear is accompanied by a play of light suggesting a moment of illumination and transportation for the spectator. It is at this point that the spectator is invited to experience a transformational moment offered by the mystical gaze.

Clifford Geertz describes what all religious collectives do for their devotees. They offer “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivation seem uniquely realistic.”⁸⁴⁶ Geertz could be describing *Picnic at Hanging Rock* where Peter Weir structures this film in such a way that he turns spectators into willing devotees of the mystical, spiritual power of nature symbolised and sexualised in the religious symbol of the Rock as representative of male and female.

⁸⁴⁵ Rayner J, *The Films Of Peter Weir*, p. 59.

⁸⁴⁶ Geertz C, “Religion as a cultural system” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, M Banton (ed.), London: Tavistock, 1966, p. 4.

Chapter Six: *Gallipoli*

Gallipoli was a pivotal film in Peter Weir's career. It was the last story he made about an Australian subject in Australia.⁸⁴⁷ It broke Australian box office records in 1981/82 and won nine Australian Film Institute Awards in 1981.⁸⁴⁸ After *Mad Max* in 1980, it was the second Australian film to obtain a major release in the USA⁸⁴⁹ and it launched Weir's international career. School children all over the country were taken to see it. Documentary films were commissioned about Australians at war as a result of it⁸⁵⁰ and it generated an array of studies and commentaries in popular and scholarly journals.⁸⁵¹ 1982 saw the largest turn-out for an ANZAC Day Parade, the annual Australian war dead commemoration, since it

⁸⁴⁷ Weir's next film *The Year of the Living Dangerously* was an Australian production about an Australian journalist set in Indonesia and shot in the Philippines. All other films have been about US stories, funded by US studios and shot in the USA. This includes *Master and Commander: the Far Side of the World*, presently in production, funded by 20th Century Fox, being shot at the 20th Century Fox studio at Rosarito, Baja California, Mexico. It is due to be released in 14th November 2003.

⁸⁴⁸ These included Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Editing, Best Achievement in Sound, Best Costumes, Best Actor in a Lead Role: Mel Gibson, Best Actor in a supporting role: Bill Hunter. It had been further nominated in the categories, Best Actor in a Lead Role: Mark Lee, Best Actor in a Supporting Role: Bill Kerr, Best Production Design. It was also nominated in 1982 Golden Globe Awards as Best Foreign Film.

⁸⁴⁹ It was released by Paramount Pictures in the USA on 28th August 1981. *Mad Max* was released by American International Pictures on 21st March 1980.

⁸⁵⁰ Some of these films were Frank Bignall, *ANZAC: A Nation's Heritage*, 16mm, Film Australia, 1981; Donald Murray Douglas Fraser, *Crosses: Australia's War Experiences*, VHS, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 1984. Films about Australians at war include: Frank Warwick, *Gallipoli Veterans*, VHS, Channel 7 Brisbane, 1984; Harvey Broadbent, *Behind the News: interviews with Gallipoli Veterans*, U-matic, ABC, 1985; Geoff Burrowes, *ANZACS*, VHS, Burrowes Dixon Production/Film Victoria, 1985; Cathy Miller, *ANZAC Day World War I*, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 1985; Russel Braddon, *Decline and Fall: Images of Australia*, 16mm, ABC, 1986; Bob Lagetti, Norm Wilkinson, *The Children of Federation*, VHS, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 1987; Harvey Broadbent, *Gallipoli: The Fatal Shore*, VHS, Harvey Broadbent Productions/ABC, 1988; Ron Saunders, Pamela Vanneck, *Private John Simpson*, 16mm, Film Australia, 1988; Harvey Broadbent, *The Boys Who Came Home: Recollections of Gallipoli*, VHS, ABC, 1990; Harvey Broadbent, *10 Days of Glory: The Gallipoli Pilgrimage 1990*, VHS, ABC, 1990; Stephen Claney, *Gallipoli: The ANZAC Legend*, VHS, Interface Productions, 1990; Marilyn Sue Dooley, *Australia in World War I*, Screen Sound Australia, 1997; Ryebuck Media, *Somewhere in France: In search of the ANZACS*, 16mm, 30 mins, 1991.

Given that war has been a defining experience of Australian society, it is surprising to note that only 12 feature films about the experience of war have been produced since the re-establishment of the Australian film industry in 1970: *Breaker Morant* (1979); *The Odd Angry Shot* (1979); *Attack Force Z* (1980); *Gallipoli* (1981); *The Highest Honour* (1982); *Sky Pirates* (1984); *Rebel* (1985); *Indecent Obsession* (1985); *Death of a Soldier* (1986); *The Lighthorsemen* (1987); *Blood Oath* (1990); *Paradise Road* (1996). Of these films one is set in the Boer War, two in World War I, eight in World War II, and one in Vietnam. The Korean War has never been a focus for an Australian feature film.

⁸⁵¹ As examples of the variety of comments see: A Blonski, Propositions on the films of Peter Weir and his place in contemporary cinema, p. 8; T Dowling, "Peter Weir: his films are like mysteries that don't have a solution", p. E10; M Haltof, "*Gallipoli*: mateship and construction of Australian national identity", *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 21, 1, Spring 1993, pp. 27ff.; N Jillet, "Images of *Gallipoli*: the day Peter Weir met the ANZAC Ghosts", p. 17; S Lawson, "*Gallipoli*: picnic at the Pyramids - you are being told what to remember", *Film News*, December, 1981, p. 11; R Lucas, "The gendered battlefield: sex and death in *Gallipoli*", p. 62; S Rohdie, "*Gallipoli* as world camera fodder", *Arena* 60, 1982, pp. 36ff; S Rohdie, "*Gallipoli*, Peter Weir and an Australian art cinema", *An Australian Film Reader*, A Moran and T O'Reagen (eds.), Sydney: Currency Press, 1985, pp. 194-197.

began.⁸⁵² *Gallipoli* continues to be revered as a film about Australia national mythology.⁸⁵³

In late 1975 Weir thought about making a film about the soldiers who went to the front line in France to fight for England in World War I.⁸⁵⁴ There is significance in Weir reflecting on war and colonialism during this period. 1975 was the year that the last Australians troops were brought home from Vietnam. Weir likened the return of the Diggers from Gallipoli to those returning from the fall of Saigon.⁸⁵⁵ “In a sense no one came back.”⁸⁵⁶ Then, on 11th November 1975, the anniversary of the end of First World War, the Whitlam Federal Government was sacked by the Queen Elizabeth’s representative in Australia. The seeds of an anti-colonial film were sown. In 1976, on his way to the Somme in France, where he intended to set his film about the ANZACs, he was encouraged to visit Gallipoli. Weir has spoken about this film emerging from a personal mystical experience “with the ghosts” where he swore to them that he would do a film about them, honouring their sacrifice.⁸⁵⁷

Although it departs from the more explicitly mysterious interests Weir exhibits in *The Cars that Ate Paris*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Last Wave* and *The Plumber*, as I have identified in Chapter One *Gallipoli* is regularly spoken of as a mystical film or one concerned with mythology or spirituality. In this chapter I will show how this effect is structured through the narrative, the apparatus and the positioning of the spectator in relation to the characters as they look for answers to questions regarding identity, desire and difference.

⁸⁵² See “Largest turnout ever”, *The Australian*, 26th April 1982, p. 1; www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/religion/Mythoz/Gallipoli.

⁸⁵³ At the time of its release, Weir said that *Gallipoli* is an explicit exploration of Australia’s national mythology. “I was the last generation where the battle was taught as sacred...a celebration of a defeat. Today kids think of the whole episode as a joke”, Thomas K, “*Gallipoli*: a dream fulfilled”, p. 32.

⁸⁵⁴ Weir P, “I felt somehow I was touching history”, p. 213.

⁸⁵⁵ The impact of World War I on the Australian national psyche can hardly be exaggerated. In 1914 there were only 4.89 million Australians. 300,000 Australian men went to fight in World War I (almost 16 % of the population). 60,000 of them never came home (3.2% of the entire population), with 10,000 dying at Gallipoli. See www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs.nsf, www.teachmovies.org/guides/gallipoli.html.

⁸⁵⁶ Fonda-Bonardi C, Fonda-Bonardi P, “The birth of a nation: an interview with Peter Weir”, *Cineaste*, 11, 4, Winter 1982, p. 42.

⁸⁵⁷ Jillet N, “Images of *Gallipoli*: the day Peter Weir met the ANZAC ghosts”, p. 17.

Mystical Intertextuality

Death in the desert

Weir wrote the story for *Gallipoli* and then engaged Australian author David Williamson to write the screenplay. They based their story and script on two sources: C.E.W Bean's The ANZAC Book and Bill Gammage's The Broken Years.⁸⁵⁸ The first book is a 1916 collection of hagiographical stories, essays and poems that created the ANZAC myth in the first place.⁸⁵⁹ The second book is an edited, but uncensored, collection of letters and diary extracts from Australians in World War I.⁸⁶⁰ Unlike *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the general outline of the events of this film is historical. The 8th and 10th Regiments of the Light Horse, recruited from Western Australia, landed on the Aegean side of the Dardanelles in April 1915. They did attack a Turkish stronghold on 7th August 1915. It was a bloodbath. Later it was discovered there was confusion in the attack because the watches of all parties were not synchronised. There were reports of markers being seen in Turkish trenches which were later found to be false. And while Archy and Frank are fictional inventions, there were two brothers in the Light Horse Regiment who, literally, raced each other to death in the charge from the Australian trench.⁸⁶¹ The objections made to the narrative have not been that Weir gets the facts wrong, but that in basing the narrative on Bean's book, *Gallipoli* demeans "the original ANZACs by denying them their complexity as human beings and creating a shallow stereotype instead."⁸⁶²

As in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* there are no surprises for the spectator, at least not one from Australia or New Zealand. He or she knows that the campaign at Gallipoli was a disaster. Death hangs like a pall over the film. The allusions to it are

⁸⁵⁸ Weir P, "I felt somehow I was touching history", p. 214.

⁸⁵⁹ See, W Gammage, The Broken Years – Australian Soldiers in the Great War, Sydney: Penguin, 1974; D Kent, "Bean's ANZAC and the making of the ANZAC legend", pp. 36, 27, 33; C Bean (ed.), The Anzac book: written and illustrated by the men of Anzac, for the benefit of patriotic funds connected with A.N.Z.A.C., London: Cassell, 1916.

⁸⁶⁰ Gammage was engaged as the historical adviser on film. His main task, however, was to ensure historical accuracy with costumes, props and art direction. Gammage readily concedes that he was aware while on set that the primary goal in the film was not to present a documentary about the events of the campaign, but to entertain. Gammage B, "Working on *Gallipoli*" p. 68.

⁸⁶¹ Travers T, "*Gallipoli*: film and the traditions of Australian history", Film and History, 14, 1, February 1984, p. 19.

⁸⁶² Kent D, "Bean's ANZAC and the making of the ANZAC legend", p. 34. Also see J Freebury, "Screening Australia: *Gallipoli*, a study of nationalism in film", Media Information Australia, 43, February 1987, p. 8; T Travers, "*Gallipoli*: film and the traditions of Australian history", p. 18; A Lohrey, "Australian mythologies: Gallipoli: Male Innocence as a Marketable Commodity", Island Magazine, 9/10, 1982, pp. 30f.

everywhere. Archy tells us that the pyramids were, “Man’s first attempt to cheat death.” Later, Archy signals how the drama will end when he challenges Frank, “Race you to the Pyramids.” The pyramids become a metaphor for the military engagement that will end with these soldiers’ live entombment. Moreover, “the Australians’ tents resemble small pyramid-tombs. However, pyramids are not only symbols of death but also of immortality.”⁸⁶³ Snow is encouraged to enter the Cairo brothel because, “...in a month’s time we could be dead.” The Peninsula battlefield, strewn with the corpses of young men, is called a “field of death”. When the soldiers go for a swim in the crystal blue waters of the Aegean, they come under attack. Like a prelude of what’s coming, this “heavenly image is shattered by an artillery barrage, and we see fragments of shrapnel whip angrily through the blue water, which quickly becomes stained with blood.”⁸⁶⁴ On the eve of the assault, Captain Barton plays the duet of Zurga and Nadir on his gramophone, “In the depths of the temple” in which they pledge their love unto death. Moments before the assault, one soldier recites the 23rd Psalm, “Though I walk in the valley of death, I shall not fear.” Finally, Archy and Frank’s mystical fog-bound landing at Gallipoli is an explicit allusion to the crossing of the River Styx.⁸⁶⁵

This intertextual allusion to the River Styx is skilfully used, especially given that a good portion of the film is set in Egypt and western Turkey which are areas with historically rich mythological traditions. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the crossing of the water was the point at which Weir’s heroes began their final, mysterious journey up the Rock. In *Gallipoli* the Rock becomes a desert and in both films the heroes never return after crossing the water. In Virgil, the River Styx “meanders around the Kingdom of Hades (hell), completely surrounding it.”⁸⁶⁶ Human souls must negotiate this river on their final journey after death. In Roman mythology Styx came to have a double meaning. At Styx, Pallas begets two powers: Kratos (power) and Bia (violent strength) and so the river was considered deadly. At the same river, however, Thetis immerses Achilles in its waters and he is made immortal.⁸⁶⁷ Weir plays on both ideas. Gallipoli is a place of death and immortality.

⁸⁶³ Haltorf M, *Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide*, p. 43.

⁸⁶⁴ Lewis, G, “Real warriors and road warriors: *Gallipoli* and *Mad Max F*”, *Australian movies and the American Dream*, New York: Praeger, 1987, p. 143.

⁸⁶⁵ Peake C, “Peter Weir prepares to launch his \$2.5 million view of *Gallipoli*”, p. 11.

⁸⁶⁶ Grimal P, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, p. 428

⁸⁶⁷ Bonnefoy Y, “River Styx”, *Mythologies*, W Doniger (ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981, pp. 371-413.

It is not just any death Weir is interested in; it is not just Archy's death either. Like the girls who picnic at Hanging Rock, Archy is symbolic of all those pure, innocent, virginal men whose consummation of life comes in the heroic nature of their death. Weir is interested in the sacrificial death in the desert of all Archys. The desert holds special meaning for indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. While it is the place which has tested some of Australia's greatest heroes and where they met with death,⁸⁶⁸ Weir draws on several other texts apart from the national mythologies, to construct the narrative. Taking seriously that the theories of Carl Jung were a major influence on Peter Weir's understanding of the symbolic and spiritual order, I will now analyse *Gallipoli* by using Fredericksen's process of looking to the appropriation of "archetypal imagery against *parallels* from mythology, comparative religion, folklore, ethnology and so on."⁸⁶⁹ I will show how mythology, Jungian archetypes and the Biblical narrative are interwoven and help to cast light on this film and Weir's mystical sensibilities.

Given Weir's explicit invocation of the crossing of the mythical River Styx, it is possible to read the martyrdom of Archy as an allegory of the Greek myth, Persephone and Demeter.⁸⁷⁰ Read in this light, *Gallipoli* is Australia's field of death whereupon an innocent youth is kidnapped by the forces of hell, but not trapped there. Like Demeter, Archy is reborn, and signals a new awakening, a new season or harvest. While the annual ANZAC commemoration occurs in the southern hemisphere's autumn, it does preserve symbols heralding the northern hemisphere's spring.⁸⁷¹ At variance with this reading of the film is that unlike Persephone, Archy dies, and his memory becomes the cause of the rebirth of a new Australian national identity. It could be more helpful to read *Gallipoli* in the light of the more famous myths of sacrificial deaths like the Greek myth of Dionysius or the related one of the

⁸⁶⁸ Places include Uluru, Hanging Rock, Gallipoli and the Outback. People include Voss, Richard Mahony, Burke and Wills, and Leichhardt. "...all places or figures of loss, sacrifice and ruin." See D Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, p. 199.

⁸⁶⁹ Fredericksen D, "Jung/sign/symbol/film, part one", p. 188.

⁸⁷⁰ See, C Downing, *The Long Journey Home: Re-visioning the Myth of Demeter and Persephone*, Boston: Shambhala, 1994; T Agha-Jaffar, *Demeter and Persephone: Lessons From a Myth*, London: McFarland & Co, 2002; K Carlson, *Life's Daughter/Death's Bride: Inner transformations Through the Goddess Demeter/Persephone*, Boston: Shambhala, 1997.

⁸⁷¹ Even though ANZAC day is celebrated on 25th April, the day the first soldiers landed on Gallipoli, the poppy flower used on the day is a northern hemisphere symbol of spring. It was the first flower to grow again on the battlefields of Northern France after the carnage of World War I campaigns and the soldiers claimed that its red colour came from the blood that had soaked into the ground. In war dead commemorations throughout the British Commonwealth the red poppy is a symbol of rebirth. See, www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/customs/poppies.

Egyptian story of Osiris, where a hero-god-man suffered and died for the sins of the people, so they might be set free. In him followers find a model of selflessness to emulate.⁸⁷² Weir could equally be using the myth of the Greek warrior and athlete Odysseus who, like Archy, ventures far from his home across the sea take a part in a defining battle for the Greek nation.⁸⁷³ Odysseus' physical prowess and courage in the siege of Troy made him an exemplar of the warrior-hero tradition.⁸⁷⁴ As attractive as these applications might be, Weir makes no claim for the divinization of Archy who remains throughout the story a naïve and flawed human being.

In the previous chapter I drew attention to Weir's explicit exploration in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* of Jungian ideas about dreams as an access point to the world of the unconsciousness, to symbols as a manifestation of totemic presentations and of the significance of the outward and inner journey. Allied to these central interests in Jung's theories is the concept of the archetype. "The collective unconscious consists of the sum of the instincts and their correlates, the archetypes. Just as everybody possesses instincts, so he also possesses a stock of archetypal images."⁸⁷⁵ And later, "The concept of the archetype... is derived from the repeated observation that, for instance, the myths and fairy tales of world literature contain definite motifs which crop up everywhere..."⁸⁷⁶ Jung held that the main archetypes were the Shadow, the Anima/Animus, Syzygy (the divine couple), the Child and the Self.⁸⁷⁷ *Gallipoli* can be analysed using a number of these categories, but the most illuminating ones are those of the Child and the Self. The Child in Jung is "another symbol of the rejuvenated self, is the forebear of new hopes that will light the way to the man who has finally accepted his maturity."⁸⁷⁸ The boyish Archy is the symbolic Child in the narrative. He achieves self-realisation by staring down death and so enters into

⁸⁷²The parallels between Dionysius, Osiris and Jesus in regard to the nature and purpose of their deaths and other aspects of their lives are striking. See: T Freke, P Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries: was the 'Original Jesus' a Pagan God?*, London: Thorsons, 1999; www.religioustolerance.org/chr_jcpa. In 1875 Kersey Graves argued that the story of Jesus was a composite of many elements of the ancient world's best-known saviour myths, including the sacrificial elements of his death. See K Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*, Boston: Colby & Rich, 1875.

⁸⁷³ Archy and Odysseus arrived in neighbouring regions as excavations show that the ancient city of Troy is only 30kms south of ANZAC Cove.

⁸⁷⁴ See: M Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, New York, New York: New York Review of Books, 2001; "Encyclopaedia Mythica" at www.pantheon.org/areas; www.timelessmyths.com/classical/heroes2.html#Greeks.

⁸⁷⁵ Jung C, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 8, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967, par. 283.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid. Vol. 10, par. 847.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid. Vol. 9, part one.

⁸⁷⁸ Fredericksen D, "Jung/sign/symbol/film, part one", quoting Isabella Conti, p. 175.

immortality, where human consciousness is assumed into the divine. As a result Archy is taken up by a nation in search of a national martyr.

Self-sacrifice is a surrender of the ego that also attains to a mastery of the ego. In the denial of ego implied by self-sacrifice, one makes conscious the forces of society, forces that, according to Sigmund Freud, are identical with the superego and are a source of constant moral conflict. A potential Self is thus actualized, transformed into a conscious Self... which corresponds to the individuation process.⁸⁷⁹

It is not insignificant that Jung thought Buddha and Jesus were human beings who achieved the integration of opposites necessary for individuation and that there suffering and death were indicators of their the fully realised egos.⁸⁸⁰ I will return to the importance of Jung's theories about individuation and its importance for *Gallipoli* when I analyse how Weir positions the spectator in *Gallipoli*.

It is the third category, that of the biblical story, which casts the greatest light on the influences in Weir's narrative. Dermody and Jacka alert the viewer to how *Gallipoli* moves "sacramentally from point to point as through the chosen scenes of the legend are like Stations of the Cross."⁸⁸¹ There are three motifs Weir favours most in the narrative: the desert; the sacrificial death of an innocent; and the foot race. As in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* Weir deploys these metonymically so that they come to signify the discourse of mysticism at the heart of the film. Though these motifs are constructions from earlier mythological traditions, they come together most strongly in the Christian mystical tradition and serve to construct a similar end to *Gallipoli*. Remembering that Weir had a strict religious upbringing in a Protestant home, "...I was devout little boy,"⁸⁸² the influence of the biblical narrative, reflecting as it does universal archetypes, casts light on his project. In Jungian theory, the Bible is a repository of archetypal stories, symbols and patterns that demonstrate the universality of the collective unconscious. "Symbols receive cultural and conscious elaboration; indeed, within religion, myth, and folklore such elaboration often extends over long periods of time."⁸⁸³ In this regard Jungian theory enables Weir not to have

⁸⁷⁹ Glucklich A, "Self and sacrifice: a phenomenological psychology of sacred pain", *Harvard Theological Review*, October 1999, pp. 477-506. Also see C Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 252-280.

⁸⁸⁰ See J Heisig, "Jung, Christianity and Buddhism", *Nanzan Bulletin*, 23, 1999.

⁸⁸¹ Dermody S, Jacka E, *The Screening of Australia Volume II: Anatomy of an Australian Cinema*, Sydney: Currency, 1988, p. 159.

⁸⁸² Armitage M, "For Weir the word is 'unsolved'", p. 34.

⁸⁸³ Fredericksen D, "Jung/sign/symbol/film, part one", p. 176.

to reject his own Western Christian heritage, but to see it as a participation in a wider archetypal process. “His theories of archetypes seemed to create an indissoluble link between religion and psychology.”⁸⁸⁴ In this light the entire film can be read as revolving around the biblical injunction, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”⁸⁸⁵, which can be read as description of the process of individuation. Weir helps construct the viewing subject and sutures the spectator into the *mis-en-scène* as a witness to martyrdom. Weir borrows from the biblical story themes and motifs that have long associations with mystical traditions. As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, the apophatic, kataphatic and nature mystical schools withdraw from the world and embrace sacrifice as a means of encountering Otherness. The fourth school, social action mysticism, engages with the world, but embraces sacrifice, even to the point of martyrdom, as the key element in its encounter with Otherness. *Gallipoli* can be read in the light of both these aspects: Otherness and martyrdom.

It also true that journeys to the desert have been for many mystical traditions abundant in revelation, transformation and recreation.⁸⁸⁶ Since the early centuries of the Christian Era the pilgrimage to the desert is highly prized. Its most ancient expression is seen as “dying unto self” and rejecting the evils of the secular society. Though not the first Christian mystic to go to the desert, the 3rd Century saint, Anthony of Egypt, is considered the founder of Christian Monasticism and is first to extensively teach about mysticism and the desert.⁸⁸⁷ Anthony was suspicious of the attractions of everyday life and considered them to be distractions from the mystical unity attainable in this world.⁸⁸⁸ He argued that the mystical life in the desert was a means to sacrifice everything as a way of obtaining a life of peace and courage.⁸⁸⁹ *Gallipoli*, therefore, does not just gain its significance from its Australian associations alone. It is the wider appeal to the archetypal desert, especially as it is imagined in the

⁸⁸⁴ Wilson C, *Lord of the Underworld: Jung and the Twentieth Century*, p. 109.

⁸⁸⁵ Jn 15: 13.

⁸⁸⁶ Ferguson G, Chrysavgis J, *The Desert is Alive: Dimensions of Australian Spirituality*, Melbourne: JBCE, 1990, p. 99.

⁸⁸⁷ In 270 CE Anthony sold his considerable fortune and went to the Egyptian desert at Der el Memum to be a Christian hermit. Disciples followed him and by 305 he emerged from his hermitage and began to organise his disciples into a religious community. Their life was marked by fasting, prayer, works of charity and teaching. Rubenson S, *The Letters of St Antony*, pp. 9f.

⁸⁸⁸ Rubenson S, *The Letters of St Antony*, p. 197

⁸⁸⁹ Newman J, *Historical Sketches*, p. 99.

West through the biblical stories situated there, that gives *Gallipoli* its universal mystical resonances.

Sacrificial Love

To achieve his own post-colonial and nationalistic agenda Weir carefully constructs the iconography of *Gallipoli* from the collective images latent in the Western spectator. From the start of the film Archy is situated in a desert, the outback of Western Australia. Weir has long establishing shots highlighting the space and aridity of the environment. Later, when he and Frank team up, they are lost in the desert and nearly die of dehydration. When they arrive at Gallipoli Cove, even though it is by the sea which the ANZACs have dug into a desert headland with sparse and arid vegetation. This is a mountainous version of the Australian outback. Because of the prevalence of Judeo-Christian narratives in Western societies, spectators already associate deserts as places of self-sacrificing love and death. In the biblical tradition Moses and Jesus are the most notable sacrificial deaths that occur in deserted places. For all of Moses' faithfulness to God's directions in Egypt, and his leadership in the desert, the author of Book of Deuteronomy records that God decided that while Moses could see the Promised Land from the far side of the Jordan River, he could never enter it.⁸⁹⁰ In all four Gospels Jesus was led out of the city and crucified at Golgotha, a word that means the place of "a skull". In the Gospel of John, especially, the death of Jesus is linked to Moses. "The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert."⁸⁹¹ Weir borrows these biblical motifs, and their associated meanings of seriousness, obtaining favour, redemption and atonement and transfers them on to Archy. Archy is a blood gift for God, King and Country and by taking Frank's place in the next line to "go over"; he is the model of sacrificial love.

Archie's sacrifice demonstrates the seriousness of his love for his mate, Frank. Faced with an inevitable death, Archy, who convinced an unwilling Frank to come to

⁸⁹⁰ Deuteronomy 34: 1-12.

⁸⁹¹ John 3: 12-13. Throughout this Gospel there is a comparison between Moses and Jesus. See F Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*, Rome: PAS, 1976, pp. 120ff. Jesus, in the fourth Gospel, is always superior to Moses. See W Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, Leiden: Brill, 1967, pp. 296-297, 318-319.

The raising up of Jesus on the cross at Golgotha supersedes the raising of Moses' standard in the desert. See John 3: 14; 8: 28; 12: 32-34. Jesus is the fulfilment of the messianic expectations of Israel and the Mosaic law and tradition: the innocent victim comes from heaven to earth, is lifted up on the standard of the cross, dies, returns to heaven and prepares a place there for all who believe. See G Nicholson, *Death as Departure: the Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema*, Chicago: Scholars Press, 1983, pp. 91-97.

Gallipoli, faces up to the consequences of his choices and desires. Everything in *Gallipoli* is directed to this moment. The seriousness of a blood sacrifice was counted in what it cost those who offered it. For the Israelites the slaughter of an ox was their livelihood. Archy's courage costs him his life. The sending of thousands of Australian Archys proved the seriousness and devotion Australians had for their Imperial "mother". Given that there was hardly a town in Australia that did not lose young men between the ages of 13 – 40 in the First World War, this blood sacrifice meant the country bore untold social and economic hardship for the next generation.

Australia sacrificed its young men to earn the favour of the Empire, to protect its interests and to seal the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. In 1914 the country part of "King and Country" was not a separate Australian national identity, but a dependent child of England whose approval and patronage was sought and necessary. In part Australia repaid the debt it owed to its colonial mother by fighting for the interests and prerogatives of England, to help it resist any attack which may threaten its boundaries, interests or security. Archy's life is an acceptable sacrifice in this colonial exchange. Weir, however, also argues that it was a down-payment for the emergence of an independent Australian national identity.

Rightly, *Gallipoli* is read as a critique of war and the unnecessary waste of human life in foreign trenches. Weir condemns the values that saw all Archys become cannon fodder. Pacifism, however, is not the only focus of Weir's interests. Just as the sacrifice of Moses and Jesus in the desert take on new meaning and significance, so Weir reclaims Archy's death as the beginning of colonial separation. The parallels are striking. Moses, Jesus and Archy are faithful servants of a higher power, cut down in a deserted place, two of them before seeing the fruition of their life's work. The three of them pay the price for the sins of the people, and establish a new model for sacrificial identity. Their deaths are not meaningless, however, but a necessary requirement for all those devoted to their cause to inherit a new identity, a new dignity and perspective on their destiny. Through the preaching of their closest mates, Joshua, Peter and Frank, their fame is extolled and they are held up as the respective prototypes of Jewish, Christian and Australian duty, courage and love. They become the measure by which all followers will be judged. The final scene of the film where Archy runs to his death is the first time since he arrived at Gallipoli that he has run "on the flat". It directly parallels the opening scene of the film where Uncle Jack urges Archy to race against the clock down the flat, deserted, running track at home.

Uncle Jack records how Archy has run into history by breaking the world record for the 100-yard dash set by “the great Lascelles.” But it is a private victory. Only Jack and Archy know about it. In the final scene of the film Archy’s sacrificial love sees him publicly race to claim the martyr’s crown. Archy not only makes history, he embodies it. Weir’s Archy is sacrificed in the desert so that an emerging independent, post-colonial Australian nationalism may bring salvation to all. In *Gallipoli* Weir points the way to an antipodean Promised Land.

The Athletae Dei

Commentators and critics have, rightly, made much of the athletic metaphor in Weir’s mis-en-scène. As I noted above these are the visual bookends to the film. A race begins *Gallipoli* and a race concludes it. Archy’s “springs of steel” race against Uncle Jack’s clock and his speed offers him the opportunity of immortality like Lascelles. At the end of the film Frank’s legs cannot get him back in time to save Archy springing out of the trench and racing to his mortal death and his rebirth as an immortal hero.

Karen Jaehne was the first to link Weir’s athletic theme with the Olympic traditions. On first reading this is an attractive idea.

Weir has focused on the fundamental purpose and goal of athletic training as it was originally ‘Olympically’ conceived...let it be remembered that the original games provided the very exercises and dexterity necessary to a foot-soldier in war. A quick glance at a Pindaric Ode to the classical Olympic victors (a kind of jock poetry of the ancient Greeks) will verify the symbiotic relationship of athletics and warfare.⁸⁹²

Like most commentators Jaehne links Archy’s run with a heroic victory in the ancient Olympic tradition. It deserves close analysis.

Before the 8th Century BCE the Olympic Games were originally held to determine who would be the next local “king for a year”. Once the contest was decided a bull was sacrificed and a hymn honouring the god and the local hero was sung.⁸⁹³ By 776 BCE, however, these contests developed into a religious festival.⁸⁹⁴

⁸⁹² Jaehne K, “*Gallipoli*”, *Cineaste*, 11, 4, Winter 1982, p. 43.

⁸⁹³ Harrison J, *Themis: a Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, Cambridge: University Press, 1912, p. 256.

⁸⁹⁴ There were four major sporting festivals in Ancient Greece: the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian and Nemean Games. Each of them were held to honour a deity: Zeus, Apollo, Poseidon and Apollo,

“The Olympic games were sacred games, staged in a sacred place and at a sacred festival ... in honor of the deity. Those who took part did so in order to serve the god and the prizes which they won came from that god...The Olympic games had their roots in religion.”⁸⁹⁵

The Pindaric Ode is not a preparation for military contest, but a hymn to honour the memory of the ancestors whose courage and strength is now incarnated in the victor.⁸⁹⁶ With the exception of the warrior exercises of Alexander the Great, Jaehne confuses the ancient Greek and Roman aims in athletic games. The Romans disliked the Greek traditions of athletic games to mark religious festivals. “They believed in physical fitness for the ulterior end of warfare.”⁸⁹⁷ This is why unlike the Greeks whose games also included competitions in music, dance, poetry, drama and other arts,⁸⁹⁸ the only events which interested the Romans were “the fighting events, wrestling, boxing and the pankration.”⁸⁹⁹ The problem in invoking the Olympic tradition as a metaphor for *Gallipoli* is that games in ancient Greece were never contested to the death.⁹⁰⁰

Weir presents only one athletic event in this film: the foot race, which was the preserve of the Greek tradition. Weir uses it over and again as the metonymical sign of the Archy’s and Frank’s journeys in the film. There is Archy’s world record run at home, the competition between Archy and the horse, the 100 yard dash at the local fete where Archy and Frank meet, the run to catch the train, the race for their lives across the salt flats, the race to the Pyramids, the running with the ball in the soldiers’ football match, Frank’s dash through “death valley” to bring the bacon home, Frank’s frantic run between the battle front and allied headquarters, and Archy’s final sprint through “no man’s land” to his death. All these evoke the way in which life is sometimes referred as “a race”. In *Gallipoli* Archy races against his personal limitations, physical endurance, mortality and time. He is offered up as a blood sacrifice to the gods of warfare. In his race to death Archy receives the victor’s wreath of immortality. Hymns are sung and festivals of the dead are annually celebrated as

respectively. See A Guttmann, “From ritual to record”, *Sport and Religion*, S Hoffman (ed.), Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Books, 1992, p. 147.

⁸⁹⁵ Drees L, *Olympia: Gods, Artists and Athletes*, G Onn (trans.), New York: Praeger, 1968, p. 24.

⁸⁹⁶ Harrison J, *Themis: a Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, p. 257.

⁸⁹⁷ Guttmann A, “From ritual to record”, p. 148.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 147

⁸⁹⁹ Gardiner E, *Athletics of the Ancient World*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930, p. 49.

⁹⁰⁰ See L Drees, *Olympia: Gods, Artists and Athletes*, p. 31; A Guttmann, “From ritual to record”, p. 148.

all Archys are remembered for their courage and prowess. As attractive as these Olympic references might be, the mythically-related Biblical narratives cast greater light on the runner, waging a war and claiming the prize of death and immortality.

The Hellenistic influence in Palestine by the 1st Century CE is evident in the letters of Paul of Tarsus in the Christian Scriptures. He knew about and admired the Greek and Roman traditions of athletic training. So much so, the image of the runner, the race, the prize and persevering in the Christian life as in a battle become some of the most potent metaphors he uses in his letters. Every runner and fighter desires to claim or capture the same prize, which is the undying wreath of eternal life.⁹⁰¹ All suffering is worth bearing⁹⁰² if it enables one to follow in the example of Jesus who sacrificed everything for the sake of his friends.⁹⁰³

Of the many times he employs these metaphors,⁹⁰⁴ three directly parallel the way Weir uses the motif in *Gallipoli*. In the ninth chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians, while discussing the demands of the Christian faith and the elements of Christian freedom, Paul says, “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we (run for) an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.”⁹⁰⁵ In his first letter to his young disciple Timothy he writes, “fight the good fight of faith; take hold of eternal life, to which you were called... until the manifestation of Jesus Christ...who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light.”⁹⁰⁶ The army metaphor was much more fully developed in his Second Letter to Timothy. “Share in suffering like good soldiers in Christ Jesus. No one serving in an army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier’s aim is to please the enlisting officer. And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules.”⁹⁰⁷ Written as age and physical

⁹⁰¹ See: 1 Corinthians 9: 25; 1 Timothy 6: 13; 2 Timothy 2: 5, 4: 8.

⁹⁰² Romans 8: 18.

⁹⁰³ See: 1 Timothy 6: 11; 2 Timothy 4: 6; Hebrews 10: 14-15; 12: 1; Revelation 2: 7; 2: 26; 3: 21; 21: 7.

⁹⁰⁴ For the image of the battle: 1 Corinthians 6: 12f; Romans 8: 5f; 1 Timothy 3: 16; 1 Thessalonians 2: 2; 2 Corinthians 10: 3; Philippians 4: 3; 1 Corinthians 9: 25; Philemon 2: 16f; Colossians 1: 29. Also see, J Bauer (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Biblical Theology*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1978, p. 451.

⁹⁰⁵ 1 Corinthians 9: 24-27. Interestingly given my arguments here, Paul immediately goes on to give as an example of those who were disqualified by God - the followers of Moses who perished in the desert.

⁹⁰⁶ 1 Timothy 6: 12, 14, 16.

⁹⁰⁷ 2 Timothy 2: 3-5.

danger mounts, Paul concludes this letter by reflecting on his life in these terms, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.”⁹⁰⁸

The influence of this tradition on mysticism is notable. I have already indicated the importance of Anthony of Egypt for desert mysticism in early Christianity. A similar relationship exists between the images of the athlete and warfare. The earliest name the desert mystics gave to their hermitages were “wrestling rings” in which they became “athletes for God.”⁹⁰⁹ The desert fathers and mothers did not suffer from the dualism that affected later Christian theology and practice. They did not despise their bodies, but saw the development of the body as a constitutive element of the ascetical life.⁹¹⁰ It is not until the bans of Christian Emperor Theodosius between 392 and 395 that Greek games are understood as an extension of pagan rites and the body as a carnal trap for the soul.⁹¹¹

Like the runners of ancient civilisations and like Archy at the hands of his mentor Uncle Jack, the monks passed down from one generation to the next the link between the spirit, mind and body.⁹¹² The intertextuality here is not accidental in *Gallipoli*. Michael Ventura was the first to link most of Weir’s work with his devout Protestant heritage. Weir’s films all involve

...a disappearing into, being surrounded by, or a surrendering to, the new, the alien, the unseen...In *Gallipoli* a boy disappears into the story - into, specifically Western history, which is experienced as

⁹⁰⁸ 2 Timothy 4: 7.

⁹⁰⁹ Workman H, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, London: Epworth, 1927, p. 45.

⁹¹⁰ See H Waddell, *The Desert Fathers*, pp. 68, 74, 107. This is not to imply that the monks did not punish their bodies but much of what is popularly understood about the later harsh and anti-body ascetical practices are not encouraged in this period. The foundation of western mysticism does not view the body as an enemy, but as an ally.

⁹¹¹ Eitzen D, and Sage G, “Sport and religion”, *Religion and Sport*, C Prebish (ed.), London: Greenwood, 1993, p. 84.

⁹¹² Sport as a locus for the mystical union is not a new idea. “Let’s be sure that in every competition, however desperate, there is something even stronger than the will to win....the desire for sport, the love of sporting competition is an eternal verity of the soul.” Baker P, “New understanding of the phenomenon of man”, *International Research in Sport and Physical Education*, E Jock, E Simon (eds.), Springfield, Illinois: Thomas, 1964, p. 169. Roger Bannister alludes to self-confrontation as one way sport takes on metaphysical dimensions, “Sooner or later in sport we run into a situation that is too big for us to master. In real life we dodge them...in sport we cannot. As a result, sport leads us to the most remarkable self-discovery.” See R Bannister, *The Four Minute Mile*, New York: Dodd, 1958, p. 218. Mountain climber Maurice Herzog notes, “In overstepping our limitations, in touching the extreme boundaries of man’s world, we have come to know something of its true splendour. In my worst moments of anguish, I seem to discover the deep significance of existence which till then I had been unaware.” Herzog M, *Annapurna* New York: E P Dutton, 1953, p. 12. World champion shot putter Parry O’Brien borrows language from the mystical tradition to describe his experience. “When I’m ready for a toss, I’m all wrapped up in myself. I’m in a different world.” Doherty K, *Modern Track and Field*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 343.

the distant (military) command determining a mass event (a slaughter) in which there are victims but no participants, because to participate is to invoke choices and no one in this story acts as if there is such a choice. The boy, in other words, disappears into Calvinism, which is a slightly more precise word for the assumptions with which the West defines its mission and its history.⁹¹³

Archie, the innocent victim is found worthy to claim the prize of the martyr's death. Frank is initially unwilling to enter the race, but later does. Frank is too worldly to win the prize of a heroic, sacrificial death, but through failing to have the speed to reach his prize he enables Archy to claim the victory and to earn immortality.

In the analysis above I have argued that Weir uses the desert, martyrdom and the foot race as metonyms to signify the mystical. Through the careful construction of these motifs in the text of the film and in the intertexts that accompany them, the spectator is encouraged to deploy the mystical gaze and enter into an experience of Otherness.

STRUCTURES OF THE MYSTICAL GAZE

There are several scenes in which the mystical gaze is carefully constructed for the spectator. For our purposes the final sequence is the most important: from the arrival of Frank and Archy at Gallipoli up to Archy's death. Given that it takes the film 75 out of 109 minutes to get to the site of Anzac Cove, the film is not primarily interested in the war. "My interest was not in the causes of the war but in the men who went."⁹¹⁴

This final sequence involves thirty scenes which highlight how Weir builds the empathy in the scene,⁹¹⁵ and at a critical moment again repositions the spectator with an omniscient look and moves the viewer to a moment of illumination and can be shown on the following table.

75:00 - 77:37:	The arrival of the boats.
77:38 - 78:28:	Early days at Gallipoli.
78:29 - 79:47:	Skinny dipping in the water.
79:48 - 80:11:	The attack on The Nek is announced.
80:12 - 80:38:	Frank attempts the short-cut, "death alley".
80:39 - 81:27:	Battle preparations.

⁹¹³ Ventura M, "Peter Weir's State Of Emergency", p. 39.

⁹¹⁴ McFarlane B, Ryan T, "Interview with Peter Weir", p. 329.

⁹¹⁵ See footnote 831 for an explanation of my application of the terms shot, scene and sequence.

81:28 - 82:59:	Frank barter his gun for bacon and then meets his mates.
83:00 - 85:18:	The Colonel plans The Nek attack.
85:19 - 86:46:	Frank's mates prepare to "go over."
86:47 - 87:20:	Archy and Frank hear the launch of the attack.
87:21 - 88:44:	Post-attack, Barney is dead.
88:45 - 89:45:	Snow lays dying.
89:46 - 90:47:	Archy comforts Frank in their dugout.
90:48 - 91:44:	Archy suggests Frank take his place as the runner.
91:45 - 92:45:	Barton listens to the aria on the eve of battle.
92:46 - 93:42:	Frank is called to be the runner.
93:43 - 94:27:	Soldiers prepare for battle.
94:28 - 94:48:	Archy writes a letter home.
94:49 - 96:10:	Confusion over watches, Robinson orders men over.
96:11 - 97:32:	1 st wave goes over.
97:33 - 98:30:	2 nd wave goes over.
98:31 - 100:32:	The assault is halted, Frank is sent to General Gardner.
100:33 - 101:39:	Frank runs through the short-cut, "death alley."
101:40 - 102:00:	General Gardner orders the attack to cease.
102:01 - 102:11:	Frank races back to the trench with the order.
102:12 - 102:25:	The line from the Colonel's HQ to the trench is fixed.
102:26 - 105:03:	Colonel orders the men over, men prepare for battle.
105:04 - 105:54:	3 rd wave goes over.
105:55 - 106:15:	Archy runs to his death, Frank collapses in despair.
106:16 - 109:01:	The credits roll.

This sequence is marked by the direct way the story is told. Weir employs standard cross-cutting techniques to build the tension within this final act of the film. The informed or attentive spectator knows by this stage in the narrative that Frank and Archy's athletic ability will be pivotal to how one or both meets or avoids death. There is, however, a shift in the positioning of the spectator in this sequence which moves him or her from active point-of-view observer to an omnipotent position, presiding over the unfolding disaster. Four scenes within the final act demonstrate this point.

The Participatory, Empathetic Identification

I have already noted the intertextual importance of the arrival of the troop ships at Gallipoli (75:00). A series of static shots from the boats track the troops rowing toward the shore in the fog-bound blue night-light. "I wanted them to cross the water through the mists as if they were crossing the River Styx."⁹¹⁶ Spotlights guide the troops' rowboats to the beach and by reflected light the viewer sees the anxious

⁹¹⁶ Peake C, "Peter Weir prepares to launch his \$2.5 million view of *Gallipoli*", p. 11.

faces of the troops. The spectator is situated as if a soldier in the boat, looking back past the men out to sea. For this final scene to work the spectator is necessarily and intimately connected with the action, with the heroes. Closer to the shore, the fog lifts, artillery fire breaks the serenity of the scene and we see an excited Archy and a petrified Frank. What the soldiers and the spectators see in these shots is a parody of the reality it portrays. There are glittering lights, as at a carnival, marking out the side of the hill in front of them, and the hospital troop ship, which is seen in a reverse-angle shot, is similarly festooned. The whistles and explosions of the artillery fire could just as easily be fireworks on New Year's Eve, except the counterpoint of the sombre music announces that not everything is as it appears, undercutting any sense of festivity.

As in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Weir uses music to great effect in this film. *Gallipoli* opens with Albinoni's "Adagio for Strings and Organ." This lament sets the tone for a brooding film. The piece is played at length at the outset of the film, but is not used again until this arrival scene. It elicits from the spectator a sombre disposition to the climax of the film. The reverential atmosphere created by this music is sharply broken when a shell explodes immediately to the right of the boats. From a medium high angle wide shot, panning left to right, the men jump out of the boat and race for the beach (77:38). The music dies and the cacophony of men surviving a military barrage dominates the sound track. A medium two-shot frames Archy and Frank whose response to the barrage remains unchanged: excitement at the adventure versus fear. As the pair exit the shot, screen right, an unidentified voice calls out, "Come on fellas, you'll be right." The lies have begun.

During twenty-one scenes in this final sequence the sound of bombs and artillery fire make up the major feature of the sound track. The response of the laconic Australian troops to this bombardment is to shrug it off or laugh at it. In the other nine scenes in the sequence Weir uses silence, especially in the trenches before the men go over, or he uses music. While the noise of battle is entirely appropriate to this action, it also plays a very important role in the construction of the spectator's empathetic identification. Initially, Weir positions the viewer either in the boat with the soldiers or on the beach watching them arrive. Each time the battle sounds recur the spectator identifies with the people on the receiving end of the barrage because his or her gaze is a low angle mid-shot, usually from within the trench or a dugout. This remains true

until Weir repositions the spectator exactly half way through this final thirty-four minute sequence. The sound track queues this movement in the spectator's gaze.

The turning point in this sequence begins with Major Barton, alone, listening to his gramophone at night in his dugout (91:45). Williamson's screenplay makes no mention of the name of the music to which Barton listens. "Barton sits in his dugout with a wind up gramophone listening to a scratchy operatic aria and puffing on his pipe. He stands up, takes the pipe from his mouth and begins to sing the aria. Bemused SOLDIERS [sic] glance in as they pass. Barton opens the champagne given to him by his wife and pours a glass."⁹¹⁷ Given that Barton has to sing along with the gramophone in the scene, Weir had to make his selection in pre-production. The choice is significant. "Au fond du temple saint" ("In the depths of this holy temple") was composed by Georges Bizet for his 1863 opera, *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* (*The Pearl Fishers*). On a beach in ancient Ceylon, the locally elected fishing king Zurga welcomes back his best friend Nadir whom he has not seen for many years. When they last met they both renounced their pursuit of the same woman rather than sacrifice the closeness of their friendship. The extract from the aria Weir uses, in the scene with Barton, is where Nadir vows life-long loyalty to Zurga, who has invited his "tender friend of my youth," to affirm that, "...hand in hand, as faithful partners until death, let us share the same destiny." There is some commentary on the homoerotic nature of this aria.⁹¹⁸ Based on this and other scenes in the film, a similar homoerotic analysis of *Gallipoli* has been made as well.⁹¹⁹ In every respect, this is an unexpected and tender scene in this final sequence. On the eve of a battle, the man who will send his youthful charges to their death on an Asia Minor beach, listens to an aria about undying love between men. With the sound of artillery shells exploding around him, Barton ponders the price to be paid for love. Whether the spectator knows the aria or

⁹¹⁷ Williamson D, *Gallipoli*, unpublished screenplay, Sydney: R & R Films, 1980, scene 117, p. 72. I am grateful to producer Patricia Lovell for her copy of this screenplay for my research.

⁹¹⁸ See C Sowerwine, "How far the East, how far desire?", *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, Sydney: Playbill, Showbill Publications, 2000; R Dellamona, D Fischlin (eds.), *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood and Sexual Difference*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Also see V Mackie, "The metropolitan gaze: travellers, bodies and spaces", www.sshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue4/vera; www.q.co.za/2001/2002/03/a33-qmunity-opera.html; www.sfu.ca/~truax/os6.html; www.cdbaby.com/cd/leuze.

⁹¹⁹ See B Creed, "Feminist film theory: reading the text", *Don't Shoot Darling!*, A Blonski (ed.), Greenhouse: Melbourne, 1987, p. 298; L Dobrez, P Dobrez, "Old myths and new disclosures: Peter Weir's Australia", *War: Australia's Creative Response*, A Rutherford, J Wieland (eds.), Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1997, p. 226.

not, he or she is aware of the doom that awaits the heroes, empathises with Barton's burden and the carnage over which he will preside.

In the final scene of the sequence and against the noise of battle, Weir slowly tracks in on Archy in the dugout (93:43). He is writing a letter home, "...we are getting ready to make an all-out assault on 'Johnny Turk'. We know we are going to give a good account of ourselves and our country. Everyone is terribly excited. There is a feeling we are all involved in an adventure, somehow larger than life." Through a mid-shot the viewer sees the cannons fall silent. In a series of close-ups of watches, Weir amplifies the sense of absurdity in the misadventure that will claim Archy's life. As the Turks run back to their trenches, the spectator is reminded of the consequences of the unsynchronised watches. Colonel Robinson orders the first group of men to go over. Through a series of wide shots and tracks, the spectator watches the carnage of the troops from the right-hand side of no man's land. As the wounded crawl back to their trench, the second wave prepares to go out (97:33).

Weir builds up the tension in this final act through the scenes of Frank trying to convince Colonel Robinson that the assault is futile. Robinson is implacable. Frank suggests to Barton "to go above Robinson's head." Barton orders Frank to do so. "General Gardner. Go like the wind." For six minutes and forty-six seconds Weir has only used battle noise to accompany the pictures. The last piece of music heard on the sound track was "Au fond du temple saint". In an aural and visual inclusion Weir places Jean-Michel Jarre's "Oxygene" under the scene of Frank racing to General Gardner. Frank is pictured taking on "death alley" to make the journey as short as possible. Jarre's theme was last used when Frank and Archy ran for their lives in the salt desert of Western Australia. Although a thoroughly modern and synthetic work, its pulsating rhythms, stylised gunshot sounds and piercing melody sit perfectly with Frank's race against time. Weir builds even more tension by adding artillery fire to the sound design of these scenes and having Frank call out for a path to be cleared for his sprint.

Weir has arrived at the most critical stage in this sequence, where the spectator now sees everything in the theatre of war, and wills Frank to get back in time to save his friend's life. Frank is pictured by a medium wide shot racing back to Barton with the news that General Gardner has called off the attack (102:01). Meanwhile, the communication line is repaired. Weir indicates to the spectator that Frank will not get back in time by reintroducing his principal theme, the lament, "Adagio for Strings and

Organ.” This music accompanies the exchange of letters and photographs in the trenches and close-ups of Frank suffering fatigue as he races to his destiny. Above the music the phone rings out and, through a slow tracking medium close-up to extreme close-ups, Robinson orders Barton to send the men over (102:26). “It’s cold blooded murder.” “I said push on.” Barton then announces, “Right men, we’re going. I want you to remember who you are. The 10th Light Horse. Men from Western Australia. Don’t forget it. Good luck.” Through a series of close-ups the spectator is drawn into the raw humanity of the moment through men embracing, leaving behind wedding rings, watches and medals, writing letters home, reading the 23rd Psalm and extinguishing a final cigarette. During these scenes, which account for three minutes and 37 seconds, there is a total absence of the artillery fire that Weir has placed under nearly every other shot in the final act.

Throughout this final scene of *Gallipoli* Weir has placed the spectator in a position where he or she empathise entirely with Archy and his heroic sacrifice. The drama of the watches, the reissuing of the military commands, and Frank’s failure to make it back in time to save Archy, serve to build a greater sense of tension and drama around the central narrative and visual concern of the entire film, Archy’s martyrdom. Weir was so confident about the sense of identification most spectators would have for Archy and his fate and the mystical intertexts that accompany similar stories of heroic love, that he concludes the film with a freeze frame of the moment of his death. Archy’s life has been vanquished, but the spectator’s sense of identification with his memory has just been born.

The Omniscient Look

The impact of the scene on the spectator is matched in the seeming power Weir gives to the spectator as the events unfold. The repositioning of the spectator’s gaze begins in the one-minute scene within Barton’s tent. Weir starts the scene with a right to left pan from the gramophone to the singing Barton. The spectator’s voyeuristic view is justified with a tracking shot as one soldier, and then a two-shot of others, all Barton’s subordinates, watch him. As with the viewer, Barton is oblivious to their gaze. As Barton whistles an accompaniment to Nadir’s profession of love, the gaze of the camera changes dramatically. With no shift in the immediacy of the sound design, the spectator is unexpectedly positioned outside the intimacy of the scene, on a boat on the water looking back toward the carnivalesque night-lights on the

escarpment. Recalling the arrival of the troops in the opening scene of this sequence, the viewer sees bombs explode like fireworks over the heads of the resting soldiers and listens to music that diminishes the horror behind the scene. Weir repositions the gaze to create a space in which the spectator can comprehend the full import of what is about to happen.

In the scene immediately preceding the one just described, Archy has urged Barton to choose Frank over him as the runner during the battle. Earlier still, the spectator became the only one in the diegesis to know that Barton and the Colonel's watches were not synchronised. Though Weir returns the spectator from the presiding shot off the coast to the intimacy of the trenches in the scenes that follow the Bizet scene, the spectator is now all-knowing about what will cause the slaughter, (the watches), who will try to save the day, (Frank the runner), and who will die (Archie, who will be Frank's faithful partner until death). As in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, at almost exactly half way through this scene, the spectator's all-knowing presence in regard to the narrative, is now repositioned to be an all-seeing and all-present gaze as well. For the remaining fifteen scenes in the film the spectator presides as a knowing but impotent participant over the slaughter of the sacrificial Archy and his mates.

In the next scene, the day of the assault on The Nek, Weir uses a left to right pan, followed by a series of mid-shots, as the spectator sees Frank called up to be the runner. Then, in series of tightly framed close-ups of their faces, and a handshake, Frank takes his leave of Archy. "See ya' when I see ya." "Not if I see ya' first." It is the last time they will speak to each other. As Frank reports for duty the artillery barrage begins on the Turkish trenches. Weir now exploits the mobility of the spectator's gaze within the scene for he or she sees the cannon balls as they are fired from the cannons and then land near the Turkish trenches. This latter view is especially poignant because the spectator is placed in "no man's land," surrounded only by the remnants of battle, ammunition, guns and pieces of uniforms left behind. Weir now seamlessly moves the spectator between the pathos of the trenches and the intimacy of a man's final moments before death, and the dreadful inevitability of where their final journey will end.

The spectator is aware of exercising a mobile gaze in this sequence which is not contained in Williamson's screenplay. As Archy waits his turn in the third group to be sent out, he notices a weeping soldier preparing to go over. In a series of close-ups, Archy identifies the soldier as "Les" who, in one of the first scenes of the film,

told Archy that, “Girls run. Men box.” Les is now trembling with fear as he is about to undertake the last run and fight of his life. Archy stumbles away from Les to his post, the whistle sounds and Les is mowed down as soon as he lifts his head above the trench. Major Barton orders a cessation to the attack. When the phone line is cut, Barton sends Frank to Colonel Robinson. As Frank weaves his way through the trenches Weir shifts the viewer back to the right-hand side of no man’s land. In a pan from left to right the viewer surveys the dead and dying. A wounded soldier who moves over his dead comrades on the battlefield is shot by enemy fire.

Preparing to go over, the innocent and “boyishly beautiful” Archy⁹²⁰ is framed in a close-up, wearing an oversized hat and holding a large bayonet in his hand. Williamson’s screenplay outlines how Archy hears his Uncle Jack’s pre-race questions as a voice-over. Weir, however, powerfully puts this final speech of the film on Archy’s lips. “What are your legs? Springs. Steel springs. What are they going to do? Hurl me down the track. How fast can you run? As fast a leopard. How fast are you going to run? As fast as a leopard. Then let’s see you do it.” As the soldiers prepare to leave the trench Weir, in a long shot, places the spectator, for the first and only time, in an enemy trench, looking over the barrel of a poised machine gun waiting for the Australians to rise up and run into no-man’s land. During this shot “Adagio for Strings and Organ” comes to an end. With Frank in earshot of the front-line, Barton sends the men over with the shrill call of his whistle. The men jump up and out of the trench and are greeted by a hail of machine gun fire. From a rare high angle shot of the trench the viewer sees Frank scream and collapse in despair. Archy, now without hat or bayonet, leads the way in racing out into no man’s land. The spectator is there, forward and to the right of Archy, as a volley of five shots rings out and hits him in the chest. This mid-angle shot of the dead Archy with arms outstretched, as in a cruciform, quotes the opening scene when he crossed Uncle Jack’s finishing line at athletic training, and set a world record. Archy has now crossed the line from this world to the next, forever recorded among the immortal war dead. It could also be that the Jungian Weir saw in the cruciform pose the Mandala, which combines the “birth of the whole man and the reunion of the ego and the self.”⁹²¹ Weir freezes this shot for ten seconds, and fades to black whereupon

⁹²⁰ Dobrez L and Dobrez P, “Old myths and new disclosures: Peter Weir’s Australia”, p. 226.

⁹²¹ Fredericksen D “Jung/sign/symbol/film, part one”, quoting Isabella Conti, p. 175.

Albinoni's "Adagio for Strings and Organ" begins again. Three seconds later the credits role for which Weir chooses blood red characters over the black background.

Illumination

Throughout the previous analysis I have drawn attention to the music, sound, set design, silence, composition of shots, camera angles and editing all of which are employed to construct and represent the mystical gaze. Weir enables the spectator to generate meaning and experience from *Gallipoli* by deliberately repositioning the gaze of the viewer from empathising with and accompanying the heroes to presiding over their destruction in the role of an omniscient spectator. In the second part of the final act the spectator adopts an all-encompassing omnipotent stance. Rather than being part of the subject of the narrative he or she becomes all-knowing, all-seeing and all-present to the world of the subject. This reinforces Weir's predilection for the permeability of boundaries between the self and the physical world that was in evidence in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. For most of *Gallipoli*, Weir constructs the gaze of the spectator to identify with Archy, until Archy's death becomes inevitable. Then through music, the absence of looks between Frank and Archy on the screen and the increasing mobility of the gaze, the viewer moves from identifying with Archy's death to crossing the line with him. Archy is relocated in the spectator's memory by the spectator knowing his story and by being relocated with the diegesis to receive his memory, which survives Archy's physical annihilation. "Archie's appointment with the highest honour is presented as something preternatural, equivalent to Miranda's appointment with the Rock: two ineffable transubstantiations of golden youth."⁹²²

In terms of the illumination which Weir achieves in the film here, he enables the spectator to achieve a glimpse of what Jung calls "individuation" by collapsing the boundaries between the subjective and the objective, between the conscious and the unconscious. Just as a Jungian therapist is understood to be a midwife to the unconscious enabling the client to reach a state of "undividedness",⁹²³ so Weir creates the right conditions to seamlessly reposition the spectator, inducing in him or her a glimpse of self-actualisation. He uses the character of Archy, inverts the national

⁹²² Rayner J, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 102.

⁹²³ Wilson C, *Lord of the Underworld: Jung and the Twentieth Century*, p. 139.

mythology and uses symbols “not to identify with the conscious or the unconscious but to forge and keep a living tie between them.”⁹²⁴

Gallipoli is indeed, as Dermody and Jacka have noted, a modern passion play,⁹²⁵ offering an answer to the greatest of all abjections: death, wherein we find the “breaking of the whole human person, an unacceptable and repugnant event, disintegration rather than achievement, a final fall into the weakness, of being human - a fall even for religious faith and theological articulation.”⁹²⁶ By this reading *Gallipoli* stands as a response to the abjection of death in a death-denying Western culture. *Gallipoli* enables the spectator to redefine issues of self and identity in the face of the threat of a hopeless and final death. The spectator is drawn by Weir not just to focus on Archy’s death, but respond to all deaths, to his or her own death, and even to the death of national discourses. As Rose Lucas observes,

Perhaps at least one reason for the enduring nature of the Gallipoli legend is the very fascination of the precarious play with the collapse into abjection, ...an historically and narratively contained replay of the return of the repressed. The drama of Gallipoli, particularly as it is represented in Weir’s film, allows for a simultaneous recognition of and instance from the possibility of dissolution or reversal inherent within the dominant discourse of patriarchy and nationalism.⁹²⁷

It is in such a context that the mystical gaze takes root because it is most clearly in the Christian mystical tradition that “the parallel mythological symbol(s) has a similar context and therefore the same parallel functional meaning.”⁹²⁸ Given the various responses to death “to grieve, to lament, to wrestle with nothingness and own up to the risk that nothing could be there, the promise of God is bound to what is empirically the end of all promise.”⁹²⁹ Weir explores this boundary by invoking the iconography and metaphors of the Christian mystical tradition which give hopeful readings of death. *Gallipoli* takes the senseless death of Archy and gives meaning to his courage and sacrifice. Weir might well see Archy as a colonial victim, but he also resurrects his memory and immortalises his sacrifice. Through Archy, Peter Weir

⁹²⁴ Fredericksen D, “Jung/sign/symbol/film, part one”, p. 181.

⁹²⁵ Dermody S, Jacka E, *The Screening of Australia Volume II: Anatomy of an Australian Cinema*, p. 159.

⁹²⁶ Collopy B, “Theology and the darkness of death”, *Theological Studies*, 39, 1978, p. 39.

⁹²⁷ Lucas R, “The gendered battlefield: sex and death in *Gallipoli*”, p. 62.

⁹²⁸ Fredericksen D, “Jung/sign/symbol/film, part two”, p. 467.

⁹²⁹ Collopy B, “Theology and the darkness of death”, p. 39.

narrates that all heroic deaths are a locus for meaning and hope. Weir's response to the abjection of a selfless death is reverence and awe. As I have shown it is entirely consistent with the fundamental elements of the origins of the Western mystical tradition, which in turn is steeped in the Biblical literature, to read temptation and sacrifice in the desert as a metaphoric test of the hero's ability to run the race of endurance and fight the good fight of perseverance, so to claim the prize of martyrdom and immortality. All mystical experiences are enunciations that death is not annihilation, that immortality is possible and that somehow, in some way, a metaphysical existence continues. Weir's own mystical illuminating encounter with "the ghosts" at Anzac Cove bears out how powerful an influence mysticism was in the decision to tell this story in this way.

Conclusions

Gallipoli is most often read as a film enshrining a post-colonial gaze. It is easy to see why. The presumptions and representations of race, class and power in this film are self-evident. Dorfmann's observation that the racial gaze "feels no obligation to avoid the caricature, and rebaptises each country as if it were a can on the shelf"⁹³⁰ is telling in regard to *Gallipoli*. The British, especially, were appalled at the way they were represented. Some critics claimed the film was filled with inaccurate clichés⁹³¹ and more recently scholars have looked again at the way Weir presents the Aborigines.⁹³² In Chapter Two I noted Richard Dyer's more recent challenge to study films for the diversity of ethnic backgrounds contained within dominant racial groups. Applying Dyer's theory to *Gallipoli*, white Australians are also sharply defined and divided. The upper class authority figures, embodied in Colonel Robinson and the arriving British, are seen to be demanding, cruel and indifferent to the slaughter of the working class soldiers. Among the soldiers distinctions are made between the infantry and the Light Horse Brigade, even though both groups end up battlefield fodder. I also

⁹³⁰ Dorfman A, *The Empire's Old Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Barbar and Other Innocent Heroes Do to Your Minds*, p. 24.

⁹³¹ See D Malcolm, "More than a decade of living dangerously", p. 22.

⁹³² For example, the second scene of the film in which the Aboriginal jackaroo washes with Archy, prepares his feet, urges him on and delights in his win could well be true of a particular digger who went to war. It belies, however, the treatment to which Black Australians were subjected to at the time. Their culture was being systematically destroyed, children forcibly removed, rivers poisoned, they were given bread laced with strychnine and could be shot on sight. All this was going on in Western Australia in 1915. See, Dobrez L, Dobrez P, "Old myths and new disclosures: Peter Weir's Australia", p. 219.

noted in Chapter Two that racial and ethnic gazes are rooted in social and religious iconography. The mystical gaze, then, is related to racial and post colonial gazes but attends to different questions and effects a different outcome, revolving around transcendence of racial, ethnic and sexual boundaries.

Gallipoli's view of the Australian concept of mateship, for example, is highly sexualised in film, but is not eroticised. It is a portrayal of a bond of love, and how an individual can go to his death out of love for another. Whereas in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the mystical gaze was presented in the context of virginity and Nature, in *Gallipoli* it is deployed in relation to the ideal of mateship or brotherly love. It is my argument that the mystical gaze transforms usual cinematic conventions and expectations and into something more ethereal, universal and eternal.

In this chapter I have argued that, latent in the Western spectator, is an identification with the metaphors of the desert, the sacrificial love of the innocent hero and the foot race with mystical codes that lead to a sense or encounter with Otherness through martyrdom, personal suffering and sacrifice. By the end of the film the spectator has reconstructed Archy's martyrdom, by bestowing meaning on his senseless death, but he or she has been, in turn, offered an experience of a different kind of reality, one imbued with the spiritual and the mystical. That Weir is interested in creating this world in the cinema should come as no surprise given that Jung believed the process of individuation and religious or mystical experiences were closely linked.⁹³³ Colin Wilson's observation about the Jungian goal of individuation in the characters of Proust is as applicable to what Weir wants to achieve in *Gallipoli* and how in the final scene he constructs it.

What we glimpse in such moments is that if consciousness could move beyond its normal limitations, we could easily experience a kind of chain reaction into mystical ecstasy. The delight, the sense of meaning, of other realities, other times, and places, releases an immense surge of optimism and purpose. This in turn is enough to raise us permanently to a higher level of vital drive and determination – for, like a man who has glimpsed heaven, nothing less can now ever satisfy us.⁹³⁴

⁹³³ See C Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, pp. 280f. Also see, C Wilson, *Lord of the Underworld: Jung and the Twentieth Century*, p. 109.

⁹³⁴ Wilson C, *Lord of the Underworld: Jung and the Twentieth Century*, p. 143.

Chapter Seven: *Witness*

Peter Weir had come to attention of Hollywood studios after *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*. In 1979 Warner Brothers approached Weir to direct a film adaptation of Colleen McCulloch's best-selling novel, *The Thorn Birds*.⁹³⁵ He declined. Instead he made *Gallipoli*, which went on to become the number one box office film in Australia in 1981, debuted at number one in United Kingdom, made US\$6 million in the USA, and was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film in 1982. Paramount Pictures were the US distributors for *Gallipoli*.⁹³⁶

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer backed Weir to make *The Year of Living Dangerously* in 1982. It was Weir's first film made without Australian government assistance. Shot for US\$3.4 million, it became the most commercially successful Australian film in the USA up to 1983, making US\$16.38m for MGM.⁹³⁷ It won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for Linda Hunt and was nominated for dozens of awards, including the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.⁹³⁸ Weir was now a bankable, as well as a critically acclaimed, director.

In 1983 Weir read Paul Theroux's novel, *The Mosquito Coast*. He became "obsessed" by it and lobbied the Hollywood studios to back a film adaptation of it.⁹³⁹ Even with Paul Schrader as the screenwriter, no one shared his level of enthusiasm for the project. During this time Harrison Ford had been signed by Paramount to star in *Witness*. Ford's contract enabled him to approve the director of the film and, having admired Weir's work in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, he wanted him for *Witness*. Weir had made money for Paramount with *Gallipoli* and it was clear by early 1984 that he would not be able to make *The Mosquito Coast*, so he met with Ford and signed on to *Witness*.⁹⁴⁰

It is regularly stated that *Witness* was a fill-in film for Weir until he was able to get backing for *The Mosquito Coast*.⁹⁴¹ This is understandable given that Weir is quoted as saying that in 1984 he only wanted to read scripts that were " 'green light'

⁹³⁵ Dell'Oso A-M, "Peter Weir finds a new direction in Pennsylvania", p. 14.

⁹³⁶ See, www.afc.com.au and www.boxofficeprophets.com/hudson.

⁹³⁷ www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/film/dbase/1998/yearof.

⁹³⁸ www.pro.imdb.com/title/tt0086617/awards.

⁹³⁹ Mann R, "Weir's lens lingers on the intimacy of a glance", p. 32.

⁹⁴⁰ Silverman J, "Harrison Ford takes off his fedora – and turns humble", *Herald Examiner*, 1985, p. 22. Also see J Rayner, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 130.

⁹⁴¹ See M Bliss, "Keeping a sense of wonder", *Film Quarterly*, Fall, 1999, p.12; A-M Dell'Oso, "Peter Weir finds a new direction in Pennsylvania", p. 12; R Mann, "Weir's lens lingers on the intimacy of a glance", p. 31; M Bygrave, "Hollywood smiles on our directors", p. 8; J Rayner, *The Films of Peter Weir*, pp. 130f; D Shiach, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 139.

projects and if one is half decent, I'll take it.”⁹⁴² This observation, however, regularly leads to false conclusions about Weir's involvement with and influence on *Witness*. Jonathan Rayner, for example, states, “Accepting *Witness* in place of his own project entailed working on a ready-made film rather than a subject of choice, which meant submitting to more external supervision than might have been the case in Australia.”⁹⁴³ Apart from the fact that Weir was already used to significant intrusion in his films as happened with the South Australian Film Commission on *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and the Australian Film Commission on *The Last Wave*,⁹⁴⁴ Rayner does not take into account that it was Ford, then one of Hollywood's most bankable actors,⁹⁴⁵ who sent producer Edward Feldman to sign Weir up for *Witness*. Weir concedes he took the film only after meeting with Harrison Ford and then agreeing that what the script needed was a new direction. “Fortunately Harrison and I agreed on everything. So the first thing we did was build up the Amish aspect of the story.”⁹⁴⁶

Although Weir is not credited as a writer, he relates how he rewrote the script three times.⁹⁴⁷ “On my first rewrite, I dismissed the melodrama, removed it even and the producer brought me back to earth and back to realities.... ‘Remember it's a thriller, and if you keep that in mind you'll construct a kind of hybrid between your style and the genre.’”⁹⁴⁸ In the subsequent rewrites, and in what must have been the final directions to the credited screenwriters, Weir changed *Witness* in two dramatic ways. He felt that the real contribution he could make to the film was to explore and understand the world of the Amish and juxtapose their world to the so-called

⁹⁴² Bygrave M, “Hollywood smiles on our directors”, p. 8.

⁹⁴³ Rayner J, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 130.

⁹⁴⁴ In the first film Weir had to insert a romance into the narrative which he disliked so much he waited to buy back the rights to the film and cut it out in the Director's cut of 2001. In the second film he could not secure sufficient extension funding from the AFC to fully realise the tidal wave which engulfs Sydney at the end of his script.

⁹⁴⁵ In 1985, as a bankable star, Harrison Ford only followed Sylvester Stallone who appeared in both *Rocky IV*, which grossed US\$300.5m, and *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, which grossed US\$300.4m, and Robert Redford who starred in *Out of Africa*, which grossed US\$239.5m.

⁹⁴⁶ Mann R, “Weir's lens lingers on the intimacy of a glance”, p. 31.

⁹⁴⁷ Dell'Oso A-M, “Peter Weir finds a new direction in Pennsylvania”, pp. 12, 14. Neil Jillet asserts that *Witness* was “loosely written by Earl W Wallace and William Kelley.” Jillet N, “Weir's weaknesses more obvious than his strengths”, *The Age*, 2nd May 1985, p. 14. It must be noted that whatever of the authorship of the final script Kelley and Wallace are the credited authors for the story and the script, and they went on to win: the 1985 Oscar for “Best Screenplay written directly for the screen”; The Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Motion Picture in 1986; and the Best Screenplay Directly Written for the Screen from the Writers Guild of America.

⁹⁴⁸ Clinch M, *Harrison Ford: A Biography*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, p. 220.

advanced world of the USA in the 20th century.⁹⁴⁹ As a result he shifted the perspective of the original script from telling the story from John Book's point of view to largely telling the story of *Witness* from the perspective of Rachel Lapp and her son Samuel.⁹⁵⁰ Weir went as far as to "place the relationship between Harrison Ford and the young Amish widow at the heart of the movie, filming it in scenes with nuances and glances, in scenes in which Weir removed much of the dialogue, and at a pace slower than the Hollywood norm."⁹⁵¹ With these significant changes to the original narrative Weir marked it with his personal and distinctive stamp.

Witness was released in the USA on 8th February 1985. Made for US\$12m and grossing \$68.7m it was the ninth most commercially successful film that year.⁹⁵² It was nominated for a host of awards around the world and was successful in some categories.⁹⁵³ Critically, it received a more mixed reception. Some critics were impressed.⁹⁵⁴ "*Witness* is arresting, with these dreamlike images... something like a mystical reverie."⁹⁵⁵ Dell'Oso opined, "We are in a lost world, another of Peter Weir's spiritual landscapes... Those who have always enjoyed Peter Weir's eerie style

⁹⁴⁹ McDonald D, "Fresh but flawed thriller", p. 16.

⁹⁵⁰ Maslin J, "At the movies: Cooper film an inspiration for *Witness*", *The New York Times*, 134, 8th February 1985, p. C12. There seems to be some confusion about this point because one source says that, "The original screenplay focused on Rachel, but director Peter Weir asked screenwriters William Kelley and Earl W Wallace to rewrite it to focus on the comparison of pacifism and violence as seen through the eyes of John Book." See, www.pro.imdb.com/title/tt0090329/trivia. It seems more likely, however, that Maslin's account is correct for why would Weir, who wanted to give more prominence to the Amish side of the story, recraft the narrative around Book?

⁹⁵¹ Bygrave M, "Hollywood smiles on our directors", p. 8.

⁹⁵² The largest grossing films in the USA in 1985 were: *Back to the Future* US\$350.6m; *Rocky IV* \$300.5m; *Rambo: First Blood Part II* \$300.4m; *Out of Africa* \$239.5m; *A View to a Kill* \$152.4m; *The Color Purple* \$142.2m; *Cocoon* \$76.1m; *The Jewel of the Nile* \$76m; *Witness* \$68.7m; *The Goonies* \$61.4m. For a full list of the US box office results in 1985, see, www.teako170.com/box85-89.

⁹⁵³ At the Oscars it was nominated for Best Picture, Best Actor in a Leading Role, Best Director, Best Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction, Best Original Score and Best Film Editing. It won in the Screenplay and Film Editing categories. It won Best Edited Feature from the American Cinema Editors, USA, 1986. It won the Australian Cinematographers Society Cinematographer of the Year for John Seal in 1986. At the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) it won Best Score and was nominated in Best Film, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Editing, Best Cinematography, Best Original Screenplay. It was the opening film at 1985 Cannes Film Festival.

⁹⁵⁴ See: D Anderson, "Weir's genre piece with a difference", p. 30; P Attanasio "A Conventional Tale saved by the cast", *Washington Post*, 8th February 1985, p. 1; R Combs, "*Witness*", *British Film Bulletin*, 52, 616, May 1985, p. 67. Other critical responses to *Witness* include; S Kauffman, "A Review; a report", *The New Republic*, 192, 22nd December 1985, p. 24; R Kolker, "Gun lore: *Witness*", *Cinema Papers*, 51, May 1985, p. 24; J Kroll, "A Cop in Amish Country", *Newsweek*, 11th February 1985, p. 73; D McDonald, "Fresh but flawed thriller", p. 16; T O'Brien "Hit and Miss", *Commonweal*, 22nd March 1985, p. 18; K Chanko, "*Witness*", *Film in Review*; R Schickel, "Afterimages", *Time*, 18th February 1985, p. 26; J Simon, "Fancy meeting plain again", *National Review*, 5th April 1985, p. 58; M Sragow, "Bearing *Witness*", *Film Comment*, May/June 1985, p. 6; C Warnick, "*Witness*: give it a good look", *Washington Post*, 8th February 1985, Weekend p. 23.

⁹⁵⁵ Salamon J, "An Australian in Amish country", p. 32

–“to be mysterious without being mystifying” - can be reassured that Hollywood and *Witness* did not lose him; his magic simply works through more solid objects, like mist seeping from under a closed door.”⁹⁵⁶ David Denby at New York Magazine went as far as saying that Weir masterfully turned the police genre piece into “a meditation on violence.”⁹⁵⁷

Not all critics liked what they saw. Pauline Kael thought that Weir had “succumbed to blandness” in *Witness* and that it “was like a kind of Brigadoon”⁹⁵⁸ where Book’s time on the farm is “a trip to fantasyland.”⁹⁵⁹ Robert Hostetter took issue with Weir for taking the cop/thriller genre film “on a cinematic tour” of Amishland. He was unconvinced about Weir’s attention to detail as principally evidenced by Rachel’s inexplicably forward behaviour toward Book.⁹⁶⁰ Others thought Weir’s film was more at home in the agrarian and spiritual landscape of the Amish farmland than in corrupt Philadelphia.⁹⁶¹ Lawrence O’Toole noted that this is the first of Weir’s films explicitly to have a romance at the centre of the story, but that Weir was unable to satisfactorily fuse it with the cop and thriller elements in the narrative.⁹⁶² The speed of the plot developments were just too much for Neil Jillet. “Book recovers from a bullet wound with the same improbable speed that Rachel gets over her husband’s death.”⁹⁶³ And the way Weir uses Book’s gun in the Lapp’s house drew opposite responses. Jillet objects that “...there are clumsily contrived scenes with Book’s gun that come across as no more than fashionable, and inconclusive, contributions to the US debate on small-arms laws”⁹⁶⁴ while Kolker enthuses that “By keeping the gun consistently within the viewer’s awareness ...yet refusing to allow it to be used by the characters in their moment of greatest need, the film suspends us between our own cultural imperatives and clichés and those of a group alien to us.”⁹⁶⁵

The Textual Forebears of *Witness*

Although *Witness* is the best-known fictional representation of the Amish

⁹⁵⁶ Dell’Oso A-M, “Peter Weir finds a new direction in Pennsylvania”, p. 12.

⁹⁵⁷ Denby D, “The last of the just”, New York Magazine, 11th February 1985, p. 72.

⁹⁵⁸ Kael P, “Plain and simple”, The New Yorker, 61, 25th February 1985, p. 78.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 79.

⁹⁶⁰ Hosstetter R, “A Controversial *Witness*” Christian Century, 10th April 1985, p. 342.

⁹⁶¹ D McDougal, “Fresh but flawed thriller”, p. 16; M Sragow, “Bearing *Witness*”, p. 6.

⁹⁶² O’Toole L, “A thriller with two minds”, Maclean’s, 18th February 1985, p. 57.

⁹⁶³ Jillet N, “Weir’s weaknesses more obvious than his strengths”, p. 12.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 12.

⁹⁶⁵ Kolker R, “Gun lore: *Witness*”, p. 83.

community in the arts, it was not the first. Indeed, as American society became more technologically advanced the Amish way of life went into sharper relief. This becomes especially evident after the Second World War when the Amish lifestyle is untouched by the economic success of the rest of the USA. Today there are, approximately, 126,000 Amish in the USA.⁹⁶⁶ Their representation in film, television, theatre and literature is disproportionate to their number. An early, fictional portrayal of the Amish to the wider American society was in the 1955 Broadway musical comedy *Plain and Fancy*.⁹⁶⁷ Its narrative has an impact on *Witness*. A couple from New York City inherit a farm in an Amish district. When they venture from the city to Lancaster County they arrange for the sale of the farm to a Mr Yoder. To effect the sale they have to find him first. Everyone in the district is called Yoder. As the hapless couple search for their buyer they are touched by the simplicity and goodness of the Amish people they meet.

Strangers look on us and call us strange,
But lie we don't; and cheat we don't;
And wars we don't arrange...
Plain we are, for plain is good,
And plain is how we want to live.
We pray to God each day to keep us plain.⁹⁶⁸

Also in 1955 novelist Leigh Bracknett published, *The Long Tomorrow*, a science fiction story about how two Amish survivors of a nuclear bomb discover a computer, become fascinated by technology and cannot return to the Amish way of life. Bracknett's work was to be the first of many science fantasy novels centred on the Amish.⁹⁶⁹ The most influential of these is Isaac Asimov's *Foundation Gate* where he describes a "Hamish" civilisation whose simple agrarian practices enable them to survive an intergalactic war.⁹⁷⁰ Another related textual source for the wider

⁹⁶⁶ See census information for various US denominations at www.adherents.com.

⁹⁶⁷ Stein J, Glickman W, *Plain & Fancy*, Musical Comedy, New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1955. Joseph Stein was to stay with religious themes in his work. He is the author of the book, *Fiddler on the Roof*.

⁹⁶⁸ Stein J, Glickman W, "Plain We Live", *Plain & Fancy*, p. 24.

⁹⁶⁹ See J Anderson, *Millennium*, New York: Tor, 1994; G Bear, *Moving Mars*, New York: Tor, 1993; T Bison, *Fire in the Mountain*, New York: Arbor House/William Morrow, 1988; J Crowley, *Little, Big*, New York: Bantam, 1981; M Gloss, *The Dazzle of Day*, New York: Tor, 1997; P Levinson, *Silk Code*, New York: Tor, 1999; P Levinson, *The Meddelian Lamp Case*, New York: Harper Prism, 1998; R Sayer, *Calculating God*, New York: Tor, 2000; B Sterling, *Holy Fire*, New York: Bantam, 1997. For a fuller listing see www.adherents.com/lit/sf_amish. It is interesting to note the recurrence of the publishing house Tor in many of these titles, see, www.tor.com/tor.

⁹⁷⁰ Asimov I, *Foundation's Gate*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982.

community's knowledge about the Amish comes from the literature of the more accessible Mennonite community, especially those of Lancaster County. Since 1962 the Mennonites have provided fictional and non-fictional stories of their beliefs, lifestyle and community which is, in many respects, closely related to that of their religious cousins, the Amish.⁹⁷¹

Before *Witness* the only other film to focus its narrative on the Amish was Delbert Mann's *The Birch Interval* of 1976, where an 11-year-old girl is sent to live with Amish relatives in Lancaster County. Here she learns hard lessons about simple living, loving and letting go. Several themes emerge from this brief survey of the intertextual relationship between *Witness* and its antecedents. The arrival of an urban sophisticate in an Amish community is filled with revelation for the city dweller about the values of sharing and simplicity of lifestyle. As the Amish go about their daily life and explain their beliefs they are, at the same time, admired and parodied for their quaintness. The outsider never stays, but returns to the city-life enriched for the contact with Amish. The insider sometimes chooses to depart or is "shunned". For all of the reworking of these themes in *Witness* it remains the most important artistic representation and has led to much more interest in the Amish. Subsequently the Amish have now become subject matter for many other films and television programmes.⁹⁷²

⁹⁷¹ See R Wiebe, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, New York: Vintage Books, (1962), 2003. Set in Lancaster County: S Stambaugh, *I Hear the Reaper's Song*, Philadelphia: Good Books, 1984; A Wiebe, *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1984.

⁹⁷² Recent representations of the Amish on film and in television programmes include: Comedies: Ron Reiner, *North*, 1994; Peter Farrelly, Bobbie Farrelly, *Kingpin*, 1996; Brian Spicer, *For Richer or Poorer*, 1997; John McTiernan, *The Last Action Hero*, 1993; Michael Moore, *Canadian Bacon*, 1995; Wes Andersen, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, 2001; Peter Doctor, *Monsters Inc*, 2001; *Join the Amish*, Eveo Films, 1994; *Amish Boogie*, Short Film, 1999; Dramas: Larry Elikann, *Stoning in Fulham County*, 1998; Arthur Alan Seidelman, *Harvest of Fire*, 1996. There have been episodes of *Lois & Clark: The Adventures of Superman*, *As the World Turns*, *Murder, She Wrote*, *Picket Fences*, where central characters have been Amish, or the episode is set within an Amish community. Documentaries: *Amish – Not to be Modern*, Mpi Video, 1997; *Amish a People of Preservation*, Vision Video, 1991; J Tanner, *Amish Daughters*, 2001; A Williams, *This Side of Heaven*, 2000; D Eitzen, *The Amish and Us*, 1998; L Walker, *Devil's Playground*, 2002. A series of documentaries from 1989 – 2000 from the Amish County Videos: *Reflections of Amish Life*; *An Amish Country Adventure*; *An Amish Barn Raising*; *A Train Ride thru Amish Country*; *Amanda's Amish Kitchen*; *Amish Values and Plain and Simple*; *Amish Lifestyles*; *Amish Music Variety*; *Amish Harmonica*. See www.amishvideos.com/videos. The producers of this last series of films claim to have been given access to the Amish community, but as I will soon demonstrate, such access would incur on an individual, family or community "shunning" or excommunication from the group.

THE STRUCTURES OF THE MYSTICAL GAZE

Mystical Intertextuality

Apart from the biblical names used for the characters⁹⁷³ *Witness* is the most explicitly religious story Peter Weir has brought to the screen.⁹⁷⁴ Given his mystical interests in previous films, it is hardly surprising that Weir was the director Ford wanted⁹⁷⁵ and that the Amish were the elements of the story which drew Weir to undertake the project. The only way to comprehend the Amish lifestyle is to appreciate its appeal to the belief structure and corporate mysticism which underpins it. "The soil gives life, and the farmer experiences this source first-hand. These roots are embedded in the religious psyche, thus giving these rural people a sense of divine mission and contact with supernatural life."⁹⁷⁶

Menno Simons in Holland founded the Mennonites in 1536 as part of the Protestant Anabaptist reformation. The Anabaptists chiefly rejected infant baptism and the recognition of non-biblical Sacraments. In Switzerland in 1693 Jacob Amman led a reform of the Mennonite movement arguing against the use of buttons on garments, forbidding shaving for married men and holding that excommunication or "shunning" dissolves the marriage vows. His followers were initially called Upland Mennonites, but in time came to be known as the Amish, after their founder. The Amish came to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in the USA as a result of William

⁹⁷³ The intertextual references here are self-evident. I will deal with John Book's name in another section. The namesakes of the three main Amish male characters in *Witness* all appear in the First Book of Samuel. Eli (a name which means "For God's honour") is the elderly priest who tells the infertile Hannah that she will conceive a son. She does and names him Samuel (a name which means "God has heard me"). While he is still a young boy Hannah brings Samuel to the Temple where he becomes Eli's apprentice. Soon God calls Samuel to be a prophet. Samuel grows up to be the last of Israel's judges and goes on to appoint Israel's first King, Saul. Eventually Samuel deposes Saul and anoints David as King. One of Saul's sons, and David's most intimate friend, is Jonathon (a name that means "the Lord is gracious"), who is a warrior and is killed in battle. In the Book of Genesis Rachel is the mother of Joseph who was sold into slavery, from where the Chosen people were liberated in the Exodus. As a result she is considered one of the great Matriarchs of Israel. The reader is told that Jacob desired Rachel because he could not stop "gazing into her beautiful eyes". In the Book of Daniel, the prophet Daniel is tested by God to see if his faith is worthy. He is placed in a lion's den where his prayer is heard and the lions lay down before him. Daniel becomes the model of facing down adversity with faith and trust.

⁹⁷⁴ Unless Bliss has an odd meaning for "religion", I cannot agree that, "Weir has alluded to religion in previous films, but he had never portrayed it." I do agree that this is the first time Weir has explored an organised religious denomination. See M Bliss, *Dreams within a dream*, p. 111.

⁹⁷⁵ This is especially true given that Weir came to Ford's attention principally through *The Year of Living Dangerously*, described as "a thrilling breakthrough picture – for no other film that I can think of has looked on a political event as a spiritual crisis, nor spiritual growth as a political act, while letting the word 'spiritual' carry the full weight of paradox we feel within." See M Ventura, "Peter Weir's state of emergency", p. 5.

⁹⁷⁶ McMullen W, *A Rhetorical Analysis of Peter Weir's Witness*, p. 26.

Penn's religious tolerance movement, arriving after 1720. They hold to a literal interpretation of the Bible, the centrality of family life and communal self-sufficiency, pacifism, humility in dress and personal behaviour, simplicity of lifestyle, and a strict ordering of religious ritual and community structures. Extensive use is made of excommunication as a means to maintain social control. They reject the taking of oaths, lawsuits, and holding any civil office.⁹⁷⁷ One of their central beliefs has a bearing on the cinema. The Amish reject photography, film and television, not just because it employs modern technology but, more so, because the pictures represent graven images.⁹⁷⁸ Ironically any member of the Amish community who is caught watching *Witness* would be "shunned".

In Chapter Two I identified various elements of apophatic, kataphatic, nature and social action mysticism. In the Amish it is possible to see many of these foundational beliefs institutionalised in their religious and communal rituals. The Amish are apophatic mystics. They believe the world beyond their social boundaries, "out there among them English", to be a place of darkness where evil dwells. Following in the monastic tradition of the Early Desert Fathers and Mothers, they reject the world and adopt a strict internal regime to recreate heaven on earth. An extension of this separation is the rejection of images that may take the place of the image of God they seek. This practice echoes the anonymous, mystical author of The Cloud of Unknowing where he or she argues that the experience of Otherness is found in burying all images in a cloud of unknowing so that "the blind stirring of the heart" may bring the person to a knowledge of God.⁹⁷⁹ The Amish are kataphatic in as much as the demands of communal living brings them into the light of revelation. The degree to which one can obey the rules of the community assures the adherent that he or she is more deeply sharing in the encounter with God. The Amish are best known for their nature mysticism, where agrarian self-sufficiency is not only valued as an economic principle, but as a spiritual one as well. It is why Jonathon Rayner aptly describes Book's venture among the Amish in *Witness* as a retreat from Sodom into the Garden of Eden.⁹⁸⁰ Finally the Amish are social action mystics. The demands of their religious experience entails the assertion of their right not to bear arms, not to be

⁹⁷⁷ For a full discussion of Amish history and beliefs see D Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish Culture, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989. Also see www.800padutch.com/amish.

⁹⁷⁸ Huntington G, "The Amish: not to be modern", American Anthropologist, 89, 1987, p. 775.

⁹⁷⁹ Johnson W, The Mysticism of The Cloud of Unknowing, p. 18.

⁹⁸⁰ Rayner J, The Films of Peter Weir, p. 132.

conscripted, not to educate their children beyond the eight grade, and not to hold any public office. These social rights have now been successfully argued before the law courts in the USA and offer an alternative socio-political position by which the dominant group's view is challenged.⁹⁸¹ In this process the Amish have been regularly victimised and scapegoated for their beliefs.⁹⁸²

Peter Weir takes the narrative of *Witness* and constructs the mystical gaze through the conscious and skilful use of archetypal symbols. As I have noted in regard to *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Gallipoli*, what Weir does is to use symbols metonymically to signify the mystery and mysticism of the film. In this he moves beyond the “combination of familiar plot and exotic atmosphere, the ineffable, indefinable (woolly?) [sic] collusion of one mystery with another”⁹⁸³ to enable the spectator to ask, again, fundamental questions about meaning, purpose, identity, existence and the relationship of this world to worlds beyond. It is not insignificant in this regard that the working title of *Witness* throughout its production was *Called Home*.⁹⁸⁴

Book's journey to Lancaster County is not, as some critics have argued, a day tour with the Amish or a tourist trip to Fantasyland. Book embodies the quest of Western society's nostalgia, used here in the most ancient, and richest sense of the word, “the pain or yearning to be at home.”⁹⁸⁵ The spectator identifies with Book as not really being at home “among them English” where violence and corruption increasingly hold sway, and fears that Eli Lapp's prediction that Book is “going back to nothing” is also true of his or her Western, industrialised existence. Book symbolises Western culture's existential disenfranchisement from the social structures it has created and its flirtation with worlds which find meaning in existence through a more ancient appreciation and appropriation of the mystical in the everyday. Read in this light, it is critical that in *Witness* Book does not consummate his flirtation with

⁹⁸¹ On each of these issues see D Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, passim.

⁹⁸² As I have already pointed out the idea of a scapegoat in society is seen to have its roots in the mystical and theological presumptions of organised religion. See R Girard, *The Scapegoat*; R Girard, J Oughourlian, G Lefort, *Things hidden Since the Foundation of the World*; R Girard, *Selections*; P Dumouchel (ed.), *Violence and Truth: On the Work of René Girard*.

⁹⁸³ Combs R, “Witness”, p. 67.

⁹⁸⁴ www.pro.imdb.com/title/tt0090329/maindetails.

⁹⁸⁵ “Nostalgia comes from the Greek words nostos (a return home) and the suffix -algia, from algos (pain). Nostos is from the ancient root nes- (return home), which also appears in harness. The suffix -algia also appears in other pain words, including neuralgia (nerve pain) and myalgia (muscle pain).” See, www.mailarchive.com/word@tlk.com/msg00008. Also see M Warner, “Tongues untied: memoirs of a Pentecostal boyhood”, *The Material Queer*, D Morton (ed.), Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996, pp. 44, 56.

the earth mother Rachel Lapp, but returns to his own home, somewhere else. What changes most through Book's encounter with a community whose existence takes spiritual things seriously, is John Book. "The American tradition - and *Witness* served in that tradition - is have the hero... start off with a flaw that is healed or cleansed. At the end, he walks off into the sunset, and he's a better man for the experience."⁹⁸⁶ I assume this is what scholars have meant when they have described *Witness* as a "redesigned Western".⁹⁸⁷ I will soon return to the importance of the change in the film's title from *Called Home* to *Witness*.

By encoding *Witness* with universal, archetypal symbols Weir further explores the way they heal the split or the alienation of humanity from its own life. "The symbol leads us to the missing part of the whole man. It relates us to our original totality... And since the whole man is a great deal more than the ego, it relates us to the suprapersonal forces which are the source of our being and meaning. This is the reason for honoring subjectivity and cultivating the symbolic life."⁹⁸⁸ Pre-eminently among the symbols deployed in the text is the name "John Book". Having lived by the book as a police officer, John Book goes to a community ruled by The Good Book. Furthermore, the name "John" invites an allegorical reading of the character to John the Baptist, whose life changed as a result of who he met in the wilderness, and the Gospel of John, the most symbolic Gospel of the four and one which argues for believing without seeing.

In *Witness* there are, at least, 19 cross-cultural symbols that have similar meanings in mythical or mystical literature. Weir deliberately and metonymically constructs the visual and verbal narrative around them. These include a funeral, grandchild, grandparent, angel, bells, birds/birdhouse, gun, barn, buggy/car/train/travel, windows, doors, blood, wounds, breasts, farm and a picnic.⁹⁸⁹ The scope of this chapter precludes the examination of how Weir uses each of these

⁹⁸⁶ McGilligan P, "Under Weir and... Theroux," *Film Comment*, 22, 6, November-December, 1986, p. 31.

⁹⁸⁷ See M Haltof, *Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide*, p. 79; J Rayner, *The Films of Peter Weir*, pp. 131f; D Shiach, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 131.

⁹⁸⁸ Edinger E, *Ego and the Archetype*, Baltimore: Penguin, 1972, p. 130, quoted in D Fredericksen, "Jung/sign/symbol/film, part one", p. 189.

⁹⁸⁹ See, J Campbell, *Myths To Live By*, London: Paladin, 1988; T Chetwyn, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, London: Granada, 1982; J Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1981; J Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1978; A deVries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, Amsterdam/London: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1984; C Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, New York: Aldus, 1964; C Jung, *Memories, Dreams Reflections*; S Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, New York: Allen and Unwin, 1955. Also see www.mythsdreamssymbols.com.

symbols. I will limit myself to the ones Weir uses in a most metonymical and intertextual way at critical stages in the narrative: the rituals of farewell and transformation; the birds and taking flight; the gun.

Rituals of Farewell and Transformation

Witness has a straightforward three-act structure. Act One opens with a funeral and concludes with Book collapsing from a gunshot wound on the Lapp's farm in Lancaster County. Act Two opens with Book recovering from his injury and his awareness of the different world he has entered. It concludes with Book assimilating into this world through the barn-raising. Act Three opens with Book finding out his police partner has been killed which drives him to engage in a fist fight in the local town which blows his cover and concludes with him driving away from Rachel and the farm. Weir deliberately exploits or places symbols throughout the narrative which are pregnant with intertextual references of mystical importance.

Presuming that the action of the *Witness* begins with the shooting in the Philadelphia train station and concludes with the police shoot-out on the farm, Everett Corum argues that *Witness* begins and ends with violence.⁹⁹⁰ While there is a bookend structure to this film, violence is not its theme. Given that the funeral of Rachel's husband opens the film and Book's departure from the farm closes it, *Witness* begins and ends with a departure and a farewell. In both cases the farewell is surrounded by travel. In the opening establishing shots of the film Weir has the Amish "rise up" from the earth as they walk or ride to the Lapp farm for Jacob Lapp's funeral. We are never given any reason for Jacob's death. By custom he would have been only slightly older than Rachel⁹⁹¹ and so we can assume Jacob has died in early mid-life. Weir is not interested in Jacob's death, but in his funeral ritual. For the Amish, of course, Jacob is not dead, but is alive to God. Weir signals this transformation in the opening scenes of *Witness*. The scene is set with Jacob's pine box coffin⁹⁹² covered by a white pall, the ancient Christian symbol of the baptismal robe, recalling the day when the adherent began the Christian journey by "putting on Christ" and preparing for the day when he or she will wear the wedding garment at Christ's eternal banquet. For a young man's

⁹⁹⁰ Corum E, *Tantalizing Ambiguity: the Cinema of Peter Weir*, p. 121.

⁹⁹¹ "Boys and girls begin their search for a spouse when they turn sixteen. They marry by the time a young woman turns twenty or a young man is in his early twenties." See, www.800padutch.com/amish.shtml.

⁹⁹² For a description of Amish funerals see www.rockome.com/html/amish.

death, there is little public display of grief at Jacob's funeral, except for Jacob's wife, Rachel, and his father, Eli. During the funeral liturgy the Amish minister announces in Dutch German "Christ has now welcomed Jacob home."⁹⁹³ Daniel speaks on behalf of the entire community when, in the first English dialogue of the film, he says to Rachel "I am sure Jacob will now walk in the way of the Lord." Immediately following this scene there is a montage of dissolving shots, taken at various times during the day, showing the Amish working in, and harvesting, their fields. Death in general, and Jacob's death in particular, has only briefly disrupted their routine. Indeed death is but one more season in their lives.⁹⁹⁴ Jacob has now reached the harvest of his faith, he has gone home.

At the end of *Witness*, a similar transformation has occurred in regard to John Book.⁹⁹⁵ Book's farewell begins after the shoot-out scene in the Lapp's barn with Police Captain Paul Schaefer laying down his gun. In the next scene Book has discarded his Amish costume and is now dressed in his city suit and tie. He sits with Samuel amongst the tall grass by the banks of a pond. They say nothing until Book affectionately kisses the boy and begins to walk away. Samuel says, "Goodbye John Book" to which Book replies, "Goodbye Samuel." On the porch of the Lapp's house Book meets Rachel for the last time. No words are exchanged, only sexually charged glances and longing looks. Over Book's left shoulder is the reconstructed and reinstalled birdhouse that he crashed into the day he arrived. This is the same one we saw him rebuilding in an earlier scene. Book breaks their mutual gaze and turns and walks toward the car. Rachel moves to the frame of the door and follows his progress with her eyes. At the car Eli Lapp tells John Book, "you be careful out there among them English." Book waves and drives up the hill. The birdhouse is now at the extreme right hand edge of the shot. On the road Book passes Daniel; on his way we assume to see Rachel. Daniel salutes him as he passes. Book stops the car, but Daniel keeps walking down the hill toward the Lapp's farm. Book proceeds to drive up and over the hill.

The bookends of *Witness* are in place. The entire film has been about rites of passage. Moreover it has charted a rite of transformation: from the confidence of the

⁹⁹³ I am grateful to Mennonite Minister, Rev Jeremiah Krutz for his translation of this scene from Dutch German to English.

⁹⁹⁴ These shots evoke the commentary on the life cycle from the Book of Ecclesiastes. "For everything there is a season and a purpose for every time under heaven. A time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant and a time to reap." See Ecclesiastes 3: 1-2.

⁹⁹⁵ See M Bliss, *Dreams Within a Dream*, p. 123.

Amish's belief that the unseen Jacob has moved over from this world to the next; to Book's movement from being near death to seeing life in at least two different ways. The spectator assumes, for example, that Book's response to Schaefer's violence, "Enough! Enough!" indicates that he has moved to see the value of a life of peace. Second, earlier in the film we learnt from Book's sister Elaine's reported comments to Rachel that Book loves his job more than he has ever loved a woman. By the film's end Book has moved to the point where he loves Rachel enough to let her go. Book has been born again.

Birds and Taking Flight

In concert with the understanding of transformation in religious collectives,⁹⁹⁶ Weir uses other metonymical parallels in *Witness* to signal his mystical interests. From the beginning of the film there is travel by horse and buggy, cars, train and on foot. For many mystics one's life is described as a journey and most analysis of myth and symbols concur that forms of transportation in mystical apparitions, visions, dreams and art indicate a spiritual or psychological movement.⁹⁹⁷ Whoever is in control of the form of transportation indicates the degree to which the individual is in control of the process. In *Witness*, Rachel and Samuel are always passengers in the horse and buggy, the train, the police car and in Book's car. Book, however, is always the driving the car, that is until he crashes it into the birdhouse and is physically, emotionally and spiritually stuck on the farm.

This latter metonym is important. In Chapter Five, when dealing with the importance of birds in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, I outlined how they function as an archetypal symbol of transformation in many cultures. While birds in flight are missing from *Witness*, the birdhouse looms large in the visual narrative. It cannot be by mistake that Weir has Book initially crash into the birdhouse, and then later has him restore, reinstall and drive past it at the end of the film. If *Witness* is in large part about seeking and finding a home, then the birdhouse, where birds nest, nurture their

⁹⁹⁶ Smart N, Dimensions of the Sacred, p. 117, particularly the myths of Osiris, Shiva, the crossing of the River Styx, Demeter and Persephone, Pegasus and the Celtic legend of Arianrhod.

⁹⁹⁷ The idea of journey in mysticism is also expressed as being on the path or following or finding the way. See D Solee, "To be amazed, to let go, to resist", Mysticism and Social Transformation, J Ruffing (ed.), Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001, pp. 45, 51; E O'Brien, Varieties of Mystic Experience, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951, pp. 313-319.

Also see "journey", "way" or "path" in T Chetwyn, A Dictionary of Symbols; J Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols; J Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols, A deVries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery; and www.mythsdreamssymbols.com.

young and return from their flight, becomes one of Weir's central visual metonyms. Through it he alerts the spectator to see how the violent, masculine and spiritually corrupt journey, which has constituted John Book's world until now, comes crashing down. As physical healing takes place so does a spiritual transformation where a more feminised Book, now in touch with the things of the earth through milking, enjoying good food and experiencing family and community living, restores the birdhouse. It is under the now restored birdhouse that Rachel goes out to meet Book and they passionately kiss and embrace. With his rebirth complete and the birdhouse back in place Book can return to his world a more whole person, having reclaimed the intuitive elements of his personality. Jacob and Book survive their rites of passage and emerge from the same fertile fields to a new, unknown life. The split between this world and the next is healed through the belief that Jacob is not dead. The split in Book's personality is healed through him reclaiming his psychological shadow.

This strongly Jungian reading is further justified by a more subtle symbolic theme that runs throughout *Witness*: flight. Jacob makes the ultimate flight. Rachel takes flight with her grief and goes to her sister "in the city" of Baltimore.⁹⁹⁸ Book helps Rachel and Samuel take flight from Detective McFee and then discovers that he is in flight from Captain Schaefer. As Rachel and Book's romance develops Eli warns Rachel that she risks being "shunned" or sent into flight, and Daniel encourages Book to take his leave of the Lapp farm. In the only discussion about their mutual attraction Book tells Rachel that for their relationship to develop one of them would need to take flight from the world they know, and so Book returns to his world at the end of the film.

Ideas about "flight or fight" underpin several psychological theories. These can often be spoken of in negative terms.⁹⁹⁹ It is regularly associated with progression and regression. For Carl Jung, however, flight was not necessarily viewed in

⁹⁹⁸ One of the puzzling aspects in the narrative at this stage is that we assume Rachel's sister is also Amish. Eli would never have permitted Rachel and Samuel to go to people outside their religious community. Given that, how does she live the agrarian Amish life in Baltimore? If she lives on a farm outside Baltimore why does Daniel make so much of Samuel going to "the city"? If he is destined for another farm all Samuel will see of "the city" are train stations. I assume this is a narrative device to prepare the spectator for what Samuel will see, which is that part of the world which is not the Lapp farm.

⁹⁹⁹ For an excellent summary of how flight and fight has been used in psychological literature, and its limitations, see S Taylor, L Cousina Klein, B Lewis, T Gruenewald, A Gurung, J Updegraff, "Behavioural responses to stress in females: tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight, Psychological Review, 107, 3, pp. 411-429.

retrograde terms, but was associated with an inward and outward movement in regard to the subconscious self.

The regression of libido (or adaptation to the inner conditions) can similarly proceed in two ways: extraverted, manifest as “a flight into extravagant experience of the outside world”; and introverted, being in retreat from the outside world. “The process of energetic transformation or conversion” he termed the canalization of libido, viewing it as “a transfer of psychic intensities or values from one content to another, a process corresponding to the physical transformation of energy.”¹⁰⁰⁰

The central flight in *Witness* is that of John Book. One can see the intertexts at work here between Weir’s Jungian beliefs and sensibilities, and Kelley and Wallace’s genre piece. As we saw in the poetic language of mysticism in Chapter Two the idea of flight is central to how many devotees describe their experiences.¹⁰⁰¹

Book’s unexpected and unwanted flight into the world of the Amish is filled with revelation about who he is and what he might become. It touches on the major constructs of Jung’s theories about the process of individuation. Weir constructs the character of Book in the narrative to move from being an overly extraverted, masculine, logos/animus driven man to him discovering, through the Amish, his introverted, anima “feminine soul”,¹⁰⁰² as Jung would term it. In the process there is a letting go of violence and an awakening of his “Eros”, symbolised by his love and passion for Rachel. The importance of the child Samuel in this process is critical. It through Samuel’s eyes, what he witnesses, that Book finds himself on this inner flight in the first place. The wounded Book gives as the reason why he cannot be taken to a hospital, “If they find me, they find the boy.” And by the end of the film we witness Book non-violently fighting off the threat which the child’s sight gave cause to, and integrating the insight of the values of the community which nurtures the child’s innocence. In befriending the boy and coming to love him, shown by the poignant, almost silent scene where Book kisses Samuel goodbye, Weir suggests that Book has

¹⁰⁰⁰ Frank O, “Carl Jung”, www.ozzyfrank.150m.com/pages/CarlJung.

¹⁰⁰¹ O’Brien E, *Varieties of Mystic Experience*, pp. 30, 50, 78, 129, 183.

¹⁰⁰² In Latin “anima” means “soul” and “animus” means “spirit”. See M Stein, *Jung’s Map of the Soul*, Chicago: Open Court, 1998, pp. 133f. Don Shiach claims this feminisation of Book is similar to what Weir regularly does to many of his protagonists in his other films. See D Shiach, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 134.

befriended the child within himself. Children play significant roles within all major mystical traditions as sources of innocence, truth and revelation.¹⁰⁰³

This reading is further amplified by Book returning from where he came. For Jung the circle, or mandala, was the symbol of wholeness, of the divine.¹⁰⁰⁴ For individuation every inward journey must be completed by the complementary outward one and vice versa. Book's flight therefore is sealed with his departure back to "them English" in the city. And Rachel and Samuel's flights are also perfectly completed with Book's departure, a return to the routine of their daily life and, we assume, Daniel's future proposal of marriage to Rachel. Without such return journeys the flights of all the characters in *Witness* would be one-way, and so incomplete.

The Smoking Gun

Throughout Book's time with the Amish his gun becomes the strong metonym of his previous life. It does not, however, just evoke images of a violent street war, as much as a sexual battle. There are 21 scenes in *Witness* where a gun is prominent.¹⁰⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰³ See C Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," in The Collected Work of Carl Jung, Vol. 9, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959, Part 1, pp. 151-181; Also see C Jung, C Kerenyi, Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis, R Hull (trans.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969; C Kerenyi, Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter, R Manheim (trans.), New York: Schocken Books, 1977; E Neumann, The Child, New York: Putnam, 1973.

¹⁰⁰⁴ See M Stein, Jung's Map of the Soul, p. 156.

¹⁰⁰⁵ There are 21 occasions in *Witness* when a gun is a central element in the narrative.

1. After Samuel witnesses the murder McFee draws his pistol and holds it ready to shoot as he searches the cubicles in the train station's toilet.
1. In the Police Station's trophy cabinet wherein Samuel sees the photograph of McFee, there are several pistol shooting trophies.
1. McFee and Book draw their guns on each other in the shoot-out in the underground car park. Book is wounded in the battle.
1. Book fully loads his gun as he speaks on the phone to Carter, his police partner.
1. Samuel discovers Book's loaded gun and starts to play with it. Book finds him doing this and removes the bullets. Rachel finds Samuel holding the gun while sitting next to Book on the bed. Book asks her to hide the gun in a safe place.
1. Book's gun and bullets are on the Lapp's table as Eli teaches Samuel about why the Amish reject guns and violence.
1. Book asks for his gun back from Rachel. She fetches it from behind the soup tins and the bullets from the flour jar.
1. Book returns the gun to Rachel's hiding place and wraps her hand around the bullets.
1. Schaefer, McFee and Fergie get out of the car just short of the Lapp farm and load up their guns in the boot of the car. They walk to the gate of the farm publicly bearing their arms.
1. McFee knocks Eli to the ground with the butt of his rifle.
1. Fergie and McFee hunt for Book in the barn with cocked rifles.
1. Book seizes Fergie's gun after he drowns him with corn in the silo.
1. At gunpoint Schaefer takes Rachel and Eli to the barn.
1. Book shoots McFee as McFee targets Book.
1. McFee fires a bullet into the air as he slides down the barn wall.

In psychological theory and analysis, and in its impact on film theory, a gun usually represents two things: aggression and hostility; and sexual energy.¹⁰⁰⁶ In both cases, the use of guns in *Witness* discloses a further case for the mystical gaze. In the last chapter when analysing *Gallipoli*, I demonstrated the way in which violence and sacrifice are reconstructed in mystical traditions in terms of valuing martyrdom. Appropriately enough for a film at least in part about war, guns are everywhere at the end of *Gallipoli*. I noted, however, that in the most mystical moment in that film Archy discards his gun and runs to his death. In part *Witness* is also about war, an urban war where accessible guns are increasingly leading to senseless deaths. In the final confrontation between Schaefer and Book none of the Amish are armed. Rachel and Book do not run to the kitchen to retrieve the gun from behind the soup cans. These defenceless people only have strength in their numbers and the power of what any of them could witness to if they survived Schaefer's gunfire. In a sense Book says, "Go ahead Paul, make martyrs of us all." If Schaefer had shot Book and the Amish at that point, this is how their deaths would be claimed, as martyrs for the pacifist cause. Weir takes us to the brink of such a moment and then pulls back. Weir is not interested in turning the Amish into Archys. Weir is more interested in the silent power of peace over the angry confrontations of battle. "The mere act of watching is more powerful...Schaefer, virtually enclosed within a semicircle of Amish onlookers, is defeated and sinks penitentially to his knees."¹⁰⁰⁷

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1. As Book moves toward the door of the barn bearing Fergie's gun, Schaefer holds a pistol to Rachel's head.
 1. Book throws down his gun.
 1. Schaefer points Fergie's rifle into Book's back and marches him out of the barn.
 1. At the door of the barn he sees the local Amish men now surround him and he pushes Book out into the semi-circle they have created.
 1. Book calls on Schaeffer to lay down his arms. "What are you going to do Paul, are you going to shoot me, shoot him?...him?...the woman?...me?...It's over! Enough! Enough!"

Book walks up to Schaefer and seizes the rifle and then grabs the pistol which is couched in the top of Schaefer's trousers.

¹⁰⁰⁶ As one example of this research see Jung's ideas on cross cultural phallic images, A Stevens *On Jung*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 101-107. It is interesting to note that Jung argued the gun was also a phallic symbol. For the impact on film theory of the psychoanalytical reading of guns and weapons as phallic symbols, see B Creed, "Phallic mania: hysteria and *Dead Ringers*", *Screen*, 31, Summer, pp. 125-146; K Gabbard, G Gabbard, "Phallic women in the contemporary cinema," *American Imago*, 50, 4, 1993, pp. 421-439; T Miller, "James Bond's penis", *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies Culture*, P Lehman (ed.), New York: Routledge, 2001; M Pomerance, J Sakeris (eds.), *Bang Bang, Shoot Shoot! Essays on Guns and Popular Culture*, Needham Heights: Pearson Education, 2000; D Shiach, *The Film of Peter Weir*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Bliss M, *Dreams within a Dream*, p. 122.

The ideal of peace, and thereby the pursuit of non-violence, is the single most universal goal of cross-cultural mysticism.¹⁰⁰⁸ It shares this goal with most psychological schools. In the Jungian school, for example, a peaceful existence is a key indicator of the level of individuation an individual is achieving. For Jung, the collapsing of boundaries between the conscious and unconscious, led to a balance in one's life which is manifest by an inner peace.¹⁰⁰⁹ The entire narrative of *Witness* explores this challenge and Weir proposes here, as he does in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Gallipoli*, and *Dead Poets Society* and *The Mosquito Coast* and *Fearless*, that the roots of this conflict are not primarily political, but spiritual.¹⁰¹⁰ John Book, as the symbol of a society seduced by the rule of the gun is converted to peace by the spiritual values and practices of a mystical community that the so-called sophisticated industrialised society thinks antiquated. By the film's end their insights are found to bear witness to another, better way.

The other usual reading of a gun is as a symbol of sexual energy. Weir could not have been unaware of the way in which the narrative suggests this reading. Take for example when the fatherless and prepubescent Samuel finds Book's gun in the bedroom drawer. On seeing Samuel playing with the gun Book yells out, "Don't even...even touch it. It's a loaded gun. I'll take the bullets out. Now it's safe...I am sorry to yell at you, but I just don't want you to get hurt." "Okay Mr Book", Samuel replies. As they sit on the bed, Book takes out the bullets and hands the gun to Samuel. "It's alright for you to look at it now. It's unloaded. It's safe. If you want to handle it, you can handle it while I'm here, that's alright." Rachel enters the room and sees Samuel handling the gun. She is horrified. She sends Samuel out of the room to wait for her downstairs and admonishes Book. "John Book while you are in this house, I expect that you will respect our ways." Book agrees with her and asks her to hide his gun, "Put it safe, somewhere where he won't find it." Rachel takes the gun from Book by the very tip of its butt, as though it is infectious to hold.

By any reading, this scene is about male initiation. In Book's unreconstructed world it is acceptable for a small boy to handle a gun under adult supervision. In the Amish world this is never permissible. Similarly if the gun is read as a symbol of

¹⁰⁰⁸ See M Eliade, *The Sacred and profane*; M L Furse, *Mysticism: Window on a World*; F Happold, *Mysticism*; R Jones, *New Studies in Mystical Religion*; N Smart, *The Phenomenon of Religion*; N Smart, *Worldviews: Cross Cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*; N Smart, *The Phenomenon of Religion*; F Staal, *Exploring Mysticism*.

¹⁰⁰⁹ See C Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, pp. 285f.

¹⁰¹⁰ See M Ventura, "Peter Weir's State Of Emergency", p. 5.

sexual energy then here is an older man, who will soon be competing for the affections of the young boy's mother, initiating him into what is at stake; explaining that male sexuality has safe and unsafe characteristics and that to understand its power he needs tutelage, supervision and care. By extension, the laying down of the law by Rachel emasculates Book and Samuel as she hides the gun on both of them for the protection of her son and at the request of her soon-to-be love interest.¹⁰¹¹ As if to underline the point the next scene has Eli with Samuel on his knee teaching him about the horrors of violence. He says while pointing to the gun, which is on the table in the foreground of the shot, "What you take into your hands, you take into your heart. Therefore you come out from among them and be separate, saith the Lord, and not touch the unclean thing." In the space of a day Samuel is given two contrasting instructions ostensibly about violence, but as potently about differing attitudes to male sexuality.

It has often been observed that Weir's films have little sex in them or that his characters are asexual or repressed.¹⁰¹² In the last chapter I argued that the Weir's mystical gaze was about the transformation of sexuality. *Witness* may be an exception to this rule, but Weir handles the sexual energy between the main characters in a very different way to most mainstream filmmakers. Book's gun belongs to his former identity, including his sexual identity. The spectator knows that although Book is middle aged, he is without a wife and children and that he disapproves of his sister bringing her lovers back to the family home. Apart from being married to his job, there is a sense that Book's sexual energy has been invested in other uncommitted relationships, where, as Book's sister tells Rachel, he has been able to avoid the responsibility he fears. When Rachel hides his stock-in-trade, Book has to learn a new way of relating to the world on every level. Though Weir has Rachel and Book passionately kiss under the birdhouse, there is no evidence in the text of the film, that they physically consummate their relationship. As I have indicated earlier in this chapter, it would be inappropriate for them to do so, because Book is establishing an altogether new, softer, intuitive identity, where even the opportunity of loving a woman celibately is an option. This new way of being sexual is confirmed by the fact that at no stage does Weir have a scene in which Book reclaims his gun and bullets

¹⁰¹¹ Rayner J, *The Films Of Peter Weir*, p. 138.

¹⁰¹² See M Bliss, *Dreams within a Dream*, p. 111; M Haltof, *Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide*, p. 134; D Shiach, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 133.

from Rachel. To the spectator's knowledge at the end of the film the gun remains, like a trophy, behind Rachel's soup tins in the kitchen cupboard.

As sexually constrained as some commentators presume religious experience and mysticism might be, it is, in fact, often reported in highly sensual and erotic terms. Paul Tillich goes as far as to say that "Eros is the driving force in all cultural creativity and in all mysticism."¹⁰¹³ By this he is not referring to all sexual activity, but "as a longing awareness of alienation becomes the dynamic force behind creativity, growth, and self-transcendence. It is the moving power of life."¹⁰¹⁴ In Greek mythology, Aphrodite bestowed two types of sexual love on humanity, one which gave into the "earthly passions" and "heavenly love which is free from the lewdness of youth."¹⁰¹⁵ Various mystical traditions within Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism have elevated the pursuit of sexual pleasure into an experience of the divine. The great 16th Century Hindu mystic Mirabai encourages her followers to enjoy sexual activity to the fullest because it recalls how the world was created through the sexual action of the gods.¹⁰¹⁶ The Islamic Sufi mystic Hafiz of Shiraz describes his desire for God in terms of his attraction to a handsome young man in his village.¹⁰¹⁷ Displaying different appetites, Hafiz's colleague Rumi describes heaven as a banquet of fine wine and beautiful young women.¹⁰¹⁸

The Hebrew culture had no problem in using "sometimes down to earth, very material, and deliciously sensual language"¹⁰¹⁹ to capture its relationship with God. Through the highly erotic images of the book of The Song of Songs it uses the metaphor of the bride and bridegroom, which have become a central metaphor in Western mystical language. Even though the Christian Scriptures are more muted in their erotic or sensuous language, in its most mystical of texts the bride/bridegroom metaphor is among the most important.¹⁰²⁰ Even St Augustine who is known more for

¹⁰¹³ Paul Tillich quoted in A Irwin, Eros Toward the World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, p. 1. Also see E O'Brien, Varieties of Mystic Experience, passim.

¹⁰¹⁴ Quoted in A Irwin, Eros Toward the World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic, p. 8.

¹⁰¹⁵ R Solomon, K Higgins (eds.), The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991, p. 16.

¹⁰¹⁶ A Schelling (trans.), For Love of the Dark One: Songs of Mirabai, Boston: Shambhala, 1993, pp. 39, 48, 51, 89.

¹⁰¹⁷ P Avery, J Heath-Stubbs (trans.), Hafiz of Shiraz: Thirty Poems, London: John Murray, 1952, pp. 22-23.

¹⁰¹⁸ J Moyne and C Barks (trans.), Open Secret: Versions of Rumi, Putney, Vermont: Threshold Books, 1984, p. 43.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ackerman D, A Natural History of Love, New York: Random House, 1994, p. 48.

¹⁰²⁰ See Revelation 18: 23; 19: 7; 21: 2; 22: 17.

praying, “Lord grant me chastity and continence, but not yet!”¹⁰²¹ also uses a highly erotic interpretation of the bridegroom metaphor to describe the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Like a bridegroom Christ went forth from his chamber, he went out with a presage of his nuptials...He came to the marriage bed of the cross, and there, in mourning it, consummated his marriage,...he lovingly gave himself up to the torment in place of his bride, and he joined himself to the woman forever.¹⁰²²

The most famous Christian mystic to employ sexual language to describe her experience is Teresa of Avila who says that during prayer a smiling angel pierces her heart and thrusts the arrow down to her bowels which arouses in her a divine ecstasy.¹⁰²³ Teresa of Avila’s ecstasy provides but one example of the ways in which phallic symbols pervade mystical literature. One only has to think of the ways in which swords, arrows, spears, knives, serpents, crosses and candles are used in the discourse of mystics from most religious groups to appreciate the phallic nature of the symbol.¹⁰²⁴

Weir is stepped in a tradition which understands the duality of the symbol of the gun. Like Freud and Jung, he is aware that as a weapon it is a dealer in death, but that it is also a phallic symbol. In *Witness* he uses the gun to inextricably link the power of life between the energy of Eros, procreative love, and Thanatos, death.¹⁰²⁵ John Book is emasculated when his gun and its bullets are taken and hidden. Book, who was almost killed by the “whacking” he received from McFee’s gun, cannot “whack” anyone else without it. It is Rachel’s intervention that forces Book to embark on another course, on a new life. In this reading Rachel is not Book’s potential wife, but his earth mother.¹⁰²⁶ When Book declares, “Enough! Enough!” to death, his

¹⁰²¹ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, chapter vii, paragraph 17.

¹⁰²² Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo Suppositus*, 120, 8. Quoted in D Ackerman, *A Natural History of Love*, p. 317.

¹⁰²³ E. Allison Peers (trans. & ed.), *The Complete Works of St. Teresa of Jesus*, Vol. III, London: Sheed & Ward, 1972, p. 282.

¹⁰²⁴ See: R Goodland, *A Bibliography of Sex Rites and Customs*, London: George Routledge & Sons, 1931; G Scott, *Phallic Worship*, London: Senate, 1996; S Rocco, *The Masculine Cross and Ancient Sex Worship*, San Francisco: Sun Publishing, 1999; www.mythsdreamssymbols.com.

¹⁰²⁵ W Graham Cole, *Sex in Christianity and Psychoanalysis*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 227.

¹⁰²⁶ Rayner sees an iconographic link between the mirror framing of the semi-naked Rachel in her bedroom and the framing of Miranda in the mirror at the beginning of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. He also

actions indicate that he has accepted an entirely new way of life. For Book and Rachel to consummate their love in *Witness* would constitute spiritual incest. It would end in another death for one of them, that of their previous life. So the relationship is resolved in highly mystical terms where a passionate, erotic and sensuous desire is contemplated, dreamt about, flirted with, acted out in small measure, but not given full rein. This enables Book and Rachel to resolve the alienation in which the spectator found both of them at the beginning of the film and to see that by the end of *Witness* they have both accepted a self-transcending sacrificial love which marks the resolutions of many of Weir's films.¹⁰²⁷

Prepared then by the texts and their intertextual references to other mystical texts and traditions, and by numerous metonyms that signify Weir's mystical interests, he constructs his scenes to enable the spectator to exercise the mystical gaze. Three pivotal scenes in the film will demonstrate this point and show how the exact nature of the mystical gaze varies according to the film, and that not all four structures of this gaze are present or given equal weight in the mystical scenes in every film. In *Witness* the omniscient look is almost entirely absent from the scenes which have attracted the most metaphysical reading, but that does not mean that this look is not used at all. On two occasions it marks a turning point in the narrative.

The Omniscient Look

As Samuel begins to explore the Philadelphia train station, his own gaze is transfixed on a large bronze statue in the arrivals hall. It is Walter Hancock's "War Memorial."¹⁰²⁸ This imposing bronze is of a male phoenix/angel¹⁰²⁹ clasping a dead man to his breast. The male figure is reminiscent of Michelangelo's "Pietà" except that in "War Memorial" the wings of the phoenix/angel indicate a vertical movement

argues that "viewing the mother figure naked prompts him to reject integration into the Amish." See J Rayner, *The Films of Peter Weir*, pp. 142, 145.

¹⁰²⁷ This theme can be seen in the resolutions of *Gallipoli*, *The Last Wave*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Dead Poet's Society*, Billy Kwan's death in *The Year of Living Dangerously*.

¹⁰²⁸ Walter Hancock (1901 – 1998), *War Memorial*, commissioned after World War II. It is 12 metres in height and dominates the northern end of 30th Street Station, Philadelphia. Given the way Weir uses the metaphor of battle and warfare, it seems appropriate that Hancock used his 1936 bronze of *Pegasus and Woman* as his sketch for *War Memorial*.

¹⁰²⁹ In the chapter on *Picnic at Hanging Rock* I described in detail the intertextual allusion to angels. The significance of a Phoenix is no less important. "In Greek mythology, the Phoenix was a bird with great beauty, splendor and longevity. ... The Phoenix is said to rise from its own ashes. ... It comes alive through the transforming power of fire and it lives in full splendor. In the Middle Ages the Phoenix was often used as a symbol for Christ, as he resurrected. This legendary bird is an archetypal dream symbol that brings us positive and powerful images of birth." See www.mythsdreamsymbols.com.

taking the figure upward, rather than the horizontal repose of Jesus' corpse in his mother's lap. When Samuel happens upon the statue Weir changes the atmosphere of the scene completely. Maurice Jarre's haunting, long chords take over from the sounds of the busy terminal. Samuel's gaze is pictured through an inward tracking shot and short upward tilt. The spectator then assumes an omniscient gaze through a static, high-angle, reverse wide-shot over the phoenix/angel's left shoulder. The spectator sees Samuel's expression of awe and then his mother entering the frame. She looks up to see what Samuel is looking at. Rachel takes Samuel by the hand and leads him back to their seats. As they walk off Samuel looks back over his shoulder twice and Rachel looks back once, suggesting they are conscious of being observed.

With a deft touch Weir metonymically parallels the drama that is about to unfold in *Witness* and positions the spectator to knowingly preside over it. The Amish are about to become involved in battle from which there will be casualties. Their anonymity, peaceful lifestyle, pacifism, Rachel's membership of the community and Samuel's safety will all be threatened as a result of the ensuing local war. This visual reference also serves to cast Rachel into the phoenix/angel role she will soon fulfil. Within a day of this event, Rachel will cradle the wounded Book to her breast and take him home. In an obvious intertextual reference to Jesus as an innocent man who suffered for many, Book bleeds from his side, as a result of being "pierced through" by a bullet. By reading the bronze figure as a mythic Phoenix the parallels to Rachel's role in the narrative are even more striking. Rising from the ashes of Jacob's death, Rachel nurses Book back to physical life and later through her love awakens in him a spiritual renewal where he can renounce the violence of urban warfare.

The most common reading of *Witness* is that it is a statement about pacifism, or as Denby more accurately observes, "a meditation on violence."¹⁰³⁰ Remaining consistent with the themes explored above, a good amount of psychological literature links flight, fight and violence.¹⁰³¹ In a similar way, as I outlined in the last chapter on *Gallipoli*, the mystical life has often been expressed in terms of a battle or war. This metaphor is by no means limited to Western or Christian mystical traditions. Almost every eastern mystical tradition, including those who strongly advocate pacifism, is

¹⁰³⁰ Denby D, "The last of the just", p. 72.

¹⁰³¹ L Berkowitz, *Aggression: Its Causes, Consequences and Control*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1973; L Eron, J Gentry, P Schlegel, *Reason to Hope: A Psychological Perspective on Violence and Youth*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1995; N Miller, *Frustration and Aggression*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1976; J Tedeschi, R Felson, *Violence, Aggression and Coercive Actions*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998.

replete with similar images.¹⁰³² Ninian Smart observes that it is in this area that mystics make their most important social contribution. “Since, strange to say, our human instincts so often turn towards warfare, we need the counterpoise of the pacifist side of religion – and this is often supplied by the mystic.”¹⁰³³ In the contemporary culture of the USA the Amish, Mennonites and Quakers are the best-known mystical collectives that advocate complete pacifism, and yet they understand their lifestyle to be a personal battle between good and evil and maintain a social war to preserve their community’s prerogatives. From above the War Memorial the spectator sees that the more general battle between good and evil, between the inner and outer worlds, is about to be particularised in the plight of Samuel and Rachel.

There is only one other shot in the film which could be described as an omniscient look. It comes in the barn-raising sequence, which I am about to analyse in detail. Strikingly, in concert with the analysis of where the repositioning occurs in the scenes from *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Witness*, it comes at just half over half way through the sequence, at 72:06, when, just before lunch, the outward structure of the barn is completed. At this point the camera pulls back to an unpopulated field to an extreme long shot of the partially completed barn. There is nothing on the soundtrack. This effect creates a reverential silence. Unlike the other scenes I have analysed, this shot is from a low angle, there is no movement in it, and Weir does not return to it. It does, however, mark the point at which the sound design changes. The rest of the sequence has no music, only actual sounds of the lunch scene and the completion of the barn. Why does Weir not use the omniscient look more in *Witness*? Because while it is a significant construct within the mystical gaze, Weir knows he has other equally powerful devices at his disposal.

The Barn-Raising

This scene is the one that critics use the most mystical or poetic language to describe.¹⁰³⁴ This sequence involves thirty-four scenes and the host can be tabled as follows.¹⁰³⁵

¹⁰³² See, K Armstrong, *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, New York: Ballantine, 2000; Sun Tzu, *The Art of Spiritual Warfare*, Quest Books, 2000; www.berzinarchives.com/kalachakra/holy_war_buddhism_islam_shambhala_long.

¹⁰³³ Smart N, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, p. 297.

¹⁰³⁴ McMullen calls it “upbeat and a spiritual uplift...a testament to the beauty and value of community.” See W McMullen, *A Rhetorical Analysis of Peter Weir’s Witness*, p. 207. For a similar commentary see J Salamon, “An Australian in Amish country”, p. 32. Shiach likens the sequence to the

67: 22 - 67:32	Arrival of the Amish community.
67: 33 - 67: 37	Women begin to gather with their baskets of food.
67: 38 - 67: 50	Book and the Lapp family arrive on their dray.
67: 51 - 67: 59	Hochleitner greets Book as Rachel watches both of them
68: 00 - 68: 02	Eli calls the men to work.
68: 03 - 68: 13	Rachel joins the women.
68: 14 - 68: 30	Hochleitner tells Book that now he has recovered he should go home.
68: 31 - 68: 55	Book meets the other Amish men, as Rachel watches on.
68: 56 - 69: 38	The barn frame is prepared for raising and then drawn up.
69: 39 - 69: 46	From a safe distance Rachel and Samuel admire the work.
69: 47 - 69: 59	Eli coordinates the positioning of the walls.
70: 00 - 70: 24	Montage of working shots: hammering, sawing, drilling.
70: 25 - 70: 41	Hochleitner admires Book's work and shares his lemonade.
70: 41 - 71:11	Montage of working shots: hammering, sawing, drilling.
71: 12 - 71 :18	Rachel helps to prepare lunch.
71: 19 - 71: 23	Book is seen to be a competent and hard worker.
71: 24 - 71: 48	Final beams of the structure are put in place.
71: 48 - 71: 59	Book and Rachel gaze at each other. Rachel averts her eyes and walks away as Book continues to look and smile at her.
72: 00 - 72: 06	Women lay lunch out on the benches.
72: 06 - 72: 12	The barn's structure is completed.
72: 13 - 72: 16	Sitting at the benches the men say Grace before meals as Rachel prepares to serve.
72: 17 - 72: 29	Rachel walks to where Book is seated and pours him a drink.
72: 30 - 72: 42	Eli is shocked.
72: 43 - 72: 51	Hochleitner and other members of the community look on in disbelief.
72: 52 - 73: 05	Hochleitner jealously gazes at Book.
73: 06 - 73: 10	The men return to work on the barn.
73: 11 - 73: 14	Book and Hochleitner work together on the apex of the roof.
73: 15 - 73: 28	Montage of working shots as the barn nears completion.
73: 29 - 73: 32	Rachel works on a quilt with other Amish women.

great Hollywood tradition in Westerns of taming the frontier. See D Shiach, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 131. Not all commentators liked it. Haltorf says it "approaches cliché" and is a "...Disneyesque scene, consists of shots of antlike activities, harmony, labor division by gender." See M Haltorf, *Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide*, p. 89.

¹⁰³⁵ See footnote 831 for an explanation of my application of the terms shot, scene and sequence.

73: 33 - 73: 46	An older Amish woman admonishes Rachel for the attention she pays to Book.
73: 46 - 73: 51	By dusk and the barn has been finished.
73: 52 - 74: 02	The Amish pack up their tools, congratulate Book on his skill and depart.
74: 03 - 74: 14	Rachel introduces Book to the couple whose barn he has just helped build.
74: 15 - 74: 41	The Amish community sing a hymn of thanksgiving as they depart the farm as Book and the Lapp family depart on their dray silhouetted against the evening sky.

The Participatory, Empathetic Identification

The scene immediately preceding this one has Schaefer tell Carter about how the police force is like the Amish, "...We're a cult too. Well, a club. With our own rules." This barn-raising scene shows the spectator the communitarian and agrarian rules by which the Amish live. It is only the second time in the film we have seen a gathering of the Amish community. The first was for Jacob's funeral at the beginning of the film. There are parallels. The community gathered to pray that Jacob will rise from the dead on the last day, and now it gathers to raise a barn from nothing in a single day. Weir invites such observations because of the way he opens both sequences. The spectator is placed at a low angle position below the grassy knolls at the side of the road along which the Amish ride or walk on their way to the respective farms (67:22). As with *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Gallipoli* the scene begins with the spectator entering the world of the Amish as a identifying participant. Nearly all the angles are low and looking up at the barn as it is raised (68:56). This is constructed through a series of close mid-shots and medium wide shots of the men and boys at work while the women admiringly support them and serve lemonade (70:41, 71:12). By contrast with *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Gallipoli*, there is no repositioning of the spectator within the sequence whereby they are recreated as the Other, presiding over the action. In *Witness* the gaze of the spectator is entirely justified by our relative placement within the narrative. We are empathetic witnesses throughout this film and now we are privy to the social action that flows from the spiritual beliefs of the Amish. The mysticism of the sequence, however, is further evoked in two other ways: lighting and music.

The Look of Illumination

John Seale's lighting reinforces the idyllic quality of the scene. Although there is a time distortion in the scene¹⁰³⁶ Seale bathes this sequence in the contrasting warm colours of the fields and hills around the pinewood frame of the emerging barn, the whiteness of the farmhouse and the muted colours of the Amish clothes. Underlying this idyllic presentation is drama of the scene which centres on the sexual competitiveness between Book and Hochleitner,¹⁰³⁷ the growing mutual sexual attraction between Rachel and Book and the risk of shunning Rachel runs by pursuing "the Englishman". The drama is constructed chiefly through points of view shots and reverse angles as each of the three characters plays off each the others throughout the sequence.

Even more so than in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Gallipoli* Weir uses music to great effect to achieve a mystical feeling in this sequence, though he only lays music under the action for the first 17 of 34 scenes in the sequence. Given the importance of music in Weir's films, *Witness* provides a good example for analysing how it helps Weir construct the mystical gaze.

¹⁰³⁶ Although the spectator is told that "we have a barn to raise and a day to do it", the light quality in the arrival scene places the action in the late morning or at midday.

¹⁰³⁷ The sexual competitiveness between the two men is crafted around highly erotic symbols: builder's pouch; a hammer; hammering four times with which they drill and plug holes. For a full discussion of Hermes and the erotic nature of hammers and pouches see C Jung, "The outline of the shadow", www.cgjungpage.org/ccintroone, and www.mythsdreamssymbols.com. As the Lapp's dray comes to a halt the spectator sees Book reclining on the tray with a builder's pouch in his lap and a large hammer protruding from its top. As he dismounts Daniel Hochleitner greets him. Rachel looks on as Hochleitner says, "I hear you're a carpenter." "It's been a while", Book replies. "No matter, we can always use a good one." In the medium close up that follows Daniel has a pouch, but no visible hammer. As he and Book walk toward the work site, Hochleitner's hammer is firmly hanging down against his leg from the back of his carpentry pouch. As they walk toward the other men Hochleitner asks, "Your hole is better now?" "Yeah, it's pretty much healed." "Good. Then you can go home." When the two men who are vying for Rachel's affection reach the work site Book takes his pouch from over his shoulder and fastens it around his waist. Book and Rachel exchange smiles as he does so. The spectator sees that Book has two large hammers whereas while the men around him all have their pouches in place, they have no visible hammers. In the montage shots that follow Weir pictures Book hammering four times, drilling a hole twice, plugging a hole once and sawing timber twice. Hochleitner cannot keep up with the more virile Book. In the same montage Weir has Daniel hammering once and drilling once. He never saws timber and never plugs a hole. No wonder by lunchtime Rachel only has eyes for Book. Weir constructs the sexual tension through the use of close-ups and symbols. He could not have been unmindful of the intertextual references in mythology, especially in the myth of Hermes, where hammers are seen as weapons with phallic power and pouches are symbols of the womb. Weir positions the spectator to see in this mythic battle of male sexuality between John Book and Daniel Hochleitner that the more endowed Englishman is going to win out. For a full description of the scene see Appendix X. For a discussion on the hammers and trade tools as phallic symbols in film, literature and popular culture, see P Kirkham, J Thumin, *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993; P Schwenger, *Phallic Critiques: Masculinity and 20th Century Literature*, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984; www.subliminalworld.com/SLANG.

Composer Maurice Jarre has worked with Peter Weir on *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Witness*, *The Mosquito Coast* and *Dead Poets Society*. His son Jean-Michel Jarre was the composer on *Gallipoli*. In *Witness* the father borrows the son's trademark synthesisers to perform the musical score.¹⁰³⁸ There are four moments in *Witness* when Weir has Jarre write distinctive musical material for the Amish. Each one of them further supports and develops the mystical quality of the pictures on the screen and the intertextual references in the narrative. These include “*Witness*: the Main Title”, which is used as the Amish gather for Jacob's funeral; “Building the Barn”; “The Amish are Coming” which accompanies the community running to the Lapp farm after Samuel rings the bell to alert the neighbours that they are in trouble; “*Witness*: main theme: Reprise”, which accompanies Book's departure from the farm and the closing credits.¹⁰³⁹

In the barn-raising sequence Weir skilfully places Jarre's stately and strong bass notes of a Quaker-style hymn under the arrival of the Amish. This foundation in the music parallels the activity in the scene: a well-prepared foundation for a more lyrical structure to built upon it. The melody of the hymn theme emerges as the Lapp family arrives. It is relatively unadorned until Book and Hochleitner move to the work site. As they do, and in a way that picks up the movement that will soon follow on the screen, Jarre introduces the first of two variations on his theme. This first variation is configured around a flowing pastoral semiquaver melody. When Book and Rachel are caught gazing at each other, a strong crotchet counter melody is placed over the moving parts below it. This theme is maintained until the first wall of the barn is raised. As it goes up so, the music crescendos into the second more regal and expansive exposition of the hymn tune. This decrescendos into a counterpoint pattern of steady whimsical semiquavers over the solid hymn-tune base. As Book proves to be a good worker and is admired by the other Amish men, a striking synthetic flute obbligato is placed above the other parts. As the spectator sees Hochleitner, in an act of generosity, share his lemonade with Book, the obbligato becomes more embroidered as the men work hard in the noonday sky to see the barn rise. When Rachel comes out from the house, she looks up to see the progress the men have made. Jarre reintroduces the central hymn theme but this time in a key one-third above the original key signature. This adds a majestic quality which sits well with the

¹⁰³⁸ See www.mfiles.co.uk/Composers/Maurice-Jarre.

¹⁰³⁹ Jarre M, *Witness: the Original Score*, Los Angeles: Varese Records, 1985.

picture of the completed shell of the structure. This last variation of the theme continues until the scene concludes with a final cadence, reminiscent of the “Amen” sung at the end of a chanted prayer. As I noted above for the rest of the sequence, the lunch and the afternoon’s work, only atmosphere tracks are used, until at the very end of the day’s work when the Amish sing an unaccompanied hymn of thanksgiving as they depart from their day’s activity.

Weir and Jarre masterfully induce a mystical atmosphere to the sequence through the content of the music score and its placement in the diegesis. Jarre’s work highlights several motifs on the screen and in the narrative. By using two contrasting but complementary counterpoint melodies over the strong structure of the hymn tune, Jarre successfully captures the complexities of the feelings on the screen and accompanies the illumination of the spectator. The Amish are solid and proud. Their love of nature is robust and expansive. Playing out within this world is Book’s exploration of the Amish culture which he is coming to admire in a similar way as they are warming to him, and the attraction Rachel and Book have for each other. Jarre gives a voice to all these competing moods through the two intersecting obbligati. The spectator is aware, however, of the omnipresent hymn. Unlike *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Gallipoli* where the music accompanied the spectator’s mobile and omnipotent gaze, the spectator’s memory of hymnody and its spiritual roots triggers the mystical gaze in *Witness*. It is the point of illumination where the truth of Book and Rachel’s love is laid bare, and the bonds of the Amish community are celebrated.

The relationship between music and mysticism is attested to in nearly all mystical traditions across the cultures.¹⁰⁴⁰ Music was considered by the ancient Romans and Greeks to have been a gift given to humanity from the gods. From music which accompanies the presence of the Other in ritual, to ecstatic cults which use music as a means of entry into an encounter with the Other, to the Other being a source of inspiration for a particular piece or style of musical expression, the relationship between this art form and religious experience is ancient and complex.¹⁰⁴¹ Weir exploits this relationship in the barn-raising scene.

¹⁰⁴⁰ See J Godwin, *Music, Mysticism, Magic: a Resource Book*, New York: Arkana, 1989; I Khan and H Khan, *The Mysticism of Sound and Music*, Boston: Shambhala Press, 1996; N Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, pp. 104-105; F Streng, *Understanding Religious Life*, pp. 159-170; There is a website devoted to other resources on this topic, See www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/mys/music.

¹⁰⁴¹ See V Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, Vol. 2, N Guterman (trans.), Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 13f.

It remains true that hymns create a sense of exultation, a sublime sense of holiness, sorrow at the death of a saviour, a feeling of ethical commitment, loyalty to the tradition and so forth...It is an aspect of ritual that has depth and power...Similar effects are brought about by secular equivalents, such as national anthems and military music.¹⁰⁴²

This barn-raising hymn tune causes the spectator to be illuminated as to consequences of the love between the saviour Book and the earth-mother Rachel. Jarre's music carries the often-associated attractive and warm feelings of the encounter with Otherness. It also accompanies a ritual activity for the Amish, the building of one another's barns, which flows immediately from their religious and spiritual beliefs. About the role of music in *Witness* and his other films Weir says that he is "moving further and further away from word. Music is the only art you can trust. I try to make my films like music – to be beyond interpretation and definition."¹⁰⁴³ The spectator exercises the mystical gaze at the barn-raising because Weir draws the spectator into a liturgical interaction suggested and supported by the music. What was implicit in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Gallipoli* is now explicit: music within the diegesis triggers the mystical gaze.

The Last Farewell

It seems appropriate in a thesis arguing for the mystical gaze and analysing how Peter Weir constructs it that I now turn to the last four minutes and thirty five seconds of *Witness* which is entirely predicated on the power of the look,¹⁰⁴⁴ and has only three lines of dialogue which come in the last 49 seconds of the action of the film. This final sequence has 25 scenes and can be tabled in the following way.

99: 47 - 99: 51	Book and Samuel sit next to each other on the side of the pond.
99: 52 - 101:08	Book pats and kisses Samuel.
101:09 - 101:15	Book stands to walk away.
101:16 - 101:27	"Goodbye John Book", "Goodbye Samuel."
101:28 - 101:32	Book stands at Rachel's door with his hands in his pockets.
101:32 - 101:39	Establishing wide shot: Rachel comes to the door, Book half turns to her.

¹⁰⁴² Smart N, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁴³ Peter Weir quoted in A-M Dell'Oso, "Peter Weir finds a new direction in Pennsylvania", p. 14.

¹⁰⁴⁴ The publicity grab for *Witness* was "A big city cop who knows too much. His only witness – a small boy who's seen too much!" Shiach D, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 121.

101:40 - 101:42	POV ¹⁰⁴⁵ Rachel: c/u of Book with birdhouse in the far right hand corner of the frame.
101:42 - 101:46	POV Book: c/u of Rachel framed and lit like a Rubens painting.
101:46 - 101:52	POV Rachel: c/u of Book. He smiles at her.
101:53 - 102:03	POV Book: c/u of Rachel She returns the smile and then casts her eyes down and turns her head aside.
102:04 - 102:09	Previous shot of Rachel's POV of Book, except Rachel is no longer looking. Book stops looking at Rachel and gazes out to the horizon.
102:10 - 102:18	Previous shot of Book's POV of Rachel, except Book is no longer looking. Rachel lifts her head and look back toward Book.
102:19 - 102:29	Previous shot of Rachel's POV of Book. Book looks back and meets Rachel's gaze.
102:30 - 102:47	Rachel's POV of Book. Book breaks the gaze between the two of them turns and starts to walk away. The shot pans right to left. We see his car in the distance.
102:48 - 102: 58	Previous shot of Book's POV of Rachel, except Book is no longer looking. Rachel eyes have welled up with tears. She moves lifts her hand against the doorframe as she follows Book's progress to the car with her eyes.
102:59 - 103:04	Rachel's POV: Book arrives at the car.
103:05 - 103:07	Eli comes out of the shed.
103:08 - 103:12	Eli's POV: Book opens the car door and look back toward Rachel.
103:13 - 103:14	Eli steps down from the top step of the barn, breaks Book's gaze and says, "You be careful out there among them English."
103:15 - 103:25	Eli's POV: Book looks at Eli, smiles, waves and gets into the car.
103:26 - 103:32	Eli looks quizzical as he sees Book depart.
103:33 - 103:45	Eli's POV: Hochleitner is walking into the long shot, down the road toward the farmhouse. Book's car is driving in the opposite direction.
103:46 - 103:51	In a close up of Hochleitner saluting Book's car as it slows and stops. Hochleitner does not stop but keeps walking.
103:52 - 104:21	Eli's POV: the long shot of Book driving up and over the hill as Hochleitner walks toward the Lapp's farm. Credits roll.
104:22 - 105:47	Fade to black. Credits still rolling. Music continues to play.

The Participatory, Empathetic Identification

Earlier in this chapter I drew attention to the intertextual significance of Book saying goodbye to Samuel. It is the child who definitively announces that Book is not

¹⁰⁴⁵ Point of view shot.

staying (101:09), and given that Samuel is not leaving, the spectator assumes Rachel is not leaving her son behind and venturing forth with Book. Samuel's farewell is all that the spectator needs to know, so the rest of the scene is played out in silence. Silence is a tool Weir uses to great effect. In the scenes I analysed in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Gallipoli* and the barn-raising scene in *Witness*, dialogue is kept to a minimum. At turning points in the narrative Weir chooses to have his characters say nothing. The importance of silence in every major mystical tradition is also critical. The closer one comes to the Other the more the devotee composes him or herself so they can further deepen or sustain the encounter, listen to any potential revelation, contemplate the action that will flow from the event, examine oneself or attempt to replicate a previous experience. In the scene where Book says farewell to Rachel (101:32), nothing is said for one minute and forty-five seconds, forty two percent of the entire farewell sequence. Jarre's atmospheric and sustained chords support the exchange of looks between Book and Rachel (102:1 – 103:04). This continues until Eli, who is the father figure and, therefore, the lawgiver in *Witness*, breaks the gaze between them by humorously telling Book to be careful "out there" among his own ethnic group (103:13). At this point, as Book gets into his car, it is clear that the couple are not going rush into each other's arms. To accompany his departure Maurice Jarre's Amish hymn reemerges and plays through to the end of the credit roll.

The critical position of the spectator in this sequence comes in the series of looks between Book and Rachel. As in the barn-raising scene Weir does not reposition the spectator to an omniscient position within the diegesis. Rather than distancing the spectator from the action and emotions of the scene he or she is drawn more into the drama and intimacy of the moment. So much so, the spectator, after the first two exchanges of looks between Book and Rachel, assumes the same point of view, even though the character is not actually beholding this view at this stage. It is a critical construction. The first is from Rachel's perspective. When Rachel looks away from Book the spectator assumes the point of view she held when she was looking at Book (101:46). As a result he or she sees an anguished Book turn and look toward the horizon. Weir has the spectator empathetically identify with Rachel's dilemma. The second construction is from Book's perspective where neither of the characters is looking at each other (101:53). The spectator assumes Book's position when he was looking at Rachel, though he is now looking at the horizon (102:04). The spectator also empathises with Book's plight. Rachel lifts her head and looks toward Book. The

spectator sees what Book does not (102:10). The spectator reverts to Rachel's point of view and sees Book turn and meet her gaze (102:19). In the reverse angle shot we see Book almost in tears, looking longingly toward Rachel (102:30). He breaks the gaze and walk down the stairs of the farmhouse (102:45). The spectator maintains Book's previous point of view as he or she watch Rachel, now in tears, follow Book's walk toward the car with her eyes. It elicits from the spectator a desire to see that, either Rachel will break out of the frame and run to Book, or that Book will quickly return to this previous position and profess his love for Rachel. In a small pan from left to right Rachel rests her hand on the frame of the door of the house and watches Book depart. It is the last time the spectator sees her. Rachel is going nowhere. From Eli's point of view the spectator sees Book steal one last look at Rachel, a gaze the spectator assumes is being returned. The old man intervenes and sends Book on his way.

Also earlier in this chapter I posited the theory that Book cannot consummate his relationship with Rachel because Weir casts her into the role of an earth mother who has helped tutor Book in a new way of life. *Witness* is a conversion narrative.¹⁰⁴⁶ The unfilled desire for union and the exchange of longing glances at the end of this film bears out this reading. Within the construction of each shot Weir uses a number of devices that enables the spectator to move from reading the relationship between Book and Rachel as purely romantic to a spiritual or mystical relationship. Firstly, given that the Lapp farm has been, in Rayner terms, Book's Garden of Eden, then it is fitting that he be expelled from it because he contravened its basic laws of non-violence and peaceful coexistence. Any member of the Amish community would be shunned for such infringements of their laws and customs. Secondly, and generally through Rachel's care and tutoring, the time with the Amish has been abundant with revelation for Book. The completeness of his conversion is seen in his call to Schaefer to lay down his gun. All schools, spiritual ones included, are not ends in themselves. The students are sent out to apply their learning. Book cannot stay because he has a mission to his own people, "out there among them English." The final sequence in *Witness* positions the spectator to identify how Book has grown. He is a new man. It enables the spectator to see the relationship between mysticism and social action.¹⁰⁴⁷

¹⁰⁴⁶ See R Schickel "Afterimages", p. 91.

¹⁰⁴⁷ For a full discussion of this relationship see J Ruffino (ed.), Mysticism and Social Transformation, pp. 1-28.

I have already shown that the erotic subtexts of *Witness* are entirely reconcilable within the mystical tradition. This equally applies to the highly charged erotic exchange of gazes at the end of the film. Eroticism, however, does not exhaust the possibilities of the way in which the look between Rachel and Book can be read. It is also a look of intimacy and love. In these regards, the look is a more mystical than romantic gaze because it cannot, and in any case it is not, fulfilled. “Since mysticism involves by virtually universal teaching, the disappearance of the object-subject distinction, then if an Other is postulated as kind of merging or union is envisaged, often expressed in terms of the image of love, of the two-in-one.”¹⁰⁴⁸ I demonstrated in Chapter Two that a feature of most mystical traditions is that the adherent can never fully achieve union with the Other, at least while he or she is alive. Mystical experience is predicated on the devotee wanting to repeat the encounter so as to further deepen the union they have achieved. He or she is always left wanting more. Rachel and Book behold each other throughout this film. They see each other clothed and semi-naked, powerful and vulnerable. They also know that to possess the other will entail a death to one or both of their previous ways of living.

Illumination

Such a distinctive mystical structure of this text is further amplified by the composition of elements within the shots. I stated above that car and house windows and doors feature strongly in several critical scenes of *Witness*. Often it is Rachel who is framed against a house door¹⁰⁴⁹ and she and Samuel regularly look out of windows and through doors. Book always looks inward. Drawing on cross-cultural archetypal mythology, Jung used the image of the door as the entry point into the unconscious and sometimes likened the self to a house.¹⁰⁵⁰ It was Plato who first said the eyes were

¹⁰⁴⁸ Smart N, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Harrison Ford claims that the idea for framing Rachel within the doorway of the house during this final sequence came from when he and Weir visited an exhibition of Flemish Masters in Philadelphia during the shoot. See M Clinch, *Harrison Ford: A Biography*, p. 221. Also see M Bliss, *Dreams Within a Dream*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Jung said, “The dream is a little hidden door in the innermost and most secret recesses of the soul, opening into that cosmic night which was psyche long before there was any ego-consciousness, and which will remain psyche no matter how far our ego-consciousness extends.” www.usd.edu/~tgannon/jung. Also see C Jung, “The structure and dynamics of the psyche”, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 8, H Read, M Fordham, G Adler (eds.), R Hull (trans.), Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969, part 1; C Jung, “The archetypes and the collective unconscious”, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 9, H Read, M Fordham and G Adler (eds.), R Hull (trans.), Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971, part 1. This image is also used in A Huxley, “Visionary Experiences”; E Weinrib, *Images of the Self*, Boston: Sigo Press, 1983.

windows to the soul.¹⁰⁵¹ Weir's use of the house and its window and doors in his mise-en-scène are highly significant and are metonyms for the illumination occurring in Rachel and Book's life. I have already drawn attention to the transformation symbolism inherent in the birdhouse. Reading the house as a symbol of the self Book crashes into it, and then rebuilds and reinstalls it by the end of the film. *Witness* can be deconstructed as a psychological allegory. Book is rescued from his destructive and corrupt former life by his anima and child. His anima nurses him back to physical health and helps him explore his emotional and spiritual depths as well. As his child and anima get to know and befriend him and Book them, they regularly look out for him. He also starts to seek them out, and falls in love with them. He comes to value them sufficiently to protect them, but does so in a way that integrates his reclaimed shadow. The assertion of the law forces him not to over-identify with the anima and the child, but enables him to return to his conscious world and take with him the learning he has gained from the exploration of the unconscious world.

This psychological deconstruction has a clear mystical illumination subtext as well. Book can be read a shaman. As a general summary of the vast literature in this area, a shaman is the member of the tribe who often goes through physical suffering and pain, which includes the flesh being pierced or a limb dismembered, and then being restored to life through sweat and herbs. The shaman recovers to become a wounded healer who has special spiritual and ethical insights by virtue of the lonely journey he or she has endured from death to rebirth. The shaman is believed to have been transported to heaven, or a similar place, and beheld the Other who has revealed some saving truths for the whole tribe.¹⁰⁵² The parallels between this shamanic tradition and John Book are striking. Read in this way *Witness* is a profoundly mystical text where the spectator becomes a companion to the shamanic John Book as he undertakes his lonely journey through physical and emotional pain to the discovery of a new life. Book has arrived at a turning-point chapter in his own life where the

¹⁰⁵¹ Plato, "The second speech of Socrates: the chariot analogy continued...the control of the passion. a concluding prayer" *The Phaedrus*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998, paragraph 225 [c].

¹⁰⁵² Smart N, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, pp. 94-95, 191. For the common elements to shamanism across ages and cultures, especially in Greek and Roman mythology, archaic religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, see M Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*; F Goodman, *Where the Spirits Ride the Wind: Trance Journeys and other Ecstatic Experiences*, Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990; M Harner, *The Way of the Shaman*, New York: Harper Collins, 1990; M Keeney, *Shaking out the Spirits: A Psychotherapist's Entry into the Healing Mysteries of Global Shamanism*, Boston: Station Hill Press, 1994.

expected script has been completely altered. He must return from the experience to his tribe, “out there with them English”, with a message and a new ethic. By positioning the gaze of the spectator so intimately in the scene and in the place of the central characters,¹⁰⁵³ Weir invites the spectator to vicariously undertake a similar personal and psychologically illuminating journey in the safety of the cinema.¹⁰⁵⁴

Conclusions

Producer Edward Feldman, Harrison Ford and Peter Weir were happy with the “romantic thriller” they had made, as were the public and many critics. The thriller genre is inherently unstable,¹⁰⁵⁵ including diverse areas such as the psychological, spy, legal, science fiction, gangster, romantic, military and detective thrillers, as well as some forms of the film noir style.¹⁰⁵⁶ *Witness* combines several of these sub-genres, most notably the gangster/detective, western and romance sub-genres. As I outlined in Chapter One Weir grew up with these films, understood their importance and developed what they might have to say to contemporary culture.

The western and gangster film have a special relationship with American society. Both deal with critical phases of American history. It could be said that they represent America talking to itself about, in the case of the western, its agrarian past, and in the case of the gangster film/thriller, its urban technological present.¹⁰⁵⁷

There are three features of the genre as a whole that unite them into a definable style: they create fear and apprehension in the spectator,¹⁰⁵⁸ they are inherently voyeuristic and sexual in nature, and they presuppose a mystery to be explored and solved.¹⁰⁵⁹ *Witness* fulfils all three criteria, as Feldman required, but it does so via Peter Weir’s different perspective on the type of apprehension he creates in the spectator, the shift

¹⁰⁵³ Jonathon Rayner argues that “the framing of events by, and their being viewed through, the doors and windows of rooms and vehicles provides an analogy to the perception of the viewer.” Rayner J, *The Films of Peter Weir*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Against this experience of the film, John McGowan finds the absence of dialogue distances the spectator, because it “seems to condemn us to a certain type of superficiality.” See J McGowan, “Looking at the (alter)natives: Peter Weir’s *Witness*”, *Chicago Review*, 35, 3, 1986, p. 46.

¹⁰⁵⁵ See B Grant, *Film Genre Reader*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 4, 6.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Neale S, *Genre*, London: BFI, pp. 26-29, 67, 69.

¹⁰⁵⁷ C McArthur, *Underworld USA*, London: BFI, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵⁸ As against terror in the related horror genre.

¹⁰⁵⁹ For a full discussion of the elements that make up the thriller genre see, C Derry, *The Suspense Thriller: Film in the Shadow of Alfred Hitchcock*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co, 2001, chapter one; L Hammond, *Thriller Movies: classic film and suspense and mystery*, Ottawa, Ontario: Octopus Books, 1974.

he achieves in moving the spectator from being sexual voyeur to an intimate companion and how he raises more questions than he solves. *Witness* is most defiantly a hybrid within the genre.

In this chapter I have shown that *Witness* is a romantic thriller which has a mystical journey at its core. When Weir came to the project he was “obsessed” by Paul Theroux’s novel about the ecological crisis, which threatened the end of Western civilisation. He was attracted by the Amish side of the detective thriller story because it gave him the opportunity to explore another simpler agrarian world and contrast it with the increasingly violent and corrupt industrialised urban landscape.

I have argued that to achieve this end, Weir has used archetypal and cross-cultural symbols and myths in the narrative and vision to construct a text which enables the spectator to join John Book in his inward journey of self-discovery. Earlier I pointed out that the working title of *Witness* was *Called Home*, highlighting, in 1985, the growing nostalgia within post-modernity.¹⁰⁶⁰ The change of name to *Witness* is important. Weir constructs the spectator in the diegesis not just as a voyeur or, as in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Gallipoli*, as an all-knowing, all-seeing presiding presence, but as a companion and a witness. As a fellow traveller with Book the spectator becomes a witness to a world where the boundaries between the real and the unreal, the physical and spiritual, the conscious and unconsciousness, Eden and Sodom are more fluid than he or she had imagined.

Weir has created a mystical quest narrative, where the wounded hero, who is in flight from his actual war in the corrupt external world, is led by the symbolic child and anima into the house of his inner world, where the reality of the next world is taken as seriously as is the importance of living close to the earth. Within this context the hero undergoes an inner battle, purifications and rites of passage within which he physically recovers, and the split between his conscious and unconscious world is healed. He learns a new peaceful way of life as he befriends his anima and child, puts down his actual and phallic gun, and takes up a new social ethic. This quest comes at

¹⁰⁶⁰ Françoise Meltzer has outlined that the “secular nostalgia” of postmodernity appeals to a premodern religious world where there is “a seamlessness between body and idea.” Meltzer F, “Re-embodying virginity secularized”, *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, J Caputo, M Scanlon (eds.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 268. Many of postmodernity’s understandings harken back to “its own prelapsarian era: before the Enlightenment.” F Meltzer, “Re-embodying virginity secularized”, p. 268. Postmodernity wishes to escape from the tyranny of self-consciousness. See A Hollywood, “The mystical body: religion, postmodernity and nostalgia”, *The Way Supplement*, 101, 2001, p. 50.

a cost, for the hero experiences the pain of intimacy, the lack of not being able to achieve full union with the object of his love, and the sacrifice of farewell. He is sent back to his world as an illuminated man.

Mysticism, as quest for the absolute that would ensure meaning, stability and being, encounters that which radically destabilizes meaning and subjectivity. The mystic seeks the transcendental signifier and discovers the paradoxical interplay of presence and absence through the signification process. Ecstasy occurs both in the quest for the absolute and the recognition of its impossibility.¹⁰⁶¹

The spectator in *Witness* beholds and falls in love with the image of the Other, the child and earth mother, the simple life, the love of nature, community, spirituality and intimacy, a world he or she can glimpse, but not possess. As Jung observed of the cinema, “The cinema, like a good detective story, makes it possible to experience, without danger, all the excitement, passion and desire we must suppress in ordinary daily life.”¹⁰⁶² Positioned by Weir to have empathy for Rachel and John Book we want to unite with both of them, or at least we want them to complete the union. The spectator, however, having met Book and Rachel must now relate to these characters as they relate to each other on the screen: say goodbye with desires unfulfilled. The pleasure and pain of the encounter is such that the spectator wants to repeat it. The cinematic mystical gaze is constructed in relation to the film’s themes of communal love, intimacy and Otherness. The spectator has accompanied Book as a shamanic trailblazer as he has sought out the Other which has been narratively and visually drawn in explicitly spiritual terms. As with Book’s odyssey there and back, the spectator’s trip is painful and pleasurable, but as mystics have described it, cinematic mystics included, what one beholds on arrival, and sees later in the mind’s eye, makes the journey thrilling and fulfilling.

¹⁰⁶¹ A Hollywood, “The mystical body: religion, postmodernity and nostalgia”, p. 57.

¹⁰⁶² www.spiceyquotes.com/html/Carl_Jung_Cinema.

Conclusions

In this thesis I have shown how the mystical gaze is at once integral to Peter Weir and more generally significant for theories of the gaze. Whether or not others take mysticism seriously, Peter Weir does. The discovery of the artefact in Tunisia, the day-dream in which he felt confirmed as a filmmaker, the dialogue he had with the ghosts at Gallipoli - these three recorded encounters shaped Weir's life, his professional choices and his awareness. Along with these experiences there is his lament for the lack of "wonder" in Western society which he says religion used to provide. Weir has explicitly said that he sees his task as filling this gap. "I think a sense of wonder is really what I attempt to create."¹⁰⁶³ Furthermore he has spoken about the ongoing influence that the theories of Carl Jung have had on him and his filmmaking.¹⁰⁶⁴

In my analysis of Weir's work I have taken both points of reference, mysticism and Jung, as seriously as he does. I have argued that it is by neither accident, nor the hyperbole of journalistic flair which has led writers to speak of Weir's work as mystical. By using such language, and whether they realise it or not, critics and scholars have provided a rich but untheorised insight in what Weir has achieved in his films. Through a careful analysis of the diegesis we can see that he has elicited from the spectator a mystical gaze.

The mystical gaze is constructed through mystical intertextuality, where Weir writes or reworks material which has mystery at its core - not just human mysteries with a neat solution at the end, but rather metaphysical mysteries about this world in relation to other unseen worlds, forces and powers which call forth heroic and loving action, of an altogether different dimension to the everyday. Entry points into this other spiritual world occur in Weir's narratives via intertextual references, quotations, metonyms and allusions to archetypal mythologies and symbols, religious memory, allegorical commentary and a celebration of nature.

The mystical gaze is also constructed through one, or a combination, of looks. There is a participatory, empathetic identification, where the spectator grows to care for the hero who is invested with shamanic characteristics, like Miranda and Book, or

¹⁰⁶³ "Dialogue on film: Peter Weir", *American Film*, 11, 5, March 1986, p. 13.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Weir seems to have been ambivalent at different stages of his career in regard to his debt to Jung's insights, admitting their importance to him and his work in 1978, moving away from this position in 1981, but strongly returning to it by 1998.

is a saviour figure like Archy. The spectator identifies with the hero or heroine's search, which is primarily spiritual, or at least played out within a mystical context.

Then, at critical points within the film the spectator is repositioned and granted an omniscient look, which enables him or her access to a greater spiritual insight into the motivations of the characters and the narrative, and an awareness of the fluidity of the boundaries between the seen and the unseen. This gaze also means the spectator knowingly, but powerlessly presides over climax points in regard to the quest of the hero.

Finally, through tropes of sexuality, death, intimacy and through the use of music, lighting and camera angles, the sight/insight interplay is constructed and the spectator is offered a moment of illumination. Through this look Weir draws the spectator in further to link his or her own exploration of the unconscious with that of the protagonist and to ask personal questions about his or her own meaning and purpose.

As well as offering a particular reading of Weir's work, this study has provided a more general commentary on the cinema and a hitherto unnamed element within gaze theory: the mystical component of the spectator's look. I have shown that while writers may have borrowed the language of magic and mysticism from spiritual or religious collectives, they need not borrow the belief structures which attend them, to accept that the mystical as an aspect of spectatorship. I have demonstrated that a study of the history of mysticism shows the central role the pagan Roman philosopher Plotinus has played in defining what we now mean by a mystical encounter. Plotinus is the patron of secular mystics, of which Weir is one. So what is the Otherness secular mystics seek? Daniel Madigan's theory that encounters with Otherness are experiences of oneself, of one's belief as they are formed and proffered by any social community¹⁰⁶⁵ makes sense of the universal reports of similar encounters, and places Weir's attraction to Jung's theory in context. For Weir Otherness is similar to the Jungian definition of the world of the collective unconscious, "the deposit of mankind's typical reactions since primordial times to the universal situations such as fear, danger, the struggle against superiority, love, birth and death."¹⁰⁶⁶ Such a broad definition does not demand a conventionally religious frame of reference. That said, I have argued the cinema offers a secular context, once the domain of religion, for the

¹⁰⁶⁵ Madigan D, "When experience leads to different beliefs", p. 65.

¹⁰⁶⁶ C Jung as quoted in J Jacobi, *The Psychology of Jung*, New Haven: Yale University, 1943, p. 10.

experience of mysticism in its narratives, the relationship it establishes between the screen and the spectator, its architecture, codes of exhibition and assembly. I have also argued that the mystical gaze, although it draws on other structures of the gaze such as the gendered, racial, abject, seductive and masochistic, offers a new way of conceptualising spectatorship. In addition it is clear that the mystical gaze of the cinema shares a great deal with the religious traditions of mysticism. This can be seen especially in the similar ways the experience of film spectatorship and mysticism is reported and the effect it can have on behaviour, as in Rudolph's Otto's "mysterium, tremendum et fascinans", the mysterious, and alluring encounter with Otherness that can compel and frighten at the same time.

I have maintained that the quest for the mystical encounter, as attested to in every social community in the world, is still active in the increasingly secular Western world, and that its secular temple is the new Multiplex. There, spectators, who are primed by the structures of the cinema itself, see films like those of Peter Weir which construct a world for them where they can exercise the mystical gaze while simultaneously entering into a mystical experience with the shadow world being played out on the screen before them.

Filmography

Short films

Count Vim's last exercise, five minutes, 16mm, B&W., 1967.

The Life and Flight of the Rev. Buck Shotte, 33 minutes, 16mm, B&W., 1968.

Michael, 31 minutes, 16mm B&W., television episode in the *Three to Go* series, Commonwealth Film Production Unit, Director: Peter Weir; Producer: Gil Brealy; Script: Peter Weir; Director of Photography: Kerry Brown; Editor: Wayne Le Clos; Musical Score: The Cleves, 1970.

Stirring the Pool, documentary film, six minutes, 16mm, colour, 1970.

Homesdale, 52 minutes, 16mm, B&W., Experimental Film Fund. Director: Peter Weir; Producer: Richard Brennan and Grahame Bond; Script: Peter Weir and Piers Davies; Director of Photography: Anthony Wallis; Editor: Wayne Le Clos; Musical Score: Grahame Bond, Rory O'Donoghue; 1971

Australian Colour Diary No 43: Two Dimensions in Australian Pop Music, documentary film, 10 minutes, 16 mm, colour, ACFU. Director: Peter Weir; Producer: Malcolm Otton; Director of Photography: Michael Edols; Editor: Jim Coffey; Sound: Julian Ellingworth; 1972.

Boat Building, four minutes, 16mm, colour, 1972.

The Billiard Room, six minutes, 16mm, colour, 1972.

The Computer Centre, five minutes, 16mm, colour, 1972.

The Field Day, five minutes, 16mm, colour, 1972.

Tempo: Australia in the 1970s, 24 minutes, 16mm, colour. Director: Keith Gow; Script: Peter Weir, 1972.

Incredible Floridas, 12 minutes, documentary film, 35mm, colour, Film Australia. Director: Peter Weir; Producer: Malcolm Otton; Director of Photography: Bruce Hillyard; Editor: Anthony Buckley; Music Score: Richard Meale; 1972.

Whatever happened to Green Valley, 55 minutes, documentary film, A Film Australia Production. Director: Peter Weir; Producer: Anthony Buckley; Photography: Nikey Ardizzone, Don McAlpine, Ross King, Guy Furner; Editor: Barry Williams; 1973.

The Fifth Façade, documentary film, Producer and Director: Donald Crombie; Screenwriters: Peter Weir, Keith Gow, Donald Crombie; 1973.

Fugue, screenwriter, 1974.

Three Workshop Films, 28 minutes, 16mm, colour, A Film and Television School Sydney Production, Director: Peter Weir; Producer: John Morris; Script: Vince O'Donnell and Grant Reed; Director of Photography: Milton Ingerson; Editor: Bob Allen; 1975.

Heart and Hand: Peter Rushford, Potter, documentary film, 25 minutes, 16mm, colour with B&W. sequences, Crafts Council of Australia Production, Director: Peter Weir; Director of Photography: John Seale; Editor: Bob Cogger; Sound: Don Connolly; 1975.

Luke's Kingdom, TV series, two episodes, Nine Network. Director: Peter Weir; Producer: Tony Essex; Script: Donald Bull, Keith Dewhurst, John Dorsman, Tony Morphett, Keith Raine, Brian Wright; Director of Photography: John McLean; Editors: Ernest Hilton, Richard Hindley; 1977.

Man of the Earth, documentary film, 30 minutes, 16mm, colour, Producer, Director, Screenwriter: Peter Butt; Editor: Peter Weir; 1980.

Feature Films

The Cars That Ate Paris, Salt Productions/Royce Smeal Film Production, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Hal McElroy, Jim McElroy; Script: Peter Weir, Keith Gow, Piers Davies; Director of Photography: John McLean; Editor: Wayne Le Clos; Musical Score: Bruce Smeaton, 1974.

Picnic at Hanging Rock, South Australian Film Commission/Australian Film Commission, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Hal McElroy, Jim McElroy, Patricia Lovell; Screenplay: Cliff Green from the novel by Joan Lindsay; Director of Photography: John Seale; Editor: Max Lennon; Musical Score: Bruce Smeaton, 1975.

The Last Wave, Ayer Productions, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Hal McElroy, Jim McElroy; Screenplay: Tony Morphett, Petru Popescu, Peter Weir; Director of Photography: Russell Boyd; Cameraman: John Seale; Editor: Max Lennon; Musical Score: Charles Wain, 1977.

The Plumber, South Australian Film Commission, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Matt Carroll; Screenplay: Peter Weir; Director of Photography: David Sanderson, Editor: Gerald Turney-Smith; Production Design: Wendy Weir, 1979.

Gallipoli, Paramount Pictures, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Robert Stigwood, Patricia Lovell, Screenplay: David Williamson, Peter Weir; Director of Photography: Russell Boyd; Editor: William Anderson; Musical Score: Jean-Michel Jarre; Production Design: Wendy Weir, 1981.

The Year of Living Dangerously, Wayang Productions/MGM, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Hal McElroy, Jim McElroy; Screenplay: David Williamson, Peter Weir, C J Koch, from the novel by C J Koch; Director of Photography: John Seale; Cameraman: Russell Boyd; Editor: William Anderson; Musical Score: Maurice Jarre, 1982.

Witness, Paramount Pictures, Director: Peter Weir; Producer: Edward Feldman; Screenplay: Earl Wallace, William Kelley, Director of Photography: John Seale; Cameraman: John Seale; Editor: Thom Noble; Musical Score: Maurice Jarre, 1985.

The Mosquito Coast, The Saul Zaentz Company, Director: Peter Weir; Producer: Jerome Hellman; Screenplay: Paul Schrader from a book by Paul Theroux; Director of Photography: John Seale; Cameraman: John Seale; Editor: Thom Noble; Musical Score: Maurice Jarre, 1986.

Dead Poets Society, Touchstone Pictures, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Steven Haft, Paul Junger Witt, Tony Thomas; Screenplay: Tom Schulman; Director of Photography: John Seale; Editor: William Anderson; Musical Score: Maurice Jarre; Production Design: Wendy Stites, 1989.

Green Card, Touchstone Pictures, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Peter Weir, Jean Gontier; Screenplay: Peter Weir, Director of Photography: Geoffrey Simpson; Editor: William Anderson; Musical Score: Hans Zimmer; Production Design: Wendy Stites, 1991.

Fearless, Warner Brothers, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Paula Weinstein, Mark Rosenberg, Screenplay: Rafael Yglesias; Director of Photography: Allen Daviau; Editor: William Anderson; Musical Score: Maurice Jarre; Production Design: Wendy Stites, 1994.

The Truman Show, Paramount Pictures, Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Scott Rudin, Andrew Nicol; Screenplay: Andrew Nicol; Director of Photography: Peter Biziou; Editors: William Anderson, Lee Smith; Musical Score: Burkhard Dallwitz; Special Design Consultant: Wendy Stites, 1998.

Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World, 20th Century Fox. Director: Peter Weir; Producers: Samuel Goldwyn, Samuel Goldwyn Jnr., Duncan Henderson, John Manulis, Peter Weir, Screenplay: John Collee, John Ferguson, Peter Weir; Director of Photography: Russell Boyd; Editor: Lee Smith. Release date: 14th November 2003.

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